

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007



Edited By
Dr. Mohsen M. Saleh



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

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Introduction

The internal Palestinian crisis, prior and post the Mecca Agreement, as well as the attempts to revitalize the political settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis entailed two central features of 2007. These two features set the framework within which the international politics concerning Palestinian issue moves, as various international powers tried to adapt these features according to their orientations.

In their central approaches, the policies of some international powers were characterized by working to prevent the formation of a Palestinian national unity government in the first phase (since the beginning of the year till Mecca Agreement). When formed, they sought to abort it through overloading with various demands and cloaked interventions. Other powers opted to discriminate amongst cabinet members and boycott Hamas members and the prime minister himself.

Some international politics contributed, among other factors, in a sharp split in the regional and governmental Palestinian structure. This was demonstrated in the in the de facto status quo of two governments; in Gaza and Ramallah, and a parallel administrative and financial schism between WB and GS.

Some of the international efforts invested this separation in sustaining their strategic vision for the region, and the others (Russia and some third world countries) opted to encourage the Palestinian groups to return to unity.

The available information indicates that the powers of investing in the schism and of utilizing it for strategic purposes were more dynamic and effective. Perhaps the frequent visits of the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the Middle East, which were up to eight visits during 2007, were an indicator of the “diplomacy fever” that aimed at utilizing this.

This fever triggered a call for an international conference, a goal that the US was not enthusiastic about prior to the split, as shown in the US statements that shall be referred to later.

To monitor the international strategic orientations towards these two characteristics, the politics of the major powers in the international system towards each characteristic will be traced individually to be all connected at the analysis conclusion.

First: The United States of America

By the beginning of 2007, US was in an uncomfortable position in the Middle East; apart from being bogged down in the quagmires of Iraq and Afghanistan, the Israeli ally had suffered from severe shakes due to its massive casualties and bitter experience in the July 2006 war against Lebanon. Meanwhile, Hamas government managed to survive despite the Israeli, American and international blockade.

The Mecca Agreement and the formation of a national unity government constituted a failure for the American policy of destroying the unity in the Palestinian rank; Hamas' reaction to the Dayton plan also has been a surprise for the Americans, as Hamas managed to gain control over GS.

However, the US policy has continued to adapt and change tactics frequently in 2007, without changing its overall track in pursuing the siege and overthrowing Hamas in GS, and in supporting President 'Abbas, Fayyad Government and the course of the peace settlement.

In 2007, the US sought to create the settings for war or for powerful strikes against Iran, but the course of events did not help, especially after a US intelligence report showing that Iran's military nuclear program have been halted since 2003. Thus, by the end of 2007, the American politics was suffering from a loss of direction, though temporarily, at the time it reverted to focusing on the option of making the Palestinian–Israeli conflict settlement possible.

The American strategic orientation concerning the Palestinian issue is based basically on three axes:

The First Axis

It is the formation of a Palestinian authority in the WB and GS that accepts the Quartet principles (US, EU, Russia and the United Nations—UN). These principles are: the recognition of Israel; renouncing armed resistance; and accepting to

negotiate bilaterally with the Hebrew state on the issues of refugees, the lands occupied in 1967, and Jerusalem—away from clinging to the relevant international resolutions.

In order to ensure the achievement of this goal, The US opted to block the formation or development of a national unity government that includes parties calling for settlement on the basis of the international resolutions and the Arab initiative (such as, Mustafa al-Barghuthi), or parties averse to Oslo Agreement, the Road Map, and the Quartet terms, (such as PFLP).

The former US President Jimmy Carter revealed this, saying that the Quartet and the international community insistence on imposing a siege on the Palestinians is due to the US desire to topple Hamas Movement.¹ The US also maintained pressure to assure the formation of a Palestinian authority with certain characteristics, that accepts what was referred to hereinbefore, which is evident in the following practices:

1. The obvious link between giving or withholding financial aid to the Palestinians and the political conduct of the Palestinian government. Whenever there is any rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah, the US threatens to freeze aid, for example, the Congress has frozen the transfer of \$86 million to the Palestinian presidency post to Mecca Agreement,² and resumed aid once the two movements are apart. It was the same, after the June 2007 “legitimacy and authorities crisis” in Gaza, when, after less than four days of the crisis, when the American administration declared through Jacob Wallace, the American Consul General in Jerusalem, that the US will lift the siege on the new government that will be formed by the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas after the crisis, a decision the US actually carried out three days later.³ This was preceded by the American Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s immediate support for the state of emergency declared by ‘Abbas after the “legitimacy and authorities crisis” in Gaza, and the US immediate recognition of the legitimacy of Salam Fayyad’s cabinet.⁴ This cabinet was formed as an emergency government, and then turned to be a caretaker government which then began to act as if it were a legitimate government that won the PLC’s vote of trust as required under the Amended Basic Law. This was followed by US adoption of the Israeli position towards the GS as being “a hostile entity.”⁵

The US aid is one of the main tools to intervene in the preparation of the Palestinian–Israeli negotiating settings. Through this aid, the US pursues to support a specific Palestinian party that shows continued willingness to respond gradually and cumulatively to the American views of peace settlement on one hand. On the other hand, the US withholds such aid from other Palestinian parties according to their hesitation to respond to the American views. At the beginning this has been used against Yasir ‘Arafat and then against the first Hamas’ cabinet and the national unity government. Now, the US employs aid to support the Salam Fayyad’s government, and use it practically to apply some pressure on Fatah and Mahmud ‘Abbas himself by granting the aid through Salam Fayyad.

It is clear that the American party is aware of how deep the economic crisis in the Palestinian community is. It seeks to utilize this crisis politically, providing aid to a particular party (i.e., the Fatah movement through President ‘Abbas); to help Fatah to employ such aid in expanding its popular base, and restricting Hamas basically. Mark Helprin of the American Claremont Institute expressed this by saying that when the US provides aid to the WB to revive it, this will lead the Gazans to turn against Hamas.⁶ This will be a premise for the legalization of any agreement that emerges from the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations which will follow the international conference held in Annapolis at the end of 2007.

It should be noted that there were some pressures exerted on Arab parties, even through some countries, to prevent any aid to the Palestinian people, not only to Hamas or PIJ. Had the embargo been lifted from the Arab part, the American aid would not be effective as such. Note that all estimates which considered that the siege of GS would turn its people against Hamas were illusory and mistaken.

Within this context of politically employing the financial dimension, one can comprehend the US State Department’s announcement of a \$5 million reward for whom ever can arrest the Secretary–General of the PIJ Ramadan Shallah,⁷ as well as the continued freezing of the movement’s financial accounts,⁸ for being considered as an armed resistance movement.

In August 2007, the US announced that it would increase its military aid to Israel by \$6 billion over the next 10 years, bringing the annual US military support to \$3.1 billion annually in 2018. This new agreement replaces an old one that had been proposed by the former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in 1998, which

provides that the US would gradually reduce the economic aid to Israel (\$1.2 billion annually) at a rate of \$120 million annually over 10 years beginning in 2000. On the other hand, the old agreement stated that there would be an annual increase in military support of \$60 million for the same period. Thus, the US support would have grown gradually from \$1.8 billion to \$2.4 billion for the same period.⁹

2. Weakening the Palestinian internal front; to make the negotiations develop while the Palestinian negotiator is in the worst state of weakness. Perhaps the serial of bloody conflict between Hamas and Fatah since 2006, the failure in forming a national unity government, and the split of the Palestinian legitimacy into two legitimacies in Gaza and Ramallah, are all indicators of creating the next stage of negotiations.

The report published in various media and written by Alvaro de Soto, the UN's Under-Secretary-General and Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process attributed to an American official the statement: "The US is interested in the prevention of rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah... and the US will withhold its contribution in the UN budget unless the UN is committed to a financial boycott of the elected Palestinian government."¹⁰ This statement confirms the desire to dismantle the Palestinian internal front. The US even froze a \$200 million military assistance for Egypt, until Egypt "destroys the smuggling networks between Gaza and Egypt";¹¹ which reinforces this American orientation.

There are evidences supporting this American orientation through the testimony of David Welch, the US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee for the Middle East and South Asia, on 23/5/2007, i.e., before the explosion of GS crisis (the Palestinian legitimacy and authorities crisis), when he said that the bilateral Palestinian-Israeli track encounters the challenges of the Mecca Agreement and the formation of a government of national unity... The US has to support moderates in the various security institutions, official institutions and non-governmental organizations... The US has to concentrate efforts on providing financial assistance to the Palestinian people, without the Palestinian government led by Hamas benefiting from it.¹²

The US fights the Hamas' resistance line first. The problem with The Mecca Agreement is that it comes outside the context of US policy in the region, which is governed by the course of settlement.

The American Secretary of State Rice did not conceal the US orientation towards weakening the internal Palestinian front, thus weakening the Palestinian negotiator to the fullest extent possible. On 16/10/2007 at a press conference in Cairo she said that: “The US is against the dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, describing Hamas as a terrorist organization which can not be dealt with.”¹³

In this respect, the eight visits undertaken by the American Secretary of State Rice to the region during 2007 should be mentioned. It is noted that she had visited the region in January, February, March and April respectively. Then, she suspended her visits to the region in May and June; the two months in which the internal Palestinian crisis soared ending with the government split. It is being understood that Lieutenant General Keith Dayton, United States Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority, had submitted the report issued by the US Department of State on 25/5/2007 indicating that, “things are going against the fanatical extremists in Gaza.”¹⁴

Rice, then, began to return to the region since 30/7/2007 then August, September and October respectively to drum up support for the ‘Abbas government in Ramallah, and the convening of an international conference in Annapolis, which was held on 27/11/2007.

The Second Axis

It is about modifying the Arab peace initiative 2002 to allow for more Arab and Palestinian response to the American and Israeli demands in the political settlement.

The US has dealt with the Arab initiative since it was put forward as a starting point not an ending point. Thus, the US devoted its diplomatic efforts to adapt this initiative in a way that makes it more acceptable to the Israeli side. This was done by demanding the Arabs to take steps towards the normalization and not to await the peace settlement.

American diplomacy decided that accomplishing this must be accompanied by pressures on the Palestinian negotiators, tempting them with all American and Israeli diplomatic, military, media and economic means to make concessions that the Arabs would rely on to move forward more towards the Israeli side.

From the American perspective, the pressure on the resistance wing within the Palestinian entity (including particular currents within Fatah) on one hand, and the

temptation of the “non-resistance” wing within this entity on the other hand, can allow the Palestinian negotiator more space for movement. In addition, this applies some pressure on the Arab countries to support the negotiator and Salam Fayyad. This is due to the importance of achieving an agreement between Ehud Olmert and ‘Abbas to be employed by the Republican Party in the upcoming elections, and to improve Bush’s image that has been linked with failures. Such an agreement is an advantage for Olmert in entering Israeli elections and would rescue him from losing due to his responsibility for losing the July 2006 war against Lebanon. ‘Abbas also needs such an agreement to save his political line. It could also lead to some concessions that would eliminate any embarrassment of some Arab parties in dealing with Israel, as a prelude towards building a “new Middle East,” which could be employed by the US in future international competitions or conflicts in the long run.

To demonstrate this American orientation, it is worth mentioning the statement of David Welch, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, to which was previously referred to. He says that, through our discussions with the Arab League’s follow-up committee... We understood that the Arab initiative was not meant to be a take-it-or-leave-it suggestion, but it was merely a base for discussion.¹⁵

The Third Axis

The American attitude witnessed, in 2007, a remarkable shift of attention regarding the convening of an international conference to discuss the Palestinian issue. At the beginning of 2007, the American administration did not show enthusiasm towards the idea of convening an international conference, which was expressed by the Rice:

The idea of an international conference is one that at some point may make sense, but what I’ve found in talking to the parties is that they most want to try and engage each other, not the international community as a whole. We have to be very careful about gestures, and rather I think now try to get down to work in what has proven to be an extremely difficult problem to make progress on.¹⁶

However, the American attitude changed in July, specifically on 16/7/2007, when the US President George W. Bush called to convene an international conference to discuss the problem in the Middle East in which regional and international parties participate, but he pointed out that, “The US is prepared to

lead discussions to address these issues, but they must be resolved by Palestinians and Israelis, themselves.”¹⁷

It appears that this shift in the US attitude resulted from a number of factors:

1. The Internal Palestinian strife (represented in the bloody violence, the national unity government collapse, legitimacy and authorities crisis between the WB and GS, the severe economic crisis, and the terrible Palestinian public mood).

It is normal, that the internal Palestinian situation would be reflected on the Palestinian side’s negotiating capacity. Since the Palestinian situation is almost the weakest since 1967, this provides a golden opportunity to extract maximum concessions that the Palestinian negotiator will be obliged to provide under the pressures of such difficult circumstances.

It is noted that, the American call for convening the Annapolis conference on 27/11/2007 aimed at negotiating with the Palestinians before they would be able to return to unity. Most of the US political elite seem to believe they will. A number of 44 US experts (such as Samuel Berger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Warren Christopher, Edward Luttwak, Anthony Zinni..., etc.) were asked about the prospects for continued separation between Gaza and the WB; 81% said that it will not continue, (45% said that it will not continue, and 36% said that it will continue for a while before it ends), But what draws attention is the question the American approach towards this separation; of which the results have been as follows:¹⁸

- 50% recommended working to engage and unite the two Palestinian movements.
- 25% recommended treating Fatah and Hamas as two separate governments, supporting ‘Abbas and Fatah as the legitimate authorities, while dealing with Hamas as an illegitimate authority.
- 16% recommended that the US government should wait until a clear victor emerges.
- 7% recommended treating Fatah as a legitimate government and isolating Hamas.

2. Regional environment: the network of Inter-Arab relations in its present condition may be less bad than the Palestinian situation. The Syrian–Saudi relations and the Syrian–Egyptian are quite tense. There are also the Lebanese, Iraqi, Sudanese and Somali crises; and even tensions in the Arab Maghreb region (the

Western Sahara issue, and the Ceuta and Melilla issue with Spain which reemerged during this year). All make the Arab position unable to coordinate or influence.

The US and Israel in particular would find such a situation tempting for investment as the Palestinian negotiator will find himself in circumstances that do not help to realize any achievements along with the internal emptiness in his internal front.

3. The US internal circumstances: President Bush seeks to achieve some success in restoring the cracks that struck the image of his administration in particular, and the US in general, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. He seeks also to face the escalating crisis of the dollar status in the global economy, and the series of successive resignations of senior officials in this administration.

The White House Chief of Staff, Joshua Bolton, articulates this view, saying that President Bush wants his successor, whatever his party is, to be capable of having a lasting presence in the Middle East and he wants the US to remain a respected and influential force in the region.¹⁹

4. The American desire to invest in the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's position as the envoy of the International Quartet Committee for Peace in the Middle East: It is noted that Blair's statements indicate that the US seeks to confine the Quartet's mission in the part related to the international economic aid to the Palestinians. The US also emphasizes on leaving the political negotiations to be agreed upon by the Palestinian and the Israeli parties, which will end up in favor of the Israeli side due to the large imbalance of power. A statement by James Wolfensohn, the Middle East envoy of the Quartet, who left office in May 2005, articulates the movement limits of the Quartet stating that he has resigned due to "frustration of the lack of progress."²⁰

As a result of all these factors, the US sought to hold an international conference in Annapolis near Washington on 27/11/2007. The US managed to congregate a substantial international presence, in which 44 countries participated, including the permanent members of the UN; a number of European, Arab and Islamic countries; non-aligned countries such as India; and some African countries including South Africa.

There are a number of observations on the conference:

First: the American role, according to what was announced, will not be more than an assistant role, leaving the outcome to the bilateral negotiations between the

two parties (An outcome governed by the balance of power that is totally weighted for the Israeli side); it may be inferred from the following:

1. In his opening address to the conference, the US president says, “we will use our power to help you as you come up with the necessary decisions.”²¹
2. As referred to in the outcome document of the conference, “The US will monitor and judge the fulfillment of the commitment of both sides.”²²
3. It also states, “Immediately launch bilateral negotiations in order to conclude a peace treaty to resolve all core issues without exception.”
4. The outcome document of the conference states, “Formation of a Steering Committee, jointly chaired by the two parties,” i.e., without the US participation.

That means that the US degree of commitment will not be enough to practically affect the Israeli side, it would rather leave the Palestinian negotiator facing the Israeli side which is well-armed with all political, military, economic and media tools of pressure, while the Palestinian side lacks all of these tools, including the armed resistance.

Second: In the outcome document, it is clear that the priority for practical steps would be the responsibility of the Palestinian party, the document states that the implementation of the future peace treaty depends on the Road Map implementation. It is known that the Road Map, signed by the Quartet Committee, requires the Palestinians to dismantle the infrastructure of the Palestinian resistance networks, and to halt armed resistance, and where in its second paragraph after the preamble pointed to the confrontation with “terrorism” and incitement.

Third: The foreword of the statement stated that President ‘Abbas had participated in the conference, “as the chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and the President of the Palestinian Authority (PA),” which means his implied obligation of the organizations under the PLO to the results and to the international conference.

In line with the orientations of the Annapolis, an international conference in Paris was held on 17/12/2007, to provide economic aid to the PA. The donors pledged at the conference to provide \$7.4 billion over the next three years (that is, until the end of 2010). The US pledged to pay \$555 million during 2008, including \$400 million that the White House had announced before, and the Congress has not ratified until then.

But remarkably, the sums that were pledged in the Paris conference by the participants, 88 donors (68 countries and 20 financial and international institutions and organizations) will be disbursed under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund on one hand, and it needed to be repaid with steps to create a lasting settlement, as Blair said on the other hand.²³

To assess the outcome of the Annapolis conference from the American perspective, an official assessment and non-official one—conducted by American research centers—are examined:

1. The official assessment: The American Secretary of State Rice considered the number of Arab countries attending the conference as an indicator of moving a step forward in the direction of contact with Israel and said in an interview with the American channel ABC that, “Arab states like Saudi Arabia that were not active in the peace process, are now involved.”²⁴

2. The American research centers assessment:²⁵ Aaron David Miller of the Woodrow Wilson Center said that he is not convinced that the parties are aware of the seriousness and magnitude of work required to accomplish what they promised to do by the end of Bush’s term in office. While Jon Alterman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies believed that, “The parties neither have the support at home or the control of their governments to do something extremely serious.” Another researcher, Bruce Riedel, of Brookings Institute, referred to the US commitment to reach clear results, where he expressed “his serious doubts that the US administration is prepared to engage sufficiently to accomplish what it promised.” Daniel Levy of the New American Foundation thought that the US president has invested “his prestige in an unusual way.”

To conclude, the US strategic orientation during 2007 focuses on the following strategic features:

1. Liquidation of the Palestinian armed resistance and in favor for reinforcing the line of political settlement in the Palestinian arena.
2. Applying pressures on Arab states to support the bilateral negotiations, support ‘Abbas and Fayyad, and isolate and oppose Hamas.
3. Keeping the Lebanese crisis unsolved.
4. Tightening the noose on Syria.
5. Maintaining the decision of war against Iran even at a lower pace.

6. Preventing the Syrian–Saudi reconciliation and the Egyptian–Syrian–Saudi understanding.

It is clear that the outcome of these features is funneled into the interests of the Israeli–American agenda in the region.

Second: The European Union

The study of the European politics constitutes some sort of a methodological dilemma, there is a European foreign policy, being announced by High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (EU), Javier Solana, on one hand. On the other hand, some aspects of this policy are sometimes inconsistent with the positions individually announced by or practiced by some EU countries.

Moreover, from exploring the European public opinion polls, it is obvious that the rhythm of change in the orientation of the European public opinion is faster than the rhythm of change in the orientation of the official political opinion on the situation in the Middle East. There is a gap between the European public opinion and the official European stance towards the Israeli aggression and occupation, and sympathy with the Palestinian people, the war on Iraq, or the war against Iran.

Accordingly, the European position will be generally investigated through the EU positions, mentioning the individual policies, expressed by officials of the major European countries (Germany, France and Britain), and without neglecting the positions of other European countries that are less influential in the EU political decision–making process.

As pointed out in investigating the US position; what will be tracked is the European position regarding two central issues: the internal Palestinian crisis, and attempts to revitalize the track of political settlement for the conflict with Israel.

1. The Internal Palestinian Crisis

In general, the EU position was characterized by having a “less” sharp attitude towards Hamas’s victory in the 2006 elections than that of the US. Though, it maintained a firm position afterwards, which was represented in the gradual and increasing pressure on Hamas to accept the terms of the Quartet, particularly

the recognition of Israel, renouncing armed struggle and accepting all previous agreements signed by the PLO or the PA with Israel.

It means that, some European countries believed that the dialogue or contact with Hamas helps in achieving the desired goals, and that controlling the internal Palestinian crisis helps in this regard. Therefore, the Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema welcomed the dialogue between Hamas and Fatah since the beginning of the year and he expressed support for their dialogue in Gaza. Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the European Commissioner for External Relations and European Neighborhood Policy, considered that contact with Hamas positively “encourages the movement to change.”²⁶

But such positions were often linked to a number of terms announced by the foreign ministers of some European countries, such as Spain and Italy, namely:²⁷

- a. The government’s declaration of respect for the previous international resolutions and agreements.
- b. Recognition of Mahmud ‘Abbas as a leader for the negotiation with Israel.
- c. Halting launching rockets and smuggling arms into Gaza.
- d. The release of the Israeli soldier captured by Hamas on 25/6/2006. The President of France Nicolas Sarkozy gave special attention to this issue.

This orientation was reinforced when most of the European Parliament members demanded to lift the siege imposed on the Palestinian government, following the Mecca Agreement in February 2007. This position was encouraged by the MPs representing the Socialists, Greens, Liberals and United Left, while those representing of the United People’s Party opposed it.²⁸

Dealing with the Palestinian government has taken an unusual way in the history of diplomacy. Most European countries dealt with the non-Hamas ministers only. After the situation exploded between Fatah and Hamas in June, and the Palestinian community faced the authorities and legitimacy crisis between Ramallah and Gaza, all European contacts with Gaza were suspended, the existing government in Ramallah headed by Salam Fayyad was considered the legitimate government and the EU lifted the financial blockade on this government.²⁹ On the other hand, European Commission Spokeswoman for Science and Research, Antonia Mochan announced that the EU “will not finance the fuel to Gaza if Hamas collected the taxes”; the EU resumed financing electricity after Hamas’ confirmation that it is not the authority that collected the electricity bills.³⁰

When tracking the various policies of the European countries separately, sometimes there is clear divergence amongst these countries, and there is even divergence in the statements by officials in the same country.

This inconsistency may be due to some change in the European governments, as happened in France, Britain and Germany during this year on one hand, and on the other hand it may be due to the orientation divergence in different political forces within these countries.

The European positions during 2007 towards the Palestinian government (Hamas government before Mecca Agreement, the national unity government after the Mecca Agreement, and the governments of Ramallah and Gaza) could be divided into three positions:

a. Positions of countries tend to deal with a wing of the Palestinian governments excluding the other, when they dealt with the non-Hamas ministers. This group included the major European countries; namely France, UK and Germany.

However, the positions of these countries witnessed some intensity fluctuation, and perhaps the French government's position, which witnessed the most acute change, after Sarkozy has taken office in France, his Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner started showing a more hostile attitude towards Hamas and more agreeable towards Fatah.

Sarkozy generally expressed this position saying: "I have the reputation of being a friend of Israel, and it's true. I will never compromise on Israel's security."³¹ Kouchner interpreted this as a procedural attack on Hamas, which he accused of having "close ties with al-Qaeda," while his government will give direct financial aid to the government appointed by 'Abbas in Ramallah.³² However, at Paris conference for donor countries, Sarkozy called upon Israel to withdraw from the WB, freeze settlement, reopen institutions in East Jerusalem, and assist the people isolated in Gaza; but on the other hand, he called upon the formation of an international force to assist the Palestinian security authorities.³³ The German Defense Minister Franz Josef Jung supported such directions and called for "supporting Fatah and isolating Hamas."³⁴

b. However, the attitudes of some officials in this group of countries adopt the idea of the need for contact with the other wing of the Palestinian governments, specifically, Hamas ministers. At a conference on the situation in Iraq held in

London early in 2007, The German Foreign Minister Frank Walter Steinmeier offered his view on the relations with Hamas, saying that: “We can not demand Hamas extradition before talking and negotiating with them, this has not been done with the Sinn Féin and their opponents in Ireland.”³⁵

In the UK, a parliamentary committee demanded conducting talks with Hamas; because “isolating Hamas will increase its relations with Iran.”³⁶ The Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi called in August to dialogue with Hamas even after the movement gained control over GS.³⁷ The former Netherlands Prime Minister, Dries van Agt condemned the Quartet treatment of the Palestinian national government (discrimination among ministers) as some “sort of double standards and incompatible with the principles of balance, impartiality, and fairness.” This position has been supported by Fausto Bertinotti, the President of the Chamber of Deputies (one of the Italian Parliament houses), who described the national government as a “legitimate government.”³⁸ The Swedish Socialist Party (the largest party in Sweden) fully recognized the government of national unity with all its cabinet members without discrimination.³⁹

Since the two groups constitute the major powers in the EU, this orientation was generally reflected in the politics of the EU towards the internal Palestinian crisis, as follows:

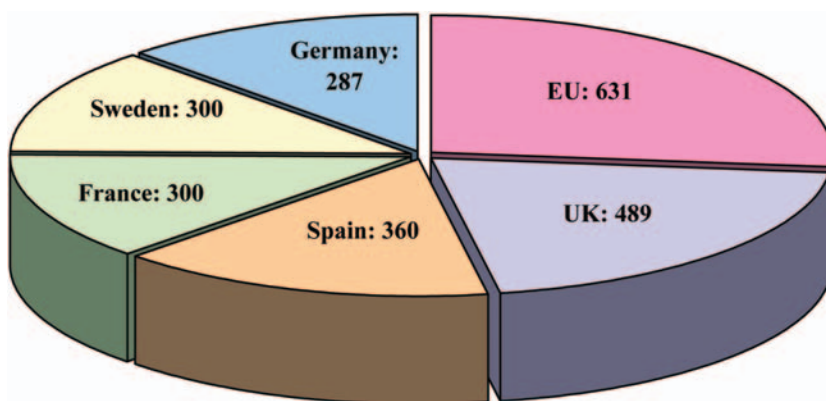
1. The constant pressure on Hamas to change its positions, and providing more inducements to Fatah; to continue with the political settlement approach with Israel. Perhaps the statement released by the foreign ministers of 10 European countries in June supporting President ‘Abbas,⁴⁰ is the broader articulation of this policy. Blair described the strategy of luring Hamas by saying that, “Some of the signs coming out of Hamas are not unhelpful, but we need to know where they really are.”⁴¹
2. Providing economic aid that prevent the escalation of the situation into humanitarian crisis, while ensuring that Hamas will not benefit from such aid in any way.

The European aid, which was pledged at the Paris conference on 17/12/2007, is included in this context, particularly the clear link between aid and the progress achieved in the settlement process. At the Paris conference, the Europeans had pledged aid as follows:

Table 1/5: EU Financial Pledges to the PA in Paris Conference (\$ million)⁴²

Entity	Value
EU	631
UK	489
Spain	360
France	300
Sweden	300
Germany	287
Total	2,367

EU Financial Pledges to the PA in Paris Conference (\$ million)



c. There is a third party that tried to keep its relations with the Hamas, even after it gained control over Gaza, but they retreated due to foreign pressure; such as Norway, which decided to sever its ties with Hamas after several contacts between them, something that Norwegian Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Støre has told Israel about.⁴³ However, an Italian delegation of politicians and representatives met with Hamas representatives in the WB, and held a telephone conversation with the head of the dissolved government in Gaza, Isma‘il Haniyya, in late December 2007 in spite of the pressures from various parties to prevent contacts with Hamas.⁴⁴

2. Political Settlement

From the various European statements, it seems that Europe senses the US orientations in the attempt to have exclusively the political dimension in the settlement. Perhaps the statement from the Italian Deputy Foreign Minister Ugo

Intini, would explain that. He said that the theory of unilateral solutions adopted by the US administration lately retreats back in favor of the concept of joint solutions.⁴⁵ This view is consistent with the call from the Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Moratinos and the EU to convene an international peace conference in the first half of 2007, and to include Arab countries to the Quartet.⁴⁶ It is a dangerous proposal because it lures the Arabs to the Quartet's attitude of leaving everything for negotiations.

In its statement on 22/1/2007, the EU puts an outline for the settlement of "ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, and the establishment of an independent democratic viable Palestinian state, living side by side with Israel and the other neighboring countries in security and peace."⁴⁷ In paving the way for that, Solana saw that Israel has to freeze building settlements at the beginning, which he—as he said—was surprised by the speed of its construction.⁴⁸

However, Some European positions, particularly the British, contribute to the framework of the peace settlement before the negotiations begin. Concerning the issue of refugees, one of the most important issues, Kim Howells, the British Minister of State at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with responsibility for the Middle East, said that "the right of the refugees to return to their ancestor's places is illogical and could not be achieved, and that Jordan has a long experience in hosting refugees and deportees from different neighboring countries, it is a hospitable country and we should learn from it a lot." He stressed that "it is not possible to return to what was before 1948."⁴⁹

While the US ensures its role by virtue of its military, political, and economic influence, the strategy of the EU seems to be more relying on the economic variable in expanding the EU role in the peace settlement; a strategy that the US favored; because it will lead to easing the US economic burden. The EU's aid to the Palestinian Authority was about \$1 billion annually, along with the training of customs, border, and police officers. In addition to sending European observers to the borders (there are about 70 members of the EU to monitor the Rafah crossing).

Meanwhile, the dimensions of the economic support limits for the Palestinians is revealed in a statement by John Kjaer, the head of the European Commission Technical Assistance Office for WB and GS (ECTAO), when he said in September

2007, that “the volume of economic support for the Palestinian people is linked to the progress in the peace process between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.”⁵⁰ It is noticeable that this statement came after the US president’s announcement of holding the international conference for peace settlement in November 2007.

British position is consistent with the US position on the issue of political settlement in terms of the need to invest in the internal Palestinian crisis. During the inter-Palestinian fighting and just before the Mecca Agreement, Margaret Beckett, the British Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, said that the world leaders will be guilty of gross negligence, if they fail to seize the opportunity in the Middle East to push talks Between Palestinians and Israelis... It will be gross negligence, failing to seize this opportunity.⁵¹

The Vatican’s position is consistent with the European position. During a meeting with Israeli President Shimon Peres in September 2007, the Pope Benedict XVI called upon “to exert all efforts to find a just solution.” He also supported the idea of convening an international peace conference, which the President Bush had called for.

The EU designed the features of its strategic orientation towards the settlement in a statement released on 25/11/2007, just before the convening of the Annapolis conference. The title of this document which contains the EU orientations was “State building for peace in the Middle East: an EU Action Strategy.”⁵² In this document, the EU identifies the peace principles, namely: land for peace, relevant UN’s Security Council resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Road Map and previous agreements reached between the parties. The EU strategy calls for the continuity of the peace process under the auspices of the Quartet, with the involvement of the international community.

It draws attention that the European strategic plan calls for continuing cooperation with Arab partners, pledging assistance according to the Annapolis outcome, supporting the establishment of modern and democratic police forces, in full cooperation with the US Security Coordinator. The EU will design its programs and activities so as to contribute to the unity and contiguity of the future Palestinian state, resolving the status of Jerusalem and pursuit of a just and equitable solution to the refugee issue.

Solana, the High Representative of Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, announced the ending of the EU Police Mission in the Palestinian Territories (EUPOL COPPS) which supported the PA in taking responsibility for law and order⁵³.

After the conference, Solana described the results as “remarkable achievement” and said that the strategic plan adopted by the EU is “to make the EU’s role more creative, more positive and more ambitious.”⁵⁴

It is necessary to take into consideration the viewpoint of the European public opinion in interpreting the official European policy, as the political leaderships in these countries tend to sense the public opinion directions and take them into consideration as much as possible, because they realize that the ballot boxes are the source of their authorities.

The European public opinion polls show that there is still a wide gap between official policy and the European public opinion directions, despite the relative impact of this public opinion. A European public opinion poll conducted by the BBC, during the period from 3/11/2006–16/1/2007, demonstrated the widespread of Israel’s negative image in the European people’s minds. Israel was classified as the worst country in the world by 77% of Germans, 66% of French, 65% of British, and 58% of Italians (Compared with 33% of Americans).⁵⁵

Another poll conducted by the German Bertelsmann Foundation in February 2007, showed that 30% of the German people believe that “Israel is waging a war of extermination against the Palestinians” and 40% believe that “what the State of Israel is doing to the Palestinians today is in principle no different from what the Nazis did to the Jews in the Third Reich.”⁵⁶

A number of positions taken by the civil society institutions indicate a public position less biased towards Israel, such as the decision of supporting the boycott of the Israeli products by the NUJ (National Union of Journalists) in the UK, the decision of academic boycott of Israel by the British University and College Union (UCU) (A decision that was rejected by 250 academic), and the decision of the Britain’s UNISON (British labor union) to back exerting economic and cultural pressure on Israel.⁵⁷

Hamas' release of Alan Johnston, the kidnapped British journalist in Gaza, on 4/7/2007 had a positive impact on the western media to a certain extent, but it did not influence the official relations between Hamas and the European countries. Moreover, in many statements, the British government was keen to detach its consuls' contacts with Hamas members from any political content other than working for the release of the kidnapped journalist.

The organization of European Jews for a Just Peace (EJJP) appealed to the EU for the immediate and full recognition of the national unity government and for lifting the blockade. The British Organization Oxfam International called for the need to resume aid to the Palestinians "without discrimination" referring to the WB and GS.⁵⁸ In Ireland, the Catholic bishops called on to reconsider the commercial and cultural relations with Israel, which turned Gaza into a big prison.⁵⁹ Brendan Barber, The General Secretary of Britain's Trades Union Congress (TUC), declared his support for "the establishment of a Palestinian state."⁶⁰

From the above, the EU strategic direction in 2007 can be outlined as follows:

- a. The EU attempts to emulate the American role, though very carefully, in playing a key role that aims at reaching a political settlement in the region; using mainly the economic tools. However, the European position remains weak and inadequate. There is still a long way for it to be independent from the US influence and to neutralize or weaken the impact of the Jewish lobby in the European countries, in order to play a more balanced role in the Arab–Israeli conflict.
- b. The role of the European public opinion, despite the increase of its positives, did not go so far as to influence the European political orientations significantly.
- c. The political change in France (Sarkozy taking office) was an additional burden on the Palestinian side, especially since the attitude of the president and his foreign minister is largely harmonious with the orientations of the French Jewish lobby. It is worth mentioning that there was a political crisis between Algeria and France. It raised from a remark that Algerian minister Mohammed Cherif Abbas has made on the role of the Jewish lobby—which controls some important industrial sectors in France—in Sarkozy's taking the presidency, as well as the lobby role in the alliance between him and his leftist Foreign Minister Kouchner, and the Jewish roots of both.⁶¹

Third: Russia

Russia's position, among the international forces (along with China), is the most interested in the cohesion of the internal Palestinian front. Despite Russia's support for the international Quartet positions; it tries to maintain an equal distance between its position and the Palestinian parties of the internal dispute.

The Russian politics supported Fatah and Hamas meetings in Saudi Arabia and supported the Mecca Agreement and the formation of the national unity government. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Mikhail Kamynin stressed this on several occasions.

On the other hand, the Russian position is characterized by attempting to interpret the internal Palestinian conflict "as resulting from interference of external factors."⁶² Though the Russian government did not specify these factors, the overall context suggests that it refers to what was known as the Dayton plan, which has been talked about a lot, and which considers Hamas as the real reason behind the explosion of successive crises in the Palestinian internal front.

It seems that Russian diplomacy believes that dialogue with Hamas is more effective than exerting pressures on it to change its position, as Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister, hinted.⁶³ This is not due to Russia's compassion towards the harsh reality on Hamas, but rather from many reasons:

1. The Russian relationship with Hamas gives importance to the Russian role in the Palestinian issue, in terms of ability to communicate with and influence on Hamas, on one hand. On the other hand, representing the relationship with Hamas as a proof that the Russia's attitude towards the Islamic movements is not a religious one, as proclaimed by the Chechen movements, which constitute a source of internal concern for the Russian Government.
2. Russia is not interested in aborting the powers opposed to the American policy in the region; it is keen to keep the American grip on the region as soft as possible, allowing Russia to sneak into the region through the gaps in this grip.
3. There is no doubt that the Russian–Iranian relationship and the Russian–Syrian relationship have some impact in making Russia relatively less rigorous in dealing with Hamas.

4. Russia's positions—in the issues regarding Arabs, Muslims, and the Third World in general—are primarily subject to its own interests and the interests of its national security in Europe. For example, the recent statement that Russia was ready to support The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Afghanistan if the NATO abandoned the idea of accepting the membership of Ukraine and Georgia. However, the Russian position will be more open if the west closed the way to bargaining with Russia in Europe or had more restrictions on it.

The previous reasons could be seen in the Russian diplomatic statements and activities. Defining his attitude towards the national unity government after the Mecca Agreement, Lavrov said, "I count on the Quartet speaking out in support of the agreement to form a new Palestinian government... I count on the Quartet in favor of removing financial and economic sanctions that were introduced by Israel. At least that will be the position of Russia, the EU and the UN secretary-general."⁶⁴ It is noted that his statement excluded the US.

In the aftermath of the legitimacy and authorities' crisis exploded in June 2007, Russia confirmed its position on the importance of maintaining the cohesion of the internal Palestinian front. Russia called on the emergency government, which formed in Ramallah and headed by Salam Fayyad, for "dialogue with Hamas."⁶⁵ Russia also called on both Israel and the Quartet to lift the siege on Gaza, and continued to reject classifying Hamas a "terrorist movement." These were conventional positions of the Russian politics.

However, the Russian government exerted pressure on Hamas through reducing the level of contact with it, as did Putin with a delegation from Hamas that visited Moscow in late July.⁶⁶

At the Paris conference for donor countries, in December 2007, the Russians pledged to provide \$10 million to the PA. The Russian Foreign Minister pledged to convene an international meeting in Moscow to follow up the Annapolis outcome, however, he linked this follow up with the parties' implementation of their commitments; such as Israelis' freezing of settlement construction, and the Palestinians' halting of military operations.⁶⁷ However, he is unlikely to uphold these terms, if it was necessary to convene an international conference in Moscow.

Fourth: China

The contemporary Chinese foreign politics could be described as a mix of little Maoist tradition impact on one hand, with lots of the requirements for the Four Modernizations on the other hand.

China does not have a global political project currently; it focuses on developing its economy, avoiding any confrontations, except regarding the issue of Taiwan in which China turns into a fierce tiger. However, in all other issues it takes a general position that is least provocative to the US, Israel, or any other party. It then implements Arabic Motto “Say your word and go your way,” gaining time to develop its economy and military forces along with its high technological capabilities. Thus, China is not expected to clash or be rigorous for any issue other than Taiwan.

Concerning the internal Palestinian conflict, after the formation of the national unity government, China refused to discriminate among the cabinet members on the basis of their political affiliation. A Chinese official statement stated that “China will treat the national unity government, formed by Fatah and Hamas without discrimination among its cabinet members.”⁶⁸ However, the Chinese government stressed the need for “the Palestinian government commitment to peaceful negotiation promoting the peace process in the Middle East.”⁶⁹ According to the statement by Li Zhaoxing, Chinese Foreign Minister, in March 2007, provided that this negotiation is on the basis of “Land for Peace, the principle of peaceful coexistence between Palestinians and Israelis, and on the basis of UN resolutions.”⁷⁰

Fifth: Japan

Perhaps the guidelines of the Japanese politics regarding the Palestinian issue is the project known as the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity,” which extends from the WB to Jordan, then to the Arabian Gulf. This project is based on developing the cultivation of fruit and olive trees in the WB, and marketing the yield in the Gulf. The first meeting of the advisory committee of the project, which includes Japan, Israel, Palestine, and Jordan, was held on 27/6/2007.

Taro Aso, the Japanese Foreign Minister, called the principle governing Japanese policy in the region as “Arc of Freedom and Prosperity,” which he outlined in the following dimensions:⁷¹

1. Deepening the Japanese involvement in the Middle East not only economically but also politically, highlighting that 89.2% of the Japanese imported crude oil comes from the Middle East, including 76.4% of the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. In addition to this, Japan conducts a project of building a petrochemical complex with Saudi Arabia, in Rabigh city. It will be the largest of its kind in the world.
2. Promoting the high-level visits between Palestine, Israel and Japan, with emphasis on cooperating with the central powers of the region such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

However, looking into the Japanese policy towards the region shows that the political dimension is almost marginal. The visit of Shinzo Abe, the Japanese Prime Minister, to the Middle East during the period from 28/4–2/5/2007 included the Gulf States and Egypt, without visiting Palestine or Israel. Moreover, the visit of Taro Aso, the Minister of Foreign Affairs in August 2007 focused on the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity,” and announcing providing aid of \$20 million to the Palestinians.

The trading pattern (Mercantilism) in Japanese politics is the dominant pattern. In addition, the Japanese tendency to be harmonious with the US position encourages it to avoid taking clear political stances to ensure appeasing all parties.

The Japanese conduct can be explained as follows:

1. Japan accepted the economic role assigned to it in the framework of creating common Arab–Israeli interests, which help to transform the conflict gradually from its zero perspective to a non-zero perspective, through creating a network of common interests between the warring parties that contributes, in turn, in narrowing the scope of conflicting interests.
2. It can be assumed that Japan believes that the continuing conflict situation in the region contributes to increased defense expenditure of the region countries, and indulging in arms procurement policies, in which Japan has no share. However, enhancing the peaceful track would redirect the defense expenditures towards expenditure on other goods, in which Japan could strongly compete.

In this respect, Japan pledged at the Paris conference, previously referred to, to provide \$150 million to the PA.

Sixth: The International Organizations

The UN is the most important international organization with regard to the Palestinian issue. It is necessary to look at the UN orientations, whether through its decisions, recommendations or statements made by the Secretary–General or his representative, as a reflection of the balance of power within the Security Council. The UN resolutions are merely reflections of the will of its members. However, with regard to the General Assembly, the formula is different because the US hegemony or the influence of a few countries will be feeble amongst greater and wider collective will.

In light of the above, the UN positions could be understood from the two axes on which the 2007 Strategic Assessment was built on; namely: the internal Palestinian crisis, and the orientations towards the political settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

1. Internal Crisis

The UN did not show a hostile attitude towards the efforts of forming a national unity government, and it criticized making the daily lives of Palestinian citizens difficult in both the WB and GS. This is evident in a number of positions of Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary–General, who believed that the Mecca Agreement between Fatah and Hamas is a positive step and criticized Israeli restrictions on the movement of individuals and goods, and preventing the delivery of customs and taxes by Israel, especially after Hamas formation of the Palestinian government. In addition to this, Ban Ki-moon stressed frequently the need to preserve the Palestinian rights, as did the Executive Office of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, by establishing a Palestinian state on the lands occupied in 1967 including Jerusalem.⁷² Ban Ki-moon has also criticized the Israeli decision that considered GS “a hostile entity,” because it contradicts with the international law.⁷³

Nevertheless, the political conduct of the Secretary–General and his representatives is clearly not in line with these orientations. It was significantly aligned with the orientations adopted by Washington in particular, and other international forces in general. After the formation of the national unity government the UN announced that it would conduct diplomatic contacts with the non-Hamas cabinet members, Ban Ki-moon explained that by saying that the UN expects this

government to respond to the expectations of the international community in order to achieve peace and security in the region.⁷⁴

That means that the Secretary-General reflected the desire of major players in the Security Council, particularly the US and Europe in applying pressure on Hamas. The International Quartet Committee articulated this in the main general terms of recognition of Israel, and acceptance of all agreements already signed by the PA and the PLO. All this confirms that the positions of Secretary-General do not reflect the positions of the General Assembly; he rather has his own agenda regarding relation with the US and the Security Council in general.

In the aftermath of the Gaza events, the issue of deploying an international force in GS emerged; an issue advocated by the PA leader. The UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, Michael Williams, ruled out responding to this request “in the short run.” Michèle Montas, the UN Secretary-General’s spokesperson explained that the idea of deploying international observers in GS was the PA president’s, and not from the Secretary-General of the UN.⁷⁵ Note that the Israeli government opposed this idea, which explains repudiating it, even though the Palestinians have rejected it as well.

In the economic dimension, there were many complaints by the UN bodies, particularly United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA); from the lack of material resources to meet the needs of the Palestinian people, which were estimated in 2007 at about \$246 million.⁷⁶

The slow-pace of donor countries in providing assistance to the UN could be understood, in this regard, as not separate from the economic blockade which has political backgrounds, hereinbefore referred to more than once. These actions are directed specifically towards the Hamas government before the Mecca Agreement, the Hamas wing in the national unity government, or the Gaza Government.

Of the things that indicate that the employment of the UN orientation is consistent with the orientations of Washington is that the World Bank report released in February 2007, at the same time with the Mecca Agreement. It stated that it is not clear how much the payment through the Office of ‘Abbas are subject to financial controls and applicable to internal audit measures in the Palestinian government. There are evidences that raise concerns on a significant decline in transparency and accountability, because of failure to lift the financial reports regularly.⁷⁷ The careful reading of this report indicates two points:

- a. The date of releasing the report was accompanied by diffusing the internal Palestinian crisis through the Mecca Agreement, which the US was discontent with.
- b. There is an implicit suggestion for the Palestinian President 'Abbas that he might face financial problems in the future, if he continues in the direction of rapprochement with Hamas. This would be clearer if we noticed that the content of this report is associated to the decision of the Congress in the same period, and following the Mecca Agreement, to freeze the previously mentioned \$86 million financial aid to the Palestinian government.

2. Political Settlement

The focus here will be on tracking the UN role through extrapolation of the Quartet's role. It is known that, since its establishment and the release of the first statement on 16/7/2002, the Quartet's position was to specify precisely what is required for the interest of the Israeli side (recognition of Israel, halting armed resistance, and dismantling the armed Palestinian organizations). In addition, the committee kept the Palestinian demands and the international decisions subject to negotiation between the Palestinian and Israeli sides without taking a clear stance towards them.

It is worth noting that the Quartet did not convene during the period from September 2006 till February 2007. In addition, the reviewing of the 10 statements released by the Quartet during 2007 indicates that they have added nothing new to its traditional approach.⁷⁸

The statement released on 2/2/2007 includes ending the Israeli occupation that began in 1967, and achieving a just peace based on Security Council resolutions no. 242 and 338 on one hand. On the other hand, it emphasizes the Palestinian recognition of Israel and acceptance of all previous agreements, signed by both the PA and the PLO.⁷⁹

In the second statement released on 9/2/2007, the Quartet again emphasized that the Palestinian government to be formed must be committed to all the previous agreements.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the third statement released on 21/2/2007, stressed that the parties must not take any actions that affect the issues of the negotiations (referring to the Israeli settlement in the WB).⁸¹

In the fourth statement released on 30/3/2007, the Quartet welcomed the national unity government. Meanwhile, it expanded its requirements in the fifth statement released on 30/5/2007, demanding to halt launching rockets by the Palestinian resistance from Gaza thus targeting Israeli settlements. It also called on releasing the soldier Gilad Shalit imprisoned by Hamas immediately and unconditionally.⁸² In return, it called on Israel to release the Palestinian government members and deputies detained by Israel. This statement referred to the Arab peace initiative as “a vital contribution to the peace process,” which means considering it a component of the settlement and not the basis for it, the statement also called to promote and expand Arab contacts with Israel.

Upon analyzing the Quartet statements, it is clear that the Palestinian demands are expressed generally and non-specifically, while the articulation of the Israeli demands was clear and explicit.

In the wake of legitimacy and authorities crisis, and the division into two Palestinian governments one in the WB and the other in GS, the Quartet took a biased position to one party at the expense of the other. This was clear in the sixth statement released on 16/6/2007, where the Quartet expressed understanding and support for President ‘Abbas’ decisions to dissolve the Cabinet and declare an emergency.

After appointing the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair as the special envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East, and in its seventh statement, the Quartet identified Blair’s mission as: to mobilize international assistance to the Palestinians, to work closely with donor bodies and countries, to secure international support to the Palestinian institutions, to develop the Palestinian economy, and to support the Quartet objectives. It seems that Blair represents a sort of confiscation of the Quartet, restricting its role to the economic side and the rebuilding of institutions. That means returning to the US choice, as shown so far, since the call for the Annapolis.

The Quartet’s eighth statement on 19/7/2007 acknowledged the legitimacy of the Ramallah government only, and called for providing international support for it. It also supported Bush’s call to convene an international conference in Annapolis to settle the Palestinian–Israeli conflict. The Quartet again stressed supporting and expanding the Arab–Israeli scope of contact.

Moreover, Blair made his first tour to the region as the Quartet's special envoy, on 23/7/2007, without meeting any representative of Hamas. Prior to the Quartet meeting in September, Blair called for supporting the Palestinian police forces. In addition to this, on 23/9/2007, in the Quartet meeting attended by Tony Blair, the Quartet called in its ninth statement to achieve a number of requirements including:⁸³

- a. Support dialogue between the Palestinian president and the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert.
- b. Support formation of the negotiating delegations following the international conference called for by Bush.
- c. Call for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the WB and GS, and emphasize the importance of a comprehensive solution based on UN resolutions 242 and 338.
- d. Support Blair's efforts to provide financial support to the PA institutions and endorsing an extension to what was known as Temporary International Mechanism (TIM), a body that was established in June 2006 by the European Commission upon a request from the Quartet to provide health care and service support to the Palestinians.

In this regard, Blair has announced, on 19/11/2007, a plan for creating tens of thousands of jobs in the WB and GS, through the opening of industrial and agricultural projects.⁸⁴

It is clear that the European strategic plan previously referred to, as well as Blair's economic plan both represented "solicitation" for the Palestinian side to enter into negotiations, and even to encourage the Fayyad's government to proceed in disarming the resistance, and pursuing resistance fighters. The Quartet expressed grave concern at the persisting Palestinian rocket firing on Israeli settlements, as well as Hamas' suppression of press freedoms and freedom of expression in GS.

The Quartet's tenth meeting, which was held one day before the Annapolis conference, stressed on calling upon the Arab Monitoring Committee to attend the meeting scheduled for December 2007.

Furthermore, the report submitted by John Dugard, Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied by Israel since 1967, reveals the extent to which the US influences the Quartet, which led him to:

recommend the withdrawal of the UN from the Quartet, because the Quartet can not challenge the restrictions imposed on the Palestinians by Israel. The Quartet also stands by a Palestinian party, President 'Abbas, against another party, Hamas movement, regarding the disputes between them, instead of working to bridge the gap between them.⁸⁵

This view is supported by the De Soto report mentioned above, regarding the Quartet in particular and the UN in general, in which he stated that he was prevented from contact with Hamas and the Israeli mission at the UN is able to reach the higher levels in the UN Secretariat; the secretariat examines the position of the US and the Israeli position before taking any step, rather than discussing the correct position that should be taken. The Quartet has turned from a body aimed at applying the Road Map into a body that is concerned with boycott imposition on an elected government of a nation under occupation.⁸⁶

Seventh: India (Case Study)

In this paragraph, we present the case study of India with regard to the Palestinian and Israeli affairs. Most researchers agree that India represents the major developing country, in terms of the immediate and future international significance, which is why its position should be studied more thoroughly. In 2007, Israel succeeded in strengthening its relations with India officially and publicly, more than ever, despite the Islamic and leftist strong opposition.

1. Indian–Palestinian Relations

The Indian public opinion, represented in the press, leftist and centrist parties, the Indian public and particularly the Muslims of India, totaling more than 150 million people, continued to support the Arabs and Palestine. This is shown in demonstrations, sit-ins, conferences and symposia, which take place from time to time in various Indian cities. It is shown also in the way newspapers deal with news about Israel and Palestine, as well as the articles, editorials, and statements released by the Islamic and leftist organizations, at every important development of the Palestinian cause, whether in India or abroad.

One of these occasions was the Conference on War, Imperialism and Resistance in West Asia, which was held by the leftist Indian powers on 12–14/3/2007 in New Delhi, attended by delegations from Arab countries, including delegates from Palestine. The conference called upon the international community to put an end

to the Israeli occupation, and to remove the Separation Wall. The conference also emphasized the right of the Palestinian people in their homeland, and their right to resist occupation by all legitimate ways.⁸⁷

The leftist organizations held another conference in August 2007 on the Palestinian and Middle East issues, along with dozens of conferences, symposia and sit-ins, carried out by leftist and Islamic organizations throughout India, particularly in Delhi and Bombay. Such activities aimed at supporting the Palestinian issue, and exerting pressure on the Indian government to stop persisting in its relations with Israel, in addition to calling for commitment to the established traditional policy of India in supporting the rights of the Palestinian people.

An example of such activities is the Conference on Jerusalem and Palestine, held by major Islamic organizations in Jamia Millia Islamia in New Delhi on 5/10/2007. The leftist and centrist parties, especially the Communist Marxist Party released some press statements and appeals inside and outside the Parliament several times in 2007, calling upon the government to desist from consolidating relations with Israel.

As explained by the Minister of External Affairs of India Pranab Mukherjee before the Advisory Committee for Foreign Affairs on 12/12/2007, the official position of the Indian government is that India supports a negotiated settlement that leads to the establishment of a sovereign, independent, viable and united Palestinian state, within secure and recognized borders, living side by side with Israel, as confirmed in the Road Map and the International Security Council resolutions 1397 and 1515.⁸⁸

The Indian position is also articulated in the speech delivered by Chinmaya R. Gharekhan, India's Special Envoy for West Asia and the Middle East Peace Process, in a special conference for West Asia on 22/11/2007, where he identified the Indian position as follows:⁸⁹

a. The broad outlines for a settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict have been laid down in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. However, this requires attention to what mentioned in his speech on this concern when he said that:

The Palestinian leadership is realistic enough to recognize that Israel will not simply give up the land on which some of its large settlement blocs have been built. At the same time, Israel will also have to accept that, in return for the WB territory that they wish to absorb in Israel, they will have to yield an equivalent area from somewhere else to the Palestinian state.

That means that India agrees to the continuation of the settlements built in the WB, particularly Jerusalem as part of Israel, as it agrees to the principle of exchanging lands, noting that the portion available for exchange with Israel is the Negev Desert. The Indian official may know that this exchange is a formal, unequal, and unjust.

b. The Indian official believes that the Palestinian leadership will be able to formally give up the right of return. At the same time, no Israeli leadership of any political orientation will ever acknowledge or agree to the return of over four million Palestinian refugees to Israel. One has reason to expect that “it is not beyond the bounds of human ingenuity to evolve a mutually acceptable formula on this issue.”

c. Israel should relinquish the Golan Heights.

d. If the Annapolis conference failed; it would be in favor of the extremist powers, although the Palestinians are well-known for their secular orientations, including Hamas, unfortunately, al-Qaeda found a foothold in the Palestinian community. In spite of that, if ‘Abbas is to put any agreement with Israel for referendum, it would be wrong to exclude Hamas, which represents an important factor when presenting the results of this referendum.

The foregoing indicates that the Indian position calls for Palestinians to accept the status quo regarding the non-return of refugees and the permanence of settlement blocs in the WB. It also indicates, without evidence, an existence of al-Qaeda. This situation is nearer to the Israeli–American position, and more far from the resolutions of “international legitimacy”; it also responds to the propaganda launched by President ‘Abbas and others, concerning Hamas’ relation with al-Qaeda.

India participated in the Annapolis conference held on 27/12/2007, despite local opposition to such participation in the American efforts. After that, India attended the conference of donor states of Palestine, held in Paris the next month. One of its consequences is that India actually provided aid amounting to \$25 million to the PA.

In the economic and humanitarian framework, India expressed its willingness to assist the Palestinians, though symbolically. The Indian ambassador to the PA

in Ramallah said that India receives 40 students from the WB and GS for training in several fields every year, along with 10 grants for higher education every year. He added that India provided a piece of land to the Palestinian embassy in the Indian capital, India is building a secondary school in the Abu Dis village, and is constructing a center for malignant diseases annexed to the Shifa' hospital in Gaza. It is also building the cabinet headquarters in Ramallah.⁹⁰

During his visit to Ramallah in September 2007, the Indian Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahamed said that India provided \$15 million assistance to the Palestinian government. This grant was for the implementation of projects in the WB and GS, including the establishment of a unit for heart surgery in Gaza, and setting up a park for computer and information technology at the University of Jerusalem.⁹¹

2. Indian–Israeli Relations

Following the establishment of Israel in 1948, India recognized it as a de facto in September 1950. Months later, India allowed it to open commercial office in Bombay (now Mumbai), which turned into a consulate in June 1953 with the pretext of attending to the Jews in India. Meanwhile, India refused to recognize Israel as de jure, consequently refusing to deal with it. Then, Indira Gandhi came to office; she preferred to deal secretly with Israel in the military and security fields. India recognized the PLO as the official and only representative of the Palestinian people in 1975. It then recognized “Palestine” as a state in 1988, allowing the PLO to open an embassy in India.

However, the normal diplomatic relations have not been established until PV Narasimha Rao headed the National Congress Party government on 29/1/1992. The first procedure he took was allowing Israel to open an embassy in the Indian capital. It was said at the time that India has done this after receiving the approval of Yasir ‘Arafat and his encouragement, which drew considerable opposition from the Indian political and public circles, particularly from Islamic organizations and leftist movements.

In spite of this opposition, the common belief was that the Israeli embassy would be like many foreign embassies in the Indian capital, which are heard about rarely. Surprisingly, the Israeli embassy turned quickly into one of the most active diplomatic missions in India.

The Israeli ambassador began writing in newspapers, delivering lectures, sending Indian delegations to Israel, traveling extensively within the country, and even started making contacts and contracts with the governments of the Indian states, which was unusual in India; where foreign embassies generally communicate with the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

Soon, these relations evolved with breakthroughs in the field of military cooperation, that India began importing increasing quantities of Israeli arms; it also requested benefit from the Israeli expertise in training soldiers and fighting “terrorism.”

Israel places great importance on its relations with India, to the extent that Tel Aviv officially celebrated the 15th anniversary of the establishment of full diplomatic relations with India early in 2007. On this occasion, the Israeli Foreign Ministry released an official statement on 29/1/2007, in which it described this relationship as a “historic milestone,” saying that Israel is fully committed to push these relations forward strongly.⁹² Israel thinks that it is important to strengthen links with emerging global powers such as India and China.⁹³

Israel tries to form pressure group (lobby) in India in various ways. Signs have emerged that the Israeli embassy has built relationships with several newspapers; it shows from published articles written by the Israeli ambassador and other embassy officials constantly in some newspapers, which do not try to obtain similar articles by the Palestinian ambassador and other Arabs or Muslim ambassadors. Israel has also formed a joint Israeli–Indian singing band called Bharati (i.e., Indian) in collaboration with Sahara India Commercial Corporation. The band includes 60 dancers and 20 musicians from India and Israel, and this band performs in various joint Worldwide tours.⁹⁴ In India, there was news that the Israeli embassy is building relations with some Urdu newspapers, i.e., newspapers that is published and read by the Muslims in India.

During the early 2007, the so-called “Hindu–Jewish Leadership Summit” was held in New Delhi on 6–7/2/2007, for the leaders of the Hindu religion represented by Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati, the Convener of the Hindu Dharma Acharya Sabha, heading a delegation composed of about 30 Hindu prominent priests. From the Israeli side, Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel participated, heading a delegation of Jewish leaders. This summit was organized by an unknown American Jewish organization called World Council for Religious Leadership, in

cooperation with an unknown Indian organization. The Israeli government was, in fact, behind this initiative. The evident is that the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs published the statement of this “summit” when completed. During this “summit,” a joint statement was signed, “recognizing the common values shared by two of the oldest religions of the world,” condemning “every violence based on religion,” and declaring “the establishment of a Hindu Jewish permanent committee.”⁹⁵

On the sidelines of the summit, a meeting was held between the Jewish delegation headed by Yona Metzger, Chief Rabbi of Israel and a number of Indian Muslim figures, some known as being opportunists, others are not interested in political issues, especially the Palestinian issue. When the news of this meeting spread, the Muslims of India raged, the Islamic organizations and figures direct a barrage of condemnation and denunciation, demanding to boycott the Muslims who participated in this summit. This condemnation lasted for weeks. The result was that all the individuals who met with the Israeli delegation retreated; some apologized, while some said they were deceived, or that the meeting was “personal.”⁹⁶

Israel repeated attempts to bring around some of the Muslim leaders of India; so, it invited a delegation of some unsung Muslims, including some journalists, to visit Israel on 14–21/8/2007.

When the news spread days before the delegation’s travel, and the source was Israel as usual and not India, there was a burst of condemnation and denunciation. The result was that the majority of delegation members canceled their travel, including the chief editor of an Urdu newspaper, who is said to have intimate relations with Israel. Nevertheless, some people, including the son of a mosque imam in Delhi, who heads a small organization, that claims to represent Indian imams, went to Israel, and met Israeli officials including the Israeli president, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who asked the delegation to play a role to resolve the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The delegation tried to meet Sheikh ‘Ikrima Sabri, the grand mufti of Jerusalem, but the mufti refused to meet them, according to news in some Indian newspapers.

There were nationwide protests across India, including sit-ins organized by the All India Muslim *Majlis-e-Mushawarat* (An apex forum of Muslim organizations and institutions of national eminence along with some well-known personalities), with the participation from leaders of major Indian Islamic organizations, in

front of the Indian Parliament on the Indian on 17/8/2007, during the presence of the delegation in Israel.⁹⁷ The organizations participating in the sit-in presented a memorandum to the Indian prime minister, holding the Indian government responsible for this visit. It also denounced the policy of getting closer to Israel which the Indian government exercises. Hundreds of statements were released by Islamic organizations and leading figures from all over India condemning the visit. The Islamic Press labeled the delegation as “the hypocrites of India” and “sellers of the nation” and “opportunists” and “snakes of the sleeve.”⁹⁸

The Israelis held a global conference for the leaders of religions at the University of Guru Nanak Dev University in the Amritsar City in India on 28/11/2007.⁹⁹ It was held through an initiative from a Jewish foundation called Elijah Interfaith Institute. 50 religious personalities from all over the world were invited, including the Dalai Lama, the spiritual leader of Tibet; 20 Muslims from around the world, some were of those Indian Muslims who had visited Israel in August 2007.

It is clear that the purpose of these visits, initiatives and joint conferences is gaining the leaders of other religions or at least neutralizing them towards Israel.

In 2007, there was some little tension in the relations between India and Israel as result of the anxiety of the Indian public opinion; due to the influx of thousands of young Israeli men and women, their drug abuse and trade, and the involvement of some in crimes. In additions to this, the Israelis, as individuals and companies, tended to buy lands in India in spite of the law that bans foreign ownership of real estate without prior permission. This news was published more than once in Indian newspapers, and was the subject of debate even in the Israeli Knesset in early January 2007.¹⁰⁰

Among the other issues that the Indian government and people were not pleased with, the Jewish organizations that seek to Judaize tribes in northeast India, asserting without evidence, that they are some “lost” Jewish tribes contradicting the results of the genetic analysis. Despite this, the Israeli Jewish community accepted such allegations, and Jewish organizations came to work amongst these tribes, Judaizing them by teaching the principles of the Jewish religion, and putting them through the many rituals necessary to recognize them as Jews. India has banned the Israelis from entry to some security-sensitive areas in Nagaland and Manipur states, where they practiced Judaization.

A thousand of Judaized Indians, who claim they are the remnants of the Bnei Menashe tribe, immigrated to Israel, and seven thousands of them were waiting for Israeli travel permits in 2007.¹⁰¹ They went to Israel exploiting the Israeli Immigration law of 1950, serving in menial occupations and as border guards. The Israeli Interior Minister Meir Sheerit suggested amending the immigration law; in order not to be exploited by such people.¹⁰²

3. Mutual Trade between India and Israel

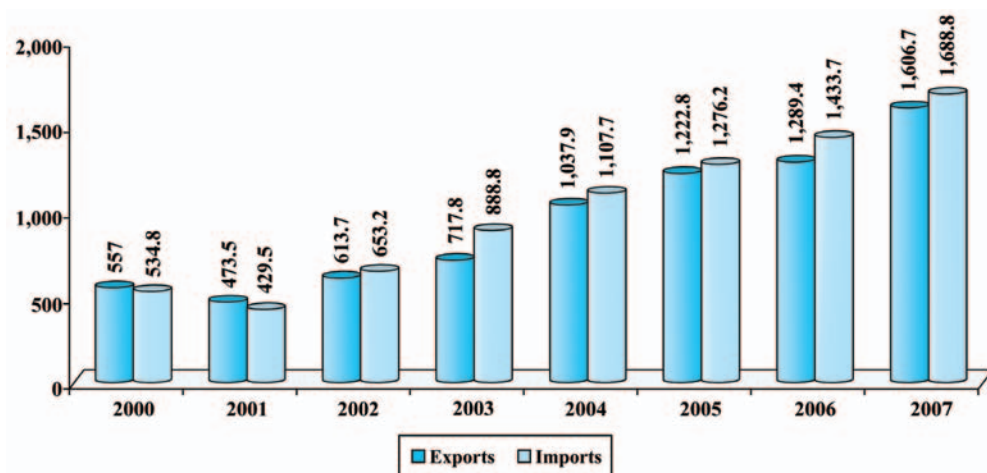
Trade between the two countries was characterized by rapid growth in 2007, recording steady increase since the establishment of relations between them. From a balance of trade reaching \$200 million in 1992,¹⁰³ when the diplomatic relations were established, the bilateral trade sprung to \$2.2 billion (\$1.2 billion for Indian exports to Israel, and \$1 billion for Indian imports from Israel). This was during the fiscal year 2005–2006, increasing by 39% over the previous fiscal year, according to the Indian official figures,¹⁰⁴ believed to conceal Indian payments for Israeli weapons.

India and Israel agreed in principle to approve a trade treaty between the two countries. The two countries also agreed in March 2007 on creating a joint working group to discuss the possible commercial areas for cooperation. During 2007, many pieces of news were published on the cooperation between the two countries in the fields of agriculture, railways, housing, tourism, power production and others.

**Table 2/5: Israeli Exports and Imports with India
2000–2007 (\$ million)¹⁰⁵**

Year	Exports	Imports
2000	557	534.8
2001	473.5	429.5
2002	613.7	653.2
2003	717.8	888.8
2004	1,037.9	1,107.7
2005	1,222.8	1,276.2
2006	1,289.4	1,433.7
2007	1,606.7	1,688.8

Israeli Exports and Imports with India 2000–2007 (\$ million)



4. Military Cooperation between India and Israel

The secret of the fast growing Indian–Israeli relations after the establishment of diplomatic relations lies in the fact that Israel was already helping India in the fields of military and security, by secretly selling weapons, and providing expertise and information since the early 1960s. Opening the embassy in the Indian capital gave a chance to Israel to develop rapidly these relations in the subsequent years.

The need of India for such assistance has increased due to the deteriorating security situation in several regions of India, such as the armed separatist movement in Kashmir, violence and separatist movements in several regions of India, and the Pakistani occupation of the Carghil in the summer of 1999.

This situation provided Israel with a great opportunity to provide India with weapons, consultation and training services. Israel also equipped India during the Carghil battle per se. It was said then that the reason for this flourishing in the Indian–Israeli relations is the establishment of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government led by the Indian People’s Party (with Hindu sectarian extremist orientations) in 1998. These extremists consider Israel as a natural ally against the Islamic powers in the world.

When the United Progressive Alliance coalition came to power in May 2004, under the leadership of the National Congress Party, observers thought that things will change, and that relations with Israel will see some sort of stalemate. However, the opposite has occurred, the relations were boosted more than ever, under the new

government, to the extent that Israel rapidly became the second largest exporter of arms to India after Russia, and now it is candidate to become the first in exporting arms to India.

At the beginning, the Government of NDA openly revealed its relations with Israel, but they soon returned to the secrecy that has characterized the Indian–Israeli relations before the beginning of diplomatic relations in 1992. There were two reasons for that, first: the desire of the Indian government not to jeopardize its relations with the Arab countries. Second: not to get the Muslims in India, who are anxious concerning these relations, into rage; especially that they represent a significant weight in at least 100 electoral districts of Federal Indian Parliament districts. Thus, most news about the growing Indian–Israeli relations, the big military deals, exchanging visits of officials, particularly military leaders and security officials come from Israel instead of India.

Under this policy of secrecy, the Indian government tried to conceal the secret visit by General Moshe Kaplinsky, the Israeli Deputy Chief of General Staff, to the Indian portion of Kashmir in June 2007, to providing India with consultancy on how to quell armed violence in this province.¹⁰⁶ It was followed by a similar visit in October by some Israeli military experts, under the pretext of assessing the performance of the weapons that Israel sold to India, which is used in Kashmir, especially along the ceasefire lines with the Pakistani portion of Kashmir.¹⁰⁷

By the beginning of 2007, Israel has become the second state after Russia in selling arms to India, and India became the first state to buy weapons from Israel. An Israeli official said that his country had sold arms to India of about \$1 billion each year in the past few years, while the Israeli arms sales to India in 2006 amounted to \$1.5 billion, according to the Israeli official,¹⁰⁸ representing one third of the weapons imported by India.

The Indian military purchases from Israel include Barak-1 anti-missile defense systems, Green Pine early-warning radars, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV), such as, Searcher UAVs, and Heron UAVs. In addition to using Israeli companies in the renovation and modernization of Russian weapons in the Indian Army such as the MiG fighters and T-72 tanks.¹⁰⁹ The Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) sold other products to India, such as the three Falcon AWACS early warning systems worth of \$1.1 billion in 2004.

In addition to buying the ready-made Israeli weapons, India started cooperation with Israel to produce new weapons, and develop old weapons, including pilotless aircraft flying at a higher altitude for longer distances; electronic warfare systems including missiles such as Crystal Maze, Python, and Popeye; and infantry night-vision equipment.

Further more, among these projects is a \$350 million joint project to develop the new generation of “Barak” anti-missile, reaching 60 km range, in comparison with the 9 km Barak-1 missile, that India bought from Israel for its navy. In a meeting headed by Manmohan Singh, the Indian Prime Minister, the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) approved, on 11/7/2007, a cooperation project between the Indian Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO) and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), to develop a medium-range air missile for the Indian Air Force that costs \$2.5 billion; to replace the Russian Pechora, which has become outdated. The new missile will be an advanced version of the Israeli surface-to-air Spyder missile system, with 55 km range. India also decided to use the Israeli Aeronautical Development Agency; to participate in the development of multimedia radar for the Indian light fighter aircraft, after the Indian scientists were delayed in the production of this radar with their self-effort.¹¹⁰

At the end of August 2007, an Indian Defense Ministry official said that there are 18 projects for the joint military production between the two countries.¹¹¹ The industrial research and development fund was established between the two countries in 2005 with \$3 million capital. In March 2007, David Danieli, the Israeli Ambassador to India said that the capital of this fund will be doubled more than once.¹¹²

The Ambassador Danieli had announced on 9/11/2006 that Israel will use an Indian spacecraft to launch an Israeli satellite called Taskar. On 21/1/2008, an Indian spacecraft indeed launched this satellite from an Indian rocket launcher. Political and media uproar were sparked in India, when the news came from Israel that the satellite spies on Iran, particularly on its nuclear facilities. Indian officials said that the process of launching the Israeli satellite was merely commercial, but the opponents of such cooperation realize that it is a decision with profound political dimension, shows a significant change in the Indian foreign policy orientations.

The paramount importance that India place on its military relations with Israel could be measured by its rejection to put the Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and Rafael Company for weapons on the black list. Although the India’s Central

Bureau of Investigation registered a case against these two companies on charges of paying bribes to pass the Barak-1 missile deal, which was signed in October 2000, through the government of NDA.¹¹³ It is believed that Israel paid bribes amounting to \$88 million for passing the Barak-1 missile deal, of which India's navy bought at least 24 systems, at a cost of \$22 million for each. Investigations into this scandal began in October 2004, following the rise of the National Congress Party to power. Investigation in this scandal continues to this day (early 2008).

Israel adopts inaction and leniency with India in military contracts; Indian Defense Ministry officials expressed "their content about the Israeli enthusiasm on making and fulfilling deals with India, comparing to the stubbornness shown by the Russians in some major deals, and the delay that occurs in buying military equipment from the US."¹¹⁴

In early August 2007, Israeli Naval Chief Vice-Admiral David Ben Bashat visited India, where he met Chairman of Chiefs of Staffs Committee & Chief of the Army Staff General Joginder Jaswant Singh, Air Chief Marshal Fali Homi Major, and his counterpart in the Indian navy Admiral Sureesh Mehta, in addition to the Defense Secretary Vijay Singh.

During this visit, an agreement was made on further joint projects, including the development of Indian Naval aircraft Sea Harrier, the "Barak" anti-missile system,¹¹⁵ and production of pilotless helicopters. It was due to the lack of the latter helicopters in the Israeli Navy, that Hizbullah was able to destroy the ship Hanit, by the Chinese-made C-802 missile, during the war between Israel and Hizbullah in the summer of 2006. India believes that it is also facing a similar threat, because Pakistan had obtained the same missile from China.¹¹⁶ Previously, Indian Chief of Army Staff General Joginder Jaswant Singh visited secretly Israel in early March 2007, and before that the Indian Air Force Chief Marshal then Shashindra Pal Tyagi visited secretly, also, the Hebrew state.¹¹⁷

5. Security Cooperation between India and Israel

Security and intelligence cooperation are of the most important aspects of Indian-Israeli relations; this cooperation began in 1968, when India established a foreign intelligence agency under the misleading name, Research and Analysis Wing (RAW). Prime Minister Indira Gandhi advised the first director of this agency Rameshwar Nath Kao, to consolidate relations with Mossad for the benefit of both countries.¹¹⁸

This part of the Indian–Israeli cooperation is taking place under the guise of secrecy. Currently, the security coordination between the two countries is accomplished through the “Indo-Israeli Joint Working Group on Counter–Terrorism” which was set up by the two countries in 2002. The group held its sixth meeting in New Delhi on 13/3/2007. Ambassador Miriam Ziv, deputy director general for strategic affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, headed the Israeli side, while the Indian side was headed by the Additional Secretary of International Organizations, Ministry of External Affairs. According to a statement by Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesman on 14/3/2007: “The two sides discussed terror threats in the regional and global context as well as national counter–terrorism measures, combating terrorist financing, transfers of weapons to terrorists, the threat of narco trafficking and cooperation at multilateral forums.”¹¹⁹

In order to consolidate this relationship, Israel exploits news, published from time to time about the “threats” of al-Qaeda¹²⁰ and other organizations against India, in emphasizing for New Delhi the necessity of security and intelligence cooperation between the two countries. The Defense Ministry Director–General Pinchas Buchris spent several days in late 2007 in the Indian capital to discuss ways of intelligence cooperation between the two countries under the pretext of facing of these “risks.”¹²¹

During recent years, one of the main causes of the Indian government’s interest in developing relations with Israel is that it believes strengthening relations with Israel including the Jewish lobby in the US would be an effective way to improve relations with the US Government. Israel and the American Jewish lobby publicly boasted the active role they played in passing the US–India Nuclear Agreement, which the Indian government was eager to pass, but did not sign it with the US until now, because of the threat from leftist parties allies to withdraw from the ruling coalition if it does. If they withdraw, the current Indian government would fall, leading to early elections.

The negative development in the Indian position, compared to what it was before the Oslo Agreement, emphasizes the dire consequences of the Oslo Agreement in terms of the expansion of international recognition of Israel and comprehending its attitudes. It also underlines the magnitude of the Arab decline

in mobilizing friendly nations' attitudes towards the Palestinian issue, as was the case in previous phases, particularly the decline that has taken place after the Oslo Agreement and previously, the Egyptian–Israeli treaty. The Arab League must reconsider this issue confirming that the Palestinian issue is still having the Arab support. Here it must be noted that the dialogue with India and other former friends must be reinitiated.

Conclusion

The strategic features of 2007 can be outlined as follows:

1. There is a continuation in the international pressure on the Palestinian side to abandon armed resistance; this pressure has two dimensions: First, a political dimension represented in an almost entire international diplomatic boycott from the international actors towards the Palestinian force, which adopts the option of resistance despite its victory in legislative elections. Second, the economic pressure, especially on GS where the forces of armed resistance control, and linking economic aids to the Palestinians according to their compatibility with the Israeli side.

2. The Annapolis Conference was held in the US with broad international attendance without bringing about a clear profile project for the peace settlement. It rather left the issue to the bilateral negotiations with increasing American supervision that started from the middle of the second half of 2007. This is evident by focusing on the continuation of negotiations under all circumstances, reviving the America–Israeli–Palestinian tripartite committee, and turning the Quartet into a false witness. In addition to continuing to link economic aid with the development in the peace settlement on the one hand and ignoring the escalation of Israeli military operations, especially, against GS, as well as assassinations, arrests and incursions in the WB on the other hand.

3. Impediment from the US and some European powers to any efforts that aim at healing the rift in Palestinian internal front, in addition to, threatening to give up on the issue in case that 'Abbas re-communicates with Hamas.

4. The US policy is based on direct and accurate identification of the Palestinian obligations, in comparison with leaving the Israeli commitments in the peace

settlement to “the negotiations.” In fact, these negotiations are meant to reach an agreement in accordance with the vision of Bush, and the conditions of Olmert with some minor adjustments, specifically, in giving a small part of East Jerusalem, promises to release the detainees and financial promises.

All this suggests that 2008 will be a year of clashes in the Palestinian arena, particularly in GS, where the pressures will be extremely intensified politically, economically, and militarily; at local (from the Palestinian forces advocating settlement), Arab and international levels.

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- ¹¹⁵ http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/India/India_Israel_to_step_up_naval_ties/articleshow/2263575.cms
- ¹¹⁶ http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/World/Rest_of_World/India_Israel_mull_development_of_unmanned_combat_helicopters/articleshow/2279391.cms
- ¹¹⁷ ‘*Awam* newspaper (in Urdu), New Delhi, 13/3/2007.

¹¹⁸ For details, see “RAW & Mossad: the Secret Link,” Rediff.com, 8/9/2003,
<http://www.rediff.com/news/2003/sep/08spec.htm>

¹¹⁹ IMRA, 14/3/2007.

¹²⁰ See for example *al-Hayat*, 9/6/2007.

Some Indian Muslim groups accused Israel of being responsible for fabricated news given to the media, see *The Milli Gazette*, 16-31/7/2007. Some newspapers, issued in Urdu in India, also accused Israel of being responsible for the terrorist attacks in India, for example: The editorial of ‘*Awam*’ newspaper, 16/10/2007, and its translation was published in: *The Milli Gazette*, 1-15/8/2007, p. 2.

¹²¹ “India, Israel Establishes Mechanism to Share Intelligence Information on Regular Basis,” Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), 1/1/2008,
http://www.app.com.pk/en_/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=25040

This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is glad to present to its reader The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007, the third 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.

This Report is distinguished for its updated information till the end of 2007 and for its outstanding team of academics and experts.

Despite the unfortunate state of schism that characterized the Palestinian arena, and despite the hot and sensitive issues discussed, the Report did its best to be professional, scientific and objective. Thus, this Report is a distinguished addition to the Palestinian studies.

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

مركز الزيتونة للدراسات والاستشارات

P.O. Box: 14-5834 Beirut - Lebanon

Tel: +961 1 803 644 | Tel-Fax: +961 1 803 643

info@alzaytouna.net | www.alzaytouna.net

