

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005



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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Setting

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The Palestinian Issue and the International Setting¹

Introduction: The international scene in 2005, in relation to the Palestinian issue, was not different from that of the post *Intifadah* years and the events of 11 September 2001. America's hegemony continued under the guise of the so-called "anti-terrorism" campaigns, globalization policies, and the attempts to redraw the map of the region in accordance with the standards and interests of America and Israel. Sharon and the Israeli government have succeeded in dragging the international community to be preoccupied with the unilateral disengagement, and the withdrawal from Gaza Strip (GS). In this way, they can paralyze the Road Map project adopted by the Quartet Committee (USA, European Union, Russia, and the UN). America supported the unilateral disengagement, and assured the Judaic nature of Israel. Moreover, a new dimension has emerged in the American policy, namely the support of Israeli control in the settlements of the West Bank (WB), which contradicts "international legitimacy".

Meanwhile the United States is sinking in the Iraqi quagmire. Its failure to face "terrorism", and the deformation of its international image encouraged several countries to pursue a kind of independent policies, or, at least, to be less submissive to the USA. This is highlighted in the attitude of Russia and some European countries, like Spain. However, the general attitude of the politically and economically effective great powers continued to be pragmatic, and based on the vested interests of each country.

Europeans have tried to play a more effective role in the settlement process, which is evident in their broadminded engagement with Hamas, and their economic support to the Palestinian Authority (PA). The Europeans were chosen as a third party to supervise the boundary paths of GS, but Israel insisted on restricting their role, and succeeded in mitigating and diminishing the impact of the London Conference on the Palestinian issue. Moreover, it seems that the political, economic and security interests, of India and China, particularly the increase in their trade with Israel, has impeded the ability of these two gigantic countries to pursue their traditional support to the Palestinian issue.

The United States of America:

The failure of 15 July 2000 Camp David Summit, that was held during the era of Clinton, led to a series of changes in the American policy towards the Palestinian issue and the end of the conflict, and in the behavior of the American policy-makers towards the whole peace process. The Clinton's administration squarely blamed the Palestinian side for this failure,² which others attributed it to the non-participation of the other international powers, or to the then ambiguity of the American priorities towards the conflict in this region.

The beginning of the *Intifadah* coincided with the election of the new administration of George W. Bush, who, as well as the Americans public at large, considered the *Intifadah* nothing but an expression of a new and violent behavior on the part of the Palestinians that was triggered by the failure of the Camp David Summit.³ The *Intifadah* had, in fact, constituted a turning point in the international conceptions towards the peace process, be it the two main parties concerned, the Palestinians and the Israelis, or those two powers that are interested in the struggle and the negotiations, headed by the USA, the European Union, and the UN. From the beginning, the USA followed the policy of "hands off" towards the *Intifadah*, and gave the Israeli government a carte blanche to adopt a policy of suppression against the Palestinians. Moreover, the accession of Sharon to the premiership led to another drastic change in the course of the *Intifadah*, as he dealt with it in a cruel and suppressive manner. This was clearly seen in his invasion of Palestinian cities and the siege of the Palestinian leadership in its headquarters in Ramallah.

The White House, within its new policies, expected that the Israeli military forces would force the Palestinians to accept what they refused in Camp David. This means that the American silence at the beginning of the *Intifadah* was by no means withdrawal from their hegemony on the region, but rather a deliberate means to push the two parties, the Palestinians and the Israelis, into a deadlock that would convince Israel of its inability to get all that it wanted by force, and the Palestinians that time and force will not serve their cause. This American silence, coupled with the Israeli military supremacy, indicated that the Bush administration was extremely biased towards Israel.

However, the events of 11 September affected American policy towards the Palestinian issue as shown below:

1. The new American strategy aims at forming an international coalition against al-Qa'eda, hence is its strive to persuade Arab and Islamic

countries to join this coalition that would give it more legitimacy.

2. There is an American attempt to exhibit a moderate policy towards the Palestinian issue, which is evident in the declaration of President George W. Bush of the necessity of establishing a viable independent Palestinian state.⁴
3. Attempts are made to give Europeans and the UN a role in the Arab-Israeli dispute. Though admittedly rather ineffective, this role puts an end to the exclusive American control of the peace process in the Middle East.

The US exploited the international sympathy that it had from various governments and peoples across the world after 11 September to call for a concerted international effort, to tighten the grip on the Palestinian resistance groups. In coordination with the Israelis, this campaign was soon extended to include the leader of the PA, Yasir 'Arafat. However, this extremely hostile American policy towards the PA was not unanimously accepted internationally, especially by the European Union, which declined to boycott the President of the PA. However, European policies remained largely ineffective, and were restricted to the diplomatic field.

The USA and the Road Map: The Road Map is different from what had been suggested previously to put an end to the Arab-Israeli conflict. It concentrated on parallelism, not succession, and sets a certain time frame for its implementation. Finally, the plan stipulated that it should end in establishing an independent and viable Palestinian state. These visions came as a result of many factors amongst which are:

First: The war against Iraq in which the USA reverted to the same mentality and mechanism that it used in its war against Afghanistan. However, the USA had then to appear to be more objective, particularly, as it has been popularly viewed as the representative of Israel who cares for nothing except its narrow interests. To give its war in Iraq an international legitimacy, America reverted to the policy of wide collation in order to secure international support, including that of Arab and Islamic countries, especially after facing difficulties in obtaining legitimacy from the UN.

Second: The practical developments in Palestine came after a series of American attempts, called Mini Plans, like Mitchell's report, Tenet's negotiations, and Anthony Zinni's visits. These attempts were patterned after America's classic handling of the Palestinian issue, i.e., stopping violence on both sides,

and return to the negotiation table. But this was not a sufficient response to the new realities that had taken place after the outbreak of the *Intifadah*. Thus, the Road Map came as a comprehensive solution that had a clear time limit and an ultimate aim, i.e., the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.

Third: The participation of the UN, Russia, and the EU in the peace process, with, of course, the USA. This is now known as the Quartet Committee.

However, a thorough analysis of the Road Map reveals that it did not come with anything new. On the contrary, it aborted all the previous achievements. This plan was a compliment to Russia, Europe and the UN, who were considered as sponsors of the peace process.⁵ By this approach, America had nominally given up its previous monopoly of the issue which prevented the participation of other powers. However though this plan represents, on the whole, the new American attitude in the region, it is important to mention that, the American and Israeli interests in Iraq were much interrelated.⁶ The Road Map is not an independent measure that may achieve peace; but is essentially an outcome of regional developments.

The Road Map opened the issue of reform of the PA. However, the aim is not reform per se, but to force the PA to carry out the part related to security. The USA tried to do so through applying pressure on Palestinian leaders, especially the Palestinian President, Yasir ‘Arafat. The real aim of the Road Map was lost, and it trod on the steps of previous plans by calling the Palestinians to fulfill their obligations, while ignoring the brutal policy of Israel that makes it impossible to achieve peace in the region. This was evident when Mahmud ‘Abbas (Abu Mazin), assumed the premiership in response to the calls for reform of the PA, and the fulfillment of its security obligations. However, the Israeli reaction to a Palestinian offer of an armistice was the continuation of its assaults, and demands that the Palestinians should uproot the so-called “terrorism” and “terrorist movements”.

The USA and the Concept of Security: On this premises, that had crystallized in less than a decade, the international scene for the year 2005 had been formulated, which has its effect on the Palestinian issue. What distinguishes the recent period is the involvement of multi-international powers, though the USA remain to have the lion’s share in the international arena,⁷ particularly with regard to the international political dynamics and their impact on the Palestinian issue.

The new concepts of security, that the world is experiencing today, are a logical outcome of the recent changes and effects of globalization, since no country can be isolated from this universal milieu. Influencing the international status quo has no longer been confined to the national resources of a given state. So, there appeared some new concepts concerning security such as Human Security, World Security,⁸ Comprehensive Security,⁹ Mutual Security,¹⁰ and Security Partnership.¹¹ These changes, which are largely imposed by the USA, made the concept of security transcend the national borders of a state. They are also considered to be among the most important international factors which affected the Arab-Israeli conflict since the beginning of 2005. The developments in Arab-Israeli relations, represented in the Israeli withdrawal from GS, the new suggestions to withdraw from the WB, and the new program of the Kadima Party, cannot therefore be understood without reflecting on the changes in the American concept of security.

This factor plays an important role in determining the future of the Palestinian-Israeli relations. As for Israel, it superseded what may be called “*First Israel*” (Israel Phase One), which was based on establishing its existence. Then it turned to “*Second Israel*” (Israel Phase Two), which is based on the important role that Israel should play in the region. This cannot be achieved unless other countries acknowledge the distinguished role of Israel in the region. Thus, Israel must convince the neighboring countries that it had occupied what it wanted in the WB. If this is realized, then Israel will overcome the great internal demographic problem. As for Palestine, this factor plays an important role, particularly when we consider the geographic, or economic, potentialities that the WB and GS need to have in order to build an independent state. Having looked at the regional milieu of this state, it seems that Israel is the only state capable of making the project of the Palestinian state successful. This will lead to a new kind of occupation that has been unimaginable until now. Thus, the outcomes of Israeli relations with Muslim countries after its withdrawal from GS can now be grasped.

One of the most important changes in the past year is the failure of the American policy in the war against “terrorism”. The inability of America to fulfill its promise of achieving democracy, which was the *raison d’etre* for waging its war against Iraq and toppling Saddam Husayn, led to drastic changes not only in the Middle East but throughout the world. This was evident when many countries around the world expressed their dissatisfaction with the American occupation

of Iraq. Later, those countries called for amending the international system, in a manner that gives the UN a more effective role in international affairs. Thus, the American theory has failed to make any real change. Moreover, the extension of the scope of war against “terrorism” to comprise European countries urged some European governments to oppose American policy, especially after the shameful scandals of Abu Ghreib and Guantanamo prisons. All of this helped to undermine the American position, and curtail its central role in leading the world.

The USA and the Palestinian Political Status:

The dynamics of 2005 began with the departure of the historical President of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO); Yasir ‘Arafat, which embarrassed the American administration, who kept maintaining that his absolute monopoly of power was the stumbling block to the peace process. This required Washington to work on two fronts, first, to pursue the peace process, and, second, to deal with the bi-products of the events in Palestine (the elections and the participation of Hamas in the legislative elections) after the death of Yasir ‘Arafat.

America was bound to move to establish its claim that ‘Arafat was the problem, and that his absence was the key to the solution. This is actually what it did. Immediately after ‘Arafat’s demise, the Bush administration declared that the time was opportune for radical reform in the institutions and policies of the PA, which is a pre-requisite to achieve progress in the peace process. America increased its effort in the region in a salient way, particularly after the victory of Abu Mazin, who is known for his opposition to the *Intifadah*, or, to be precise, to its militarism. During a session of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Senate, on 18 January 2005, the Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, expressed her satisfaction with the “fair” presidential elections.¹² As a practical demonstration of this satisfaction, she announced during her visit to Ramallah, on 7 February 2005, the appointment of an American general to keep an eye on the situation in the WB, GS and Israel. She also declared that \$40 million will be extended to support the efforts of reforms and security.¹³ On the other hand, Bush stated that his country was absolutely committed to the Road Map, and that the independent Palestinian state must be set up during his reign.¹⁴

Mahmud ‘Abbas was received by President Bush in the White House twice in

2005, in May and October. But these visits failed to persuade Israel to implement its obligations in the Road Map. On the contrary, they were determined to apply pressure on the Palestinians to stop what the Israelis called “terrorism”. Consequently, American financial support and praise for Abu Mazin was not for free; it was a prelude to ask for “security reforms”. This, in essence, means to quell the Palestinian resistance movements, and to undertake political reform that guarantees the realization of the American vision through some misleading slogans, like fight against corruption, reform of the educational curricula, and the spread of democracy. The real objective behind these slogans is to impose American values and standards on the Palestinian people.

The application of these administrative, political, and judicial reforms dragged on, whereas security reform took a different track. Abu Mazin hoped to persuade the Palestinian resistance movements to declare a truce, and his efforts in this respect culminated in a meeting attended by all Palestinian groups in Cairo. But this way of handling the security issue was unacceptable to America and Israel because it indirectly acknowledged the Palestinian right of resistance, a development that was completely incompatible with the American position towards these so-called “terrorist” organizations, which should not be negotiated with, but had to be suppressed and their infrastructure crushed. However, America was encountered with two other developments:

1. The unilateral disengagement plan.
2. Hamas’ declaration of participation in the legislative elections.

The unilateral disengagement plan was out of the context of the peace process, and clashed in one way or another with the American plan on the issue of Palestine. While the US has been trying to give the new Palestinian leadership a chance to prove its worth, the disengagement plan frustrated this accomplishment. Moreover, the disagreement of Israel to associate this disengagement with the Road Map embarrassed the USA. But, as usual, America adjusted itself to the Israeli agenda; rather than exerting real pressure on it to abide by the decisions of the UN, and the “international legitimacy”. So, the USA concentrated on relating the two positions, and considered the disengagement a step in the peace process.¹⁵

In a joint press conference with Sharon in Washington on 14 April 2004, Bush announced America’s formal support of the disengagement plan. Contrary to America’s formal attitude towards the Israeli settlements in the WB and

GS and to international law, Bush declared America's prior commitment to maintain the security of Israel and its Jewish characteristic. He also confirmed that Israel could retain its hegemony over the settlements in the WB. He added that "the new developments on the ground, including the existence of the main settlements, made it unlikely that Palestinian-Israeli negotiations would end in a complete return to the 1949 Truce Line." Having encouraged Israel to continue implementing the disengagement plan, America had, in fact, abandoned its traditional policies concerning the settlements. During her tour in the Middle East in June 2005, Condoleezza Rice said that there were many realities on the ground that must be taken into account when dealing with the peace process, in reference to the settlements in the WB.¹⁶ Thus, America concentrated on criticizing Israeli setting up of "illegal settlements",¹⁷ which implicitly meant that it could keep what may be called "legal settlements" in Palestine in future.

The USA played an important role in facilitating the implementation of the disengagement plan, and was also instrumental in the conclusion of the Agreement of the Passages of GS in November 2005. The latter was under the auspices of Rice herself.

The other development, which is no less important than the disengagement plan, was the relationship with Hamas. Though classified as a "terrorist" organization by America, Hamas was bound to play a major role in political decision-making in Palestine, either through its ability to form a Palestinian government, or as a strong opposition. Hence is the American controversy on how to deal with Hamas, for the central question here is: When will Hamas be a full-fledged political organization? Irrespective of the confused American position towards Hamas, the Palestinian reality shows that Hamas has become a major player in the issues of peace and war on the Palestinian land. No democratic process that excludes Hamas from being a main political party can materialize. America has thus been once more engaged with the crucial question, what are the best ways and means to undermine the role of Hamas?¹⁸

Meanwhile, 339 American Senators signed a petition that asked President George Bush to prevent Hamas from participating in the legislative elections, if it refused to disarm. 71 Senators and 268 members of Parliament signed a message, that called Bush to force the PA to implement the disarmament of the Palestinian groups concurrently with the withdrawal from GS, and before the elections.¹⁹

On 18 February 2005, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy published the Presidential Study Group Report, entitled: “*Security, Reform, and Peace: The Three Pillars of US Strategy in the Middle East.*” The fifty three members of this Group, who belonged to both the Republican and the Democratic Parties, ratified this Report. The Presidential Committee for this Group included many famous figures; Madeleine Albright, Samuel Burger, Alexander Haig, Jeane Kirkpatrick, Robert McFarlane, and James Woolsey. This Report sought to formulate a plan for the second presidential term of George Bush. It also called for adding Hamas and Hizbullah to the list of “terrorist organizations”, and to target their financial sources and military infrastructure. The Report advised that the aim of the USA should be to achieve progress in the direction of a solution based on two states. This could be carried out successfully by concentrating on three basic issues: to support Israel in carrying out the disengagement plan, to support Palestinian attempts to fill the political vacuum created by the death of ‘Arafat. This should be done through the setting up of representative, legal, and supervisory institutions, and by guiding the efforts of the major regional and international sponsors of the PA to constitute an accountable and transparent administration to replace the Israeli military occupation, and be responsible for achieving peace. The Report also called for rejecting any new peace strategies.

All the attempts to isolate Hamas failed. Its acceptance of a truce, and strong performance in the municipal elections as well as Abu Mazin insistence on Hamas’ participation in the political process persuaded the American administration to allow the Organization to participate in the legislative elections in an attempt to absorb it, or restrict it, politically. On 21 October 2005, America declared that it would not compel the PA to prevent Hamas from participating in the next legislative elections.²⁰

The EU and the European Countries:

The year 2005 did not witness any major changes in European policy on the Palestinian issue. Though more flexible and courteous to Palestinians and Arabs concerns, compared to the USA, the Europeans did not apply any pressure on Israel to stop its suppressive practices, annexation of Palestinian lands and building of the Separation Wall. They continued to include Hamas in the list of “terrorist organizations”, even though it represents a wide sector of the Palestinians. However, Israel has faced increasing criticism from the European public and academicians, who viewed it a threat to world peace.

The European political map experienced important developments during the year 2005. The success of the Labor Socialist Party in the Spanish elections on 14 March 2005 weakened the political relations between America and Spain, as seen in the withdrawal of Spanish forces from Iraq, and the call of the new Spanish government for the participation of Hamas in the legislative elections.²¹ On the other hand, the success of the Christian Democratic Party, led by Angela Merkel, in the German elections on 18 September 2005, and her attempts to cultivate closer relations with America strengthen the latter's hand in the European Union. Meanwhile, the British Premier Tony Blair faced decline in his popularity and that of the Labor Party in the parliamentary elections held on 5 May 2005. In spite of its overall victory, the Party's majority shrank by more than 100 seats, presumably because of Blair's foreign policy, especially in Iraq and Palestine, and his strong relations with the American administration.

Although the history of Europe is full with positions that affected the Palestinian issue, these positions and the degree of their impact had changed over time. The stance of Europe was highlighted in the Florence statement of June 1996, where the European group called for enhancing the peace process and setting up a viable Palestinian state side by side with the Israeli state.²² This European attitude on the Palestinian issue was triggered by some internal and external limitations of which the most important are:

- One can not claim that the European Union has thus far reached a unified foreign policy, which could express a distinguish attitude.²³ It faced the problem of standardizing the constitution as well as foreign and defense policies. It is still divided into two fronts, one under the leadership of Britain, and the other under the leadership of France.
- The admission of ten new countries into the EU increased the degree of this division. Having strong relations with the USA, the affiliation of these countries to the EU strengthened Britain's position in the Union, and largely harmonized the foreign policy of the EU with that of the US. A discussing of the role of the EU as a whole, or each of its countries separately, may lead to the following observations:
 1. European policy on the Palestinian issue was characterized, especially since the beginning of 2005, with a kind of objectivity and neutrality. European countries refused to adopt the Israeli point of view in some issues, like the Separation Wall, Israeli settlements, and several other

issues. Cecile Pozzo di Borgo, the spokeswoman of the French Foreign Ministry, declared that the building of settlements and the Separation Wall will affect the outcome of the final negotiations, which are supposed to discuss the issue of settlements.²⁴

The French and British are in agreement on refusing the building of the Wall.²⁵ The British position can be summed up in an article that Blair gave to the ABC, and was published in the Emirate newspaper, *Albayan*, on 18 March 2005. Tony Blair detailed his position towards the Palestinian issue in the following points:

First, abiding by the idea of setting up two states, as spelled out in the Road Map, and the importance of the existence of an American administration which is ready to implement this condition.

Second, calling for international support that guarantees the Palestinians a political, economic, and security infrastructure to establish their viable and independent state.

Third, supporting Israeli withdrawals, that takes into account the security of Israel, and to open the door for GS trade through an airport and a harbor.

Fourth, continuing the peace process on the basis of the Road Map.²⁶

Thus, all in all, the British position remains to be very close to that of America, though it is distinguished by Britain's clear ability to perceive the Palestinian and Arab concerns, which it acquired from its wide political and colonial experience in the region.

2. Though there is not much difference between the American and the European attitudes towards the Palestinian issue, the latter have independent views on certain crucial issues such the Wall, settlements, and Hamas. The Europeans expressed their desire to allow the participation of Hamas in the political life as a first step to implement its disarmament and recognition of the Israeli state.²⁷ This is not in line with the American position that insists on Hamas' disarmament prior to participation. Europe went a step further by initiating direct communication with Hamas, and informed America about the developments which resulted from these communications.²⁸ In addition, the European position of the Separation Wall was described by the British Minister, Kim Howells, as odious and shameful.²⁹
3. The EU, along with European governments, tried to play a more effective role, especially after the disengagement plan. It depended on the Arabs,

and specifically the Palestinians, to give it the chance to do so.

The European attitude towards the Palestinian resistance was also less tense than its American counterpart. The chair of the Development Committee of the EU, Luisa Morgantini, confirmed the right of the Palestinians to resist the occupation, but without killing civilians.³⁰ Although the EU classified Hamas as a “terrorist” group, some European countries saw no fault in contacting it, especially after the municipal elections. They organized the Beirut meeting, which was held on 21 and 22 March 2005, between Hamas and some American and European dignitaries. Alistair Krock, a retired British security official, was the mastermind of this gathering.³¹

As argued above, the European handling of the Palestinian issue was affected by some recent changes that helped in reshaping the European role in the region, such as its membership in the Quartet Committee and its supervision over the Road Map plan. The new role of Europe gave it a more effective role in the region. Thus, since the implementation of the disengagement plan, the EU has begun to play an effective role in the Palestinian issue. It adopted some positions that are considered by Israel to be biased towards the Palestinians of which:

1. The EU emphasized that the disengagement should be connected to the Road Map.³² The EU asked, through a declaration by its special envoy, for a further extension of GS withdrawal to include settlements in the WB on condition that this be through Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, and not by a unilateral act.³³
2. The EU considered that economic developments in GS will not be possible within the existing Israel policies that aim at turning GS into a huge prison.³⁴
3. The necessity of setting up a viable and independent Palestinian state that can be achieved through offering economic support to implement projects in GS and the WB. The European Commission had actually suggested a strategic plan to set up such an economically and politically independent state. In 2005, the EU offered \$295 million, most of which was used to implement developmental projects, while some European countries (an individual basis) offered \$300 million. Germany offered the largest of this sum, \$56 million, followed by Britain, \$50 million. The EU promised to double the aid from 250 million to 500 million euros, if real development becomes apparent.³⁵

4. The EU viewed the Israeli policy of expansion of settlements as a violation of the Road Map, and a predicament to the peace process. European experts, in charge of this mission on behalf of the European Parliament, confirmed this position in their reports. The spokesman for the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Herve Ladsu, declared that the continuation of the Israeli settlements clashed with the provisions of the Road Map, that ordered their freeze. He added that the building of new settlements tantamounted to a prior determination of the outcome of the final negotiations.³⁶

Britain tried to play a more effective role in the peace process by an invitation to hold a Conference in London to discuss the Palestinian issue. But Israel did not hesitate to boycott this step, lest it faces any kind of pressure. It even tried to undermine the European role in the settlement process. However, the Conference was held on 1 March 2005. The UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan, Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, and other foreign ministers from more than twenty countries attended.³⁷ The final communique stressed upon the necessity of the reform of the PA, ending Palestinian attacks and implementing the disarmament of the Palestinian groups, and it offered more economic support to the PA.³⁸

The EU proved its effectiveness on the Palestinian issue, when both the Israeli and Palestinian sides agreed to have European supervisors on the passages between GS and Egypt.

It is expected that the European role in the Arab-Israeli conflict may increase in the future. This is because of the failure of American policy in the region, and the increasing Russian role there. But what may weaken this EU role is the strong relationship between the new German government and America, along with the German's cool relationship with its traditional European ally, France.

Russia: During the year 2005, Russia exhibited a desire to restore its previous effective role on the Palestinian issue, Middle Eastern issues and international affairs. Its tangible success in the areas of economic and internal security was most useful in this direction. In a reception held in honor of the Palestinian Ambassador to Moscow, Khayri al-'Urudi, Russia emphasized its strong relationship with Palestine.³⁹ The Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Sultanov, commended the developing Russian-Palestinian relations, and the constructive dialogue between the two countries. He also referred to his talks with President 'Abbas on 16 April 2005 in which the two leaders discussed

strengthening the Palestinian-Russian economic relations.⁴⁰

To activate the role of his country in the peace process, the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, proposed during his visit to Egypt on 27 April 2005, to hold an international conference in Moscow to discuss the peace process in the Middle East. But the Israeli government rejected this or any other international interference in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, except, of course, that of America.⁴¹ The US responded to this suggestion with great indifference as could be seen in the remark of Secretary Rice, who mentioned that they should concentrate on what they have, that is to make sure that the withdrawal from GS will be successful, and then they may think of the next necessary steps.⁴² This strong position forced Russia to temporarily retreat from the idea of the conference.⁴³ However, Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, reiterated the idea on 13 October 2005,⁴⁴ but once more Israel gave a deaf ear.

Russia continued to support the Quartet Committee, and President Putin promised its special envoy, James Wolfensohn, that Russia would offer its complete, direct, and clear support to the Committee.⁴⁵ Russian also continued its support to the Road Map plan which had already been adopted by the Committee. Although it welcomed the Israeli withdrawal from GS, Russia opposed unilateral solutions as well as the Israeli settlements in the WB and the erection of the Separation Wall. This was emphasized by the Russian Foreign Minister, Sergey Lavrov, and the spokesman of the Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Kamynin.⁴⁶

In a comment on the Israeli withdrawal from GS, Sergey Lavrov emphasized the importance of including all aspects in this process in order to ensure a secured and continuous life in GS. He also maintained that the Palestinians and the Russians positions were consistent with each other in their demand not to prolong the implementation of the decisions of the UN which are related to the Road Map, including the negotiations of the final settlement, which should be inclusive for all the avenues of a peaceful settlement in the region.⁴⁷

On the other hand, the Russians were keen to maintain good and balanced relations with Israel. Putin, during his visit to Israel on 28 April 2005, informed Sharon that he could rely on Russia to be Israel's strategic ally on all matters related to security and "terrorism". He assured the Israeli leaders that the international conference that he suggested is on the level of experts not presidents. Putin indicated that his country was keen to maintain the security of

Israel, and as long as he is in power, no step that threatens the Jewish state will be taken.⁴⁸

In 2005, the Russian government dismissed the Rabbi of Moscow because of doubts that he was a spy of the Mossad (Israel's Secret Security Agency). But this did not affect Russian-Israeli relations.⁴⁹ The year 2005 also witnessed an increase in trade between Israel and Russia, which was a step towards the strengthening of the relations between the two countries.⁵⁰ According to official Israeli statistics for the year 2005, the Israeli exports to Russia were estimated at \$415 million & 800,000, while its imports from Russia totaled \$1,055 million & 700,000 (see table 5/2).⁵¹

China: China was one of the first countries to open a consulate for the PLO in Beijing, and subsequently it appointed an Ambassador in Palestine. However, it gradually moderated its strict anti-Israel attitude during the last twenty years, and adopted a policy that was largely based on maintaining its interests, especially in the economic field. China continued its "calculated" support of the Palestinian cause, but in a much more sympathetic manner than the other major powers.

The Chinese Prime Minister, Wen Jiabao, emphasized after his meeting with the Palestinian President, Mahmud 'Abbas, who visited China on 17 May 2005, the importance of strengthening the political and economic relations with the PA. During this visit, China and the PA signed five agreements, of which one was for technical and economic cooperation.⁵²

Moreover, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs visited President 'Abbas in his headquarters in Ramallah on 20 June 2005, where he maintained that the main objectives of his visit were to promote the peace process and the Chinese cooperation with the countries in the region. The Chinese Minister signed with his Palestinian counterpart an agreement in which the Chinese government undertook to construct a new building for the Palestinian Foreign Ministry in Ramallah. China also offered \$7 million to train Palestinian diplomats in Beijing, and another \$5 million to establish a large and fully equipped hospital, and to train 80 Palestinian cadres in various fields. In addition, it decided to study a new project to set up a Palestinian-Chinese industrial zone in Northern GS.⁵³ It offered an urgent aid of \$300,000 to the victims of the Israeli invasion of Rafah and another \$1 million & 500,000 to support the Palestinian legislative

elections.⁵⁴ China also continued its support to the Palestinians, in the fields of security and communication.⁵⁵

On the other hand, Amos Yudan, the manager of one of the most important companies in Israel, was the first Israeli to initiate trade exchange with China in 1981, though this was through the backdoors due to the then sensitive political conditions. He presented a feasibility study on the prospects of trade with the huge Chinese market, which was endorsed and adopted by the Israeli government in 1987.⁵⁶

The Israeli-Chinese military cooperation forms the main, but obscure, part of the trade exchanged between the two sides. This importance is derived from the fact that Israel is the back gate for transferring into China the Western and American weapon technology and military industry. Moreover, this kind of trade is important for the Israeli economy, though it annoys America.

According to two reports, published at the end of the year 2004, by the Pentagon and the American Congress, Israel was the second source of weapons to China after Russia, and the military trade between the two countries was estimated at more than a billion dollars per year. Moreover, European press reported that Israel sells weapons to China by an estimated amount of \$1,250 million every year. But Israel denied these reports and figures, and claimed that it had sold China defensive weapons only, and for not more than \$35 million.⁵⁷

One of the deals concluded between Israel and China at the beginning of 2005 included a contract by which Israel developed pilotless planes, called “Harpy Killer”, that had already been sold to China.⁵⁸ The two countries also agreed to cooperate to develop a sea missile similar to the Israeli Gabriel sea-to-sea missile, and to produce the air-fighter F-10. Israel also offered China the technology to produce an air-to-air missile, which, in effect, is an imitation of the American rocket named “Sidewinder.”⁵⁹

In an attempt to absorb the American anger, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom, apologized, in an interview with the Israeli press on 19 June 2005, to the US about any Israeli weapon deals that might have effected American national security. Moreover, Minister Mofaz asked 50 Israeli companies to undertake to submit official requests to the Ministry before traveling to China.⁶⁰

As for non-military commercial activities, it is important to note an Israeli trade delegation, under the leadership of Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Deputy Premier and Minister of Industry, that visited China in 2003 to increase Israeli exports to this country; from \$600 million in 2003 to about \$2 billion at the

beginning of 2005. Trade between the two countries increased about thirty times more than what it has been two decades ago when commercial transactions were initiated between the two countries. The main sectors of trade between China and Israel, in addition to the military sector, are: advanced technology, security, cars, agricultural products, plastic industries, and air conditioning. Israel also strives to promote its advanced technological products (wireless communication, medical apparatus, computers, information programs, and agricultural techniques of production) that are being met with interest in the Chinese market.⁶¹

On 25 November 2004, China and Israel signed a protocol of financial and economic cooperation, which allowed long-term financial credit to Chinese companies when they import Israeli products. These facilities were guaranteed by the government owned Israeli Insurance Company for Foreign Trade.⁶²

According to the official Israeli statistics for the year 2005, Israeli exports to China were estimated at \$743 million & 200,000, while imports were about \$1,888 million & 200,000 (see table 5/2). This reflects a noticeable increase in the commercial relations and mutual interests shared by the two countries.⁶³

All this indicate that the trade exchanged between Israel and China would substantially develop as a result of this industrial cooperation, especially in the military field. In addition, is the huge potential of Chinese investment in the field of agriculture, which is looking for Israeli agricultural techniques.

India: India was a traditional supporter of the Palestinian cause. This had been seen in the strong support offered to this cause by the Congress Party, under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and others, and in India's refusal to recognize Israel. However, the subsequent departure of many Arab countries from their previous ideological commitment to the Palestinian, and the acceptance of the PLO to the principle of negotiations and peaceful settlement triggered a pragmatic change in the Indian policy towards the Palestinian conflict that served its interest with both parties, the Arabs and Israel.

Indian interests in the region were threefold: Security concerns, economic interests and the Indian immigrants and employees, especially in the Gulf region, which is related to the economic aspect. The security interests dictated India's drive to benefit from the military expertise of Israel in order to find a strong balance, or, precisely, "a balance of terror", with its neighboring arch

rival, Pakistan. The desire of India to strengthen its relations with America was another factor for its new strive to befriend Israel, as it is very well known that Israel is an important factor in the formulation of American foreign policy. However, on the other hand, India wanted to have strong relationship with the Arab countries, as their region, especially the Suez Canal, constitutes an important commercial route for India. Besides, there are 3 million & 500,000 Indian workers⁶⁴ in the Arab region who represents a very important source of revenue to the Indian economy, while 60% of India's oil is imported from Arab countries.⁶⁵ Consequently, India is careful to be balanced in its dealings with the Palestinian issue in order not to harm any of its own interest with either side.

Within this context, India supported in September 2005 the Israeli withdrawal from GS and expressed its hope that it, coupled with that from the WB, would lead to the establishment of a real independent Palestinian state. The Indian Foreign Ministry declared in a formal statement, on 12 September in New Delhi, that India welcomed the Israeli step as a positive and good beginning to find a compromised solution. The statement added that this step should be exploited by the parties concerned to achieve progress in the peace talks, which would lead, in a suitable time, to the establishment of a recognized, independent and secured Palestinian state living side by side with Israel.⁶⁶

Like China, India tried to develop its economic and military relations with Israel. According to official Israeli statistics for the year 2005, India's imports from Israel were estimated at \$1,224 million & 200,000, while its exports to Israel amounted to \$1,276 million & 300,000.⁶⁷ Other sources claim that the diamond trade formed half of the trade exchanged between the two countries, which multiplied by ten times since formal diplomatic relations were established between the two countries in 1992.⁶⁸

In the year 2005, the Israeli Military Industries (IMI) won a contract, estimated at \$140 million, to set up 5 factories in Bihar (India) to produce chemical explosives. Other reports spoke of two deals; a \$12 million one to supply India with advanced tank missiles, and a second \$40 million deal to help the Indian army develop its rocket industry.⁶⁹

In November 2005, the Indian News Agency reported (according to Israeli sources) that Israel will launch, after a year, a spy satellite from the space center "Station Down" in India in order to strengthen the relations between the two countries.⁷⁰ While Pakistan anxiously followed this Indian-Israeli military co-operation, the Pakistani newspaper *Daily Times* maintained that India was

preparing to buy fifty pilotless spy planes from Israel for \$220 million.⁷¹

No doubt Israel tries to invest its military influence in the US to build strong relations with India, taking into account that this country is expected to be one of the greatest world powers in the next 20 years. In this drive, Israel benefits from Arab weakness and disunity, and plays on their support and sympathy with Pakistan, the traditional “enemy” of India.

Japan: It is difficult to isolate the policies and positions of Japan in the region from those of the European countries and the USA. Meanwhile Japan concentrates on its commercial and economic interests, and does not thus far aspire to play an active political role. Its economy is the second largest economy in the world, and it is one of the donor countries that support the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, both politically and financially. Its aid to the Palestinians is estimated at \$760 million since the Oslo Accord,⁷² and the relations between the two countries were strengthened through mutual visits. During the visit of the Palestinian President to the Japanese capital, Tokyo, in May 2005, the two sides signed various agreements, besides an offer of urgent Japanese financial support to the Palestinians. Japanese financial support to the Palestinian people during the course of the year 2005 can be divided into many parts:

First, aid through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA). In February 2005 the Japanese government decided to offer the Palestinian people, through the UNDP, an urgent aid of \$30 million. The Japanese Embassy in Amman said, in a statement, that this sum is just part of an allocated aid of \$60 million to encourage the peace process in the Middle East.⁷³ During the year 2005, Japan decided to offer \$9 million & 586,000 to the UNRWA to support its activities in Palestine, and to improve the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees.⁷⁴

Second, direct support to the PA. During the visit of the Palestinian President to Tokyo in May 2005, the Japanese government offered several projects to the Palestinian people, of which one was designed to help in the completion of the sewage project and develop the coastal roads in GS, in addition to other projects of about \$400 million during the next three years.⁷⁵ Japan also undertook to extend an additional \$100 million to the PA in order to achieve peace in the Middle East.⁷⁶

Third, support within different developmental projects, or through bilateral agreements between the two sides. One of these agreements, concluded during President 'Abbas' visit to Tokyo in May 2005, allocated funds to finance the project of Gaza coast road, which extends for 40 km from the north to the south of GS, and cost about \$60 – 65 million.⁷⁷ Subsequently, it was agreed to implement other projects through the Japanese Agency for International Co-operation (JICA), which aims at improving local administration and reproduction health,⁷⁸ and to support developmental study of the regions of Jericho and the Jordanian Valley.⁷⁹ In July 2005, the Palestinian signed financial agreement with Japan by which the latter offered to set up a Joint services council to exploit the solid wastes in the provinces of Jericho and the Jordanian Valley.⁸⁰ In November 2005, the Japanese government decided to increase its support to the Palestinians in 2006 from \$100 million to \$200 million.⁸¹

Thus, the Japanese policy towards the Palestinian issue is not isolated from that of the powers concerned with peace in the region, especially the US on one hand and Israel on the other. So the financial support that Japan offers to the Palestinians is subjected to political maneuvers and international pressure on the Palestinian people.

On the Israeli side, the country and Japan are economically strongly connected with each other. In 2005, Israeli exports to Japan were estimated at \$792 million & 400,000, while its imports totaled \$1,278 million & 100,000.⁸²

Israel tried to persuade Japan to purchase defensive systems against rockets that Tokyo needs to protect itself against the arsenal of its neighbor, Northern Korea, and its weapons of mass destruction. But America interfered and the Israeli efforts were frustrated.⁸³

Brazil: The success of socialist or anti-American hegemony trends in Latin America and the world at large, is generally in favor of the Palestinian issue, especially so in 2005. This applies to Brazil, Venezuela, and Bolivia, but we will choose for our purpose here the case of Brazil, the biggest and the most important country in South America.

Non-alignment has usually characterized the Brazilian foreign policy, but, the year 2005 witnessed great tension in Brazilian-Israeli relations. Some diplomatic Israeli sources considered the Brazilian President as being more receptive to the Palestinians positions than those of the Israelis. The Israeli Vice Premier, Ehud Olmert, had maintained, during a visit to Brazil in March 2005, that this country

could not participate in the Middle Eastern peace process, unless it conducts a serious dialogue with Israel.

Brazil severely criticized the Israeli military operations in the WB and GS, and in January 2005, the Brazilian Minister of Human Rights, Nilmario Miranda, complained of the Israeli predicaments to the mission of the monitors of the Palestinian presidential elections. Miranda added that Israel depends on weapons and American support, and noted that the delegation of supervisors sent to the WB and GS reflected the support of the Brazilian government to the Palestinians.⁸⁴

But Brazilian diplomats denied any change in their country's traditional principle of non-alignment, and maintained that the Israeli protests are just simple misunderstandings between friends. A Brazilian diplomat explained to Agence France-Presse (AFP): "Our relationship with Israel is excellent, and it is natural that we disagree about some points, exactly like two friends when facing each other frankly." Gunter Rodzit, a professor of international relations in Armando Alvares Penteado Institution in Sao Paulo, argued that the drive of the Brazilian President Lula in the Middle East is triggered by commercial motivations in particular. He added that the Brazilians have understood how to deal with the Palestinian question, which is of extreme importance to the Arabs, but their primary concern is money and business in the region.⁸⁵

As for the Brazilian-Palestinian relationship the Brazilian President, praised, during his meeting in Brazilia with the Palestinian President, Mahmud 'Abbas, in May 2005, the "patience" of the Palestinian people, and emphasized the readiness of Brazil to support the peace process.⁸⁶ Moreover, the Palestinian Commercial and the Industrial Chamber in Nablus was invited to participate in an economic conference, held under the auspices of the Arab Brazilian Chamber and on the occasion of the Arab-Latin American Summit, during the period 12 and 13 May.⁸⁷ In July 2005, The First National Conference on Equality and Apartheid was convened in Brazil. However, it did not clearly and outrightly denounced the Israeli racist practices against the Palestinians, but only agreed that the Brazilian government send a delegation to the WB and GS just to monitor the racist Israeli practices and military operations against the Palestinians.⁸⁸

The United Nations:

The UN suffers from a structural defect that makes it incapable to have an effective role without the consent of the major powers and members of the Security Council.

In spite of the hundreds of resolutions passed by the UN, in support of the Palestinian rights, these resolutions have no real effect on the ground, because they were not obligatory. The only ones that could be binding were vetoed by USA, because they were against Israel. This happened 39 times during the previous years.

The UN resolutions of the year 2005 on the Palestinian issue remained consistently monotonous. The General Assembly adopted 5 resolutions on 3 December 2005, that dismissed Israel as an occupying country that should withdraw from the occupied territories, including Jerusalem, and reaffirmed both the Palestinian right to set up an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital, and, the refugees right to return. The discussions were concluded with a demand for quick resumption of negotiations that would hopefully lead to a permanent settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict, and a criticism of the illegal Israeli settlements. Both Israel and America, along with Micronesia, voted against all these resolutions. USA and Israel waged a campaign to abolish the Department of the Palestinian Rights in the General Secretariat, the Special Media Program on Palestine, and the Committee concerned with the pursuit of the unconditional Palestinians rights.⁸⁹

Kofi Annan did nothing concrete, as he limited himself to only appeals for calm and official statements, which reflect the paralysis of the UN to take any effective decision on the ground. Annan condemned Israeli annexation of Palestinian lands and the building of the Separation Wall, but, at the same time, he asked the Palestinians not to face this with violence. He also asked the Israelis to stop atrocities, which would endanger the forthcoming negotiations for a final settlement. On the other hand, he recognized the Israeli Security requirements, but he hoped that the Israelis will achieve this by alternative means other than the Separation Wall, which caused serious harm to the Palestinians.⁹⁰ The UN Human Rights Commission condemned the Israeli use of force against the Palestinian civilians, and called upon Tel Aviv to stop building settlements in the occupied land.⁹¹

In 2005, Israel achieved a moral victory, namely the unanimous endorsement by the General Assembly of the UN, in its 60th session, of an unprecedented resolution that considered 27 January as an International Day for the commemoration of the victims of the Holocaust.⁹² It is, however, unexpected that the UN and the Security Council, will change in the near future their current

positions and attitudes and effectively support the Palestinian cause, as long as they are suffering from the existing structural defect, in decision making and the domination of the narrow interests of the great powers, especially USA.

Conclusion: The American hegemony is still heavily reflected on the situation in Palestine. America has for many years lost the credibility of being an “honest broker”, and it is unlikely that American policy will seriously change in the foreseeable future to deal in a fair manner with the Palestinians case, particularly as the right wing groups, the new conservatives, and the Zionist lobby continue to have an effective role in shaping American foreign policy. The increasing American support to Israel in 2005, especially on the settlements in the WB and the unilateral disengagement from GS is a regressive step, particularly when we compare this position with the terms of the Road Map, that had been patronized by the USA and the rest members of the Quartet Committee.

The distorted image of America, which resulted from its foreign policy, especially in the Middle East, encouraged some countries to adopt more independent policies, as appears in the case of Russia which strives to restore its role in the region. Moreover, the outcome of recent parliamentary elections have caused some political shifts in many countries, e.g. in Spain, which have relatively distanced itself from American policy, in Germany, which had closer relations with the USA, and in Britain, where the alliance of Labor government with America had negatively affected the performance of the Party in the last general elections. Moreover, an increasing number of South American countries had either distanced themselves from the USA, or adopted anti-American policies.

Thus, the general tendency in international politics is still associated with the pragmatic considerations of each country. But effective breakthroughs in international positions are difficult to achieve in the short run. There is a need for a unified and effective Palestinian position, and a radical change in the way in which the Arab and the Muslim world deals with Palestinian issue. On the other hand, the top down policies and narrow calculations of Israel and America may generate more dissatisfaction and hatred to these countries, which could be translated in future in increased sympathy with the Palestinian and Arab rights.

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The Palestinian Strategic Report 2005



This Palestinian Annual Strategic Report explains, discusses and analyses the events that took place during 2005, and pursues their developments. The primary objective of this Report is to assess the Palestinian situation on a regular basis through a rigorous study of its various aspects, i.e., internal political affairs, economic development, the educational system, demographic indicators, the Arab-Islamic and international positions and the Israeli attitudes and policies.

The chapters of this academic exercise were commissioned to distinguished meticulous specialists. These chapters were submitted to further scrutiny by another high caliber specialist in the Palestinian issue. Then, the two editors edited the texts and incorporated what may have been overlooked. Hence, it is important to note that this project is essentially a product of team work.



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