

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006



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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

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The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

With its distinguished Islamic status and sanctity, Palestine plays a major role in arousing the emotions of the Muslims and in determining their attitudes towards various issues. Hence, the countries of the Muslim world constitute an important source of support to the Palestinians and their struggle against Israeli aggression and occupation. However, the degree of response to the Palestinian issue varies from one Muslim country to another because of several factors of which the most prominent are the following:

1. The different ideologies, be it Islamic, secular or national, that are patronized by the ruling regimes.
2. The relative human, economic and political strength of a ruling regime, and the degree of its regional and international impact.
3. The nature of the relations, loyalties and alliances concluded by these regimes, and the degree of their independence or association with the major powers, particularly the USA.
4. The geo-strategic factor, i.e., the geographic and strategic locations and their roles in determining the responses of various countries to the Palestinian issue.
5. The interest and priorities that govern the position of the ruling regimes towards the Palestinian issue.
6. The ability of the organizations and the popular and Islamic parties in generating interest in the Palestinian issue, and to rally popular support behind it.

This chapter surveys the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian issue, with special emphasis on the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), and three of the major Muslim states, namely, Turkey, Iran and Pakistan.

First: The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)

Like in previous years, the record of the OIC in 2006 is full with bombastic declarations and statements, but void of concrete actions and achievements. However, the new secretary-general of the OIC, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, tries to activate the organization and to make it more dynamic within his limited authority and the limitation of the OIC itself. In particular, the political, economic and social differences between the organization's 57 member-states restrict the chance of having common strategies, and, in many cases, make them void of content.

The OIC sent a delegation to participate in the monitoring of the Palestinian legislative elections, and its General Secretariat issued a day after the elections a declaration in which it congratulated the Palestinian people for their democratic achievement.¹ Following the victory of Hamas, the secretary-general of the OIC issued another declaration that congratulated the Palestinian people and the leadership of the PA for the success of the election exercise, but urged Hamas to be realistic and pragmatic in order to maintain the rights and achievements of the Palestinian people. The declaration had, moreover, called upon the international community to refrain from prior judgments, respects the outcome of the elections that reflects the democratic option of the Palestinian people, and continue its support to the peace process to enable the Palestinian people to liberate themselves from occupation, and to establish, on the basis of the resolutions of the UN, their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.²

Neither in this nor in subsequent declarations did the OIC congratulate Hamas for its victory, but it kept urging the organization to form a government of national unity, and to be pragmatic in dealing with the realities of the situation. The secretary-general of the OIC reiterated this position on 14/3/2006 to a Hamas delegation, led by Khalid Mish'al, that discussed with him the developments of the Palestinian issue, particularly after the legislative elections.³

However, after the formation of the new Palestinian government, the OIC congratulated in person Premier Isma'il Haniyah and his Foreign Minister Mahmud al-Zahhar.⁴ The overwhelming international pressure and opposition to Hamas and the progressive weakness and disintegration in the Arab-Muslim world was behind this reserved attitude towards Hamas and its government, which had, anyhow, reflected the position of the majority member-states of the organization.

The OIC stated that it “looks forward to cooperate with the Palestinian government in a manner that consolidate the role of the organization to serve the Palestinian just cause.”⁵ This basic difference in outlook was further demonstrated when the secretary-general received in the organization’s headquarters in Jeddah on 19/4/2006 the Palestinian Foreign Minister Mahmud al-Zahhar who was in his first Arab tour. While Ihsanoglu dismissed the explosion of a restaurant in Tel Aviv on 17/4/2006 as a “terrorist act,” al-Zahhar described the operation “a legitimate right of the Palestinians,” and a source of “pride to any person struggling to liberate his land.”⁶

After the meeting, Ihsanoglu renewed the OIC demand of respect to the democratic option of the Palestinian people, who should not be punished for exercising this right. He urged the international community to open a channel of dialogue with the new Palestinian government, and undertook that his organization will strive to end its isolation.⁷

The OIC had repeatedly expressed, in its declarations and activities, support to the Palestinian people and condemnation of Israeli violations. It also asked the international community for the end of the Palestinian sufferings, and threw more than once the idea of sending an international force to the occupied Palestinian territories.

The Palestinian issue was on the agenda of all the OIC meetings, even the organizational ones, and those of its various institutions, and the secretary-general had highlighted it in most of his official and social functions. Though mere declarations and condemnations do not change the realities on the ground, they had in this case at least reflected the keenness of the organization to permanently interact with the issue. It is worth noting that the secretary-general kept issuing declarations of this kind on different occasions, such as during the memorials of *al-Israa’ wa al-Mi’raj* (the night of Prophet Muhammad’s ascension to the seven heavens), the Jewish arson of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the Land Day, and on the occasions of the closure of the embassies of El Salvador and Venezuela in Jerusalem. Such declarations were also issued on the release of some kidnapped journalists, and on the blockade imposed on the Palestinian people and the general misery that it generated...⁸

During the summer of 2006, Israel launched a major military operation in GS in retaliation for the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and under

the pretext of Hizbullah's arrest of two Israeli soldiers, it waged a full-scale war against Lebanon. In collaboration with the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ICCI), the OIC organized on 25/7/2006 a humanitarian campaign to support the Palestinian and Lebanese people.⁹ It also held on 1/8/2006 an emergency meeting of all the humanitarian and philanthropic relief institutions working in Istanbul to develop a mechanism for collecting and distributing donations to the two people. For this very same purpose, the OIC also held on 3/8/2006 a Special Meeting of the Extended Executive Committee in Malaysia, and contacted international and European officials.

These contacts between the secretary-general and international officials formed a prominent aspect of the OIC activities during the year 2006. Through them, Ihsanoglu tried to discuss the Palestinian issue, and to emphasize the organization's support for the fundamental rights of the Palestinians, and its demand not to discontinue aid to them. Amongst those important meetings was the one that took place between Secretary Ihsanoglu and Javier Solana, EU high representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), on the occasion of the latter's visit to the OIC headquarters on 13/2/2006. Others were with Jack Straw, the British foreign secretary, and Terje Roed-Larsen, the representative of the secretary-general of the UN, on 8/3/2006 and 19/3/2006 respectively. Moreover, on the invitation of the Russian government, Secretary Ihsanoglu visited Moscow on 7-8/6/2006. While participating in the UN General Assembly 61st Session in New York, Secretary Ihsanoglu had meetings with Solana, Nicholas Burns, the American under secretary of state for political affairs, on 22/9/2006, and, three days later, with Kofi Annan, the secretary-general of the UN.¹⁰

The OIC contributed in the endorsement by the Human Rights Council (HRC) of a resolution presented by the Arab and Islamic blocks on the violations by Israel of human rights in the occupied lands.¹¹ The OIC-UN Coordination Meeting held in Rabat on 11-13/7/2006, succeeded in formulating a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the two organizations on human rights,¹² and the UN had patronized on 4/12/2006 a resolution that consolidated the international role of the OIC.

On the economic and cultural fields, the OIC had initial contacts with the IDB and the PA to take preliminary measures to implement the special resolution to establish *al-Aqsa* University in Jerusalem, which was part of the 10 year program

approved by the Third Extraordinary Session of the Islamic Summit Conference, held in Mecca in December 2005. The Coordination Meeting of the OIC Subsidiary Organs and Institutions on 5/3/2006, held in Jeddah, discussed the establishment of *al-Aqsa* University and how the Research Centre for Islamic History, Art and Culture (IRCICA) will execute projects to preserve the Islamic identity of Jerusalem through (*al-Quds* 2015) program.¹³

On 1/6/2006, the president of the IDB, Ahmad Muhammad ‘Ali, declared the allocation of \$100 million to establish some vital projects in the Palestinian lands during the coming 12 months. Of this sum, \$70 million were given by the Arab economic funds and the rest, \$30 million, by *al-Aqsa* Fund. The president added that this fund is exclusively for funding the projects, and not for the payment of salaries.¹⁴

By the end of 2006, the OIC tried to bridge the widening gap between the Palestinian factions. Since October 2006, it conducted numerous contacts with the Palestinian leaders, and repeatedly called the Palestinian factions and political forces to be patient, avoid bloody intra-conflicts and resume the negotiations on the formation of a government of national unity. Under the patronage of Secretary Ihsanoglu, and during a visit that he paid to the Palestinian land in which he met both President Mahmud ‘Abbas and Premier Isma‘il Haniyah, a three-point agreement was concluded to calm the situation on 19/12/2006,¹⁵ but it soon broke down. Nonetheless, this showed Ihsanoglu’s concern about the deteriorating security conditions in Palestine, and his activities and mediation were, in fact, welcomed and commended by Haniyah¹⁶ and the Palestinian factions.¹⁷ Subsequently, in his drive for a truce, Ihsanoglu met Khalid Mish‘al in Damascus and discussed with him the internal Palestinian affairs.¹⁸

The OIC announcement of the forthcoming meeting of the Islamic Office for the Boycott of Israel, which is part of the organization’s infrastructure, led to an outcry in the Israeli press. But Ihsanoglu responded by saying that the OIC position on the issue of boycotting Israel is based on the decisions of its 57 members-states.¹⁹ Though some Muslim countries have political and economic relations with Israel, the overwhelming majority of the Muslim masses consider Israel to be a staunch enemy of the Muslim nation (*Ummah*), and adamantly oppose normalization with it. Indeed this is the major predicament for any development of diplomatic or commercial relations with Israel.

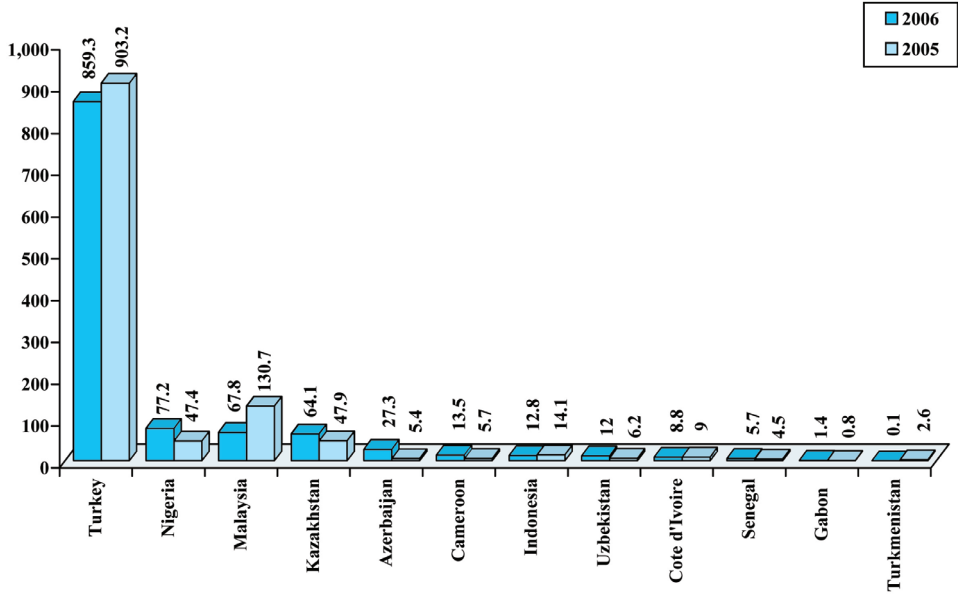
However, Turkey is the major Israeli trade partner in the Muslim world. Its imports from Israel totaled \$859.3 million in 2006 compared to \$903.2 million in 2005, while its exports to Israel in 2006 amounted to \$1.27 billion compared to \$1.22 billion in 2005. Israel also have a fairly strong trade relations with Nigeria, Malaysia, Indonesia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as well as with some Arab countries. The following table records the volume of Israeli trade with a number of non-Arab Muslim countries as provided by Israeli sources:

**Table 1/5: The Israeli Trade with a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2003-2006 (\$ million)²⁰**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2006	2005	2004	2003	2006	2005	2004	2003
Turkey	859.3	903.2	813.5	470.3	1,272.7	1,221.1	1,166.9	951.5
Nigeria	77.2	47.4	43	28.4	0.3	0.7	0.8	5.1
Malaysia	67.8	130.7	203.7	276.8	53.8	41	32.6	26
Kazakhstan	64.1	47.9	38.5	28.5	2.3	3.6	0.5	1.1
Azerbaijan	27.3	5.4	5.3	2.9	0.7	0.4	0.1	0.5
Cameroon	13.5	5.7	4	2.8	0	0	0	0
Indonesia	12.8	14.1	11.3	10	87.1	43.6	27.4	32.6
Uzbekistan	12	6.2	9.9	6.3	1.3	1.3	1.2	1.8
Cote d'Ivoire	8.8	9	10.5	8.4	2.2	5.5	4.1	2.9
Senegal	5.7	4.5	4.5	2.2	0	0.1	0	0
Gabon	1.4	0.8	0	0.1	1.5	1.4	1.8	2.7
Turkmenistan	0.1	2.6	9	6.8	1	1.7	1.6	1

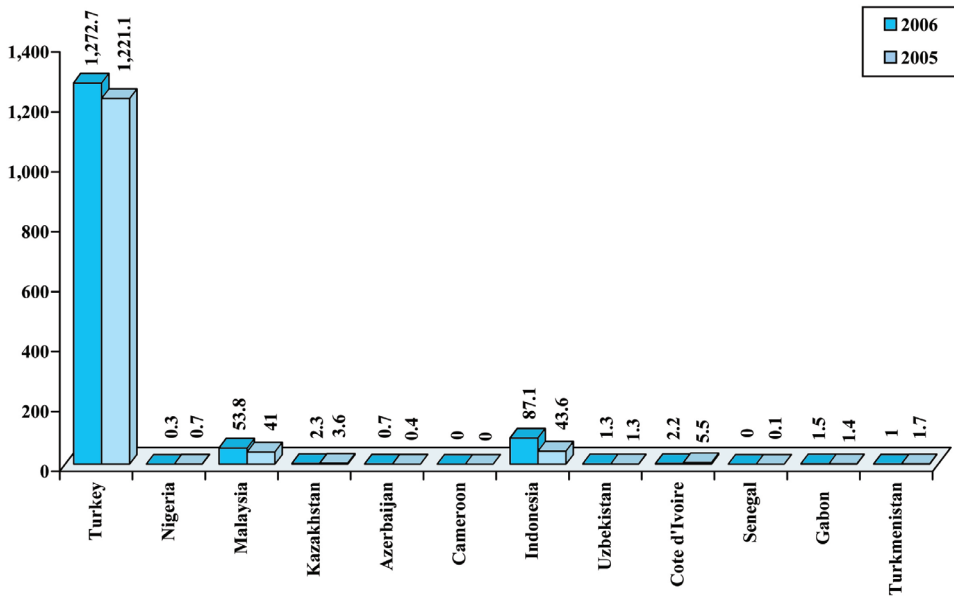
Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries

2005-2006 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries

2005-2006 (\$ million)



Second: Turkey

The Turkish-Palestinian relations in the year 2006 had entered a rather different phase. The year had experienced some significant events that had their impact on these relations, particularly on the Turkish side where policies were reformulated and restructured, sometimes drastically.

The resounding victory of Hamas in the legislative elections, and its single-handed formation of the Palestinian government in 2006, after years of Fatah domination, had taken all other forces by surprise. This was particularly so in Israel and in the west, who decided to confront this important, and presumably dangerous, development through a tight blockade of the new government until its crawls and accepts to recognize Israel.

Being an offshoot of the Muslim Brothers that swept across the Arab-Muslim world, Hamas was in a way intellectually related to the Turkish Islamic Movement under the leadership of Necmettin Erbakan.

However, in August 2001, the “*Tajdidiyun*,” loosely rendered “the Revivalists,” led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan and ‘Abdullah Gul, disassociated themselves from the Erbakan Islamic trend, and formed their own party, the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*-AKP). Notwithstanding the denials of its founders, this party is somehow conservative and Islamicly-oriented.

On its assumption of power in autumn 2002, the AKP initiated a new policy that opened up towards the Arab-Islamic world, particularly Syria, Iran and Saudi Arabia, but tangibly contracted Turkey’s relations with Israel. This was the first test of the Islamic orientation of this budding party whose leaders has, however, continued to persistently deny because of some internal sensitivities. However, what encouraged the party to pursue this line was the progress in Turkey’s plea to join the European Union that had been facilitated by the country’s common stand with some major European powers, like France and Germany, against the American occupation of Iraq. Indeed, western powers do have their differences over Iraq and some other foreign policy issues, but they are united on the Palestinian issue. Though giving the Palestinians practically nothing during the era of the so-called “moderates,” the west had now solidly rose against Hamas that have, ironically, come to power through democratic elections.

The AKP felt the time to be opportune for undertaken a leading role that will, if successful, multiply Turkey's influence in the region, and consolidate the Islamic base in the country. Hence, on 16/2/2006, the world was stunned by the presence of Khalid Mish'al, the head of the Political Bureau of Hamas, in Ankara, and his two meetings with the minister of foreign affairs, 'Abdullah Gul, and his top aides. A lot has been written about this controversial visit, and we need not to address it in details in this limited space. Suffice to say that this visit was a turning point in Turkey's foreign policy.

Below are some observations on this visit:

1. We do not know who had specifically extended the invitation to Mish'al. Is it the government through its Ministry of Foreign Affairs or the AKP, or had it been extended on the personal request of the quest or through the good offices of the premier's advisor, Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu? This indicates that the AKP was rather confused on the exact procedure to be adopted.
2. The visit's program, that had been announced just a few hours before Mish'al's arrival, had not been strictly observed by the Turkish government. The scheduled meeting with Prime Minister Erdogan did not at all take place, while the meeting with Minister Gul was not held at the headquarters of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but at the headquarters of the AKP in Ankara. Moreover, none of the party's officials participated in Mish'al press conference, and all the slogans that indicated that it was held in the party's headquarter were removed.

Obviously, the invitation had exposed the AKP to widespread criticism within the country and abroad, in Israel and the west, particularly the USA. However, the major impact of the visit may be summarized in the following points:

1. The unfortunate manner in which Mish'al was received in Ankara damaged the image of Erdogan's government, which was exhibited as weak and hesitant, even not in control of the internal affairs of the country to the extent that it could not bear the repercussions of such a visit. While on the other hand, Moscow and Tehran had officially received Mish'al and at highest levels.
2. The manner of reception portrayed Hamas as an illegitimate organ, which is a grave insult to both Hamas and the democratic process.

3. Conversely, the fact that the visit took place at the peak of the Israeli-western drive to tighten the isolation of Hamas is in itself an important step towards bypassing this isolation. The Turkish message that there is no way but to recognize Hamas and accept the outcome of the democratic elections was somehow propagated.

All in all, the government of the AKP was in this respect in conformity with the fundamentals of the Turkish policy. For the crux of the message that ‘Abdullah Gul addressed to Mish‘al was that Hamas should first and foremost recognize Israel and discard violence, which is the very essence of the Israeli position. Apart from offering a free of charge service to Israel, the Turkish demands were against the fundamentals upon which Hamas was elected to power. Even if Hamas agreed, what will the Palestinian issue get in return? Moreover, why had not Israel offered something to the PA that recognized Israel many years before Hamas won the elections?

Turkey tried to have an effective role in the Middle East through Hamas, thus was its double role and double talk with Hamas and Israel. No doubt, in the circumstances prevailing at the time, this has given an edge to the Turkish government. But Turkey’s maneuver was obstructed by the refusal of both Hamas and Israel to budge. While Hamas declined to accept the Turkish demand without concrete gains to the Palestinian issue, Israel and its patron, the USA, did not give a positive signal in case Hamas retreats from some aspects of its political discourse.

The Turkish role stopped at this juncture as Washington has not yet been prepared to pay the price of the settlement. The American position was apparently motivated by some regional considerations related to the insistence of the Bush administration not to show any sign of weakness at that time when it was striving to exercise pressure on Iran, Syria and Hizbullah.

Turkey had been exposed to massive pressure, first not to allow the visit to take place, then to give Mish‘al the “appropriate” message if and when he comes, and, finally, on the expiry of the visit without satisfying the Israeli-American agenda, a campaign was launched against the orientation of the AKP.

In fact, Turkey had changed course after the visit, and both its government and institutions had become more cautious towards Hamas government. Nonetheless, contacts between Hamas and the Turkish government continued. Premier Erdogan called his Palestinian counterpart, Isma‘il Haniyah, several times, and the Turkish

government capitalized on its relations with Hamas to penetrate and have a say in the region. Hence, on the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, on 25/6/2006, Erdogan rushed to offer mediation between Hamas and Israel on this crisis. However, he demanded from Ehud Olmert, the Israeli premier, to show flexibility when negotiating with Hamas government.²¹

By this proposed intermediary, Turkey wanted to improve its image among the Israeli public that had been distorted by Mish'al's visit. After failing to draw Haniyah to its position, the government of the AKP tried the Syrian avenue. Erdogan's senior advisor, Dr. Ahmet Davutoglu, visited Damascus and met the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and Khalid Mish'al. The Turkish government had at first denied that a meeting with Mish'al had ever taken place, but later, several days after the incident, it admitted the contact between the two men.

The new meeting with Mish'al was an indicator of Erdogan's desperate interest in a diplomatic breakthrough, even at the expose of contacts with the man whose earlier visit to the capital had led to a barrage of criticism of Erdogan's government. But to no avail.

It is interesting to note that the government of the AKP had been criticized for its rush to invite an individual who bears no official capacity in the PA. This may have been because by the time of the invitation the Arab and international responses to Hamas had not been clearly specified, and that Hamas government had not yet been formed.

However, the case of Isma'il Haniyah is different. In spite of his official capacity earned through democratic elections, the Turkish government never extended to him an official invitation to visit Ankara since his assumption of the premiership on 21/2/2006, and throughout the year 2006. Perhaps the government of the AKP did not have the stamina for another confrontation with Washington and Israel, particularly after the serious repercussions of Mish'al's visit had become visible, and the application of the blockade on Hamas' government gained momentum.

But this development hampered the struggle of Hamas to end the American-Israeli siege of its government. For the inability or unwillingness of the government of the AKP to invite Haniyah to Ankara encouraged the Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer, to engage in a serious and negative precedent against the Palestinian people, namely when he met the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas in the Palestinian occupied territories on 7-8/6/2006, but without seeing Premier Haniyah.

Though Sezer may be “very sensitive” towards all Islamic trends, particularly in Turkey and the AKP specifically, this is not a convincing justification for not meeting the premier of a democratically elected government. Moreover, Sezer’s charge that Hamas is a “terrorist” movement that targets civilians should have logically been extended to include Israel which occupies Arab lands and commits the worst acts of terrorism.

The refusal of Sezer to see Premier Haniyah is indeed an insult to the option of the Palestinian people, the Palestinian democracy and to Turkey itself if it was at all striving to gain the confidence of the Palestinian people in particular and the Arab masses in general. The failure of the government of the AKP to invite Haniyah and the decline of Sezer to see him are indeed interrelated and interconnected.

Thus Turkey, with all its shades of opinion and under such circumstances, is neither neutral nor qualified to play a balanced and an effective role in the Palestinian issue. In fact, the Israeli-American factor determines all its movements, at least on this issue.

No body doubts the sincerity of the leadership of the AKP to support the struggle of the Palestinian people, an objective that they had initially, and on their assumption of power, actively pursued directly and indirectly. But they failed to sustain this even-handed policy because of the massive pressure that placed them in a dilemma, namely, either to ignore this pressure and go ahead with their intention to support the Palestinians irrespective of the dire consequences, or to keep a low profile awaiting a more favorable environment. Thus, we can suggest the following on this topic:

1. It is generally believed that a change in the Turkish internal and external policies requires a long time. The first five years’ term of the AKP is not adequate to effect such a change, and another term of at least five years is needed, since the forthcoming elections, scheduled in the autumn of the year 2007. Pending this development, it is unlikely that the reserved Turkish attitude towards Hamas would change, if, of course, it continued in power.
2. It has become glaringly clear for the AKP that the “fundamentals” of the “Kemalist” state, which has been rooted for many decades, could not be easily changed. Thus has been the party’s retreat from the open policy that it adopted on assumption of power.

3. Amongst these fundamentals is the Israeli-Turkish military relationship, represented in treaties that provided for, *inter alia*, joint training and maneuvers, and cooperation in the field of military industry. Ankara have no option but to give due consideration to this reality.
4. Since the USA is Turkey's main supporter on issues related to Greece, Cyprus and Armenia, the Turkish government was bound to improve its relations with the Jewish lobby to face the Armenian and Greek lobbies in the American Congress. The key to this is to continue Turkey's good relations with the Hebrew state.
5. Hamas is generally viewed as a staunch representative of the so-called fundamental Islam, which is adamantly opposed by the extreme "Kemali" trend in Turkey that is represented by the Army, the Presidency and other state institutions, the Council of Higher Education and the Judiciary. These forces do their utmost best to obstruct any rapprochement between Turkey on one side and any Arab or Islamic partner on the other side. To confront the new policy of the AKP, they exerted all kinds of pressure on Erdogan, including threat of a military coup.

Nonetheless, by and large, the AKP succeeded in changing the official Turkish orientation (the masses are in total support) towards the Palestinian issue. After being exclusively one-sided, the AKP managed to steer Turkish foreign policy towards the Arab-Muslim world, notwithstanding Ankara's intense and long-standing secular and western fundamentals.

Several campaigns were launched in Turkey during the year 2006 to collect donations for the Palestinians, in which as much as 91 NGOs were sometimes involved.²² Demonstrations in support of the Palestinian cause were frequent, particularly after the Israeli attacks on GS following the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier by the end of June. The Turkish Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), for example, organized on 9/7/2006 a huge demonstration in Istanbul that condemned the Israeli brutal attacks.²³ Moreover, several Turkish MPs resigned from the Israeli-Turkish Parliamentary Friendship Group in protest of the mounting Israeli aggression on Palestine and Lebanon,²⁴ and the opinion polls always reflect the hatred of the Turks to both Israel and the USA.

The significant Turkish pro-Arab and Palestinian policies that were masterminded by the AKP have, no doubt, constituted an unprecedented historical

achievement when compared to the previous ones. Judging by his repeated criticism of the Israeli barbaric practices against the Palestinians, which seems to have by far superseded those of some Arab leaders, Erdogan is, so to speak, much more “Arabist” than those Arab leaders.

Turkey was not satisfied by those verbal denunciations, but also took several measures to minimize the hardship imposed on the Palestinian people. According to press reports in some Turkish newspapers on 6/1/2006, Turkey planned to establish an industrial zone near Erez Passage to employ 6-10 thousand Palestinian workers. Both the PA and Israel agreed to this project in treaties concluded on 4-5/1/2006 respectively. The construction of this \$100 million project, which was funded and managed by the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), had actually started in the spring. But during their invasion of GS that followed the kidnapping of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, the Israeli tanks completely destroyed all the infrastructure of the industrial zone that has been appropriately named “the baby of Erdogan.” Nothing is known about the future of the zone and the project.²⁵

To objectively assess the drive and efforts of the AKP to support the Palestinian people, we should understand the Turkish historical and political legacy, as well as the delicate internal balance of power that the party inherited, and which have robbed a democratically elected government the freedom of movement vis a vis the existing institutions. For the government of the AKP continued to adhere to the military treaties concluded with Israeli, and it attended the joint security meetings in which the USA, the UK and others had also participated.

Meanwhile, trade between the two countries continued, and its volume was almost the same as that of the preceding year, 2005. Turkish exports to Israel increased from \$1.22 billion in 2005 to \$1.27 billion in 2006. As for the Israeli exports to Turkey, they were reduced from \$903.2 million in 2005 to \$859.3 million in 2006.²⁶

But the most significant step was the initiation of the necessary conditions for extensive cooperation in the field of energy, as Turkey is an important corridor for the flow of natural gas and petrol from Russia, Qazvin region, Iran, and Iraq to Europe, Israel and others. On 15/12/2006, a treaty was signed by the energy ministers of both countries to extend a pipeline from the Turkish Ceyhan Port on the Mediterranean Sea to Israel. Its aim is to secure the flow of petrol and natural

gas to the port of Ashkelon, and from there across an existing pipeline to Eilat, and hence to the Indian and east Asian markets.²⁷

However, Turkey had not only endorsed the decision of the UN to consider 27 January of each year a memorial day of the Holocaust, but also undertook in early 2006 to organize yearly festival activities on this occasion. As mentioned earlier, Turkey usually support the Jewish lobby all over the world, but particularly in the USA, to help it to confront the Greek and Armenian lobbies in the American Congress.

Turkey followed throughout the year 2006 a delicate and dangerous policy that aimed at two rather contradictory goals, namely, to maintain a minimum, but courteous, expression of its Islamic identity, and to contain to the lowest possible level the negative attitude of the American administration towards Erdogan's government during the forthcoming Turkish presidential and legislative elections, scheduled in May and November 2007 respectively. Thus, the foreign policy of the government of the AKP is not expected to change, at least in so far as its courteous attitude towards Hamas government is concerned, before the conclusion of these two elections. This is particularly so because of the ongoing extremist policy of the Bush administration towards all its adversaries in Iraq and the region at large.

Third: Iran

With the assumption of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the Iranian presidency in the summer of 2005, the clear cut position of Iran towards the Palestinian issue and Israel has increasingly attracted world attention. While calling for complete support to the Palestinian people and their right to return to their land, President Ahmadinejad casted doubt on the viability of the existence of the Jewish state, and considered "its eradication from the world a foregone conclusion, its days are numbered, and the peoples of the world will be elated by the disappearance of a state that was founded on lies and aggression."²⁸ These declarations, coupled with Ahmadinejad's call on 11/12/2006 to revisit the issue of the Holocaust, and to convene an international conference to review the global vision of the Holocaust in Tehran, to explore the exaggeration and myth that were associated with this historical issue, led to an outcry in the West. The Israeli premier, Ehud Olmert, claimed that the proposed conference "provokes disgust,"²⁹ and the president of the

Knesset, Dalia Itzik, condemned Ahmadinejad as “a retarded person who wants to pursue Hitler policies.” She also called upon the presidents of world parliaments “to enact a decree that makes the denial of the Holocaust a criminal act.”³⁰

The Iranian president’s declaration and his antagonism to Israel gave many quarters a pretext to associate Ahmadinejad’s threats to abolish Israel with Iran’s “presumed acquisition” of the atomic bomb, and to call upon the international community to prevent Iran by all means to complete its nuclear program.

Another provocation against the Iranian nuclear program was based on the possibility that Iran provides “fundamentalist” Islamic movements, likes Hamas and Hizbullah, with atomic bombs that maybe used against the western states and Israel. Some detailed studies were conducted to explore the legitimacy of using this weapon from an Islamic point of view. They claimed that the Muslims had bypassed the “traditional jurisprudence,” and became more inclined to justify the so-called “suicidal operations” and the killing of civilians in cold blood as defense means. Contemporary Muslims are reflecting in their religious legacy to support this justification, and to ascertain how and when atomic bombs can be used.³¹

This extensive obsession with the Iranian nuclear program extended to claim that nuclear weapons might fall in the hands of non-governmental Islamic organizations that do not care a damn for the new, unexpected and increasing spread of the phenomenon of “self-immolation operations” during the last two decades.³² During a meeting with the Russian President Vladimir Putin, the Israeli premier, Ehud Olmert, warned that these weapons may fall in the “hands of the terrorists, the enemies of Israel.”³³

Israel and the world community do not lack excuses for this instigation against Iran and its presumed ability to pass conventional and nuclear weapons to radical Islamic movements. For Iran had consistently supported the Palestinian people and the resistance movements against Israel, and refused to recognize it. It is because of this very support that Iran is accused of supporting “terrorism.” The USA insisted on the condition that the Islamic Republic must discard “terrorism,” for any resumption of relations with Iran. The Iranian support to Palestine reached its nadir during a visit that Ahmadinejad paid to Damascus. After a meeting with all the leaders of the Palestinian resistance factions, Ahmadinejad declared his country’s full support to “the option of resistance,”³⁴ and promised to continue supporting Hamas until it “liberates all occupied territories.”³⁵

Thus, it is not surprising that this Iranian consistent support to the Palestinian issue, which the president had untirely repeated, be taken as a “suitable pretext” for the hypothesis of the transfer of nuclear weapons to the Palestinian resistance movements that fight Israel. With the support of the USA, Israel should then stop this threat before it becomes a reality by all possible means, including a military strike. Unlike the previous years, Iran had become the focus of the deliberations of the International Policy Institute for Counter-Terrorism (ICT) conference in Herzliya. It was there that the Israeli consultant on the fight against terrorism, Shlomo Mofaz, maintained that “Iran, not the Palestinians, constitute a strategic danger because it has the capability to threaten the existence of Israel.”³⁶

The other development that highlighted the relations between Iran and the Palestinian issue during the year 2006 was the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections in 25/1/2006. This presumed unexpected victory had confused Arab and international policies towards this new reality, and gave Hamas the opportunity to form the government and become a full partner in the PA. All the expectations that peace was on the gate after the demise of President Yasir ‘Arafat have now turned upside down. With the organization’s insistence on the resistance and its refusal to recognize Israel or directly negotiate with it, the presence of Hamas complicated the political equation. The world found itself confronting a new “stubborn problem” in Palestine. Though the international community had kept encouraging free and fair elections, but the result on the ground in the Palestinian case was the success of a political force that was unwanted by the USA and Israel. Rather than exploring the possibility of a peaceful settlement, the attention of the world community was now directed, read diverted, to look for measures to blockade Hamas, and to force it to change its fundamentals and priorities.

Rather than being a source of strength for Hamas, in the Arab and Islamic arena, some tried to make this victory a formidable liability and a burden on the movement. While in the past numerous invitations were extended to Hamas, and its delegations were cordially received in Arab capitals, no Arab state, except Qatar, had officially invited Premier Isma‘il Haniyah after the formation of Hamas government.³⁷

Nonetheless, Iran never ceased or hesitated to publicly declare its support to Hamas. On 19/2/2006, a Hamas delegation, led by Khalid Mish‘al, was received in Tehran, and the visit had synchronized with a parliamentary resolution to form a

committee to support the Islamic revolution in Palestine.³⁸ The assistant president of the Republic insisted that “the duty of the Arab and Islamic masses is to defend and continuously support the Palestinian people to continue the resistance.” He emphasized Iran’s support to Hamas “until it achieves the aspirations and ambitions of the Palestinian people...”³⁹ The Iranian government promised Khalid Mish‘al to compensate the suspension of the American-European aid to the Palestinian government by a sum of \$250 million,⁴⁰ and ‘Ali Khamenei, the guide (*Murshid*) and the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, declared, after a meeting with Mish‘al in Tehran:

The victory of Hamas is a fulfillment of God’s promise of victory to the *mujahidin*... All the doors had been closed in the face of Hamas, and what remains is one door, the door of the Jihad... The victory of Hamas is inseparably associated with the resistance and the defense of the rights of the Palestinian people.

Khamenei commended the position of Hamas and Mish‘al by saying, “They are principled and correct positions...”⁴¹

On the occasion of Haniyah’s visit to Tehran in 7/12/2006, Shimon Peres called for the expulsion of Iran from the UN, and a Likud Knesset member, Yuval Steinitz, demanded that the Palestinian leadership be expelled outside the country.⁴² However, Haniyah declared that his visit achieved tangible results, “around \$250 million and several projects, which constitutes direct economic and financial support to the Palestinian government and peoples, of which \$120 million were allocated for the year 2007.” He also said that Iran undertook to pay six months’ salaries of officials in three ministries, and the grants of the detainees and their families, which cost \$45 million. Haniyah added that Iran also undertook to allocate a sum of \$60 million to cover the cost of six months’ stipends of 100 thousand workers at a monthly rate of \$100 per worker. As for the fishermen who were deprived from going to the sea for months, Iran offered to fund three thousand of them by a monthly aid of \$100 each and for a period of six months, which cost \$1.8 million. Iran also undertook to allocate \$15 million to build the “Palestinian Cultural Palace” and national libraries, and other \$20 million for the maintenance of two thousand houses.⁴³

Following Iran’s visit that had slightly relaxed the imposed financial and political blockade on Hamas after its victory in the legislature elections, the movement was exposed to an extensive and widespread campaign of abuse and accusations by

some Israeli, Arab and Palestinian quarters. They propagated at times that Hamas is “an agent of Iran that implements its designs,” and at others that it “plans to make the PA a replica of the Iranian regime.” Some Israeli political and security sources expressed their “deep concern of the rapprochement between Hamas and Iran.” According to the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, the directors of the various security agencies in Israel held several intensive meetings to evaluate the bilateral relations between Tehran and Hamas, and that they come to the consensus that the regime in Iran aspires for a strategic alliance with Hamas..., and that Hamas’ action is a defiant step that had been jubilantly taken after the general enthusiasm for its success to reduce the damage of the siege on the Palestinian people.⁴⁴ A spokesman for the US Department of State said, “If Hamas accepts to have Iranian financial aid, this shows that it does not intend to discard terrorism.”⁴⁵ Moreover, Dan Gillerman, the Israeli ambassador to the UN, strongly attacked what he called the axis of Iran, Syria and Hamas that constitutes, in his words, “a new plague that grows the seeds for the First World War in the 21st century.”⁴⁶ The American-Israeli attack was “two-in-one” in the sense that it was directed towards both Iran and Hamas on the assumption that the former is “close” to the Palestinian territories, and the latter is “committed” to establish a state on the Iranian model in GS and the Palestinian territories under the jurisdiction of the PA.⁴⁷

We should point out here to some different readings of Hamas-Iran relationship after the former’s victory in the elections, and the formation of the new Palestinian government. An Israeli analyst, Amos Gilboa, wrote in *Ma’ariv* newspaper that Iran will fill the financial vacuum of the Palestinian government if Israel, the EU and the USA failed to transfer the funds..., but he expressed doubt in the “blind following” of Hamas to Iran because it “had maintained independence, and its work program is categorically different from that of Iran.”⁴⁸ The Israeli intelligence and some western analysts and diplomats had also felt that the “claim of a probable close relation between Hamas and Tehran is premature and exaggerated.” They based their analysis on Hamas “traditional refusal of any foreign intervention and its adherence to the national agenda.” Likewise, Anat Kurz of the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies (JCSS) considered Hamas to be “first and foremost a national Palestinian movement, before being Islamic. Thus, any rapprochement with Iran is farfetched, as it may rob the movement its solid support in the Palestinian political arena.”⁴⁹

Thus, Mish'al and Haniyah's visits to Tehran had exposed Hamas to a barrage of criticism and accusation that focused on a presumable shift in Hamas' position to be a "tool" in the hands of Iran, and that its alliance with Iran constitutes a serious danger to the Hebrew state. Conversely, some Israeli security analysts and politicians argued that this presumed alliance is exaggerated because Hamas adamantly refuses to allow any external influence.

Meanwhile, Hamas' victory shocked American policy makers who has been planning for "a new Middle East" void of radical movements and "terrorism" that have threatened the American and Israeli security and strategic interests. Washington considered its occupation of Iraq a necessary preliminary step for the birth of this planned Middle East, and the expulsion, after the assassination of President al-Hariri, of Syrian forces from Lebanon to be the second step towards "the birth of democracy." The American officials kept repeating that their duty is to defend the weak and fragile governments in the Middle East, or what they call the "young democracies," in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine. Hence, when Hamas achieved victory and it was asked to form the new government, the pro-American states were confused, and international attention shifted from them towards exploring ways and means to intensify pressure and tighten the siege on Hamas. The American administration declared that its confrontation with Hamas is part of its struggle against "the axis of the extremists," which includes Syria, Iran, Hamas, and Hizbullah. What was required from the international community, and even Arab official and public quarters, was to point fingers to this axis that should not be allowed to obstruct peace and stability in the Middle East. Thus, from the American point of view, Iran and Hamas are two sides of the same coin in the sense that they constitute one front against the American project. When Jordan accused Hamas of smuggling weapons into its territories, Iran was accused of being the source.⁵⁰ But, since the government of Hamas was in desperate need to open up towards the world, particularly in its Arab and Islamic neighborhood, it is farfetched that it would indulge itself in such an adventure that is "suicidal by all means and measures."⁵¹

Within this exaggerated tendency of a new axis composed of Hamas and Iran that constitutes an imminent threat to Israel, the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* published in 10/2/2006 an article by Ben Caspit that spoke of a change in the fronts that surrounded Israel and threaten its security. He maintained that the

historical eastern front no longer exists, but there is a new eastern front of Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and Hamas. He added that these four hands emerge from one body, and receive their instructions from one head, the snake that lives in Tehran. To deal with the Palestinian side of this front, Caspit suggested total isolation of the Palestinians. He maintained that “since the Palestinian people had chosen Hamas, this is what they deserve.” During the deliberations of the leaders of the security apparatus, Dan Halutz suggested to stop paying the Palestinians the 300 million shekel (about \$68 million) of taxes that Israel collects monthly on their behalf because they will allocate this fund “to establish radical and ideologically committed schools. This will never take place and we will not help it because it will be an axis that connects Tehran with Damascus, Beirut and Gaza. We should destroy it now and right now.” Halutz added, “We should view Hamas and deal with it as if we are dealing with Iran.”⁵²

Meanwhile, the relative success of Hamas in breaking the blockade and its contacts with Iran increased the fear of the American administration that the organization will continue in power and its experiment proves to be successful. This was one of the reasons behind the American decision to wage the war via Israel on Lebanon in July 2006 to crush the resistance of Hizbullah, one of the most important allies of Hamas and Iran. From the view of America and its supporters, this will crush at an early stage this probable alliance between these “radical” forces that hamper peace and security in the Middle East. Thus, even after the Israeli failure to crush Hizbullah, Washington never separated the Palestinian and Iranian issues. For progress along the Palestinian-Israeli route will facilitate Washington’s effort to form a strong coalition against Iran and international “terrorism.”⁵³

But Israel seems to have its own concerns on this fusion between the Iranian and Palestinian issues. The vision of the “moderate” Arab states was to achieve a “satisfactory solution that restricts Iranian radicalism towards the Palestinian issue.” Yet, this “satisfactory solution” was still unacceptable to Israel.⁵⁴ However, these Israeli fears are unfounded in the foreseeable future, as the USA, particularly the administration of the neo-conservatives, have not exercised any pressure on Israel to surrender any meaningful concessions that prepare the stage for the resolution of the Palestinian issue. On the contrary, Washington has supported all the Israeli security, political and military policies, including the racist Separation Wall.

As far as the Palestinian issue is concerned, the year 2006 was the year of Hamas, which stood fast and never budged, and Iran, which persistently continued to support the Palestinian issue and Hamas. However, the insistence of President Ahmadinejad on the illegitimacy of the existence of Israel and the inevitability of its end had intensified western political and media campaign against Iran. Correspondingly, the year 2006 was the year of intensive pressure on Hamas and Tehran. The American administration seems to be determined to pursue this line of policy, and to press the Arab countries to view Tehran, not Tel Aviv, as their first enemy in order to tighten the grip on Iran and its allies and weaken their influence and prestige. Will this American strategy succeed? It remains to be seen.

However, in a famous article in *Foreign Affairs*, Richard Haass, the president of the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), responded to the above query by writing, “The Middle East’s next era promises to be one in which outside actors have a relatively modest impact and local forces enjoy the upper hand, and in which the local actors gaining power are radicals committed to changing the status quo.” Haass argued that The Islamic Revolution in Iran had “brought down one of the pillars of U.S. policy in the region.” The factors that contributed to Washington’s loss of influence in the region are, in Haass’ view, the collapse of the peace process, the failure of Camp David negotiations of 2000, the weakness of ‘Arafat’s successor, the rise of Hamas and the unilateral Israeli measures and policies. Haass also opined that Iran will be a formidable power in the region, and that the Hebrew state seems to be in a more difficult situation than it had been before its war with Lebanon, which will further deteriorate if Iran developed nuclear weapons. Haass maintained that there is no tendency in the horizon for a real peace process, thus the “new Middle East” will not be as the USA and Israel want, rather it will be along the vision and the expectations of their adversaries.⁵⁵

Fourth: Pakistan

The Pakistani regime adopted on the Palestinian issue the general line of the pro-American Arab regimes. Thus, it endorsed the official declared policies that support the Palestinian issue and call for the right of the Palestinian people for self-determination, the establishment of their independent state in the WB and GS and the return of the refugees. Conversely, since the year 2005, the official, but

rather low-key Pakistani-Israeli contacts, which had been widely resisted by the masses, have come to the forefront. The Pakistani regime, under the leadership of Pervez Musharraf, saw in the country's relations with Israel a vehicle to improve relations with the USA, and to secure American financial help. Moreover, it will also be beneficial in the realization of some economic and military interests that are necessary to improve Pakistan's capabilities to face its historical adversary India, which maintains relations with Israel. Nonetheless, due to several interrelated internal factor, the Pakistani government approached this subject with considerable care and caution.

Thus, Tasnim Aslam, the spokesperson of the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs, welcomed the stage that will follow the Palestinian legislative elections and the victory of Hamas. In an official communiqué, she said, "The government and people of Pakistan welcome the fair and completely peaceful Palestinian legislative elections. This is the practical democracy that we welcome, and we hope that the outcome of the elections will lead to the continuation of the peace process in the Middle East." However, this carefully worded declaration did not include any word of congratulation to Hamas for its victory in these elections.⁵⁶

Pakistan's stereotyped and routine relations with the Palestinian side continued during the year 2006. The only important development was the visit of Mahmud al-Zahhar, the Palestinian foreign minister, to Islamabad on 7-8/6/2006, when the Pakistani government declared a grant of \$3 million to the Palestinian people, undertook to build at its own expense an embassy for Palestine in Islamabad and to increase the scholarships offered to Palestinian students in the universities of Pakistan.⁵⁷

During a visit to Syria on 13/7/2006, Ehsan ul-Haq, the special Pakistani envoy to the Middle East, condemned the Israeli continuous aggression on the Palestinian and Lebanese people, and emphasized his country's rejection of all forms of aggression.⁵⁸ Pakistan also condemned the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, and declared its full support to the Lebanese people. After the Lebanon war, both the Pakistani Premier Shaukat 'Aziz, and the Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri, visited Lebanon in a show of support and solidarity.⁵⁹

Meanwhile, the relations of the Pakistani government with Israel during the year 2006 was even more cautious because of the mass protests of the peoples of Pakistan against any kind of contact with Israel. However, during the occasion of

Davos Economic Forum, the Turkish Premier Erdogan had reportedly discussed with President Musharraf the possibility of “an Islamic initiative,” under the auspices of the OIC, that as mentioned by Erdogan “will allow us” to undertake a form of intermediary role between the Palestinians and Israel.⁶⁰ If these reports are true, this move indicates a dangerous retreat on the Pakistani side at least, as it shifts the country from being part of the front that supports the Palestinian right to a mere neutral intermediary.

During his visit to Islamabad, al-Zahhar seems to have been assured that Pakistan will not establish any form of relationship with Israel before the Palestinian people secure their rights. As for the contacts between the governments of Pakistan and Israel during the past few months, al-Zahhar was told that they do not mean that Pakistan will stop supporting the Palestinian people. It was also declared that a scheduled visit by a Pakistani delegation to the Palestinian territories had been postponed to a later date after September 2006, when the Palestinian side will assume full control of the Rafah crossing on the expiry of the treaty that vested on the European supervisors the authority to supervise the security arrangements in Rafah Passage.⁶¹ But no official Pakistani visit to the Palestinian territories appears to have taken place, as Israel continued its closure of the passage and the blockage of the Palestinian people.

However, Pakistan repeated several times its rejection of normalization before the establishment of a Palestinian state.⁶² In a report published by the American newspaper *Los Angeles Times*, of which a resume was given in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, President Musharraf explicitly recorded the position of his government by saying that it “will eventually have to recognize Israel, but it would be political suicide to do so today.” He added that “his considerable skills at walking a tightrope’ would not enable him to negotiate the firestorm that recognizing Israel would cause, particularly after its recent attacks on Lebanon.” He mentioned that “his country would consider formally recognizing Israel only after the creation of an independent Palestinian state.”⁶³

According to the *Foreign Policy* magazine, Musharraf currently avoids to publicly address these issues, instead he talks about general topics like “moderate Islam” and a just and comprehensive settlement, whatever this may mean. The president reserves serious issues to closed doors meetings.⁶⁴

Before the end of the year 2006, there were indications of a secret meeting between the foreign ministers of Pakistan and Israel. A report published in *The Jerusalem Post* of 27/12/2006 mentioned that the Pakistani foreign minister, Kasuri, told Geo TV, a local Pakistani television station, that he lately met his Israeli counterpart Tzipi Livni. When asked on the issue, the newspaper added, the spokesperson of the Israeli foreign minister responded by evasively saying, “no comment.”⁶⁵

Under the umbrella of normalization, and on the invitation of the American Jewish Congress’s Council for World Jewry, which strives to improve Israeli-Pakistani relations, an eight-member delegation of the Pakistanis in the diaspora, selected from amongst the members of the American Muslim Peace Initiative, visited Israel. They met top Israeli officials including the president of the Supreme Court Aharon Barak, the Foreign Ministry Director-General Aharon Abramovitch, and senior officials of the ministry as well as the Israeli Defense Forces Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories General Yusef Mishlav, and the Knesset members Silvan Shalom, Efraim Sneh and Ghaleb Majadle. On the Palestinian side, the delegation met Sa’ib ‘Urayqat and Sari Nusseibeh.⁶⁶

A member of the delegation, ‘Umar ‘Atiq who lives in Arkansas state, in the USA, said, “We don’t have an iota of doubt that there should be relations between Pakistan and Israel and between Israel and the entire Arab world.” He added, “The ice has been broken. It’s just a matter of time. It’s not if, it’s when. It’s around the corner, despite what is going on in the news.”⁶⁷ Though imbued with normalization, this visit is of marginal impact as the delegates come from America, and the popular refusal of normalization with Israel inside Pakistan is as strong as ever.

In the economic field, the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported in its issue of 8/2/2006 that a delegation of Pakistani businessmen will participate in the Israeli annual fair for agricultural technology, Agritech ’06, scheduled May 2006. The source mentioned that “Members of the delegation have already informed the fair’s organizers that they plan on examining the possibility of purchasing advanced agricultural equipment and new technologies for cultivating mountainous and desert regions.” The newspaper added that the delegates also expressed interest “in signing deals for the purchase of greenhouses, irrigation equipment and other innovations that may be useful to Pakistani crop farmers.” Agritech ’06 director

said, “The organizers were surprised by the fact that the Pakistani businessmen did not even attempt to hide their identity and submitted their names and the companies they represent.” However, the newspaper did not mention its source nor how did it get the information from the Pakistani businessmen, and it did not publish further reports or news on the subject. However, it is not clear whether any Pakistani businessman attended the exhibition or any commercial deal had been concluded between the two sides.

All in all, the strong and overwhelming Islamic sentiment in Pakistan and the deeply rooted and popular hatred to Israel and to normalization, coupled with the strong opposition to Musharraf’s regime, make it very difficult for the government of Pakistan to venture at this juncture on a serious step to cultivate good relations with Israel.

Conclusion

Israel had not been able throughout the year 2006 to achieve a meaningful breakthrough in the area of normalization with Muslim countries. Besides, its tight siege on the Palestinian people, its attempts to overthrow their democratically elected government and its war on Lebanon and Hizbullah, have provoked intensive anger against it in the Muslim world. But the governments of the Islamic states and their umbrella organization, the OIC, are not up to this standard. They are impotent and disabled to have an impact on the ground. As usual, they were below the standard to deal with the Israeli blockade, and to employ their huge material and diplomatic capabilities to support the Palestinian cause. However, amongst the non-Arab Muslim countries, Iran played a decisive material and moral role in supporting Hamas and its government, and the Palestinian people in general. The nature of the Iranian regime, the threat that it may be exposed to from America and Israel and its nuclear ambitions had consolidated this Iranian pro-Palestine policies. As for Turkey, it continued its distinguished relations with Israel. Though popular and enjoys a substantial parliamentary majority, the AKP was unable to effect tangible changes in the country’s relations with Israel, because the entrenched and influential army, as well as the secular forces that support it, insist that the relations continue and flourish. The reception of the AKP to Hamas delegation in Ankara and the modest financial aid that it extended to the Palestinians

was an expression of support, and an attempt to play a more balanced role towards the Palestinian issue. Apparently the ruling regime in Pakistan had diluted its enthusiasm for establishing diplomatic relations with Israel when it realized the massive popular opposition to any form of normalization with Israel. Additionally, the shaky position of the regime and the formidable internal problems that it is facing make it difficult for Musharraf to venture on such a risky adventure.

While the Muslim world has shown enthusiastic support to the Palestinian people who are suffering from occupation, oppression and the blockade, the intra-fighting in GS and the WB have negative impact that diluted the Islamic positive interaction with the Palestinian issue. Hence the Palestinian leadership should bear their national responsibility to consolidate national unity and effective contact with the Muslim world that provide a real strategic reservoir that should not be at all neglected.

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Al-Zaytouna Centre is glad to present to its readers The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006, the second in an annual series. The Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, issues concerning the Land and the holy sites, the economy, the Palestinian demographic indicators, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. In addition, it devotes a chapter to discussing the Israeli war on Hizbullah and Lebanon.

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ISBN 978-9953-500-66-9



9 789953 500669



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