

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007



Edited By
Dr. Mohsen M. Saleh



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007



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The Palestinian Strategic Report 2007

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List of Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi)
ARIJ	Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem
B'Tselem	Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CMR	Crude Marriage Rate
CPI	Consumer Price Index
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EU	European Union
Fida	Palestinian Democratic Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GS	Gaza Strip
Hamas	Islamic Resistance Movement
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IAI	Israel Aerospace Industries
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICJ	International Court of Justice
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
INSS	Institute for National Security Studies
ISESCO	Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NSC	National Security Council
OCHA	The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OIC	Organization of the Islamic Conference
OPT	Occupied Palestinian Territories
PA	Palestinian Authority

PCAS	Popular Committee Against Siege
PCAW	Popular Campaign Against the Wall
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFLP-GC	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command
PIJ	The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestinian Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestinian National Council
Shabak	Israel Security Agency
TOBB	Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UK	United Kingdom
UNHCR	The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
USA	United States of America
WAFA	Palestinian News Agency
WB	West Bank

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Demographic
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Introduction

The Palestinians have faced in 2007 one of the most difficult challenges in their modern history. On the one hand, it was a year where hopes were high for a national consensus when the Mecca Agreement was ratified and Palestinians sought to form a national unity government. On the other hand, frustrations prevailed due to the state of lawlessness, the implementation of the Dayton plans, the suffocating siege, and the Palestinian political and geographic schism after Hamas took control of Gaza. The ramifications were clear proof of the importance of settling the differences, respecting pluralism and having a peaceful transfer of power, without any foreign interference. Thus, the need became urgent for a binding “National Charter” and the activation of the Palestinian Liberation Organization, in order to form an effective representative entity gathering the whole Palestinian people and factions, within a national program that defines the guiding principles, unchanging demands and the priorities.

This is the third annual *Palestinian Strategic Report* covering the year 2007 (PSR 2007). It traces the major track of events, combines the latest detailed information, analysis and general vision, and attempts to foresee the track of coming events.

The sensitive issues of schism, fragmentation and polarization in the Palestinian arena provided us with various narrations of events and their subsequent interpretations. This made the task of researchers and authors more difficult, compelling them to discuss the issues with strict neutrality, and to deal with the largest available documented information within the basics of scientific research and objectivity.

In eight chapters, this Report monitors and analyzes the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli–Palestinian scene, the Arab, Islamic and international stances on the Palestinian issue. It also discusses the issues that concern the Land and the holy sites, and the demographic and economic indicators. Eleven experts and researchers of the Palestinian issue participated in writing this Report. We commend the efforts of our distinguished professors, the Report consultants, and our colleagues, the co-editors, and the staff of the Archive and Information Department at al-Zaytouna. Undoubtedly, PSR 2007 is the product of a collective

integrated effort of this distinguished team. Since the chapters of the Report were revised, edited and modified, and since the Report is considered a collective work gathered in one book, we didn't put the names of the writers at the beginning of every chapter. Hence we preferred to introduce them and describe their contributions in the first pages of the book.

We faced some of the expected difficulties in researches and genuine studies, such as the difference in statistics and information among the Palestinian, Israeli and international references. We were keen on solving this problem to the best of our ability by making comparisons, verifications and the required scientific critique.

In the end, we must thank all our colleagues who supported this Report, encouraged us to go on and benefited us with their comments and remarks. We thank God for the wide success of our last two annual Reports that became references to researchers, university students and everyone interested in the Palestinian issue.

We are always open to advice, guidance or critique.

**The Editor,
Dr. Mohsen Saleh**

Chapter One

*The Internal Palestinian Scene:
Brothers' Misery*

The Internal Palestinian Scene: Brothers' Misery

Introduction

In a nutshell, the year 2007 was, so to speak, the year of “political and geographical divisions,” during which the Palestinian conflict by passed all its red lines and reached to a breaking point. The developments during this year reflected the depth of the Palestinian–Palestinian differences, and demonstrated that some powerful quarters are adamantly against a viable project for national unity, and that external powers has a strong say in determining the Palestinian internal affairs.

The year 2007 witnessed the continuation of the efforts to discredit The Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas), and prepare the ground for The Palestinian National Liberation Movement’s (Fatah) resumption of power that it had lost during the legislative elections. Various ways and means were employed to attain this objective, viz international financial siege as well as Israeli pressure that took the shape of incursions, systematic arrests, organized killings, and culminated in the arrest of Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) in order to paralyze its entire machinery.

However, the security option was the most important of all these obstructive means. All the security forces were placed under the presidency jurisdiction, and the government was not allowed to deal or direct them. This brinkmanship led to continuous confrontations and unprecedented anxiety that propelled Arab intervention which had finally crystallized in the Saudi initiative and Mecca Agreement by which a government of national unity was formed.

Mecca Agreement was, indeed, an outstanding achievement as it stopped the bloody confrontation and emphasized the necessity of a Palestinian political partnership supported and guaranteed by the Arabs. However, this breakthrough did not deter the security forces, particularly the Preventive Security Services, which continued their defiance and strife to impose their control. Thus, the security confrontations were resumed, and a corresponding media campaign blamed “the other” for the tension. The upshot was the eruption of an all around military confrontation, the collapse of the national unity government, and finally, the

division of the Palestinian national territories whereby the government of Isma‘il Haniyyah imposed a tight control over Gaza Strip (GS), while the presidency and Salam Fayyad’s emergency government assumed the rule of the West Bank (WB). This de facto political and geographical division was well exploited by the presidency to actively pursue its policy to declare the results of the elections null and void and to call for new elections, as explained below:

First: The Phase of the Agreement over the Amended “Detainees’ Document”

By the opening of the year 2007, the conflict between Fatah and the presidency on one side and Hamas and the Palestinian government on the other side was still in place. While the siege, that had been increasingly and simultaneously imposed by Israel, the United States of America (USA) and European countries, continued in full swing, the presidency intensified its pressure on Isma‘il Haniyyah’s first government under the guise of plebiscite, early elections, and the need for a new government that could lift the tight siege. Such a new government should accept the conditions of the Quartet, namely recognition of Israel, and all the signed treaties as well as the stoppage of the resistance to the occupation. Meanwhile, a well organized public and secret campaign was orchestrated to intensify insecurity, and to paralyze the ability of the government, be it that of Hamas or a national unity government, to maintain law and order that enable ordinary people to continue their normal life.

During the first half of the year 2006, the issue of the so-called National Reconciliation Document, also known as the Detainees’ Document, had come to the forefront. During the negotiations over this draft document, the presidency had persistently threatened that it will call for a plebiscite if the parties failed to conclude an agreement on the issue. However, an agreement, in which some mutually agreed amendments were incorporated in the draft, was finally concluded, and the formation of a national unity government in which all parties should participate appeared to be the next logical step. Nonetheless, by contrast, two coherent moves appeared during the second half of the year 2006. The first was a political move patronized by the presidency, which threatened to call for new elections, as reflected in a number of press releases

from the president's office: 21/5/2006, 27/9/2006, 16/12/2006 and 19/1/2007.¹ Simultaneously, there was an intensified security move, masterminded by Muhammad Dahlan, the former head of the Preventive Security Services, which aggravated the lawlessness in the Palestinian territories.

Due to the military confrontations in which some were killed and wounded from both sides, two consecutive meetings were held in early 2007 in GS between President 'Abbas and Premier Isma'il Haniyyah. While Haniyyah declared that he agreed with 'Abbas to withdraw the fighters from Gaza streets, and on the necessity of the continuation of calm, the latter did not make any statement. However, Fatah issued a statement that ignored the call for restraint, and provocatively said, "Blood for blood and aggression for aggression... All members of the movement should openly respond to every attack."²

Behind these events were two important issues. The first issue was the American initiative of extending \$86.4 million* to support the Presidential Guard Forces. An American document mentioned that General Keith Dayton, the American Security Coordinator for Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), was in charge of the program to support and reform the Palestinian security sector that is under the supervision of the presidency.³ The other issue was the continuous conflict between the presidency and the government over the Executive Force that was placed under the command of Interior Minister Sa'id Siyam, which had been, since its formation, targeted by the Presidential Security Forces in GS. In harmony with this position, the office of President 'Abbas issued on 6/1/2007 a decree that declared "the Executive Force, both officers and soldiers, to be illegitimate and unlawful, and that it will be dealt with on this basis unless it is immediately incorporated in the legal security forces that are stipulated in the Palestinian Basic Law."⁴ This decree aggravated security tension and increased security confrontation between the two parties. Moreover, a tense political environment prevailed, which sharply reduced the possibility of an agreement on the formation of a national unity government, even threatened that a total confrontation between the rival security forces might erupt.

These dangerous developments triggered Ahmad Bahr, the acting speaker of PLC, and Ibrahim Abu al-Naja, secretary of the High Follow-Up Committee of

* The term \$ used throughout this book is the US\$.

the National and Islamic Forces, to initiate a new round of talks that aim for the formation of a government of national unity.⁵ While saying that there is still time to explore the possibility of such a government, President ‘Abbas insisted that he will resort to early general elections if this endeavor failed.⁶

While this heated contest was gaining momentum, Fatah organized on 7/1/2007 a central rally at Yarmouk Stadium that was headed by Member of Parliament (MP) Muhammad Dahlan. He threatened Hamas leaders that they will not be “beyond the reach of our force,” described the movement as a “gang,” and added that “if they harm one of us we will harm two of them.” A Hamas spokesman responded to these threats by saying that Dahlan works for an American–Israeli agenda,⁷ while a close source to Premier Haniyyah, said that “Dahlan is striving to control Fatah... and to rearrange his personal status in line with a very well known agenda.” Moreover, the source added, all the PA security forces adamantly refuse to cooperate with the Interior Minister Sa‘id Siyam.⁸

Lest that this tension lead to an explosion, the resistance factions hurriedly called for convening (public) dialogue sessions to discuss a document entitled “general principles to end the security disorder and to resume national dialogue to form a national unity government.”⁹ But the effective dialogue was held in Damascus to which two delegates, Ziad Abu ‘Amr and Khalid Salam (known by his pseudo-name Muhammad Rasheed), and the Qatari Minister of the State For Foreign Affairs Ahmed Bin ‘Abdullah Al Mahmoud had rushed to prepare the ground for a meeting between President ‘Abbas and Khalid Mish‘al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau.¹⁰

The main issues of the mediation focused on the following:

1. The premiership of the national unity government, should it be given to Hamas which has the majority in the PLC or to an independent to appease the Quartet?
2. The letter of designation, its contents, the conditions of the Quartet, and if the program of the government will be in line with the letter’s stances, or can it express its reservations concerning them?
3. The “sovereignty” ministries (Foreign Affairs, Interior, Information and Finance), will they totally or partially go to Hamas, or will they be given to independents, where both parties mutually agree-upon their names?

The mediators in Damascus crystallized a draft agreement on the desired government that was based on independent nominees for the “sovereignty” ministries. Some will be chosen by Hamas and the rest by Fatah, though no specific names were spelled out. To bridge the huge gap between the presidency and the government, the draft agreement proposed a compromise on the content of the letter of designation, on the formation of a new security council and the restructure of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).¹¹

The Qatari mediation was synchronized by a dubious decision by President ‘Abbas that led to considerable suspicion and political uneasiness, namely the appointment of Dahlan the top commander of all Palestinian security forces. This decision was revealed by the Israeli press,¹² and *Maariv* newspaper specifically recorded that the appointment was verbally communicated to Dahlan. These news provoked the concern of many quarters, including Hamas and the Interior Minister Sa’id Siyam, particularly so as the law prohibits the duality of being an MP and an occupant of any executive office. Nonetheless, in that tense environment, President ‘Abbas arrived in Damascus on 20/1/2007, and had a meeting with the Syrian President Bashar Assad. It was hoped that this meeting would facilitate the mediation between Fatah and Hamas during the forthcoming meeting of their leaders ‘Abbas and Mish’al. The Syrian press release that was issued after the meetings of the two presidents “emphasized the necessity of the unity of the Palestinian people... the importance of discarding violence, the consolidation of national unity, and the active pursuit of dialogue between all Palestinian factions as the sole means to form a government of national unity.” The presidential press release added that Syria “supports all that the Palestinian agree on, and will willingly extend its help in this respect.”¹³ Hence, it was hoped that the Palestinian mediation delegation will fine tune the draft agreement, and that it will be endorsed in the scheduled meeting between ‘Abbas and Mish’al. But the events took a different course mainly because of a major rift between the president and the government of Hamas over the letter of designation and the response of the premier to it. While President ‘Abbas insisted that the forthcoming government, which is led by Hamas, unequivocally “abides” to the signed treaties, and the decisions of the PLO, the Arab summits, the international community and the Palestinian National Council (PNC), Hamas proposed “to respect” those decisions. Since there is so much difference between the words “abide” and “respect,” the mediation was doomed to failure and the scheduled meeting between ‘Abbas and Mish’al never took place.

Though appearing to be minor and around two words only, the rift was, in fact, serious and deep, as it was on two different political approaches that could not be reconciled except by getting a consensus. Statements attributed to ‘Abbas indicated that he was aware of the nature and the depth of the gulf between the two sides and that he wanted “a government acceptable to the world and can lift the siege,” which means the acceptance of the Quartet’s conditions that Hamas out rightly rejected because they contradict its political agenda. ‘Abbas had also reportedly said that “the Americans will not accept the word respect.”¹⁴ However, Syria, who refused that its capital be the venue for aggravating Palestinian differences, pressured both parties to have a meeting that revolves around four principles, namely rejection of internal fights, adherence to Palestinian national unity, rejection of a temporary Palestinian state and the continuation of the dialogue to form a government of national unity.¹⁵ However, this enforced meeting actually took place.

When the news of Damascus dialogue reached GS, a leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), who was actively engaged in arranging Fatah–Hamis dialogue, said, “The failure of ‘Abbas–Mish‘al meeting will not affect what will be internally agreed upon on the issue of the initiation of the national dialogue inside the Palestinian territories.” The PFLP had, in fact, arranged four meetings between Fatah and Hamas, which were attended by some prominent leaders of The Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ) as well as Ahmed Bahr, the acting speaker of PLC, and Ibrahim Abu al-Naja, secretary of the High Follow-Up Committee of the National and Islamic Forces. The outcome of the fourth five-hour meeting, held on 20/1/2007, was an agreement that provided for the resumption of the dialogue and the reactivation of the joint Hamas–Fatah office and the Joint Media Committee (JMC) between the two organizations. The dialogue session materialized on 23/1/2007 in an agreement to deliberate over some shelved issues concerning the dialogue, that had actually started eight months ago in GS and Ramallah and culminated in Damascus, and which concentrated on the stoppage of all kinds of aggression and all negative responses.¹⁶

However, the absence of a political settlement lead to the resumption of security confrontation, e.g., between those of the Preventive Security and those of the Executive Force in northern GS on 25/1/2007, while an improvised explosive device exploded the next day in Jabaliya north of the GS in which a member of the Executive Force was killed and seven others were wounded. Once more each side

hastened to specify the main points of the political agreement which are also the main points of difference. Premier Isma'il Haniyyah said:

To bypass this deadlock and to form a government of national unity, the national Palestinian consensus that is spelled out in the National Reconciliation Document should be respected and strictly adhered to. For the quest for political formulas outside this document had been the cause of all political dissension in the past.

Haniyyah also talked about the necessity of “the firm belief in political partnership, not only in the government but also in the entire structure of the Palestinian political system whether it was in the government, the PLO, the embassies, representatives or the governors.” Haniyyah had also renewed his opposition to early parliamentary elections.¹⁷ By contrast, some informed Palestinian sources quoted ‘Abbas saying that he sticks to his original position that called for “early legislative and presidential elections if the option of a national government, which is currently explored in the dialogues of Gaza, fails.” Previously, ‘Abbas had reiterated this stand in Damascus by saying, “Early elections is a viable option if the negotiations for the formation of the government fail.”¹⁸

Due to these estranged political stances, military confrontations had once more erupted, and on a wider scale. In Gaza, nine were killed, seven from Hamas, one from Fatah and the ninth was a baby, in addition to the tens of wounded and kidnapped. The confrontations extended to Nablus where 24 of Hamas members were kidnapped.¹⁹ The fighting was intensified during the subsequent three days to involve all the cities of GS, and, more dangerously, the cities of the WB where many confrontations and kidnappings took place, and the casualties reached 26.²⁰

Through its security delegation stationed in Gaza, Egypt initiated on 28/1/2007 another initiative to stop the fighting on the foundations of:

1. Withdrawal of all armed persons from the streets.
2. Removal of all forms of tension.
3. Release of all the kidnapped from both movements.
4. Removal of all road blocks.
5. The Palestinian police force should be the only authorized agency to investigate all security issues. Hamas and Fatah should, moreover, submit lists of all the persons implicated in the latest incidents.²¹

Instead of helping the Egyptian initiative to take its course, the security sources of the presidency declared that it had blown up eight tunnels built by Hamas in GS to assassinate President ‘Abbas and MP Muhammad Dahlan. They added that “a tunnel in the vicinity of ‘Abbas’ house in Gaza was found and blown up a few months ago” and that “these tunnels are usually located on the route taken by President ‘Abbas and the leader in Fatah Muhammad Dahlan, and that their aim is assassinating both.”²²

In an orchestrated intensive media campaign, both Haniyyah’s government and Hamas rejected and denied these charges. In a press conference on 27/1/2007, Interior Minister Sa’id Siyam, openly stated the following stances:

1. He accused President ‘Abbas of shelving his decisions concerning the Palestinian security forces, and enumerated several of them that were not implemented by those under the authority of the president.
2. He severely criticized ‘Abbas appointment of Dahlan in charge of all the Palestinian security forces, considering it contradictory to the Amended Basic Law. Premier Haniyyah, he added, sent to the president several official messages objecting to this appointment, but received no response.
3. The Minister spoke about the arms received by the security forces about a month ago and wondered about their destination and to whose benefit are these forces armed? Meanwhile, the police force received none of these armaments, which included armored Jeep vehicles imported into the territories in coordination with Israeli occupation, but without a prior permit from the Palestinian Ministry of Transport.
4. The minister spoke of an American plan to form brigades and battalions in GS and WB. He maintained that some meetings were held for this purpose, and that he has some documents written by senior security officers that mentioned some urgent demands to face the internal situation.
5. The minister demanded the restructuring of the National Security Council (NSC) headed by President ‘Abbas himself, and offered the restructuring of all the security forces, including the Executive Force, on strict national nonpartisan basis.²³

Likewise, Yahya Musa, the deputy head of Hamas parliamentary bloc, “held President ‘Abbas fully responsible for all what happened, for all the Palestinian tension, for obstructing the Palestinian agreement, and for all the forms of coup

d'état that isolated the government, besieged it and obstructed all its businesses.” Musa added that “President ‘Abbas embraces the criminal team that conspires against the elected government of the Palestinian people, and he legitimizes those who plot to overthrow the government.” Isma‘il Radwan, Hamas’ spokesman, held Fatah responsible for the latest military confrontations, and added that the movement extends organizational, financial and political cover to “a group of insurgents that is conspiring against the nation’s fundamentals, and is implementing an American–Israeli plot to drag the Palestinians into a civil war.” The Palestinian Information Center website, which is affiliated to Hamas, joined the campaign against Dahlan. It accused him of “doing his part” of an American plot to overturn Hamas, and pointed to “information leaked by some of Dahlan’s confidants that on the verge of a Palestinian agreement on the national government, he ordered his men in the security forces to foment internal political unrest.”²⁴

Hamas counter campaign indicated that the decisive confrontation was imminent, especially after the Presidential Guard Forces were deployed in the streets of Gaza, and missiles were fired at the house of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahmud Zahhar. Faced by these dangerous developments, Premier Haniyyah called upon President ‘Abbas, then on a foreign tour, “to quickly and urgently order the withdrawal of all fighters and the removal of all military checkpoints that have spread all over GS.” While in a cabinet meeting, Haniyyah appealed to the Palestinian people “the necessity to protect national unity, continue the dialogue and remove all arms and armaments from the streets.”²⁵

In the face of this spiraling military, political and media tension, the Saudi government struck a deal that was acceptable to all parties, namely Mecca Agreement.

Second: The Phase of Mecca Agreement

On 29/1/2007, King ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz issued an urgent appeal to the Palestinian people which stated:

With a strong hope, desire and determination, I call upon my Palestinian brothers, represented by their leaders, to forthwith end this tragedy and adhere to what’s right. I indiscriminately call them all to an urgent meeting in their brother homeland the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and in the vicinity of the Holy Sanctuaries, to discuss their differences impartially and without interference from any side.

He urged the Palestinians “to be rational and allow the language of dialogue to supersede the language of violence.” However, the Saudi officials emphasized that this meeting is conditional on the stoppage of the Palestinian military confrontations.²⁶

King ‘Abdullah’s appeal was immediately welcomed by the Palestinian presidency and Hamas as well as by Egypt, Syria, Jordan and the Arab League. However, what was immediately required was the stoppage of the fighting, because one day after after the Saudi initiative, the clashes continued in GS, the alert escalated in the streets and the Palestinians who were killed amounted to 33 while more than 100 were injured. Egypt took up this task, and Major-General Burhan Hammad, head of the Egyptian Security delegation in the Palestinian territories, managed to convince both parties—Fatah and Hamas—on 30/1/2007, to meet and agree on a ceasefire with an immediate commencement of the national dialogue. The security agreement was signed and proclaimed in a press conference; It stipulated that there must be an immediate ceasefire, a withdrawal of all fighters from the streets, a removal of all road blocks, a return of all security forces to their barracks, an end to all kinds of tension, a release of the kidnapped, and that the conflict will not be conveyed to the WB while the government of Isma‘il Haniyyah will take the full responsibility of maintaining security, general order and the supremacy of the law.²⁷

After a brief lull, and during the decisive days between the King’s invitation and Mecca meeting, a bloody fighting erupted in Gaza. The architect of this new wave of fighting, viz the security forces, had their own agenda behind this sudden move, namely to decisively impose their control of the internal front, and hence influence the course of the forthcoming dialogue. There were 25 dead and about 250 were wounded in the city of Gaza. Moreover, a combined force of the Presidential Guard Forces and the Presidential Security Forces (Force 17) waged a calculated attack on the compound of the ministries as well as the old building of the Ministry of Interior. At the beginnings of February 2007, the attacks included the Islamic University, one of Hamas’ fundamental strongholds which came after al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’ military wing, intercepted what they said to be a load of arms and armaments that were on their way to the Presidential Guard Force, the university was bombarded, resulting in huge losses, including the destruction of the university library and laboratories. The mass media exhibited pictures of the university after

its arson, which showed defamatory slogans written on the walls and signed by the Presidential Guards and Fatah. The president of the Islamic University, Kamalin Sha'ath estimated cost of damage to be \$15 million.²⁸ Meanwhile, a Fatah source claimed that the Presidential Guard Forces that infiltrated the university building arrested seven Iranians and an eighth blew himself up during the clashes. Hamas denied this alleged capture.²⁹ Even the media disseminated the official release about the "Iranians capture," but the Presidential Guards and the concerned authorities failed to show any of the alleged captives, which indicated that the whole scenario was nothing but a publicity stunt.

Meanwhile, in a corresponding exhibition of force, Hamas waged a wake up, swift and widespread, but brief, attack on the security forces. However, the Security Forces leaders, Muhammad Dahlan and Rashid Abu Shbak, seemed to have got the message that their strategy of a quick and decisive victory in Gaza was farfetched. Hence, they stopped their major offensive.

In an indirect accusation to the security forces of being under the American thumb, Isma'il Haniyyah asked the American administration to stop interfering in the affairs of the Palestinian people; otherwise a civil war might erupt.³⁰ However, the Egyptian security delegation had once more interfered to calm the situation, though skirmishes continued here and there until Mecca meeting of 6/2/2007. Due to all this unnecessary chaos, Hamas had at first objected to Muhammad Dahlan's membership of Fatah delegation to the talks, but it eventually withdrew this demand in the interest of a smooth conduct of the meeting.

Mecca rendezvous, which continued for three days, resulted in an agreement which provided for the following:

1. The deal, which is to be called "Mecca Declaration," agreed on four main issues:
 - a. The emphasis on the prohibition of Palestinian bloodshed, as well as on the unity as the basis for national steadfastness and defiance to the occupation, and on dialogue as the only means to achieve this unity.
 - b. The agreement on formation of a national unity government in accordance with a detailed agreement between the two parties.
 - c. The active pursuit of reforming and developing the PLO.
 - d. Emphasis on the principle of political partnership in accordance with the principle of political pluralism.

2. Agreement on the contents of the official letter of designation addressed by President ‘Abbas to Isma‘il Haniyyah, the designated new prime minister. In this letter, both the words “abide” and “respect” were mentioned. The former was used in the context of the supreme interest of the Palestinian people, protecting their rights, while achieving these interests in accordance with the provisions of National Councils, the Basic Law, the National Reconciliation Document and the resolutions of the Arab summits. The latter word, “respect,” referred to the decisions of the international community and the agreements signed by the PLO.

3. Agreement (within the dialogue committee) on the distribution of the ministries: nine for Hamas, six for Fatah, four for the four other blocks in the Legislative Council and five for independents (including the Ministries of Finance, Foreign Affairs and Interior). As for the latter, around which there had been prolonged differences before and during Mecca meeting, it was agreed that Hamas appoints to it an independent personality who should be endorsed by President ‘Abbas. Parallel to this deal, it was agreed that Fatah appoints the Deputy Prime Minister.³¹

At the background of the Mecca Agreement emerged a major issue, namely international publicity to this agreement as a basis to lift the siege imposed on the Palestinian government that was formed by Hamas after its victory in the legislative elections.

Once the agreement was finalized, Haniyyah and the delegates of Fatah and Hamas returned to Gaza on 12/2/2007. The agreement was jubilantly received by the Palestinians, particularly in Gaza, and was a great relief across the Arab and the Muslim worlds. There were preparations for the resignation of the current government and for the delivery of the new letter of designation officially to Haniyyah, in order for him to start consultations to form the new national unity government in accordance with the established constitutional procedures.

Meanwhile, even before Mecca Agreement, Israel reiterated its conditions for dealing with the government of national unity. The Israeli Minister of foreign affairs, Tzipi Livni, publicly declared that the conditions of the Quartet provide the basis for her government’s dealing with this government.³²

In appreciation of the constructive Saudi role in the negotiations, Palestinian sources said in Mecca that members of the Saudi delegation explained to them some of the political, even the security dimensions of the agreement, and what may

be accepted by the international community to help in lifting the siege. ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of Fatah delegation, said that “the Saudi officials assured them that the agreement will help them in their contacts with the foreign powers, particularly the USA, to lift the siege.”³³

Nonetheless, a few days later, David Welch, the assistant secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, phoned President ‘Abbas to caution him that the USA will continue the siege under the new Palestinian government. Similarly, the US General Consul in Jerusalem Jacob Wallis, visited ‘Abbas and told him officially that “the American administration refuses to deal with the new government because it does not clearly commit itself to the conditions of the Quartet.”³⁴ Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, had also directly told President ‘Abbas in Ramallah on 18/2/2007 that the American administration would boycott the government of national unity, and restrict its contacts with the Palestinians to the president’s office only.³⁵

Immediately after his return to Gaza, Isma‘il Haniyyah started his preliminary consultations to form the new government by a meeting with the High Follow-Up Committee of the National and Islamic Forces that embodied 15 factions and political parties. During the deliberations, the leftist forces expressed some negative observations on Mecca Agreement, which they criticized for being too narrow and exclusively between Fatah and Hamas. Other preliminary deliberations between Hamas and Fatah were over the nominees for the ministers of Interior and Foreign Affairs and the deputy premier, as well as the fate of the “Executive Force.” However, official consultations started on 16/2/2007, when Haniyyah formally submitted his resignation to President ‘Abbas during their meeting in Gaza. The latter asked Haniyyah to form the new government via deliberations that supposed to take three weeks, and might be extended for more two weeks. The president’s letter of designation to the designated premier used the word “respect” that had been agreed upon in Mecca, i.e., “I call upon you to respect the decisions of the international community and the agreements signed by the PLO.” Haniyyah, on his part, declared his acceptance of the letter of designation.³⁶

On 17/2/2007, Haniyyah officially met the PIJ, PFLP, The Palestinian National Initiative and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and subsequently consulted the other parties. On 15/3/2007, Haniyyah submitted his proposed cabinet to President ‘Abbas who accepted it, and the new government

won on 17/3/2007 the confidence vote of the PLC with an overwhelming majority, 83 PLC members voted for granting confidence while only three members against. Premier's Haniyyah's address to the Legislative Council tantamount to the program of the new government, which stated the following:

- It vividly mentioned resolution 194 of the General Assembly of the United Nations which calls for the return of the Palestinian refugees.
- The address explicitly mentioned that the Palestinian state will be established in the 1967 occupied territories, with Jerusalem as its capital. But it avoided any reference to Israel.
- Refusal of a state with temporary borders that was offered in the "Road Map."
- The address referred "to all forms of resistance, including the people's resistance," and undertook "to consolidate the truce and extend it to be comprehensive, reciprocal and concurrent in return for the commitment of the Israeli occupation to stop all its measures on the ground."
- The conduct of the negotiations is within the prerogative of the PLO.
- To expedite the settlement of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit within an honorable deal for the exchange of the prisoners and the return of the exiled.
- To invite foreign powers to take practical steps to end the siege, and to call upon the American administration to reconsider its positions towards the Palestinian issue.
- The address undertook to address the issue of security, to "reconstruct the NSC, being the reference to all the security forces," and to "formulate a comprehensive security plan to end all forms of chaos." Besides, the premier committed his government to sensible expenditure and to fight corruption.

The cabinet included 25 ministers, 'Azzam al-Ahmad of Fatah was appointed deputy premier while the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Interior and Finance were respectively headed by Ziyad Abu 'Amr (independent), Hani al-Qawasmi (independent) and Salam Fayyad (the Third Way Bloc). Thus, Hamas and Fatah had voluntarily forgone the sovereignty ministries to independents and other parliamentary blocs.

The formation of the national government was a great relief, and had spread optimism and hope to lift the siege, end the lawlessness, and hence proceed to the implementation of the core of Mecca Agreement that is based on political partnership between Fatah and Hamas (and other factions and blocs). Though this vividly included three areas, the government and its affiliated bodies, the security forces and the PLO, it soon became apparent that the presidency and the influential group in Fatah had another understanding of political partnership, i.e., confined to the government and its ministries, but not to include the security forces and the PLO, which were viewed to be the exclusive prerogative of the presidency. This contradictory interpretation of the concept constituted an entrée to weaken the new government, particularly the Ministry of Interior around which there had been heated controversy before the Mecca Agreement, specifically on who will be its minister (the independent minister Hani al-Qawasmi). The first crisis that faced the new government was about the functions of the Interior Ministry, and which of the security forces will be under its control and which will be under the command of the presidency. Another dispute was about the discipline of the security forces and whether they had the freedom to accept or reject the directives of the Minister of Interior. As for the PLO, no meeting was convened to discuss its restructuring or the activation of its institutions.

Third: The Spiral of the Security Crisis

On 2/3/2007, and while Haniyyah was engaged in finalizing the team of the new national unity government, President ‘Abbas issued a decree by which Muhammad Dahlan was appointed the presidents’ National Security Advisor, in addition to heading the NSC. Though the news were not officially announced but only leaked to the press, the appointment of Dahlan to this top security position had complicated the Palestinian scene.

However, this delegation that gave Dahlan supreme control over the whole security apparatus was contradictory to the Amended Basic Law which prohibits the duality of membership of the Legislative Council and an executive post. This presidential decree was accompanied with another decision that ‘Abbas issued by virtue of his presidency of Fatah, namely the appointment of two organizational committees, one for GS and the other for the WB, whose members were handpicked

from among Dahlan supporters. Hence, Dahlan controlled both the security of the PA and the organizational apparatus of Fatah. The third article of the appointment decree authorized Dahlan to participate in the meetings of the PLO to present issues related to his posts.³⁷ But this was a flagrant violation of the PLO regulations that restrict the attendance of the Organization's meetings to those elected by the PNC. The agenda behind this appointment was to confine the political partnership stipulated in Mecca Agreement to the government of Isma'il Haniyyah only, and not to extend it to the security forces which were totally placed under the authority of the presidency. This would certainly directly affect the position and functions of the Minister of Interior, and implant the first time bomb for the national unity government. However, the appointment of Dahlan engendered bitter opposition in the government as well as in Fatah and Hamas.

In the heat of this crisis, President 'Abbas appointed, on 15/4/2007, himself the head of the NSC, while Haniyyah was given the position of vice president and both Muhammad Dahlan and the Minister of Interior Hani al-Qawasmi were appointed members of this Council. Hence, the government's spokesman Ghazi Hamad declared that difference was still pending over Dahlan's appointment to the membership of the Council as a representative of the security, though he is concurrently a member of the PLC.

Meanwhile, the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* published the details of an American security plan drawn by General Dayton, the American Security Coordinator for Israel and the PA, that aimed at strengthening the Presidential Security Guards that was under the control of President 'Abbas, and the establishment of a new office for the president's National Security Advisor Muhammad Dahlan.³⁸ Hence, Yahya Musa, deputy head of Hamas parliamentary bloc, strongly opposed Dayton's plan, which is, in his words, "a stab in the chest of Mecca Agreement,"³⁹ while Mahmud al-Zahhar declared Hamas' refusal of Dahlan's appointment in the position of an advisor or a member of the NSC saying that "some intend to keep private military units, whether to this person or that."⁴⁰

Simultaneously, the crisis within Fatah gained momentum. The movement's civil and military cadres convened a conference in GS, on 10/4/2007, under the presidency of Ahmed Hillis, they bitterly criticized "Some of Fatah leaders who controlled the movement for their personal interests." They demanded "the return to Fatah's ideology and principles as specified in the Internal Order Document,"⁴¹ in reference to their opposition to the newly appointed organizational committees

within the movement. In an interview with *al-Hayat* newspaper, Ahmed Hillis said “We trust Brother Abu Mazin, and hope that he’ll support the movement and its interest, and not the interests of certain persons who only work for their personal agenda.”⁴²

While this heated debate was ongoing, the Minister of Interior Hani al-Qawasmi drew a security plan that was endorsed by the government on 14/4/2007. Its objectives were three, to disseminate the security and police forces, confront internal fighting and regulate the possession of arms. According to Mustafa al-Barghuthi, the Minister of Information, the plan was approved by “a comprehensive national consensus.” He added that “a general overseer, stationed in the Ministry of Interior, will be appointed for all the security forces,” and special attention will be given “to end the partisan nature of the security forces.”⁴³ Besides, the Minister of Interior declared that the internal security forces will be responsible for implementing the plan, though “the chaotic status of the Palestinian territories may dictate seeking the help of the National Security Forces and other available forces such as the Executive Force.”⁴⁴ Subsequently, the minister said that “the security forces will be reformulated and restructured on strict professional, non partisan, basis.”⁴⁵

However, this ambitious security plan soon faced formidable obstacles that impeded its implementation. The Minister of Interior was so frustrated that he submitted his resignation in protest, but Premier Haniyyah refused to accept it pending his next meeting with the president. Al-Qawasmi enumerated his reasons for resignation in the following:

1. Predicaments and obstacles created by the Interior Ministry Director General Colonel Rashid Abu Shbak, a confidant of Muhammad Dahlan also, to strip the jurisdictions of the Interior Minister. He, moreover, monopolized authority in three of the security forces, the Preventive and Police Forces and the Civil Defense, and refused that the minister has contacts with their commanders, thus monopolizing this mission.⁴⁶

2. The Palestinian presidency stripped the financial and administrative functions of the Interior Minister and invested them in the Interior Ministry Director General Colonel Rashid Abu Shbak. Thus, the minister has no functions except through the director-general, and can not even call an officer or a soldier without his prior consent.⁴⁷

The crisis of the resignation triggered a meeting in Cairo on 28/4/2007 between President ‘Abbas and Khalid Mish‘al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau, to consolidate the Mecca Agreement and the government of national unity. The security problems and the obstructionist role of Abu Shbak were thoroughly discussed, whereby President ‘Abbas undertook to resolve this issue in his forthcoming meeting with Premier Haniyyah in Gaza.

On his part, in declarations to *Albayan* newspaper of 29/4/2007, Colonel Rashid Abu Shbak played down his differences with al-Qawasmi, but added that “there may develop a misunderstanding on the issue of the functions,” though “he had not transgressed the functions of any person by exercising his functions within the law.”⁴⁸ However, the controversy around the Ministry of Interior and Abu Shbak’s security forces, that operated independently from the Interior Minister, had soon become the issue that would make or break the success of the government of national unity and the Mecca Agreement. Meanwhile, the economic and financial siege continued as severe as ever.

‘Abbas and Haniyyah met to discuss the functions of the Ministry of Interior amid security deterioration and the aggravation of the war of words between the two sides. While Haniyyah had warned in the Friday sermon of 4/5/2007, “the rioters against the continuation of their behavior that endangers the security of the citizens,”⁴⁹ Yusuf ‘Isa, the director of the Preventive Security Services, criticized the media campaign that held his apparatus responsible for the security breakdown of law and order. However, ‘Abbas and Haniyyah held several meetings that were attended from time to time by the Minister of Interior or delegates from Hamas and Fatah. The discussion focused on the functions of the Minister of Interior and his authority over the director of the security, the illegitimacy of the appointment of Muhammad Dahlan to the NSC, and whether it is feasible to implement the security plan in these circumstances. However, ‘Abbas was unable to decisively settle the conflict. While telling the Minister of Interior that “we have come to secure your success not failure”⁵⁰ and promising to “pressurize Abu Shbak to completely cooperate with Qawasmi,”⁵¹ ‘Abbas insisted on Dahlan’s membership in the NSC. Meanwhile, the resignation of the Minister of Interior remained on the shelf awaiting the fulfillment of these promises.

Though the two parties appeared to have been engaged in a controversy over the functions of the Minister of Interior and other details, the conflict that they tried to

conceal was, in fact, essentially political in nature. Immediately after the departure of President ‘Abbas from Gaza, bloody fighting was resumed in which many were killed, wounded or kidnapped. While Fatah held Hamas squarely responsible for the tension and the killing, the latter issued a communiqué in which it refused these charges, and “accused dissidents of the national consensus who want to swing the country back to the time of fighting in the service of a non-nationalist agenda.”⁵² Bitter fighting continued the next day and life in the GS was virtually paralyzed. The government met to discuss the deteriorating situation, but the Minister of Interior insisted on his resignation, and the cabinet appointed Haniyyah as the acting minister on 14/5/2007. The sustained tension was reflected in numerous proclamations of accusations and counter accusations. Fighters took positions in the streets, and President ‘Abbas was said to have cancelled a visit to the GS because of an abortive plot against his life,⁵³ which was out rightly denied by Hamas, which claimed that it very well knows the “dirty sources” that fabricated these news to the bureau of the French press agency, Agence France-Presse (AFP).⁵⁴ Worried by this escalation, the Egyptian Security delegation, headed by Major-General Burhan Hammad, hurriedly returned to Gaza, and tried without success, to calm down the situation in collaboration with Hamas and Fatah. Tension continued for several days during which the Presidential Security Forces barricaded in the main streets. However, Ahmed Hillis, a prominent Fatah leader, issued a commendable press release in which he distinguished between Fatah and the Security Forces by saying, “Fatah did not take a decision to confront Hamas, and it will lift the cover off any person who undertakes operations to kill the Palestinians, and that the people know exactly who kills their sons.”⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the confrontation dominated the scene, though President ‘Abbas paid a second visit to Gaza on 22/5/2007, and Ahmed Hillis claimed that the visit “gave guarantees to everybody that no plan was harbored to ignite the situation,”⁵⁶ whereas the situation was escalating every minute.

Once more Egypt interfered, and initiated negotiations between Egyptian security officers and representatives of Palestinian factions in Cairo. Several suggestions to end the fighting were put on the table, but the impetus for the confrontation was much stronger than the rationale for dialogue. By the start of June, the on and off fighting had turned into an organized and well planned

confrontation. It extended to the city of Rafah, and some prominent Hamas leaders were targeted, notably Ahmad Abu Harb, the commander of the artillery unit of al-Qassam brigades, while on 11/6/2007, the office of Isma'il Haniyyah, the Prime Minister, was fired at, and the attacks did not spare hospitals and mosques. The truces that had been arranged from time to time quickly broke down and mutual accusations altered from the general accusations to accuse people in specific. Hence, Mushir al-Masri, the secretary of Hamas parliamentary bloc, said that the attacks were undertaken by members of the Presidential Security Forces and the security forces affiliated to him as well as "the insurgents in Fatah," and that the so-called "*al-Muntada*" (assembly or salon) "turned into a stronghold for killing, kidnapping and torture." Mahir al-Miqdad, the spokesman of Fatah in Gaza, said, "Hamas decided to continue the escalation."⁵⁷ It is worth noting that this escalation took place at a time when all the Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, were invited, on Egypt's initiative, to hold talks to reach a comprehensive Palestinian agreement. All the concerned parties had agreed upon dialogue and Cairo's talks. Nonetheless, verbal outbursts and fighting on the ground in Gaza continued as strong as ever.

As expected, this security escalation synchronized with political onslaught. The office of the presidency issued a statement accusing Hamas leadership of planning to control the government, and The Central Committee of Fatah circulated another communiqué that accused "Hamas' extremist wing" of striving "to end the legitimate national authority," and declared that "We will never hesitate to protect our national authority and national project." Moreover, Ahmad 'Abd al-Rahman, the official spokesman of Fatah, threatened that the "The Central Committee will hold an emergency meeting to reach a final decision on the Organization's continued participation in the government and the Legislative Council," while the National Security Forces declared that it "will firmly resist the attempts to wage a coup against the Palestinian legitimacy." Faced with this media and political escalation, Hamas responded with a similar defiant tone. Ahmed Bahr, the Acting Speaker of the PLC, maintained that "a conspiracy is being hatched within the headquarters of the presidency," and sent a message to President 'Abbas warning him against "the ongoing mess undertaken by his supporters."⁵⁸

Fourth: Hamas Domination of GS

Three indicators demonstrated that the government of national unity will be short-lived. The First was the American–Israeli plans and lobbies whose aim was the collapse of the government of national unity and the collaboration with an emerging Palestinian party, said to be part of Fatah, that favorably responded to the American plans. Persistent reports emphasized that Dayton had been actively pursuing his scheme to train and arm the Presidential Security Guards for a possible confrontation with Hamas,⁵⁹ and that 15 thousand soldiers, who were presumably loyal to Muhammad Dahlan, were allocated for this mission. The plan was to crush Hamas, and thus enable President ‘Abbas to take the required political and strategic decisions such as the dissolution of Hamas-led government and the formation of an emergency government.⁶⁰

By April 2007, there were persistent reports of some American suggestions submitted to President ‘Abbas under the code “Action plan for the Palestinian Presidency 2007,” which aimed at strengthening Fatah, prepare the ground for a decisive battle with Hamas, and to avail what is needed to strengthen the President’s grip over the security forces. The plan fixed a time frame of three to nine months to attain its objectives.⁶¹ Other reports maintained that Dayton, towards the end of May 2007 and in a hearing session of the American House of Representatives’ sub-committee on the Middle East, said that “the situation will soon mercilessly explode in GS.”⁶² Moreover, Alvaro de Soto reported in his final report as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process that since the formation of Hamas government and until the conclusion of the Mecca Agreement a year later, the United States was actively designing and pushing for a confrontation between Fatah and Hamas. De Soto added that ‘Abbas’ close advisors “revealed to us, on condition of anonymity, that they had prepared an initiative to dissolve the government of Hamas.”⁶³

The second indicator was represented by the reluctance of the presidency and the influential security group in Fatah to genuinely cooperate in disciplining and organizing the security forces. The appointment of Muhammad Dahlan as National Security Advisor was viewed by Hamas and many observers as an indication of escalation, though, in this respect, the most conspicuous element was the campaign to delay and fail the work of the Interior Minister Hani al-Qawasmi, which compelled him to resign.

As for the third indicator, it was represented by a group of practical measures taken by the influential group in Fatah, which were largely compatible with what had been leaked of the American plan. They were the expansion and training of the Presidential Guards, including the inclusion in this force of 500 loyal soldiers to ‘Abbas who were trained in Egypt, the construction of security checkpoints, and the increased operations of kidnapping and assassination by individuals affiliated to President ‘Abbas and Muhammad Dahlan. Particularly so, according to Hamas’ sources, was the assassination of 22 Hamas activists in a week in mid May 2007,⁶⁴ and the targeting of other citizens simply because they were bearded or reported to be sympathizers with Hamas. The assassination on 13/5/2007 of two journalists working for *Felesteen* newspaper was a vivid example of this intentional security escalation.⁶⁵ More catastrophic was the brutal murder of a young member of Fatah, namely Husam Abu Qainas, whose body was thrown from a tower just because he bearded, as later established by Tawfiq Abu Khusah, a leader of Fatah in GS.⁶⁶

However, Hamas entered during the period 11–14/6/2007 in what it called the decisive battle with the “conspiring faction in Fatah” after which it controlled the GS. 116 and 550 were reported dead and wounded, respectively,⁶⁷ though the statistics of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights mention a higher number of casualties during the period 7–16/6/2007, i.e., 161 dead, including 43 civilians, 91 from Fatah and its security forces and 27 from Hamas, al-Qassam Brigades and the Executive Force.⁶⁸

Hamas defended its decisive action as absolutely necessary, and that it targeted only a sector that affiliated itself to Fatah. The movement maintained that it did not originally intend to control GS, but the sequence of events drifted to this conclusion. It never planned to control the security square and the presidential headquarters, but was forced to do so because they were vacated and exposed to theft and robbery. In these explanations, it was mentioned that the control of the security headquarters was undertaken to intercept the designs of what has been described as “the Zionist group that conceals behind some forces,” and that:

the leader of this Zionist and treacherous group had considered the partnership [with Hamas] as defective, and did his utmost best to make us fail. We exercised restraint, and asked our brothers in Fatah to suppress this oppressive group, but to no avail until this group controlled the centers of power in the movement and exploited them to serve the Zionist objectives.

Hamas' communiqué added, "We do not antagonize any of the [security] forces, but we are against the group that penetrated them."⁶⁹ In this respect, Sami Abu Zuhri, the spokesman of Hamas, said, "We were compelled to undertake this step after all the mediations to stop the crimes had failed... This is not a deadlock. If President 'Abbas is seriously determined to stop these incidents, we are ready."⁷⁰

However, Hamas decisive operation, known also as "the coup," was not free of some drawbacks that damaged the image of Hamas. Some pro-Hamas media had exhibited disgusting scenes that has substantially served the cause of Hamas opponents, who effectively used them to incite the people against Hamas, e.g., the brutal assassination of Samih al-Madhun, forcing the Palestinian security officers to leave the premises with naked chests, hosting Hamas' flag on some buildings, and, in one incident, the destruction of the picture of the late President 'Arafat by walking on it. Many of Hamas leaders admitted these wrong practices, and proclaimed their refusal to such acts, but they considered them within the context of the bitter and mutual incitement between Hamas and Fatah.

Hamas refused to call what it did as a coup, as the one who ordered is the premier of the government of national unity cum acting Minister of Interior, and with the support of the majority of PLC. Hamas had, moreover, continued to recognize the legitimacy of President 'Abbas, and called him for dialogue without prior conditions. However, whether we call Hamas' action "decisive operation" or a "coup," the fact remains that it has far-reaching repercussions on the Palestinian scene of which the most important are:

1. Besides the political schism, it led to a geographical division, in the sense that Palestinians of GS found themselves under the control of Hamas and its dismissed government, while those of the WB were placed under Fatah, the Palestinian presidency and the emergency government.

2. The incidents that culminated in the decisive step showed the strong impact of the external factors on the Palestinian national affairs. Though unable to crush Hamas once and for all, the US succeeded to weaken and divide the national front, and to provoke its two main players, Fatah and Hamas, into a bloody conflict.

3. The incidents had seriously damaged the image of the national Palestinian project, and its program of resistance. Moreover, it led to a kind of disgust and apathy among the Arabs and the Muslims, and within the international forces that support the Palestinian rights.

4. The Palestinian presidency found in Hamas' control over Gaza an opportunity to dismiss the government of national unity and to appoint an emergency government in the WB, though this is contrary to the Basic Law. It also exploited the paralysis of the Legislative Council, caused by the Israeli arrest of more than 40 of Hamas MPs, to issue presidential decrees that had the force of law. The decrees and measures undertaken by the presidency and the emergency government had gone a long way to corner Hamas and destroy its personnel and institutions in the WB, and to try to undermine its organizational and military infrastructure, at a time when they (the presidency and the government in the WB) developed their security coordination with the Israeli occupation. According to Hamas sources in the WB, the movement was subjected to 1,007 attacks by the security forces and Fatah during the period 11/6–31/8/2007, which included 639 operations of arrest and kidnapping, 36 incidents of firing live ammunition, 175 attacks on institutions and societies that included Qur'anic schools, philanthropic societies, media institutions, press offices, schools and nurseries. 156 attacks were also reported on the private properties of members and supporters of Hamas.⁷¹

Conversely, Hamas and its dismissed government tightened their grip on the GS, and dealt harshly with the supporters of Fatah, as the practices of some were viewed as a threat to security and stability. We do not have specific statistics of the size of illegal practices committed in GS, though both Authorities in the WB and GS were, however, criticized by human rights organizations.

5. The decisive operation provoked doubts and fear among a number of Palestinian forces towards Hamas, who questioned its credibility and commitment to the democratic option and peaceful devolution of power. The resort to "violence" triggered hostile media campaigns that dismissed the organization as "extremist," "terrorist" and "reactionary," and associated it with al-Qaeda. This damaged the reputation of Hamas in some Arab countries, particularly Egypt whose regime has been facing difficulties in dealing with the Muslim Brothers, to whom Hamas is considered to be affiliated. Hamas spent many months of contacts and explanations to minimize the damage that had resulted from decisive operation.

6. In absence of partnership with Hamas and the Legislative Council, the Palestinian presidency had free hands to pursue negotiations with the Israeli side, with the guidance and the support of USA, Europe and some Arab regimes. However, the Palestinian negotiator was placed in his weakest position, with

limited control over the WB, an internal front in disarray, and lack of ability to pursue serious measures to rebuild the PLO or conduct a dialogue with Hamas. Being unable to maintain national unity without the partnership with Hamas, the Palestinian negotiator found himself in an awkward position as he could pursue the peace project and build relations with USA and Israel only if he dissolved this partnership. Israel would certainly make use of this dilemma to extract further concessions from the Palestinian presidency, though, at the same time, it was not sure that 'Abbas has the guts and ability to execute the agreements that may be concluded, hence has been hesitating to concede its commitments.

7. The GS has suffered from a tight and continuous siege and ongoing Israeli aggression. Unfortunately, some quarters in the PA incited the situation to secure the downfall of Hamas government and the failure of its experience. Amongst the examples of this drive is the accusation that Hamas harbors al-Qaeda and confiscates the funds that it collects from the electricity bills. However, in spite of the huge sufferings of the inhabitants of Gaza, Hamas managed to maintain its control over the GS. It is worth noting that the Israeli campaigns of pressure and aggression had ultimately a backlash as Hamas regained its popularity.

8. The decisive operation reduced the lawlessness in GS as well as the factional and family conflicts. This indicates that Hamas had relatively succeeded in weakening and containing this phenomenon, and that its claim of considering a particular security faction that is related to Fatah, extremely responsible for the breakdown of law and order seems to be probable. According to Al Mezan Center for Human Rights the number of casualties of the breakdown of law and order during the first six months of the year 2007 was 422 dead and 1,946 wounded, and it was significantly reduced during the last six months of the year that followed Hamas' control, where only 60 were killed and 425 were wounded.⁷² As for the first three months of the year 2008, the casualties are estimated by 13 dead and 25 wounded.

It is worth mentioning that though the worst security confrontations were between Fatah and Hamas, the fighting was not confined to them but mushroomed to include family conflicts, thuggish brutality and the execution of "justice" by some citizens, all were bound to occur in the absence of the might of the government.

There are no specific statistics of the casualties of the two sides during the year 2007. However, according to Hamas, it suffered since the conclusion of Mecca Agreement, on 7/2/2007, and until the decisive operation on 14/6/2007, 69 dead, 74 wounded, 120 kidnapping incidents, 102 cases of aggression on institutions and 97 cases of firing live ammunition.⁷³ As for Fatah casualties during the year 2007, which are not independently confirmed, it totaled 138 dead and 299 wounded. Coupled with these catastrophic losses, many innocent citizens were victims of the chaos. However, despite the extreme hardship, the GS did not record any death cases resulting from conflicts between Hamas and Fatah during the first three months of the year 2008. For the lawlessness during the first six months of the year 2007 (see table 1/1), and for the casualties of the lawlessness during the years 2002–2007 (see table 2/1).

Table 1/1: Some Statistics of the Dead and Wounded due to the Lawlessness in GS⁷⁴

Year 2007	Number of wounded		Number of dead	
	Wounded	Children	Dead	Children
January	325	24	75	6
February	408	32	52	4
March	204	30	21	3
April	141	21	22	2
May	212	34	64	4
June	656	72	188	9
Total	1,946	213	422	28

Some Statistics of the Dead and Wounded due to the Lawlessness in GS

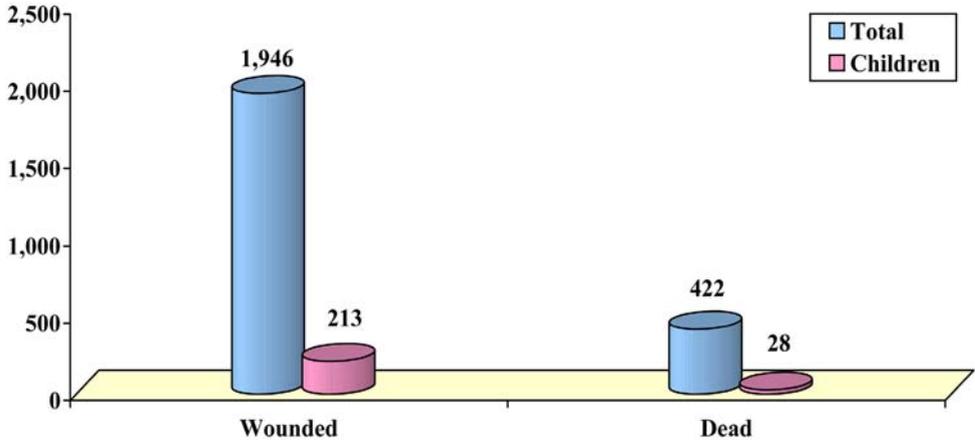
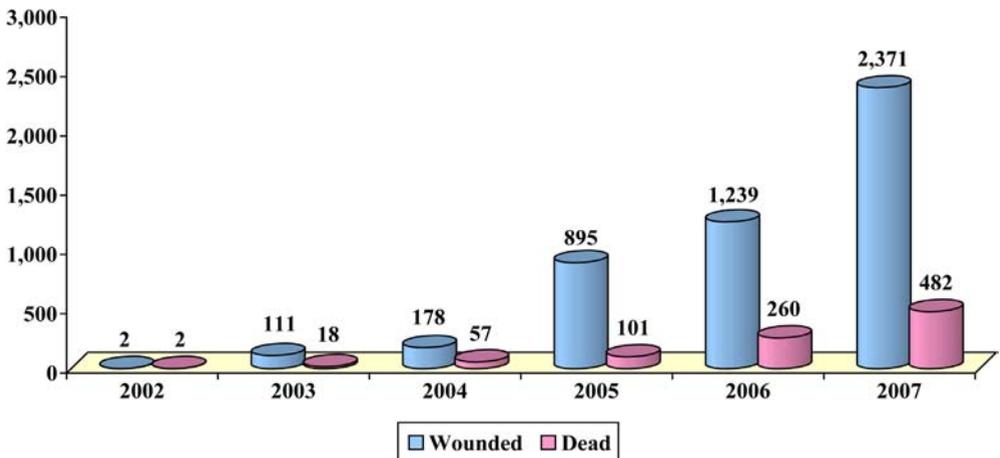


Table 2/1: Victims of Lawlessness 2002–2007⁷⁵

Year	Wounded	Dead
2002	2	2
2003	111	18
2004	178	57
2005	895	101
2006	1,239	260
2007	2,371	482
Total	4,796	920

Victims of Lawlessness 2002–2007



9. It was obvious that the decisive decision was locally taken by Hamas leaders in Gaza, i.e., it was not a central decision. However, though Hamas leadership in the WB and in the diaspora supported the operation, they did not appear to be ready to bear its repercussions. This is particularly so in the WB where Hamas personnel and infrastructure were exposed to the bitter antagonism of the security forces and some individuals affiliated to Fatah, including arrests and closure of institutions. It is evident that Hamas' media and the mobilization campaign that accompanied the decisive operation had several loopholes that were employed to attack the movement, coupled, of course, with drawbacks and negative practices of the operation itself.

10. It is clear that many of the personnel of the security forces did not view the battle with Hamas as their own concern, but rather that of a specific group in the security forces and Fatah. For if the 55 thousand troops of the security forces in Gaza viewed the confrontation as their personal battle, Hamas may have encountered formidable difficulty in its drive to decisively settle the fighting in its own favor. Many of the officers had, in fact, voluntarily vacated their positions, wore civilian clothes and handed their headquarters to Hamas once they realized that it was about to control some of the major buildings, and after the flee of many of Fatah security and political leaders who were in charge of the battle with Hamas.

A report prepared by the military office of Fatah movement in Gaza on the spectacular and swift collapse of the security forces recorded that many of their personnel genuinely believed that they were defending the project of a small influential group in the PA and Fatah. Similarly, the report of the presidential investigation committee, assigned by 'Abbas and headed by al-Tayyib 'Abd al-Rahim, reached the same conclusions. It mentioned that Hamas succeeded in neutralizing a sizable sector of Fatah and its leadership apparatus, who did not view the battle to be that of Fatah per se.

However, after its control of Gaza, Hamas called for a bilateral dialogue with Fatah and a comprehensive one with the other factions under Arab patronage. The aim was to unite the country, and to agree on the nature of the political partnership set up by Mecca Agreement, which had partially been achieved by the government of national unity under the premiership of Isma'il Haniyyah. But Fatah and the Palestinian presidency patronized another analysis and a different position. They

argued that what took place in Gaza was nothing but a military coup against the legitimate authority, and that they will not engage in any dialogue unless and until the insurgents completely retract and nullify what they did.

Due to these contradictory positions, some Arab and Palestinian parties volunteered to call upon Fatah and Hamas to engage in a dialogue. It was intended to supersede what happened through an acceptable and mutually agreed arrangement. The Arab League initiated the formation of an investigation committee as an entrée towards the suggested dialogue, but the Palestinian presidency angrily refused the idea, saying that “the principle of accepting an investigation committee is a de facto recognition of the legitimacy of the insurgents.”⁷⁶ The deadlock continued until the end of 2007. While Hamas agreed to the many mediation initiatives suggested by Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and the Sudan, Fatah stuck to its guns. Within this estrangement, each side started to unilaterally arrange its affairs in the light of its position and the reality on the ground.

Fifth: Measures Undertaken by the PA

The drive of the Palestinian presidency to exclude Hamas from the Palestinian legitimacy necessitated that they ignore and supersede the Legislative Council in which Hamas enjoyed the majority. Since it was essential to have an alternative reference that provides a legal cover to the president’s decrees, the presidency reverted to the hitherto dormant PLO and its institutions that suddenly started to deal with the Palestinian daily affairs, though it has been generally agreed that the PLO should have no executive or legislative functions, but solely be a reference to the PA on major issues.

In line with this orientation, the Executive Committee of the PLO convened an emergency meeting on 14/6/2007 to consider the serious developments in Gaza. It submitted for the consideration of President ‘Abbas several recommendations:

- Dismissal of Isma‘il Haniyyah’s government (which, anyhow, is the prerogative of the President).
- To declare a state of emergency.
- To form an emergency government.
- To call for early elections.⁷⁷

‘Abbas immediately accepted these recommendations and ordered their forthwith implementation by virtue of three presidential decrees. Henceforth such decrees constituted the primary means that the president used, under the guise of the prevalence of state of emergency, to supersede the legitimate institutions. Salam Fayyad was handpicked to be the designated premier of the new emergency government.

According to the Basic Law, the summarily dismissal of Isma‘il Haniyyah’s government should automatically transform it into a caretaker government. But the Palestinian presidency depended on the state of emergency to override this legal condition. However, the pertinent question is: Is the declaration of an emergency government a legal act?

According to Palestinian legal experts, the first and second presidential decrees, that had respectively dissolved the government of national unity and declared the state of emergency, are constitutional. But the third, which ordered the formation of an emergency government, is not based on any legal text. For the law gives the president the right to declare the state of emergency only. It may last for 30 days that may be extended for another 30 days with the approval of at least two thirds of the members of the Legislative Council, which, obviously, the President can not secure. However, the Basic Law does not allow the formation of an emergency government.

Another legal text requires that a government, any government, must win the vote of confidence of the PLC. This applies to the government of Salam Fayyad, if its formation is considered legally acceptable, a procedure that the President did not opt to follow.

All these legal predicaments were bypassed through the theory of governing by “decrees.” Hence, few days after the incidents, a decree was issued on 22/6/2007 suspending a legal article (article 79 of the Basic Law as amended in 2003) that requires the consent of the PLC to any ministerial appointment.

These decrees synchronized with a security campaign against Hamas activists in the WB, while another presidential decree targeted Hamas’ institutions, including the financial ones. The decree authorized the Minister of Interior to “revise the licenses of all societies and institutions that had been issued by the Ministry of Interior or any other governmental body.” Hence, this decree empowered the Minister of Interior to close down all Hamas’ financial and philanthropic institutions. Salam Fayyad

constituted all his eleven–minister cabinet from independent technocrats who were not affiliated to any of the Palestinian resistance factions. The new emergency government took the constitutional oath before the president on 17/6/2007.⁷⁸

After a short duration, the two lawyers who were chief drafters of the Basic Law, lawyer Anis al-Qassem and Professor Judge Eugene Qatran said that the document does not authorize President ‘Abbas to appoint a new government without the approval of the PLC, nor to suspend any article of the Basic Law. The two drafters added that the Basic Law requires that the dismissed government of national unity be a caretaker government, until President ‘Abbas secure parliamentary approval to a new government. Judge Qatran, a Palestinian by origin but then a Chief Judge in the United Kingdom (UK), said to Reuters news agency: “What is clear is that Haniyyah’s government should not be disbanded during the emergency period.” Lawyer al-Qassem said that the Basic Law does not include any article on an emergency government, and Judge Qatran emphasized that the existence of the state of emergency does not mean that the president can form an emergency government, and that governing by decrees does not mean that the president has the right to suspend or change the Basic Law.⁷⁹

With regard to the declared intention of the Palestinian presidency to call for early elections, the independent legal expert cum dean of the Faculty of Law of al-Najah University, Ahmad al-Khalidi, said, “there is no text in the Basic Law that speaks of early elections,” and “there are texts that speaks of a fixed duration for the PLC, which is four years.”⁸⁰

Sixth: The Attempt to Control the PLC

The Israeli arrest of 41 (later rose to 44) of Hamas MPs was exploited by the Palestinian presidency to achieve its goal of controlling the PLC. Since Hamas had technically lost its majority in the legislative body, President ‘Abbas issued a presidential decree, on 5/7/2007, that fixed a date for the second ordinary term of the PLC. The decree stipulated that the Council elects its new Speaker Office before conducting any discussions on any item on the agenda, including declaration of the state of emergency and Salam Fayyad’s new government. The plan was that Fatah would hopefully capture, in cooperation with other parliamentary blocs, the Speaker’s post and will head various committees, thus expelling Hamas from

the entire Palestinian political system. However, the direct objective behind this maneuver was to win vote of confidence to Fayyad's government that it should have by the end of the constitutional grace period of 30 days, scheduled to expire on 17/7/2007. As argued by 'Azzam al-Ahmad, the head of Fatah's parliamentary bloc in the Council, this decree was issued on that date because the four-month duration of the Council's first session expired one day earlier.⁸¹ Though Fatah had boycotted an earlier session called for by Hamas' parliamentary bloc on the grounds that it was illegal, it accepted to attend the session called for by the new presidential decree. However, Hamas boycotted this session, thus the Council was unable to convene, and consequently Fayyad's government did not secure the required vote of confidence. More importantly, was the paralysis of the Legislative Council and its inability to function.

Shortly before the expiry of the constitutional duration of the emergency government, a presidential decree, issued on 13/7/2007, appointed four new ministers to Fayyad's cabinet, to be 16 ministers including Fayyad. Fayyad's government resigned the next day after which it had been viewed as a caretaker government.⁸² Thus, the situation caused an open ministerial crisis. Meanwhile, 'Abbas failed to exploit the Israeli arrest of Hamas MPs to constitute an alternative majority in the Council and capture its leadership. To find exist from the crisis, 'Abbas reverted to the PLO and called for a meeting of its Central Council. In response, Hamas called for an ordinary session of the PLC. Ahmed Bahr, the acting speaker of PLC, declared that the authorizations written by the arrested MPs will be used to cast their votes, but Fatah and other parliamentary blocs refused the principle of voting by authorization.⁸³

The Central Council of the PLO met on 18/7/2007, where President 'Abbas emphasized the following in his address to the meeting:

- To sanction early presidential and parliamentary elections based on proportionate representation.
- Renewed his accusation to Hamas of attempting his assassination.
- Summarily terminated Cairo Agreement that had been concluded between all Palestinian factions.
- Said that Hamas had totally violated Mecca Agreement.

The Central Council of the PLO agreed to all that the president asked for, including the principle of early elections. However, it was generally agreed that

a partial election in the WB would practically alienate Gaza, and thus effectively consolidate the schism between the two parts of the country, and that no genuine elections can be conducted without a harmony between the two sides, Fatah and Hamas. Hence, even the parliamentary blocs that supported Fatah declared that they will not participate in an election that is not preceded by a national consensus, and conducted in both the WB and the GS. To appease the opponents, the president changed his stance by saying: “We will give the dialogue ample opportunity before the call for elections on condition that the insurgents retract what they did,”⁸⁴ a stance that the president and his advisors stuck to until the end of the year. In response, Hamas issued a violent declaration that totally refused the tone and content of ‘Abbas’s address. It, moreover, declared that ‘Abbas has no constitutional right to call for early elections, and “emphasized Hamas’ commitment to both Mecca Agreement and Cairo Declaration.”⁸⁵ In a press conference in Qatar, Khalid Mish‘al declared:

- Hamas total refusal to override the existing Palestinian Council bodies by concentrating only on the legitimacy of the presidency, while ignoring that of the PLC and the government.
- Hamas refusal to use the PLO as an alternative reference to the PLC.
- The first step towards national reconciliation should be the resolution of the security issue and the reorganization of the security forces on strictly national and professional basis that cleanse them from corruption and all suspected roles.⁸⁶

This wrangling led to concrete repercussions. The PLC was completely paralyzed, and the call for early elections could not practically materialize, though the notion remained on the table but amended from time to time to suit the understanding of the presidency and Fatah to the essence of elections if and when held. Hence, in an address before Palestinian workers in Amman, dated 15/8/2007, President ‘Abbas declared that the elections, if held, “it would synchronically be in WB and GS.”⁸⁷ On the other hand the Palestinian president endorsed, on 2/9/2007, an electoral law that accepted the system of proportionate representation in legislative elections. For during the past elections, Hamas won 45 out of the 66 seats allocated for direct elections and Fatah got only 17 of them, while the two movements were neck to neck in the proportionate elections, i.e., 44.4% (i.e., 29 seats) for Hamas compared to 41.4% (i.e., 28 seats) for Fatah.

By this decision, ‘Abbas also aspired to appease the Palestinian secular and leftist forces for whom proportionate representation was vital to strengthen their role in formulating Palestinian politics, and with whom the President betted to cooperate to swing the balance of power in favor of Fatah in case a new government is to be formed. President ‘Abbas decision contained another dangerous item, which required every parliamentary or presidential candidate to abide in advance by the political convictions of the PLO. In effect, this provision denied all opponents the right to stand for elections, and made it a foregone conclusion that the PLC be overwhelmingly controlled by one political trend only, which would, in turn, close the door for any reconciliation.⁸⁸

Seventh: The Crisis within Fatah and the PA

Fatah suffered from increasing disarray, flaccidness and corruption, as well as the lack of charismatic leadership, particularly after the demise of Yasir ‘Arafat. It also paid a heavy price by sticking to the Oslo Accords and their dues, which was reflected in the movement’s decline of popularity compared to the sizable support that Hamas got in the municipal and legislative elections. Additionally, Fatah needed, and still needs, to put its house in order, and to convene its long awaited Sixth General Congress, as the last one was held way back in 1989.

The scramble within Fatah during the year 2007 reflected serious conflicts over power and policies between the movement’s different factions. While the security group strove to dismiss Hamas government, in cooperation with the Americans if deemed necessary, another faction demanded that serious effort be exerted to achieve understanding and reconciliation between the two movements, in order to put the Palestinian house in order, and it criticized Muhammad Dahlan’s obstructionism and intrigues. Fatah grass roots had particularly asked for the convening of the Sixth General Congress to inject new young blood in the movement and to dissociate it from a weak and corrupt clique. But the dramatic events that led to Hamas’ control over Gaza, and the way by which Hamas implemented its military operation shocked all the sectors of Fatah and united them against what they considered to be a humiliating blow to their movement and to the joint national work. This triggered support within Fatah to President ‘Abbas’ measures against Hamas and

to the current leadership of Fatah, notwithstanding its protracted delay to convene its Sixth General Congress and reluctance to put Fatah house in order.

In a meeting held in Damascus on 16/12/2006 with 10 Palestinian factions, Faruq al-Qaddumi refused 'Abbas' call for early elections in December 2006.⁸⁹ In a further interview, dated 6/1/2007, with *al-Kifah al-Arabi* magazine, he argued that the insistence on this move would lead to a Palestinian civil war. In this interview, he attributed his political differences with 'Abbas to his "rejection of the Israeli conditions for settlement, such as the stoppage of the resistance and the harassment of the activists." He added, "Abu Mazin is ready to entertain these demands, even calls for them," because "his psyche is American and western, though the West has been exploiting him without extending anything to the Palestinian people." Al-Qaddumi also said, "There are no differences between Fatah and Hamas, the difference is between Hamas and the presidential team that works to promote its interest and political program." He added that the behavior of some members in Fatah "is alien to the general orientation" of the movement, and that they need to be re-educated and re-trained. Al-Qaddumi gave the example of the the Preventive Security Services,⁹⁰ which, in his words to *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper of 22/6/2007, "has been accustomed to do some deeds that we do not accept, specially after the appointment of Muhammad Dahlan National Security Advisor."⁹¹ In another dialogue published in the Egyptian magazine *al-Ushbu'* of 23/6/2007, al-Qaddumi referred once more to his differences with Mahmud 'Abbas and what he called "Fatah—the PA," where he said that President 'Abbas has no authority outside the framework of the PA, which is restricted in the WB and Gaza, adding that Palestine is now "a state without a president."

In the name of Fatah members, cadres and officers in the diaspora, a communiqué was issued in Amman on 14/1/2007, which spoke of the intervention of some of the movement's influential leaders to block an internal investigation on the reasons for the death of the late President 'Arafat. The communiqué mentioned more than once the name of Muhammad Dahlan and his close associates without spelling out their names. It, moreover, sternly warned that it will disclose the documents and the events if the strife to ignite a Palestinian civil war continued.⁹²

Internally, one of the most important signs of a serious rift within Fatah was glaringly exhibited during the conference "*Risalatuna*" (our message), held by Ahmed Hillis, a member of Fatah revolutionary council, in GS on 10/4/2007.

During the discussions, it appeared that there was a general rejection of President ‘Abbas’ decisions on the movement’s affairs, and to the policies of some of his close associates. The participants, who included some elite and military cadres, bitterly criticized some of Fatah leaders for their “control of the movement in the interest of their personal interests,” and undertook to correct the path of the movement. Hillis said that the congress aimed at confronting some of the illegal decisions issued in the name of President ‘Abbas, in reference to the President’s decision to form the so-called provisional leadership committees as alternative organizational frameworks. Hillis went to the extent of accusing the president “of trying to impose unqualified people on the security institutions, and to give them functions that obstruct and destroy the serious organizational effort, and shackle it with some measures in the interest of specific persons.”⁹³

Few days after *Risalatuna* conference, a number of *al-Aqsa* Martyrs Brigades’ military leaders called for a press conference in which they supported what they described as the “corrective movement” lead by Hillis. *Al-Aqsa* Brigades’ prominent military leader Khalid al-Ja‘bari said during the conference that “Fatah had been hijacked by some of its leaders under American–Israeli pressure,” and added that “some personalities in Fatah receive American and Israeli aid,” in obvious reference to the funds that the American congress had decided in that very same period to grant to President ‘Abbas.⁹⁴

Meanwhile a crisis erupted between Fatah ten-member Supreme Leading Committee in Gaza (which was appointed by President ‘Abbas to administer the affairs of the Movement after Hamas’ control of the GS) and the government in Ramallah over the stoppage of the salaries of some 10 thousand troops of the Fatah security forces in Gaza. The entire members of the council, lead by Zakaria al-Agha, submitted their resignations to President ‘Abbas, as affirmed by Ahmed Hillis, who added that the resignations were in protest of the “irresponsibility of some Fatah leaders in Ramallah.”⁹⁵

Subsequently, while preparations for Fatah’s Sixth General Congress were in progress, bitter conflicts erupted within the movement, which were partly motivated by Gaza events. Amongst those was a fight that took place during the 34th session of the Revolutionary Council, held in Ramallah during the period 10–13/1/2008, between Nasr Yusuf, a member of the movement’s Central Committee, and Muhammad Dahlan, a member of the Revolutionary Council.

Yusuf bitterly criticized Dahlan and held him squarely responsible for Fatah's "catastrophe" in Gaza, which provoked heated controversy and exchange of harsh words between the two men.⁹⁶ Similarly, media onslaughts were exchanged between Dahlan and Hakam Bal'awi, a member of Fatah Central Committee.⁹⁷

Another conflict emerged when Abu 'Ali Shahin, a member of Fatah's Revolutionary Council, severely criticized President 'Abbas' handling of what he called " Hamas' coup," and described him as a "failed leader," who does not have the guts to take the appropriate decision at the right historical moment. On behalf of the president and the Central Committee, Bal'awi issued a statement that described Shahin as a man with "a sick imagination," and vividly accused Fatah leadership in Gaza of being responsible "for the betrayal of the movement either in the battle, or by being conceited, presumptuous and coward."⁹⁸

Gaza incidents had thus led to a crisis within both the PA and Fatah, which was particularly demonstrated by series of decrees that dismissed the senior officials of the security forces in Gaza because of their so-called apathy in defending their positions. Dr. Husam 'Udwan, a Fatah leader in Gaza, took the initiative in a press conference, dated 17/6/2007, of "forming a revolutionary court to prosecute the symbols who caused the destruction of Fatah in Gaza, headed by Dahlan, and inflict maximum punishments against them." Two other Fatah officials closely associated with Ahmed Hillis, the top Fatah leader in Gaza, told the press that they "support the trial of Dahlan and all who are related to what happened, on condition that it would be within the official frameworks of the movement." They called upon Fatah Central Committee to constitute a committee for the trial of Muhammad Dahlan, Rashid Abu Shbak and the leaders and officers of the security forces.⁹⁹

On 18/6/2007 news were leaked of President 'Abbas' presidential decision to dissolve the NSC,¹⁰⁰ which he actually did by virtue of a presidential decree issued on 22/6/2007. The decree achieved dual purposes: to get rid of some undesirable leaders of Fatah in this sensitive post specially Muhammad Dahlan, and, concurrently, Isma'il Haniyyah, the dismissed prime minister. Another presidential decree dismissed Interior Ministry Director General Rashid Abu Shabk, Muhammad Dahlan's right hand in a confrontation with the government of national unity.¹⁰¹ However, a general feeling against Dahlan and some senior Fatah leaders had already been crystallized within Fatah's ranks, because they left GS before the crisis was over.

On 26/6/2007, President ‘Abbas issued a decree that banned all the militias and the para military organizations irrespective of their affiliation, and asked the government to confiscate their arms,¹⁰² including those of Fatah, Hamas, PIJ and other Palestinian factions. This measure was said to be essential in order to prepare the ground for the implementation of a security plan that was in the making in the Ministry of Interior headed by Major General ‘Abd al-Razzaq al-Yahya. And in reality, it was an actualization of an article in the Road Map plan that stipulated the dismantling of all the resistance cells.

President ‘Abbas issued another decree on 27/6/2007 that ordered, on the recommendation of an investigation committee that he constituted, the dismissal of the leaders of three security forces: Brigadier General Misbah al-Biheisi, commander of the Presidential Security Forces, his deputy Ziad Judah and Manar Muhammad, the commander of the Joint Forces in Gaza.¹⁰³

Another crisis appeared when Hani al-Hassan, a prominent leader of Fatah’s Central Committee and the senior advisor of President ‘Abbas, had on 27/6/2007 an interview with Aljazeera TV Channel. For he declared during this interview that Hamas decisive action was not directed against Fatah itself, but it aimed at suppressing the supporters of General Dayton and his plan within the movement. Hamas, he added, has initially moved against this corrupt group that accepted for itself to work under the directives of this American General, while “the majority of Fatah did not care....” This daring position lead to an outcry within Fatah, and opened the way for the emergence of a faction in the movement that patronized these views, and stood against Muhammad Dahlan and his ilk. In retaliation, ‘Abbas dismissed Hani al-Hassan from his position as the President’s senior advisor,¹⁰⁴ but the demands to also dismiss him from the Central Committee and to try him internally vanished with time, largely because of their illegality. Other Fatah members defended al-Hassan’s right to express his concerns which, they maintained, should be discussed within the movement.¹⁰⁵ Hatim ‘Abd al-Qadir, a member of the provisional leadership committee in the WB, said that “what brother Hani al-Hassan said in his interview with Aljazeera is in line with the views of many of Fatah’s members and cadres,” though he criticized the timing that al-Hassan chose to air these views, whose forum, they argued, should have been Fatah’s internal apparatus, not the media. Others of the Fatah’s cadre said in a meeting that they organized in Ramallah on 30/6/2007 that “al-Hassan’s diagnosis,

analysis and induction resemble what is in the minds of both the rank and file and the leaders of Fatah at all levels.”¹⁰⁶

The “war of the decrees” developed to reach the PA itself. A decree, dated 17/8/2007, withdrew all the presidential decrees issued during the period 7/3/2007–15/4/2007, i.e., during Isma‘il Haniyyah’s premiership of the national unity government. They dealt with the promotion and transfer of government officials, the decree also withdrew all the functions and privileges granted to them by virtue of previous decisions.¹⁰⁷ Isma‘il Haniyyah responded to this drive by saying that President ‘Abbas retreated from and undermined Mecca Agreement by these decrees, which he described as an “administrative massacre.”¹⁰⁸

Subsequently, President ‘Abbas issued a decree addressed to his Premier Salam Fayyad that elevated Riad al-Maliki from an acting to a full-fledged Minister of Foreign Affairs, which had in effect stripped al-Qaddumi from the title that he insisted upon, namely the Palestinian Minister of Foreign Affairs, and thus all his foreign functions.¹⁰⁹

Eighth: The Stance of the Palestinian Factions

The outcome of the elections of the PLC, on 25/1/2006, had reformulated the Palestinian political map to be, to a large extent, a two-party system. For Fatah and Hamas had jointly won 86% of the vote and 90% of the parliamentary seats, while the leftist Palestinian factions under the PLO (the PFLP and DFLP as well as the People’s Party and Feda group) got only 7% and 3.8% of the vote and the seats, respectively. As for PIJ which boycotted the elections, the opinion polls gave it only 3–5% of the popular vote.

The general tendency of the other Palestinian factions was to emphasize their historical, national and resisting role, thus they refused marginalization. They strove to build a political system that is based on national harmony, and not on a partisan Hamas–Fatah platform, where they will increase their political influence and role in making and shaping Palestinian politics, but, at the same time, maintain their identity and entity, i.e., not to be an offshoot of either Fatah or Hamas. Thus was their quest for proportionate representation in elections that was jointly demanded by the PFLP and DFLP as well as the People’s Party and Feda group. This system

will enable them to have the casting vote between the two biggest blocks, Fatah and Hamas, as none of them was likely to have an absolute majority. Hence, they will be in a better position to impose their conditions and increase their role in the democratic game.

The PFLP criticized Mecca Agreement because it was exclusively concluded by Fatah and Hamas, who distributed the ministerial and other senior posts between themselves. Moreover, the PFLP claimed that the Agreement compromised on the minimum Palestinian rights as set by the National Consensus Document that had been endorsed by all factions. The PFLP also criticized the Agreement's closure of what it called the files of corruption and internal fighting and the non-accountability of those who committed these crimes.¹¹⁰ Hence, was the Front's rejection to participate in the government of national unity.

As for the DFLP, it viewed the Mecca Agreement as defective and needs to be developed through a comprehensive dialogue that should transform it from a bilateral deal into a full-fledged national agreement that would guarantee the formation of a truly government of national unity.¹¹¹ However, though criticizing the partisan system of Fatah and Hamas, the DFLP participated in the government of national unity by a single ministerial post.

PIJ welcomed Mecca Agreement for being instrumental in sparing the Palestinian blood, but refused to participate in the government of national unity, which was in harmony with its position that viewed the PA as an outcome of Oslo Accords, boycotted the elections and refused to participate in the political and administrative structure of the PA.

The Independent Palestine Bloc participated in the government of national unity, through its leader Mustafa al-Barghouthi, who was allocated the Ministry of Information and played a distinctive role notwithstanding the short-lived government of the national unity. The Third Way Bloc, also, participated in the government through Salam Fayyad, who was handpicked for the Ministry of Finance because of his distinguished contacts with the West. Fayyad was later destined to play a role that was too large for the boots of his tiny bloc that had two MPs only in the PLC, namely the premier of the emergency government that President 'Abbas appointed after Hamas' control over the GS. This position gave Fayyad an opportunity to increase his influence and contacts, and to play a larger role in Palestinian politics.

The other Palestinian factions and forces tried to mediate between Fatah and Hamas, and exerted considerable effort to control the conflict between them. They held them jointly responsible for the turbulence, but none of them supported Hamas' forceful seizure of the GS. However, it is worth noting that the four factions of the PLO (The PFLP and DFLP, the People's Party and Fida) had all participated in the meetings of the Central Committee of the PLO, which gave the Palestinian presidency the opportunity to claim legitimacy, and provided a legal cover for the measures and decrees that it took to establish its authority versus Hamas. Moreover, while adamantly rejecting Hamas' "coup" and its accompanied measures and practices, these factions had, to say the least, mildly criticized the decrees, measures and the security onslaught of the presidency and Fayyad's government against Hamas in the WB. Various explanations are given for this inconsistency. While some attribute it to a measure of similarity between the political program of these factions and that of Fatah rather than Hamas, others speak of conflicting positions between the pro-President 'Abbas' internal leaders of these factions and their more extreme diaspora counterparts. Another explanation may be found in President 'Abbas (PLO leadership) funding of these factions that dictates upon them a restrained political stand, and his complete support to their demand of an electoral law based on proportionate representation. However, each of these factors had its impact in determining the inclination of these factions towards Fatah, though researchers differ in estimating the exact weight of each and every factor in this respect.

The PFLP rejected Hamas' control over Gaza, and called upon the movement to nullify it, though, at the same time, it criticized President 'Abbas' "hasty" decision to form an emergency government that aggravated internal tension and deepened the Palestinian crisis. As for the DFLP, it maintained that Hamas' action was a "coup" against the legitimate authority, and submitted a four-point initiative to bypass the Palestinian trap, as follows:

1. Hamas should retreat from its "coup" in Gaza, and undertakes to maintain democratic freedom and political plurality.
2. The formation of a transitional government, under the premiership of an independent personality, to replace the emergency government formed by Abu Mazin, which should create a conducive environment for holding new general elections.

3. To amend the electoral law on the basis of proportionate representation.
4. To activate the PLO, the only legitimate representative body of the Palestinian people, and to restructure its institutions on democratic basis.¹¹²

Though PIJ had also criticized Hamas' control over Gaza, it understood its motivation more than any of the other Palestinian factions. However, some quarters in Hamas had expressed their resentment of PIJ's attempt to play an intermediary role, while it should have, in their view, decisively supported Hamas, as the two movements are committed to the Palestinian Islamic trend and to the resistance of the Israeli occupation. The joining of many of Fatah members in Gaza the PIJ after Hamas' control over the GS was suspiciously viewed as they may exploit their new umbrella to foment trouble in Gaza. Nonetheless, PIJ continued its active resistance and launching of missiles against the Israeli incursions shoulder to shoulder with Hamas, though it, likewise, suffered from the Israeli wave of assassinations and arrests.

However, it is noticeable that the Palestinian factions were closer to Hamas in their criticism of Annapolis Peace Conference and the entire settlement project. Thus they had not been assimilated in either of the two big parties, but had from time to time supported or opposed one or the other as they saw fit. This apparent neutrality may qualify them to play a more positive role in achieving Palestinian national unity if they play their cards effectively and efficiently.

Ninth: The Siege and the Uplifting of the Siege

The siege was imposed by the USA, West Europe and Israel on the entire PA throughout the durations of Isma'il Haniyyah's first government and the government of national unity. However, these powers exempted from this siege what they called humanitarian aid, and declared that they will deal and send funds to the office of the Palestinian President only. But after Hamas' decisive action in Gaza and the political hostility between the governments of Ramallah and Gaza, western powers and Israel lifted the siege on the former while it remained in place on the latter. The presidency and Ramallah's government maintained that they will build a successful and developed experiment in the WB compared to the failed administration in Gaza that will not be able to provide the means of living

to the people, which will ultimately lead to the collapse of Hamas' experiment in Gaza. In effect, this meant that the PA will be a participant in the siege on Gaza. Nonetheless, many quarters in the world demanded the separation between hostility to the new "authority" in Gaza and collective punishment imposed on the 1.5 million population of Gaza. Correspondingly, the government of Salam Fayyad, who posed itself as the representative of all the Palestinians, realized that it will be placed in an embarrassing situation if it denied the aid that it gets to Gaza. Thus, though continuing, the siege was unable to stand some of the challenges that it faced, particularly with regard to some public financial responsibilities such as the cost of petrol, water and electricity that was paid to Israeli companies. Hence, a view emerged that the government of Salam Fayyad should continue to bear its financial responsibilities in Gaza, and restrict its effort to preventing the flow of funds to Hamas only. Hence, the slogan of drying up the sources of Hamas' funds emerged, and Salam Fayyad's government initiated over a period of six months (June–December 2007) a series of measures to achieve this goal, in addition to administrative decisions to weaken Hamas' grip over the GS.

The implementation of this plan started within days after Hamas' control over Gaza by leaking to the press news of:

a series of decisions recently taken by the leaders of the security forces to prevent the repetition of Gaza's experience in the WB, of which the most important are to destroy the military cells of the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades and the Executive Force, and to dry up Hamas' sources of funding and to close down its institutions.¹¹³

Along this line, a presidential decree was issued on 22/6/2007, which authorized the Minister of Interior to dissolve the previously licensed societies.¹¹⁴ Four days later, another decree ordered the dissolution of all the militias and para military formations.¹¹⁵

Subsequently, after these general decisions, the following specific measures were taken:

- Non-recognition of the results of the secondary school certificate issued by the dismissed government in Gaza, which in effect meant obstruction of university education.¹¹⁶
- Non-recognition of the list of nominees for the pilgrimage submitted by the *Awqaf* (Islamic Endowments) Ministry in Gaza.¹¹⁷

- Abstention of Salam Fayyad’s government from paying the salaries of the government employees in Gaza, and its discrimination between those of the governments of Ramallah and Gaza.¹¹⁸
- Exemption of all the inhabitants of Gaza from taxes and customs in order to deprive the dismissed government, or any other government, from a major source of revenue.¹¹⁹
- To incite the people to revolt against Gaza’s government in protest of the power cuts that resulted from the Israeli stoppage of fuel supply to Gaza. In a press conference, Riad al-Maliki, the Minister of Information in the government of Fayyad, said, “The Palestinian people in every house in Gaza should publicly say to Hamas that you are squarely responsible for this crime.”¹²⁰ However, the European Union, which normally funds the cost of fuel for the electricity supply, finally resolved this problem.
- Enactment of a special law to prevent money laundering in order to “shrink Hamas’ sources of funding.”¹²¹
- The siege that sharply restricted the flow of funds to Gaza led to a major health crisis, particularly with regard to chronic diseases, and to a sharp reduction of medicine in hospitals. Basim Na’im, the acting Minister of Health in Gaza, warned, in a press conference, held on 20/11/2007, against this dangerous development.¹²²
- The government of Ramallah dissolved all the *Zakat* (almsgiving) committees in the WB on the pretext that they constitute a source of funding to Hamas.¹²³

Coupled with the Israeli crippling siege, these administrative and financial measures lead to such a difficult economic situation in the entire GS that the Deputy Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Filippo Grandi, called for a press conference in Gaza on 9/8/2007 in which he warned that “the GS is in real danger of being totally dependent on international aid, a society that is isolated and closed.” He added that both the agricultural and industrial sectors “are exposed to a catastrophe,” and demanded the opening of the crossings and the resumption of export and import activities.¹²⁴ The United Nations declared that the Israeli siege led to the closure of 85% of the factories in Gaza due to the scarcity of raw materials. Another report issued by the world organization recorded that these factories had discharged all their 70 thousand workers.¹²⁵

Conclusion

Internally, the year 2007 is perhaps among the worst years in the entire modern Palestinian history. For it witnessed a bloody conflict between the two major Palestinian movements, that ended in a de facto political and territorial division.

The year 2007 demonstrated the fragility of the Palestinian political and democratic structure, the existence of a crisis of confidence between the major partners and insufficient understanding of the rules of the democratic game and peaceful devolution of power. The parties were unable to administer the differences between two largely incompatible programs, particularly with regard to the quest for a peace and the issue of resistance, and in dealing with the Israeli occupation and the international community. The year had also glaringly shown the substantial impact of the Israeli, American and international pressure on the internal Palestinian scene, which proved to be a major player and a decisive factor in igniting the conflict between Fatah and Hamas. Nonetheless, had not some influential Palestinian parties been willing to enthusiastically respond to these pressures for the sake of promoting their own agenda, the tragedy could have been minimized or even avoided.

Historically, Fatah had been the pioneering and leading movement in the confrontation with Israel, within the PLO, and in the option of negotiations which led to Oslo Accords and, finally, in the formulation of the PA. Within this framework, most of the Palestinian resistance factions placed themselves under its umbrella and accepted its pursued policies, though they occasionally criticized its practices. However, with the progress of time, new political and resistance forces were bound to emerge from within the Palestinian society. Fatah should have expected the inevitable emergence of these forces and developed a mechanism to deal with them within the agreed democratic game that should, in the end, accept the principle of peaceful devolution of power. But the insistence of Fatah leadership to swiftly return to power and to conduct early elections placed many obstacles in the path of the Hamas led government. It, moreover, triggered foreign intervention and led to the bitter struggle over the functions that had tremendous negative impact on both sides.

Mecca Agreement was an outstanding Palestinian–Arab achievement that established for the first time a united national government on the basis of a true

partnership, which imposed restrictions on both the peace and resistance projects. While Fatah made in this agreement some concessions with regard to authority and procedures, Hamas had correspondingly compromised on its declared political stands. However, within a month, the government of national unity suffered a serious blow at the hands of an influential group that affiliated itself to Fatah, and which directed the security forces to foment trouble that would lead to the collapse of the government of national unity in coherence with Dayton's American plan. This led to the resignation of the Minister of Interior, who was unable to perform his duties because of the many predicaments that some senior security personnel placed on his way.

Hamas maintained that its decisive operation in Gaza, the so-called coup, was by all means an obligatory and not a voluntary action. Nonetheless, this gave Abu Mazin an opportunity to dismiss the government, form an emergency government and orchestrate a ferocious campaign against Hamas in the WB. On its part, Hamas found itself responsible for administering the GS at a very difficult time when the people suffered from an unprecedentedly tight blockade that aimed at the collapse of Hamas. The persistence rejection of the presidency to the call of unconditional negotiations between the two sides left Hamas with no viable option except to continue its control over Gaza.

What attracts attention is that the Arab calls for dialogue during the first months after the "decisive military action" were ferociously rejected by the Palestinian presidency but accepted by Hamas. But the subsequent Arab initiatives had gradually accommodated the conditions placed by President 'Abbas.

Many of Fatah cadres were equally unhappy with Fayyad's leadership of the emergency government. For he took this opportunity to increase his influence in various government institutions, including the security forces, even if this was at the expense of the movement itself. This triggered growing opposition within Fatah to Fayyad's leadership and the demand that the movement directly participate in the government.

The Palestinian situation should have healed the wounds and united the internal front through a real, serious and strategic dialogue. Alas, though experiencing an unprecedented condition of weakness, the Palestinian presidency pursued the peace settlement project and abrogated Cairo Agreement of March 2005, while Fatah and Hamas strove to respectively consolidate their grips over the WB and the GS. This

closed the door, hopefully temporarily, in the face of any serious effort to reform the Palestinian political system, and to reactivate and restructure the PLO.

The body of the Palestinian issue is still too heavy to be supported by the weak legs of the Palestinian people and their institutions. The Palestinian decision making continues to be really problematic, and the major Palestinian forces are, unfortunately, still engaged in a futile power struggle to weaken each other instead of joining hands, or amicably and fairly share roles and power among themselves.

The GS is heading for more blockade and hardship, while the negotiations for a peace settlement are unduly protracting and dragging, which enables the Israeli occupation to impose realities on the ground and to Judaize Jerusalem. Nonetheless, the national Palestinian project could overcome this formidable stumble through a serious effort to put its house in order and to protect it from internal and external interventions, and by a pragmatic reading of the reality and prospects. Then and only then could it develop its own power and secure the support of the Arabs, Muslims and the international community at large, while, at the same time, giving due attention to the bundle of challenges and restrictions imposed by the Arab and international realities.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 22/5/2006; *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper, London, 28/9/2006; *al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 17/12/2006; and *Alwatan* newspaper, Oman, 19/1/2007.
- ² *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 6/1/2007.
- ³ Reuters News Agency, 5/1/2007, <http://www.ara.reuters.com/>
- ⁴ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 7/1/2007.
- ⁵ Site of Arabs 48, 6/1/2007, www.arabs48.com; and see also *al-Khaleej* newspaper, al-Shariqa, 8/1/2007.
- ⁶ *Al-Hayat*, 8/1/2007.
- ⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 8/1/2007.
- ⁸ *Al-Hayat*, 9/1/2007.
- ⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 10/1/2007.
- ¹⁰ See *al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 14/1/2007; and *al-Hayat*, 16/1/2007.
- ¹¹ See *al-Hayat*, 16/1/2007.
- ¹² *Al-Khaleej*, 12/1/2007, quoting the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*.
- ¹³ *Al-Hayat*, 21/1/2007.
- ¹⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 22/1/2007.
- ¹⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 22/1/2007.
- ¹⁶ See Ma'an News Agency, 23/1/2007, <http://www.maannews.net/ar/index.php>; and *Albayan* newspaper, Dubai, 23/1/2007.
- ¹⁷ *Al-Hayat*, 26/1/2007.
- ¹⁸ Interview conducted by Ghassan Charbel with Mahmud 'Abbas in: *al-Hayat*, 23/1/2007.
- ¹⁹ *Al-Hayat*, 27/1/2007.
- ²⁰ *Al-Hayat*, 29/1/2007.
- ²¹ *Algomhuria* newspaper, Cairo, 29/1/2007; and Ma'an, 28/1/2007.
- ²² *Al-Hayat*, 29/1/2007.
- ²³ See Arabs 48, 27/1/2007; and *Asharq Alawsat*, 29/1/2007.
- ²⁴ *Al-Hayat*, 29/1/2007.
- ²⁵ *Asharq Alawsat*, 29/1/2007.
- ²⁶ *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah, 29/1/2007; and see *al-Hayat*, 30/1/2007.
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Chapter Two

*The Israeli–Palestinian Scene:
Exploitation of the Schism and the Peace
Evasions*

The Israeli–Palestinian Scene: Exploitation of the Schism and the Peace Evasions

Introduction

For Israel, the year 2007 was the year in which it exploited the Palestinian schism, and tried to put its house in order after its war with Lebanon in July 2006. While paying lip service to peace, Israel continued its aggression on the Palestinian land and people, and imposition of realities on the ground.

In spite of the prevalent corruption in the machinery of government, Israel is equipped with dynamism and an institutional system that enable it to deal with the problem. Moreover, rather than serving the Palestinian interest, the weakness of the Israeli premiership and government triggered more extremism and delayed the peace process.

This chapter gives an overview of the Israeli–Palestinian scene during the year 2007, and explains the factors that had triggered the conflicts and skirmishes and determined the relations between the various players during the year under consideration. The reader will find an explanation of the Israeli political map, population, economy and military apparatus. Moreover, the discourse addresses the Israeli responses to the internal Palestinian conditions and the peace process.

First: The Israeli Internal Scene

The 2007 Israeli scene focused on a number of realities and variables that dominated most aspects of the Israeli political affairs, including the political system, and the executive, legislative and judicial institutions, as well as the political parties and forces. The 2006 general elections established the pillars of the Israeli reality for the year 2007 with regard to representation in the Knesset and the strength of parties and other political forces.

1. The Government and the Governance System

To consolidate the authority of the government and strengthen the relations between the Knesset members and the voters, the Israeli president formed by the

beginning of 2007 a committee, under the chairmanship of Menachem Magidor, to explore the possibility of introducing some reforms on the political system and the electoral law. One of which is the introduction of electoral constituencies rather than considering the entire Israel as a single electoral constituency, which would deprive small political parties from representation in the Knesset and, thus, sharply reduce their impact on decision making that, in turn, would consolidate the grip of the government.

Following the outcome of the 17th Knesset elections, held on 28/3/2006, the incumbent government under the premiership of Ehud Olmert continued in power with 29 seats won by his party Kadima. On 4/5/2006, Olmert formed a new government and got the vote of confidence in the Knesset by a majority of 65 against 49 votes, while four Knesset members abstained. The Labor Party and the religious and rightist parties participated in the government.¹ The government program strove to crystallize Israel as a Jewish state, which required the fixation of its lands and the usage of the Separation Wall to achieve the Israeli goals.

Since his assumption of power, Olmert tried to stabilize the government machinery through increased cooperation with his coalition partners, particularly the Labor Party, but at the expense of the political program. Notwithstanding the progressive erosion of its popularity, the government's continuation in power depended on certain factors, including:²

1. The continuation of the Labor Party in the coalition and Ehud Barak in the position of Minister of Defense, which will consolidate the government military and security grip, and minimize the dangerous repercussions of the criticism launched by Winograd Commission on the performance of the previous government.
2. The control of the ambitions of Ehud Barak, who did well in the opinion polls, to enter the premiership contest with Olmert and Benjamin Netanyahu. Olmert tried to introduce some amendments in his government structure to accommodate the developments in the political scene that resulted from the elections of Ehud Barak and Shimon Peres to the leadership of the Labor Party and the presidency of Israel, respectively. Many of the political analysts expected that Barak's assumption of the Ministry of Defense would improve the performance of the government on war and peace issues, compared to his inexperienced predecessor Amir Peretz.

3. The ability of Olmert to free himself from the heavy legacy of Ariel Sharon, and to pursue the peace process without offering major concessions.³

Olmert government managed to remain in power simply because its downfall was not in the interest of other political parties, particularly the Labor Party, Pensioners Party (Gil) and Shas Party, who did not expect to increase their representation in the Knesset in a future election. Meanwhile, the position of the party Yisrael Beitenu (Israel is our home), which was headed by Avigdor Lieberman, had 11 seats in the Knesset and had belatedly joined the government in October 2006, was not consistent during the year 2007. This was clearly reflected in its withdrawal from the government on 16/1/2008 in protest of the track of the peace settlement, though the government continued to maintain a majority of 67 out of 120 seats in the Knesset.

Olmert depended on the support of the traditional leadership of Kadmia, while Tzipi Livni controlled the party's youth. Olmert's two other competitors over the premiership were Benjamin Netanyahu, who derived his influence from the old guard of the Likud Party and the Jewish religious institution, and Ehud Barak who commanded the support of the military institution.

The popularity of Olmert, the 11th Israeli premier, had gone down the drain.⁴ Though elected a successor of the bed-ridden Sharon, Olmert is his contrast in appearance, physique and behavior. The chaotic, military-oriented and meticulous Sharon took his time in everything, while Olmert is comparatively cool, dynamic, proficient and intelligent. Nonetheless, he is personally too uncharismatic to be the first man in Israel, and all opinion polls indicate that he was not as powerful and influential as all his predecessors. However, the quick turn of events enabled him to assume power, as, following the stroke inflicted upon Sharon, he was elected a caretaker premier, and, subsequently, a full-fledged prime minister who led a broad and strong coalition, though his personal popularity progressively declined.

The Israeli government continued to command the majority in the Knesset, but historically Israeli coalition governments had been profoundly unstable, as issues that required decisive decisions were normally instrumental in their downfall. This was glaringly reflected over the issue of the final peace settlement over which the positions of the coalition parties were basically incoherent. While Yisrael Beitenu (11 seats) withdrew from the government in protest of the course of the peace negotiations, the same issue triggered a stern warning from the religious Shas

Party (12 seats) that it would follow suit if major concessions were offered to the Palestinians, particularly on Jerusalem and the refugees.⁵ Moreover, the persistent charges of corruption against Olmert may lead to his dismissal or resignation from the premiership.

2. Changes in the Personnel

The Israeli political scene had witnessed during the course of the year 2007 a bundle of changes in the leadership of the major political and military institutions:⁶

- a. The resignation on 17/1/2007 of the Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, who had a record of 40 years service in the military, particularly in the air force, because of his failure in the Lebanese war of July 2006, and his Deputy Moshe Kaplinsky soon followed suit. Gabi Ashkenazi was appointed the new chief of staff on 14/2/2007.
- b. The President of Israel, Moshe Katsav was suspended because the attorney-general accused him of rape and sexual harassment, and his term ended by early 2007. Four nominees stood for the election of the new President: Shimon Peres of Kadima Party, the Knesset Member Reuven Rivlin representing the Likud Party, the Knesset Member Colette Avital from the Labor Party and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Yisrael Meir Lau. But the real contest was between Peres and Rivlin. Finally, the former got the position on 13/6/2007.
- c. Due to his failure and insufficient military experience during the Lebanese war of July 2006, Minister of Defense Amir Peretz lost the internal elections in the Labor Party on 12/6/2007 to Ehud Barak. The latter was subsequently selected to replace Peretz as Minister of Defense in Olmert's cabinet.
- d. The Minister of Finance Avraham Hirschson resigned on 1/7/2007 over reported embezzlement, and his responsibilities were temporarily assumed by Premier Olmert until the former Minister of Interior Roni Bar-On was selected for the position on 22/4/2007, while the former Minister of Housing replaced him as Minister of Interior.
- e. Police Commissioner Moshe Karadi resigned over charges of corruption, and David Cohen, Central District Police Commander, succeeded him on 1/5/2007.

- f. The former Minister of Justice Haim Ramon was appointed Vice Prime Minister on 4/7/2007, notwithstanding his accusation of sexual aggression.

3. The Judiciary

The judiciary experienced tension between the Minister of Justice Daniel Friedmann and the President of the Supreme Court Dorit Beinish. This conflict came to the surface when the former circulated a message in which he declared his intention to introduce institutional reforms in the judiciary. It included the independence of the judiciary from the Supreme Court and stripping the latter from its prerogative of appointing judges that should henceforth be invested in an independent committee. Friedmann had further argued that the Supreme Court had become too powerful for a democratic system.⁷ However, the conflict between the minister and the president of the Supreme Court revolved around a handful of issues, including:

- a. The expansion of the functions of the Supreme Court, particularly after its previous President Barak, secured for it the right to look into all kinds of issues and subjects, even political and human right cases, and to the right to cancel the Knesset laws, though this had been outside its jurisdictions.
- b. The issue of the appointment of judges, where the Supreme Court had the right to appoint three of the nine-member committee that was empowered to appoint the judges, it has also a role in the appointment of the judges of the central courts.
- c. Conflict over the duration of the presidency of the Supreme Court, where the Knesset had ruled to limit the duration of the presidency of all courts, including the Supreme Court, to seven years.
- d. The attempts of some new leaders who had worked in the courts, like Eliyahu Winograd and Micha Lindenstrauss, to extensively enlarge the powers and the role of the State's Comptroller in supervising the government, and to present him as the fourth center of power in Israel.⁸

4. The Partisan Scene

The Israeli political scene did not witness dramatic changes during the course of the year 2007. All the major political forces maintained their representation in the government and the Knesset, while partisan polarization had subsided within

the Israeli society, and the Israelis were no longer keen to identify themselves with the positions of their traditional parties. Political and partisan activities had also retreated, and the feeling of inability to implement change had progressively increased within the Israeli society. Confidence in the political parties and the political leadership had declined for a group of reasons of which the most important were:⁹

- a. The spread of political and financial corruption within the political and partisan leadership, including some of the most senior political and party leaders from both the left and the right.
- b. The accumulated failure of the elected members of the political parties to honor their commitments to the electorates.
- c. Lack of tangible differences between the positions of the political parties, particularly on issues of foreign policy that constitute the central concern of the Israeli citizens.
- d. The increased economic hardship, across all the sectors of the Israeli society, lead to an increased preoccupation with the living conditions at the expense of politics. Hence, there was a noticeable decrease in the percentage of political participation during the previous elections of 2006.

The partisan scene experienced intensive differences across the major Israeli parties. In Kadima, Olmert struggled to survive, and in case he resigns Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, would be the most likely alternative. In the Labor Party, the attack focused on Amir Peretz, the head of the party and the Minister of Defense in Olmert's cabinet, who was accused of negligence during the 2006 war with Lebanon, and subsequently a competition over his two posts started. Barak won the internal elections of the Labor Party on 12/6/2007 against his competitor Ami Ayalon, the former director of Shabak (Israel Security Agency—ISA), and he replaced Amir Peretz in the leadership of the party. Netanyahu consolidated his control over the Likud Party against his competitors, and he continued his efforts to split Kadima Party.

The Arab parties were poorly represented in the Knesset because of the boycott of the Islamic Movement, led by al-Sheikh Ra'id Salah, to the elections, coupled with changes and modifications in the electoral laws that were introduced to sharply reduce the representation of small parties, particularly the Arab parties, in the Knesset. Moreover, was the abolition of the system of extra votes that had

given the small parties, including the Arab parties, the opportunity to exchange these votes between themselves in such a way that enabled them to win one or another seat in the Knesset.¹⁰

The case of the Arab member of the Knesset, ‘Azmi Bishara, had preoccupied the Arab parties. For the Knesset had passed a law that legalized the stripping of citizenship from any Israeli who “violates loyalty to the state.” It was seen that it targeted the Arab minority to stop its continuous call for Arab national and cultural rights.

All in all, it may be suggested that the moderate camp had made progress within the Israeli society, and that new young, but non-military, politicians had started to take positions in the front line leadership of the political parties, while the influence of the traditional political parties waned.¹¹ However, the Likud had organized itself during the 2007 elections and made use of Olmert’s mistakes, particularly his failure in the war with Lebanon, to boost its popularity and to return to the first position among Israeli political parties, as indicated by the opinion polls.

5. Political Corruption

During the last few years political corruption had become so glaringly visible in the Israeli society that the former State Comptroller of Israel, Eliezer Goldberg, said that its rising danger superseded that of the Palestinian *Intifadah* (Uprising). In the same vein, the former Speaker of the Knesset Avraham Burg commented that Israel has become “a state of settlements run by an amoral clique of corrupt lawbreakers.” In reality, corruption in Israel had become organized and widespread at all levels, including presidents, premiers, ministers, members of the Knesset, politicians, administrators and military officers. The phenomenon of political corruption was reflected in a number of modes of which the most important were:¹²

- a. Government privileges and dishonest behavior.
- b. Bribery and exploitation of public posts for personal benefits.
- c. Nepotism and patronage in political appointments in favor of some leaders.
- d. Moral crimes and sexual scandals.

A report by the World Bank indicated that the percentage of corruption in the Israeli official institutions reached 8.8%, the highest of all advanced countries, where it did not go beyond 4.91%. The repercussions of political corruption were reflected in the following:

- a. The confidence of the ordinary citizens in the governing institutions had been seriously eroded. The democratic measurement showed a decline in confidence in the prime minister, from 34% in 2006 to 21% in 2007, while that of the president waned from 67% to 22% in the same years. Retraction in confidence included the army, police force and other public institutions.¹³
- b. The negative perception of the West towards Israel and its leadership, which had previously been viewed with great respect.

A report of the Israeli Institute for Democracy had indicated that there is rising decline of confidence in the government and its institutions in the last couple of years, while opinion polls showed that 78% of the Israelis were dissatisfied with their leadership. The report of the Winograd Commission on the July 2006 war with Lebanon had also confirmed distrust in the political and military leadership. An opinion poll indicated that 56% of the Israelis believed that Olmert was at the top of the list of corruption in the government, followed in a descending order by the Minister of Finance Hirschson (55%), Ramon and Lieberman (33%), while both Ehud Barak and the Minister of Finance Roni Bar-On took the fourth rank, with a 29%. As for the most honest and straight forward members of the government, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni came first with a 46%, followed by the Minister of Education Yuli Tamir (40%). As for the Knesset, 40% of those questioned viewed Tzachi Hanegbi as the most corrupt, followed by Netanyahu (38%), and then Amir Peretz.¹⁴

International reports also confirmed the corrupt nature of the Israeli governing institution. The Global Corruption Barometer 2007 placed it in the 30th rank out of 180 states. Charges of corruption included most of the symbols of the political system, where the premier and the Minister of Finance were at the top of the list. The measurement included in the category of corruption most of the Israeli institutions: the government, the Knesset, the political parties, the General Federation of Labour in Israel—Histadrut, and even the local authorities.

6. The Report of Winograd Commission

The outcome of the war with Lebanon and its negative political and military aftermath triggered a call for a comprehensive review of the military and political performance. The war had also demonstrated the absence of a strong political leadership capable of taking important decisions, and increased the conviction that Israeli security could not be achieved by military might alone.¹⁵

Due to the growing public pressure and criticism of the government's weak performance during the Lebanese war of 2006, an investigation commission was formed chaired by retired judge Eliya Winograd and the membership of Prof. Yehezkel Dror, Prof. Ruth Gabizon, Retired Major General Chaim Nadel and Retired Major General Menachem Einan.¹⁶

The report held Premier Ehud Olmert, the Minister of Defense Amir Peretz and the Chief of Staff Dan Halutz to be squarely responsible for the failure and mistakes of the war as well as its achievements, and opined that these three should take the major responsibility for reform. The report diagnosed the failures of the three, each in his area of responsibility, as follows:¹⁷

- a. The Prime Minister: Being responsible for the process of decision making, he did not give due weight to the long term impact of his decisions. This was because of his inexperience, and limited ability to confront and criticize the military, as well as his naivety and limited knowledge of the interrelation between the military might and the political objectives. Besides, he lacked a capable advisory team.
- b. The Minister of Defense: He knew very little about the functions and responsibilities of his ministry, and was hardly aware of the delicate balance between the military and the political agenda in a major war. Moreover, he was not qualified to crystallize independent positions on central issues, and he neither pursued methods and means nor sought advice to improve his ability and performance in this respect. Besides, he was largely concerned with tactical issues, and never had tangible role in the strategic decisions.
- c. The Chief of Staff: All his recommendations were central, and he directly administered all the military operations, but without sufficient internal discussions of the strategies of the military. It was he who convinced the prime minister and the defense minister of the ability of the army to undertake the attack.

The report placed the responsibility of the failure on Olmert's government, the chief of staff and the previous Israeli leaders, who had all failed to address the accumulated problems of the previous years. However, the Israeli public focused on the criticism launched against the premier, held him primarily responsible for the failure and called for his resignation. Meanwhile, the sharp criticism against the chief of staff led to his resignation. Anyhow, the report revealed the defect of the Israeli system, and the unbalanced relationship between the political and military leaderships.

The comments on the report reflected the growing necessity for substantial change in the decision making process in the political and military arenas. There were increased calls for urgent reform of the role and performance of the government that should seek the support of fresh professional and security expertise. The government should not excessively take into consideration the security aspects at the expense of the political ones.¹⁸

There were also calls for consolidating the role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the National Security Council in the decision making process on decisive political and security-oriented issues, and never to leave this duty solely to the military institution. All in all, it may be concluded that the report had led to a decline in the confidence of the Israeli public in the political and military elite, and revealed the dominance of the army over the political leadership that was represented by the security–inexperienced prime minister and minister of defense.

Though accusing the principal Israeli leaderships of negligence, the report did not call for their resignations, specifically the prime minister, but shelved their political destiny on the Israeli public. Hence, Olmert tried to appease the public and absorb their anger through his declared commitment to implement the recommendations of the committee. His first decision in this respect was to strengthen the cabinet’s military expertise by entrusting the defense portfolio to Barak. Moreover, to restore the credibility of the government and that of the military institution, Olmert exhibited extremism over the major issues of the Arab–Israeli conflict, and an inclination to use military force against Iran.¹⁹

Second: The Major Population, Economic and Military Indicators

1. Population Indicators

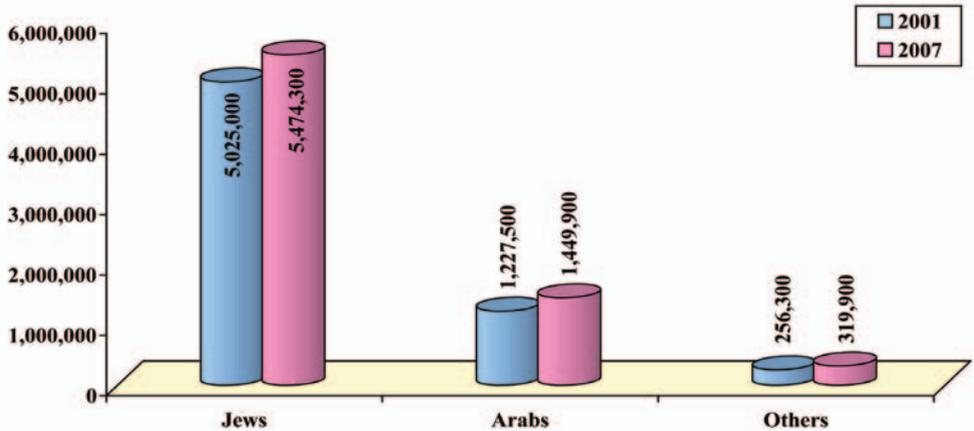
According to official statistics, the population of Israel totaled by the end of 2007 about 7.24 million persons, of whom about 5.47 million were Jews (i.e., a percentage 75.6%) while about 320 thousand persons (i.e., 4.4%) did not disclose their religion. The latter were mainly immigrants from Russia, countries of the former Soviet Union and East Europe whose Jewishness had not yet been ascertained, and non-Arab Christians. The Arab population, including those in East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, totaled about 1.45 million individuals, i.e., 20% of the total population.

If we subtract the population of the latter, about 266 thousand persons, then the numbers of the so-called 1948 Palestinians will be 1.18 million persons, i.e., about 16.3% of the total population. There are 480 thousand Jewish settlers residing in the WB, including East Jerusalem, while another 20 thousand lived in the Golan Heights (see table 1/2).

Table 1/2: Population of Israel 2001–2007
 (Population estimates do not include foreign labor)²⁰

Year	Gross population number	Jews	Arabs (including the population of East Jerusalem and in the Golan Heights)	Others
2001	6,508,800	5,025,000	1,227,500	256,300
2002	6,631,100	5,094,200	1,263,900	273,000
2003	6,748,400	5,165,400	1,301,600	281,400
2004	6,869,500	5,237,600	1,340,200	291,700
2005	6,990,700	5,313,800	1,377,100	299,800
2006	7,116,700	5,393,400	1,413,300	310,000
2007	7,244,100	5,474,300	1,449,900	319,900

Population of Israel in 2001 and 2007



During the year 2007, 19,700 persons immigrated to Israel, compared to 20,961 in the course of the previous year, 2006, which is in line with the declining rate of immigration to Israel since 2000. This was a source of concern for some Israeli circles, particularly since the number of those leaving Israel

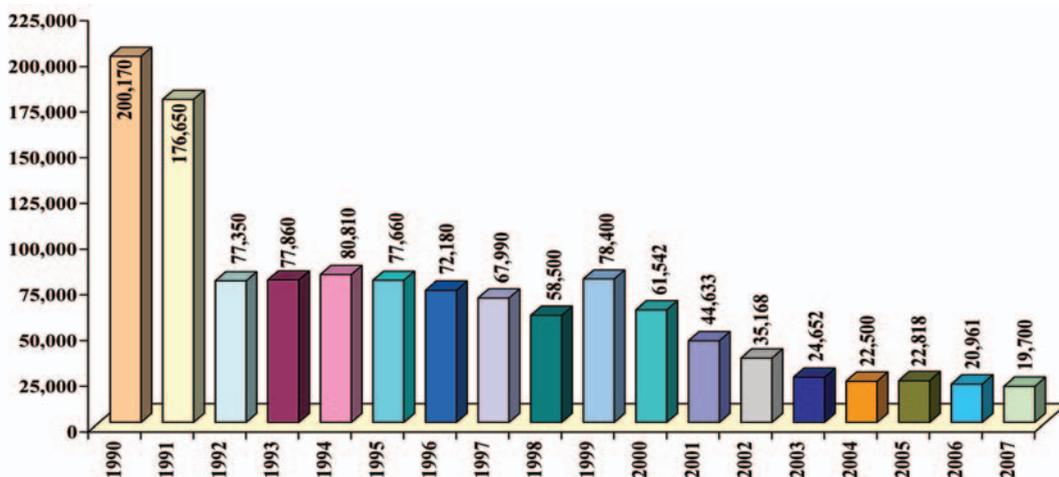
in 2007 were more than those immigrating to it, and this is the first time it happens since more than 20 years (see table 2/2).

Table 2/2: Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2007²¹

Year	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999
No. of immigrants	200,170	176,650	77,350	77,860	80,810	77,660	72,180	67,990	58,500	78,400

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
No. of immigrants	61,542	44,633	35,168	24,652	22,500	22,818	20,961	19,700	1,219,544

Number of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2007



Reports show the strife of the Israeli authorities to bring emigrants from countries that had not previously been among their central concerns, like India and Iran. A group of wealthy Jews of Iranian origin allocated a fund to encourage Jewish immigration from Iran, whereby each migrant family to Israel was given \$60 thousand, coupled with the offers and financial privileges granted by the Israeli Ministry of Immigrant Absorption from the special “absorption basket” to all Jewish immigrants.²²

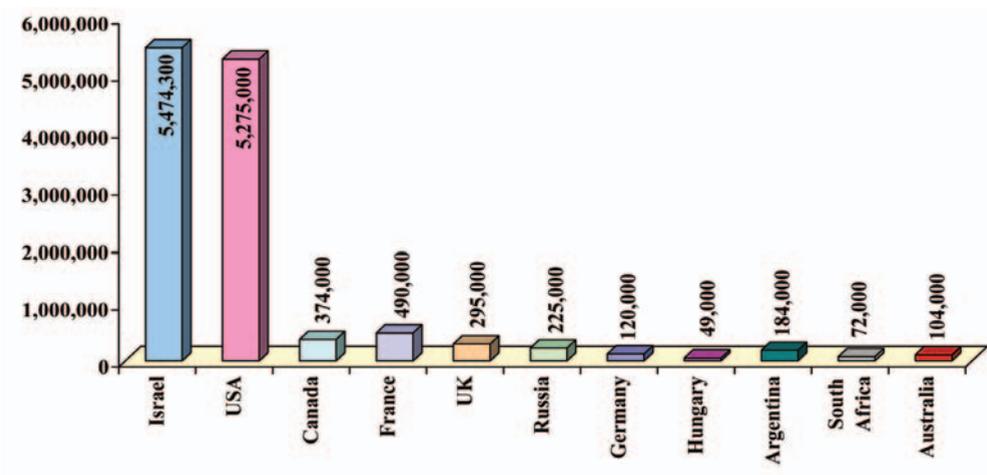
It is estimated that about 750 thousand Israelis live abroad,²³ of whom 25 thousand work in American research institutes and in the industries.²⁴ As a sign of counter immigration, about 4,313 Israelis got German citizenship in 2006, an over 50% increase compared to the previous year, 2005.²⁵ The Israeli

authorities seem to be facing the problem of absorbing the immigrants in their areas of expertise. According to the annual statistics book, issued by the Ruppin Academic Center’s Institute for Immigration and Social Integration, only one third of the immigrants, who hold masters or Ph.D. degrees and are from the former Soviet Union, work in positions related to their studies. While 21.9% of those, work in the building, agricultural and industrial sectors, 52.7% in the services and sales business and 7.9% as unskilled laborers.²⁶

An opinion poll published in April 2007 by *Maariv* newspaper indicated that 26% of the Israelis indicated their dissatisfaction with the conditions in Israel which triggered them to think last year of migration, and that this percentage increased among the youth to reach 50%.²⁷

As for the total world population of the Jews, the 2007 statistics of the Jewish Agency for Israel, as reported in the annual report of the Jewish People Policy Planning Institute, recorded that they totaled in the year 2007, 13.155 million, with 60 thousand increase compared to the year 2006, of whom about 5.275 million lived in the USA, 374 thousand in Canada, 490 thousand in France, 295 thousand in the UK, 225 thousand in Russia, 120 thousand in Germany, 49 thousand in Hungary, 393 thousand in Latin America of whom 184 thousand stay in Argentine, 77 thousand in Africa of whom 72 thousand were in South Africa, and 104 thousand in Australia.²⁸ This negatively affects the Jewish population growth in Israel. The World Jewry suffers of many problems that negatively affect the Jewish population growth; of which the most important are: family breakdown, intermarriages and assimilation into the western societies.

Number of Jews in Selected Countries 2007



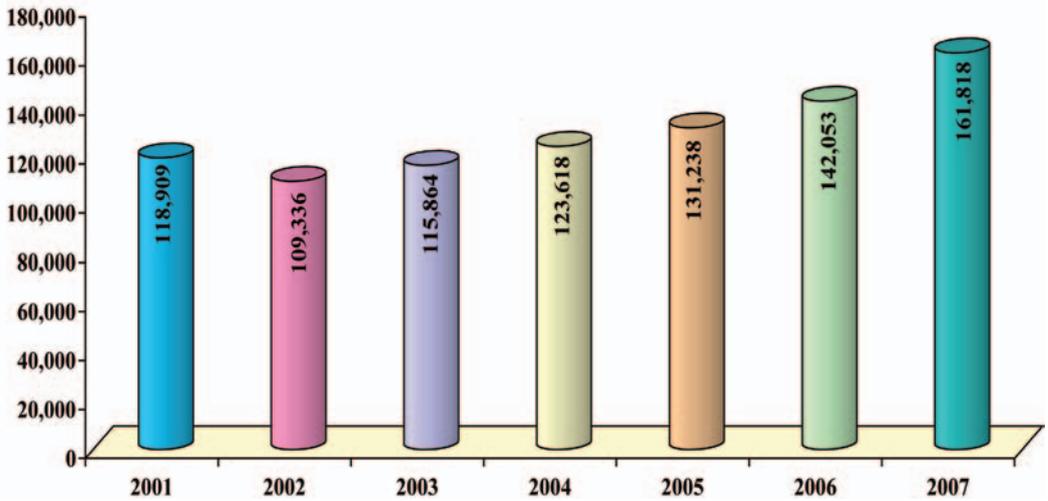
2. Economic Indicators

Official Israeli statistics indicated that the rate of the Israeli economic growth for the year 2007 was 5.3%, compared to 5.2% in 2006.²⁹ The Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2007 increased to about 664.76 billion shekels (i.e., about \$161.82 billion, according to the 2007 dollar rate of exchange), compared to 633.06 billion shekels in 2006 (i.e., about \$142.05 billion, according to the 2006 dollar rate of exchange).³⁰ However, it should be noted that these figures are derived from official sources, who update and amend the figures from time to time. Thus, the reader is advised to take this in consideration if he observed any discrepancy between these figures and those recorded in the 2006 and 2005 Strategic Reports. Moreover, there are sometimes discrepancies in the figures and data of the Israeli sources themselves, as is the case between those of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) and the Bank of Israel. It should also be noted that an important reason for the increase in the dollar amounts of the GDP is the decrease of the exchange rate of the US dollar vis-à-vis the shekel, from 4.4565 shekel per dollar in 2006 to 4.1081 in 2007.

Table 3/2: Israeli Gross Domestic Product and Gross National Income (GNI) 2001–2007³¹

Year	GDP		Less: Net income paid abroad		GNI		Shekel exchange rate (according to Bank of Israel)
	Million shekels	\$ Million	Million shekels	\$ Million	Million shekels	\$ Million	
2001	500,083	118,909	20,486	4,871	479,597	114,038	4.2056
2002	518,011	109,336	20,014	4,224	497,997	105,111	4.7378
2003	526,983	115,864	18,409	4,047	508,574	111,816	4.5483
2004	554,054	123,618	16,472	3,675	537,582	119,942	4.482
2005	588,970	131,238	7,163	1,596	581,807	129,642	4.4878
2006	633,057	142,053	2,507	563	630,550	141,490	4.4565
2007	664,764	161,818	-277	-67	665,041	161,885	4.1081

Israeli GDP 2001–2007 (\$ million)



According to the statistics of the Bank of Israel, the GDP per capita rose from \$20,100 in 2006 to \$22,500 in 2007 (see table 4/2).

Table 4/2: Israeli GDP per Capita 2000–2007 (\$ thousand)³²

Year	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
GDP per capita	19.2	18.5	16.6	17.3	18.2	18.9	20.1	22.5

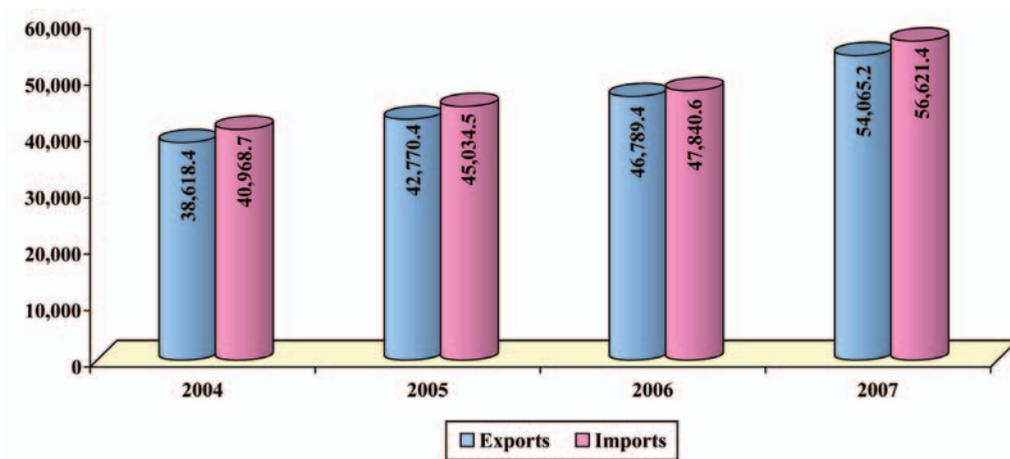
The budget for the year 2007 expected the expenditure to be 294.5 billion shekels (approximately \$70 billion).³³ During the year 2007, Israel’s gross external debt increased by about \$2.52 billion to reach by the end of the year about \$89.95 billion.³⁴

The value of the Israeli exports for the year 2007 totaled about \$54.07 billion, compared to about \$46.79 billion in 2006, i.e., a 15.6% increase. As for the imports of 2007, they totaled \$56.62 billion, compared to about \$47.84 billion in 2006, i.e., an increase of 18.4%. Thus, the year 2007 repeated the stereotyped pattern of increase in the deficit of the Israeli balance of trade (see table 5/2).

Table 5/2: Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2004–2007 (\$ million)³⁵

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007
Exports	38,618.4	42,770.4	46,789.4	54,065.2
Imports	40,968.7	45,034.5	47,840.6	56,621.4

Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2004–2007 (\$ million)



The USA kept its position as Israel's largest. The 2007 Israeli exports to the USA totaled about \$18.89 billion, about 35% of the total Israeli exports. As for the Israeli imports from the USA, they totaled in 2007, about \$7.85 billion, about 13.9% of the total Israeli imports. To a large extent, Israel compensated its trade deficit with most of its trade partners through its surplus trade with the USA, about \$11 billion. This constitutes a major support to the Israeli economy (see table 6/2).

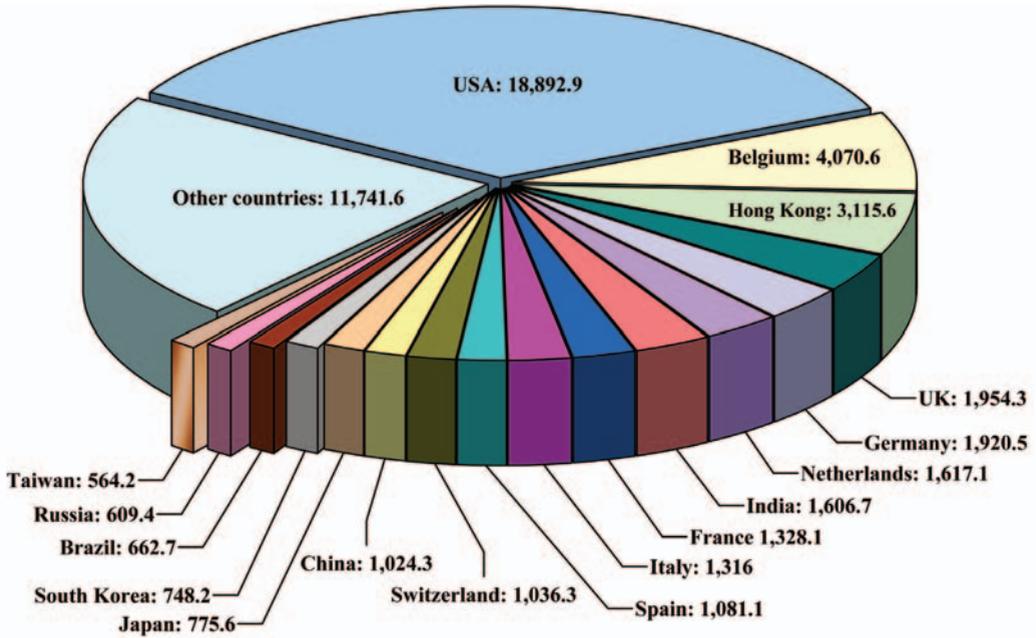
Belgium had also maintained its position as the second trading partner with Israel, as the Israeli exports to it totaled about \$4.07 billion, while the value of Israeli import from it was about \$4.46 billion. Belgium had been placed in this advanced position seemingly because of the trade in diamond and other expensive minerals.

Besides the USA and Belgium, the other major importing countries of Israeli goods were in this descending order: Hong Kong (about \$3.12 billion), UK (about \$1.95 billion), Germany (about \$1.92 billion), Netherlands (about \$1.62 billion), followed by India, France, Italy and Spain. As for the major countries from which Israel imported goods during the year 2007, they were in a descending order Germany (about \$3.484 billion), China (about \$3.477 billion), Switzerland (about \$2.88 billion), then UK (about \$2.68 billion), followed by Italy, Netherlands, Japan then Hong Kong (see table 6/2).

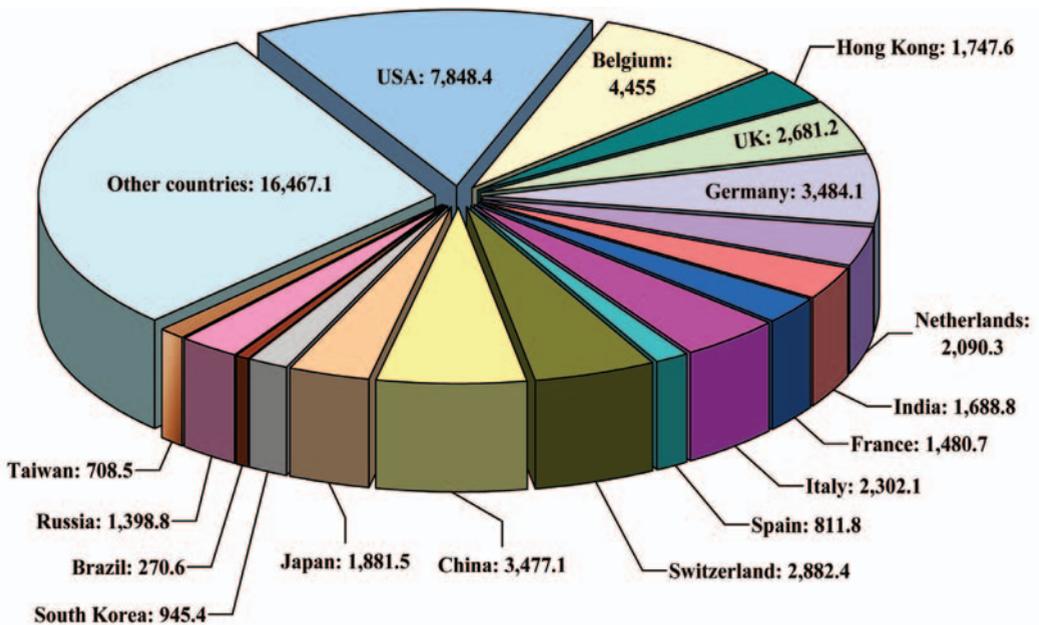
**Table 6/2: Israeli Exports and Imports with Selected Countries
2004–2007 (\$ million)³⁶**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2007	2006	2005	2004	2007	2006	2005	2004
USA	18,892.9	17,957.2	15,500.1	14,175.1	7,848.4	5,919.5	6,042.1	6,099.1
Belgium	4,070.6	3,068.4	3,679.5	2,898.1	4,455	3,936.9	4,557.7	4,130.8
Hong Kong	3,115.6	2,776.1	2,373.6	1,907.7	1,747.6	1,527.5	1,277.7	1,178.3
UK	1,954.3	1,601.7	1,649.9	1,447.8	2,681.2	2,458.6	2,552.1	2,482.8
Germany	1,920.5	1,757.9	1,345.9	1,361	3,484.1	3,201.4	2,986	3,090.2
Netherlands	1,617.1	1,312.2	1,259.7	1,232.8	2,090.3	1,786.8	1,626.7	1,483.8
India	1,606.7	1,289.4	1,222.8	1,037.9	1,688.8	1,433.7	1,276.2	1,107.7
France	1,328.1	1,092.2	882.6	764	1,480.7	1,301.5	1,203.8	1,248.9
Italy	1,316	1,072.7	897.8	810	2,302.1	1,839.4	1,733.7	1,565.7
Spain	1,081.1	903	687.8	616.2	811.8	749	613.7	652.3
Switzerland	1,036.3	809	900.3	782.3	2,882.4	2,805.9	2,464.7	2,682.1
China	1,024.3	958.8	747.9	786.9	3,477.1	2,427.7	1,888.3	1,418.4
Japan	775.6	792.8	799.1	782.3	1,881.5	1,292.3	1,238.1	1,197
South Korea	748.2	650	449.8	417.7	945.4	893.6	852.7	759.9
Brazil	662.7	465.7	467.3	488	270.6	209.4	166.5	207
Russia	609.4	524.6	417.6	319.1	1,398.8	1,141.6	1,055.7	688
Taiwan	564.2	589.8	602.3	587.6	708.5	617	553.4	498.6
Other countries	11,741.6	9,167.9	8,886.4	8,203.9	16,467.1	14,298.8	12,945.4	10,478.1
Total	54,065.2	46,789.4	42,770.4	38,618.4	56,621.4	47,840.6	45,034.5	40,968.7

Israeli Exports to Selected Countries 2007 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Selected Countries 2007 (\$ million)



The industrial products, including electronics and machinery, top the Israeli exports list, followed by diamond. Raw materials top the imports list followed by rough diamond, polished diamond, and fuel (see tables 7/2 and 8/2).

Table 7/2: Israeli Exports by Commodity Group 2006–2007 (\$ million)³⁷

Year	Agricultural	Manufacturing	Diamonds		Others	Total
			Polished	Rough		
2006	1,031.2	29,089.1	6,609.7	2,676.8	293.7	39,700.5
2007	1,347.6	34,004.1	7,094	3,373.2	70.8	45,889.7

Table 8/2: Israeli Imports by Commodity Group 2006–2007 (\$ million)³⁸

Year	Consumer goods	Raw materials	Investment goods	Fuels	Diamonds rough and polished net	Others	Total
2006	5,900.5	18,517.5	6,573.4	7,455.6	8,659.1	211.7	47,317.8
2007	7,512.4	21,393.8	8,031.2	8,935.2	9,642.1	588.9	56,103.6

Though viewed as one of the rich and developed countries, Israel continued to receive an American subsidy, which totaled \$2.5 billion in 2007, of which \$2.34 billion was a military grant, compared to about \$2.53 billion in 2006. According to a report by the Congressional Research Services (CRS), the American aid that Israel received during the period 1949–2007 totaled about \$101.191 billion, though the author’s calculation of the amounts extended during the same period, as mentioned in this very source, totaled slightly less than the figure given by the CRS; i.e., \$101.188 billion (see table 9/2).³⁹

Table 9/2: American Aid to Israel 1949–2007 (\$ million)

Period	1949–1958	1959–1968	1969–1978	1979–1988	1989–1998	1999–2007
Total	599.6	727.8	11,426.5	29,933.9	31,551.9	26,947.8

During the periods 1949–1967 and 1968–1978, the value of the American aid to Israel totaled \$1.18 billion and about \$11.53 billion, respectively. From the conclusion of Camp David Accords in 1979 to the signature of Oslo Accords in 1993, it was about \$45.93 billion, while it totaled during the period 1994–2007 the sum of \$42.5 billion.⁴⁰

With the tangible improvement of the Israeli economy in the mid 1990s, the rationale for the American economic aid had become less convincing. Hence, the then Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu suggested in 1998 that the American government gradually reduce over the next 10 years, starting 2000, the \$1.2 billion American annual economic aid by the sum of \$120 million per year. On the other hand, the USA should increase its military aid to Israel by an annual sum of \$60 million during the same period, so that it will grow within the 10 years from \$1.8 billion to \$2.4 billion. In August 2007, the USA declared the increase of its military aid to Israel by the sum of \$6 billion during the next 10 years so that it will total \$3.1 billion annually by 2018.⁴¹ This reflects the close US strategic relation with Israel, and the US insistence to support Israel regardless of its military and economic superiority.

3. Military Indicators

The Israeli military institution had experienced in 2007 the repercussions of the country's war with Lebanon in the summer of 2006. Israel tried to extract lessons from this war that forced the Israeli military to review its theories and field performance. Criticism was extended to a number of the senior officials and military leaders who were compelled to resign, e.g., Amir Peretz who quitted his defense portfolio and his leadership to the Labor Party to be replaced by the former Chief of Staff and Premier, General Barak. The Commander in Chief of the Israeli naval force, David Ben Bashat also resigned on 26/7/2007. Israel had become engaged in preparations for a possible war to restore its image and credibility versus Hizbullah, and for a possible strike of Iran's nuclear facilities. Moreover, it closely monitored the inter-Palestinian conflict and the supremacy of Hamas in GS, and entertained the invasion of GS.

The Lebanese war ended the theory of swift victory through a surprise attack, and led to the reconsideration of the role of the air force in military battles. It has no longer been viewed as a decisive factor in achieving victory, but reverted to its normal supportive role to prepare the ground and provide air cover for the land forces. Hence, Israeli military circles had engaged in extensive discussions, particularly after the summer of 2007, during which it was credibly argued that the conventional military plan, that had given since 2003 priority to the air force over all other forces, and squeezed the budget of the land force by about 30%, and abolished some of its military units, proved to be erroneous. To overcome

the shortcoming, the army leadership has become convinced of the necessity to increase the budget of the land force, to keep the infantry units that were about to be disbanded, and to develop the tanks and the infantry weapons.⁴²

By September 2007, the military leadership endorsed the five–year Israeli military procurement plan, known as Tefen 2012, which provided for the purchase of extensive and modern defensive and offensive weapons: American stealth fighter jets, modern warships, hundreds of new armored personnel carriers, and numerous planes without pilots. The plan gave priority to the ground forces, but adequately strengthened the air and naval forces. It also provided for the continuation of the manufacturing of Merkava Mark 4 main battle tanks, the strengthening of the tanks defense system, and the manufacturing of hundreds of armored personnel carriers. Additionally, the plan stipulated for the provision of a squadron of 25 stealth–capable F-35 Strike Fighters, anti-missile defenses will be incorporated in the modern tanks. It also emphasized the importance of training and the intelligence.⁴³

By early 2007, the project of Merkava tank was about to be closed, which would have negatively affected 200 factories that employed about 10 thousand workers.⁴⁴ However, the inclination of the new military strategy to strengthen the land forces saved the project, on condition that some modifications and improvements will be incorporated in the modern tanks. The military leadership decided to introduce an Active Protection System (APS), known as “Wind Coat,” which designed to supplement the armor of both light and heavy armored fighting vehicles, which intercepts and destroys incoming missiles and rockets with a shotgun-like blast. It includes also fire-control. It was decided to construct 100 of this defensive system by early 2008.⁴⁵

Within the general orientation of the military plan, the administration of RAFAEL Armament Development Authority announced on 10/8/2007 that it will start after one year and half the deployment of a new missile to intercept the Qassam and the short-range Katyusha rockets. This project, known as the “Iron Dome,” was expected to enable the radar warning system, the Red Dawn (*Shahar Adom*) and Israeli radar manufactured by Altra Company to detect a rocket or missile and then send a counter missile to destroy them in the air.⁴⁶ In November 2007, the Israeli Ministry of Defense announced that it will develop, with an American subsidy of \$155 million, a new anti-missile defense system, known as “David’s Sling,” that would be capable of intercepting different kinds of the locally made Palestinian

missiles as well as long range missiles with nuclear heads.⁴⁷ However, it seems that some senior Israel officers were not absolutely convinced of the efficiency of these systems. The leader of the Israeli Air Force had said in this respect that it will be sheer dreaming for anyone to assume that we can crush once and for all those who fire the resistance missiles.⁴⁸

To strengthen the Israeli missile capability, it was said that the air force planned to buy a big number of American offensive missiles, a \$100 million worth, equipped with a low cost navigation system which will convert a bomb from a fired bomb to an smart bomb directed by the satellite.⁴⁹ The air force had also negotiated with the Israeli air industry to purchase LORA land-land missiles whose range reached one thousand kilometers, and can be an alternative to planes.⁵⁰ By the end of August 2007, there were news of an American–Israeli deal by which Israel would purchase American modern air and naval missiles, including 200 AMRAAM medium range air to air missile, 500 Sidewinder air to air short range missiles and 30 naval Harpoon missiles. The total cost of this deal was said to be \$334 million.⁵¹

By the end of March 2007, Israel declared its intention to purchase a hundred of the F-35 plane, which is reputed to be the primary American war plane in the future. If materialized, Israel will receive the first of these planes, which value \$47 million per plane, in 2014.⁵² The Israeli war industry had also started manufacturing solar powered drones that can stay over the skies of the targeted countries for long a period.⁵³ And in order to monitor the Iranian nuclear project, it was announced that the preparations had started in Israel to launch a TecSar satellite by September 2007, which is capable of photographing very small targets and sending their photos under any weather condition.⁵⁴

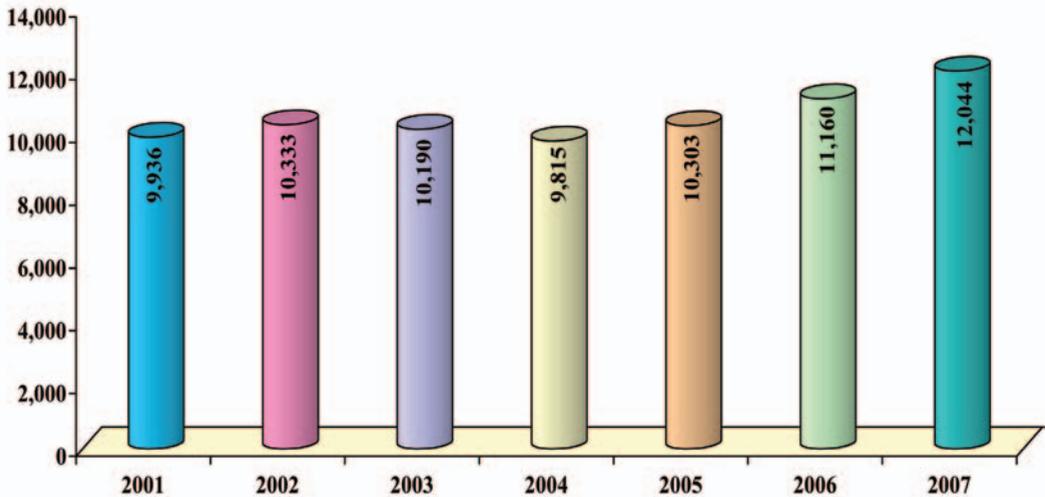
It is difficult to accurately specify the Israeli military budget. Some items of the military expenditure were not disclosed because of their confidentiality, while many deals of selling or purchasing armaments were secretly undertaken, and the budget had been subjected to review and changes during the course of the year, either to increase or to decrease the allocated funds. Nonetheless, according to the Israeli central statistics office, the budget of the military expenditure for the year 2007 totaled about 49.48 billion shekels (\$12.04 billion). This sum is referred to as the net expenditure, and reached after clearing the revenue of the sales, which amounted to about \$253.2 million in the year 2007. Hence, the actual military expenditure of the year 2007 totaled about \$12.3 billion.⁵⁵ It is thus clear that the

actual value of the military sales was not released. Nonetheless, Israel occupied the fourth position worldwide, after the USA, Russia and France, in the sales of armament, whose value was estimated to be \$4.9 billion annually.⁵⁶ It is said that the military budget for the year 2007 was the highest in Israeli history, and there are indications that the government had increased it after it had been officially approved by the Knesset.⁵⁷

Table 10/2: Official Israeli Military Expenditure 2001–2007⁵⁸

Year	Million shekels	\$ Million
2001	41,788	9,936
2002	48,957	10,333
2003	46,349	10,190
2004	43,989	9,815
2005	46,239	10,303
2006	49,735	11,160
2007	49,476	12,044

Official Israeli Military Expenditure 2001–2007 (\$ million)



The social disintegration and flaccidness in the Israeli society, and the spread of the culture of materialism and consumerism in it had adversely affected the military institution, and made it difficult to recruit suitable youngsters for military service. According to some Israeli sources, about 25% of the Jewish youth escaped

the compulsory military service,⁵⁹ and an internal army report revealed that 14.7% of the soldiers suffer psychological problems.⁶⁰ This is probably one of the reasons for the increased religiosity in the Israeli army. A report published in *Maariv* newspaper of 26/8/2007 claimed that the percentage of religiosity among senior Israeli officer reached 40%, though the religiously committed in the Israeli society at large constituted 7% only. By the early 1980s their percentage in the army was less than that in the Israeli society.⁶¹

Third: Aggression and Resistance

Israel continued during the year 2007 its aggression on the Palestinian people. It took advantage of the schism and the accompanied fighting and lawlessness that had exhausted much of the Palestinian energy, and weakened, even damaged the image of the Palestinian resistance. The resistance operations of the year 2007 were mainly defensive in nature, with an emphasis on launching missiles that had become more accurate and wider in range. Apart from their crippling siege and continuous attacks on GS, Israeli forces continued their occupation of the WB, and took advantage of security coordination and cooperation with the PA during the second half of the year 2007.

However, it is essential to record that Israeli sources, as well as their Palestinian counterparts, give contradictory figures of the number of dead, wounded and the detainees. However, out of necessity, the discourse had finally opted for the below specific numbers.

During 2007, 412 Palestinians were killed by Israeli forces, of whom 315 were from GS and 97 from the WB, including Jerusalem. The occupation forces conducted 38 assassinations in which 67 Palestinians were killed, including 42 minors of less than 18 years old. There were 1,500 wounded and 69 citizens have died; 13 perished on Israeli military crossings, and 56 because they were denied to exist from GS to receive medical treatment aboard. The death toll of the Palestinian civilians was at least 131 killed.⁶²

According to the Shabak, 13 Israelis died in Palestinian operations, and the Palestinian resistance launched 1,263 missiles and fired 1,511 mortar bombs that killed two Israelis and wounded 300. The Shabak claimed that it aborted

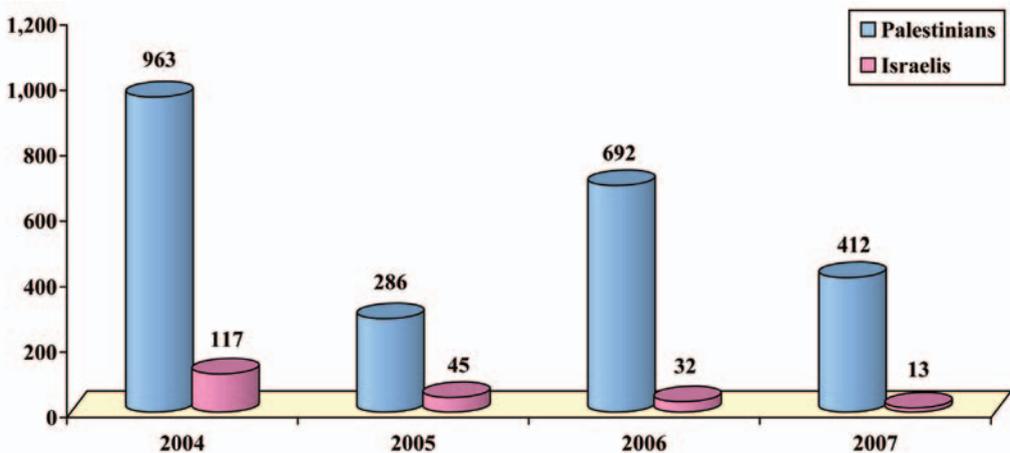
29 “self-immolation”* operations, arrested 220 Palestinians who are suspected to participate in planning operations against the occupiers, and uncovered 12 tunnels of which four were dug towards the Israeli side.⁶³

The occupation forces conducted 1,466 penetration operations in the towns, villages and camps of the WB during which 2,800 Palestinians were arrested, including 15 women and 170 children.⁶⁴ Moreover, the occupation forces continued their attack on the medical teams, and obstructed the transportation of the wounded to the hospitals. The Palestinian Red Crescent recorded 520 attacks on its medical teams during the year 2007.⁶⁵

Table 11/2: The Killed and Wounded among the Palestinians and the Israelis 2004–2007⁶⁶

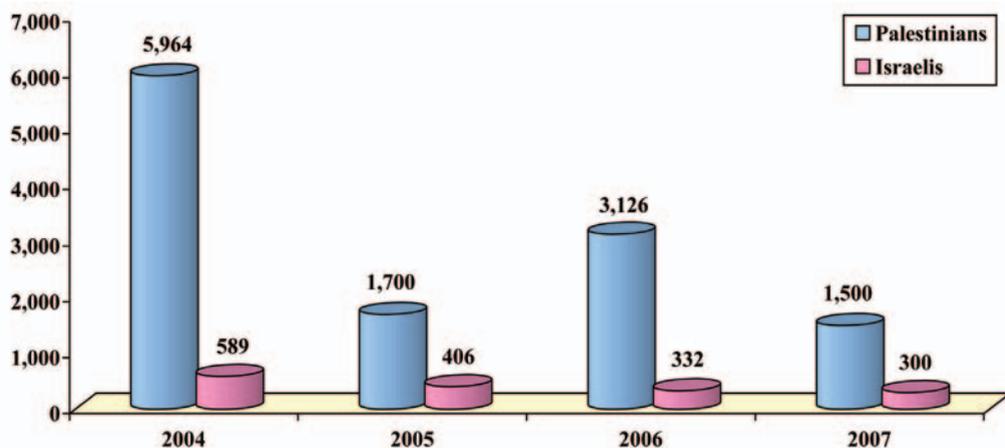
Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinians	Israelis	Palestinians	Israelis
2004	963	117	5,964	589
2005	286	45	1,700	406
2006	692	32	3,126	332
2007	412	13	1,500	300

The Killed among the Palestinians and the Israelis 2004–2007



*The overwhelming majority of Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims are considering these operations as “martyrdom operations” while most Israelis and western writers and media are considering them as “suicide operations”. We used the word “self-immolation” in this report to be as neutral as possible. However, such terms may need more discussions.

The Wounded among the Palestinians and the Israelis 2004–2007



The Palestinian Ministry of Detainees and Ex-detainees Affairs considered the year 2007 the worst of all years for the prisoners. For by its end 11,550 were detained in the occupation prisons, of whom 10,485 were from the WB, 860 from GS and 140 from the 1948 occupied Palestine, in addition to many Arab prisoners and others from the Golan. Among those detainees, 4,950 were sentenced, 5,600 awaited trials and 950 were administrative detainees. There are 700 detainees who were sentenced to one or more life imprisonments.

During the year 2007, the occupation authorities arrested 7,495 Palestinians, of whom 6,670 were from the WB and 825 from GS. In the very same year, 45 ministers and members of the PLC, including Maryam Salih, the first female member of the parliament to be arrested, as well as mayors and members of the municipal councils. With the arrest of Ahmad al-Haj, the detained members of the PLC and the ex-ministers totaled 52. Of the 47 detained members of the PLC, 42 were of the list of reform and change (Hamas), and four from Fatah, of whom three were arrested before the legislative elections, and one, Ahmad Sa'dat, belonged to the PFLP.

The number of the sick detainees in Israeli detention centers rose from 1,000 in 2006 to 1,250 in 2007. Women prisoners totaled 114, of whom 110 were from the WB, and four from GS. Among the detained women, 62 were sentenced to imprisonment, 48 were awaiting trials and four were administratively detained. The number of children and minors below 18 years in Israeli jails were 330 of whom 155 were sentenced, 48 awaiting trials and six administratively detained.⁶⁷

Table 12/2: The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails 2007

No. of detainees on 1/1/2007	No. of detainees on 31/12/2007	Detainees during 2007		No. of women by the end of 2007	No. of children by the end of 2007
		WB	GS		
11,000	11,550	6,670	825	114	330

Table 13/2: The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails according to Geographic Locations by the End of 2007

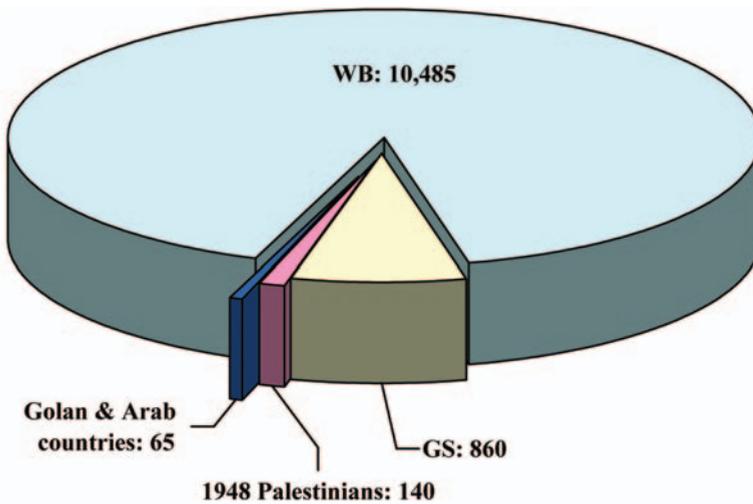
WB	GS	1948 Palestinians	Golan & Arab countries	Total
10,485	860	140	65	11,550

Table 14/2: The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails according to Their Legal Status by the End of 2007

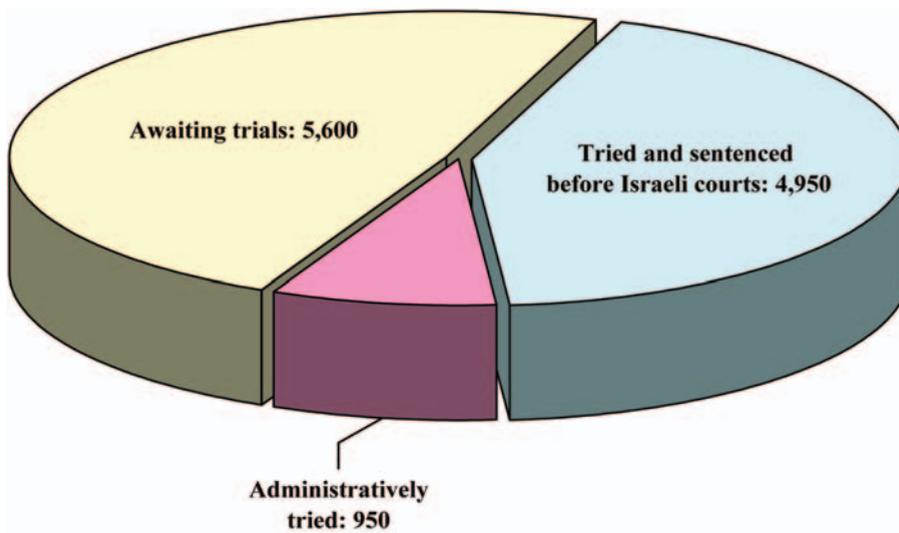
Tried and sentenced before Israeli courts	Administratively tried	Awaiting trials	Total
4,950	950	5,600	11,500*

* The Ministry of Detainees was unable to specify the legal status of 50 detainees.

The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails according to Geographic Locations by the End of 2007



The Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Jails according to Their Legal Status by the End of 2007



The Israeli policy towards the detainees was to all intents and purposes vicious in the sense that whenever a group is released amongst a noisy media propaganda, others would be immediately arrested. This meant increasing, rather than decreasing, their numbers and hardships in Israeli prisons. During the second half of 2007, Israel released 780 detainees in three groups, whose majority were from Fatah and with light imprisonment periods. But, for example, three weeks after releasing the first group of 255 prisoners under the guise of “good intentions,” Israel arrested 350 other Palestinians,⁶⁸ let alone the thousands detainees throughout the year 2007.

During the year 2007 six detainees were killed in Israeli prisons because of medial negligence, or were directly fired at, while three others were murdered in cold blood.⁶⁹ Israeli authorities brutally suppressed the detainees’ protests that demanded their human rights, of which the most violent was the merciless crushing of an uprising in the prison of the Negev Desert in which Muhammad al-Ashqar was killed and more than 250 others were wounded. Additionally, the personal belongings of the detainees were burned down in one section of the prison.⁷⁰

Fourth: The Israeli Stand on the Internal Palestinian Situation

The gist of the Israeli position towards the internal Palestinian developments during the year 2007 may be summarized in the following:

1. Total rejection of Hamas' leadership or its participation in the government, and the strife to secure its downfall by all means.
2. The continuation of detaining the representatives of Hamas in the PLC in order to paralyze its activities.
3. Encouragement of the internal Palestinian schism, and rejection of Mecca Agreement and the government of national unity, while supporting the Palestinian presidency and some groups affiliated to Fatah in their confrontation with Hamas.
4. Continuation of the brutal siege imposed on the Palestinians in order to humiliate them and compel them to accept the pro-Israeli political options.
5. The exploitation of the internal Palestinian conflicts and the lack of law and order to tarnish the image of the Palestinian struggle and resistance, separate between GS and the WB, weaken the Palestinian negotiating position and secure the maximum possible concessions, and to continue the policies of the settlements and judiazation of the occupied lands.

Being the most beneficiary from the Palestinian schism, the Israelis closely and anxiously observed the lack of law and order and fighting between Fatah and Hamas. Though actually doing their utmost best, economically and politically, to secure the downfall of Hamas government, they pretended not to be part of the conflict.

Since the beginning of the year 2007, Israeli officials never concealed their jubilation of the internal Palestinian feuds, and their concern by a possible deal between the two sides. An Israeli official reiterated that the fighting confirmed to the world “how correct we were when we said that they are not qualified to govern a state, and are immature to conclude peace treaties.” He expected a prolonged fight that would end any possibility for a government of national unity between Hamas and Fatah.⁷¹ Olmert expressed his concern by the possible meeting between ‘Abbas and Khalid Mish‘al,⁷² while the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs warned

‘Abbas against any agreement with Hamas by claiming that “It would not only be futile but will also lead to another impasse.”⁷³ Chairman of the Likud Party and the Leader of opposition Binyamin Netanyahu was even blunter, as he openly called, in the opening session of Herzliya Conference on 21/1/2007, for the downfall of Hamas “to open the door for a more moderate Palestinian force,” and emphasized that the collapse of Hamas constituted “a pivotal Israeli objective.”⁷⁴

Israel was, on the other hand, extremely concerned that Hamas may be the winner in the confrontations. Minister Ze’ev Boim cautioned that “the Palestinian fighting might backlash on Israel, especially if Hamas had the upper hand,” which “would necessitate an Israeli intervention to prevent the transformation of GS into another Lebanon.”⁷⁵ Meanwhile, there was a consensus within the Israeli government not to directly and flagrantly interfere in the fighting between Fatah and Hamas lest it develops into an Israeli–Palestinian confrontation. Nonetheless, Olmert openly declared that he “prefers the victory of the President of the PA Mahmud ‘Abbas.”⁷⁶

The Israeli leaders exhibited their disapproval of Mecca Agreement. For it does not only unite the Palestinian internal front but also denies Israel the opportunity of making use of the Palestinian schism, provides Hamas and its led-government with an Arab umbrella, and opens the gate, at least partially, for lifting the European and international political and economic embargo on the Palestinian government and people.

Tzipi Livni, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, viewed Mecca Agreement as disappointing because it did not lead to any change in Hamas’ political stand, but, on the contrary, it “imposed its conditions on Fatah.”⁷⁷ Olmert also expressed his fury over Mecca Agreement and the selection of Isma’il Haniyyah for the premiership.⁷⁸ He added that Israel is in agreement with the USA to boycott the Palestinian government of national unity, which they will never recognize or cooperate with until and unless it accepts the conditions of the Quartet.⁷⁹ Both Israel and the USA had hastened to exercise pressure on many European states and the other international powers who indicated that they may recognize and cooperate with the government of national unity. The outcome of this drive was the continuation of the boycott of the government and the siege of the Palestinian people.

The Israeli worry was reflected in its declared intention to cancel a prior arranged meeting between ‘Abbas, Olmert and Condoleezza Rice on the pretext that Mecca

Agreement had aborted it before holding it, but the USA expressed its desire to hold the meeting on time.⁸⁰ However, rather than being a negotiation forum, it turned into a platform to air Israeli–American anger with President ‘Abbas. Yossi Beilin, the President of Meretz Party had even dared to advise ‘Abbas not to attend the meeting to avoid the Israeli “reprimand.” Concurrently, the Minister of Interior Roni Bar-On, called for the intensification of the pressure on ‘Abbas, but warned of the dire consequences of his boycott as this would push him into the “hands of Hamas.”⁸¹

After the formation of the Palestinian unity government under the premiership of Isma‘il Haniyyah, the Israeli government issued a communiqué in which it expressed its hostile stand towards the new government, which crystallized in the following points:⁸²

1. As long as the Palestinian government, as spelled out in its political program, does not accept the conditions of the international community, which are based on the recognition of the existence of Israel and the “refutation of terrorism,” Israel will not deal with this government or any of its members.
2. Israel will continue to deal with the President of the PA Mahmud ‘Abbas, especially on matters related to security and the improvement of the Palestinian living conditions.
3. As long as the political program of the new government stipulated the legitimacy of “terrorism,” the prospects for a future Palestinian–Israeli deal is farfetched.
4. The president of the PA should “dismantle the terrorist organizations,” and Israel would continue its policy of isolating the new government until it accepts the conditions of the Quartet.

While determined to continue its siege and boycott of the Palestinian government, Israel actively coordinated with the USA on a number of security measures, especially Dayton Plan, in order to secure the downfall of the national unity government. In his meeting with ‘Abbas on 15/4/2007, in which the pro-‘Abbas Palestinians explained in details the security plan concluded between the Palestinian presidency and the American Security Coordinator Keith Dayton. Olmert expressed Israel’s support to Dayton Plan of training and arming the Presidential Guard. The Israeli Deputy Minister of Defense Efraim Sneh, with

whom the plan was discussed, said that the strengthening of ‘Abbas Presidential Guard “explicitly meant the strengthening of the moderate forces versus Hamas and Islamic Jihad.” He added that any drive to stop the smuggling of weapons will be in Israel’s interest.⁸³

With great relief, Israel observed the stumbling of the national unity government, the resignation of the Minister of Interior Hani al-Qawasmī and the violent internal fighting that erupted in mid May 2007. Interestingly, the May 2007 intensification of the Israeli military activities in GS had so amazingly coincided with the intensification of the internal fighting, that had been masterminded by some Palestinian quarters affiliated to Fatah, presumably as an initiation of the implementation of Dayton Plan. During that month 66 Palestinians killed by Israeli fire, of whom 55 were from GS. Observers had inquisitively observed that the toll of killed during the previous five month (1/12/2006–30/4/2007) was 73, of whom 21 only were from GS.⁸⁴

In the same month, May 2007, Hamas launched a barrage of missiles against the Israeli settlements to concentrate on the real enemy of the Palestinians. According to a senior source in the Israeli Ministry of Defense, the military commentator of Channel 10 said that the Israeli army decided to respond to these missiles “on condition that this action will not negatively affect the continuation of the fighting between the two Palestinian movements.” Similarly, according to the Israeli Hebrew broadcasting service, a senior source in Olmert’s office said, “Israel has a major interest in the continuation of the internal fighting because it will weaken Hamas,” and the director of the Shabak, Yuval Diskin, said that the biggest and most successful military operation that the Israeli army may launch against the resistance movements in GS “could not achieve better results than the internal Palestinian fighting.”⁸⁵

The Israeli political expert Ehud Yaari said that Hamas’ missile attacks on Sderot can be sabotaged by a trio plan:

1. The destruction of Hamas and putting it under local, Arab, and international siege.
2. The exhaustion and attrition of Hamas in order to enable Dahlan to impose his control and to implement Dayton Plan.
3. To provide one billion dollar fund to rebuild a new and strong Palestinian security apparatus under the leadership of Dahlan.

Yaari opined that Fatah, in his words, “the weak and flaccid” will be rebuilt to know whether it can govern or not? He added that some of its leaders, like Jibril al-Rajub, obstructed Dahlan’s work in GS, and hindered the drive to control Hamas. He felt that a one-year plan was in the making to reform and strengthen Fatah Movement. Meanwhile, Israel will continue its strife to destroy Hamas.⁸⁶

However, Israel and the USA failed to suppress Hamas, which controlled GS in mid June 2007. The senior commentator Nahum Barnea in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* commented on this development by writing, “The Palestinian internal fighting that Israel hoped for since many years had finally materialized. But alas it developed in the wrong direction... It is Hamas that crushed Fatah.”⁸⁷ Ehud Yaari, a military analyst of the Second Channel of the Israeli Television, said that the forces that Dahlan built in GS, with American funding and Israeli agreement and support, had, in his words, “collapsed exactly like a paper tower.”⁸⁸

Despite the Israeli frustration, ‘Abbas’ summary dissolution of the government of national unity, his formation of an emergency government in Ramallah, and consolidation of the Palestinian political and geographical division between the WB and GS opened the gate for Israel to take advantage of the new reality. Hence, Olmert said that the status quo “gave Israel a long awaited opportunity... This opened a new avenue,” and added that he “will work diligently to make use of this development.”⁸⁹ He continued to say that the strategy that he and Bush had agreed upon “dictates substantial support to ‘Abbas,” though, correspondingly, Israel and the USA will do their utmost best to “block any contact between Hamas and Fatah.”⁹⁰

Israel welcomed ‘Abbas’ formation of the emergency government and the various decrees and measures that he took against Hamas. Moreover, it expressed its relief for the “determined” move of security forces led by Fatah in the WB against Hamas’ activities and institutions. Israel viewed the emergency government as a viable peace partner, and decided to gradually lift the economic blockade on the WB, hand over the funds that it froze to Fayyad’s government,⁹¹ and, as a declaration of “good intention,” released hundreds of the Palestinian detainees in Israeli jails.

Israel cooperated with the emergency cum provisional government on political, economic and security matters. It also provided, directly or indirectly, a great service to the authority in Ramallah by detaining Hamas’ members of the PLC

of the WB, which paralyzed the Hamas-controlled PLC which, if convened, had the power to dismiss Fayyad's government and to nullify all 'Abbas decrees and measures. Hence, Ramallah continued with its fait accompli, and it pursued its program of coordination and negotiation with Israel. Meanwhile, Israeli authorities continued their siege of GS and drove to secure the downfall of Haniyyah's dismissed government by all means.

Israel expressed its satisfaction with the extreme position of the Palestinian presidency towards Hamas, and was keen to deepen the Palestinian schism. The peace negotiations continued systematically until they culminated in Annapolis Conference on 27/11/2007. Meanwhile, Israel threatened to stop its contacts with 'Abbas and Ramallah's government if they renewed their contacts with Hamas.⁹² Olmert said that 'Abbas "categorically told me that there will be no peace with them [Hamas]... We will always fight them... I hope that he will abide by this promise."⁹³ Later, Livni commented that she knows that the international community is keen for a kind of understanding between Fatah and Hamas, but added, "this is fallacious, this is wrong, a big, a grave mistake."⁹⁴ The policy of consolidating the power of Abu Mazin and Fayyad and to weaken and isolate Hamas remained one of the major characteristics of Israeli policy during the second half of the year 2007.⁹⁵

One of the rare and astonishing aspects of coordination between Israel and Ramallah's authority was their successful joint effort to obstruct a Qatari initiated anti-Israeli draft resolution that the Security Council was about to pass, and which called for the declaration of GS "a humanitarially catastrophic region." Ironically, the main heading of the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* of 1/8/2007 read as follows: "Palestinians in the service of Israel in the UN." The newspaper reported that 'Abbas said, "I will never allow Hamas to have any footing in the world through achievements in the Security Council." *Maariv* added that 'Abbas demanded that GS be driven into a real humanitarian crisis so that he can hold Hamas squarely responsible.⁹⁶

On the other side, Israel was extremely disturbed that Hamas remained steadfast in GS, and that Fatah was unlikely to dislodge it.⁹⁷ Israel also never concealed its anxiety of Hamas' continued popularity and strength in the WB, despite the fact that due to the pressures of both Israel and Ramallah, Hamas couldn't express its full strength. In what appeared to be an incitement against Hamas, *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper reported that some officials in the Israeli Ministry of Defense had

said in early September 2007 that a recent evaluation revealed that Hamas' strength in the WB equaled that of Fatah, and that Hamas constituted an imminent threat to President 'Abbas's security forces. The newspaper added that the Israeli military institution was "gravely anxious of the possibility of the collapse of Fatah forces as had happened in Gaza."⁹⁸ According to Channel two of Israel Broadcasting Service, the Israeli fears had increased after a campaign launched by the Israeli army in the camp of 'Ain Beit al-Ma' near Nablus, which revealed the tremendous strength of Hamas' infrastructure in the WB that had, according to senior Israeli military officials in the middle region, "astonished the army and the Shabak."⁹⁹

Israel had threatened more than once to invade GS if Hamas continued to control it and the launching of missiles continued against Israeli targets. Nevertheless, it opted for the rest of the year 2007 to continue its tight siege and assassination operations, and to strike specific targets. Amongst the Israeli measures were gradual decrease of electricity supply, basic foodstuffs and fuel in addition to raw materials for factories and workshops. Consequently, these will lead to total paralysis in GS, which may incite the people to rise against Hamas and its government. Moreover, Israel declared Hamas a "hostile entity" and ordered the stoppage of bank transfers.¹⁰⁰

Apart from the possibility of a military failure, Israel was repeatedly warned that a total military invasion of GS might have a negative impact on the Palestinian presidency and the government of Fayyad in Ramallah. Ami Ayalon, a minister and the former president of the Shabak, felt that such a widespread military operation would inflict a decisive blow on 'Abbas, strengthen Hamas and Iran and may provoke the supporters of Fatah to defend their homes and properties. Moreover, Ami Ayalon opined that the targeting of Hamas' infrastructure in such a violent manner would abort Annapolis, strengthen Iran and Hizbullah, and may compel 'Abbas to resign. He also cautioned that a comprehensive invasion is inter-related to two vital conditions: First, its justification must be "convincing," and secondly the political and strategic course must be pursued in such a way that the brutal consequences of the battle should not outweigh the justification of undertaken it.¹⁰¹ Hence, the issue of the best option to deal with GS remained a source of heated controversy in Israeli circles, especially in the light of its possible impact on the internal Palestinian situation and the Israeli interests.

Fifth: The Political Settlement Track

The Arab–Israeli conflict had experienced consecutive rounds of both substantive and nominal negotiations, and several tracks for concluding a peace settlement had emerged. The negotiation process had been subjected in all its stages to several local, regional and international variables that had clear impact on the positions of the negotiating partners and on the rounds of negotiations themselves, of which we enumerate the following:¹⁰²

1. The internal situation of the conflicting partners, whether the Arab or the Israeli side. The Arab scene was characterized by disintegration and lack of will for a joint Arab action, but the focus here will be on the Israeli side. The Israeli leadership during the year 2007 was rather new and lacked sufficient knowledge and understanding of the political and security issues at stake.

The Israeli leadership suffered from the humiliation of the war on Lebanon, and from the endless investigations on corruption. Olmert faced many competitors who were anxious to replace him, while the coalition government was so fragile that it may collapse at any time over the issue of the peace settlement. On this vein, two of the main coalition partners warned that they will quit the coalition. Yisrael Beitenu Party, which had 11 seats in the Knesset, declared that it will withdraw from the government if excessive concessions were given to the Palestinians on the issues of the settlements and the Palestinian state, while the religious party Shas, which had 12 seats in the Knesset, had also threatened to quit over any compromise on Jerusalem or the refugees. Thus, the government was perplexed and unable to patronize specific stances on the issue of the peace settlement.¹⁰³ Conversely, other quarters insisted on the military option to impose a peace settlement on the Arab side, particularly the increasingly unpopular military institution, whose interests and gains were liable to be negatively affected by a peace settlement.¹⁰⁴

2. The regional situation, which was overwhelmed by four major crises: the American occupation of Iraq, the Iranian nuclear issue, the Lebanese crisis and the Fatah– Hamas dispute over power in Palestine.

3. The international situation and the bitter rivalry during the cold war between the major powers over the region that ended by the undisputed American hegemony on it and the absence of any competitor on the international level; while Europe tried on its own accord to be an international partner in the series of attempts to strike a peace settlement in the region.

Hence, the Israeli objective behind the negotiations and the peace process was to have the least degree of political stability in the region, and to employ the negotiation process to contain the hotbeds of tension via the least possible military operations and with the minimum cost. To cover up the inability to reach to a viable settlement, the negotiations had thus dragged on, but in a more organized and diversified manner. The objective focused on having a truce and trying to extend the peace periods, rather than having a real peace settlement.

While Israel had previously responded to Madrid's slogan of "peace for land" by patronizing "peace for peace" slogan, its current dogmatic objective is to alter the principle of "negotiations for the sake of peace" to the principle of "negotiations for the sake of negotiations" in order to maintain the status quo without concluding substantive and viable settlements on the ground.¹⁰⁵

Some of the Israeli leaders tried to exploit the peace process to achieve personal and partisan objectives. Olmert, for example, had made use of this process to strengthen his internal position at a time when his popularity had eroded to its lowest ebb during the year 2007. He saw in the peace settlement a convenient means to overcome his increasing internal problems. He accepted the calls for international conferences to appear as an advocate of peace while he very well knew that these forums will not impose on Israel any concessions. In his judgment, such a strategy would enable him to kill two birds with one stone, namely to pose as the champion of the Israeli fundamentals and thus consolidate his shaky internal reputation, and to concurrently win the support of the USA which favors the peace process.¹⁰⁶ Similarly, Shimon Peres, Barak and Netanyahu had all tried to assert their leadership to their parties by insisting on the Israeli fundamentals.

However, there was a consensus among the leaders of the ruling coalition, Prime Minister Olmert, the Minister of Defense Ehud Barak, the Minister of Foreign Affairs Tzipi Livni, the leader of Shas Party Eliyahu "Eli" Yishai and the leader of the Yisrael Beitenu Party Avigdor Lieberman, to pinpoint the Israeli demands in a peace settlement as follows:¹⁰⁷

1. Any peace settlement should secure first and foremost Israeli's security.
2. To endorse the Road Map with the 14 Israeli reservations. Besides, any settlement should be conditioned on the strict adherence of the Palestinians to their commitments.
3. The PA should dismantle the "terrorist" organizations.
4. Rejection of any agreement of principles regarding the core issues of the conflict, like Jerusalem, the refugees and the borders, except after the implementation of the previous phase.
5. The importance of the participation of Arab states in the peace process, though the actual negotiations should be bilateral between Israel and the PA. Besides, Israel rejected the Arab Initiative as a reference to the negotiations.
6. The "Jewishness" of the state must be guaranteed, thus no concessions would be made on the issues of Jerusalem and the refugees, though a population swapping may be allowed regarding the settlements, the 1948 Arabs and Jerusalem. Moreover, the starting point of the negotiations should be Palestinian recognition that Israel is a "Jewish state."
7. The necessity of terminating the state of conflict in the region to guarantee the security of Israel, and the Palestinian state should continue to be disarmed.
8. Israel is not bound by any specific time frame.¹⁰⁸

Israel depended in any regional peace negotiations on two documents that it viewed as supportive to its stand:¹⁰⁹

1. Bush's message to the former Israeli Premier Sharon that the major settlements would be under Israeli sovereignty.
2. The principles embodied in the Road Map which require that the Palestinians dismantle the infrastructure of "terrorism" prior to the opening of the negotiations.

During the last year, Israel offered a number of political initiatives to satisfy the American side that strived to keep the peace process moving forward. These initiatives had, moreover, aimed at appeasing the Palestinian side, and, hopefully, to indicate to the Israelis that their government do have a peace initiative. Below are the most important of those initiatives:¹¹⁰

1. Shimon Peres's Initiative: It included an Israeli agreement to transfer to the PA an area of land, equivalent to 100% of the lands occupied in 1967, on condition that Israel would keep settlements blocs in 5% of the WB in return for compensating the Palestinian by a similar area in the Negev Desert that is adjacent to GS. A possible swapping of some settlements blocs with some of the Arab villages and towns in the 1948 frontiers. A joint administration of Jerusalem the three monotheistic religions over the holy cites in Jerusalem and the possibility of a joint solution to solve the Diaspora's issue.

2. Haim Ramon's Initiative: In this initiative, Ramon, the deputy premier and a close associate of Ehud Olmert, agreed to an Israeli withdrawal from 70% of the lands of the WB, and to evacuate mostly isolated settlements on condition that this would be followed by fixing a date to begin negotiations for a final-status agreement. He claimed that this proposal was officially endorsed by 'Abbas and the PA.

3. Olmert's Initiative: This initiative declared the intention of an Israeli withdrawal from 90% of the lands of the WB, and provided for a secured tunnel between the WB and GS, maintenance of the major settlements blocs in the WB, the possibility of giving the Palestinians some remote suburbs of Jerusalem to be the capital of their state, but with a joint control of the holy places, and the possible return of the refugees to the state of Palestine but not to Israel. However, the implementation of the provisions of this initiative would depend on the ability of the PA to establish the necessary institutions and to control the state.

4. Tzipi Livni's Initiative: Besides political security, this initiative provided for the opening up of the economic horizon through the establishment of numerous economic projects in the Palestinian state, including infrastructure for electricity and water supply and city planning, and the establishment of a joint project in cooperation with Jordan for the development of Jordan Valley. Besides, the initiative provided for an Israeli withdrawal from 82–90% of the lands occupied in 1967. The initiative was also supported by a proposal by Rani Lubenstein, senior advisor to the Director-General of the Ministry of Finance, which included advising the PA to concentrate on a number of economic projects in order to limit the influence of

the pro-Hamas groups. Livni patronized an amendment to her initiative to bypass the first phase of the Road Map, which requires the termination of violence, to the second one that allowed the establishment of a provisional Palestinian state on condition that the right of return would become null and void.

A close look at these initiatives reveals that they are all indiscriminately based on the Israeli fundamentals that do not accept the pre-1967 borders as the basis of a settlement, and refuses the return of the refugees, the partition of Jerusalem and the dismantling of the settlements. Besides, though presented by some prominent Israeli leaders, these initiatives had never been reduced into concrete plans incorporated in the official program of the government, which indicated that their objective was to pose the Israeli position as perplexed and ambiguous, but without being committal to Israel. They are part and parcel of the slogan of negotiations for the sake of tranquility, and negotiations without any hope of proceeding towards implementation on the ground. Besides, some of these initiatives may have been put on the table to propagate and win support for one or the other of the candidates in the elections.

The attitude of the Israeli public towards the peace settlement had not substantially changed; it remained basically the same as in the previous years, (see table 15/2). The percentage of those who supported the establishment of the Palestinian state on most of the WB and GS was 41%, the lowest of the last three years. Similarly, the percentage of those who supported the return of some regions and the annexation of others was comparatively lower than previous years, only 46%. Moreover, the percentage of those who supported the return of old Jerusalem except *al-Buraq* Wall (Wailing Wall) retracted to 27% while that of those who supported the possible relinquishment of the suburbs of Arab Jerusalem to the Palestinians was reduced to 37%, which, of course, did not include the relinquishment of old Jerusalem. As for those who supported the return of a number of the refugees to Israel the percentage was 17%, higher than for the years 2004 and 2006, but lower than the one for 2005.

Table 15/2: Percentage Support for Various Possible Elements of a Peace Treaty with the Palestinians 2004–2007 (%)¹¹¹

Year	2004	2005	2006	2007
1. A Palestinian state on 95% of the WB and GS with Israel retaining the large settlement blocs	43	46	45	41
2. Giving areas to the Palestinians in return for areas remaining as part of Israel	48	50	54	46
3. Transferring the Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem to the Palestinians, except for the Old City	36	40	45	37
4. The Temple Mount will be given to the Palestinians and the Wailing Wall will be retained by Israel	30	29	28	27
5. A limited number of refugees will be permitted to return to Israel	14	20	16	17
6. Israel will transfer control of the Jordan Valley within a few years	20	24	21	22

The attitude of Israel towards the other international peace plans is briefly presented below:

1. Annapolis Conference

The objective behind the call for Annapolis Conference had right from the beginning provoked controversy and doubt in Israel. The overwhelming view was that the USA called for this conference to support the American president and his troubled administration, and to capitalize and deepen the Palestinian schism after Hamas' control of GS. However, Israel reluctantly declared that it will attend the conference as long as it would not discuss issues of the final status. Moreover, the Israeli government tried to downplay expectations from this conference, and declared that it is a mere get together.

To block the way in front of any American pressure to concede concessions on Jerusalem, the Israeli government had well before the conference called the Knesset to pass a law that required the majority of two thirds for any changes in the status of the city.

During the conference the disassembled and heterogeneous Israeli government succeeded to make the function a platform of public relations to boost its image

and that of the Israeli leadership which had lost the confidence of the Israeli public. It also managed to make the Road Map the main reference of the conference, and to ignore the Arab Initiative. For it had concentrated before the conference on the procedural aspect of the Road Map, and tried to oblige the Palestinians to observe their part of it without giving any undertaken in return. As for the Israeli public, it opined that the conference did not achieve any progress with regard to the peace settlement. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* on 29/11/2007, 50% of the public felt that the conference was a failure, while only 18% considered it to be successful.¹¹²

Israel claimed that the international conference was not for peace per se, but an occasion to formulate some understandings that would facilitate the continuation of the negotiations. To avoid any obligation and gain time, Israel refused any time frame for the negotiations, and argued that they should deal with the generalities not the specifics. It also insisted on the participation of the Arab states in the conference, as this would tantamount to a certificate of good conduct to Israel, and a virtual recognition that it does not constitute danger to the Arab countries.

2. The Stance on the Arab Initiative

Since Israel consider itself to be a leading power in the region and an ally of the great powers, it gave great attention to the Arab Initiative that was concluded in Riyadh in 2007, though it had formally objected to it and asked for its amendment. It viewed the initiative as a preliminary step for a leading Israeli role in the region,¹¹³ particularly so as it was issued in the name of the Arab League and had been masterminded by some Arab states that do not recognize Israel, which is in itself an indication of eventual normalization with Israel. However, while considering the initiative a basis for discussion, Israel had emphasized that it is not a comprehensive plan for a settlement.

There had been a general consensus on the issue of peaceful settlement between the major Israeli political forces, especially Kadima, the Labor Party, Shas and Yisrael Beitenu. No change had occurred whatsoever in their positions on the issues of Jerusalem, the settlements and the right of the refugees, and they all refused to accept the pre-1967 frontiers, though a Palestinian state may be established. The uniformity of the Israeli stand on the issue of peaceful settlement had, in fact, become a popular demand, which had been supported by a broad coalition between the Israeli political parties. Such a united stand was also important to improve the

image of Israel in the world that had been damaged by the course and outcome of the war with Lebanon, and by the repercussions of the Israeli war and siege on GS.

During the course of the year 2007, the programs of the governing coalition parties, and even that of the opposing Likud, had become basically similar, and the debate centered on who should lead Israel to achieve a peaceful settlement with the least concessions. All Israeli leaders were of the opinion that security is pivotal and had to be given precedence over the peace settlement itself. Moreover, they all acknowledged the all important role of the USA in achieving a peace settlement, but insisted that undue American pressure on the Israeli side should be avoided by all means.

Towards the end of 2007, extensive negotiations and many meetings were convened between the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert and the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas to issue a joint Palestinian–Israeli declaration.

Israel viewed these deliberations as a phase in a series of rounds of negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to keep the momentum of a negotiated deal.¹¹⁴ This would reduce the frustration and worry of the Israeli public that resulted from the lack of a settlement, the Lebanese war and the control of Hamas over GS. Moreover, these negotiations and a possible deal would compel Hamas to respond to these developments, and contribute in the peace settlement. Besides, the negotiations would increasingly involve the Arabs in the peace process, and strengthen the moderate forces in the region. Conversely, their failure would further push the “extremists” towards the option of resistance and war.

In conclusion, it may be suggested that a peaceful settlement in the region is still farfetched, and that what had been offered to the Arabs and the Palestinians is far less than the accepted minimum. Meanwhile, Israel will remain enthusiastic to continue the deliberations and discussions in order to intensify the Palestinian schism. Moreover, it will strive to weaken Hamas in GS and support the government of Mahmud ‘Abbas in the WB. Concurrently, rather than depending on the negotiations to determine the Palestinian destiny, Israel creates realities on the ground. Admittedly, there have been a general inclination in Israel not to depend solely on the military strength to achieve a settlement, but the demand to maintain Israel’s striking military capability and its role in achieving a particular settlement on the ground is also glaringly vivid.

On the other side, Israel is aware of the huge threats that endanger its very existence. According to a report by The Jewish People Policy Planning Institute (JPPPI), published in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, Israel is exposed to the following dangers that threaten its existence:¹¹⁵

1. The spread of weapons of mass destruction in countries like Iran and among Islamic organizations.
2. The deepening instability in the Middle East will increase if the influence of the moderate forces decline.
3. The erosion of the position of the USA as the sole strong force following the fiasco that the American policy experienced in the Arab region, and the increasing influence in the international arena of some new great powers, like China and India, coupled with their need for energy from the Arab region, which would propel them to pursue pro-Arab policies.
4. The increasing weakness of coordination between Israel and the Jewish groups in the world, which would decrease the opportunities of Jewish immigration to Israel, particularly so as the sources of this immigration has been dwindling, and counter migration from Israel is progressively increasing.
5. Increased frustration within Israel, especially among the youth, because of the lack of Israeli institutions that are capable of achieving their demands for peace and social justice.¹¹⁶ Additionally, there is a spread on a wide scale of racism and dispute within the Israeli society at the expense of democracy as well as economic and political corruption.

Hence, the crisis of the Israeli project is will escalate, and the time factor will not necessarily be in its favor in future.

Conclusion

During the year 2007, Israel tried to absorb a number of shocks that resulted from the July 2006 war with Lebanon, and to make use of the Palestinian schism to confront Hamas' dominance of the Palestinian government, and its subsequent control of GS.

Being overwhelmed with the widespread political, moral and financial corruption and the frustration of the July war, the Israeli society and political setup tried to restore confidence, and to extract lessons from these bitter experiences. Within a five-year plan, the Israeli army had regiven priority to the land force coupled with a qualitative improvement of the air force. What helped the Israelis to deal with these profound difficulties were the dynamism of their society that allowed a large measure of self-criticism and the institutional system that facilitated the understanding of these shortcomings and the factors for their development. However, on the other side, Israel has become aware of the increasing danger of the so-called “fundamentalist forces” in the region. Moreover, it knew that the “human being” that it has been confronting could no longer be humiliated and subdued. Meanwhile, the Israeli society suffered from the end of the role of the “pioneer generation,” the absence of the frontline leaders, the decrease of Jewish immigration, the spread of the materialist culture, and the decline in the “quality” of the recruits to the army and the security agencies.

Though dismissed as the most unpopular prime minister in the entire history of Israel, Ehud Olmert managed to continue in power because of the disinterest of his partners in a new election that may lead to the erosion of their political power. But the weakness of the Israeli premier was not necessarily in the service of the Palestinians. On the contrary, it was in many cases against it as this embattled leadership took throughout the year 2007 extreme measures that made the voice of the “bulldozer” and the “tank” higher than any other voice in order to boost its waning popularity and to rally public support behind it. Amongst these measures were the increase of the settlements, the Judaization of Jerusalem, suppression of the Palestinian people, dogmatism in the political negotiations and refusal to grant any substantial concessions to the Palestinian side. Moreover, Israel actively pursued its policy of imposing realities on the ground and demoralizing the Palestinian people.

Israel exploited the Palestinian schism, and has become a partner, directly or indirectly, in the attempts to secure the collapse of Hamas and its government. Besides its brutal attacks, Israel imposed a tight blockade on GS, and tried its utmost best to stop the launching of the missiles on its settlements. Nevertheless, the resistance managed to increase the range of these missiles as well as their accuracy and destruction capabilities.

On the same vein, Israel tried to aggravate Palestinian differences by threatening Mahmud ‘Abbas and his government that it would stop the negotiations and resume the siege if they dared to reconcile with Hamas. Admittedly, this schism should have given Israel better opportunities to extract concessions from the Palestinian side had it not knew very well that “peace” was not then possible because ‘Abbas could not possibly speak on behalf of all the Palestinians as he was weak and the legitimacy of his authority was doubtful and incomplete. Thus, a peaceful settlement is doomed, particularly as Israel itself is not at all serious in granting the Palestinian their minimum and internationally recognized rights. Besides, the Palestinian schism could not possibly enable any Palestinian side to forge a peace settlement or oblige others to abide by it.

While the Palestinians continue to suffer from the occupation and its internal and external repercussions, Israel is, on its part, exposed to a variety of crises and dangers that will escalate in the long run. This provides the Palestinian forces and resistance movements with opportunities that they may capitalize; if they put their heads together and pooled their resources, before they proceed to confront the Israeli project.

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Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

We have sufficient evidence to consider 2007 as the year which revealed all the accumulated Arab practices, or rather malpractices, towards the Palestinian issue. This was particularly reflected in the Arab methodology of administering and resolving the conflict with Israel, which drifted towards submission to the American version of the repercussions of the 1991 Gulf war to liberate Kuwait. Hence were Madrid peace conference, the marginalization of the United Nations and the acceptance of a new legitimacy, namely “the balance of power-based strategy of negotiations,” that had ultimately lead to Oslo Accords and Wadi ‘Arbah Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan.

This negative position engendered during the course of the year 2007 an almost total Arab negligence of what used to be their prime and central concern, namely the Palestinian issue, which has increasingly become a Palestinian–Israeli conflict rather than an Arab–Israeli conflict. The new trend had first expressed itself in some implicit responses to a call, uttered by the American President George Bush during his January 2008 tour of the region, that asked the Arabs to establish partnership with Israel against what he called “the Iranian enemy.”¹ In effect, George Bush had by this call firmly supported an earlier suggestion, voiced by his Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice in the midst of the summer 2006 Israeli war on Lebanon, to establish a new Middle East. Taking advantage of the explosive Shi‘ite–Sunni conflict, Rice called for a new regional equation based on the hypothesis of a “moderate axis,” composed of the pro-American states in the region, versus an alleged “evil axis” that includes Iran, Syria, Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Palestinian movements Hamas and PIJ. Hence, the Arab–Israeli conflict would automatically be transferred into an Arab–Iranian conflict, whereby the Arabs would view and deal with Israel as a partner and Iran as an enemy.²

The Arabs had given up at an early stage the option of inflicting a devastating defeat on Israel in favor of concluding a peace deal with it. But the terms and conditions that they accepted for such a deal would not guarantee by any means the achievement of peace or justice; on the contrary they were bound to lead to the Arab total surrender to Israel, and the loss of the Palestinian rights.

An analysis of the Arab position during the year 2007 towards the developments in Palestine and the siege of Gaza reveals, inter alia, three most important developments. First, is the increasing weakness of the Arab street, and its inability to have a tangible impact on the positions and policies of the Arab governments. Second, the weakness of the official Arab position, represented by the Arab League, which had been confined to futile rhetoric and meaningless lip service to the Palestinian cause. Third, while most of the Arab states had remained alarmingly passive, some betted that the crisis would lead to the collapse of Hamas, and the supremacy of Abu Mazin in Gaza, with all its dangerous aftermath. Since the failure of this bet would place those Arab states in an awkward position, they expressed unequivocal support to the 2005 agreement on the crossings, and totally endorsed the position of the PA that adhered to it, though none of them, including Egypt, was a partner in this agreement.

The danger of the above three sweeping developments lies in the consequences that they may lead to. Specifically, is the possibility of a recurring Israeli military option to impose the undertakings given by the PA in Annapolis conference, which was, however, solely based on the Road Map to the neglect of all other peace initiatives, including the Arab peace initiative that had been re-emphasized in the Riyadh Summit in March 2007.

The year 2007 had revealed the serious and accumulated concessions surrendered by the Arabs via their peace project. Hence, the developments that took place during the year were not only surprising, but also shocking and catastrophic. Indeed this is extremely sad and alarming, but it is a logical outcome of the deteriorating Arab performance and roles over long years, particularly since 1979, under the guise of quest for peace.

Nonetheless, the devastating sequence of events during the year 2007 requires a sober critical analysis based on a comparative methodology within three Arab levels, namely:

1. The performance of the official Arab regime (the Arab League and the Arab Summit).
2. The performance of the Arab states.
3. The performance of the public Arab street.

An analytical study along these three levels towards the basic Palestinian concerns, specifically the peace project, inter-Palestinian conflicts, the effort to

support the Palestinian steadfastness, and relations with Israel, would give answers to several pending questions that would not only explain what had happened, but also helps in understanding what may occur in future.

First: The Performance and Positions of the Official Arab Regime

An analysis of the performance of the official Arab regime, i.e., the Arab League and its institutions, particularly the Council of Foreign Ministers, the Council of the League and the institution of the Arab Summit, would give an overall picture of the Arab positions and trends towards the Palestinian issue and its developments. From this critique, we will be able to detect the general progress or regression of the Arab position towards the issue. However, this approach does not pinpoint the actual position of each and every Arab state, hence it would not alone help us to know who is supporting and who is hindering and striving towards surrender. Thus, it is essential to complete the picture by comparing the collective Arab performance with that of the position of each individual Arab state.

Besides comparing the collective official Arab position with that of each state and with the public Arab position, this discourse will also give a comparative analysis of the positions towards the four most important Palestinian concerns: the peace settlement project and the developments of the so-called “peace process,” the inter-Palestinian conflicts, the support to the Palestinian steadfastness, and, finally, the various forms of calls for normalization with Israel.

1. The Position towards the Developments of the Peace Process

The official Arab regime gave an almost complete priority to the peace process at the expense of all other considerations. This indicates its drive and persistence to achieve a settlement that would relieve it of the predicaments and aftermath of the Palestinian issue, in particular its negative impact on the relations between the United States and the Arab nations, the regional complexities of either partnership with Israel or conflict with Iran. Moreover, the continuation of the Palestinian conflict constitutes an embarrassing obstacle towards involvement in the American project of a new Middle East, and it would lead to political instability within the Arab states that opt to join this project.

Of all the efforts related to the Palestinian issue, the Arab official regime focused on activating and promoting the peace process. Hence were two most important developments, namely, the Riyadh Arab Summit which endorsed the reactivation of the Arab Peace Initiative and the decision of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers to participate in George Bush–patronized “Annapolis meeting,” also known as the “Autumn Peace Conference.”

A focused study on these two developments would provide a comprehensive survey of the position of the Arab official regime towards the peace process, and, more importantly, the overall Palestinian issue.

a. The Riyadh Summit and the Reactivation of the Arab Peace Initiative

The Arab peace initiative was given priority in the agenda of the Riyadh Summit of 28–29/3/2007. Interestingly, this move was a direct response to a new American drive towards the peace process; namely the imposition of polarization between what Washington called the “axis of moderation” (the states of The Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) plus Egypt and Jordan) versus the “axis of evil” (Iran, Syria, Hizbullah, Hamas and PIJ). The crux of these efforts was related to the American strive to secure support for its project in Iraq from one side and for its hostile policy towards Iran from another side. However, to secure progress in these two directions, America was obliged to give attention, even nominally, to the peace process between the Arabs and Israel, and to try to secure some progress in the resolution of the Palestinian–related problems.

This may explain the sudden attention given to the so-called “reactivation” of the Arab peace process, which had been practically frozen since 2002. The new move was, in fact, instigated by America and Israel, rather than being an Arab initiative per se. For the idea had been crystallized over four months, and after four successive tours in the region undertaken by Condoleezza Rice. According to her declarations, uttered after a meeting with Ehud Olmert, and further emphasized after a follow up meeting on the same day with Mahmud ‘Abbas, Rice asserted that the Arab peace initiative provides “a useful basis for implementation,” and that she never asked for its amendment. Subsequently, Tzipi Livni declared in Washington that the initiative “contains positive elements,” which clearly indicated that Israel was in favor of a move towards its revitalization. However, Livni did not neglect to mention the Israeli reservations that lead to its earlier rejection, though she summed them in a brief and general way by saying that the initiative “embodies

some elements that contradict the principle of two states,” in reference to the initiative’s special item on the right of return to the Palestinian refugees.³

The first Arab response came after a meeting held in the Jordanian capital Amman on 13/3/2007, which was presided by King ‘Abdullah II and attended by the foreign ministers of Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. A declaration by the Jordanian Royal Council reported that King ‘Abdullah II said, “The Arab states should collectively work towards a unified position with regard to the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative, which the Arabs had adhered to in Beirut Summit.”⁴

The call for the revival or reactivation of the Arab peace initiative, which had been associated with a related suggestion on the topic that had been presented by Rice during her fourth Middle East trip in four months, on 23/3/2004. She wanted to coax the Israelis into giving the Palestinians what she calls a “political horizon”—the glimmerings of a Palestinian state. But, at the same time, she wanted the Arabs to also sketch a “political horizon” for the Israelis—the beginnings of recognition to give the Israeli government more room to strike a deal.

Rice discussed this plan with what she innovatively called “The Arab Quartet,” i.e., Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), Jordan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The Americans handpicked those four states on the presumption that they play an important role in the promotion of the peace process, e.g., training of the Palestinian security forces, and having a pivotal role in the Arab League.⁵

Interestingly, this nomenclature “The Arab Quartet” was coined just before the Riyadh Arab Summit, but it disappeared forever after the end of the summit, and new mechanism for the reactivation of the initiative, which had already been re-emphasized by the summit, was formed.

The most important, probably the sole, action undertaken by this Arab Quartet was arranging for Rice to have two meetings in the Egyptian town Aswan: the first with the foreign ministers of the four states, and the second with the directors of their intelligence agencies.⁶ In the former meeting, the ministers had reportedly presented to Rice the Arab initiative as the fundamental basis for the resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict, as it “embodies Arab fundamentals and is based on international resolutions.” It was further reported that this Arab Quartet will not submit to the Riyadh Summit a written report on its negotiations with Rice, but just verbally communicate to the leaders the gist of these deliberations.⁷

Though, in a subsequent round of negotiations with the leaders of Israel, Rice failed to secure their support to the American plan, and Ehud Olmert publicly refused the Arab initiative, even suggested instead to meet King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz to normalize relations with his Kingdom, the Arab Summit did not retreat from its position of reactivating the initiative. The only angry Arab response to Rice’s failure in Israel came from King ‘Abdullah who mentioned the Arab solidarity with “the occupied Iraq,” which provoked an angry, but seemingly artificial, American response that was voiced by the spokesmen of the State Department and the White House, and which was, however, eventually contained by Rice.⁸ It is ironic that the King’s remark provoked such a violent reaction at a time when an American initiated resolution of the Security Council had described Iraq as an occupied country. However, the importance of this presumably deceitful anger lies in the frustration of the American government by the failure of Rice’s deal, though this was squarely due to Israel’s stubbornness and defiance.⁹

Monitoring the Saudi position during that period, specifically a few days after the Aswan meeting between Rice and the Arab Quartet and till the end of the Riyadh Summit, reveals two interesting developments. First, a categorical denial by a spokesman of the Saudi foreign minister, Sa‘ud al-Faisal, of any intention to amend the Arab peace initiative, and, second, the utter refusal of any connection between Rice’s meeting with the Arab Quartet in Aswan and the Arab Summit. In this respect, al-Faisal angrily said, “No modification or amendment of the peace initiative. I emphasized this 20 times and this is the last time that I do so.”¹⁰

This decisive response reveals the confusing rumors that accompanied the summit, particularly an alleged intention to amend the initiative to have the blessing of Israel. The summit’s resolutions emphasized adherence to the initiative as approved in Beirut Summit of 2002, and which is based on the decisions of the international community to end the Arab–Israeli dispute (note that they used the word dispute and not conflict); and the establishment of a comprehensive and just peace settlement that provides security to all the states of the region, and enable the Palestinian people to establish their own state, including Jerusalem. The summit had, furthermore, assigned the initiative’s Arab ministerial committee to continue its efforts and form working teams to conduct the necessary contacts with the secretary–general of the United Nations, state–members of the Security Council, the Quartet and the other concerned parties to resume the peace process.

It should also rally support for this initiative and start serious negotiations on the basis of the terms of reference represented in relevant UN resolutions, and the principles of giving land for peace and the illegitimacy of annexing land by force. The summit had also delegated the Council of the Arab League on the ministerial level to follow up and evaluate the effectiveness of the current peace effort and to decide on the basis of this evaluation the next steps to be pursued.¹¹

The ministerial committee for the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative held on 18/4/2007 its first meeting at the Arab League's headquarter in Cairo, in which 13 states participated, namely Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Syria, Palestine, Lebanon, Bahrain, Qatar, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Yemen and the Sudan.¹² Meanwhile, the Arab League drafted a dual-purpose action plan to be discussed by the initiative's committee. The first, the political dimension, stipulated that an Arab delegate should approach the American administration and the congress to explain the initiative, and to travel on similar missions to the European Union and Russia. The second purpose of the plan suggested a media campaign in the USA and Europe to acquaint the mass media there—which should include influential T.V. stations, mainstream newspapers and journalists—with the components of the Arab initiative. A machinery should also be formed to fund this Arab drive. Some diplomatic sources had, furthermore, reported a Palestinian suggestion to advertise the initiative within the Israeli society via contacts with influential Israeli personalities, and the translation of the initiative to Hebrew and its wide distribution among all the components of the Israeli media.¹³

Following this meeting, Reuters news agency reported that several Arab states, who participated in the committee of the Arab peace initiative, were ready to contact Israel if it accepted some very modest demands amongst which were the stoppage of the Separation Wall in the WB and the withdrawal of Israeli troops to their positions before the *Intifadah*. As for the Arab League, it issued a communiqué after the meeting of the initiative's committee saying that “it delegated Egypt and Jordan to explain the initiative to Israel.” In a comment on the conditions of such contacts, ‘Amr Musa, the secretary-general of the Arab League, had reportedly said, “The time for free concessions is over,” and added that the letter and spirit of the initiative “is based on the prior Israeli withdrawal from all the lands that it occupied on June 5, 1967, and then the Arab normalization would come.”¹⁴

‘Amr Musa’s declaration had been issued to correct a previous presumption that the above demands were not prior conditions for normalization, rather they were conditions for the contacts. Four weeks later, in an interview with the BBC, ‘Amr Musa dismissed as “sheer nonsense that should not be heeded to” the claim by the Israeli President Shimon Peres to the effect that “Israel is ready to conduct serious negotiations with the Arab states on their peace initiative if they presented serious proposals.” ‘Amr Musa had furthermore accused Israel of “deliberately and continuously dragging on and of viciously revolving around the core issue (i.e., readiness to achieve peace with its Arab neighbors) without directly addressing it.”¹⁵ ‘Amr Musa also refused a call by Ehud Olmert to meet the Arab leaders to discuss with them the Arab peace initiative, which Musa described as nothing but a “ploy.”¹⁶

Meanwhile, after much talk about the ambiguity of the mission of the Egyptian and Jordanian foreign ministers to Israel to deliberate on the Arab peace initiative, specifically whether this visit was in the name of all the member states of the initiative’s committee or in the name of Egypt and Jordan only. Hence, some Arab governments had reportedly asked ‘Amr Musa to issue a communiqué that clears out the decisions of the Arab summit and the committee of reactivating the initiative on this issue, which state that the two ministers were not delegated to negotiate, but only to contact Israel in their own capacity as representatives of two Arab countries that have diplomatic relations with Israel. The governments of Syria, Libya, Algeria and Yemen had, on their part, emphasized that originally there was not yet anything to negotiate.¹⁷ Subsequently, ‘Amr Musa declared that neither the Arab League nor any state would negotiate on behalf of another state, and that Palestine would be the one to negotiate with Israel, as is also the case with Lebanon and Syria.¹⁸

On the same issue, Hisham Yusuf, director of Arab League secretary general’s office, said, “In this respect, the Arab League is governed by the decision taken in the last meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo. Hence was the delegation of Egypt and Jordan specifically to perform this mission on behalf of the Arabs because they have diplomatic relations with Israel.” In response to what some had dismissively described as a free and non-reciprocating move, i.e., the Arab League presumed initiation of negotiation with Israel without the latter’s recognition of the Arab peace initiative, Yusuf responded by saying, “With all due respect to this

point of view, but we should know that contacts between the Arabs and Israel were not non-existing for them to ask for a reciprocation to resume them.”¹⁹

Finally, however, nothing came out of the mission of the Arab delegation, as its visit to Israel was nothing but a publicity stunt. No wonder as the government of Ehud Olmert had then no vision or a political program to achieve peace with the Palestinians or the Arabs. Particularly so because Olmert had not originally recognized the initiative, but he merely aspired to render it void of content, as he had more than once sarcastically described it as the “Saudi initiative.”²⁰

Practically the Arab League achieved nothing from its drive to reactivate the Arab initiative, as Washington had once more frozen it either willingly or under Israeli pressure. As for the Arab states, they gave up the futile effort of “reactivating the initiative,” particularly so after the bloody Gaza incidents between the presidency of the PA and Hamas. The call for peace with Israel had thus been sidelined in favor of a more urgent and crucial task, namely inter-Palestinian peace.

b. The Arab Participation in Annapolis Meeting

Immediately after Bush declaration of his initiative to convene the Annapolis conference, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Welch indicated the participation of Arab states that “have no relations with Israel.” Since Welch’s priority was to induce some Arab states that do not recognize Israel to sit with it on the same negotiation table, he strove to persuade them to do so in Annapolis by giving the following pretexts, “The crux of the Arab peace initiative is based on the desire to sit on the table to discuss peace with Israel, and when talking of the implementation of the initiative, the Arabs themselves had suggested an international conference.”²¹ Besides evading thus far talking about the agenda, venue and time of this conference, Welch had evasively responded to a question on Syria’s possible participation by saying, “We have not yet decided who will and who will not participate, but the address of President Bush gives the broad criteria for this participation, viz. rejection of violence and the acceptance of the existence of Israel are key elements for the acceptance of the outcome of any negotiations.” In effect this means Arab normalization with Israel and refusal of violence, i.e., normalization with Israel and the discard of the option of resistance or support to it once and for all were the fundamental conditions for participation,²² indeed they were the underlying objectives behind the call for the conference itself.

What attracts attention here is that just a few days after Bush's declaration and Welch's explanations and conditions, the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers held an emergency meeting in the Arab League's headquarters. It was then and there, where they declared their support for holding a meeting or international conference in the presence of all parties concerned with the peace process that aims to the initiation of negotiations on all fronts on the agreed terms of reference. The ministers had, moreover, declared their keen desire to enter directly in peace negotiations on all the issues of the Arab Israeli conflict and within a specific timeframe to establish the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.²³ The ministers' declaration contained further Arab conditions, but it welcomed what it called the positive elements in Bush's address that can provide a reliable basis for the negotiations, particularly adherence to the two-states solution, and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. The Arab declaration also called for the stoppage of the settlements, end of the occupation of the WB and GS, the conclusion of a settlement on the final issues, including Jerusalem and the refugees, the transfer of the revenue collected by Israel in lieu of Palestinian taxes, which was frozen by Israel, to the PA, and to provide financial and economic support to the Palestinian people in Gaza.²⁴

In its 128th meeting, held on 5/9/2007 at the foreign ministers' level, the council of the Arab League issued a declaration which emphasized that the proposed international conference should end the Israeli occupation of the Arab lands within a specific timeframe, and in a way to achieve security and stability for all. The ministers had, furthermore, warned against attempts by Israel to void Bush's call out of its basic substance.²⁵

Meanwhile, 'Amr Musa said that the aim of the conference should be resumption of the peace process and to address the core issues within a specific time schedule. Moreover, the obligations of each party should be clarified in accordance with the previous agreements, and had to be build upon in the expected negotiations. Moreover, the Quartet and the Security Council should be given a role to supervise and follow these negotiations. In return for the implementation of this path, 'Amr Musa promised "good relations and the recognition of Israel." However, he cautioned that this meeting should not be allowed to be a mere political demonstration without content or outcome, as this may have serious repercussions on Arab interests and on the region at large.²⁶

However, all these Arab conditions had eventually fallen apart versus the Israeli stubbornness and the American bias. Faced with all kinds of American pressure and incentives, the Arab states were finally compelled to hold on 22/11/2007 a meeting of their foreign ministers, which declared their consent to participate in the “meeting.” They very well knew that it was a “mere meeting, and not a conference per se,” and they knew that there was a wide gulf between what they and the Palestinians called for on one side and what the Israeli had actually, and with American consent, accepted.

Once assured of the participation of 16 Arab states in the conference and only three days before its start the Israelis imposed new conditions. Thus, while welcoming Arab presence, Tzipi Livni cautioned, “These states (Arab) should not participate in the scheduled bilateral negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians,” and added, “It should not be assumed that the Arab states would decide the conditions of the negotiations or to participate in them.”²⁷ Shortly afterwards, Ehud Olmert imposed another condition, namely that any further post-Annapolis negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians “would depend on the Palestinian recognition of Israel as a state of the Jewish people.”²⁸ This means that Israel would be a full fledged Jewish state; hence the right of return would have gone with the wind, as with such an official Palestinian recognition no Palestinian would have the right to return to such a Jewish state.

Notwithstanding these alarming developments, a meeting of the Arab foreign ministers, held in the Arab League’s headquarter in Cairo, decided to accept the invitation that America extended for 16 Arab countries to participate in Annapolis conference, namely Jordan, the UAE, Bahrain, Tunisia, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Lebanon, Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania and Yemen. ‘Amr Musa said that the Arab states agreed to participate within the framework of the “Arab initiative,” that this participation does not mean the acceptance of anything, and that the conference objective is not to conclude a new treaty, but to resume once more the negotiations on the basis of certain principles that are derived from the Arab initiative.²⁹ The pretext that Musa gave for this participation was to ascertain the seriousness of the Arab position to conclude a just and comprehensive peace on all the fronts. He added that the Arabs will participate in the meeting for the sake of negotiations not normalization.³⁰

After initial talks between the Palestinian and Israeli delegations that were more of a wrangle than negotiations, the meeting was held on Tuesday 27/11/2007 at Annapolis city, Maryland. Reading from a text, the American president opened the meeting by claiming that the Palestinian and the Israelis agreed to immediately launch negotiations to conclude a peace treaty that would end decades of violence. In the text that Bush was reading, which was allegedly to be a joint Palestinian–Israeli declaration, he said that they have agreed to exert all efforts to conclude an agreement before the end of 2008, and to settle all the pending issues, including the major ones, without any exception.³¹

The meeting ended with an Arab–Palestinian retreat on all the conditions that had been declared earlier. After much hesitation, Mahmud ‘Abbas, the president of the PA, was compelled to sign a “Memorandum of Understanding” that the conference reached to, though it did not satisfy the Palestinian and Arab demands, and had not even mentioned the Arab peace initiative, which the Arab states had earlier insisted on, as the condition for their participation in the conference.

Hence, Annapolis conference had resulted in two major Arab concessions. First, is the recognition of the Road Map as the fundamental basis of the negotiations, which supersedes all other bases particularly the resolutions of the United Nations, and which also bets any progress of the negotiations on the Palestinian state on the end of resistance. The second retreat was to patronize Bush’s document of 2002, which called for two states, an Israeli (full fledged Jewish) and a Palestinian that have the content of statehood in name only. For it should either be a state that is liable for continuation, or one that totally ignores the issues of sovereignty, frontiers, right of return and Jerusalem; hence it will be a state that aborts the Palestinian dream of restoring the usurped rights.

This is the outcome of the Arab haste to participate in Annapolis meeting, in addition to the circulation of deceitful pretexts and conditions that nobody respected, though they carried the signatures of the Arab ministers of foreign affairs.

2. The Position towards the Palestinian Schisms and Conflicts

In view of the difficult circumstances that surround the national Palestinian struggle and within the Arab, regional and international environment, it was inevitable that there be competition, differences and divisions among the various Palestinian groups and resistance movements. However, being keen to maintain

and sustain the unity of the Palestinian factions, the Arab stand had always rejected these divisions and insisted on a united Palestinian front. However, for two main reasons, this position has noticeably changed since the sizable victory of Hamas in the Palestinian legislative elections. First, there are political feuds in many Arab countries resulting from the rise of the Islamic forces as a strong competitor for the capture of political power in those countries. This was particularly so with regard to the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, whose noticeable performance in the elections of the Peoples' Assembly had coincided with that of Hamas, who is viewed as an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood. Moreover, some radical Islamic movements were involved in violent actions against the governing regimes in some Arab states. Hence was the distinction in the Arab positions towards the inter-Palestinian conflicts, which was based on the degree of the danger of the Islamic factor on the internal political equation. Thus the countries which were more exposed to the so-called "Islamic danger" opposed Hamas and supported the PA under the presidency of Mahmud 'Abbas. Conversely, the states that were less exposed to this presumed danger were inclined to be more balanced vis-à-vis the Palestinian disputes. Second, was the American–Israeli pressure against some Arab countries to compel them to adopt hostile positions towards Hamas and the totality of the resistance movements that wage different kind of resistance against Israel, and to encourage them to support the PA not out of admiration and support to its policies but as a means to liquidate all the resistance movements that have been accused of "terrorism."

Hence, despite the flexibility that Hamas exhibited during the drive to form a national unity government, the USA kept pressing the Arab states to deal with it as part and parcel of an international fundamentalist movement (Muslim Brotherhood), and not an extension of the Palestinian national movement that is firmly linked with the national Arab security.

a. The Arab Position towards the Divisions that Synchronized with the Effort to Form a Government of National Unity

Prior to the formation of a government of national unity, there were internal skirmishes between the security forces of the PA and Hamas. This violence was about to end Mecca Agreement that had been achieved through Saudi mediation in which King 'Abdullah Bin 'Abdul 'Aziz was personally involved, and which was an unpleasant surprise to the Americans and Israelis who betted on their support to the president of the Authority to abort it.

In these circumstances, the Arab role was confined to calls to end the killing and maintain Mecca Agreement. Thus, the Arab League conducted consultations and contacts with a number of Arab capitals and with Arab foreign ministers to formulate the action plan to deal with this crisis.³² ‘Amr Musa volunteered to send a League’s high powered delegation to all Palestinian territories to meet all the Palestinian parties concerned to end the political tension, and to stop the internal Palestinian killing and counter killing. However, ‘Amr Musa had desperately posed a viable question, i.e., what would the delegation say in those chaotic circumstances, where everyone knows well what is required.³³

The above helpless question reveals the paralysis of the Arab League, which is attributed to some fundamental differences among the Arabs countries towards the conflicting Palestinian parties. While some had been reluctant throughout the year 2006 to mediate between the Palestinians, others supported the Presidency against the government either politically, financially or militarily by supplying weapons or training troops. This support, undertaken on behalf of other parties, had its negative impact, as it aggravated the gulf between Fatah and Hamas. It also encouraged some of Fatah leaders to assume that they had behind them an Arab ally, besides the known international parties; hence was their adamant extremism and stubborn refusal to engage with Hamas.³⁴ However, this impasse was superseded by Mecca Agreement, but only temporarily, as the Agreement had eventually collapsed, largely because most of the Arab states had cautiously and hesitantly dealt with it. This was instrumental in the resumption of the bloody feuds between the disputing Palestinian parties, and the consequential downfall of the national unity government, which took place after huge and bitter fighting between Fatah and Hamas.

Following the formation of the government of national unity, ‘Amr Musa welcomed in the name of the Arab League this development, which he viewed as a crucial step to end the political tension and its different repercussions in a way that allows the Palestinians to concentrate on their primary concern, namely establishing the Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.³⁵

The secretary-general criticized the boycott of some states, particularly Britain, to Hamas ministers in the government of national unity, which he described as “very negative,” and added, “I believe there is no rationale for the international siege, starvation or the punishment imposed on the Palestinians.” ‘Amr Musa also

protested against the refusal of the Israelis to recognize the government of national unity, by saying, “We protest against the Israeli position, which strongly favors the continuation and sustainability of schism between the Palestinians.”³⁶

The final communiqué of the Riyadh Summit stressed, in what appeared to be in the main a message to Hamas, the necessity that the Palestinian government of national unity adheres to the decisions of the Arab summits, which emphasized that peace is the strategic option of the Arab states in accordance with the Arab peace initiative. Then the communiqué emphasized support to Mecca Agreement, the PA and the unity government.³⁷ This deliberate sequence reveals the core of the Arab position, i.e., the priority should first and foremost be the adherence of the Palestinian unity government (viz Hamas) to the peace project as a strategic option, which in effect means refusal of the option of resistance, and obliges Hamas to follow this line, then comes support to the PA, and thirdly, and lastly, support to the unity government.

b. The Arab Position towards the Bloody Disputes and the Dissolution of the Government of National Unity

The Arabs had remained too paralyzed to play an effective role to stop the Palestinian blood path. However, a move in this direction appeared only after two developments. First was the success of Hamas to completely expel Fatah and the PA institutions from Gaza and to impose its control over the GS. Second, there was the proclamation by Mahmud ‘Abbas, the president of the PA, of his three famous decrees.

The former development meant a pro-Hamas transformation in the balance of power that was unacceptable to the official Arab regime. The case would have certainly been radically different had Fatah and the institutions of the Authority controlled Gaza Strip. The second development, viz President ‘Abbas’ virtual constitutional coup on the legitimacy, was no less dangerous than what Hamas did in Gaza. However, the Arab official regime supported ‘Abbas and even described his decrees as legitimate.

Initially, the Arab League’s support was rather reserved, and was drafted in such a careful manner to give the impression that it was associated with the legitimacy, thus the secretary-general said, “We do not have reservations on ‘Abbas’ decisions that are within the scope of the constitution.” In an attempt to exhibit neutrality ‘Amr Musa said, “We support ‘Abbas and the elected legislative council.” After

a six-hour meeting to discuss the Palestinian situation, the Arab foreign ministers demanded the status quo ante in Gaza, and called upon all parties to resolve their differences through dialogue. The ministers formed an investigation committee, composed of Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Jordan, Qatar, Tunisia and the secretariat-general of the Arab League, that was directed to submit its report within a month, and asked all Palestinian parties to facilitate its mission. Furthermore, the ministers condemned “the late criminal acts in Gaza,” without, however, shouldering the responsibility of the bloodshed to a specific party.³⁸

Following the first meeting of the investigation committee, which was at the level of the permanent members of the League and presided by the secretary-general, ‘Amr Musa declared that the meeting focused on the action plan of the committee, and emphasized three themes: the necessity to respect the legitimacy as represented by Mahmud ‘Abbas and the legislative institutions, the return of the status quo ante in Gaza, and the rejection of the separation of GS from the WB or the existence of two Palestinian entities. Musa admitted that some had what he called “misgivings towards the investigation committee,” but “there is no Palestinian rejection per se of this committee.”³⁹ The director of Arab League secretary general’s office, Hisham Yusuf, had explained the background of these apprehensions by saying, “The objective of the committee is only to explore the understanding of each side to what had happened. Any vision presented by any of the parties will be studied, and a report will be submitted to the meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs.”⁴⁰

However, surprisingly what was mentioned of differences around the investigation committee was not confined to the Palestinian parties, but extended to the members of the committee itself, particularly on the methodology of its work. Coupled with the scarcity of information on the incidents in Gaza, these widespread differences had further complicated the performance of the committee. Quoting one of its members, the United Press International (UPI) reported that the sharp differences between the members of the committee dragged and delayed its work, and added, “Nobody provides us with authentic facts, all that we hear are rumors and counter rumors,” UPI had further quoted another committee member saying that the members do not seem enthusiastic to end the investigation and present concrete recommendations. The two quoted members agreed that the committee may by the end of the day be compelled to take a non-committal stand that do not necessarily condemn either of the conflicting parties, particularly so as

it did not undertake a fact finding journey to the Palestinian territories, but only received reports from both the PA and Hamas that reflect their own points of views on the issue.⁴¹

Not only that, but some Egyptian and Palestinian media sources revealed that the differences between Fatah and Hamas were reflected on the joint Arab effort, and had been behind the failure of the Arab ministers to arrive at a consensus. Indeed, they were divided into two groups. First, a group that had been shackled with regional and international commitments, hence, it advocated pressure on Hamas until it submits to the peace conditions, namely the acceptance of the dictates of the Quartet and recognition of Israel. The position of this group of ministers had seemingly superseded that of the neutral side, which advocated that a consensus solution that does not antagonize either of the parties is the only exit from this stubborn impasse. Naturally, this was unacceptable to the President of the Authority Mahmud ‘Abbas and his ilk among the Arab foreign ministers, who insisted on an outright condemnation of Hamas.⁴²

However, the recommendations of the final draft of the investigation committee concentrated on the necessity of bridging the Palestinian rift, and to enable the conflicting Palestinian parties to resume negotiations, as well as to explore a role for the Arab League in this respect. Furthermore, the report repeatedly refused inter-Palestinian fighting, and demanded that Fatah and Hamas immediately and totally stop the bloodshed. The report condemned the unfair blockade imposed on the Palestinian people, and outlined its serious negative repercussions. The committee had, moreover, patronized a series of steps and contacts with the relevant Palestinian and Arab parties to achieve national reconciliation, and to return the situation in GS to the legal stand that abides by the Palestinian constitutional principles.⁴³ However, none of these recommendations was implemented, particularly so because the accelerating Arab paralysis failed to contain the conflict and the rift between Fatah and Hamas. This was clearly demonstrated towards the end of the year when the Israeli tightening of the siege on Gaza and the suspension of the supply of electricity and petrol had ignited the issue of the Palestinian crossings.

3. The Position towards the Support of the Palestinian Steadfastness

Since the imposition of the Quartet’s siege on the Palestinian people that followed Hamas victory in the legislative elections, and which was undertaken under the guise of the movement’s failure to recognize Israel, the Arab regime

was unable to take a strong and decisive position against this blockade. It did not even publicly declare its non-committal to it, or campaigned against it on the international level, rather it was keen not to provoke the Americans and Europeans and to win their consent. Hence, the official Arab response did not go beyond extending limited financial support, and in calling upon the Quartet to lift the siege on the Palestinian people. But the Arab helpless position towards the frequent Israeli incursions and arrests of the activists that was extended to include ministers and members of the parliament (MPs) had been just confined to condemnations and continuous, but futile, appeals to the United Nation's interference. Indeed, it is a foregone conclusion that the United States will block any resolution from the Security Council that condemns the Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people.

Any observer of the Palestinian situation during the year would be able to clearly distinguish between two phases of the Israeli siege on the Palestinian people, particularly Gaza. The first, pursued most of the 2007, took the shape of bombardment, assassinations and incursions, and the second was what happened during the last weeks of December 2007 and January 2008. However, the Arab weak and submissive response, even conniving as exhibited during the December 2007–January 2008 Gaza crisis, remained basically the same during the two phases.

a. The First Phase

The Arab contribution during this phase never went beyond continuing to call upon the Quartet and the international community to interfere, and to extend financial subsidies to the PA. On the other hand, nothing was given to Gaza after the expulsion of the PA from there, following the bloody clashes between Fatah and Hamas, though GS has remained the main victim of the blockade, and in desperate need for such aid.

While defending the position of the Arab League vis-à-vis the imposed blockade on the Palestinian people, Muhammad Sobeih, the Arab League assistant secretary-general for Palestinian affairs, said that the sources of all the funds to the Arab League are well known, and that they are smoothly transferred according to the resolutions of the Arab summits. As for the provisions in kind, they are distributed, in cooperation with international organizations, to the institutions and organizations inside the occupied lands. Sobeih further added that the confiscated funds, which were caught with Isma'il Haniyyah while crossing Rafah crossing, were transferred to the account of the PA, and, by virtue of an official memorandum

from the PA to the League, they were deposited in an account opened by the League in an Egyptian bank.⁴⁴

The concluding session of the ministerial committee to implement the resolutions of the 18th summit, held in Khartoum, emphasized the necessity of providing full support to the government of national unity at the global level, and its assistance to break the financial and economic siege imposed on the Palestinian people. The organization revealed that it received \$380 million out of the \$660 million Arab aid decided in Khartoum summit.⁴⁵ After the Riyadh Summit, the Arab League urged the Arab states to meet their financial obligations, and Muhammad Sobeih revealed that the Arab efforts to reactivate the Arab peace initiative will focus, after Riyadh Summit, on the lift of the siege on the Palestinian people.⁴⁶

Short of this, no Arab support to the steadfastness of the Palestinian people could be detected, except some isolated measures like the donation of one million Egyptian pounds to the stranded Palestinians on the Egyptian–Palestinian borders at the Rafah crossing,⁴⁷ contacts with the Iraqi government to stop violence against the Palestinian refugees in Iraq,⁴⁸ and the demand to free the detained MPs in Israeli prisons.⁴⁹ However, as reported by Ambassador Ahmad al-Qatan, the Saudi permanent representative to the Arab League, and after a meeting held in Riyadh by the Arab League Follow-Up Committee, there were intentions to convene a special Arab conference to support the institutions of the PA after Gaza's bloody incidents. Despite the fact that Ambassador Ahmed bin Hili, the assistant secretary–general for political affairs, had even said that preliminary steps were taken in coordination with some businessmen to organize this conference,⁵⁰ but to no avail.

b. The Second Phase

The Israeli objectives behind the tightening of the siege on Gaza, December 2007–January 2008, and the total cut off of electricity and fuel had been glaringly revealed to everybody, namely either to force the Gaza inhabitants to stop supporting Hamas,⁵¹ or to transfer the responsibilities in the GS to Egypt, thus relieving Israel of all its legal duties towards the occupied lands and their people, as advocated by the minister of war and his deputy, Ehud Barak and Matan Vilnai, respectively.⁵² Nonetheless, the official Arab position remained ridiculously weak and hesitant, even impotent, which appeared to have been in harmony with the old and continuous desire to disavow from the Arab responsibility towards the Palestinian people.

Indeed, ‘Amr Musa’s passionate appeal to the Arabs to loudly protest against the catastrophe in Gaza was seemingly a reflection of this paralysis. Following his departure from Cairo, and while heading a delegation to Beirut to try to resolve the Lebanese crisis, the secretary–general appealed to the Arabs to “at least loudly call for the stoppage of the siege imposed on GS, and to supply it with all the funds, medicine and food that they can afford, particularly as it is under total siege and daily aggression, a development that should not be allowed to pass without an Arab stand.”⁵³

However, Musa had helplessly failed to show how these funds, food and medicine could reach GS while the crossings are closed. Equally paralyzed was the communiqué issued on the same subject by the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers. After commending the Egyptian efforts to reduce the sufferings in Gaza, the communiqué called upon the Arab states to provide more help, and demanded that Israel, who should be held fully responsible for the deteriorating conditions in GS and the WB, ends the siege. The Council of Arab Foreign Ministers also demanded that the Security Council shoulder its responsibility, and called upon the concerned parties to resume the agreed and internationally recognized measures that guarantee the reopening of the crossings, including Rafah.⁵⁴

These appeals were all that the Arab League did, but without shouldering its responsibility by asking for the imposition of a new and fair treaty that guarantees the opening of the crossings, which, however, should not by any means be under the mercy of the Israelis. Besides, the Arab League did not think of providing an alternative strategic option that ends the existing situation which puts the GS under the Israeli will. For how come that the GS remains fully dependent on Israel, and, at the same time, the Palestinians are told that they will have their independence. The Arab ministers never entertained the provision of an alternative supply of electricity and petrol to the GS, seemingly because this dependence on Israel is a necessity to force the GS to submit to the Arabs core position that opted for peace as their strategic option.

4. The Relation with Israel and the Prospect of Normalization

The official Arab regime adhered to its position that refused any progress on the issue of normalization with Israel, and to the conditions spelled out in the Arab peace initiative. This was reiterated on two occasions, first within the plan to

reactivate, after the Riyadh Summit, the Arab peace initiative, and second, when agreeing to collectively participate in Annapolis meeting.

Just before the Arab summit, there were repeated Arab and international calls to the Palestinian unity government to recognize Israel. But ‘Amr Musa refused these demands, and declared, after a meeting that he had with the Croatian Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović: “Recognition should not be unilateral, by one side only, but has to be reciprocal from both sides, Hamas and Israel.”⁵⁵

After Riyadh Summit, ‘Amr Musa refused any normalization with Israel before the achievement of peace, and emphasized, “It is impossible to do this whatever the circumstances may be; as this means that they want normalization free of charge.”⁵⁶ Moreover, Hisham Yusuf, director of Arab League secretary general’s office, refused the approaches of the Israeli premier, Ehud Olmert, to have contacts with the Arab League on the peace initiative, saying that the required is that Israel define its position vis-à-vis the Arab–Israeli conflict. He further emphasized that Israel is manipulating and playing delaying tactics in order to delay any progress in the peace path, and to have concessions with nothing in return. But the positions of the Arabs and their League are crystal clear, and had been clarified further through the initiative, namely, no free concessions.⁵⁷

Following rumors that the foreign ministers of Egypt and Jordan, respectively Ahmad Abu al-Ghait and Abdel Ilah Al Khatib, had undertaken their above mentioned visit to Israel as representatives of the Arab League to further promote the Arab initiative,⁵⁸ Abu al-Ghait declared that he “represented Egypt only and not the Arab League.” He added that he and his Jordanian counterpart were delegated by the concerned ministerial committee to pursue the peace initiative of the Riyadh Summit, but “certainly they do not represent the Arab League.”⁵⁹

The Arab refusal of “free normalization” was further reiterated immediately after the decision of Arab participation in Annapolis meeting. In a press interview before the meeting, the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas said, “no concessions in the conference,” and that the presence of some Arab–Islamic countries that have no relations with Israel, like the KSA, does not mean normalization. For these countries do attend in the presence of Israel the meetings of the United Nations, but this act has not been viewed as a tacit normalization with Israel.

Later, this position was further emphasized by Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Sa'ud al-Faisal, who said, "No to normalization before the conclusion of a peace accord with the Palestinians."⁶⁰ A position 'Amr Musa also emphasized after a meeting of the Arab League Follow-Up Committee, which was held two days before Annapolis meeting, he said, "The decision of participation in Annapolis conference does not mean normalization with Israel, but it is a move towards peace, and to emphasize the necessity of raising the issue of negotiations after a long freeze."⁶¹

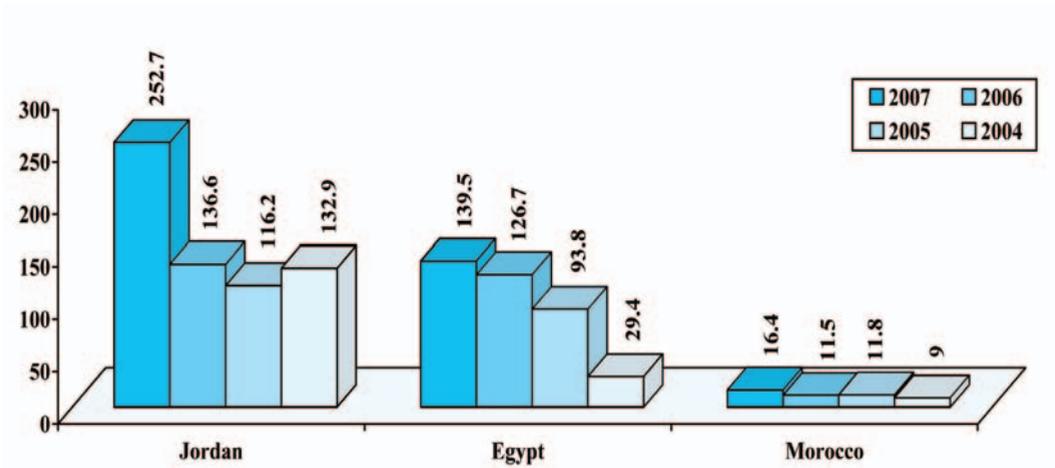
The overall Arab positions towards the peace process, inter-Palestinian conflicts, support to the steadfastness of the Palestinian people or on the issue of normalization reveal a basic fact that 'Amr Musa could not deny, namely the inability to resolve all Arab crises, not only the Palestinian issue. For, as 'Amr had indicated, these crises, i.e., in Palestine, Iraq, Lebanon, Sudan and Somalia, remain absolutely dormant and without any progress in the horizon, which means that the Arab regime and its regional organization were in a real stalemate, whose major symptom is inability to do the fundamental tasks. This serious development requires immediate reconsideration, otherwise the dangers of the American-Israeli projects to reorganize the regional order, redraw the maps and to impose regional polarization and conflicting axes would become realities. Such a fait accompli may also encourage the American President George Bush to impose upon the Arab world, during his forthcoming January 2008 visit to the region, not only to recognize Israel and conclude peace treaties with it, but also to establish a partnership with it. This partnership is to confront what he called the "Iranian enemy," the first culprit, in his view, of supporting "terrorism," which automatically extends to include all the Arab resistance movements and organizations.

In another vein, the economic relations between Israel and some Arab countries had significantly flourished during the year 2007 compared with 2006. Israeli export to Jordan had witnessed 85% increase in 2007, from \$136.6 million to \$252.7 million, while its imports from Jordan increased by 41.9%, from \$38.2 million to \$54.2 million. Meanwhile, the 2007 Israeli exports and imports to both Egypt and Morocco had also increased, though with less percentages and funds as explained in the following table.

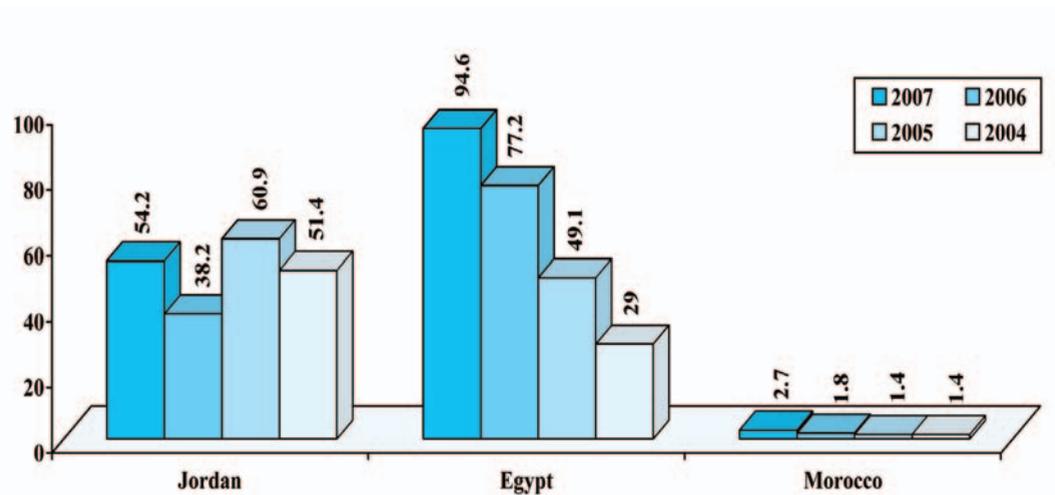
Table 1/3: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries 2004–2007 (\$million)⁶²

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2007	2006	2005	2004	2007	2006	2005	2004
Jordan	252.7	136.6	116.2	132.9	54.2	38.2	60.9	51.4
Egypt	139.5	126.7	93.8	29.4	94.6	77.2	49.1	29
Morocco	16.4	11.5	11.8	9	2.7	1.8	1.4	1.4

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2004–2007 (\$million)



Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2004–2007 (\$million)



Second: The Performance and Positions of the Arab States towards the Palestinian Issue

A study of the various positions of the Arab states towards the central Arab concern, namely the Palestinian issue, demonstrate that there are some distinctions and differences between them. Moreover, these diversified stands are closely associated with the degree of commitment of each and every state to this issue, and to the concepts of the Arab nation and Arab nationalism, as well as to the extent of their drive to oppose the American and Israeli projects which focus on the fragmentation of the Arab nations into sectarian and ethnic entities. The diversity is also reflected in the degree of friendship or alliance with the United States or Israel, and with the position of each state towards the regional and international alliances. What we are trying to explore here is the extent of the reactions of each state to the Palestinian issue and its developments, and the degree of adherence to, and defiance of, the Palestinian national rights. This will be done through an analysis of the four elements that we focused on in the above study on the performance and positions of the official Arab regime towards the same issue. For the sake of this analysis, we may categorize the Arab states into four subsidiary regions: the Arab Orient (the confrontational states with the exception of Iraq that is experiencing special circumstances), the Gulf region, Sudan and the Horn of Africa, and, the states of the Arab West.

1. The Confrontational States (the Arab Orient)

The nomenclature “the confrontational states” is taken to mean those states that are more committed and involved in the Palestinian issue. But this assumption is conditioned on the existence of confrontation per se, or the commitment of these states to confront Israel. However, with their signatures of peace treaties with this entity, both Egypt and Jordan have become more committed to the peaceful resolution of the conflict with Israel, and more enthusiastic to prevent the outbreak of wars and confrontations because they will place them in an awkward position with their own people and with the Arab masses. Notwithstanding their geographical location that dictates extensive reactions on their part to the Palestinian issue, Egypt and Jordan had, however, practically foregone their previous strong commitment to the Palestinian rights, though they continuously claim that their keenness on the peaceful resolution is in itself a reflection of their commitment to these rights. This applies to Egypt and Jordan, but not, to the same extent, to Syria and Lebanon.

a. Egypt

i. The Egyptian Stand Vis-à-Vis the Peace Process

Egypt had, indeed, the greatest national interest in the peaceful settlement of the Arab Israeli conflict, as this will ascertain the credibility and seriousness of the peace strategy that it had pursued at an early time. The year 2007 witnessed an extensive Egyptian drive to activate the negotiations, secure the success of the initiatives and to support the conferences and meetings related to the peace process between the Palestinians and the Israelis. This may be detected through three distinct phases. First, through an Egyptian alternative plan to the stumbled Road Map, this continued throughout the months of January and February 2007. The second phase was related to the preparations, participation and then the follow-up of the recommendations of the March 2007 Arab summit. The third phase, that extended from June to the end of the year 2007, synchronized with the acceptance and support for the call of the American President George Bush to convene a peace conference in autumn, which first carried the nomenclature “the autumn conference,” and finally became popularly known as “Annapolis meeting,” which, anyhow was held towards the end of 2007. During this last phase, the Egyptian government actively pursued the revival of the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations in accordance with the “Annapolis’ understandings.”

1. The Egyptian Attempt to Present and Sell an Alternative Initiative to the Road Map

This initiative was initiated by an Egyptian proposal to convene a quadrilateral Egyptian–Jordanian–Palestinian–Israeli summit to revive the peace process, and to resume the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations on the final settlement.⁶³ In an interview with the Egyptian magazine *Rose al-Yousuf*, the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said that Egypt has a specific vision for the establishment of a comprehensive peace based on the international legitimacy, and is of the opinion that a deal on the swapping of prisoners between Israel and the Palestinians would be instrumental in preparing the ground for the resumption of negotiations between the two sides.⁶⁴ In the interview, the Egyptian president revealed an initiative presented by Cairo in consultation with some Arab countries, and added that an Egyptian delegation will visit Washington in February 2007 to explain this initiative. The president asserted that this initiative is based on the Arab peace initiative, and contains some ideas to ascertain the possibility of Palestinian–Israeli co-existence, on condition that Israel

stops its practices against the people of GS and the WB, and to start to put the Palestinian political house in order. However, according to some reliable sources, this initiative included the discard of Hamas, and an emphasis on the Presidency as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians.⁶⁵

The Egyptian president submitted this initiative to Condoleezza Rice, during a meeting that he had with her in Luxor city, and to a number of Arab states, including the KSA. A senior Egyptian source denied that the proposed initiative contradicts the Arab peace initiative, and added that Saudi Arabia had accepted and supported it.⁶⁶

Ahmad Abu al-Ghait discussed this initiative with Rice and senior American officials in Washington, where he said that the Egyptian vision is to agree on two stages that will ultimately lead to the final settlement of establishing of the Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. He emphasized that Egypt totally rules out the notion of a temporary state, and that the first stage aspires to achieve stability in the relations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides through a number of reciprocal measures, notably swapping of prisoners, return to the “understandings of Sharm al-Sheikh” and strict observance of a ceasefire in order to build bridges between the two sides. As for the second stage, it is represented by the resumption of the final negotiations, which may be conducted in any form, including confidentiality.⁶⁷

The most important aspect of this initiative is its focus on the final objective of the probable negotiations. For, as the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs, Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, said, the former negotiations failed because their prior objective was not spelled out in advance.⁶⁸ However, the new initiative was also unsuccessful to break the deadlock probably because of the emergence of a new variable, namely the call for the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative, and the American–Israeli ambition of amendment to some of its terms, which they hoped to be endorsed by the forthcoming Riyadh Summit.

2. Egypt, the Arab Summit and the Reactivation of the Arab Peace Initiative

Egypt actively and favorably responded to the call for the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative through arranging for Condoleezza Rice to have two meetings in Aswan city in the south of Egypt, the first with the so-called “Arab Quartet,” and the second with the intelligence chiefs of four countries (Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the UAE). Moreover, Egypt was also an active and

direct partner in the so-called “Rice deal,” which was, however, aborted by the Israeli refusal of the Arab initiative. Additionally, Egypt patronized the Riyadh Summit in order to reactivate the initiative, and it publicly denied any intention to amend it in accordance with the American–Israeli demands. Moreover, Egypt participated in the concerned committee to pursue the initiative, which took the name of the committee of the Arab peace initiative, and Ahmad Abu al-Ghait discussed it, together with his Jordanian counterpart, with the officials of Israel. Before departing to Israel, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs denied that the initiative’s committee is delegated to negotiate with Israel, and emphasized that such negotiations is a special concern of each party that have problem with Israel, be it the Palestinians, Syrians or Lebanese.⁶⁹

Egypt continued its efforts to reactivate the peace initiative through several meetings and conferences. Amongst these was a trio-meeting in Sharm al-Sheikh between the ministers of foreign affairs of Egypt, Jordan and Israel, which triggered differences between the Arab and Israeli sides because of the attitude of Tzipi Livni towards the Arab initiative. The Egyptian minister of foreign affairs said that the meeting addressed many of the Arab concepts of peace and their Israeli counterparts. He added that the two Arab ministers asked Livni to strictly respect the territories under the PA, stop the policy of assassinations and all other military acts against the Palestinians, and to forthwith take measures that cultivate confidence with the Palestinian side.⁷⁰

After her meeting with the two ministers, Livni met the Egyptian president, and discussed with him the means to revive the peace process, and the probable Israeli interaction with the Arab initiative.⁷¹

However, the most important Egyptian move in this direction was a quadrilateral Egyptian–Jordanian–Palestinian–Israeli summit in Sharm al-Sheikh, which, according to a declaration by the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs, aimed at supporting the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas, revival of the peace process and to give a push to the Palestinian–Israeli relations.⁷²

In his opening speech of Sharm al-Sheikh Summit, President Mubarak called for a joint action to stop the bloodshed on both sides, end violence and to prepare the ground for the resumption of negotiations in accordance with a clear “political horizon” that culminates in the discussion of the issues of the final settlement, and not to unilateral actions and temporary settlements. The ultimate aim,

Mubarak added, is to achieve a just peace based on the position and principles of the international community, and the aspirations of the Palestinian people in an independent state. Addressing Ehud Olmert, Mubarak explained, “If you had fully implemented the understandings that ‘Abbas concluded in Sharm al-Sheikh in February 2005 with the former Israeli premier Ariel Sharon, the situation would not have deteriorated to the extent that it reached today.”⁷³

On the next day, the Egyptian president briefed the Saudi King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz on the quadrilateral summit. They also discussed the means of containing the grave confrontation between Fatah and Hamas, unite the Palestinian house and persuade the two movements to the negotiation table.⁷⁴

3. Egypt and the Annapolis Meeting

A couple of hours after the call of the American President George Bush to convene “in autumn” an international conference on the peace process, Egypt welcomed the proposal. Ahmad Abu al-Ghait declared that the move has some positive elements that the Arabs should adhere to and build upon. He, moreover, expressed his support to the indications mentioned in Bush declaration on the subject, namely the necessity to end the occupation and to establish an effective and viable Palestinian state.⁷⁵

Since that time and until the Annapolis meeting of 29/11/2007, the Egyptian government expressed keenness, and took steps too, to provide good preparations for the conference in order to achieve its desired objectives. Hence, Egypt undertook a number of activities towards that goal, including meetings and conferences as well as declarations by the Egyptian president and his minister of foreign affairs. President Mubarak called for an agreement on principles around the Palestinian state prior to the “peace conference,”⁷⁶ while his minister of foreign affairs said, in reference to the possibility that America fails to extend an invitation to Syria, that his country does not place any conditions for participation. In this respect, he said, “We ascertain the invitation of all Arab parties that are willing to participate in this meeting, but we do not associate this with specific conditions for Egypt’s participation or non-participation.”⁷⁷

Moreover, Egypt organized in Alexandria on 4/9/2007 a meeting between the Egyptian president and the Jordanian King ‘Abdullah II, and a trio Egyptian–Jordanian–Palestinian summit in Sharm al-Sheikh on 22/11/2007. In the former Alexandria summit, the Egyptian and Jordanian sides emphasized the importance

of Arab coordination before participation in the conference, the necessarily that the conference comes out with positive outcome, and that the Arab peace initiative constitutes the basis for the Arab vision on the conference.⁷⁸ As for the trio-summit, the Egyptian president renewed the call of good preparations, and to have clear agenda and basis by saying, “By the end of the day, the most important goal is to achieve tangible results that push forward the peace process along the Palestinians–Israeli path, and in a way that opens the gate for similar progress along the other paths.”⁷⁹

ii. The Egyptian Position Versus the Inter-Palestinian Conflicts

Throughout the year Egypt had given priority to contain the differences that accelerated to bloody conflicts between the PA and Fatah from one side and Hamas movement on the otherside. Egypt adopted various means to contain these differences, amongst which were bipartite and tripartite dialogues, then the dispatch of a high ranking security delegation, headed by Major–General Burhan Hammad and under the supervision of the Egyptian intelligence chief Omar Sulaiman, the arrangement of bilateral, trilateral and quadrilateral summits, and adopting this stance in the meetings of the Arab foreign ministers. But this attitude had changed after Gaza’s bloody and drastic incidents, as Egypt withdrew its security delegation and ordered its return to Cairo, which was an obvious indication of its rejection of the bloody means to settle the conflict between Fatah and Hamas. Subsequently, it temporarily sided with the PA, but shortly afterwards reverted to a balanced position between the two movements. However, finally, the Egyptian regime exhibited support to President ‘Abbas’ confrontational position versus Hamas.

In the beginning of 2007, and after a summit between the Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak and the Jordanian King ‘Abdullah II Ibn al-Hussein, Egypt and Jordan called for the stoppage of the Palestinian killing, and the conclusion of a deal between Fatah and Hamas to form either a national unity or technocratic government.⁸⁰ Egypt also called upon the Palestinian factions to join Mecca Agreement, and denied any retreat from its supportive position to the inter-Palestinian dialogue after Fatah and Hamas co-signed this agreement. It, furthermore, emphasized that the implementation of this agreement had been undertaken through coordination and consultation between Cairo and Riyadh, and that since several months ago the Egyptian security delegation has been continuing in performing its duty.⁸¹

Through its Gaza-stationed security delegation, under Major-General Burhan Hammad, Egypt succeeded to halt renewed cycle of bloodshed through a fifth ceasefire agreement between Fatah and Hamas.⁸² Hence, it started a new round of dialogue, with the participation of several Palestinian factions that was modeled on the previous 2005 Cairo dialogue.⁸³ But these dialogues were not completed because of Hamas' reversion to the policy of military decisiveness in the GS.

Just before this decisive military action, Israel casted doubt on the intentions of Egypt. The Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* claimed that the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said, "Egypt does not accept Hamas to be in the government, especially because of its increasingly strong relations with the Muslim Brotherhood movement." But Major-General Burhan Hammad denied this assertion,⁸⁴ and continued his role to contain the crisis between Hamas and Fatah. In fact, at a time, and before Hamas' successful and decisive military action, Major-General Hammad was the sole intermediary between the two movements.⁸⁵ By then, he ascertained that satanic hands, which had become professional in igniting fighting between the brothers, are pursuing their evil acts in the Palestinian arena.⁸⁶ He warned that he will join the Palestinian masses to stop the bloody killing in the streets, and called for an urgent meeting in his office in Gaza to stop this bloodshed.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, the Egyptian minister of foreign affairs refused the notion of sending international forces to the Palestinian territories unless and until four conditions are accepted and implemented: total stoppage of inter-Palestinian fighting, the conclusion of a ceasefire, the stoppage of all Israeli acts of aggression against the Palestinian people, and, finally, the ultimate objective should be a clear cut final settlement.⁸⁸

These developments convinced the Egyptian authorities that a "mischievous group" is fishing in troubled waters in the Palestinian arena, and that it is employed by some external forces to achieve certain scenarios, of which the most important is to foment chaos in the Palestinian territories in order to remove Hamas from power. *Al-Hayat* newspaper reported that some reliable Egyptian sources said that President Mahmud 'Abbas "knows the sequence of events, and the personalities behind the fighting. He has all the information, but he did not take any action against them, they were not arrested."⁸⁹ Subsequently, quoting a high ranking source in the Egyptian security delegation in Gaza, the Cairo newspaper *al-Masry al-Youm* reported that Muhammad Dahlan and his ilk in the security forces of the PA are responsible for igniting the conflict between Fatah and Hamas. The report

added that this group has secret contacts with Israel and the United States, and that its objective is to capture power and control the political leadership, hence concluding treaties with Israel on the latter's terms.⁹⁰

The reality of these assumptions and accusations was subsequently revealed in an article published by the American Journalist David Rose in the American magazine *Vanity Fair*. Depending on some documents, the article reported that, following Hamas' victory in the legislative elections, the American administration planned and strove to overthrow its government politically and militarily by igniting a civil war in the GS. The article added that General Keith Dayton allocated to Muhammad Dahlan this task, and that a secret plan, endorsed by the American president, the secretary of state and the Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy, Elliott Abrams, was drawn to implement this mission. David Rose continued to say that Rice approached the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the UAE to support Fatah in cash to purchase arms and to train the security forces of the PA. With the approval of the Israeli government, four Egyptian trucks loaded with light arms crossed to Gaza in December 2006. The article had even reported that the Israeli Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer explained that the armament will enable Mahmud 'Abbas to deal with the organizations that are trying to destroy everything.⁹¹

The accuracy of the information of David Rose's article was established by a report in the Lebanese newspaper *al-Akhbar*, which by quoting informed Palestinian sources, said that Hamas handed to the Egyptian authorities supportive documents of a conspiracy that Hamas found in the security headquarters, and that Egypt had consequently changed its hostile attitude towards the movement. Amongst these documents was a video tape showing some of Dahlan's reliable security agents discussing the means to place some sensitive cameras near the Egyptian borders with Gaza, and that the Israelis wanted this to surveil the movements of the Egyptian soldiers stationed there. These cameras were supposed to be connected with the Israeli security headquarters in Karam Abu Salem crossing, east of the Rafah crossing. Furthermore, these evidences included a map, signed by the former director of the Palestinian internal security Brigadier-General Rashid Abu Shbak, showing the coordinates of the Egyptian security headquarters in Gaza. While another document signed also by Abu Shbak shows the mechanism of the surveillance cameras surrounding the headquarters and information on the non-official visits by the Palestinian factions to the place.⁹²

These documents did restore balance to the Egyptian position towards the conflicting parties, but only for a short time, as Hamas' control of Gaza led to a completely different Egyptian attitude, which expressed itself in the withdrawal of the Egyptian security delegation and the closure of its headquarter in Gaza.⁹³ Hence, to guard against Palestinian migration, Egypt declared the state of emergency along Gaza borders.⁹⁴ It also welcomed Salam Fayad's government as an alternative to that of Hamas,⁹⁵ refused the separation between GS and the WB, and indicated that Hamas would be isolated. *Al-Hayat* newspaper quoted a reliable Egyptian source saying that Cairo "does not recognize the new illegitimate status" in GS, and that there is a call for an Arab gathering to emphasize the legitimacy of President Abu Mazin, and to refuse any contacts with an independent state in Gaza headed by Hamas, with the possibility of isolating it regionally.⁹⁶

In pursuit of this orientation, Egypt organized a quadrilateral summit, that included Egypt, Jordan, Palestine and Israel, to support President 'Abbas and try to end the Palestinian differences. But Olmert took an extremist position on the resumption of the peace process, threatened to retreat from the few undertakings that he gave to Mahmud 'Abbas if he opted to reopen dialogue with Hamas, as demanded by President Mubarak, and was even inclined, with the support of the Israeli media, to the military option against Hamas.⁹⁷

However, this summit demonstrated a clear and sudden contradiction between the position of Egypt on one side and the other three partners. While Olmert, 'Abbas, and King 'Abdullah II saw eye to eye on the issue of strengthening 'Abbas at the expense of Hamas, Egypt had become glaringly cautious not to fall in an Israeli trap that harbors the siege and isolation of Hamas, hence losing an opportunity to revive the peace negotiations. Such a course may also, in Egypt's view, lead in future to the "West Bank first" option and the consequential further partition of the Palestinian issue.⁹⁸ Hence, Egypt concentrated in this summit on calling upon the Palestinians to end their differences,⁹⁹ and president Mubarak had once more emphasized that Egypt will in due course resume its intercession between Fatah and Hamas.¹⁰⁰ Some Egyptian sources denied rumors that Egypt will suspend supplies to GS, instead they confirmed that it initiated contacts with the Israeli side to guarantee that the GS will not be exposed to a humanitarian crisis with regard to the basic supplies of gas, water, electricity, food and medical provisions. These sources added that Egypt's desire to emphasize and support

'Abbas' legitimacy is confronted with the concept of restoring and guaranteeing Palestinian unity, and the sources also pointed out that Cairo has grave concerns regarding the deteriorating conditions of GS. In this respect, a diplomatic source had reportedly said, "Egypt is impatiently looking for the outcome of the events in the region, and that it will not strive to isolate Hamas internationally." The source added that once calm prevails, Cairo will summon the factions for negotiations on the existing conditions, and it also emphasized the Egyptian refusal of the notion to send international forces to GS.¹⁰¹

Egypt had, furthermore, played a major role in calling the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers for a meeting to discuss the inter-Palestinian conflict, and to form an investigation committee, representing Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Qatar, to explore the vision of each side on what had happened and why it happened, and to suggest the appropriate means that guarantee contacts and the resumption of the inter-Palestinian dialogue.¹⁰² Though the mission of this committee had stumbled, Egypt continued its effort to resume this dialogue, and to contain the conflicts, particularly between Hamas and Fatah. During the course of the first week of September 2007, it invited two delegations, representing Hamas and Fatah, to Cairo to explore the possibility of the resumption of dialogue between them. Furthermore, Egypt prepared various versions for reconciliation and rapprochement, amongst which one provided for a declaration by Hamas to evacuate the security buildings of the PA, or to declare its readiness to forgo the status that resulted from its military action, without, however, spelling out the steps to do so.¹⁰³ But this step did not achieve the desired objectives, and the estrangement between the two sides continued.

However, the subsequent events of January 2008 Gaza crossings revealed President 'Abbas' intransigent conditions on the prospect of dialogue with Hamas.

iii. The Egyptian Position towards the Support to the Palestinian People and the Imposed Siege on Them

The overall Egyptian attitude towards the Palestinian issue continued to be governed by two considerations: adherence to both the Arab national security and the Egyptian national security, and to prevent Palestine, especially the GS, from being transferred into a threat to Egyptian security. Egypt (as a regime) was obliged to continue its support to the Palestinian people, but within the limits that do not adversely affect its relations with Israel, and, at the same time, do not allow

the internal catastrophe of the Palestinian people to be a source of threat to internal political stability (due to probable popular reactions), and national security (i.e., the borders and relations with Israel).

Hence, Egypt never hesitated to support the Palestinian people, though it clearly and totally refused Hamas' decisive military action in GS. It initiated extensive contacts with the Israeli side to avoid a humanitarian crisis in GS with regard to food, petrol, gas, electricity, water and medical supplies. A senior Egyptian official declared that though his country adamantly rejects the formation of a "religious emirate" on its borders, it "will not under any circumstances allow further hardship to be inflicted on the Palestinian people in Gaza." He added that Egypt "informed Israel of this position, which it had seemingly understood."¹⁰⁴ However, concurrently, some Egyptian security and border sources said, "There is no coordination between the Egyptian and Palestinian sides on the movement of the thousands of the stranded Palestinians along the borders between Egypt and Gaza." The sources added, "After Hamas' control of Rafah border crossing, contacts between the officials on both sides had almost stopped."¹⁰⁵ But subsequently, another Egyptian official source emphasized that Egypt "will never take punitive measures against the Palestinian people, factions or leaders."¹⁰⁶

These and other positions triggered some leaders of Israel to accuse Egypt of tolerance and facilitation on the issue of smuggling weapons by Palestinians into GS via the tunnels along the Egyptian side in Sinai; which had considerably strained the Israeli–Egyptian relations. Soon Israel became a partner on the "tunnels issue," and both Tzipi Livni¹⁰⁷ and Ehud Barak issued declarations on the issue that were considered by Egypt as "insulting" and to have crossed the red lines. These angry Egyptian reactions were particularly furious after hints by some American officials, like Senator Arlen Specter, that linked American aid to Egypt with the smuggling of weapons via the tunnels to GS.¹⁰⁸

These accusations were extended to include the Egyptian position towards the stranded Palestinians along the borders, particularly the pilgrims. For the tension along the borders had obstructed the passage via Rafah crossing to and from Gaza, particularly after Hamas absolute control of the GS. However, Egypt tried to reduce this tension at that sensitive time when deliberations and contacts were ongoing to reactivate the understandings of Annapolis meeting, and Egypt was trying to maintain a form of working relations with the PA and its leader Mahmud 'Abbas.

The victim of these considerations were some 2,170 Palestinian pilgrims who remained stranded along the borders, and of whom some remained for sometime on board in two boats near the Egyptian port of Nuweiba.¹⁰⁹ Finally, however, an Egyptian decree ignored an Israeli decision to keep them stranded, and they were allowed to cross.

These relatively firm Egyptian positions were extended to the crossings' crisis, which erupted in January 2008 due to the arrogance and intransigence of Israel. For it closed all the crossings with GS, imposed comprehensive blockade, which extended to petrol and electricity, and launched extensive attacks on the GS, which made it and its inhabitants virtual hostages, and exposed them to what looked like genocide. The Egyptian position towards this growing crisis was sympathetic to say the least. It started with contacts with Israel to stop the aggression and lift the siege, and developed to a favorable response to the angry reaction of the Palestinian people who penetrated Rafah crossing. In response, President Mubarak declared that he "will not allow the starvation of the Palestinian people."¹¹⁰ Hence, more than half of Gazans crossed to the Egyptian territories to get all kind of provisions, as the GS was virtually void of all things. However, the Egyptian government gradually retreated in reaction to Israeli hints to revive the Egyptian alternative, which meant the transfer of the responsibility of the GS to Egypt. Moreover, was the refusal of Mahmud 'Abbas, the president of the PA, to any compromise with Hamas, including some new arrangements on the crossings, that Egypt, in the words of its foreign minister, intended to deliberate with the PA and Hamas. Consequently, after a warning that gave the Gazans a grace period to return to the GS, the Egyptian government restored its authority on Rafah crossing, and started to maintain and rebuild the border steel fence, which had earlier been destroyed by the so-called "The Popular Resistance Committees" in Gaza.¹¹¹

The Egyptian relaxed policy towards the Palestinian travelers to Sinai, which transferred the frontiers to the so-called "soft borders,"¹¹² infuriated the Israelis and the Americans, and was probably a reason for instigating "the Egyptian option"¹¹³ by the Israeli deputy minister of defence and other Israeli officials. The influx of tens of thousands of Palestinians into Sinai led to an Israeli warning to Egypt, when the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that it has asked the Egyptian government to do what it should do "by virtue of the peace treaty."¹¹⁴ Moreover, Condoleezza Rice called upon Egypt to shoulder its responsibilities to defend "the

international borders.”¹¹⁵ Hence was the Egyptian transfer towards firmness on the issue of the borders, the appearance in the Egyptian official media of the so-called “violation of national sovereignty,” and the accusation of Hamas that it intends to establish an “Islamic Emirate.”¹¹⁶ Further successive steps followed the closure of the borders. Notably was the strong response of President Mubarak that Egypt “will not allow Israel to disavow from its responsibilities in Gaza”¹¹⁷ and Egypt’s drive for reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and finding a joint solution for the administration of the crossings.¹¹⁸ The latter proposal had, anyhow, failed because of the refusal of President ‘Abbas and senior ministers in his government to allow Hamas to have any role in the administration of the crossings,¹¹⁹ and their insistence to adhere to the 2005 treaty on the issue.¹²⁰

iv. The Egyptian Position towards Normalization

Egypt’s normalization with Israel was not isolated from the totality of the previous interactions. For the issue of peace depends, to a large extent, on the Israeli–Palestinian relations, which may be divided into two types, namely confrontational and cooperative. While the former reflects various degrees of tension and differences, the latter expresses a degree of the Egyptian enthusiasm to maintain a measure of reconciliation that may be used in the interest of the Palestinian issue.

Amongst the disputable or differential issues was the Egyptian borders issue with GS, and Egypt’s refusal to accept the Israeli accusations of leniency in the supervision of these borders by allegedly turning a blind eye to the smuggling of arms into Gaza.¹²¹ Besides are the differences over the refusal of Israel to accept the Arab Peace Initiative,¹²² on the firm official position that refuses to allow the passage or infiltration of Sudanese into Israel,¹²³ on the Israeli nuclear capabilities,¹²⁴ and the refusal of Egypt to accept the Israeli reservations on its nuclear project.¹²⁵

As for the cooperative interactions or relations, they were limited to bilateral meetings between prominent Egyptian and Israeli personalities, or to participation in trilateral or quadrilateral summits in which the two parties as well as Jordan and Palestine may be involved to promote the peace project and the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations.¹²⁶ Moreover, Egypt drove to resolve the issue of the Israeli detainee with Hamas through a deal of swapping prisoners that satisfies both the Israeli and Palestinian sides.¹²⁷

Within this proposed framework, we may be able to suggest that normalization between Egypt and Israel is strictly confined to a limited area that can not be expanded because of the extremist Israeli policies, and the ongoing manipulation of the Israeli government about the peace settlement.

b. Syria

Within the multiplicity of the Syrian positions on the four subjects of analysis, we may notice that they concentrate on the Palestinian–Israeli and the Syrian–Israeli settlement issues, and the alternatives of war and peace that are associated with them.

i. The Syrian Position towards the Palestinian–Israeli Peace Settlement

The developments in the Syrian position towards Annapolis meeting was governed by developments in the American position on the question of Syria's participation in the meeting. Thus, when America had initially failed, after three months of deliberations, to officially extend an invitation to the Syrian government, the latter's Minister of Foreign Affairs Walid al-Mu'allem responded to this American deliberate neglect by expressing his country's concern that George W. Bush may view this conference as an alternative to the Arab peace initiative,¹²⁸ and a Syrian diplomat dismissed it by saying "It is a clear attempt to sell the indecisive American and Israeli policies," and that Syria "is directly concerned with the issue of the Palestinian refugees, as it hosts more than half a million of them in its territories."¹²⁹ However, the most important comment on the conference was by president Bashar al-Assad himself, who said, "Syria has not received an invitation to the autumn conference. Even if it does, it will not participate in a conference that lacks opportunities of success, unless and until there will be clear elements of seriousness, of which the most important is to include the occupied Golan in its agenda."¹³⁰

Based on this position, Syria gave the Palestinian resistance movements the green light to organize a counter popular conference to that of Annapolis in which popular Arab delegations were scheduled to participate. This tantamounted to a Syrian message of protest against the American policies and the autumn conference itself. However, some Arab parties, particularly the PA, interfered to persuade the Syrian leadership to cancel or at least postpone this conference to a time after Annapolis meeting.¹³¹ Al-Tayyib 'Abd al-Rahim, the secretary–general of the Palestinian presidency, announced that President 'Abbas will send a delegation

to Damascus to ask the Syrian leadership not to allow a conference which some factions in the PLO, Hamas, al-PIJ and some Palestinian personalities had called for to reject the autumn meeting (Annapolis). ‘Abd al-Rahim emphasized that “Abu Mazin considers a permission to convene this conference tantamounts to a permission of establishing a new PLO, as it will lead to a schism in the present PLO.”¹³²

However, in the words of Muhsen Bilal, the Syrian minister of information, following an American invitation to Damascus, and after some contacts that President Bashar al-Assad had with international and Arab officials, “The Syrian leadership met and discussed the invitation to attend the conference. Taken into consideration the consensus of the Arab ministers of foreign affairs in their meeting in Cairo which was attended by 17 ministers, it accepted the invitation.” He added, “The acceptance of this invitation is in effect resumption of the negotiations to restore the Golan.”¹³³

After this acceptance and practical participation in the conference, Syria had to face the music regarding two developments. First, to mend its resulting strained relations with Iran that was caused by some bitter Iranian criticism to a couple of top Syrian officials, and widespread popular demonstrations that condemned Annapolis meeting, which was viewed as sell out of the rights of the Palestinian people, and the countries that participated in it. The second was the failure of the conference to achieve the aspirations that the parties, especially Syria, hoped for, particularly on the Golan. For the meeting ended with vague understandings on the resumption of the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations in the hope that this it will lead by the end of 2008 to the establishment of a Palestinian state, as promised by the American president.

To contain the strain in the relations with Iran, the Syrian minister of foreign affairs took the initiative to meet the Iranian ambassador in Damascus. He explained to him the reasons that led Syria to participate, focusing on what he called, “the national priority to the Golan.” He added, “It is unbecoming for an international conference to convene without the Golan, whether there is a possibility for its success to initiate serious negotiations or just to be a forum to explain a point of view.”¹³⁴ This diplomatic move was followed by another, namely sending Deputy Foreign Minister Faisal al-Miqdad, at the head of a high level Syrian delegation to Tehran to deliver a message from the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to his

Iranian counterpart President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, and to explain to the Iranian officials with whom he will meet the outcome of the Syrian participation in Annapolis.¹³⁵

With regard to the second aftermath, namely the practical failure of Annapolis, the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert denied that his government and that of the USA had deceived Syria on the issue of the Golan. He further claimed that the Syrian issue was scheduled to be “casual,” and indicated that negotiations with Syria on the Golan “are still premature,” and that “Syria knows our conditions for this.”¹³⁶ This comment was hailed by the Israeli press, which came to the conclusion that “the trio-Bush, Olmert and Abu Mazin were the real winners, though to varying degrees” and that Syria “is the biggest loser.” Besides, the press reiterated, “nobody in Israel will seriously view the possibility of concluding a settlement within the specified timeframe, i.e., during 2008.”¹³⁷

ii. The Syrian Position towards the Inter-Palestinian Dispute

Historically, Syria had not seen eye to eye with the leadership of the PA on many issues, specifically on the latter’s administration of the domestic Palestinian affairs, and with regard to its conduct of the peace project. Hence, Syria was more inclined to accept the Palestinian opposition and to open the country to its activities, which has frequently clashed with the vision of Fatah and the PLO. Hence, following Gaza’s bloody incidents Syria’s position was initially rather cautious and hesitant, but it soon transferred in the second phase to call for national unity and to avoid escalation to the extent of total estrangement that serves nobody except Israel.¹³⁸ This position was basically different from an almost total Arab consensus, lead by the “moderate axis,” or some of its states, that supported the PA and its President Mahmud ‘Abbas.

Before these incidents, and in a meeting between President Bashar al-Assad and Khalid Mish’al, the head of Hamas political bureau, Syria vividly demonstrated its support to Mecca Agreement.¹³⁹ However, side by side with this support, Syria exhibited special interest and treatment to both Hizbullah and Hamas. Thus, in his opening speech of the meetings of the central committee of the ruling Ba’th Party, President Bashar al-Assad undertook the continuation of support to Hizbullah and Hamas.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the president of the Syrian delegation withdrew from the meeting of the Arab foreign ministers convened in the Arab League’s headquarter to resolve the conflict between Fatah and Hamas, which was interpreted by some

observers as a Syrian opposition to the dominant pro-Abu Mazin tendency that focused on pressing Hamas to yield to the so-called “requirements of peace,” i.e., recognition of the conditions of the Quartet and of Israel.¹⁴¹

This stance was a continuation of a previous position taken by Youssef al- Ahmed, Syria’s ambassador to the Arab League and to Egypt. During a meeting of the Arab ministers of information, the ambassador objected to what he considered the disregard of the general secretariat of the Arab League to the “Palestinian legislative council,” which was dominated by Hamas.¹⁴²

Meanwhile, Walid al-Mu‘allem had demonstrated the Syrian position towards Gaza incidents and their repercussions by emphasizing that the priority should not be given to negotiations with Israel, but rather to the achievement of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. He, moreover, warned that the imposed siege on Gaza will lead to further instability.¹⁴³ Following president ‘Abbas’ declaration that dissolved Hamas’ government and formed that of Salam Fayyad, al- Mu‘allem declared, “Syria recognizes the legitimacy of President ‘Abbas and his legitimate right to dissolve the government, but at the same time ascertains the existence of a legitimately elected government and a legitimate parliament.”¹⁴⁴ Subsequently, Syrian Vice-President Farouq al-Shara‘, supported this position, and warned that what is going on is “unprecedented confusion of issues, particularly in Palestine.” He added, “The general interest requires that we support the Palestinian people, and to be with all the factions that express the aspirations of these determined people. We will not be with one side against the other; especially as such a behavior will be destructive.” Whoever stands with one party against the other “destroys the Palestinian cause, essentially there will be no peace if there is a dangerous schism in the Palestinian arena.”¹⁴⁵ By these and other declarations, Syria meant to warn against any bias towards the PA and its President Mahmud ‘Abbas against Hamas, a bias that has, in fact, dominated the policies of the Arab countries, particularly those of the so-called “moderate axis.”

iii. The Syrian Position towards Supporting the Palestinian People

Syria expressed its support to the Palestinian people through defending their rights in Arab and international forums, and practically by hosting hundreds of thousands of them in its territories. Besides, the leadership and headquarters of “the rejectionist organizations” and the Palestinian resistance are housed in Syria, which provoked constant American and Israeli accusations that it supports

“terrorism.” Terrorism is, in fact, the official American designation of all resistance and resistance movements, especially those of the Arabs.

Thus, it was only logical that Syria condemns the imposed Israeli siege, bombardment, infiltration and assassinations in GS. It, furthermore, demanded that a mini Arab summit be convened to discuss the catastrophic situation in GS, and asked, through contacts with the secretary-general of the Arab League, that the resolution of the Arab ministers of foreign affairs to end the siege on Gaza be activated.¹⁴⁶

iv. The Syrian Position on the Relations with Israel

The year 2007 was the most obscure year on the prospect of the achievement of a Syrian–Israeli peace deal, and on the possibility of war, which was not, anyhow, farfetched at any time. This obscurity was more Israeli than Syrian. For Israel had verbally given clear indications of its desire to resume the peace negotiations with Syria, but at the same time it practically committed acts of aggression and defiance that do not reflect any intentions for peace.

A study by the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) sums up this Israeli position. It warns against the possibility of the outbreak of war between Israel and Syria, and indicates that the two countries confront a security dilemma that accelerates tension between them. It recommends that the Israeli policy makers manipulate between sending to Syria messages of deterrent actions and those of peace and calm, in order to prevent deterioration in the relations between the two countries that may lead to the outbreak of a sudden and unplanned war. The study advised Tel Aviv to maintain a dubious position with regard to its future intentions towards Damascus and never to give it a feeling of full comfort.¹⁴⁷

Though the general Israeli temperament was in favor of this dubious policy, it was more inclined towards weakening Syria and to dismantle its alliances in order to compel it to accept peace on Israeli terms. The institute’s memorandum, entitled “The Campaign to Weaken Hizbullah,” fixed its objective in the following: “The necessity of minimizing the threat that Hizbullah poses to the security of Israel and the stability in the region, through eroding its power and to transfer it into a marginal player that has no role in the regional alliances.” This should be undertaken by various means that start by damaging the party’s relation with both Iran and Syria, and extends to weakening its leadership, properties, abilities and funds through “a secret battle that targets its leaders in assassination operations,

particularly its secretary-general who plays the leading role in promoting the party's image through his charismatic character and superb organizational abilities." For the liquidation of Hassan Nasrallah "will decisively shaken the party and gives Israel a first class moral boost."¹⁴⁸ All this shows that Syria has become the prime target, to such an extent that some have felt that the question is no longer whether there will be a war or not, but in which month of 2008 will it take place. This is because Syria in its present shape constitutes the primary linkage of the axis of Iran-Syria-the Resistance, the axis of evil as the United States calls it.¹⁴⁹ During the last few months of 2007, Syria had become an American-Israeli target. The weakening of the close relations between Damascus and France, which was reflected in the accusations of the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and his American counterpart George W. Bush that Syria bears the full responsibility for the failure of the efforts to elect a new Lebanese president, was only one example of the evil intentions towards the country. However, an item of INSS above memorandum talked of the opportunities of changes in the relations between Syria and Hizbullah that may weaken the latter. The memorandum noted that a change in Syria's relations with Hizbullah may be achieved through one of the following scenarios: First, the collapse, or to cause the collapse, of the existing regime and the establishment of a new one that departs from the present policies towards Hizbullah by concluding a peace treaty with Israel; second, as part of a bundle of regional arrangements; third, through intensification of international pressure on Syria; and fourth to provoke a schism or crisis in the relations between Damascus and Tehran. However, the priority of the memorandum is given to the first scenario, which could not be achieved except through a surgical operation, of which war will certainly be the first phase. But another tendency in Israel, favored by some Arab states, argues the necessity of containing Syria by dismantling its relations with Iran, as this will achieve twofold objectives. First, to weaken of Syria to such an extent that it will be compelled to accept a peace deal on the Israeli terms; second, to erode its relations with Hizbullah, by implementing an Israeli project that revives or restores the "Syrian alternative" to the forefront of Israel's diplomacy.

Some Israeli newspapers quoted senior officials saying that an agreement with Syria is achievable without negotiations while the one with the Palestinians will not materialize in spite of the negotiations. Most of the betting focuses on Ehud Barak, the minister of defense, and the most, or one of the most, important

strategists who advocates the necessity of an agreement with Syria even at the expense of the Golan. It is reported that Barak have cultivated relations with some American and Canadian Jewish investors who believed that Syria provides the best opportunities for regional investment. Besides, the price for peace with Syria is much less painful for Israel and the Israelis than that with the Palestinians, as the latter requires that Israel surrenders the West Bank.¹⁵⁰

The American supported Israeli attack on an alleged Syrian nuclear site was nothing but an extension of this orientation¹⁵¹ which, according to some observers, aimed at “restoring Israel’s deterrent capability that had been lost in the 2006 war on Lebanon.”¹⁵² Being aware of this Israeli tendency, Syria’s reaction was, as usual in such circumstances, cautious and calm. In his condemnation of the act that violated Syrian sovereignty, Walid al-Mu‘allem emphasized that:

The penetration of the Israeli planes in Syrian territories come only hours after a verbal message that I received from the Israeli Premier Olmert through the European Union’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Javier Solana, to the effect that Israel will start reducing its forces in the occupied Golan Heights.

This double talk shows that Israel had communicated this message at a time in which it was actually preparing for the aggression.¹⁵³

However, by this calculated reaction, Syria hoped to attain two objectives, namely not to be dragged into a war that the country was not ready for, and to keep up the momentum of the numerous Israeli initiatives to open up dialogue or peace negotiations.¹⁵⁴ Some had even reported indirect Syrian–Israeli dialogue, as well as mediation between the two sides, of which the most prominent were the Turkish and Russian intercessions.¹⁵⁵

Within this frame, Syria’s reserved response and hesitation between the options of war and peace may be understood. Though the Vice–President Farouq al-Shara‘ had at one time casted doubt on the opportunities for peace with Israel by saying “There is no prospect for negotiations between Syria and Israel without a clear cut American consent,” and added, “Peace with Israel is linked to all that happens in the region.”¹⁵⁶ A few months later he reiterated, “We do not want war with Israel but we feel that Israel is ready for it.”¹⁵⁷ But Walid al-Mu‘allem was much more blunt in this respect by saying that Syria “is more than ready to resume peace negotiations with Israel without prior conditions from both parties,” and added,

“If the Israelis decide to resume negotiations, they will find a ready partner.” The Syrian keenness to attend Annapolis meeting had therefore further ascertained this Syrian orientation.¹⁵⁸

c. Jordan

With noticeable coordination with the United States and Israel on one side and Egypt on the other side, Jordan gave a clear priority to the peace process. However, this was in the order of things as Jordan and Egypt were the pioneers in concluding peace treaties with Israel, and have direct neighborhood with GS and the WB. There are, moreover, the pressures and responsibilities that press the two countries to strive to conclude a settlement along the Palestinian path, which is of direct national interest for both of them. Besides, the inter-Palestinian dispute constituted the second priority of the Jordanian government within the four issues under analysis.

i. Jordan and the Peace Project

The Jordanian concern for a Palestinian–Israeli settlement expressed itself along two paths. The first path is by encouraging negotiations between the two sides, and trying to remove obstacles on their way and providing an environment conducive to their success. The second path is by resuming deliberations on the notion of a Jordanian–Palestinian confederation, but indirectly and unofficially, across some Jordanian and Palestinian quarters to avoid violent reactions rejecting this drive.

1. With regard to the first path, Jordan strove to promote the peace process through direct efforts with both Israel and the USA, and through bilateral coordination with both Egypt and the president of the PA. Hence were trilateral and quadrilateral summits with the participation of Ehud Olmert, the Israeli premier. Besides, with authorization from the Riyadh Arab Summit and in coordination with Egypt, Jordan undertook noticeable efforts to reactivate the Arab peace initiative. Moreover, it promptly and enthusiastically accepted the call of the American president for the Annapolis meeting, and did its utmost best to coordinate the Arab positions within the platform of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, or bilaterally with Egypt.

King ‘Abdullah II of Jordan had expressed this tendency at an early time in an interview with the American Journalist of the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) Charlie Rose. Within his criticism of the passive American role vis-à-vis the

settlement project, the King mentioned that Washington's hesitation to address the core concern in the region, i.e., the Palestinian issue, will lead to the regression of the American credibility.¹⁵⁹

Abdel Ilah Al Khatib and his Egyptian counterpart Ahmad Abu al-Ghait met in Cairo Tzipi Livni, a meeting that provoked differences between the two Arab ministers on one side and the Israeli minister on the other, because of the latter's rejection of the Arab peace initiative. In this meeting, the Jordanian minister emphasized the importance that Israel respects the territories under the PA, and to stop the policy of assassinations as well as all other forms of escalation against the Palestinians.¹⁶⁰

During the quadrilateral summit, which followed Gaza's bloody incidents, and in which the king of Jordan, President Mubarak, Mahmud 'Abbas and Ehud Olmert participated, King 'Abdullah II called for the initiation of political negotiations that should be based on the decisions of the international community and the principles of the Arab peace initiative. He emphasized the importance of fixing the agenda and timeframe for these negotiations that should lead to the establishment of the Palestinian state. The King added that the bloody developments in Gaza "do not serve the Palestinian people and their just cause."¹⁶¹

After the stumbling of the Arab peace initiative, the Jordanian focus shifted to Annapolis meeting. Hence, ahead of the meeting, King 'Abdullah II met President Hosni Mubarak in Alexandria to coordinate the Arab positions, which was a prerequisite for a possible positive outcome of the gathering.¹⁶² Prior to Annapolis, King 'Abdullah II also participated with President Mubarak and President Mahmud 'Abbas, in a trilateral summit in Sharm al-Sheikh that aimed at exploring ways and means for a coordinated Arab position. Moreover, the three leaders acquainted each other with the results of contacts that they had with some regional and international parties. According to the Egyptian presidential spokesman, the leaders were in full agreement on the issues discussed, and that the outcome of their deliberations opens the way for further optimism.¹⁶³

2. To pursue the second path of federation or confederation, the same method was followed, namely to explore common Arab understandings on the Palestinian rights that should be reconcilable with the Israeli interests. News circulated on meetings in the town of Jericho in the WB and the Jordanian town of Aqaba, to study the means of developing a successful Jordanian–Palestinian federation project.

Several prominent personalities were reportedly involved in these and other similar meetings. They included some of Fatah leaders like the PLO Executive Committee Secretary Yasir ‘Abd Rabbuh, Jibril Rajoub, the former Jordanian Prime Minister Abdel Salam al-Majali, at least 50 Palestinian public personalities–businessmen, university professors, journalists, etc., and over 50 prominent Jordanians.¹⁶⁴

Under the banner of talking directly with the leaders of the Israeli and Palestinian societies, some Jordanian quarters aired the notion of a federation between Jordan and the WB, which had reportedly attracted the attention of some Israeli leaders. Ehud Olmert sent a representative of the Kadima Party, Otniel Schneller, to study and be acquainted with the details of the project. It was also submitted to the Palestinian president, who expressed reservations on the proposal.¹⁶⁵

However, the notion does not appear to have matured, and it was not sufficiently and enthusiastically welcomed by both the Jordanians and the Palestinians. In a meeting with the ambassadors of the European Union, held in the house of the German ambassador in Amman, King ‘Abdullah II had himself reportedly said, “The concept of a Jordanian–Palestinian confederation or federation is not in our dictionary, and we will not accept to explore it at the present time,” adding, “Jordan may accept this project in future, but after the establishment of the independent Palestinian state, and on condition that it will then be fully accepted and endorsed by the Jordanian and Palestinian peoples.”¹⁶⁶

Subsequently, the Jordanian Government Spokesman Nasir Judah announced that the circulated reports of political approaches towards some Palestinian personalities to know their positions towards the confederation “do not by any means reflect the official Jordanian stand.”¹⁶⁷ In a further dialogue with the Jordanian *Alghad* newspaper, King ‘Abdullah II rejected the notion of a Jordanian–Palestinian confederation, known also as “responsibility sharing,” which he viewed as “a conspiracy against the Palestinian cause in which Jordan will not be involved,” adding, “Jordan has political, strategic and security interest in the establishment of an independent Palestinian state, and we reject the proposal of federation and confederation.”¹⁶⁸

ii. Jordan and the Inter-Palestinian Conflict

Jordan had exhibited noticeable attention to contain the bloody battles between the pro-Fatah and pro-Hamas elements, which were, however, linked to its calls of respect to Mecca Agreement, and the formation of a government of national unity.

King ‘Abdullah II had himself expressed these concerns in the two summits that he had with the Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, in January–February 2007.¹⁶⁹

The direct factor for Jordan’s drive to stop the killings between Fatah and Hamas was its negative internal (security) and external impact on the country. In a meeting with a group of Jordanian dignitaries with Palestinian origin, in October 2006, King ‘Abdullah II voiced these dangers by saying, “Jordan can tolerate a war in Iraq or Lebanon for a very long period, but it can not afford a similar war in Palestine for more than one or two months.”¹⁷⁰

As expressed by both the Palace and the government, the repercussions of the regional conflicts have alarmingly increased the Iranian role in the region, with its serious sectarian Shi‘ite threat to Jordan especially from the neighboring Iraq and Lebanon. Moreover, the Iranian–Syrian alliance, and Iran’s relations with the Hamas and PIJ had represented another grave danger to the Jordanian national interests. Within its definition of national priorities and after the conclusion of Camp David accords and Wadi ‘Arbah Treaty of Peace between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Jordanian government started to pursue the policy of “political and social divorce” with the Jordanian and Palestinian Islamic movements, which constituted a heavy burden on the country’s agenda that are based on the peace project.¹⁷¹ Thus, within this understanding, Jordan negatively views any Palestinian military confrontation that ends with the supremacy of Hamas. For these very reasons, Jordan was keen to avoid military confrontation between Fatah and Hamas in order not to avoid any opportunity for the latter to achieve a military victory against the PA. The same reasons were also behind the Jordanian support to the PA and its President Mahmud ‘Abbas after the Gaza events, which were viewed as a threat to the country’s national and regional interests.

Jordan focused on two objectives, namely to stop the killing and to support and protect the PA and its President Mahmud ‘Abbas. King ‘Abdullah II had repeatedly stressed this position in many regional forums, be it bilateral meetings with the Egyptian or Palestinian presidents, trio Jordanian–Egyptian–Palestinian summits or in the Sharm al-Sheikh’s quadrilateral summit, in which Ehud Olmert participated, that was especially called to support the PA and resume the Palestinian–Israeli negotiations.

Immediately after the bloody fighting in GS, King ‘Abdullah II called the Palestinian president to take all steps to stop the shedding of the Palestinian blood, end the chaos and to pursue the language of dialogue; besides calling for the protection of the PA and to prevent the collapse of its institutions.¹⁷² The same message was voiced by the Jordanian Premier Ma‘rouf al-Bakhit in a meeting that he had with the Palestinian Deputy Prime Minister ‘Azzam al-Ahmad; where he emphasized Jordan’s categorical rejection of the fighting, support to the Palestinian national legitimacy represented by the PLO, and respect to the constitutional institutions of the PA.¹⁷³

After Hamas’ imposition of its total control on GS, Jordan started to complain of Iranian intervention. The Jordanian premier claimed that the escalation in GS is artificial and had been engineered by some regional parties to divert attention from other much important regional issues.¹⁷⁴ He also talked of an agreement between Hamas and Iran by which the latter will train and supply arms to some elements of the former.¹⁷⁵ But what had been later revealed by the American Journalist David Rose in the American *Vanity Fair* magazine contradicts this version. For he mentioned that the Jordanian government was a partner of a coup plot, led by Muhammad Dahlan, to topple the government of Hamas,¹⁷⁶ and that what Hamas did was a preemptive strike that led to the failure of this conspiracy.

Jordan was among the first parties who supported the resolution of the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas that deposed the government of Hamas under Isma‘il Haniyyah and formed the new government of Salam Fayyad. This support was conveyed in a message of congratulations to the new government of Premier Ma‘rouf al-Bakhit.¹⁷⁷

In the quadrilateral summit of Sharm al-Sheikh, in which Ehud Olmert participated, Jordan’s position was in line with that of the Egyptians and Israelis in supporting the PA at the expense of Hamas.¹⁷⁸ In his address before this summit, King ‘Abdullah II recorded that “the late developments in Gaza would not serve the Palestinian people and their just cause.” He emphasized the necessity of “Jordan’s support to the Palestinian legitimacy, and that the international community and Israel should deal with Gaza Strip as an integral part of the Palestinian territories under the authority of the Palestinian Authority.”¹⁷⁹

iii. Jordan and the Support of the Palestinian People

Jordan was keen to exhibit sympathy with the Palestinian people of GS during the Israeli aggression and crimes against the GS during the period from late 2007 and throughout January 2008. This was particularly so during what became known as the “crossings’ crisis” when Israel stopped the electricity supply and prevented the passage of trucks across the crossings, which were, in fact, closed. King ‘Abdullah II approached President Hosni Mubarak, and the two agreed to intensify their joint effort with Israel and the international community to lift the siege on Gaza. According to a communiqué issued by the Jordanian palace, King ‘Abdullah II “considered the continuation of the Israeli aggression and its blockade of Gaza to be unsatisfactory.” Moreover, the King contacted the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas to once more emphasize Jordan’s rejection and condemnation of the aggression and the collective punishment that Israel imposed on GS.¹⁸⁰

Jordan’s reaction was not limited to condemnation and intercession with Israel to lift the siege, but it extended to include 16 trucks of food and medical supplies that it sent to GS. However, a controversy erupted over the seizure by Hamas’ (deposed) government of aid sent to the Palestinian Red Crescent. In defense of this step, Ziad Zaza, the minister of social affairs of the deposed government, said in a press conference that the Palestinian Red Crescent used to steal the aid to secretly distribute it to the security forces. In this respect, he said that throughout the past years aid had “reached the Red Crescent, which in turn, handed it to the security forces or the provisional governors who, on their part, gave it to a specific organization and specific individuals. It never reached the Palestinian people, not even once.”¹⁸¹

iv. Jordan, Normalization and Relations with Israel

Neither the normalized relations, nor the relations between Jordan and Israel, had witnessed drastic changes towards progress or regression, but they remained within the set limits of living together and reciprocating with each other. However, Jordan made use of this relationship to play a major role with the Israeli authorities to support the PA under the Presidency of Mahmud ‘Abbas, and its tendency of negotiations with the Israeli government, and to reduce the Israeli restrictions and attacks against the Palestinian people, be them in GS or the WB, but particularly in and around *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

In response to the attacks of Jewish extremists against the sacred mosque, the Jordanian government contacted the Israeli authorities to expel these Israeli extremists from the courtyard of *al-Aqsa*, and, on its part, it intensified the security of the mosque by increasing the numbers of the Jordanian security guards.¹⁸²

Jordan refused the Israeli decision which regarded GS as a “hostile entity” on the grounds that it “does not help to create the required conducive environment to effect the desired progress in the peace process.” The Jordanian Government Spokesman Nasir Judah called for the abrogation of this decision, and to adhere to international law in all matters related to the status of GS and its inhabitants.¹⁸³

d. Lebanon

Though the Lebanese front was the most important and active Arab front in the confrontation with Israel, the country of Lebanon was consumed during the year 2007 by its internal crisis. The Lebanese preoccupation had intensified with the eruption of the crisis of the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, which provoked many questions on the future of the Palestinians and their camps in Lebanon: their civil rights, the complicated issue of disarming them and the nationalization issue.

Like Iraq that has been engaged in its internal catastrophe, Lebanon has been preoccupied with its internal conflicts. This raises the important question of why and who is behind these disputes in the Arab world. Are they within the American plan to re-divide into sectarian and ethnic states what had earlier been divided into crippled nation-states? That division obstructed the realization of the desired Arab world development project? Or have these ethnic and sectarian divisions been motivated only by the desire to distract and to make the limited statehood concerns supersede the overall Arab national issues?

However, Lebanon reacted in a limited manner to some of the crucial developments that took place in the Palestinian arena during the year 2007. Most of the Lebanese leadership and political groups had welcomed then Mecca Agreement after it was signed in February 2007. The Lebanese President Émile Lahoud saw in it a positive development that stops the shedding of the Palestinian blood and nib the civil war in the bud. He, furthermore, viewed the option for dialogue as the best means to abort the Israeli conspiracy, and concluded that the betting on national unity in Palestine, as well as in Lebanon, should be stronger than all other bettings.¹⁸⁴ Fu’ad al-Sanyurah, the Lebanese premier, contacted King

‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and his foreign minister Sa‘ud al-Faisal to thank them for the pioneering role of the Kingdom in achieving this agreement between the Palestinians.¹⁸⁵

Though preoccupied with the crisis of Nahr al-Bared (May 2007), Lebanon exhibited concern on the developments of the Palestinian issue, or, to be exact, some aspects of it. Though Lebanon was not actively engaged in the June 2007 Gaza conflicts between Hamas and Fatah, the Lebanese government rejected the American decision to increase its aid to Israel, which, in its view, will aggravate the Arab and Lebanese frustration.¹⁸⁶ On the Israeli tightening of their siege of Gaza, and at the peak of the “crossings’ crisis,” the Lebanese Premier Fu‘ad al-Sanyurah called European Union’s High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Javier Solana to convey to him the condemnation of his government of the Israeli acts against the Palestinians, and to demand that the EU interferes to stop these atrocities.¹⁸⁷

The Catastrophe of Nahr al-Bared

The formation on 27/11/2006 of the organization Fatah al-Islam, which seceded from Fatah al-Intifadah, and its control of the latter’s basis in the Nahr al-Bared constituted a new phase for the Palestinian refugees in this camp. Apparently the organization was compelled to announce itself earlier than scheduled, because a group of its individuals in al-Beddawi refugee camp was identified and then arrested, by the security force, one day before the announcement, and after that was handed over to the Lebanese authorities.

Those who seceded from Fatah al-Intifadah were lead by Shakir al-‘Absi, and estimated to be about 80 individuals.¹⁸⁸ By the beginning of the battle in the refugee camp in May 2007, some Lebanese security sources estimated the number of Fatah al-Islam fighters as 150, while a leader of the organization, known as Abu Hurayrah, gave their number as 500.¹⁸⁹ Apparently this Islamic and Jihadist oriented organization attracted some locals as well as a group of Islamists from different Arab and Muslim countries.

The crisis of Nahr al-Bared started with the accusations of the Lebanese authorities to a group of members of Fatah al-Islam for allegedly attacking on 19/5/2007 a branch of BankMed in the district of al-Kourah, north Lebanon. Hence the internal security forces penetrated a flat that belonged to the organization in the city of Tripoli. In retaliation, a group of Fatah al-Islam

fighters attacked the barricades of the Lebanese army on the two exits of Nahr al-Bared camp, and killed 23 soldiers.¹⁹⁰ Concurrently, a military patrol in the district of al-Qalamoun, south of Tripoli, was subjected to an armed attack by some elements of Fatah al-Islam.

Using heavy artillery and machine guns, the Lebanese army started in the morning of 20/5/2007 bombarding Nahr al-Bared refugee camp, and asked the fighters of Fatah al-Islam to surrender, but they refused and fought a bitter and bloody battle that continued for three days. The outcome was the killing of 27 civilians and 30 soldiers of the Lebanese army. Through some intermediaries a truce was declared during which thousands of the inhabitants of the refugee camp migrated under difficult humanitarian conditions to other areas.¹⁹¹ Meanwhile, the Lebanese army completed its reinforcements around the camp. It is worth mentioning here that the ammunitions of the army had dried out during the first few days, which compelled the United States and some Arab countries to reinforce it with supplies of ammunition and new arms.¹⁹²

The withdrawal of the civilians from the refugee camp gave the army a much needed opportunity to intensify its attacks and to tighten the grip on the besieged fighters, using bombs and heavy artillery that caused almost total destruction of the camp. Meanwhile, commenting on the departure of many Palestinians from the camp, the Lebanese Premier Fu'ad al-Sanyurah said, "Their absence is temporary, and their return is certain. We guarantee to rebuild what had been destroyed."¹⁹³

The battle between Fatah al-Islam and the Lebanese army ended after an attempt by some elements of the organization to flee from the camp on 2/9/2007. Thus, after four months of fighting, the Lebanese minister of defense announced the death of 222 of Fatah al-Islam fighters and the arrest of 202, while the army's casualties were 163 dead and 400–500 wounded, in addition to 33 civilians dead.¹⁹⁴ A large part of the camp was destroyed and about 40 thousands of its Palestinian refugees were compelled to migrate. The cost of rehabilitation of the camp plus providing food and other supplies was estimated as \$382.5 million.¹⁹⁵

As is the case in other aspects of Lebanese life, the battle of Nahr al-Bared was politicized. Hizbullah viewed the attacks on the army, the Lebanese civilians and the Palestinians in the camp of Nahr al-Bared as a red line, and demanded that the crisis be dealt within "a political, security and judicial manner that maintains the integrity of the army but does not lead to a new camps' war."¹⁹⁶ Conversely,

General Michel Aoun emphasized that the army should not negotiate with “Fatah al-Islam’s terrorists, but rather arrest them and bring them to Justice,”¹⁹⁷ and the Lebanese government “vowed to uproot this terrorist gang, and never negotiate with it under any circumstances.”¹⁹⁸ Immediately after the army’s control of the camp, the Lebanese Premier Fu’ad al-Sanyurah emphasized that it will be “under the sole authority of the Lebanese state.”¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile Amine Gemayel, the leader of Lebanese Kataeb Party, called for the end of self-security, the implementation of the experiment of Nahr al-Bared elsewhere, and to impose the authority of the Lebanese state on all the Palestinian camps.²⁰⁰

Though the Palestinian factions had widely disagreed on the best solution of the problem of Fatah al-Islam, the Islamic forces and the national factions condemned Fatah al-Islam’s targeting of the Lebanese army. However, at the same time, Hamas condemned the security solution of the problem, and demanded that it must be basically political and humanitarian in order to avoid further hardship to the Lebanese and the Palestinians, and to maintain the image and authority of the Lebanese army.²⁰¹ Meanwhile, Sultan Abu al-‘Aynayn announced that his organization was ready to crush Fatah al-Islam. He added that “this quagmire of evil should be surgically removed; we do not want the Palestinian refugee camps to be the gateway to the Lebanese war.”²⁰²

The catastrophe of Nahr al-Bared had inflicted tremendous hardship on the innocent Palestinian refugees, who should not be held responsible for the actions of a group that entered Lebanon with the knowledge of its government. Even after the end of the war, this misery continued in various forms, either because of forced migration, destruction of property and means of livelihood, or harsh security measures. Besides was the growing hostility towards the refugees that was instigated by some quarters while the real reasons for the crisis were ignored.

2. The Gulf States and the Arabian Peninsula

The overall intensive reactions of the Gulf States and the Arabian peninsula (the states of GCC plus Yemen) towards the Palestinian issue during the year 2007 was glaringly noticeable, and came next to that of the confrontational states. The numerous interactions of the KSA to the developments of the issue during this year had even brought it on par with the confrontational states. This may be because the Kingdom happened to be the rotating president of the Arab summit during the year, or because of its increasing role at the national and regional levels. Thus,

when discussing below the positions of the Gulf States and the Arabian Peninsula, we will distinguish between the Saudi position, the Yemeni position and the stand of the other five members of GCC.

a. Saudi Arabia

The Saudi performance was characterized by a great deal of distinction in its interaction with the Palestinian issue, and that in two main areas: the first is the Arabic forceful intervention in the inter-Palestinian conflict which manifested itself in the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas movements, known as the Mecca Agreement; second, the peace process which was endorsed by the Saudi call for the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative, and by supporting the idea of convening an international conference under an American sponsorship, although it did not announce its participation until the last few moments, in order to enhance the conditions of the conference, which was known later as the Annapolis meeting. In addition, the Saudi Kingdom sought to ease the Israeli siege of the GS.

i. The Saudi Position towards the Inter-Palestinian Conflict

The Arab peace initiative, which had been re-ascertained in subsequent Arab summits of which the last was the Riyadh Summit of March 2007, constituted the solid basis of the Saudi policy towards the Palestinian issue in general and the comprehensive Arab–Israeli peace in particular. For, in the view of the Kingdom, such peace could not be achieved without reciprocal undertakings between Israel and the Arabs.

This vision was formulated on the inherent assumption, which was thus far taken for granted, of an undisputed and legitimate united Palestinian leadership that is accepted by the Palestinians and supported by the Arabs and the region at large. But this assumption was exposed after the victory of Hamas in the legislative elections to the danger of an all around collapse. For the victory had drastically changed the thus far fundamentals of the Palestinian order that was based on Oslo treaties and a dominant political force, i.e., Fatah and its political, military and security institutions, which lead this order that believed in the fundamentals of Oslo and adhered to the Arab peace initiative. Subsequently, the Palestinian destiny largely depended on the open dispute between Fatah and Hamas, be it within or outside the political institutions formulated by Oslo. Moreover, Hamas control of Gaza constituted a quality development by all standards.

The Palestinian bloody fighting was a shock to the Palestinians themselves and to the Arabs, particularly those who were directly concerned with the Palestinian issue, amongst whom was the KSA. For they saw in the early 2007 developments in the Palestinian arena considerable harm not only to the Palestinian cause, but to the totality of the Arab drive to strike an Arab–Israeli peace deal.²⁰³

To supersede this gloomy Palestinian status, the Saudi King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz took advantage of his Kingdom’s huge moral and regional influence to summon the leaderships of Fatah and Hamas to a meeting in Mecca. The objective was to find an exit that ends the fighting, restore the solidarity of the Palestinian order, and helps to overcome the siege and the international isolation that was led by the United States against Hamas government.

There are other interpretations of the underlying factors for this Saudi drive to reconcile Fatah and Hamas, amongst which was the increasing concern of the rising influence of Iran in the Arab world, particularly Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.²⁰⁴

However, the direct Saudi objectives behind this move were twofold. First, to distant Hamas from the Iranian–Syrian axis, and, secondly, to maintain calm in the occupied territories, which was expected to help in the success of the American strive to push forward the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations, and to provide conducive environment for the forthcoming Riyadh Summit, scheduled to convene in less than two months.²⁰⁵ It is worth mentioning here that Saudi Arabia was favored and accepted by both Fatah and Hamas, and King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz was known for his strong pro-Palestine sentiments, and keenness to stop the shedding of the Palestinian blood.

Whatever the interpretations may be, Mecca Agreement achieved important steps towards the Palestinian unity, and to bypass the violent differences between Fatah and Hamas. More important, it took the Palestinian issue away from the Israeli–American betting, particularly the containment of Hamas and its expulsion from the political equation, while, concurrently, strongly supporting the PA, and strengthening it militarily, materially and morally.

Mecca Agreement provoked American–Israeli anger against President Mahmud ‘Abbas, whom Tzipi Livni had dared to accuse of deceiving Israel. Meanwhile Robert Satloff, the executive director of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, argued that the Mecca Agreement had posed such formidable and dangerous predicaments to the USA that it should reconsider its pledges to support Mahmud

‘Abbas, freeze the allocated aid and stop the efforts to find a political horizon for the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations.²⁰⁶ This may have been behind Condoleezza Rice’s designation of Mecca Agreement as “an obstacle to the peace process.”²⁰⁷

This bitter American criticism coupled with the American–Israeli plot, led by Muhammad Dahlan, to topple the Palestinian government of national unity and to impose a new Palestinian political reality that reconciles with the wishes of America and Israel, contradicts the attempts of some quarters to hold Syria responsible for the failure of Mecca Agreement.²⁰⁸ Obviously, since its signature, the Mecca Agreement was targeted by the Americans and the Israelis. However, the Saudi–Syrian differences over Lebanon may have somehow been behind this failure. In any case, these developments seem to have negatively affected the Saudi position towards the bloody incidents of June 2007 between Fatah and Hamas, which had, anyhow, marked the formal death of Mecca Agreement, with all its inherent insult to the Saudi role.²⁰⁹

Following the eruption of Gaza’s bloody incidents and their consequential repercussions, i.e., the collapse of the national unity government and the formation of an emergency government that was transferred into a caretaker government, the Saudi government adopted what some have called “the diplomacy of positive silence.”²¹⁰ However, the Saudi reaction to these developments was violent and angry. For Sa‘ud al-Faisal had declared that after the failure of Mecca Agreement, the Kingdom will never ever mediate alone between the Palestinians. In a meeting in Paris with the editors of the Saudi newspapers, he stressed the necessity of conducting elections to democratically determine the Palestinian legitimacy, and consequently to conclusively settle the current differences between the Palestinians. Al-Faisal drew attention to the declaration of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, which asked the Palestinians to return to the agreement in order to end the bloody fighting between them, and added, “If they [Fatah and Hamas] opt for divorce, this is their business.” Al-Faisal continued to say:

The kingdom undertook its role at that time, and will never try again. Its work will be via the Arab League and in partnership with the Arab states. The responsibility should be shouldered by the Palestinians, who reached to the edge of the abyss; either they supersede their differences or totally fall in it... You can not be royal more than the King, if the Palestinians concluded an agreement in front of Gods House (Mecca), and staunchly vowed to respect it, but retracted from it, there is nothing that the Kingdom can do.²¹¹

The Saudi frustration by the Palestinian overthrow of Mecca Agreement did not only lead to the end of their unilateral mediation between Fatah and Hamas and the return to collective Arab diplomacy, but was also instrumental in the Saudi indifference to Gaza bloody events. During a meeting of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers, Saudi Arabia was evidently keen to have a sort of a balanced position between Fatah and Hamas. Though it was inclined towards Fatah and the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas, this preference was not, in the words of Reuters news agency, “as strong as that of Egypt and Jordan.”²¹²

The Saudi Kingdom supported the emergency government formed by President ‘Abbas, but it did not accept the exclusion of Hamas. Sa‘ud al-Faisal explained this position by saying:

The Palestinian president is elected, and the formation of the previous government was his decision, thus he has the right to change this government. But the exclusion of Hamas is a domestic Palestinian concern that should be settled by the Palestinian constitutional institutions such as the parliament and the PLO. Without this there should be elections to conclusively determine the legitimacy in a democratic manner.²¹³

However, the Saudi government hoped that the two parties would once more abide by Mecca Agreement, as spelled out by Sa‘ud al-Faisal in the following words, “It is much better for our Palestinian brothers to return to the agreement of the blessed Mecca, which was concluded last February, and to religiously implement its articles.”²¹⁴

This position was once more stressed after Annapolis meeting, the renewal of the inter-Palestinian differences and the reversion of the Israelis to all kinds of brutal oppression and suppression against the Palestinian people in GS. Jointly with Egypt, the Kingdom tried to renew dialogue between Fatah and Hamas, but this attempt was aborted because of the intransigent position of the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas, notwithstanding the miserable conditions of the Palestinian people, and the agreement of Hamas to conduct this dialogue, as demonstrated by Khalid Mish‘al’s visit to both Riyadh and Cairo for this very purpose.²¹⁵

ii. The Saudi Stand towards the Peace Process

The KSA exhibited noticeable attention to activate the peace process, which was reflected in a number of activities. First, the reactivation of its Arab peace

initiative through a recommendation issued by the March 2007 Riyadh Arab Summit. Second, support to the invitation of the American president to convene an international peace conference in the autumn of 2007, though the Kingdom had soon made some reservations on its decision of participation because of the stumbling of the Palestinian–Israeli deliberations on the agenda of this conference, which, however, was eventually held under the nomenclature “Annapolis meeting.” The final Saudi decision on the issue of participation was linked to some conditions related to the seriousness of the conference, and its adherence to the Arab initiative and the international legitimacy.

With regard to the activation of the Arab peace initiative, there were repeated news of American–Israeli demands to introduce some changes on the text of the initiative, particularly on the right of return, and that Prince Bandar bin Sultan had reportedly submitted proposals in this respect.²¹⁶ But the categorical denial of the Saudi foreign minister, the recommendations of the Riyadh Summit, the Saudi pursuit of the activation of the initiative through the special ministerial committee formed by the summit for this purpose and the Saudi comments on the Israeli rejection of the initiative had all decisively negated these rumors of amendment. Just before the announcement of the Israeli negative position towards the initiative, Sa‘ud al-Faisal said, “If Israel rejected the initiative, this means that it does not want peace, opted to leave everything to destiny, and that they [the Israelis] place their future not on the peace makers but on the war lords.”²¹⁷ Two days later, al-Faisal warned the Israelis of neglecting what he called “the peaceful–pragmatic–logical Arabism,” which will expose “Israel to unprecedented serious dangers.”²¹⁸ These comments were tantamount to a “requiem” of the project known as “activation of the Arab peace initiative,” which Saudi Arabia enthusiastically supported just before the Riyadh Summit, and had won considerable attention in Arab political and media quarters.

Saudi Arabia welcomed the address of the American president, in which he introduced the notion of the autumn conference because it saw in it some positive elements, including his call to end the occupation and form a viable Palestinian state. A declaration by a Saudi official recorded, “We hope that this will be within the framework of serious international effort that settles the core issues of the conflict in a balanced, responsible and just manner, which leads to the dismantling of the settlements not just to stop the settlement activities in future.”²¹⁹ In the same day, King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz contacted the American President George W. Bush to

convey the same message, and to impress upon the president the absolute necessity that the Palestinian people have their national rights and united territories.²²⁰ After a meeting with Condoleezza Rice in Jeddah, Sa'ud al-Faisal said that he listened to a detailed explanation from her on the particulars of Bush's initiative, and that his country is keen to attend the Autumn Peace Conference.²²¹

On realizing the Israeli procrastination in responding to the demand of a clear cut agenda to the conference, Sa'ud al-Faisal asked Israel to "demonstrate seriousness" before the conference, and casted doubt on the participation of his country.²²² Few days earlier, al-Faisal opined that the conference may not succeed unless and until it bases itself on the quest for a comprehensive solution, and that Israel demonstrates seriousness to resolve the conflict through strict adherence to some core items related to the 1967 frontiers, Jerusalem, and the return of the refugees. He added, "If the meeting does not discuss these issues, I doubt the Kingdom's participation."²²³

However, subsequently the Kingdom changed its hesitant position and accepted participation. Sa'ud al-Faisal justified this retreat from the previous conditional stand by saying that his country accepted participation in Annapolis conference because of its "keenness to support the Palestinian, Syrian and Lebanese positions, and after the Arab countries had felt that the conference will seriously address the core issues of the Arab-Israeli conflict." He added that the Arab decision of participation is based on some basic elements of which the most important is comprehensiveness in dealing with the conflict in the Middle East along all its paths, and concentration on the fundamental issues within the principles and decisions of the international community, the Road Map and the Arab peace initiative. He further recorded, "We view the conference as a pivotal station in the history of the Middle East conflict."²²⁴ Earlier, when declaring the Saudi acceptance of participation in the conference, al-Faisal explained the background of this decision by saying, "I am not concealing any secrets on the Saudi stand, we were hesitant until today, had we not have the Arab consensus that we see today, we would not have decided to go."²²⁵ Generally, the Israelis and the Americans welcomed the Saudi decision, and Tzipi Livni said that "the Arab participation guarantees the success of the conference."

iii. The Saudi Position towards Supporting the Palestinians

Saudi Arabia is considered one of the major Arab countries that support the Palestinian people at both the official and popular levels. But this support is

governed by the restrictions resulting from the Kingdom's political position towards the Palestinian issue and its regional and international commitments. Like other states, the Kingdom abided by the international restrictions imposed against the Palestinian government, be it the government of national unity, the deposed Hamas government or that of the PA. Hence, the Saudi funding remained at specified limits and at the level of the Arab League. It totaled \$127.7 million in 2007 compared to \$83.7 million in 2006.

At one of the most critical moments for the Palestinians, i.e., after Gaza's bloody confrontations, Saudi Arabia called the international community to reconsider its decision of suspending aid to the Palestinian people, and declared its undertaken to "remove the hardship" on them under these critical circumstances that the Palestinian issue had experienced.²²⁶ When the Israeli authorities renewed, after Annapolis conference, their crimes by extending the building of the settlements in Jerusalem, the Kingdom condemned this act that "contradicts the fundamentals and principles of Annapolis conference." In a meeting with Tony Blair, the representative of the Quartet, the Saudi foreign minister ascertained his country's firm stands against what he described "the colonial practices that will void the peace process from its substance, and wrecks the sincere international efforts to initiate serious negotiations between the concerned parties." He also declared his country's participation in the meeting of the donor countries to the Palestinians, scheduled on 17/12/2007, in Paris.²²⁷

In response to Israel's intensified suppression of the Palestinian people in GS and its tightening of the siege on the GS, the Saudi cabinet issued a declaration that expressed the Kingdom's "extreme concern" for the Israeli violations and policy of collective punishment, and added that Saudi Arabia will start to "meet the living needs of the Palestinian people," and contact Tony Blair, the representative of the Quartet, to ask that his committee meets its responsibilities and obligations.²²⁸ After two weeks, the Saudi council of ministers renewed "its condemnation and denunciation of the continued Israeli crimes against the Palestinian people," and firmly demanded that the international community takes a firm action against what is happening in Palestine.²²⁹

b. Yemen

Yemen had given noticeable attention to the peace process through supporting the Arab peace initiative, submitting its own initiative to contain the inter-Palestinian conflict and rejecting the proposal of sending international

forces to the WB and GS. The Yemeni President ‘Ali ‘Abdullah Saleh urged the international community, particularly the United States and the permanent member states of the security council, to press Israel to accept the Arab peace initiative, which, in his words, “represents the minimum to achieve the just and permanent peace.”²³⁰ Moreover, the Yemeni president emphasized the importance of abiding by the decisions of the previous Arab summits, and to work for the success of the forthcoming Riyadh Summit, which should come out with resolutions that satisfy the aspirations of the Nation.²³¹

On the eruption of the bloody conflict in GS, the Yemeni president refused the idea of sending international forces to the WB and GS, as, in his words, “The presence of international forces under the prevailing occupation does not tally with the facts of the Palestinian reality and the interests of the Palestinian people.”²³² Meanwhile, the president submitted an alternative initiative to bridge the Palestinian schism that concentrated on the resumption of dialogue between the two movements on the basis of the 2005 Cairo and the 2007 Mecca Agreements. This proposed dialogue should lead to the bypassing of the differences, unity of the Palestinian people and the national authority, emphasis on the Palestinian legitimacy, respect of the Palestinian law, rebuilding of the security forces on national and professional bases, and national reconciliation to establish an able government of national unity. The initiative also proposed the formation of an Arab committee to supervise the implementation of Mecca and Cairo Agreements.²³³

Yemen had been particularly concerned to end the sufferings of the Palestinians resulting from the Israeli siege. However, its proposal for an Arab summit to address this and other concerns was not sufficiently responded to; hence it was reduced to a mere meeting of the Council of Arab Foreign Ministers.

c. Other Gulf States

The focus of this part of the study is on the other five states of the Gulf’s council, as the position of its sixth member, the KSA, had been elaborately addressed above. However, as expected, the collective position of the Council reflects the positions of its six members, including KSA.

The GCC and its six states had distinguished positions on the peace process, the inter-Palestinian conflict, and on the issue of supporting the endurance of the Palestinian people. For it had patronized at an early stage the call for reactivating the Arab peace initiative, and supported the proposal of the American president to

convene the peace conference, and rallied for Arab participation in it. Abdulrahman Bin Hamad al-Attiyah, the secretary-general of GCC, considered the formation by Rabat Summit of the Arab committee to be another evidence of the Arab seriousness to strive towards a comprehensive and just peace. In this respect he recorded, “After the formation of this committee, the Arabs had placed Israel in a real test; either it declares its readiness and drive to achieve peace in accordance with the principles of the Arab initiative, or pursue the policy of procrastination, stalling and marginalizing the Arab peace initiative.”²³⁴

The GCC patronized the call for the establishment of the independent Palestinian state. Addressing a reception organized by Christian Poncelet, the president of the French Senate, in honor of the Arab ambassadors, the Qatari Ambassador Mohamad Jiham al-Kawari said on behalf of his colleagues that reform in the Middle East should be based on the right of the Palestinian people to have, side by side with the state of Israel, their own state with Jerusalem as its capital, which will effectively guarantee the security of both Israel and the Palestinians. In his words, “The just and comprehensive solution of the Palestinian issue is the only basis for security and stability; it is the only means for the recognition of Israel by all the states in the region.”²³⁵

Immediately after the declaration of the US president of his proposal of a peace conference in autumn, the Secretariat General of the GCC expressed its hope that this call constitutes a new phase that seriously deals with the core cause of the chronic Arab-Israeli conflict. He emphasized the importance that the US plays a fair and balanced role to end the 1967 Israeli occupation of Palestinian lands, and to establish an independent, connected and viable Palestinian state.²³⁶

Meanwhile, the UAE took the lead to congratulate the US President George W. Bush for his initiative to call for an international peace conference. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the head of the state, recorded that the initiative “is on the right track.”²³⁷ In its meeting of 1/9/2007, the ministerial council of GCC expressed its support to the proposal of the American president to convene the international conference, and emphasized the position of the Council’s states that called for the achievement of comprehensive and just peace, and to end the Arab-Israeli conflict in line with the Arab peace initiative.²³⁸

With regard to the inter-Palestinian conflict, the GCC rejected the bloody confrontation in GS, but was biased toward the PA. The Gulf summit of 15/5/2007

called the Palestinian factions to abide by Mecca Agreement, and asked that the trouble makers be held accountable.²³⁹ Moreover, the Bahraini Council of Ministers expressed its support to the Palestinian legitimacy represented by Mahmud ‘Abbas, the president of the PA, and welcomed the formation of the caretaker Palestinian government.²⁴⁰

Subsequently, the council of the ministers of foreign affairs of the GCC demanded that GS should return to what it had been before the supremacy of Hamas. In its 103rd session, the council called all the Palestinian partners to return to the negotiation table to resolve their differences, restore the conditions in GS to what they had been before the bloody events, respect all the legitimate institutions, including the elected PLC, and unite to maintain the rights of the Palestinians.²⁴¹ On 1/9/2007, the GCC had once more emphasized the importance of cultivating a suitable environment for uniting the Palestinian front, to abide by Mecca Agreement that prohibits the shedding of the Palestinian blood, reject dissension and work for the unity of the Palestinian brothers.²⁴²

The GCC patronized the call for lifting the siege on the Palestinian people, and to support the Palestinian government of national unity. In its 102nd session, the council condemned the repeated and aggressive Israeli practices,²⁴³ and Kuwait had even went further by establishing a Kuwaiti office in Ramallah, and, as a gesture of support to the Palestinian people, took steps to reopen the Palestinian embassy in Kuwait.²⁴⁴

The GCC support to the besieged Palestinians had, however, remained within these limits, as its states were bound to abide by some restrictions, and to submit to international pressures. This was clearly reflected in the GCC position towards the “crossings’ crisis” that had erupted in January 2008. For all the Gulf States, like other Arab states, had to submit to the so-called “international pressure,” thus they were virtually compelled not to supersede the crossings’ treaty of 2005, which placed the crossings under Israeli control and sovereignty.

However, no concentrated steps were taken towards normalization with Israel; on the contrary, its wave had faded just like the peace process. While Qatar dared to break the siege, and, according to Israeli sources, granted Hamas \$50 million,²⁴⁵ Kuwait enacted a law that prohibited dealing with the Israelis, and imposed severe penalties on its violators.²⁴⁶ In a firm position, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fahad al-Sabah, minister of National Security, emphasized that Kuwait will be “the last to normalize with Israel,”

and said in his opening speech on the occasion of the festival “*Al-Aqsa Calls Us*,” “Occupation of land legalizes the Jihad.” He added that the destruction of *al-Aqsa* Mosque is not simply the demolition of a building, as the site “has a distinguished position in our religion that we will abide by and die for.”²⁴⁷ Meanwhile, within this increasing tendency of rejecting relations with Israel, there was a call in Bahrain to reopen the Arab Boycott of Israel Office.²⁴⁸

In line with this position, the Kuwaiti embassy in Beirut issued a communiqué that rejected what Dr. Sami al-Faraj, the head of the Kuwait Center for Strategic Studies, had reportedly said that Kuwait will protect itself against the Iranian nuclear threat by placing itself under the Israeli nuclear umbrella. The embassy communiqué ascertained that this individual, i.e., Dr. al-Faraj, “does not represent the government of the state of Kuwait, and has no consultative status whatsoever to both the prime minister and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.” The communiqué also denied that the subject of the Israeli nuclear umbrella had even been discussed in the meetings of the GCC.²⁴⁹

3. Other Arab Countries

The position of other Arab countries towards the Palestinian issue may generally be included in the Arab collective reaction as expressed by the Arab League, the Arab summits and the ministerial meetings. But this generalization will not do justice to some specific stances of these states on certain issues, which deserve attention and recording in this narrative.

Colonel Muammar Qaddafi, the Libyan president, had, for example, expressed reservations towards the Arab peace initiative, and reiterated his adherence to his idea of the state of “*Isratine*,” i.e., a state that houses both the Israelis and the Palestinians. Qaddafi attacked the Riyadh Arab Summit, saying that its agenda was “prepared in Washington,”²⁵⁰ and that the Arab initiative is “doomed to failure,” as the “Arab leaders who support it are desperate.”²⁵¹

While Morocco, Tunis and Algeria demanded an immediate stop of the Palestinian feud and respect to the constitutional institutions, Qaddafi underestimated the threat of the emergence of two states in GS and the WB as an outcome of this dispute, and demanded that Arab states end their intervention in the conflict between Hamas and Fatah.²⁵² Meanwhile, Algeria denied what it called “fabricated media reports”²⁵³ that it received Khalid Mish‘al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau.

Meanwhile, according to the prominent Fatah leader, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, the Sudan, supported by both Egypt and Saudi Arabia, initiated an attempt to achieve reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.²⁵⁴

In another vein, the Sudanese Minister of Interior, al-Zubair Bashir Taha, revealed a proposed American deal with his government to recognize Israel, and accused the American intelligence of smuggling weapons to Darfur.²⁵⁵ Meanwhile, Mauritania defended its relations with Israel, which it considered to be “in line with the stance of the Arab League.”²⁵⁶

Thus, the positions of the Arab states towards the Palestinian issue were clear and diversified in terms of both intensity and diversity. While the confrontational states and Saudi Arabia had intensively reacted to the events, the reactions of the rest of the Arab states were limited, and largely within the position of the Arab official regime. However, in totality, all Arab positions were within the complete reliance on the United States and the international community, with conspicuous absence of Arab decisions and determination to press other parties to move forward towards a just settlement. Suffice to mention in this respect the dangerous statement that ‘Amr Musa mentioned in reaction to Israel’s procrastination after Annapolis meeting, namely that it is nothing but a threat to withdraw from the peace process.²⁵⁷ This declaration clearly reveals the helpless position of both the official Arab regime and the Arab states towards the developments of the Palestinian issue.

Third: The Arab Public Stance on the Palestinian Issue

The official response of the Arab regime and its engagement in the peace process, as well as the totality of the other negative Arab developments, had seemingly hugely affected the ability and effectiveness of the Arab masses to change and improve the weak positions of their governments towards the Palestinian issue. Some of the public responses were even a justification or support to these policies, and the very few were substantially different but were not powerful enough to compel governments to reconsider their policies in accordance with the wishes of the Arab public opinion, as demonstrated below.

1. The Arab Public Stance on the Peace Process

The Arab public stance remained suspicious of the viability of the peace process because of three factors. First, the increasing escalation of the Israeli military suppression, second, the total and unconditional American support to Israel and the manipulation with all the peace initiatives that were designed to give Israel more time to achieve its aims and plans, and, third, the extreme impotence of the official Arab regime to confront the American–Israeli policies, and its rush not only to accept all American ideas and initiatives, but also to actively strive to sell them to the public.

The Arab public opinion did not exhibit any enthusiasm for the reactivation of the Arab peace initiative because it knew that it was a futile exercise as the Americans and Israelis were not prepared to compromise their fundamental policies, and the Arab regimes were too weak to suggest and impose the alternative. The Arab masses had, moreover, ignored the American invitation for Annapolis meeting, and remained silent on its failure. Moreover, they did not hold the Arab ministers accountable for their decision to participate, their actual participation or even for the failure of the conference itself. This apathy may have been triggered either by an increasing disinterest in the Palestinian issue and attraction to other more urgent issues, or by lack of trust in the peace process and the ability of the Arab states and the American administration to come out with a solution that satisfies the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Nonetheless, there were some attempts of rejection to any surrender of the Palestinian rights by the Arab official regime under any cover or name that this may be. In a declaration on the 59th anniversary of the Catastrophe (1948 Arab–Israeli war), the Palestine committee of the Federation of Arab Engineers refused any initiatives that compromise the Palestinian rights, especially the right of return and the right of the Palestinian people to restore their lands that have been occupied since 1948. The committee called upon the Arab countries “to play a positive and comprehensive role to support the Palestinian people and to lift the siege imposed on them.”²⁵⁸ Being voiced at the peak of the drive of the official Arab regime to reactivate, on the recommendation of the Riyadh Summit, the Arab peace initiative, this position may be considered as a sarcastic comment on the Arab reliance on this initiative, and a doubt in the futility of engaging in its reactivation.

The public Arab refusal of this tendency was further demonstrated in a warning, by some Egyptian politicians and former ambassadors, against the danger of

accepting the strategy that President Bush had declared on the region, in general, and on Iraq, in particular. They considered that the participation in Riyadh Summit would effectively mean the participation in implementing a new American strategy; that aimed at distracting the attention on Israel and its aggressive practices and to focus on Iran.²⁵⁹

The General Arab Conference, composed of three important Arab Conferences, namely the Arab National Conference, the Islamic National Conference and Arab Parties Conference, condemned the call of the American president to convene an international meeting to resolve the Palestinian issue. For this call, which had been issued at the time of the anniversary of the victory of the resistance in the Summer of 2006 in Lebanon, was arguably nothing but a distraction from the outcome of this victory, a moral boost to Olmert, and a drive to intensify the Palestinian and inter-Arab feuds, or, possibly, a cover up to the preparations for a military aggression against Iran.²⁶⁰ When the Arab ministers agreed to the invitation of the American president, the three components of the General Arab Conference issued a joint declaration that condemned what it called “an unprecedented haste to normalize with the Zionist entity,” which “reveals the sizable defect in the official Arab position, notably its paralysis, weakness, short sightedness and haste to win the blessing of America, even if it turned the Arab countries upside down.”²⁶¹

2. The Arab Public Stance on the Inter-Palestinian Disputes

The reaction of the Arab masses towards the inter-Palestinian feuds took three forms. The first is the neutral form that confronted the divisions and called for the maintenance of national unity. The second form is either a partial or total support to the PA, which was, in effect, a condemnation of Hamas. The third is a support for Hamas, and the so-called “coup against the legitimacy.” However, generally, these disputes lead to a noticeable and progressive decrease in Arab Public support for the Palestinian issue, which reached the extent of total dismissal of the Palestinian organizations and leadership, which was glaringly reflected in a call by the Egyptian Syndicate of Lawyers to the Palestinian people to discard the leadership of both Hamas and Fatah, otherwise they will drag them into a civil war that achieves the objectives of Israel.²⁶² This call, which had been issued before the bloody conflict and the disastrous events of June 2007, is an indicator of the total refusal of the Arab masses to the inter-Palestinian fighting whoever may be responsible for it.

a. The Neutral Stance

This was the mainstream stance of the Arab masses, who were aware of the dangers of the shedding of the Palestinian blood that distorts the Palestinian struggle and its just cause. Its focus was to stop the fighting, to strive towards national reconciliation between Hamas, Fatah and all factions, to re-form a government of national unity, to be fully engaged in confronting Israel, and to uncompromisingly adhere to the Arab fundamentals.

The League of al-Sham's Palestinian Scholars urged all the Palestinian factions to resolve their differences and unite against their enemy and the enemy of the Nation.²⁶³ Moreover, the Jordanian syndicates called for the stoppage of the fighting,²⁶⁴ while the National Progressive Unionist Party held the Arabs responsible for the Palestinian catastrophe, and called for a sustainable political agreement based on a national program to be a national and democratic alternative to the current tragic situation.²⁶⁵ The Arab Transitional Parliament emphasized the sacredness of the Palestinian blood, while the Jordanian Democratic People's Party accused the leaderships of both Fatah and Hamas of "deliberately shedding the Palestinian blood," and called for the "exposure" of what it called the "advocates of sedition" among Fatah and Hamas leaders.²⁶⁶ But the national Jordanian parties called for adherence to the unity of the Palestinian people, and held squarely responsible "whoever pours oil on the fire," adding, "All should stick to the national fundamentals through total support to the struggle, and the unity of the Palestinian land and armament."²⁶⁷

b. The Pro-PA and Fatah Stance

With the aggravation of political differences and after Hamas' imposition of its complete authority on GS, a pro-PA and Fatah tendency among the Arab masses started to appear. The Egyptian the National Progressive Unionist Party, which maintained a neutral position towards the conflicting parties, declared after this development its support to Fatah. Taking advantage of a mass demonstration organized by *Kifayah* (Enough) movement and other political groups in front of the headquarters of the union of journalists that called for the stoppage of fighting and to end of the Palestinian deteriorating conditions, the party's activists distributed a declaration entitled "No to the Islamic Emirate in Gaza," which infuriated the demonstrators because of its bias for Fatah and attack against Hamas.²⁶⁸ Similarly, the Jordanian national parties changed their neutrality and became pro-PA and

Fatah. The Opposition Parties' Higher Coordination Committee in Jordan issued a proclamation which condemned Hamas military control of GS, and described it as a crime against the Palestinian struggle and sacrifices, a development that had, however, provoked the Islamic Labor Party.²⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the Jordanian opposition parties boycotted a mass gathering that the Muslim Brothers called for in order to declare an initiative to resolve the Palestinian crisis, on the grounds that the organization is not neutral but a supporter of Hamas and "the acts of killings and violence."²⁷⁰

Equally supportive to Fatah was a leader of the Moroccan United Socialist Party who declared his support by saying, "The Moroccan people renew their support to the Palestinian legitimate, democratic and constitutional Authority," which based itself on the decisions of the Palestinian Liberation Movement and the terms of the Basic Law of the PA.²⁷¹

c. The Pro-Hamas Stance

The Muslim Brotherhood in both Egypt and Jordan were the most prominent in supporting Hamas, though this was expressed after a period of fighting. Initially the Muslim Brotherhood adhered to neutrality and rejection of the fighting, a red line in the words of Egyptian Deputy Supreme Guide Muhammad Habib, though he added that the dissolution of the government of national unity was unjustified.²⁷² The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt also held all the Palestinian leaders the responsibility for shedding the blood of their citizens.²⁷³ But this neutrality had eventually changed into support to Hamas. For the Islamic movement in Jordan submitted that it is important to understand the factors behind Hamas' control of GS,²⁷⁴ and demanded a "neutral" Arab role to resolve the Palestinian differences, an indication of the Muslim Brotherhood's rejection to the growing support of the Arab regime, or some of its parties, to the PA.²⁷⁵ Moreover, Muhammad Mehdi 'Akef, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt said, "There is nothing stronger than the legitimacy of Haniyyah's government," and al-Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi criticized the Palestinian president for his intransigence and closure of the door of dialogue with Hamas.²⁷⁶

Other parties supported Hamas right from the beginning. The suspended Egyptian Labor Party had, for example, ascertained that the patriotic and national forces in the Arab world as well as the Islamic and liberal forces can not afford

neutrality in the Palestinian conflict, but have to support Hamas, “the legitimately elected group by the Palestinian people, which abide by the policy of resistance to achieve liberation.”²⁷⁷

These three divisive stances were more of an indication of the weakness rather than strength of the Arab stance on the Palestinian issue. These should have been unified and inclined only to the truth and the rejection of the fighting. More important, the Arabs should have a strategy and ability to stop the fighting, instead of these futile condemnations of the dispute and their support to this or the other party. But, regrettably, this was not the case.

3. The Arab Public Stance on the Support for the Palestinian People

The persistent oppression and siege of the Palestinian people by Israel had shocked the Arab public opinion twice. The first shock was the killing, destruction and the transfer of GS into a collective prison, while the second was the total disability of the Arab regime to lift the siege, and to submit the alternative that protects the Palestinian people. Thus, the Arab masses could not do more than organizing mass demonstrations and rallies of denunciation and condemnation to all parties; the Arab governments, Israel and the US, and to demand a positive action to protect the people and the holy sites in Palestine. But these were temporary protest movements that could not generate a sustainable strong movement to force the governments into an effective action.

There were several demonstrations in several Arab cities and capitals in solidarity with the Palestinian in GS, and many calls for the continuous opening of the GS borders with Egypt. In Cairo, thousands of Egyptians demonstrated to demand the lift of the siege on Gaza, and the participants in the Cairo International Book Fair, carrying banners that read: “Save Gaza” and “Free Despite Siege.” The protesters, whose majority belonged to the Muslim Brotherhood and *Kifayah* movements, also waved copies of the Qur’an. However, the security prohibited other protests in the Azhar area and other areas that were scheduled after Friday prayers. Moreover, on the call of the head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, al-Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, another solidarity rally took place in Doha, Qatar. In his Friday sermon, al-Qaradawi expressed his thanks to the Egyptian people and leadership, and urged President Hosni Mubarak to resist pressure and keep the Rafah crossing opened.

In Jordan, thousands of people demonstrated in different parts of the country in protest of the siege of Gaza. About five thousand people participated in a demonstration in the heart of the capital Amman, where they repeated slogans against Israel and the US, and expressed their support for the return of the Palestinian refugees. Similar marches were organized in the cities of al-Zarqa', al-Karak and Irbid during which the flags of Israel and the US were burned, and the demonstrators urged the inhabitants of GS to be persistent and steadfast. Besides, the demonstrators voiced slogans of support to Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, and demanded further resistance operations against Israel. In another vein, the Imams launched during Friday sermons harsh attacks on Israel and the US, and criticized the conspicuous "international silence" towards the Israeli "collective punishment" imposed on the 1.5 million inhabitants of GS.

In Manama, some Bahraini civil and political societies organized a sit-in in al-Fateh Islamic Center in support of the Palestinian people of GS and the protestors demanded the lifting of the siege imposed on GS since several months. The Imam of al-Fateh's Mosque, the biggest mosque in al-Bahrain from which Friday sermon is transmitted via the official television and Radio, allocated his sermon to the Palestinian issue, where he urged the Muslims to continue supporting the Palestinian cause. Besides, Ibrahim al-Sharif, secretary general of the National Democratic Action Association (NDAA), called upon the Arab governments to support the Palestinian people, and donate part of the oil revenue for their help. Al-Sharif asked the Palestinian president Mahmud 'Abbas to stop the negotiations with the Israelis once and for all in protest of their continuous aggression on the Palestinians, and urged the international community to protect the Palestinians from the Israeli aggression. The head of the National Justice Movement, Dr. 'Abdullah Hashem, had also called on the people of Bahrain to support the Palestinians at all levels.²⁷⁸

4. The Arab Public Stance on the Relations with Israel and Normalization

From the above, it is clear that there were significant developments in the Arab stance on the Palestinian issue, be this on the official and public levels. Specifically was the preference of the option of the peaceful settlement not only at the level of the official Arab regime but also by wide public sectors. The

latter desperate response seemed to have been triggered by the Arab masses' realization of the paralysis of the governing regimes, or by sheer desperation in that environment of extensive official media campaign which propagated the peace option and doubted the futility of all other alternatives, including the continuation of the struggle. Hence, it was natural that the call for normalization gains ground in the fabric of the Arab society, particularly so as many institutions were founded to advertise the so-called "peace culture" versus the "resistance culture," which had no similar institutions of advertisement—neither at the official nor at the popular levels.

The call for normalization had no longer become repugnant and shameful as it used to be in the past, on the contrary it became increasingly tolerated, even accepted, particularly so because of the falling apart of the boycott institutions, and the greedy Arab private sector that looked for quick profit via deals with Israeli companies and institutions, irrespective of the sacred and national concerns of the Nation, as was the case in the past.

This significant transfer was an outcome of the Arab decay and deterioration. Normalization was not confined to the official level, but, with government encouragement, extended to public sectors and organizations. The membership of the contact group with Israel, which was formed by the Arab Summit as part of its drive to reactivate the Arab peace initiative, could have been extended to include, besides its original members Egypt and Jordan, other Arab states had it not been for the Israeli negative response to the Arab peace initiative.

In other words, there was a good opportunity for the extension of the membership of this committee to include other countries that had no relations with Israel if, in the words of Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, "Israel exhibited its intention to pursue the peace path."²⁷⁹ Please note the condition of just "exhibiting intention," and not to be actively involved in the Arab peace initiative.

This pro-normalization tendency did not come out of the blue, nor was it without consequences. It is an indication of an increasing inclination to deal with Israel without any restrictions, as demonstrated by several incidents, of which some will be summarized below. First, was the story of the Saudi doctor, on which the Israeli newspaper *Ma'ariv* commented that he exceeded restrictions and went

to “Tel Aviv to perform surgery to save the life of a young Israeli girl.”²⁸⁰ This incident does not differ greatly from the participation of Israel in an educational conference in Cairo,²⁸¹ the tendency of some Bahraini ministries to abolish the clause of boycotting Israel,²⁸² a lecture that an Israeli Rabbi delivered in the Egyptian Ain Shams University,²⁸³ the infiltration of the products of Sharon’s farms into the Jordanian market,²⁸⁴ the Arab–Israeli youth forum under the patronage of Susan Mubarak, the wife of Egyptian president.²⁸⁵ All these events and others are indicators and evidences of the success of Israel to break the long hesitation of the Arab public to normalize relations with Israel.

Nonetheless, resistance to normalization continued, and some quarters that had normalized retreated from this path. Most of the national and Islamic groups and parties, as well many leftist parties, stick to the rejection of normalization, e.g., The Islamic Labor Front in Jordan.²⁸⁶ Moreover, the Egyptian People’s Assembly (parliament) questioned the Egyptian government on an agreement that it concluded with a Jewish investor to have a joint wind farm project.²⁸⁷ In Bahrain, parliament conducted an investigation on the reported tendency of some ministries to abolish the clause of boycotting Israel,²⁸⁸ The Bahrain Society Against Normalisation with the Zionist Enemy warned against the increasing volume of Israeli products in the Bahraini market, and urged the people to resist all kinds of normalization,²⁸⁹ some Bahraini members of parliament publicly refused normalization,²⁹⁰ and The Bahrain Society Against Normalisation with the Zionist Enemy called for the reopening of the Israel Boycott Office.²⁹¹ Furthermore, Jordan’s Higher Executive Committee for Defending the Homeland and Confronting Normalization urged the public to boycott Israeli products, be them of Israeli origin or produced by Israeli investors in the West.²⁹² But the most important development in this direction took place in Mauritania, where the call for the end of normalization and relations with Israel has gained momentum among many parties and leading personalities.²⁹³ All these and many other examples reflect an important fact, namely that the wave of normalization was artificial and had been engendered by some negative developments in the Arab arena. Moreover, the Arab street, whose awareness had been subjected to a huge distortion campaign, is still ready to restore its alert to the dangers of normalization with Israel, if the right conditions prevail.

Conclusion

The flaccid and disintegrated state of the Arab regimes reflects negatively on the Palestinian issue. This provides Israel with a great opportunity to impose its terms, create new facts on the ground, and attempt to achieve new breakthroughs in the Arab world. What made the situation worse is the state of friction and fragmentation of the Palestinians.

KSA played a major role in concluding the Mecca Agreement and in forming the national unity government. However, the Israeli–American insistence on the continuity of the siege, the participation of some Palestinian parties in a failed coup to topple the government, the emergence of an exceptional situation caused by the dominance of Hamas dismissed government in GS, and the control of the Palestinian presidency and the emergency government—backed by Fatah—over the WB, all of that led to the frustration of the Arab public.

The Arab countries, and in harmony with western countries, have dealt with Ramallah’s emergency government as the legitimate one. It did not recognize Haniyyah’s deposed government as a caretaker government, despite the legal status it has. The Arab states did not take any truly firm measures to lift the suffocating siege of the GS. There were attempts by the Sudanese, Yemeni, Egyptian and other Arab governments to reconcile Fatah and Hamas, but they were to no avail.

The Arab countries continue to cling to the Arab peace initiative to solve the Palestinian problem. Their participation in the Annapolis Conference was an attempt to push the peace settlement process forward. However, Israel and the US took advantage of the conference, without achieving any concrete progress in the peace process.

The Arab Public, frustrated by the Palestinian schism, still rejects normalization with Israel. Its solidarity with the Palestinians in general, and the besieged in GS in particular, is manifested in different forms. At the time that the Israeli trade relations with Jordan and Egypt were enhanced, the Mauritanian political relations with Israel witnessed chilliness and regression after the elections of a new president and the formation of a new government that considers those relations an embarrassing inheritance, especially in light of the escalating Mauritanian public opposition to any relations with Israel.

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Chapter Four

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

As was the case in previous years, the Muslim world had on the whole interacted with the Palestinian issue during the year 2007. Nonetheless, due to some compelling reasons related to developments within the Muslim countries, they were not instrumental in effecting any significant changes in this respect throughout 2007. The schism and deterioration within the Palestinian front had, moreover, weakened the drive for Muslim official and popular support to the Palestinian struggle.

Due to limited space, it will be difficult to study the positions of each and every Muslim state towards the Palestinian issue. Hence, the methodology of “case study” is adopted in this discourse whereby the positions of Turkey and Iran will be elaborately addressed while those of Pakistan, Indonesia and the Organization of Islamic Countries will be briefly surveyed.

First: The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)

Since the very foundation of the OIC was a direct reaction to the attempt to burn *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 21/8/1969, it was natural that the Palestinian issue and its developments be a consistent and pivotal concern of the organization.

The charter of the OIC included an important article that provided for “support of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights,” which reflected the importance of the Palestinian issue to the organization, at least theoretically.

As was the case previously, the support of the OIC to the Palestinian struggle during the year 2007 did not go beyond condemnation of the Israeli practices against the Palestinian people. Moreover, the organization had failed to put the Palestinian house in order, which plunged the country on the verge of civil war.

However, the OIC made some attempts for reconciliation. Early in 2007, the Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu paid a visit to Damascus, Ramallah and

Gaza in which he urged the Palestinians to avoid intra-fight, respect the sacredness of the Palestinian blood, resume the negotiations to form a government of national unity and implement an agreement patronized by the OIC on 19/12/2006 to stop internal strife.¹ He, furthermore, emphasized the necessity of uniting the Palestinian front and to concentrate all the efforts to lift the international blockade and establish an independent state in the land of Palestine.² In continuation of this visit, the OIC sent in mid January 2007 a delegation presided by ambassador Mahdi Fathallah that conducted a series of meetings in Damascus, Ramallah and Gaza that tried to narrow the gap between the two conflicting parties. For this purpose, the ambassador met with Khalid Mish'al the head of Hamas Political Bureau, Rawhi Fattouh, the representative of the Palestinian presidency and Isma'il Haniyyah, the prime minister.³

Subsequently, after the success of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the guest state of the OIC, in concluding Mecca Agreement of 8/2/2007 between Fatah and Hamas, secretary-general Ihsanoğlu issued a declaration welcoming the agreement, and expressing his confidence that it would:

consolidate the Palestinian national unity, help in lifting the unjust siege imposed on the Palestinian people and enable them to safe guard their national achievements and protect their holy places, and to proceed to win their solid rights in freedom and independence, and to establish their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.⁴

The OIC exhibited its support to the government of national unity through the attendance of its secretary-general to the oath taking ceremony in GS, on 17/3/2007. After the conference, he summoned a press conference in which he expressed the OIC's support to the new government of national unity.⁵

However, the formation of the government of national unity with Arab-Islamic blessing and support did not ease the Palestinian political and security tension. On the contrary, security problems had become so frequent and tense that Ihsanoğlu offered to return to Ramallah and Gaza to settle the differences between Fatah and Hamas.⁶ Nonetheless, the internal Palestinian fighting continued until Hamas had decisively settled the matter militarily through its control of the GS in mid June 2007.

The reaction of the OIC to the bloody events in the GS was very much inline with the official Arab position and that of the PA. In a meeting held on 20/6/2007, under the Presidency of Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, the Committee on Palestine of the OIC condemned what it described as “all the criminal acts” that had been undertaken in the GS, and demanded the return to the status quo ante these events, which indicated its prejudice particularly when it ignored what had been going on in the WB. Besides, the OIC reiterated its “respect to the Palestinian legitimacy under the leadership of President ‘Abbas, and to the institutions of PLO,”⁷ while it ignored the officially elected and internationally recognized PLC that was part and parcel of the Palestinian political system. This inconsistency was probably behind Ihsanoğlu’s subsequent explanation to the effect that the organization condemns “all the acts of violence in the WB and GS,” and added, “We are against all criminal acts, been committed by Hamas or Fatah, as the former did not commit these acts alone, but they are some persons from the latter and other factions who did likewise.”⁸

On the other side, the Israeli decision that considered the GS after its control by Hamas as a “hostile entity” was dismissed by the OIC as “collective punishment.” In this respect, secretary-general Ihsanoğlu said, “This is an oppressive decision, and its consequential measures constitute violation of the international law, a collective punishment and an insistence on aggression against the Palestinian people.” Moreover, he warned against the consequences of this decision, and urged the Palestinian forces “to resume the national dialogue and to unite themselves to confront this decision and the on-going Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people.”⁹

While the OIC and its member states had not taken any practical steps to lift the Israeli blockade on the Palestinians, the Islamic Development Bank (IDB), an offshoot of the OIC, extended to the emergency government of Salam Fayyad immediately after its formation on 9/8/2007 a grant of \$30 million.¹⁰ Moreover, the OIC participated in Annapolis peace conference of 27/11/2007, where it declared its support to the Palestinian position as represented by the President of the PA Mahmud ‘Abbas. This means that the organization had, in one way or another, swam with the general tide of its member states that supported President ‘Abbas authority and boycotted the government of Haniyyah in the GS.

The OIC position vis a vis the Israeli violations of the sanctity of the holy places and the policy of Judaization that Israel had pursued throughout the year 2007 was basically similar to the general political stand of the Arab and Muslim countries that did not go beyond condemnation and protest. Moreover, the reaction of the OIC to the Israeli destruction of the historical the Mughrabi Gate in February 2007 was not at the level of this grave event. For all the declarations of the organization on the subject were limited to warnings against the violation of the sanctity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and to the threat of ending or freezing relations with Israel. The OIC had also called for a united, but “non-violent,” Muslim stand against these Israeli measures.¹¹ In the concluding declaration of an emergency meeting of the foreign ministers of the OIC, held on 22/2/2007, the Security Council was asked to interfere forthwith, take measures to protect *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and to oblige Israel to implement the resolutions of the international community on Jerusalem.¹²

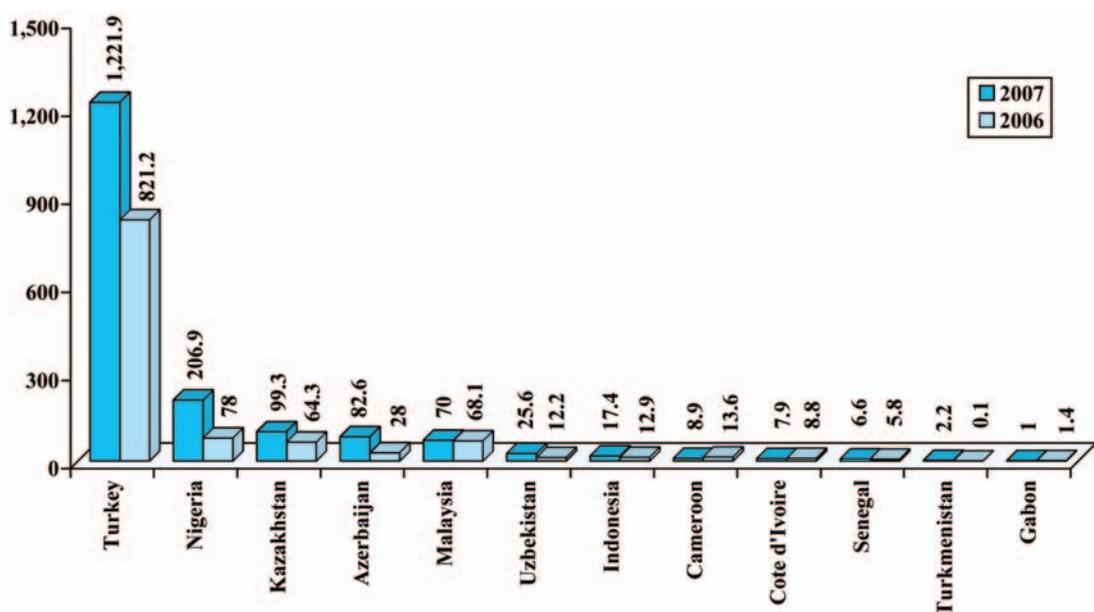
Economically, Turkey was at the top of the list of the Islamic countries that maintained commercial relations with Israel. The volume of trade between the two countries sharply increased during the course of the year 2007, as the Israeli exports to Turkey jumped to about \$1.22 billion compared to \$821.2 million in 2006, and the Israeli’s imports from Turkey reached to about \$1.61 billion compared to about \$1.27 billion in 2006. Nigeria was another country that recorded an increase in the value of Israeli exports, from \$78 million in 2006 to about \$206.9 million in 2007. However, the volume of trade between Israel and each of Indonesia and Malaysia in 2007 had slightly increased.

The same pattern was maintained with regard to other Muslim countries that established commercial ties with Israel, as seen from the following table, which, depending on Israeli sources, shows the volume of trade between Israel and some non-Arab Muslim countries.

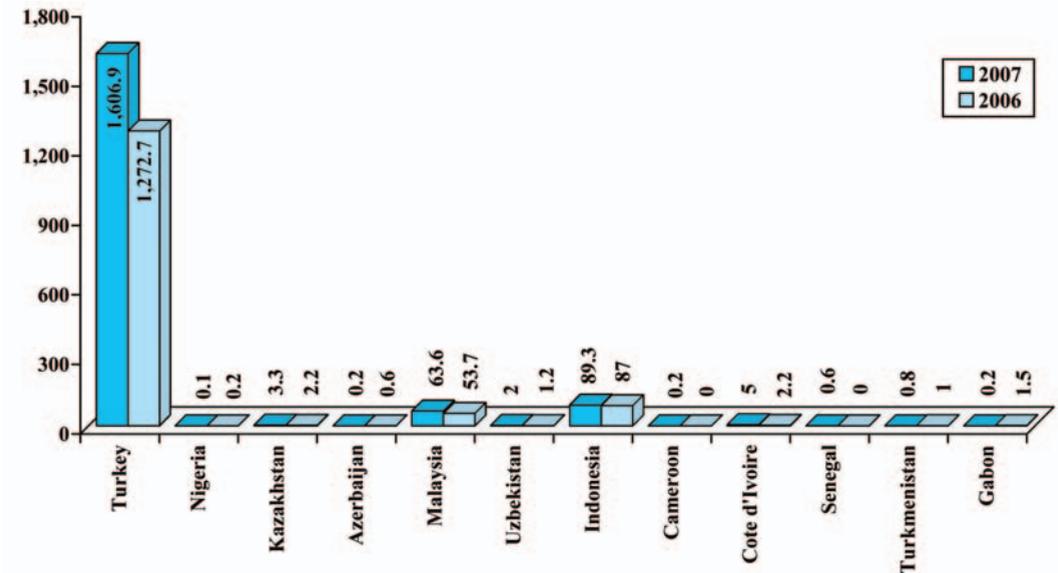
Table 1/4: The Israeli Trade with a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2004–2007 (\$ million)¹³

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2007	2006	2005	2004	2007	2006	2005	2004
Turkey	1,221.9	821.2	903.2	813.5	1,606.9	1,272.7	1,221.1	1,166.9
Nigeria	206.9	78	47.4	43	0.1	0.2	0.7	0.8
Kazakhstan	99.3	64.3	47.9	38.5	3.3	2.2	3.6	0.5
Azerbaijan	82.6	28	5.4	5.3	0.2	0.6	0.4	0.1
Malaysia	70	68.1	130.7	203.7	63.6	53.7	41	32.6
Uzbekistan	25.6	12.2	6.2	9.9	2	1.2	1.3	1.2
Indonesia	17.4	12.9	14.1	11.3	89.3	87	43.6	27.4
Cameroon	8.9	13.6	5.7	4	0.2	0	0	0
Cote d'Ivoire	7.9	8.8	9	10.5	5	2.2	5.5	4.1
Senegal	6.6	5.8	4.5	4.5	0.6	0	0.1	0
Turkmenistan	2.2	0.1	2.6	9	0.8	1	1.7	1.6
Gabon	1	1.4	0.8	0	0.2	1.5	1.4	1.8

Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2006–2007 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2006–2007
(\$ million)



Second: Turkey

For Turkey, the year 2006 was the year of Hamas. For the country was subjected to unduly strong pressure and blackmail from the USA and Israel in order to change its policy that was based on supporting the Palestinian rights, recognizing the Palestinian legitimacy and calling for the unity of the internal Palestinian Front.

During the year 2007 Turkey was preoccupied with some domestic concerns, namely the presidential and parliamentary elections that were crucial for the future of the project of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi*—AKP). Besides, there were the increasing military operations of the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*—PKK) against the Turkish army. Squeezed between this external challenge and the internal pressure of the secularists, the AKP, which controlled the government and Parliament, and subsequently the presidency, tried to sail through with the least possible damage.

Hence, in the year 2007 Turkey resumed “normal” relations with Israel, coordinated with the American administration to remedy its relations with the USA, which had its repercussions on Ankara’s position towards some of its other

concerns, including the Palestinian issue. This shift had been facilitated by the Palestinian schism that continued throughout the year 2007, but particularly after Gaza events of mid June.

1. Olmert's Visit to Ankara

Early in the year 2007, the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert paid a two-day visit to Turkey, 14–15/2/2007, during which he met some top Turkish officials. Two developments had given this visit special importance, namely it took place one week before the conclusion of Mecca Agreement and several weeks after the Israeli excavations beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The visit gave the Turkish premier an opportunity to call upon his Israeli counter-part to recognize the Palestinian government of national unity that was formed after Mecca Agreement. He argued that dealing with Mahmud 'Abbas and his authority was a wrong move that would not solve the problem, as the Palestinian elections had lead to new realities on the ground. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had even declared his intention to invite the new Palestinian government of national unity to visit Ankara. On his part, Olmert declared that Israel will not negotiate with Hamas unless and until it recognizes Israel and discard violence.

The most crucial issue of the bilateral negotiations was *al-Aqsa's* excavations. Being doubtful of the credibility of the pictures that Israel exhibited of those excavations and of Olmert's assurances that they do not touch the Islamic sites and archaeological remains, Erdoğan suggested that his country sends a fact finding technical committee to the mosque. Olmert agreed as, in his words, he had nothing to conceal.

Abdullah Gül, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, was particularly concerned during this visit by the drive of the Jewish lobby in the USA to persuade the Congress to endorse the project of the Armenian genocide. He told Olmert that this was a crucial issue for his country, and that he expects from Israel to demonstrate its friendship via concrete steps. In response, Olmert told his host that Turkey need not to worry, and that he will do what is necessary to block the project.

Olmert expressed his over Gül's visit, saying: 10 years ago, it would not have been at all possible to establish close relations between the leader of a Turkish Islamic party and the leader of an ultra-rightist Jewish party because of the then

many and deep differences between them. He described Turkey as the “coordinator” of the Middle East, and maintained that it will continue its efforts to release the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit.

After meeting Erdoğan, Olmert explicitly expressed the desire of his country that Turkey mediates between Israel and Muslim countries with whom it had no relations. He added that Turkey can play a major role to change the positions of the radical forces in the region, an implicit reference to Hamas and Syria.

An interesting event during this visit was a sarcastic smile that Erdoğan gave to Olmert’s reference to Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, to mean that Turkey objects to this claim, and recognizes Tel Aviv only as the capital of Israel.

Notwithstanding Olmert’s claim of the continuous Israel–Turkish cooperation against PKK, the differences between the two countries over Iraq and Iran were glaring.

On the economic level, Olmert expressed his desire to increase the commercial trade volume between the two countries, which had then totaled \$2.83 billion. He added that 152 Israeli companies conduct business in Turkey, and that they inject in Turkey’s gross national product billions of dollars. He, moreover, called for the increase of Turkish tourists to Israel.

All in all, Olmert’s declarations during this visit revealed the immense Israeli interest in gaining the cordiality and hearts of both top Turkish officials and the public at large. This was particularly so when Olmert said that he shared the same experiences and interest with his host in two respects, namely being former presidents of municipalities, Jerusalem and Istanbul, respectively, and football players!¹⁴

2. *Al-Aqsa’s Excavations and the Turkish Committee*

Olmert’s agreement that a Turkish fact finding mission be sent to examine the nature and extent of the Israeli excavations of February 2007 beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque facing the Mughrabi Gate, which were undertaken under the guise of constructing a new tunnel to *al-Aqsa* Mosque to replace the existing tottering one, was viewed as a victory to Turkey, and had triggered criticism in Israel. Silvan Shalom described it as an arrogant step, even the Arab Member of Knesset (MK), Talib al-Sani‘, had disapprovingly questioned Turkey’s relevance to the issue.

According to some Israeli press reports, Ahmet Davutoğlu, Erdoğan's advisor and a close associate of Hamas, was designated for the presidency of the committee. But the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs refuted the news, and said that it would be invested on Namik Tan, the Turkish ambassador to Israel.¹⁵

The Turkish committee started its work late March 2007, and by November it issued its report, that had been circulated on a limited scale, viz, among the participants of a conference on Jerusalem held by the end of November in Istanbul. And it was handed also, according to Erdoğan's advisor, to the concerned parties in Israel, the United Nations, the OIC and others. However, parts of the report that were leaked in some Palestinian websites, as noted by many observers, directed severe criticism to Israel. Nonetheless, in the interest of preserving its improved relations with Israel, Ankara was keen to avoid any publicity stunt around this report.

From the published resume of this report, it is clear that the Israeli excavations were not in line with the accepted legal and scientific standards, and that their aims were far beyond scientific curiosity. Even if there were no actual excavations in the direction of the the Mughrabi Gate of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the report maintained that there were clear indications that it was only a matter of time for the Israeli institution to undertake excavations beneath the mosque.

The Turkish report expressed conviction that the Israeli excavations in the direction of the Mughrabi Gate would affect the Umayyad's, Ayyubid's, Mamluk's and Ottoman's archaeological remains, and demanded that they stop forthwith. The report maintained that the excavations, tunneling and the large amount of soil extraction (along the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque) give the impression that there were huge and profound interventions that had nothing to do with scientific interest even though there had been no excavations in the direction of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. It added that these activities were part of a pre-arranged and systematic effort on the part of the Israeli institutions to destroy the archaeological remains of the Ayyubid, Mamluk and Ottoman periods.

The report also criticized the Israeli misleading media campaign that claimed that what had been removed was just gravel and sand, and insisted that what had been destroyed by the excavations included some archaeological remains that constituted the last of what remained of Islamic history in *al-Buraq* Yard (Wailing Yard) of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The report also noted that some Hebrew signboards, like the one that read “Nearest point to the Holy of Holies,” were placed in the tunneling and the excavations sites along the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which gives the impression that it was only a matter of time before excavations would be conducted beneath *al-Aqsa* Mosque in the direction of the Mughrabi Gate. This, the report minuted, was of great concern to all Islamic countries, particularly to the Palestinians.

The report also gave extensive information about the domed structure that was found by an Israeli archaeologist beneath a ramp which connects to the Mughrabi Gate. It added that the archaeological characteristics of these rooms and arches indicate that they were the remains of the two-storey Afdaliyyah Madrasah which was built in 1196. Interestingly, to the north of the pathway, just near the Western Wall is where the *mihrab niche* of the classroom masjid of Afdaliyyah Madrasah still stands today. Cracks have formed on the flanking walls of the *Mihrab* (prayer niche), and the floor of the *Mihrab* has been made hollow in parts and left unpreserved. In its concluding remarks the report said the surviving parts of the Afdaliyyah Madrasah must be consolidated and preserved.¹⁶

3. The Israeli Raid on Syria

The Israeli air raid, on 6/9/2007, on a Syrian building in Dayr al-Zur had almost wrecked the improved relations between Turkey and Israel. This was particularly so as the objective of the raid was unclear, and the function of the installation was not ascertained, said to be either the nucleus of a Syrian nuclear facility or a fertilizers’ factory.

Many questions were raised on the role of Turkey in this operation, as the Israeli planes on their way to and from their target had flown over Turkish skies and refueled in Turkish lands. The virtual complete silence of Turkey officials on the incident had aggravated this suspicion, as all that was said was a press release from the office of the Turkish President Abdullah Gül, who had been elected to the post a few days before the raid, to the effect that it was “a big mistake.” Subsequently, after an Israeli apology for violating the Turkish air space, Gül declared on 6/10/2007 that the matter was “over,” and that his government had no prior information of the Israeli night raid. However, this operation had once more questioned the nature and extent of the military cooperation between Turkey and Israel, particularly so as the two parties had from time to time conducted joint land and air maneuvers

over Anatolia, which would facilitate an Israeli air aggression via Turkish lands on Syria, as was the case of 6/9/2007.

4. Peres Visit to Ankara

The three-day, 11–13/11/2007, visit of the Israeli President Shimon Peres to Ankara, and his trio meeting with Abdullah Gül and the President of the PA Mahmud ‘Abbas represented the peak of the developing Turkish–Israeli relations, which, in a way, were swinging back to their earlier era of friendship and coordination.

Prior to his arrival, Peres commended Turkey’s “very important” role in the peace process,¹⁷ and added that it is a model in the Muslim world and the region. He also described it as a huge economic and military power, and a model for the harmonious blend between Islam and modernity. It is a model that combines belief in God and the usage of the computer!

Being first a military, then a political and economic power, Turkey, in Peres words, had since the early 1990s an impact on the balance of power in the region. He, furthermore, refused the claim that the Turkish–Israeli relations retracted during the era of the AKP, by saying, “The government had changed in Turkey, but not the bilateral relations and their fundamentals. This demonstrated the strength in the relations between us.”

Peres praised the vision of the late Turkish President Turgut Özal, who, in response to a question by some journalists on his great interest in Middle Eastern issues, sarcastically said, “We should know this issue very well. If invited to a luncheon party, shall we be among the guests to the occasion or the menu of the food.”

Peres launched an attack on the “extreme” forces in the region like Hizbullah, Hamas and Iran, and described his trio meeting with Gül and ‘Abbas as an opportunity for peace in the Middle East.

After his meeting with Gül and ‘Abbas, Peres highly commended Turkey by describing it as “a falcon who steadily moves forward with one wing, and balances with the other wing. This is splendid.”¹⁸ He added that Israel has specifically demanded the participation of Turkey in Annapolis conference, which was confirmed on 15/11/2007 by the Islamic newspaper *Today’s Zaman* that reported that Shimon Peres and Ehud Olmert were the ones who opened the door for Turkey’s participation in Annapolis.

On the other hand, Abdullah Gül told Israeli newspapers that the comparison between Turkey's operations in northern Iraq and those of Israel against Hizbullah in Lebanon and Hamas in the GS is wrong. "We do not occupy others' land, but this does not mean that we support violent operations or attacks against Israel, including the launching of al-Qassam's missiles. Every state has the right to defend itself, but within the limits of international law."

The peak of Peres visit to Anqara was his meeting with 'Abbas under the patronage of the Turkish President Abdullah Gül. It was a duplicat image to the minute details of holding hands, a replica of the earlier meeting between Menachem Begin and Anwar al-Sadat under the patronage of Jimmy Carter in Camp David in 1978.

The meeting was followed, on 13/11/2007, by consecutive addresses by Peres and 'Abbas in the Turkish parliament, and in a unique scene that the Turkish press described as a "historic meeting." This was the first time in which a top Israeli official delivers a speech in a parliament of a Muslim country!

This gave Peres a golden opportunity to exhibit before the Turkish public opinion and the world a peaceful and gentle face, at a time when he, like Sharon who was dismissed by the Turkish media as "the butcher of Sabra and Shatila," was famous in Turkey as the children killer in Qana. Interestingly, in his speech before the Turkish parliament, Peres quoted verses from the late Turkish poet Cahit Sitki Taranci on love, peace and the homeland!¹⁹

There was a general consensus in the Turkish press that their government's initiative to hold the trio meeting on its own soil had consolidated its position as a country needed by all partners and a major player in the Middle East, which aspires to be the fourth side of the Saudi, Egyptian and Jordanian triangle of moderation. Along these lines, Taha Akyol said to *Milliyet* newspaper that the effective role of Turkey in the Middle East would strengthen its security and brighten its future. Turkey, he added, was transferred into a rendezvous between the West and East, and that the meeting of Peres and Abu Mazin is the all important model for this accelerating role. However, Turkey's invitation to Annapolis conference was not enough, as the country's undeclared agenda was to be the fourth side added to the Saudi, Egyptian and Jordanian triangle of moderation. In tandem with this drive was the ultra splendid reception of the Saudi King who reached Ankara two days

only before Peres's arrival. Contrary to diplomatic tradition, Gül received him at the airport, and participated in a meeting that the King had with Erdoğan in his residence at the hotel, and not in an official presidential headquarter.

Ankara meetings triggered many comments and observations in Turkey. According to Fikret Bila, Turkey's main message to the world was that it is capable of getting together the adversaries of the most complicated conflict in the world in the interest of the stability and welfare of the Middle East of which it is an integral part. He added that the first benefit that the country reaped from this move was its invitation to participate in Annapolis meeting.

The Turkish commentator Sami Kohen saw in Ankara's meeting a resounding victory to Turkish diplomacy. It was clear, he added, that Turkey supported 'Abbas politically and economically, and established the industrial region in the WB, not in Gaza. He pointed to the "delicate balance" of Erdoğan's government that had previously invited Khalid Mish'al to Ankara.

However, Janqiz Chandar warned that the excessive joy over Ankara's "part," should not conceal the viable possibility that Annapolis might fail and the crisis be resumed, exactly as was the case after Camp David negotiations of 2000 between Yasir 'Arafat and Ehud Barak that were followed by the eruption of the second *Intifadah* (*al-Aqsa*). Similarly, tension was resumed after the latest Mecca Agreement between Hamas and Fatah, which had erupted primarily because of Abu Mazin's inability to control Gaza. Chander wondered whether Turkey would mediate behind the scenes between Fatah and Hamas.

In *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, Ibrahim Karagül maintained that it is unfair to keep Turkey stuck to its conflict with the PKK, and that the latest developments demonstrated that no plan could be implemented in the region without Turkey's agreement and participation. This is a message directed in particular to the USA and Israel.

During Peres's visit to Ankara, another important event took place. On the initiative of "Ankara Forum" patronized by the Turkish business chambers and stock markets that had previously been behind Gaza's industrial region that had been destroyed by Israeli forces in June 2006 in revenge of Hamas' arrest of Gilad Shalit, the Turkish government signed a deal to finance another industrial area in the WB, a project that was encouraged by President Gül himself.

The president of the Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB), Rifat Hisarciklioğlu, mentioned that “Ankara Forum” had initially decided to establish the industrial area in Tarqumia, but later shifted to Jenin, and that it looks for international financial support to this project. Gül said that the project was part of Turkey’s economic support to the Palestinian people, and efforts to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians. It is worth noting that the project, which was established under the slogan of “Industry for Peace Initiative” employed six thousand Palestinian workers, and its exports were exempted from customs.

5. Annapolis Conference

Besides 40 participant countries, Turkey was represented in Annapolis conference of 27/11/2007 by its Foreign Minister Ali Babacan. If this participation was a byproduct of the trio meeting, Turkish writers questioned the Jubilation in their country over this representation, particularly that of Babacan. On his part, the latter maintained that this was an opportune opportunity that Turkey had to grasp, and that the conference was a “good start” to settle the Palestinian–Israeli conflict, which would hopefully achieve concrete results. He added that had it not been for Turkey’s drive, Syria’s participation would not have materialized. Conversely, the Turkish press had on the whole viewed the conference as a publicity stunt, and an attempt to brighten the image of Israel and Turkey, particularly so as it had no concrete agenda or objectives, as recorded by Ceyda Karan in the *Radikal* newspaper. However, in view of the lady writer, the most dangerous aspect of the conference was to consider Israel as a Jewish state. Hence, from now on we will have such titles as the “Christian state of the USA,” the “Catholic state of Poland” or the “Islamic State of Pakistan.”

The writer Hassan Jamal opined in *Milliyet* newspaper that the last minute participation of Syria was designed to intensify Iran’s isolation, and wondered whether the whole scenario was a cover up on the part of Bush to strike Iran.

Jamal called for realism rather than optimism, and reminded everybody that the leaders of Israel and Palestine were weak, though he admitted that there was no way except to indulge in an attempt to solve the problem. He added that Annapolis should be viewed as a success if the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians were resumed, and that it is futile to repeat that Turkey’s security and economic interests would be negatively affected if it failed.

Meanwhile, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs, İltter Türkmen, did not expect anything from Annapolis, even there would be no development whatsoever after the conference. He felt that an aspect of Annapolis' fiasco would be Israel's insistence on the "Jewishness of the Hebrew state" which would block the return of the Palestinian refugees. Moreover, both Israel and Palestine suffer from substantial domestic divisions. While reviewing the previous abortive peace attempts, Turkmen felt that the only positive aspect of Annapolis was Syria's participation in the conference through Turkish efforts. Since no peace can be concluded without Syrian involvement, its participation in Annapolis, in his view, may help to develop a favorable psychological environment to exert efforts for peace after the conference.

For Hakan Albayrak, Annapolis, as he wrote in *Yeni Şafak* newspaper, was a "comedy," for who wants peace would not inject the Israeli virus, burn Iraq, starve Palestine and destabilize Lebanon. He sarcastically added:

As for the great Turkey it was jubilant beyond any limits simply because it was invited to attend the conference. For God's sake what will Turkey do there, why is Babacan joyful, what would Israel offer at a time when half or more than the Palestinian people are not represented in the conference? It is a comedy that will end in the dust bin of history. We wish Babacan happy entertainment.

In the above newspaper, Akif Emre maintained that there was no viable reason for optimism. For the USA wanted to improve its deteriorating image in Iraq via a conference on Palestine, and the Arab regimes aspired to use the occasion to remedy their relations with the American administration while what they should do is to patch up their relations with their own peoples. The underlying objective behind the conference was to prolong the crisis to give Israel sufficient time to complete its project of Judaization of the WB and Jerusalem. As for the participation of Syria, the American aim behind it was to end the Syrian–Iranian alliance; hence Annapolis was another step to prepare the ground for a military strike against Iran.

The former MP Resul Tosun summed up the conference as an attempt to support Bush and Olmert. He felt that Turkey's participation would, for the first time in a century, revive its role as a key player in the Middle East. But he maintained that the mere participation of 40 states in this conference and its issuance of a document was a blatant victory to Israel. Moreover, the demand that Israel be

an exclusive state for the Jews constituted a dangerous threat to the rights of the Palestinians. If endorsed by the conference, this provision would, in Tosun's view, end the relationship of the Palestinian refugees with their mother land.

Sami Kohen opined in *Milliyet* newspaper that the conference was "a mere hope" and nothing much should be expected from it, as it was solely concerned with the Israeli–Palestinian conflict and to prepare the grounds for the initiation of new negotiations. However, the invitation and participation of Syria in the conference was signaled an important change in the American position, while Syria on its part had registered a different stand from that of the radical forces like Iran and Hamas.²⁰

Meanwhile, on the periphery of the conference Babacan expressed his displeasure for excluding Hamas from the quest for a peace settlement. He added that there is one Palestine, and a divided Palestine between Hamas and Fatah will never serve the cause of peace. Hence, this division should come to an end. Besides, he disclosed a Turkish project to establish on the borders between Israel and the WB a university for both Israeli and Palestinian students, to which, he claimed, Israel had agreed, and the implementation is being under consideration.²¹

Following the trio meeting and its subsequent participation in Annapolis conference, Turkey had become actively involved in the Paris Donors Conference of 17/12/2007 where it offered \$50 million to the Palestinian people, though this conference was viewed as another step to support the authority of Mahmud 'Abbas and to weaken Hamas.

The elaborate meeting between Erdoğan and the American President George W. Bush, held on 5/11/2007 under the declared banner of securing intelligence cooperation between the two countries against the PKK in northern Iraq, was decisive in repairing Turkish–American relations.

However, what was exciting was the disclosed Turkish–Israeli cooperation to hunt the fighters of the PKK, particularly through the Israeli–made surveillance drones Heron unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

But the Turkish–Israeli cooperation had been extended in the year 2007 to new vital fields, such as the energy sector. After several–month negotiations, the Turkish Minister of Energy Hilmi Güler signed with the Israeli Minister of Infrastructure

Binyamin Ben-Eliezer a treaty in Israel, on 23/10/2007, on cooperation in the field of energy between the two countries, which included the extension of a pipeline from the Ceyhan Port in Iskenderun to the Israeli port of Ashkelon on the Mediterranean, and from there abroad via Ashkelon–Eilat pipeline. This was a crucial pipeline for both parties as gas and petrol go across it to the Far East and from there to Japan. The Israeli Minister said that relations with Turkey were very important not only in the political field but also in such important joint projects that might mushroom into three pipelines for petrol, gas and water that were expected to be completed within three years. He added that this project will be useful for Jordan and Palestine that suffer from shortage of water. Furthermore, it will be constructed under the sea from Ceyhan to Ashkelon for a distance of 610 km, and will be completed around 2011.²²

Though some had seen in the conference a beginning of a new peace treaty between Israel and the Palestinians, the former declared immediately after the conference that it will expand its settlements and build hundreds of housing units in East Jerusalem. But this decision triggered a Turkish protest. After a meeting with the Jordanian King ‘Abdullah on 11/12/2007, Abdullah Gül described it as shocking and counterproductive, besides being against the resolutions of Annapolis.²³

Moreover, the Turkish premier Erdoğan denounced the siege that Israel imposed in early 2008 on the GS. He said that Palestine is already a prison with open skies, the people of Gaza are facing a humanitarian catastrophe, and that they, in Turkey, find great difficulty in understanding the rational of these calamities.²⁴ On a separate occasion, Erdoğan said before a group of MPs of the AKP that Israel is penalizing through excessive bombing of the GS all people in order to penalize a specific group. He protested that it is unacceptable to commit this excessive violence under the guise of the launched missiles, and added:

Whenever we ask the Israeli about this bombardment to which the Palestinian people are exposed to, from time to time, they say that there are missiles launched from the Palestinian side. But when we ask about the extent of the damage resulting from this bombardment on the Palestinian side and the number of casualties on the Israeli side, we get no answer.²⁵

Summary

While maintaining during the year 2006 a “balanced policy,” so to speak, even leaning towards the Palestinian side with all its trends, the Turkish attitude in the year 2007 was rather tilted as it took in consideration external developments related to Turkish interests abroad, and some internal sensitive issues. Hence, the following could be observed:

1. The official and popular Turkish positions remained sympathetic with the cause of The Palestinian people, irrespective of the internal Palestinian conflicts.

2. Turkey strongly supported the Palestinian government of national unity that was formed after Mecca Agreement. The Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer had even said that it will open the way to address the paramount problems of the Palestinian people.

3. Gaza events that had culminated in Hamas’ unilateral control of the GS had immensely embarrassed the government of the AKP, which refrained from any contacts with the dismissed government of Isma‘il Haniyyah.

4. Conversely, Ankara continued contacts with the President of the PA Mahmud ‘Abbas.

5. Though the government of the AKP had in the past moved quickly to mitigate the isolation imposed on Hamas by the USA and Israel, it had apparently been influenced by the negative attitude of some Arab states towards the movement. Therefore, it opted for the maintenance of its increasingly cordial relations with those states at the expense of its contacts with Hamas.

6. The government of the AKP was seemingly anxious to avoid American and Israeli anger similar to the one that had erupted after its invitation to Khalid Mish‘al in February 2006. Hence it did not go a long way in the efforts of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas.

7. In an unprecedented move, President Abdullah Gül had personally patronized a trio meeting between himself, the Israeli premier and the President of the PA in Ankara in mid November 2007. He, moreover, invited them to address the Turkish parliament; hence the Israeli premier was the first top Israeli official to address the legislature of a Muslim country. Obviously, this step was closely related to the following:

- a. Ankara's need for the help of the American administration to face the intensified and embarrassing activities and operations of the PKK, which gave the Turkish military enough force to increase its pressure on the government. Hence, as mentioned above, following Ankara's trio meeting, which created a more conducive environment for the success of Annapolis conference, on which Washington and Israel had largely betted to finalize their policies in the Middle East, Turkish–American intelligence and military cooperation gained grounds, and Turkish air raids on the bases of Kurdistan began.
- b. Ankara's need for Israeli and American support to block a draft resolution in the Congress that considered the 1915 massacres against the Armenians genocide. The draft resolution, that was scheduled to be endorsed a few days after Ankara's meeting, had actually been blocked, thanks to the pressure of the American administration.
- c. The ability of the AKP party to successfully pursue a number of domestic issues, including parliamentary elections and election of Abdullah Gül to the presidency, which had all been strongly supported by the western powers that were in favor of the moderate experiment of the AKP.

Notwithstanding the shifts in the political landscape during the year 2007, including the shifts in Turkish foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue, we may argue that Turkey will continue to stick to its principles of calling for the end of Israeli occupation of the 1967 Palestinian lands and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the WB and the GS. Turkey is also expected to continue the recognition of the PA as represented by Mahmud 'Abbas, but resumption of contacts with Hamas would largely depend on the turn of inter-Palestinian relations. Though the government of the AKP may try to make use of any opportune opportunity to put the Palestinian house in order, it is unlikely that it would pioneer any initiative to address the deteriorating domestic Palestinian situation. For this would negatively affect Turkey's vital national security interests, including coordination with the USA on several issues, its intelligence–military cooperation with Israel, specially in confronting the PKK, and the relative harmony with the policies of certain Arab states that have considerable investments in Turkey.

However, on the popular level, the Turkish non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media and the press would certainly continue their unlimited support for the Palestinian people, irrespective of the internal Palestinian conflicts and the nature of the ruling elite in Ankara. This would require the consolidation of contacts on the popular level between the Palestinian and Turkish peoples.

Third: Iran

Like other regional powers, Iran interacted with the major events related to the Palestinian issue during the year 2007, i.e., Mecca Agreement between Fatah and Hamas, the formation of the government of national unity, the collapse of Mecca Agreement, Hamas' control of Gaza, and, finally, Annapolis conference held in late 2007 under the patronage of the USA, and in which all Arab countries participated.

Naturally, Iran's position towards these events and their repercussions was in harmony with its previous policies towards the resistance movements, notably Hamas, and the peace process in the Middle East that it had consistently rejected, and refused what may result from it.

As expected, Iran's position towards these events was so fundamentally different from many Arab countries. Some of these countries held Hamas responsible for the failure of Mecca Agreement and for the turn of events in Gaza. They all participated in Annapolis conference, which Iran rejected, condemned and forecasted its failure. That's because the conference had no specific agenda and a time frame for implementing whatever may be agreed upon. In addition, Israel did not commit itself to withdraw to the 1967 borders as stipulated in the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002, which had been viewed by the Arabs as a basis for any satisfactory settlement with Israel.

1. Mecca Agreement

Like all Arab countries, Iran supported Mecca Agreement between Fatah (the PA) and Hamas, which was patronized by Saudi Arabia, and the consequential government of national unity. Mohammad Ali Hussaini, the spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, expressed his country's relief by this agreement, which he described as a constructive step, which will contribute to end the internal crisis.²⁶

Being worried by the skirmishes that threatened to abort Mecca Agreement and their repercussions, the Iranian Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei warned, during a reception of the Secretary-General of PIJ, Ramadan ‘Abdullah Shallah, of a turmoil that will radically change the nature of the Palestinian dispute from a Palestinian–Israeli conflict into an inter-Palestinian bloody fight. Khamenei expressed his deep regret for the loss of life among Palestinians from whatever group they may be, and cautioned against the American–Israeli conspiracy to sow the seeds of sedition and discord in the Muslim world. He added that it is essential to foil the conspiracy that induces sedition through alertness, Jihad and resistance to the enemy’s threats and ambitions.²⁷ This is particularly so as the Americans and the Israelis were annoyed by the agreement, as recorded, for example, in *TIME* magazine they wrote that the agreement and the formation of a national unity government lead to an impasse between the Israelis and the Palestinians.²⁸

The Iranian officials continued to call for unity and the end of the fighting. The former Iranian President Hashemi Rafsanjani called upon the conflicting Palestinian factions “to aim their weapons against Israel.”²⁹

Being worried of the possible dangers of the developments in Gaza, Iran went beyond condemnation and denunciation to call the regional powers, particularly Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt, for consultation. The spokesman of the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs urged the Palestinian factions to unite, fight the Israeli enemy, and respect the outcome of the democratic elections. He accused some quarters of working behind the scenes to aggravate tension in the region through refusal to cooperate with the government of national unity, rejection of the Palestinian demands and imposition of economic sanctions.³⁰

2. Decisiveness in Gaza

Once the shifting and sporadic skirmishes had turned into a wide scale military operation that ended with the Hamas’ control of the GS, Iran supported Hamas. Unlike the case with some Arab governments, none of the Iranian officials held Hamas responsible for what happened, but they repeatedly spoke of the necessity of unity to confront the “Zionist enemy.” In an attempt to contain the repercussions of the crisis through dialogue, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab–African Affairs and a former Ambassador to Syria, Mohammad Reza Baqeri, came to Damascus where he held a series of meetings with the leaders of Palestinian organizations, including Hamas, PFLP, DFLP, PFLP–the General Command (GC) and Fatah

which was represented by its representative in Beirut, ‘Abbas Zaki.³¹ Muhammad Nasr, a member of Hamas Political Bureau, said that Baqeri understood “the stand of the movement,” and that the crisis reached to this level because of “the consistent refusal to the outcome of elections and the imposition of the siege on the Palestinian people.” During this get together, Baqeri made it clear that “Teheran supports national unity and solidarity to confront the occupation His country supports the just struggle of the Palestinian people.”³²

Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait accused Iran of being directly responsible for the turn of events in Gaza, which “threatens Egypt national security” as Gaza is the backyard of Egypt.³³ In a meeting with the Palestinian factions in Damascus, Baqeri refused this allegation, and subsequently Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman, Mohammed Ali Hosseini, did likewise, by saying “since the beginning, Iran had called for negotiations between the Palestinian groups, i.e., Hamas and Fatah, and supported Mecca Agreement and the government of national unity in Palestine.”³⁴

Through several messages, Iran confirmed its firm support to the government of Isma‘il Haniyyah. At one time it expressed its respect to the outcome of the democratic elections and refused domestic fighting that “harms the Palestinian revolutionary objectives,”³⁵ and, at another occasion, the Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Mehdi Mostafavi, declared, “the formation of an emergency government is against the principles of democracy, and it sharply increases political tension in occupied Palestine.”³⁶

Moreover, the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad dismissed the emergency government as being “mortgaged,” and the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) maintained that “the major powers sacked the government chosen by the Palestinian people and replaced it by this mortgaged government,” and added, “the time of terrorizing and humiliating states had gone. Do not assume that you can meet in one place and pass a resolution that rules that the Palestinian issue is over.”³⁷ However, despite its support to Hamas and dismissal of the emergency government, Iran never gave up its call for dialogue in Tehran to put an end to the internal Palestinian feud. This call was emphasized by head of the Iranian Shura Council Gholam Ali Haddad-‘Adel, who had, at the same time, reiterated that “the main yardstick should be the votes of the Palestinian people who chose Hamas that leads the legitimate government in the Palestinian lands.”³⁸

The Iranian reformists had also registered their opinion on the turn of events in Gaza and on the proposed solution. The former President Mohammad Khatami, the head of International Institute for Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations, sent two separate messages to President Mahmud ‘Abbas and the dismissed Premier Isma‘il Haniyyah in which he called “to settle the problems via dialogue and understanding.”³⁹ Being “anxious to discard schism and adhere to Palestinian unity,” Khatami offered “to personally mediate between the Palestinian factions to remove the obstacles in the way of dialogue.” This offer was after a meeting in Teheran with the Palestinian Ambassador Salah al-Zawawi and the representative of Hamas Osama Abdelmo‘ti.

In his bilateral and collective meetings with leaders of the Palestinian factions, the Iranian President Ahmadinejad urged the avoidance of difference and the denunciation of conflict, and “the importance of settling the problems through dialogue... as the only beneficiary is the enemy.” The president was also reported to have said, “The defense of the Palestinian resistance is obligatory to Iran...., the sedition between Hamas and Fatah is engineered by Israel.”⁴⁰

Based on the Iranian sympathy with Hamas, and irrespective of the repeated calls for dialogue that the Palestinian president had in particular repeatedly refused before the return to the status quo ante in Gaza, the Iranian representative to the United Nations, Mansour al-Sadeghi, demanded, in a speech delivered in a meeting of the Security Council on the Middle Eastern issues, to confront the crimes of the Israeli occupation, emphasizing, “It is impossible to discard Hamas from the political scene, even all the attempts that target it are doomed to failure.”⁴¹

In a significant shift in its foreign policy, Iran did not confine itself to repeated calls for dialogue between the Palestinians, but the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Manouchehr Mottaki, strove for the participation of the Arab side in the attempts to settle the crisis. He approached the Secretary–General of the Arab League ‘Amr Musa to “initiate a move in this respect.” In response Musa informed the Minister that he is “in contact with the two factions, Fatah and Hamas, to urge them to engage in dialogue.”⁴² Meanwhile, Mottaki denied the involvement of his country in these events, and told Musa of “the importance of conveying this message to the member states of the Arab League.”⁴³

Meanwhile, the Iranian president Ahmadinejad took all opportunities to launch attacks against Israel, “the custodian of aggression and occupation, the

Satan that is on its way to collapse and extermination”⁴⁴ and that it “will not possibly continue to exist.”⁴⁵ He undertook “to continue the struggle until the complete liberation of Palestine, and to repeatedly question the myth of the Jewish holocaust.”⁴⁶ Ahmadinejad called upon the United Nations to confront the crimes of Israel against the Palestinians, to find unconditional solutions for the return of the Palestinian refugees to their homeland, and to conduct free elections for all Palestinians—Muslims, Christians and Jews—to determine the destiny and political future of their country.⁴⁷ Ahmadinejad also asked the Israelis to “look for an alternative place other than the Palestinian lands.”⁴⁸

Meanwhile, Iran was accused of offering in 2003, during the rule of the reformists, to stop its support to Hizbullah and Hamas. In the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) television report, Iran was said to have offered, in a secret message to the American administration via its Swiss representative in Tehran, to accept the Arab peace initiative and to convince Hamas and Hizbullah to stop their operations against Israeli civilians in return for an American undertaken to lift all sanctions against Iran, to unconditionally recognize its right to have peaceful biological, chemical and nuclear technology, to respect all its legitimate rights in the region and to stop all attempts to overthrow the Iranian regime. The details of this “grand deal” so-called by American sources, were aired by the American Frontline television program towards the end of December 2007, which had also claimed that the hawks in the American administration, specially Dick Cheney, refused the Iranian offer.⁴⁹

In response to these accusations, an Iranian official of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs insisted that his country had at no time “offered to stop its cooperation with Hizbullah and Hamas.” Moreover, Mohammad Tajik, a member of the Iranian Parliamentary Defense Committee, maintained that the BBC report “is not void of illusions, because we will not surrender our values and fundamentals... Iran does not have ulterior interests behind the aid and support that it extends to these movements, except that of Islam.”⁵⁰

3. Annapolis Peace Conference

Since Iran refused to recognize Israel, and its president had, since his assumption of power, recorded his conviction that it will ultimately disappear, it was natural that it refused Annapolis conference, held in the USA towards the end of 2007, and in which the Arabs sat at the same table with the Israelis, and, before that, to reject

the “Arab peace initiative” because “it recognizes Israel and call for normalization with it.” Hence more than one Iranian official and in different places and on different occasions, issued declarations against this conference which “support the Zionist occupiers,” is of “no use to the Palestinians,” and is “doomed to fail.”

While in a visit to Saudi Arabia in March 2007, President Ahmadinejad was compelled to direct the relevant Iranian quarters to refute the news reported by the Saudi Press Agency (SPA) that he supported the Arab peace initiative “because it stipulates normalization of relations with Israel quid pro quo its withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian lands.” On the same vein, the former President Hashemi Rafsanjani asked the USA to be even-handed and discard its absolute support for Israel if it wanted the realization of stability in the region and the resolution of all its crises. He, moreover, considered the failure to establish a Palestinian state and to secure the return of the refugees the primary danger to peace in the region.⁵¹ In pursuit of his consistent campaign against Annapolis, President Ahmadinejad maintained that its aim is “to connect all Arab regimes with the Zionist entity,” but, he added “the union of Muslim states in the region is capable of aborting all these plans.”⁵² In a telephone call to the Saudi King ‘Abdullah, President Ahmadinejad said that “he would have loved that Saudi Arabia had not been registered as a participant in Annapolis conference” and added that “the Arab states should be alerted to the conspiracy and the Zionist deceit.”⁵³ The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported that Ahmadinejad said, “Since the true representatives of the Palestinian people and the Palestinian factions were absent and the least of their rights were not conceded, this meeting, and hundreds others of its like, are futile.”

The Iranian president called for a plebiscite for all the people of the participant Arab countries “to know whether they support or reject the conference.”⁵⁴

While forecasting the failure of the conference, the Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) of the Islamic Republic Ali Khamenei assured that “the alertness of the Palestinian people, which is connected with that of the Muslim Nation, particularly the Iranian people, would abort the American objectives behind this conference.”⁵⁵

Hence, the Iranian officials had unanimously denounced the convention of the conference, expected its failure, and rejected its objectives that would achieve nothing to the Palestinians, and would just lead to the Arab recognition of Israel without getting anything from it except the “resumption of negotiations.”

Meanwhile, it was reported that Iran will convene a parallel conference for all the Palestinian forces that reject the peace settlement project, and that “the leaders of the factions will come to Tehran as well as all the Palestinian parties that struggle to liberate their land.”⁵⁶ However, what happened afterwards was a conference in Damascus, not Tehran, on 23/1/2008, which was attended by all Palestinian factions except Fatah and the representative of the PA. The conferees condemned the peace project and ascertained the option of resistance.

Apart from rejecting the conference as a matter of principle as it would mean nothing but normalization with Israel, Iran was concerned that it will go beyond “peace in the region” to threaten its very existence. *The New York Times* had, in fact, maintained that the real objective of Annapolis was “to check the increasing influence of Iran and Islamic extremism in the region.” Though doubting the ability of the Palestinians and Israelis to conclude a final peace settlement, many quarters in the Arab participant countries in the conference were relieved that the USA had been once more involved in “the major and most important battle of winning the minds and hearts of the Muslims.” In the same vein, the magazine reported that an advisor of the Palestinian negotiating team said, “the Arabs did not come to Annapolis because they love the Jews or even the Palestinians, they came because they need a strategic alliance with the USA against Iran.” The same magazine spoke of “the clouds of profound anxiety over the skies of Annapolis, lest that Shiite and non-Arab Iran, which was equipped with a nuclear program and victorious allies in southern Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian lands, would supersede and assume a dominant role.”⁵⁷

On his part, the Israeli President Shimon Peres maintained that the underlying factor behind the big participation of the Arab countries in Annapolis was the Iranian threat in the region. He emphasized, “Iran, with its extremist policy that provokes fear and threat, is the reason for this.”⁵⁸

However, Iran was not surprised by the attempts to transfer Annapolis conference into an Arab–American alliance against it. For, during their visits to the region, the American envoys concentrated on the priority of the “Iranian threat” instead of the Israeli danger.

However, at the same time, the conference strove to start normalization of the Arab–Israeli relations; hence Iran would loose impetus for its extremist policy towards the Palestinian issue. For this reason, Karim Sadjadpour criticized in the

International Herald Tribune newspaper of 3/8/2007 the USA announcement that it sold what's worth \$20 billion to its Arab allies "to fight Iranian hegemony in the Middle East." For Iran's accelerating influence was not due to its military strength or military expenditure (Saudi military expenditure is four times that of Iran), but because of its employment of the militia forces across the region to weaken and destroy the hugely superior power of the USA and Israel... particularly so as the excellent performance in the elections of Hamas in Palestine, Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Hizbullah in Lebanon and the Shiite in Iraq... made Iran feel that its "Islamist friends had won the battle of gaining the minds and hearts in the region."⁵⁹

Hence, the objectives of the organizers of Annapolis were compatible, in the sense that they all wanted to simultaneously isolate Hamas and Iran in order to achieve progress in the Palestinian–Israeli track and comfort in the Arab states that their alliance with the United States against the "Iranian threat" was strong and solid. This was reiterated by International Crisis Group (ICG) which wrote on 20/11/2007, "The isolation of Hamas is the primary objective behind Annapolis. The USA, Israel and Fatah are convinced that progress in the Israeli–Palestinian question should go side by side with the marginalization of the Islamists."⁶⁰ As for the weakening of Hamas and its marginalization, Washington felt that it could be achieved through a strong coalition of Israel and the so-called moderate Arab states. The Group's report mentions that a senior American official said to the Crises Group, "We need to propagate an Israeli–Palestinian political path as Hamas would not be defeated militarily but only politically." The subsequent, in early 2008, tight siege of the GS, which Hamas controls, ascertains the plan of isolation and marginalization of the movement, and to hold it, as well as its fellow "extremist" Iran, squarely responsible for the starvation of the Palestinian people and their deprivation of fuel in a severe winter.

Summary

While supporting Hamas and refusing to accept responsibility for the turn of events in Gaza, Iran continued to persistently call for dialogue to diffuse the crisis between the Palestinians. Nonetheless, it firmly rejected Annapolis conference, which aimed at normalization, isolation of Hamas and to pose Iran, not Israel, as the imminent danger in the region. Notwithstanding its engagement in defending its "peaceful nuclear program" and refuting at the highest level the illusion of the "Iranian danger," notably by the participation of its president in the summit of the

Gulf Cooperative Council, held few days after Annapolis, Iran never stopped its calls to support “the true representatives of the Palestinian people,” as Israel, in the words of Ahmadinejad, “will not survive.”

The events of 2007 revealed that the USA and Israel will continue their drive to isolate and weaken both Hamas and Iran. Any American–Israeli progress in any of the two fronts will, no doubt, have its impacts on the other. However, the reports of the U.S. intelligence, issued late 2007, that refuted Iran’s involvement in a secret nuclear–military program⁶¹ made the presumed American military strikes against it farfetched, at least in principle. This would somehow relax the pressure and threat of sanctions on Iran, which means the intensification of pressure on Hamas. The siege and the subsequent military strikes demonstrated that the objective was to weaken Hamas, especially after the failure to clip the wings of Hizbullah in 2006. Thus, Washington hoped to resume before the end of Bush’s presidency its initiative in the Middle East, and to present to its allies what it has failed to do during the previous years (i.e., weakening the resistance and opposition movements). But the angry popular reaction to the siege of Gaza, the infiltration of Rafah crossing, and the heroic military confrontation of early 2008 demonstrate that the siege project is not as effective as some had expected and other wished.

Meanwhile, according to some Israeli analysts, the furious Palestinian, Arab and even international reactions against the siege of Gaza had triggered Israel to retreat from its defiance and threats.

Fourth: Pakistan

The Pakistani public opinion had always been antagonistic to Israel and supportive to the Palestinians and the Arabs. But the government and the official intelligence agencies had engaged in approaching Israel for a number of reasons: to cool down the increasing Israeli–Indian relations, to make inroads with the American–Israeli lobby as a means to win the USA to the Pakistani side and to guarantee the continuation of the American aid.

In return, Israel sent messages via the USA to Pakistan that it has no intention of attacking its nuclear installations, particularly as Pakistan assured Israel that it need not to be anxious by their existence and that it will not pass nuclear technology

to other countries.⁶² However, according to some observers, Pakistan's strong alliance with the USA will deter any possible Israeli attack on its nuclear facilities. In August 2007, the Israeli newspaper *Maariv* maintained that Israel views nuclear Pakistan to be more dangerous than nuclear Iran, as the Pakistani weapon may fall in the hands of extremist groups.⁶³

The Pakistani–Israeli relations are not limited to political meetings, but extended to joint security coordination. The Palestinian newspaper *al-Manar* had disclosed in January 2007 a meeting in the Chinese capital between the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert and a Pakistani security official, which, the newspaper maintained, was within the existing security cooperation and coordination between Israel and Pakistan.⁶⁴

The internal political developments in Pakistan had seemingly reflected on the country's relations with Israel. The heated competition between the Pakistani political leaders had been exploited in developing the relationship with Israel. Successive Pakistani leaders, like the late Benazir Bhutto, Nawaz Sharif and General Pervez Musharraf, had all expressed their willingness to recognize Israel and establish diplomatic relations with it. But the furious and tense street reaction after any declaration of this kind had prevented the translation of these verbal utterances into concrete actions.

In view of the suspension of the peace process during the duration of the government of national unity, President Musharraf expressed his readiness to mediate between Israel and the Palestinians. He said, "If accepted by all parties as an impartial intermediary, I will certainly be able to play a major role." He also indicated his willingness to visit Israel and meet the Israeli leaders. In response, Mark Regev, the spokesman of Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said, "We believe that moderate Islamic states, like Pakistan, may play an important role in consolidating peace in the Middle East."⁶⁵ With a possible invitation of Musharraf to act as in intermediary between Israel and the Palestinians in the background, a meeting was held between Israeli and Pakistani ambassadors to the United Nations.⁶⁶

But this suggestion was not accepted by both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert turned down the offer of mediation, while Hamas and PIJ rejected Musharraf's initiative, on the grounds that it will not serve the Palestinian cause but leads to its further regression.⁶⁷

On another vein, the former Pakistani Premier Benazir Bhutto, who was assassinated in Rawalpindi, on 27/11/2007, returned to Pakistan after she assured the USA and Israel that it would establish diplomatic relations with Israel once she assumes power.⁶⁸ After her demise, the Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert said that she would have been “a bridge between Israel and the Muslim world,”⁶⁹ while the Israeli President Shimon Peres commented that he had several opportunities to meet Bhutto, where she expressed her interest in what happens in Israel. He added that she expressed her desire to visit Israel when she assumes power in Pakistan, and that she was a courageous woman who never concealed her views, she did not know fear, and courageously served her people.⁷⁰

On the Pakistani–Palestinian relations, Pakistan continued to call for collective effort to unite the Palestinian people. The Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs criticized Gaza events of June 2007, which had deepened the gulf between Fatah and Hamas, and triggered President Mahmud ‘Abbas to declare the state of emergency.⁷¹

Fifth: Other Muslim States

Since the initiation of the peace project in the last decade of the twentieth century, Israel has been striving to build bridges with many Muslim countries. The Southeastern region is a particular target of Israel. Yitzhak Rabin was the first Israeli Premier to visit the most populous Muslim country, Indonesia, in December 1993.⁷² Hence, he started a process of exchanged visits between Israel and Indonesia. The former Indonesian president, Abdurrahman Wahid, visited Israel in 1994, after which he was appointed a member in the executive board of The Peres Center for Peace. In September 2000 Shimon Peres paid a secret visit to Indonesia in which he met successively the Minister of Foreign Affairs Alwi Shihab and President Wahid. Interestingly, this visit took place just one day before a scheduled visit of the late Palestinian President Yasir ‘Arafat to the country, at a time when Indonesia had patronized the Israeli position on what was shelved of the issue of Jerusalem in the then negotiations.⁷³

The year 2007 witnessed a new round of Israeli visits to Indonesia, though not on the official level, but not less important than their predecessors. In April 2007, a Knesset delegate was invited to participate in the meeting of the International

Union of Parliaments, held in Indonesia. However, the spokesman of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kristiarto Legowo, justified this visit under the guise that, in line with the accepted practice, “the delegate was invited by the Union and not the Indonesian government.”⁷⁴ Nonetheless, this visit provoked a chain of popular protest movements organized by Indonesian religious organizations and political parties. The Speaker of Indonesia People’s Consultative Assembly, Hidayat Nur Wahid, protested in the following strong words, “The invitation of a Knesset delegation to visit Indonesia, even though by an international organization and not an Indonesian side, is a flagrant insult to the sensibilities of millions of the Indonesians who adamantly refuse any form of relations with the Zionist entity.” In the same vein, deputy speaker of the House of Representatives, Dr. Sutarjo Suryoguritno, called for an international embargo on the members of the Knesset in protest of the aggressive Israeli actions against the Palestinians, amongst which was the arrest of the Speaker of the PLC, Dr. ‘Aziz Dweik and his colleagues.⁷⁵ Faced with this spiral of protest, the Knesset cancelled the participation of the delegate in the conference under the pretext of the huge expenses needed to protect the members of the delegation.⁷⁶

In partial response to a 2006 conference funded by Iran which casted doubts on the Jewish Holocaust, the Indonesian island Bali hosted in mid June 2007 a conference of religious leaders, including some who had escaped the Holocaust, that was organized by the USA based Lib For All Foundation and the Museum of Tolerance (MOT) of Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC). During this conference, the former Indonesian President Wahid, who was also the patron of LibForAll Foundation, contested President Ahmadinejad’s insistence that “the holocaust was a myth,” by saying that this is “forgery of history,” and added, “I had personally visited Auschwitz Holocaust Museum, and saw many of the shoes of the killed in Auschwitz. Hence, I believe that the Holocaust did take place.”⁷⁷

In December 2007, Simon Wiesenthal Center organized a visit to a delegation of Indonesian Islamic scholars to participate in the Jewish Lights Festival. The delegation also visited Sderot, Keryat Shmona settlements and *al-Buraq* Wall (the Western Wall/ Wailing Wall). In his speech, the director of the Center referred to the delegates as Muslims, but not extremists, and added, “We should not assume that all Muslim religious leaders are followers of Hamas.”⁷⁸

On the Palestinian side, Indonesia planned early in 2007 to convene an international conference in which Hamas was scheduled to participate in order

to soften its position towards the international conditions. For this purpose, the Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hassan Wirajuda, met on 4/2/2007 Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau, in Damascus and communicated to him the willingness of Indonesia to host a conference to settle the conflict between Fatah and Hamas. The minister also expressed his country's support to the government of national unity, respect to the outcome of the Palestinian elections, rejection to the siege and support to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.⁷⁹

However, with the formation of the government of national unity in March 2007, Indonesia declared the postponement of the conference, which it had hoped to be "a bridge between Hamas on one side and the European Union and the USA on the other side that would stimulate a better understanding of Hamas in the West." Just after the formation of the government of national unity, the Minister of Foreign Affairs said in a press conference, "It is a reality that Hamas won a democratic, peaceful and fair elections, which demonstrate that nobody could underestimate the movement."⁸⁰ With regard to the political crisis that erupted after Hamas' decisive action in the GS and its aftermath, namely declaration of the state of emergency and the formation of an emergency government, Indonesia asserted the importance of a Palestinian reconciliation to overcome the crisis, and noting that the Palestinian parliament did not endorse the emergency government.⁸¹

The position of Malaysia towards the Palestinian issue remained consistent. The Malaysian government supported the formation of the Palestinian national government. During a visit by the president of Hamas' Political Bureau to Malaysia on 4/3/2007, Premier Abdullah Badawi openly called the international community to support the Palestinian government, and to lift the political and financial embargo on it.⁸² Syed Hamid Albar, the Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs, maintained that Israel has no right to impose conditions for dealing with this government, which, he added, it should respect.⁸³ Malaysia had also warned that the bloody fighting of June 2007 between Fatah and Hamas would weaken the Palestinian state itself. In this respect, Abdullah Badawi sadly noted, "While we were hoping to see a solid and united Palestinian people, they are fighting each other." Without such a unity, Badawi asserted, the Palestinians will remain weak and unable to confront the enemy.⁸⁴

Conclusion

While being optimistic after Mecca Agreement, the Muslim world had plunged into a state of apathy and alienation because of the security chaos, the disintegration of the Palestinian front and Gaza events. The attitude of the Muslim world towards the Palestinian issue during the year 2007 remained basically the same as before. The political, economic and media interaction with the issue was less than the required, and the Palestinian schism had been instrumental in the regression of the official and popular support.

The Turkish government of the AKP had dealt with the Palestinian question during the course of the year 2007 with considerable caution for the sake of bypassing some domestic complexities, chiefly parliamentary and presidential elections. Moreover, it was keen to neutralize possible American–Israeli pressure on it through promoting relations with these two countries, or, at least, not to provoke them. This opened the way for the Israeli side to develop its political, economic and military relations with Turkey. The visits of Olmert and Peres to Turkey constituted landmarks in the year 2007, especially when the Israeli president was given the platform to address the Turkish parliament. However, Turkey tried to be even handed, though on a limited scale, through its unofficial hosting of Jerusalem conference, and the Turkish committee that investigated the Israeli violations at the footsteps of the the Mughrabi Gate of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Iran continued its policy of supporting Hamas and the government of national unity, and its understanding of the rationale of Hamas' military decisiveness in the GS. However, Iran had maintained its diplomatic contacts with the Palestinian presidency, and called for settling the differences through dialogue. At the same time, Iran rejected Annapolis peace conference and viewed it as part of the chain of conspiracy on the Palestinian issue. By this, Iran was in harmony with itself and the main directions of its foreign policy. Meanwhile, it tried to cautiously and efficiently face the complexities of its nuclear project and regional role, especially in Iraq, the Gulf and Lebanon.

During the year 2007, Pakistan was less engaged in the Palestinian affair and rather cool in its official enthusiasm to promote relations with Israel, largely because of its immerse preoccupation with the complexities and chaotic domestic affairs, particularly the elections and the rearrangement of the Pakistani political

map. Meanwhile, under immense spiral of enthusiasm for the Palestinian rights at the popular level, thanks to the growing influence of the Islamic movement, the Indonesian government took a number, but rather reserved political steps to interact with the Palestinian issue. This was probably behind the attempt of the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to settle the schism between Fatah and Hamas, and its abortive attempts to convene an international conference in which Hamas would participate.

Israel did not succeed to achieve any meaningful breakthroughs in the Muslim world. However, equally, the Palestinians were not able to change the realities on the ground, or to lift the tight siege imposed on the people. The first step towards a Palestinian success is to put their house in order, and to unite themselves and their efforts in a national program of action that would effectively deal with the huge strategic reservoir that the Muslim world represents.

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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

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 the 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:

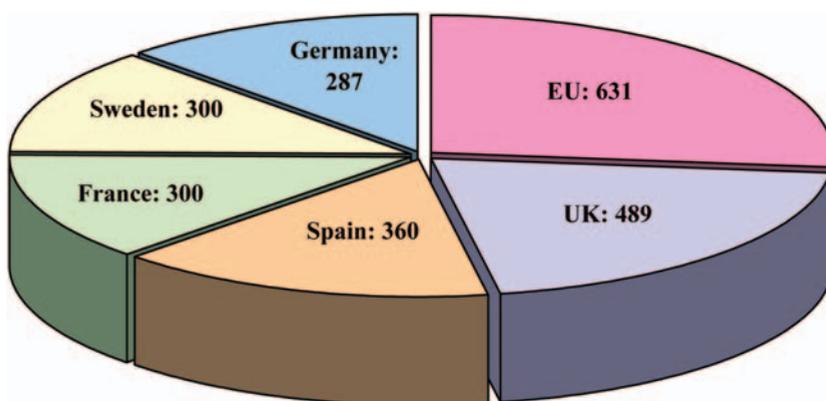
1. The constant pressure on Hamas to change its positions, and providing more inducements to Fatah; to continue with the political settlement approach with Israel. Perhaps the statement released by the foreign ministers of 10 European countries in June supporting President ‘Abbas,⁴⁰ is the broader articulation 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 appealing 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

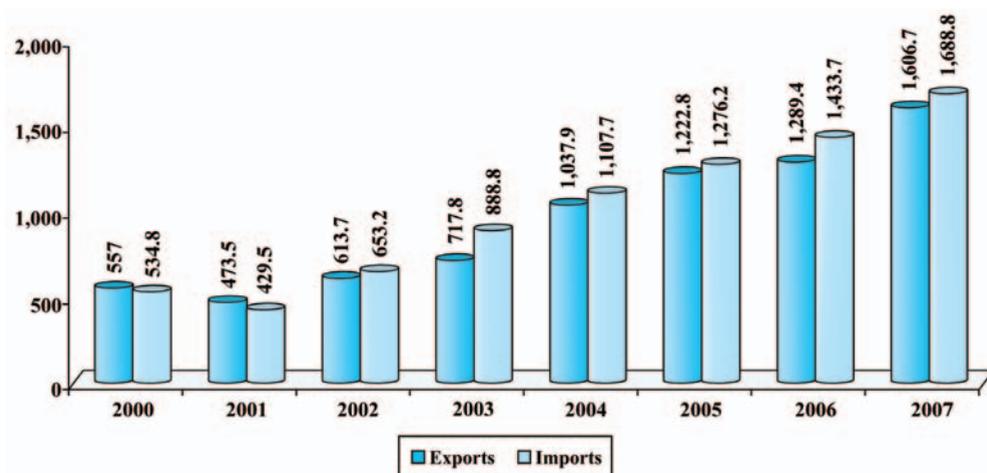
Trade between the two countries was characterized by rapid growth in 2007, recording steady increase since the establishment of relations between them. From a balance of trade reaching \$200 million in 1992,¹⁰³ when the diplomatic relations were established, the bilateral trade sprung to \$2.2 billion (\$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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The Israelis have invited the leaders of the Sikh religion to visit Israel in December 2005, and it was said then that “Jews and Sikhs are twins separated at birth,” see Lauren Gelfond Feldinger, “Sikhs and Jews-Separated at Birth?” and “Lions in Zion,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 29/12/2005; and Roe Nahmias, “India: Israeli Nabbed for Carrying Bullet,” *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 17/12/2005, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0.7340.L-3185733.00.html>
- ¹⁰⁰ Harinder Mishra, “Israel House Seeks Steps for Image Makeover,” *The Asian Age* newspaper, New Delhi, 5/1/2007.
- ¹⁰¹ Etgar Lefkovits, “118 Bnei Menashe Immigrants Arriving in Israel,” *The Jerusalem Post*, 24/8/2007, <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?cid=1187779146925&pagename=JPost%2FJP Article%2F>
- ¹⁰² Ramesh Ramachandran, “Israel Grapples with Influx of Lost Tribe from India,” *The Asian Age*, 24/11/2007.
- ¹⁰³ <http://in.rediff.com/money/2004/aug/26israel.htm>
- ¹⁰⁴ http://commerce.nic.in/pressrelease/pressrelease_detail.asp?id=1860
- ¹⁰⁵ See CBS, http://www.cbs.gov.il/archive/200401/fr_trade/td1.htm; http://www.cbs.gov.il/archive/200501/fr_trade/td1.htm; and http://www.cbs.gov.il/archive/200801/fr_trade/td1.htm
- ¹⁰⁶ *The Times of India* newspaper, New Delhi, 14/6/2007.
- ¹⁰⁷ http://www.idrw.org/2007/09/29/israeli_army_delegation_to_visit_kashmir_in_october.html
- ¹⁰⁸ *The Times of India*, 9/2/2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/articleshow/1581346.cms>.
The importance of these purchases can be measured by knowing that Israel’s sales of arms reached \$4.5 billion in 2006.
- ¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, for more details about the Israeli weapons sales to India see *al-Hayat*, 22/10/2007.
- ¹¹⁰ Ravi Sharma, “Israeli Know How for LCA Radar,” *The Hindu* newspaper, New Delhi, 29/6/2007, <http://www.thehindu.com/2007/06/29/stories/2007062954380900.htm>.
- ¹¹¹ *The Hindu*, 1/9/2007.
- ¹¹² *Al-Khaleej*, 10/3/2007.
- ¹¹³ *The Times of India*, 9/2/2007.
- ¹¹⁴ *The Hindu*, 1/9/2007.
- 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

Chapter Six

The Land and the Holy Sites

The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction

The year 2007 was no different from the previous years as far as Israel's practices in the occupied territories were concerned. Israel continued its settlement projects, confiscated lands, Judaized the city of Jerusalem, and isolated the WB. It also established the Separation Wall, continued with the policy of besieging Palestinian villages and towns, isolated the Jordan Valley, prevented Muslims from performing prayer at *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, decided on the age of Muslims praying there, demolished houses of Palestinians, and dislodged Bedouins from their dwelling places and separated them from their sources of livelihood. This chapter particularly focuses on Jerusalem but it also examines other aspects of Israeli occupation of the WB.

First: Jerusalem and the Holy Sites

Israel's policy in Jerusalem aims at extending its domination and with that aim in mind, depopulating the city of Jerusalem of Palestinian inhabitants. The success of such a policy would trigger a demographic and geographic change resulting in a fait accompli that would benefit only Israel. It shows no interest in entering into any negotiations with the Palestinians for a final peace settlement. Israel's negotiating position is bolstered by America's pledges to former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon that the facts on ground would have to be taken into consideration in any final peace settlement. Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was given such a pledge on 14/4/2004, during his visit to Washington as a guest of US President George W. Bush. Israel is determined on creating such facts on ground, i.e., a Judaized Jerusalem.

1. Judaization of the Old City

As part of Israel's policy of Judaization of Jerusalem, several significant changes took place in 2007 regarding the expansion of Israeli settlements and excavation works within and around the Old City of Jerusalem. Groups of settlers,

supported by the Israeli government, continued working on several projects to expand the Jewish presence in the city. It began with the acquisition of licenses to establish the first Jewish synagogue in the region of the Islamic quarter, near Bab Al-Silsilah. This Jewish synagogue is only 100 meters away from *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹ The Moskovitch family bought the site, known as “The Tent of Isaac.” However, this fact became public only after the Ateret Kohanim acquired building licenses. It was also revealed that Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA) was carrying out excavations under the remains of the synagogue. Wailing Wall Traditions Fund was utilized to build a museum and a cultural center in a tunnel under the synagogue. This tunnel crosses the tunnel that is parallel to the Western Wall and extends underneath the Islamic quarter.² Moreover, the Jerusalem Municipality confirmed that settlers acquired a license to build the synagogue.³

At the same time, Elad Foundation continued the excavation works under the Spring of Salwan Mosque.⁴ The same organization took over the building of a parking space for settlers in the area of Salwan.⁵ Furthermore, The Company for the Reconstruction and Development of the Jewish Quarter in the Old City of Jerusalem Ltd. (JQDC) prepared a new plan entitled “The Roofs Park” which is aimed at providing tourists transportation between the Islamic and Jewish quarters. Company officials hope that a tourist course over the roofs would lead to attracting more tourists from all religions.⁶

Ateret Kohanim is about to begin digging a tunnel that opens the Quarries of King Solomon (*Me'arat Tzedkiyahu*). However, its entrance is near Damascus Gate (*Bab al-'Amud*), and Al-Malwiyah School in the Muslim quarter of the Old City. The school was taken over by the settlement society several years ago. At present, there are talks about diggings that are tens of meters in length, at a distance of about 150 meters from the wall delineating the Noble Sanctuary. Moreover, the society communicates regularly with IAA in order to dig this tunnel.⁷

The policy of confiscation of the Palestinian houses continued like the one in al-Qarmi quarter when settlement associations seized the first floor of a building owned by al-Zalloum family.⁸

Al-Aqsa Foundation for Endowment and Heritage exposed the attempt of a large group of leading settlers, Jewish Knesset members and business executives, to establish a Jewish synagogue on the remains of Islamic Court building, located near The Cotton Merchant's Gate. The American-born Jewish billionaire Ira

Rennert donated \$100 million for this purpose. They attempted to build such synagogue based on the claim that the building was originally a synagogue in the past.⁹

Before holding the Middle East peace conference at Annapolis in the USA, the Israeli ministerial committee endorsed the resumption of archeological excavations in the Mughrabi Gate, near *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem. This was the result of pressures exerted on the Israeli government by the “Rabbi of the Wailing Wall” and “The Wailing Wall Legacy Fund.”¹⁰

In line with the Judaization policy of the Old City, Jewish extremists of Galetsia religious school undertook excavation works and removal of dust in the Jewelers’ old market beneath Sabra market. This was done with the explicit aim of taking possession and expanding the school. The area of the market amounts to four donums (1 donum=1,000 m²). This site collapsed 400 years ago and became full of dust.¹¹

Hebrew journals exposed the close cooperation between the Israel Land Administration and settlement societies in the Old City. Their expositions confirmed the firm bond between the government and the settlers. The Israel Land Administration got away with more than 70 real estates. The Israeli “Absentee Property Guardian” and other official circles, such as the Ministry of Construction and Housing, the Ministry of the Interior and the Jerusalem Municipality greatly support such activities. It was also found out that Israel Land Administration rents Palestinian land to Ateret Kohanim Society, and that hundreds of donums of these lands have already been given out in favor of settlement associations as well as Israeli contractors and construction companies.¹²

In order to increase the pace of Judaization of the city, Palestinian lands were dug to make way for the light train project in East Jerusalem that would link Israeli settlements with West Jerusalem. The Israeli Ministry of Transportation and the Municipality entrusted a private union of companies to establish the first line of the light train project. The City Pass Consortium presided over the union, which also included two French companies, namely Alstom SA and Veolia Environment SA, and three Israeli companies. The participation of the two French companies in the consortium adds legitimacy to the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel.¹³

Indeed, the Israeli settlement projects inside and outside the Old City are designed to achieve, first of all, a demographic change in favor of Israel by carrying out intensive construction works and to change Islamic historical scene

in the city by reducing the renovation and construction of the Islamic historical sites. One example of such a policy was the certification by the Israeli authorities of the course of the Plateau of the Mughrabi Gate and the excavations taking place in the Mughrabi Quarter.¹⁴ A further example was the declaration of the mayor of Jerusalem, Uri Lupolianski, to construct and market 20 thousand housing units in an area located among the Arab quarters, especially in the village of Salwan. This declaration was a revival of the Yemeni quarter project.¹⁵

It is clear from the examples cited above that the Jewish settlement projects aim at fragmenting the geographic unity of the city of Jerusalem and thereby prevent the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital.

2. Encroachments on Holy Sites

In 2007, Israel continued its encroachments on the holy sites, especially in the region of *al-Aqsa* and Jerusalem. One of the most significant developments in 2007 was the Israeli excavations at the Mughrabi Gate and its attempt to establish the Museum of Tolerance (MOT) on the grounds of Mamilla Cemetery.

In the beginning of February 2007, Israeli bulldozers were sent to raise the hill adjacent to the Mughrabi Gate in the precincts of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Furthermore, the occupation authorities declared that they were carrying out restoration works in the Mughrabi Gate road with the aim of establishing a new overhead bridge to replace the old one that had collapsed two years ago in a storm. Jerusalem Affairs Minister Yaacov Edery stated that the restoration works began only after consultations with the Islamic Endowment Department, the United Nations and Jordan. At the same time, the Licensing and Inspection Department of Jerusalem Municipality admitted that the excavation was taking place without a clear plan and without a legal license, either from the municipality itself or from the National Building and Planning Committee.¹⁶

The Israeli excavation works and land shoveling at the Mughrabi Gate brought intense and widespread protests from the Palestinians, and the Muslim world. Muslim scholars and endowment officials proved wrong the Israeli claims of the existence of any coordination or agreement between the Palestinians and the Israeli authorities regarding excavations at the Mughrabi Gate. As a result, faced with the reality, on 12/2/2007, Israel declared the cessation of works at the Mughrabi Gate.¹⁷ Two days later, however, Sheikh 'Ikrimah Sabry, chairman of the Higher Islamic

Council in Palestine, rejected the Israeli authorities' claims about the halting of excavation works. He pointed out that Israeli bulldozers were working for three consecutive days and, after completing their work, excavation works had, in fact, continued using hand-held tools.¹⁸ The Israelis, in defiance of their own public declaration, had clearly continued with their excavation works without any media attention.

Muslim scholars and endowment executives in Palestine believe that Israel aims are—through what it calls restoration—to allow a large public entrance into the Mughrabi Gate by way of *al-Buraq* Yard (Wailing Yard) and the Jewish quarter. It also aims at changing the region's landmarks, barring the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and exposing it to destruction, and tampering with Islamic monuments. This is all part of a first stage towards taking possession of *al-Buraq* Mosque, which lies within the boundaries of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, as a foothold to extend the Israeli dominion over *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹⁹

The Arab members of the Israeli Knesset also strongly protested the nefarious designs of the Israelis on *al-Aqsa*. At a press conference held in Ramallah, they, along with the activists of the local Islamic movement, charged that excavations carried out by Israeli authorities on top of the plateau is a camouflage for dangerous excavations that were taking place under the plateau. 'Abbas Zakkour, the Knesset representative of the United Arab List, pointed out that he had visited the site and thus could confirm with absolute certainty about the existence of an in-tact Islamic *Mihrab* of high quality, which the Israelis covered with boards. At its side, the two chambers to the right of the *Mihrab* were used as a mosque. Since the mosque was destroyed now only the *Mihrab* remained. He further added that the target of the Israelis was to obliterate the Islamic landmarks, threaten the foundations of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and extend the Western Wall. Farid al-Haj Yahya, director of *al-Aqsa* Society in 1948 occupied Palestine, mentioned that the Israeli authorities are determined to open the Jewish house of prayer at al-Magharibah Plateau, located below the Islamic Court. He is also convinced that the excavations, currently being carried out there, are aimed at the destruction of the Islamic Court, and is designed also at adding a second Jewish synagogue in its place.²⁰

However, Israel insisted that the excavation works did not damage Muslim holy sites. It also insisted that these works did not change the status quo of the Old City. Nevertheless, it agreed to a proposal that a specialized Turkish committee could

verify the issue. Hence, the Turkish committee conducted a study on the Israeli activities in the area of the Mughrabi Gate and submitted its report in autumn 2007. The report found Israeli procedures as illegal and established that Israel had violated international law and the interests of Muslims. The committee called for the immediate cessation of all such activities.

However, the Israeli authorities shrugged off the findings of the Turkish committee, and continued its past policy of halting its activities when protests increase, and resuming its works once the protests die out. Following a decrease in those protests to Israeli activities, in mid December 2007, Israel issued orders to IAA, to resume work in the area of the Mughrabi Gate and to finish it as soon as possible. Furthermore, the Israeli government granted an immediate \$900 thousand subsidy to IAA to complete the work. As part of the package, Israel promised to transfer a sum of \$3.5 million to build a permanent bridge after the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Committee grants its authorization. The instructions of the concerned ministerial committee, headed by Prime Minister Ehud Olmert himself, involved the removal of Islamic Ottoman monuments dating back to 1700 CE.²¹

The establishment of the so-called Museum of Tolerance on the grounds of Mamilla Cemetery in Jerusalem—referred to the 2006 Strategic report—was rehashed in the year 2007. On 29/4/2007, the Israeli Supreme Court demanded that the attorney of Israeli and American firms, insisting on the establishment of the museum, produce their evidential defense papers, as they had refused to do so previously.²² In a report presented to the Israeli Supreme court in July 2007, Prof. Raphael Greenberg, of the University of Tel Aviv, revealed that IAA had earlier received a report from its expert pointing out that there were at least 800 tombs at the Mamilla cemetery and therefore recommended against construction at that site. Nevertheless, IAA submitted a report in January 2007 without referring to its own expert's recommendation. Its report recommended that the establishment of the "Museum of Tolerance" could commence.

Greenberg added that the maps provided by IAA did not reflect the reality on ground, as they showed the completion of survey of monuments. Actually, IAA did not carry these out. Greenberg emphatically pointed out the historical significance of the tombs and opined that their destruction would conflict with the professional ethics of the archeologists.²³ In spite of all these, as 2007 ended, the issue of the establishment of the museum was still pending. However, Muslims continued all

efforts including pleading with the Israeli authorities to stop their project. The aim of Israel remains eliminating one of the most important Islamic monuments in Jerusalem.

In September 2007, Israeli authorities announced the opening of a new synagogue below *al-Aqsa* Mosque, within the boundaries of its southern wall and beneath the Chain Gate, and only 97 meters away from the honorable Dome of the Rock. The synagogue was finally opened after extensive renovation and restoration works financed by Ukrainian Jews.²⁴

An organization known as the “Temple Institute” carried out a provocative act when it installed a golden menorah, giving it the name of “Temple Menorah,” opposite the Mughrabi Gate, near the western side of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This menorah, made of pure gold and weighing 45 kg, was installed in a prominent elevated place opposite *al-Aqsa* Mosque on the western side. On its part, *al-Aqsa* Institution for the Renovation of Islamic Sites warned against such provocative acts and described them as further steps towards the establishment of the temple.²⁵

3. Settlement in the Jerusalem Area

The Israeli government continued pursuing its policy of Judaization of Jerusalem, as part of well-drawn framework of Israeli claims that Jerusalem is the permanent capital of the Hebrew State. In this context, an Israeli source in Ateret Kohanim, which supervises the expansion of settlements in Jerusalem, said that it has a license from relevant authorities to build 300 housing units in place of the headquarters of the Israeli police in Ra’s al-‘Amud neighborhood.²⁶ It is worth noting that a leftist association revealed that the Jewish settlement societies and the Israeli government had concluded a deal on this. The deal stipulated that these associations would take possession of a large building of the Israeli police in the middle of Ra’s al-‘Amud neighborhood in return for financing it in order to establish a new building for the police on Palestinian land within the perimeter of the city, in the region called “E1.” This settlement project links the settlement of Ma’ale Adummim, located in East Jerusalem, to West Jerusalem.²⁷

The above-mentioned society also obtained licenses to build 300 more housing units in the region of Abu Dees, located at a place known as Kidmat Zion,²⁸ in front of the Separation Wall. Moreover, the Jewish billionaire Moskovitch instituted legal proceedings against an Arab family living in Ra’s al-‘Amud, claiming the

land on which it was living. Thus, he attempted to establish a new settlement pit at the foot of the Mount of Olives. The area of this land amounts to approximately 2.5 donums.²⁹

In the immediate aftermath of launching of Moskovitch's legal proceedings, the Israeli authorities invited bids to build 307 housing units in Jabal Abu Ghneim.³⁰ Mark Regev, the Israeli spokesman commented on these bids saying that the building of these housing units clearly set the Israeli government's intention to set both the WB and Jerusalem apart.³¹ He also said that the implementation of the first stage of the Road Map does not apply to Jerusalem. At the very same time the Israeli Prime Minister Olmert pledged to freeze settlement activities, settlers declared the establishment of eight random private sites around the city of Jerusalem.

On 15/12/2007, Israeli authorities invited bids to build 150 housing units near al-Mukaber mount. It announced yet another bid on 30/12/2007 to build 440 housing units in "Armon Hanatziv" quarter of the Talpiot settlement, in southern Jerusalem.³²

As if these announcements for the building of new housing units were not enough, Pensioner Affairs Minister Rafi Eitan declared that the 2008 budget included the building of 250 housing units in the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim and the building of 500 more units in Jabal Abu Ghneim.³³ Peace Now Movement disclosed the Israeli government's full backing to all these projects by revealing that the Israeli government had assigned a sum of \$25 million for the establishment of these housing units.

On the other hand, according to the *Kol HaZman* journal the Israeli Ministry of Interior decided to revive and implement the Eastern Ring Road project (Route 45), which had been decided in 1996. Its course was changed for the construction of the largest and highest bridge. It reaches 350 meters in length and 115 meters in height in areas dominated by Israel. For this purpose, 1,070 donums of land belonging to the villages Sur Baher, al-Sawahrah al-Gharbiyah, Abu Dees and al-Tour were to be confiscated. Moreover, two tunnels were opened, each measuring 258 meters and 960 meters respectively in length. This street is intended to link the settlements located in northeast Jerusalem while demolishing several Arab houses.³⁴

Plans to establish 20 thousand housing units in West Jerusalem, over an area of 26 km² did not succeed because of strong opposition from the environmentalists, as the designated lands were forested areas. When Moshe Safdie's project failed,

Haaretz newspaper, on 15/1/2007, reported a new plan to establish a settlement quarter on the lands of the village of Qalandia, north of the city of Jerusalem. The plan aims to build from 11–13 thousand housing units that would house more than 60 thousand settlers.³⁵

The plan also includes the construction of a tunnel under the village of Kafr ‘Aqeb in order to link the new quarter to the Kochav Yaakov settlement that is located in East Jerusalem. This tunnel is to be built under the land belonging to the village of Barqah. The Israeli Ministry of Housing acknowledged the existence of this plan, and admitted that it also plans to establish 10 thousand new housing units north of Jerusalem, in the area of Qalandia. These plans are part of Israeli policy of bringing about a demographic change in the city, and linking this settlement to other settlements located outside the boundaries of the municipality through tunnels. When implemented, it will be the largest settlement established by Israel in East Jerusalem since 1967.³⁶

The Israelis continued planning new housing units in Jerusalem in 2007 but under local authority. For example, the Jerusalem Municipality through its local construction committee legalized the two plans to construct 1960 housing units. The first covers an area of 70 donums and the second one spreads over an area of 527 donums, in Ramat Shlomo settlement, which is located in the village of Shu‘fat. This project aims at confiscating more Palestinian land.³⁷ Further, the Ministry of Housing in Jabal Abu Ghneim approved the construction of one thousand housing units.³⁸

The Israeli government pushed ahead its policy of building new Jewish settlements in the occupied territory by confiscating two thousand donums of land in al-Walaja village. The name of the new settlement is Givat Yael. This is to hold 13 thousand new housing units, designed to accommodate 55 thousand Jewish settlers.³⁹

In a further demonstration of Israeli government support to building of Jewish settlements in the Arab sector of Jerusalem, in January 2007, the Israeli government set aside \$1.5 billion for continuing its policy of Judaization of the city. In the eyes of international law and majority of states, including those of Israel’s allies, the Judaization of Israel is illegal. This announcement was in a private session that the government held in the presence of the Mayor, who assured the necessity of enhancing the number of Jews living in the Holy City. This plan requires, in order

to Judaize the city, the transfer of more ministerial units to Jerusalem, building courts' complex, cancelling taxes imposed on employers.⁴⁰

In March 2007, the Mayor of Jerusalem announced the "Marshall Plan" for the city. Under this plan, 200 million shekels (\$50 million) are to be spent to build infrastructure and public utilities in the area. The aim of this is to encourage the building of more housing units in the area as part of the Israeli plan to establish Greater Jerusalem. Thus, Olmert's main aim to create a Jewish majority in the city of Jerusalem is being slowly implemented, hence making it difficult for the division of the city into two capitals for the two states.⁴¹

The Israeli Commander-in-Chief of the West Bank issued, on 9/10/2007, a military order number T/19/07 that orders the confiscation of 1,128 donums of al-Sawahirah, Abu Dis and al-Khan al-Ahmar. The Israeli military authority justified this by arguing that this was designed for the benefit of Road 80. Actually Israel would be the only beneficiary of such a plan since the appropriation of this land is designed to segregate and isolate the Palestinians and Road 80 is under Military Command no. 50 for Roads issued in 1983.⁴²

This road has political and economic implications. Politically, since the only the Palestinians are to use the road, it is racist. The road would also separate northern part of the WB from its southern side. The road would also isolate the city of Jerusalem from its Palestinian southern and eastern parts. The construction of such a road would also mean the expansion of the boundaries of Jerusalem by annexing the eastern settlement blocs, which consists of eight settlements, resulting in demographic change for the benefit of the Israelis. Economically, this road is designed to weaken the position of Jerusalem, drawing it out of the center of movement of trade, disqualifying it as a transportation center, and hindering constructional development eastward due to the annexation of these settlement blocs and the isolation of the villages surrounding the city.

The Jerusalem Municipality participated in the confiscation process by declaring the confiscation of certain pieces of land located within basin no. 30124 and basin no. 30120 of the lands of Salwan for building parking lot.⁴³ The Jerusalem Municipality also revealed a new plan that aims at seizing 150 donums of lands in the village of Salwan for the purpose of housing Jewish immigrants.⁴⁴ Moreover, the Hebrew University took over more Palestinian lands by building a road on land belonging to Palestinians from the village of Lifta.⁴⁵

4. Policy of Demolition of Houses and Refusal of Building Licenses

The occupation authorities' destruction of houses and possessions in occupied Jerusalem contradicts International Humanitarian Law—Fourth 1949 Geneva Convention. It also contradicts article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Indeed, by insisting on following the policy of demolishing houses, the Israeli authorities make it very clear that their intention is to force the Palestinians to leave the city of Jerusalem and turn the city into a Jewish–majority one.

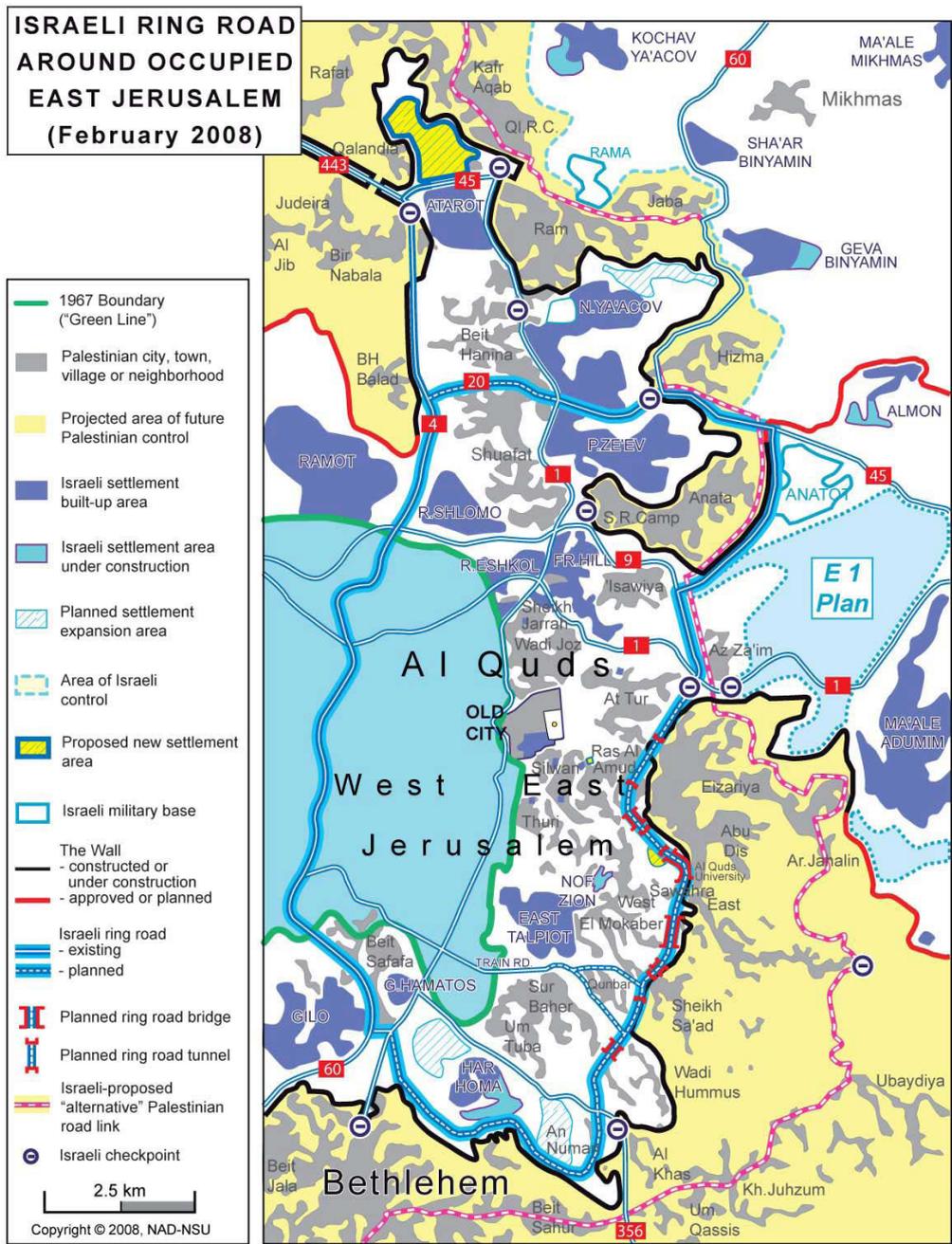
Since the beginning of 2007, the Jerusalem Municipality and Israeli Ministry of the Interior have escalated their policy of demolition of Palestinian houses, as exemplified by demolitions in all areas of Jerusalem. Thus, the Jerusalem Municipality insists on following its racist policy against Palestinians by demolishing buildings owned by Palestinians, and imposing exorbitant fines for alleged violation of building licenses. Steep fines were imposed on even licensed Palestinian–owned buildings on the pretext that they had “exceeded” the allowed ratio of building. As Israeli authorities take possession of more lands, they put up obstacles, create difficulties, and create regulations and procedures, as well as exorbitant costs for the Palestinians. This drives the Palestinian inhabitants of Jerusalem to choose between either desperately holding onto their land or painfully leaving their lands. The following table details the number of demolished houses in Jerusalem during the period 2004–2007:⁴⁶

Table 1/6: Demolition of Houses in Jerusalem 2004–2007

Year	No. of Demolished Units
2004	183
2005	120
2006	78
2007	97

The table reveals that the demolition of houses owned by Palestinians dropped to 97 in 2007. However, this needs to be accepted with much apprehension. This statistics contradicts the ones provided by the Palestinian Popular Campaign against the Separation Wall. Its statistics indicate that the occupation authorities demolished about 137 houses in the city of Jerusalem and its suburbs, as well as at least 165 houses in the WB during the year 2007.⁴⁷

Israeli Ring Road around Occupied East Jerusalem, February 2008



5. Displacement of Palestinian Inhabitants of Jerusalem and the Withdrawal of Their Right of Residence

In 2007, the Israeli violation of the rights of Palestinians of Jerusalem registered an unusual escalation in its violation of the basic rights of individuals and groups, especially in the areas of family reunion, dwelling and residence.

Investigations reveal that there are more than 10 thousand family reunion requests; where the fate of the entire family and not just that of the individuals is concerned. All pending with the Ministry of Interior, are mostly frozen because of a government order issued in the year 2002. As a result, thousands of Palestinian children are unable to register their births. Unless they are allowed to do so, they will be unable to claim medical treatment, and national insurance allowance. The Israeli policy, of course, also means that the Palestinian families would not be able to reunite their members. According to documents published by the Israeli Ministry of Interior, the latter cancelled permanent residence cards of 1,363 Jerusalemites in 2006. During the period 1967–2006, the number of cancelled residence cards reached 8,269.⁴⁸ No records are available for 2007.

The Israeli authorities intend to drive out 22 thousand Bedouins, now living in villages surrounding Jerusalem, into narrow areas all over the WB. The Bedouins are not used to this kind of life style, and the areas they are being relocated to are not suitable for the kind of work they engage in. In 1997, 60 Bedouin families living in al-Jahalin were forcibly transported to an area the south of Abu Dees. They were placed in temporary dwellings near a garbage dump. About 7,500 al-Jahalin Bedouin families live in Jerusalem. They live throughout the northern, eastern and western hills of Jerusalem. They have become the latest victims of Israel's "Greater Jerusalem" Project. The Israeli authorities intend to force them out of the city. The Bedouins of the WB have been forced to immigrate by the Israeli authorities since 1948. The Israeli occupation authorities chase the Bedouins wherever they go, and have their grazing lands closed down, houses demolished and their cattle confiscated. In this way, the Israelis have denied the Bedouins their right to live in their traditional way, hence threatening their very existence.⁴⁹

The Israelis have not spared the dead. They, too, have become the target of the Israeli policy of forcing the Palestinians out of the occupied lands. Avraham Dichter (Moshe), the Internal Security Minister of Israel, ordered the closure of Gate of Mercy cemetery, located outside the Old City. Such orders breach all

human decency and violate international conventions and charters. Thus, the Israelis, after steadfastly following the policy of confiscating the Palestinian lands and demolishing their houses, are now pursuing the Dead.⁵⁰ Dichter's orders came in the wake of a demand put forward by "The Committee for the Prevention of the Destruction of Antiquities on the Temple Mount," which is a committee for the Judaization of Arab, Islamic landmarks in Jerusalem. According to this committee, the Palestinians have "expanded the graveyards at the expense of an archaeological region." The racial separation around the city of Jerusalem by Israeli authorities went so far that they built roads separated by a five meter high concrete barrier; one for the Israelis and the other for the Palestinians.⁵¹

6. The Separation Wall in Jerusalem

Despite the international resolutions and the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ), declaring the wall "contrary to international law," Israeli authorities continued to build the wall and the system attached to it. With the exception of a section that links Dahiat Al-Barid and Beit Hanina, the wall around Jerusalem was completed. Moreover, the occupation army is constructing a military checkpoint to be an official crossing "gate" in the wall, and is making extensions at the northwest entrance of Shu'fat refugee camp. The wall has been completed in this area to isolate 45 thousand citizens in Shu'fat refugee camp, Al-Salam suburb and Anata from Jerusalem; their city and the center of their life.

In addition, the children of Beit Hanina (Tal 'Addas) are suffering greatly because of this wall, as they are:

precluded from joining schools in Jerusalem as a punishment, where the Wall separates their homes from their schools. This has deprived them of the opportunity to have an education, which is a free right and an obligation of the society and the authority. It should be available for every child who has attained the age of learning, as this is stipulated by Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), article 20, and by the UN Commission on Human Rights (UNCHR).⁵²

The construction of the Wall has isolated the villages located to the northwest of Jerusalem from Jerusalem and Ramallah. The construction of the Wall and Mekorot's (Israel's National Water Company) decision to supply only 25% of the villagers' daily water needs have turned those villages into arid land. This caused serious damage to crops, on one hand, and drove farmers to stop breeding sheep

and poultry, on the other. Furthermore, the inhabitants of the villages located to the northwest of Jerusalem were very distraught with the completion of the wall, as they no longer have any roads other than the tunnel that would be opened to connect these segregated villages with the region of Ramallah. In addition, the region has been turned into a garbage dump for the settlements. Wastewater from the settlements is diverted into the valleys of the region, leading to the pollution of wellsprings and groundwater, as well as devastating agriculture.

Furthermore, villages located to the southeast of Jerusalem are experiencing another type of isolation imposed by the wall, as the two villages of Sheikh Sa'd and Jabal al-Mukabir resemble isolated islands. The population of these two villages totals around 15 thousands. These two villages are inseparable from the eastern gate of the city as these lack sufficient basic services such as medical facilities. The construction of the wall has separated the inhabitants of these two villages from their children's schools, work places, families and even their only graveyard. As a result, 25% of the inhabitants of these two villages had to leave.⁵³

7. Aspects of the Suffering of the People of Jerusalem

a. The Economic Aspect

The Israeli economic stranglehold of the city of Jerusalem began immediately after the occupation. They began to exert pressure on the people of Jerusalem to transfer their economic activities to West Jerusalem or to move it outside the boundaries of the municipality. Israel imposed exorbitant taxes on shop owners or industrialists in East Jerusalem, restricted the issuance of licenses for new facilities forcing economic emigration to areas surrounding Jerusalem, where comfortable conditions for economic investment were available.

Israeli policy soon began to push economic weight northward, in the direction of "al-Ram," or eastwards, in the direction of al-'Ayzariya and Abu Dees. The Israeli military authorities then resorted to leniency in granting licenses and reducing taxes. In short, the occupied authorities created all obstacles in Jerusalem, by confiscating lands, freezing structural plans and restricting construction of building. All these factors led to the migration of capital to areas surrounding Jerusalem. Israeli policies encouraged Jerusalemites to move to the suburbs especially to al-'Ayzariya, and depopulated a greater part of the Old City and its precincts.

The outbreak of *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, the second uprising, created serious problem for those who had moved out of Jerusalem precisely because of Israeli incentives described above. The Israeli authorities used the outbreak of *Intifadah* to establish barricades and closed roads cutting off those Jerusalemites who had moved out of the city for better economic prospects. The Israeli authorities cancelled their residence cards arguing that they lived outside the city limits. As a result, the citizens of Jerusalem resorted to moving their dwelling places located outside the boundaries of the municipality to within its boundaries. In 2007, about 40 thousands moved to the Jerusalem Municipality causing overcrowding and leading to shortage of housing and school classrooms.⁵⁴

b. The Social and Psychological Aspects

The city of Jerusalem is following a systematic policy targeting the city's Arab population. Consequently, Palestinians' infrastructures are neglected, houses are demolished, institutions are closed, drugs are spread among the youth, and construction is restricted. Undoubtedly, these actions increased the degree of poverty and the subsequent negative effects on the Jerusalemites. For example, unemployment has increased, especially among the professionally qualified youth, reaching 20% during the year 2005.⁵⁵ Social problems, such as drug addiction and family troubles have escalated. It is worth noting that drug addiction is a painful reality among the youths in Jerusalem. This has resulted in an increase in school dropouts among the Palestinian youths. As a direct consequence, illiteracy among them has increased. Moreover, there is also an increase in crime involving the youths and a general moral degradation among them. The Palestinians lived at the average of 2.2 persons per single room before the creation of the wall. When the wall was built, and the Palestinians were denied of their residencies, many of them moved to live within the city limits so that they could claim the residency. As a result, there was overcrowding, and now five Palestinians have to share a single room. Such dire living conditions have negative impact on the ethical and social status of the family.

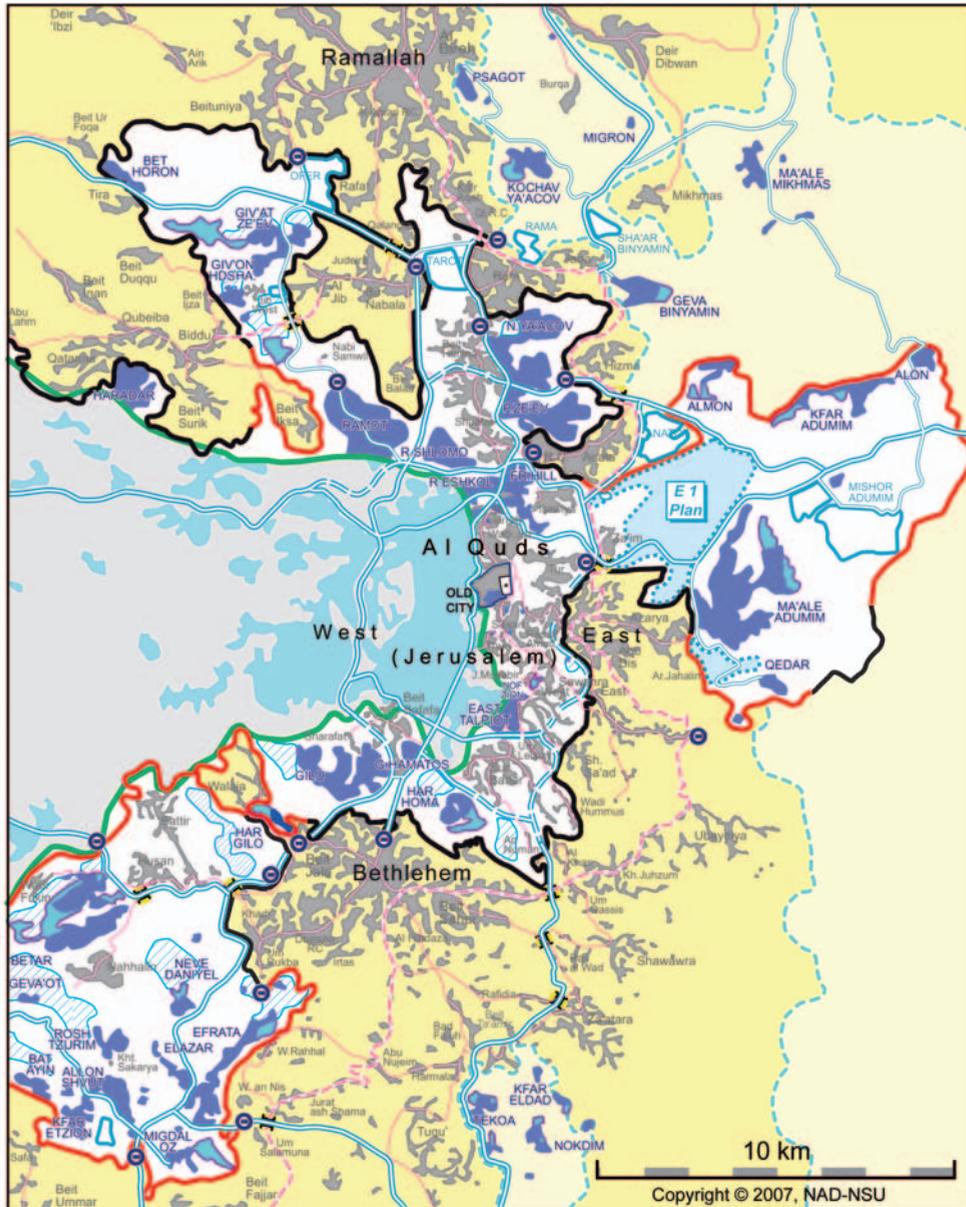
Indeed, having more than one family occupying one housing unit has contributed to marital problems and an increase in divorce rates, thus seriously affecting the stability of family structures of the Palestinians in Jerusalem. In addition, Palestinian families with limited resources face serious social problems because of the increase in rentals.

The Jerusalemites have to face innumerable problems because of the wall. This is so because they need to follow various Israeli procedures to reach their workplaces or schools. Many of them had to move their residency so that they could reach their workplaces and schools. Most of them had to move to continue to enjoy the privileges guaranteed under Jerusalem residence cards. We witness two types of retrogressive movement of Palestinians; the first is outward, while the second is inward. Movement of a person is natural, yet the movement of Palestinians out of Jerusalem was not natural. Their reason for doing so was due to the Israeli policies directed at emptying the city of Palestinians. According to official statistics, the number of families displaced from the Jerusalem governorate reached 1,635 due to the building of the wall, while the number of individuals displaced in the governorate reached 9,609. In addition, quarter of a million Palestinians will live in complete isolation following the completion of all sections of the wall. It will be extremely difficult for them to enter Jerusalem because of the strict procedures imposed by Israeli authorities since 1993.

The movement of Palestinians into the city of Jerusalem from outside is a daunting task. It has become difficult to enter the city even for those carrying WB residence cards. And although Jerusalem remains a spiritual center, it has lost its splendor and its actual centrality in the lives of the Palestinians. Its markets, therefore, are crowded with tourists (foreigners and Israelis), but its native inhabitants are noticeably absent. Moreover, cultural activities have stopped after many national institutions have moved outside the city. Hence, Jerusalem has turned into a big village.

Israel's policies directed at Palestinians in Jerusalem have devastated their social and cultural structures. The occupiers' policies have led to divided Palestinian families. For the members of such divided families living in Jerusalem, many are without any moral and emotional support as the rest of the family members are unable to enter Jerusalem. The wall has put many nuclear families in an impossible situation as far as dwellings are concerned. It is extremely difficult for the so-called mixed families (one of the spouses holding a blue ID and the other holding a green one). They face an impossible choice: either to stay together illegally—and live under the threat of cancellation of the Jerusalem ID from its holder if she/ he lives outside the boundaries of the Jerusalem municipality or the danger of detention for the one who holds the WB ID—or to live separately.

Israeli Wall and Settlements around Occupied East Jerusalem, February 2007



- | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| — 1967 Boundary ("Green Line") | ■ Israeli settlement built-up area | □ Israeli military base | Israeli-controlled tunnel or underpass for Palestinians |
| Palestinian city, town, village or neighborhood | □ Israeli settlement area under construction | The Wall - constructed or under construction | Local Palestinian road |
| Projected area of future Palestinian control | □ Planned settlement expansion area | - approved or planned | Israeli-proposed "alternative" Palestinian road link |
| □ Area of Israeli control | Israeli settler / bypass road - existing | - planned or under construction | Israeli checkpoint |

The movement of Palestinians into Jerusalem from the surrounding areas of the city has its share of serious economic and social implications. For the Palestinians, who decide to live in Jerusalem, they have to pay exorbitant costs for doing so. For example, they are required to pay high property taxes and other taxes. These put families under heavy financial pressure and their members live their day without any future plans. Palestinian residents of Jerusalem share dwellings and are therefore live in unhealthy living conditions, which ultimately affect their individuality and privacy. Life in an overcrowded environment also increases the suffering of children as well as other family members, which—in turn—often leads to an increase in the divorce rate and perversion as well as the emergence of fatal social phenomena, such as drug abuse.

c. The Educational Aspect

Undoubtedly, large investments in establishing educational institutions, especially private institutions, in north and east Jerusalem resulted in elevating the pressure in municipal schools. Moreover, the phenomenon of overcrowded classes was not quite tangible, and schools assimilated thousands of students (in mostly Endowment and Christian schools). The establishment of the wall has forced students to attend schools in East Jerusalem; thus, these schools whether public, private or endowment schools have become overcrowded with students.

Due to lack of attention paid by the Jerusalem municipality to the education sector and the development its infrastructure since the occupation has started and till this day; and due to its method of using rented housing units as classrooms, the number of schools is not adequate to accommodate all students. As a result, thousands of students are denied education. Moreover, crowded classrooms also contribute to school dropouts.

In addition, the following factors have contributed negatively to the acquisition of knowledge by the students: the increase in the number of students and the overcrowded classrooms in schools that are not proper school buildings but rented residential buildings. That's why some parents send their children to private schools, whose tuition fees are extremely high and affordable only by high-income families. While the majority, therefore, need to attend the Arab municipal schools. These schools have the policy of alienating the students and stripping away their national and cultural identity. The citizens of Jerusalem resisted sending their children to these schools until 2004, when the scale began to tilt in favor of such schools.

Then, with the emergence of municipal contracting schools, which follow Israeli curricula, these schools received 56% of the total enrolled school students, and the numbers are still increasing. This increase constitutes a serious threat to the future generations of Palestinian school children. Hence, the head of the East Jerusalem Parents' Association in a press statement stated that the conditions of education in public schools in east Jerusalem are very bad. He added that there is a severe shortage of classrooms—more than 1,500—and that the rate of dropout among secondary school students is increasing due to the privatization of public secondary education. The rate of dropout has now reached 50%, one out of every two students, according to Israeli government sources. Some schools face accommodation problem. The Rashidiyyah School—a public secondary school in East Jerusalem—for example, failed to provide seats for more than 150 students in 2007. This also applies to other public schools. In particular, the situation is worse at primary and preparatory stages. At these stages, students could not be accommodated because there isn't sufficient number of classrooms. This forced the municipality to cram them together in shelter rooms using them as classrooms, as is the case with Jabal al-Mukabir. The following are two factors have influenced the educational process:

First: An increase in overcrowdedness levels in classrooms, where it reaches 40 student per classroom in some cases.

Second: The schools lack proper infrastructures, such as playgrounds and laboratories. There is also severe shortage of administrative and educational staff and libraries. In fact, most schools have no playgrounds, auditoria, teachers' rooms or even yards.⁵⁶ The magnitude of the tragedy is clear when we note that 87% of more than 15 thousand children in Jerusalem, ranging between three and four years of age, are without an educational background, and that only 55 children are registered in public kindergartens, while 1,900 children are registered in private kindergartens. Meanwhile, 64% of Jerusalemites live below the poverty line, which makes it difficult for children to enter private schools. Moreover, the rate of dropout in public schools has reached 45%, which is in itself an indication of a systematic and organized policy of depriving the students of Jerusalem of education.⁵⁷

8. Solidarity Activities with Jerusalem

Due to the position of Jerusalem in the hearts of Arabs and Muslims, and in light of the threats and dangers to which it is exposed, the year 2007 witnessed several solidarity activities with Jerusalem. During this year, many statements condemning, warning and appealing were issued. Their subject was only one: the dangers of Israeli plots and threats against Jerusalem. In addition, some organizations held meetings with the presence of influential international figures and spoke about the dangers of what is happening in Jerusalem. Other organizations preferred to organize cultural functions and events. Meanwhile, the Muslim masses all over the world rose spontaneously to defend *al-Aqsa*. In February, this was clearly demonstrated, when dangerous excavations were taking place at the Mughrabi Gate.

The year 2007 also witnessed the launching of the second stage of reconstruction of the Old City in Jerusalem, financed by \$4 million offered by *al-Aqsa* and Jerusalem funds. This move followed a meeting, in January, to approve the project at the headquarters of the Islamic Development Bank of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

Furthermore, the year 2007 witnessed a number of major events demonstrating solidarity with Jerusalem. One such meeting was that of the annual conference of the Al Quds International Institution held in March in Algiers. At this conference, the institution—in cooperation with the Network of Institutions Working for Jerusalem—managed to acquire funding for about 55 projects in the fields of social and economic development as well as conservation of environmental and natural resources. These projects cost more than \$10 million, according to the statement of the Secretary General of Al Quds International Institution, Dr. Muhammad Akram al-‘Adlouni. During the same conference, Mr. Bouabdallah Ghlamallah, the Algerian Minister of Religious Affairs and Wakfs (Religious Endowments), declared the commencement of a \$6 million endowment project consisting of 74 luxurious houses and 28 stores to be established in Algiers over an area of 1,800 m². The earnings of this project would be used to support projects in Jerusalem and Palestinian lands. In April, the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) announced its decision to support educational projects in Jerusalem. In May, the Egyptian Medical Syndicate launched the “One Million Signatures for *al-Aqsa*” Campaign under the auspices of the Secretary-General of the Arab League, in cooperation with

the Qatari Sheikh Eid bin Mohamed Al Thani Charity Institute, which had earlier launched the campaign in a number of Arab countries.

Furthermore, *al-Quds* Net Center for Studies, Media and Electronic Publishing Center held a conference entitled, “Together for the Sake of Jerusalem,” in Jerusalem, Gaza and Beirut via satellite. A number of ambassadors to the Palestinian National Authority, religious scholars, writers, researchers, as well as political and civil figures attended this conference. The Fifth International Day of Jerusalem was celebrated via the Internet. Renowned scholar, Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and many other prominent personalities participated in this program.

The 40th year of Jerusalem’s occupation was marked in June 2007 by Al Quds International Institution, which launched an international campaign with the slogan, “Jerusalem, 40 Years of Occupation... Let’s Light the Lamps of its Steadfastness.” The campaign highlighted a number of realities in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa*, with the aim of raising public support for Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa*. The campaign also aimed at raising funds to support the struggle of the people of Jerusalem. This campaign urged influential governments, institutions and individuals to support the struggle of the citizens of Jerusalem. In order to reach the global audience, the campaign extensively used satellite, the Internet, stickers, newspaper advertisement and mobile Short Messages Service (SMS).

One of the most prominent meetings for supporting the cause of Jerusalem was “*Al-Quds* International Forum,” organized by Al Quds International Institution and the International Network of Institutions Working for Jerusalem on 15/11/2007 in Istanbul. This was attended by more than five thousand prominent figures from 65 Arab, Islamic and foreign countries. This forum adopted the Istanbul Declaration.

In addition to holding meetings and forums, several public donation campaigns in support of Jerusalem were organized in several Arab capitals, such as Beirut, Damascus, Amman, and Sana’a. Campaigns were also organized in a number of Gulf and European countries at the invitation of several societies, of which the Arab Physicians Union was the most prominent one. Prominent groups organized campaigns in most Arab capitals calling for the lift of Israeli siege of the Palestinian people. The year 2007 also witnessed the launching of a number of

youth organizations for supporting the cause of Jerusalem, such as the “League of Youth for the Sake of Jerusalem.” Moreover, Al Quds International Institution launched a website about the city of Jerusalem.

It is important to note here the low-key role of the official Arab and Islamic institutions in supporting Jerusalem. Among the most conspicuous of these institutions is the “Jerusalem Committee,” set up by the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). This committee, as well as other such organizations, did not come out with strong statements supporting the cause of the citizens of Jerusalem. Their attitudes are incompatible with their official responsibilities and the representation of about 56 Muslim countries. Ironically, the *al-Aqsa* Mosque fire of 1969 was the direct reason behind the establishment of the OIC.

Second: The Separation Wall

In 2007, Israeli occupation authorities continued building the separation wall in the WB. The readers may kindly refer to several background reports and details related to the wall published in the previous edition of the Strategic Report. In April 2007, the Israeli occupation authorities sanctioned the most conspicuous development related to the Wall. However, the Israeli Ministry of Defense made it public only in September 2007 when it published new maps of the wall. The new map revealed an increase in the areas intended to be isolated behind the Wall, reaching 28.5% (that is 157,920 donums or 157.92 km²) of the total land area of the Palestinian land. In other words, the distance of the isolated area increased from 555 km² to 713 km², and the length of the Wall increased from 703 km to 770 km.⁵⁸

Additionally, the increase centered around two areas; the first was in the southeast of WB. More precisely, it is located to the east of the two governorates of Hebron and Bethlehem, in the area adjacent to the southwest of the Dead Sea. Here the Israelis increased the length of the Wall by 53.5 km. This increase in the Wall resulted in the isolation of 153,780 donums. The second was in Latrun (Mudi'in), an area located to the northeast of Ramallah. In this area, the occupation authorities increased the length of the Wall by 13.5 km, isolating an area of 4,140 donums behind the wall. By increasing the length of the Wall in this area, the Israeli military intended to include

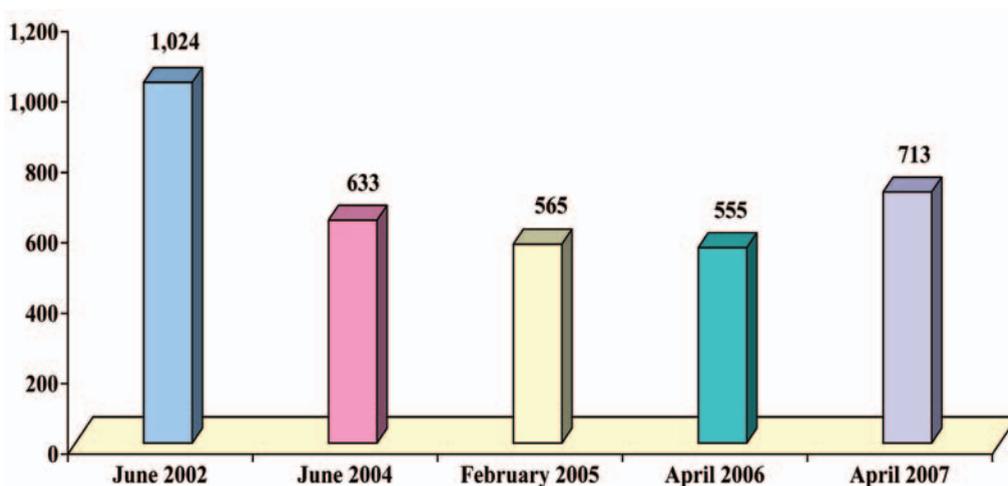
the two settlements of Nili and Na'ale within the wall. Consequently, two further Palestinian cantons would be created inhabited by about 20 thousand people who would be isolated from the rest of the WB (see the map).⁵⁹

This is the fourth time that the course and length of the Wall as well as the total area of the isolated Palestinian land was changed (see table 2/6).⁶⁰

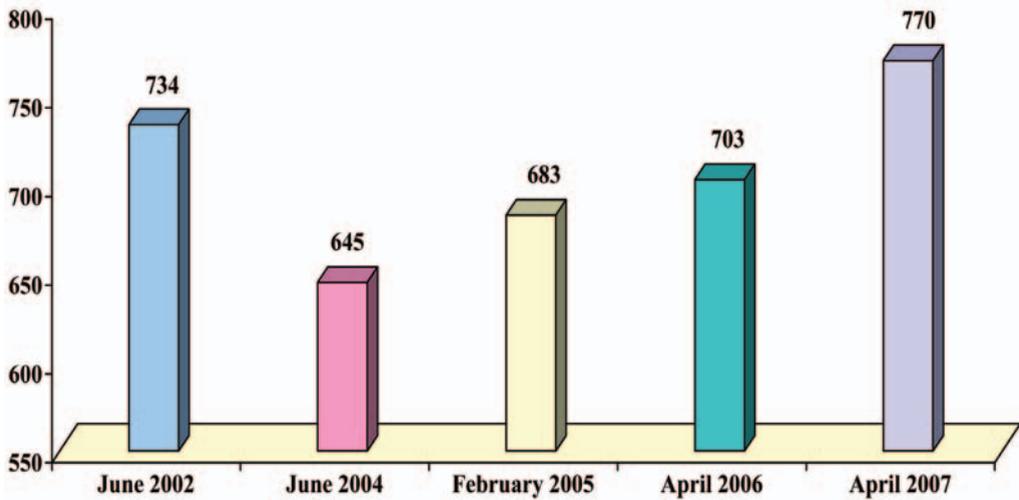
Table 2/6: The Development of the Course of the Separation Wall in the WB 2002–2007

Date	The area taken out in favor of the wall (km ²)	Percentage to the area of the WB (%)	The length of the wall (km)	The length of the wall on the Green Line (km)
June 2002	1,024	18	734	-
June 2004	633	11.7	645 with some exceptions	83
February 2005	565	10	683	138
April 2006	555	9.8	703	128
April 2007	713	12.6	770	80

The Development of the Area Taken out in Favor of the Wall in the WB 2002–2007 (km²)



The Development of the Wall Length in the WB 2002–2007 (km)



The report of the Applied Research Institute of Jerusalem (ARIJ) indicates that 29 Palestinian villages will find themselves in closed areas in the form of cantons encircled by the Wall. The total area of these lands is 216.7 km². Moreover, the construction of the Wall would damage 138 more villages, since it isolates 554.4 km² of their lands behind it. In addition, 40 other Palestinian communities, consisting of more than 37 thousand Palestinians, will find themselves isolated on the eastern side of the Wall. The Wall will encircle 107 Israeli settlements inhabited by about 425 thousand settlers. These settlements, however, cover an area of 106.7 km². As for the rest of the settlements east of the Wall, it covers an area of 37.8 km².⁶¹

Here, it is worth noting that in addition to the Separation Wall, Israel declared 925 km² of the WB as “Closed Military Zones,” and 630 km² as “state lands,” which included settlement areas and military bases. This means that the total area of confiscated lands adds up to about 40.1% of the total land area of the WB.⁶²

Furthermore, the numbers provided by the Popular Campaign Against the Wall (PCAW) indicate that occupation authorities completed the building of 48 km of the Wall in 2007. This means that the Israelis have already built about 450 km of the Wall. The PCAW estimates also indicate that almost 80 km of the Wall was still under construction.⁶³

It should be kept in mind that there are differences in the statistics about the Wall between those published by Palestinian studies institutions, such as ARIJ and

PCAW, and those published by the Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (B'tselem),⁶⁴ or those published by institutions related to the United Nations (UN). However, we do not want to confuse the readers with contradictory numbers especially that the differences are not significant.

However, we must have respect for the Palestinians' insistence on resisting the Separation Wall and their perseverance to protect their lands in spite of their great suffering. Here, we should mention the people of Bal'ain village. They have set up a magnificent example of steadfastness, perseverance and innovation using the various available means to demand their rights. We also acknowledge distinctive efforts exerted by Palestinian institutions, societies and parties.

In 2007, there were some amendments in the course of the Wall, in Jenin governorate (Zububa, Faqu'a and Jalbun), in the governorate of Qalqilya (the sections of Jayyous, Falamyeh and 'Azzun 'Atmah), and in the governorate of Ramallah (Bal'ain, Badras and Deir Qeddis). Moreover, the occupation authorities extended the time for the completion of the construction of the Wall by two more years. The occupation authorities aim to finish constructing the Wall in 2010 instead of the original deadline of 2008 thus taking eight years to complete the Wall.⁶⁵

According to various UN reports, once completed, the Wall would slice off 8.6% of WB land. There are 19 gates of the Wall, which open daily for permit holders. However, they remain closed at night. There are 19 other gates that open during special harvest seasons, or weekly.⁶⁶

Some Israeli organizations acknowledge the sufferings of Palestinians brought about the construction of Wall. For example, the Bimkom Center, estimated that the cantons stifled by the Wall affect the lives of 248 thousand Palestinians in the WB, and almost a similar number (250 thousands) living in East Jerusalem. They face serious economic, social, and health problems.⁶⁷

Moreover, Bethlehem faces a real catastrophe because of the Wall that separates it from Jerusalem and from the villages surrounding the city.⁶⁸ The Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities also affirmed that the Wall is among the most ominous obstacles to the tourism sector in Bethlehem.⁶⁹ In addition, the Israelis are ruthlessly following the construction of the "annexation" Wall, torturing Palestinians and usurping all their legal humanitarian rights, unilaterally drawing the borders of the "state of Israel." Therefore, the Israeli claim that security is the main objective of the Wall is false.

Third: The Settlers and the Settlement Expansion

In 2007, the policy of settlement expansion and construction in major settlement blocs, along with settlement expansion in the Jordan Valley region, an area excluded previously), continued unabated. Although the peace process and negotiations between both parties are continuing, the Israeli government persists in its policy of construction and expansion of settlements on occupied territories. The construction of settlements on occupied territories is illegal by any standard of international law. The Israeli government, in justifying its settlement policy, uses a pledge made by President Bush on 14/4/2004, in which he declared that any final peace settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis must take into account the facts on grounds. The following table provides the details of growth of settlements and the numbers of settlers:⁷⁰

Table 3/6: Number of Settlers and Housing Units 2005–2007

Year	No. of new housing units in the settlements	No. of settlers in the WB, including East Jerusalem (thousands)*
2005	1,727	452
2006	1,700	468
2007	3,614	482

* Average numbers.

Here, it is worth noting that there are discrepancies among different sources in identifying the number of housing units. This is perhaps due to differences between the approved housing units or the actual number of housing units mentioned in tenders in a certain year and the actual number of units either constructed or approved in the previous year. The ways the housing units are classified may also explain the said differences. For example, some may consider a building as one single housing unit, while others may consider it based on the number of flats it contains. Perhaps, we can understand this point in light of the great difference between the estimates of ARIJ and others when the former mentioned that Israel had established 122,677 new housing units in Israeli settlements during the period 2001–2007. ARIJ also states that in 2007, there had been intensive expansion of settlement movement on the occupied lands, characterized by its focus on the increase in the number of established housing units. This increase had reached 32,064 housing units by September 2007.⁷¹

The Jewish Agency and its plan, divides the WB into four settlement quarters, namely Jerusalem, the western part of the WB, the Jordan Valley, and the southern area of Hebron, in addition to the existence of buffer zones and strategic paths (roads) crossing the WB, and two strategic pivotal roads along the WB.⁷² Moreover, the plan to isolate the Jordan Valley, began in 2004, is proceeding at an accelerated rate. During the period 2004–2007, the authorities have not allowed the non-permit holders, with the exception of the Jordan Valley inhabitants, to stay in the area. Moreover, the Israeli authorities have deported the Arab inhabitants from the area and have demolished their houses. The isolation of Jerusalem from the WB is now at its final stage.

In 2007, Israel began to achieve some of its objectives adopted since the outbreak of the Second *Intifadah* in 2000 namely, the “settlement expansion,” establishment of the Separation Wall, building of alternative roads, and transformation of the prospective Palestinian state into cantons. The former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon initiated those policies and the period of his prime ministership (2001–2005) is known as the “The Sharon Era.” This is because the settlements war, the occupation of hills and winding roads, and the Settlement Stars Project all bear the stamp of one single man, Sharon, who led the state with pessimism and violence. He was the man who established tens of settlements and settlement outposts, successfully completed his project of Judaizing Jerusalem, built hundreds of alternative roads for the settlements, established tens of thousands of housing units, and brought about the *fait accompli* that is almost impossible to change. Then, his disciple, Olmert, persisted in the previous policies, beginning by accelerating the establishment of new settlement units. In 2007, 3,614 new housing units were built within the vision of a Greater Israel and the kind peace it seeks. Moreover, the settlers celebrated Jewish festivals with the commencement of a settlement campaign, without any significant opposition from either the army or the police. Daniela Weiss and Aryeh Yitzhaki, the two well-known brutal settlers led this campaign. They established five settlement outposts in the major settlement blocs of Gush Etzion and Latrun, and Nablus.⁷³

A report by the Peace Now Movement revealed that the Israeli government established three thousand new housing units in the WB settlements, especially in major settlement blocs.⁷⁴ In its report, the movement also uncovered the

establishment of hundreds of settlement housing units just before the Annapolis Peace Conference. Moreover, the report indicated that settlement expansion is concentrated in 88 settlements outposts, in addition to large settlements surrounding Jerusalem; Beitar Illit, Giv'at Ze'ev and Ma'ale Adumim.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the Israeli government invited tenders to bid for the establishment of 44 new housing units in the settlement of Ma'ale Adumim.⁷⁶

Moreover, in 2007, the isolation policy and ethnic cleansing in the Jordan Valley, which began four years ago, as well as the prevention of hundreds of citizens from entering the region, has continued.⁷⁷ However, in order to create areas free of inhabitants, the Israeli authorities pulled down Bedouins' tents in Ramadin, al-Samu'a and Yatta regions in the southern region of Hebron.⁷⁸ The Israeli authorities destroyed, as well, the Bedouin villages in the Jordan Valley forcing out all Bedouin communities from the (Iron) region.⁷⁹ This highlights its desire to isolate the Valley and to consider it as an area under Israeli dominion, so clearly expressed earlier by the former Israeli Minister of Defense, Shaul Mofaz.

Fourth: Confiscation and Razing of Lands and Uprooting Trees

In 2007, the occupation authorities confiscated about 3,143 donums for the Separation Wall, most of which was centered in the Jerusalem area. Israeli military vehicles destroyed more than three thousand donums of the WB lands. In order to identify the landmarks of the southern zone of isolation, the occupation authorities declared the confiscation of 1,230 donums of land in the villages of East Jerusalem. Military order no. T/19/2007, justified this confiscation, which stipulated building of an alternative road within the framework of policy of providing contiguous transportation for the Palestinian state and geographic contiguity for the settlement state.⁸⁰

In line with the policy of collective punishment, followed especially during the period of the First *Intifadah*, Israel pursued a new policy striking the agricultural sector, on which the Palestinian people depend, especially targeting the olive

trees. This policy included preventing Palestinians from picking olives during the harvest season, burning and cutting trees in order to impoverish Palestinian farmers who depend on the land; stopping rehabilitating and planting these trees, especially during the long periods of siege, and preventing workers from working within the green line. The development of the tree-cutting policy, along with the persistence of the *Intifadah*, the economic siege and the systematized destruction of the Palestinian economy is highly noticeable.

In addition, statistics indicate that the total area of razed land in the WB and GS during the period 28/9/2000–31/7/2006 reached 80,712 donums. Moreover, the number of trees uprooted by Israel amounted to about 1.36 million trees.⁸¹ According to statistics prepared by ARIJ institute, it is clear that in 2006, 20,300 fruit-bearing trees were uprooted, razed, or confiscated. According to the estimates made by ARIJ in 2007 a total of 34,650 fruit-bearing trees were uprooted, razed, confiscated or burned, most of which were in northern governorates of Nablus, Tulkarm and Jenin, in addition to Hebron and Bethlehem governorates in the south. Israeli transgression had a huge impact on the agricultural sector, especially in the shape of uprooted trees (mostly olives), which are the main source of income for many Palestinian families.⁸²

The Israeli encroachments also inflicted the GS. As on 28/6/2007, the Israeli occupation forces were ready to re-demarcate the buffer zone of over 58 km along the extension of the northern and eastern borders of the GS. Hence, Israel unilaterally expanded the width of the “security zone” for the second time. This expansion extended for a distance of 1.5 km onto the Palestinian side, along the border of the GS. It began from the farthest northwest point to the Karm Abu Salim crossing point in the southeast. The distance of the security buffer zone dominated by Israel is 87 km² of the borderline in the GS; that is to say 24% of the GS area (362 km²). Thus, the remaining area for the Palestinians, who amount to approximately 1.42 million people, is 275 km².⁸³

Moreover, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicated that the Israeli military operations in December 2007 destroyed 275 donums of arable lands east of the GS.⁸⁴

Palestinians in the WB suffer from Israeli control over water resources. Israel plundered about 85% of the water of the WB for use by its citizens and the settlements. Furthermore, Israel uses water as a means of pressure against the Palestinians, to embitter their lives or to strike at agriculture and economic needs. There are still 220 villages and Palestinian communities inhabited by 215,200 Palestinians. These lack water distribution networks. There are several other villages that lack complete water distribution networks or have limited or unorganized water supply. The average daily use of the Palestinian citizens amounts to 60 liters, which is 40% less than the quantity determined by international recommendations, while the Israeli citizen consumes an average of 280 liters daily.⁸⁵

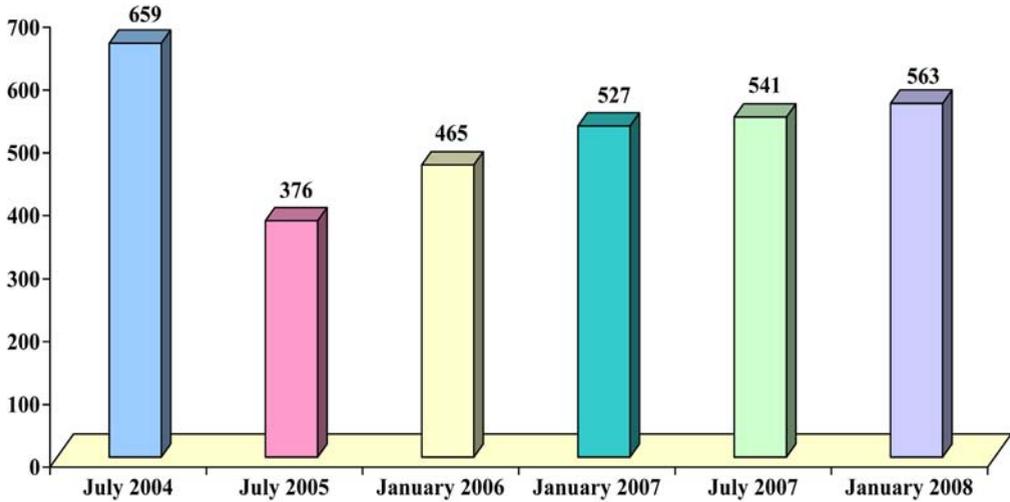
Fifth: Roadblocks, Checkpoints and Borders

Israeli authorities are not content only with the occupation and confiscation of Palestinian lands. The occupying authorities aim to restrict the natural movements of the Palestinians, and confine them to small prisons within a larger prison of the WB and the GS so that they are psychologically and economically exhausted.

Now, the Israeli authorities are establishing flying (random) checkpoints in the WB, moving them from one place to another according to its security measures in subjecting and humiliating the Palestinian people. Hence, in 2007, Israel established 5,858 flying checkpoints with a monthly average of 488 checkpoints, while in 2006 it established 7,090 flying checkpoints with a monthly average of 591 flying checkpoints.⁸⁶

Closure count in the WB totaled 553 in May 2007, and then increased to 561 in October 2007, and then into 563 in January 2008. This indicates the domination of the emergency government under President 'Abbas for the WB. This government adopted a large number of security and political measures against Hamas. It failed to reduce the number of closures in 2007, knowing that the number of closures was 527 in January 2007 and 465 in January 2006. In the period between April and October 2007, Israeli authorities removed 80 closures, but added 115 new ones. It needs to be pointed out here that the closures take on different forms like military barriers, checkpoints, gates, road blocks, earth mounds, trenches and gates, etc.⁸⁷

Immovable Barriers in the WB 2004–2008



In addition, Israeli authorities laid down obstacles against the movement of individuals of a certain age within the WB. Thus, it prevents the movement of individuals between 16 and 35 years of age, from the inhabitants of Nablus, Jenin, Tulkarm and Tubas, who are without special permits. The number of such citizens amounts to 269 thousand, i.e., 32% of the total inhabitants of these governorates.⁸⁸ Moreover, there are severe restrictions against the movement of people in the WB to East Jerusalem, which the Palestinians enter as if it has international borders. Usually, Israeli authorities do not allow citizens younger than 45 years of age to go to Jerusalem or to visit *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

As part of Israel's siege of WB and GS, it completely controls their borders. Therefore, it has full control over movement of people and goods to and from WB and GS. There are 11 military barriers covering the entrances and exits of the WB with East Jerusalem and Israel. Israel also controls borders with Jordan. Furthermore, Israel intentionally adopts the policy of closures of these points and complicates procedures with the sole aim of de-humanizing the Palestinians. This policy also aims to control their political and economic activities. The costs of transporting merchandise from Nablus to Ashdod port, for example, underwent a 55% rise due to Israeli barriers and checkpoints.⁸⁹

In the GS, Israel did not pay attention to the spirit of Crossings Agreement since Hamas swept to power in the GS. It took this situation as an excuse to close the crossing points, on 15/6/2007, and tightening its already strong siege of the GS.⁹⁰ In order to maintain the minimal necessities of life in the GS, Israel designated the two crossing points, al-Mintar and Sufa for the transportation of merchandise and humanitarian aid to the GS.⁹¹

On 19/9/2007, Israel escalated its siege of GS, declaring it a “hostile entity,” and imposed a series of additional restrictions on the GS.⁹² Moreover, on 18/1/2008, the escalation reached excessive limits when the Israeli Minister of Defense, Ehud Barak ordered the “closure of all crossing points” to the GS,⁹³ and Israel completely cut oil supplies to the GS, bringing darkness to most of the GS due to the stoppage of electricity generation stations on 20/1/2008.⁹⁴

On the other hand, Israel through the Crossings Points Agreement controls the seven crossing points of the GS at Rafah that link its borders with the GS. Egypt’s strict adherence to the peace treaty with Israel has also bolstered Israel’s grips at Rafah. According to the documentation of the Palestinian Center for Human Rights, the number of days in which the Rafah crossing was closed during the period 26/11/2005 and 31/12/2006 reached a total of 159 days. However, it was partially opened for limited hours for 31 days.⁹⁵

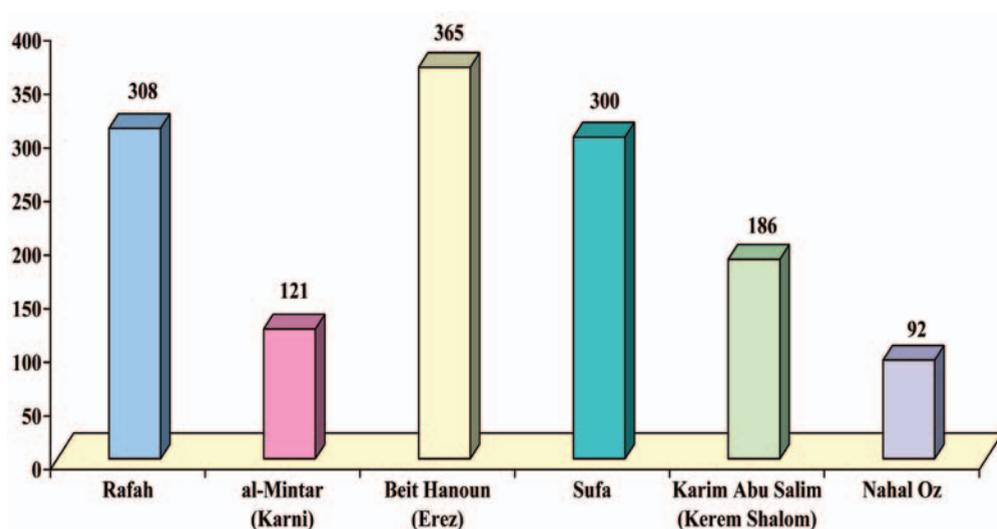
Yet, from the beginning of 2007 until 9/1/2008, occupation authorities closed the crossing point for 308 days.⁹⁶ Thus, occupation authorities completely closed the crossing point for 457 out of 776 days; about 59%, since the signing of the Crossings Agreement (see table 4/6).

The closure of the crossing points causes serious economic, health, educational and psychological damage to the Palestinians. For more details, the reader can refer to the chapter on economy in the present report.

**Table 4/6: The Number of Closure Days at the GS Crossing Points
2005–2007**

Crossing point	No. of full closure days	No. of partial closure days	No. of work days	Year
Rafah	159	31	175	25/11/2005–31/12/2006
	308	-	57	2007
al-Mintar (Karni)	112	142	111	25/11/2005–24/11/2006
	121	56	188	2007
Beit Hanoun (Erez)	254	-	-	25/11/2005–24/11/2006
	365	-	-	2007
Sufa	For goods 186	-	For goods 179	25/11/2005–24/11/2006
	For workers 365		For workers 365	
	300	-	65	2007
Karim Abu Salim (Kerem Shalom)	314	-	51	25/11/2005–24/11/2006
	186	-	179	2007
Nahal Oz	62	-	303	25/11/2005–24/11/2006
	92	-	273	2007

Number of Days in Which the Crossing Points of the GS were Completely Closed 2007 (Out of 365 Days)



Conclusion

We can state that land is at the center of the conflict, and that Jerusalem is the focus of attention. This edition of the Strategic Report concludes that Israel has exploited local and international circumstances to take possession of more Palestinian land. The occupation authorities has Judaized and expanded Jerusalem, increased the number of settlers, expanded the borders of the settlements by establishing settlement outposts, and linked these with roads that devour more Palestinian land, separate Palestinian villages and towns from each other, just like isolated prisons and islands. In this way, Israel aims at implementing previously designed projects to obliterate the Palestinian identity, Judaize the land and create a justification to deport Palestinian citizens on the pretext that the Palestinian state is Jordan (the alternative homeland). In the meantime, it maintains a broad and programmed campaign to make Jerusalem the permanent capital of Israel, with an absolute Jewish majority and an easily controlled Arab minority. Israel continues to follow these objectives within a clear plan that utilizes peace negotiations and Arab–Israeli conventions to approve their nefarious plans.

Here, it is important to refer to the steadfastness and continuous struggle of the Palestinian people for their land in spite of facing severe forms of suffering and oppression. It is also important to refer to the increasing interaction of Arabs and Muslims with Jerusalem. They continue to express indignation against Israeli occupation, and support the Palestinians in their just struggle. The Palestinians have clearly demonstrated that, as a nation, they will never surrender to the dictates of Israel. Indeed, the support for the Palestinian people’s struggle for their land is an Arab, Islamic and humanitarian duty. The interaction of the Palestinian nation with this just cause deserves more worldwide encouragement. We also need to redouble the efforts to continue earnest and programmed institutional works to stop the aggression and liberate both the people and the land.

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Chapter Seven

The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

The Palestinian Demographic Indicators

Introduction

The year 2007 witnessed the completion of the second national census of the Palestinian people in all territories, which are under occupation by Israel since 1967 except for the settlements. The Palestinian people, both inside and outside Palestine with all their diverse backgrounds, are still firmly resolved to defend their right of complete independence, and complete sovereignty over their land, resources and borders. They are also determined to achieve their right of return to their homeland, despite oppressive Israeli policies of expulsion, besiegement and starvation. Day after day, their belief grows stronger that regional peace will not become a reality as long as the Palestinians are deprived of their national rights and their legitimate demand to return to their homeland.

First: The Palestinian Population Worldwide

In 2007, the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) conducted its second national population census in the WB and the GS, including Jerusalem governorate. The results showed that the total population of Palestinians in these areas until 31/12/2007 was about 3.77 million. This figure is 244 thousand less than the estimated figure for the same year of about 4.02 million, and about 179 thousand less than the estimates for 2006. The PCBS was expecting a rise in the Palestinian population by the end of 2006 to bring the total number to about 3.95 million.¹ A number of factors explain the difference between the expected and the de facto figures of the Palestinian population. There are forced migration of Palestinians from the WB and GS due to Israeli policy; the continuous Israeli mass aggression against all Palestinians; the Palestinians' suffering under the unjust besiegement of the Separation Wall, especially in Jerusalem governorate; depriving the Palestinians from work opportunities; the systematic economic harassment and the deliberate indiscriminate acts of starvation, particularly in the GS.

The migration of Palestinians from one country to another would not lead to an increase in the number of Palestinians living abroad. Nevertheless, it is a fact that Palestinians are migrating to other countries because of repressive Israeli policy. However, Palestinians are also returning to Palestine as well. Hence, we notice that despite the rise in the number of Palestinians over that of the Jews, the Israeli policy of aggression and humiliation achieves its racial objectives and de-balances the demographic structure of Palestinians. The situation will force more Palestinians to leave their homeland for Arab and non-Arab countries. The result is that despite the initial plan to reside in these countries on a temporary basis; many Palestinians opt to choose their host country as their permanent home. Therefore, they, instead of demanding to return to their original homeland (Palestine), opt for procedures of seeking citizenship and permanent residency in their host countries. The following table shows the estimates of the number of Palestinians in the world, according to their places of residence at the end of the year 2007.

Table 1/7: Palestinian Population Estimate according to their Place of Residence until 31/12/2007²

Place of Residence	Population estimate	Percentage (%)
WB & GS	3,770,606	36.5
Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel)	1,184,468	11.5
Jordan	3,102,463	30
Other Arab countries	1,690,709	16.3
Other foreign countries	593,580	5.7
Total	10,341,824	100

Palestinians in historical Palestine are divided into two parts. Those who live in the territories occupied in 1948, i.e., Israel, and they are about 1.18 million. And those who live in the territories occupied in 1967, which are composed of the WB and the GS, as well as the part of Jerusalem governorate that Israel compellingly annexed, and they amount to about 3.77 million. It is worth mentioning, here,

that Israel illegally counts the number of Syrians who live in the occupied Golan Heights as among its citizens.

Most of the Palestinians in the Diaspora live in neighboring Arab countries, especially Jordan. The number of Palestinians in Jordan alone amounts to about 3.1 million. They constitute nearly a quarter of the total number of Palestinians in the world. The majority of Palestinians in Jordan have become Jordanian citizens. Yet, some statistics show that the number of Palestinians in Jordan is higher than the figure mentioned above.

The remaining Palestinians residing in Arab countries and in the Diaspora constitute 22% of the total number of Palestinians in the world. Most of them live in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt, the Arab Gulf countries and in non-Arab countries, particularly the USA, Latin America, Canada and Britain.

Second: Demographic Features of the Palestinians

1. The WB and GS

Preliminary estimates for the year 2007 indicated that the number of Palestinians in the WB and GS on 1/12/2007 is about 3.76 million, with about 2.35 million living in the WB (i.e., 62%) and about 1.42 million in the GS (i.e., 38%).

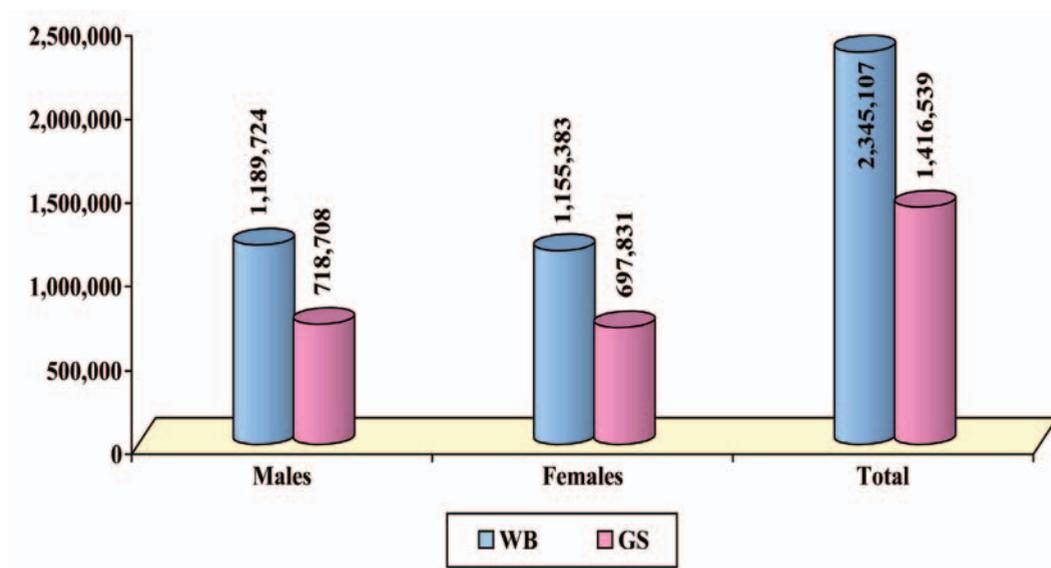
Primary findings also showed that the number of Palestinian males totaled 1.91 million while the number of females is 1.85 million; hence, the gender ratio—number of males per 100 females—is 103. This ratio is no different for Palestinians in the WB and GS.

Statistics also showed that the average Palestinian family size is 5.8 members, with a small variation between Palestinians living in the WB (5.5 members) and those who live in the GS (6.5 members). The total number of Palestinian families is 647 thousand; 428 thousand of whom live in the WB and 219 thousand live in the GS. The average Palestinian family size in 1997 was 6.4 members. Despite the drop in the fertility rate among Palestinians, the growth in the number of Palestinian families is still increasing.

Table 2/7: Population and Family Count in WB and GS until 1/12/2007³

Region	Population count			No. of families	Average family size
	Males	Females	Total		
WB	1,189,724	1,155,383	2,345,107	427,533	5.5
GS	718,708	697,831	1,416,539	219,222	6.5
Total	1,908,432	1,853,214	3,761,646	646,755	5.8

Population Count in WB and GS until 1/12/2007



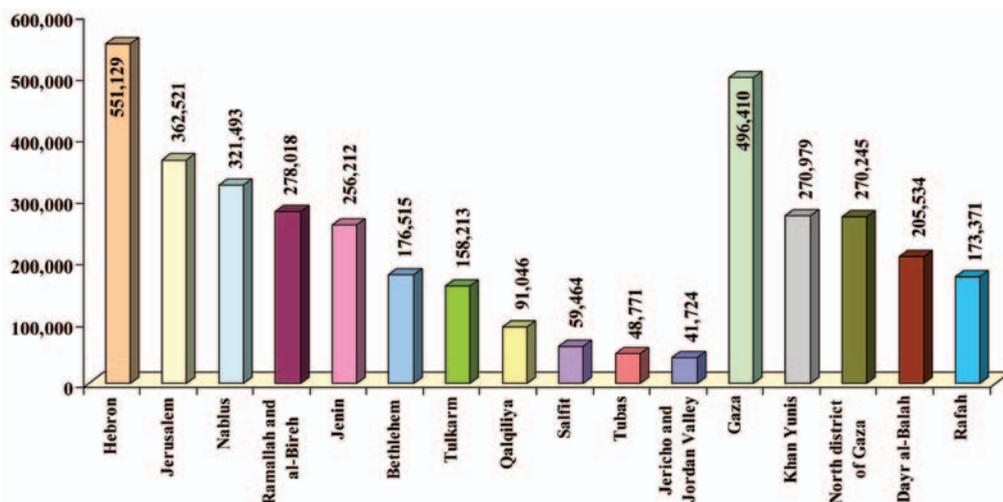
Palestinians live in 16 governorates, five of them are in the GS and the other 11 are in the WB. Hebron is the largest governorate in terms of population. Nearly 551 thousand Palestinians lived there at the end of 2007. Gaza comes next with a population of 496 thousands. Jerusalem is the third largest governorate with an estimated population of 363 thousand. The smallest populated governorates are Jericho (42 thousands), Tubas (49 thousands) and Salfit (59 thousands).

Table 3/7: Population Count, Average Family Size and Gender Ratio for the Years 1997 and 2007 in the Governorates of WB and GS⁴

Governorate	Population count		Average family size		Gender ratio	
	1997	2007	1997	2007	1997	2007
WB	1,873,476	2,345,107	6	5.5	103.2	103
Jenin	203,026	256,212	5.9	5.3	103.8	103
Tubas	36,609	48,771	6.1	5.3	103.1	102.8
Tulkarm	134,110	158,213	5.8	5.3	102.2	101.5
Qalqiliya	72,007	91,046	6.1	5.6	105.7	104.7
Salfit	48,538	59,464	6	5.4	103.6	103.2
Nablus	261,340	321,493	5.9	5.4	103.3	102.3
Ramallah and al-Bireh	213,582	278,018	5.9	5.3	100.4	101.2
Jerusalem	328,601*	362,521	5.4	5.2	102.1	103.3
Jericho and Jordan Valley	32,713	41,724	6.2	5.5	101.7	100.2
Bethlehem	137,286	176,515	5.8	5.3	104.8	103.9
Hebron	405,664	551,129	6.7	6.1	104.9	104.1
GS	1,022,207	1,416,539	6.9	6.5	103.1	103
North district of Gaza	183,373	270,245	7.2	6.7	103.7	103.7
Gaza	367,388	496,410	6.9	6.5	103.6	103.5
Dayr al-Balah	147,877	205,534	6.9	6.4	102.4	101.6
Khan Yunis	200,704	270,979	6.9	6.3	102.5	103.1
Rafah	122,865	173,371	6.9	6.5	102	101.8
Total (WB & GS)	2,895,683	3,761,646	6.3	5.8	103.2	103

* The number in this division of Jerusalem governorate, which Israel forcibly annexed, is an estimate.

Number of Population according to the Governorate 2007



The Palestinian society is very young. The surveys of the PCBS indicate that 52.2% of Palestinians in the WB and GS are young, under the age of 18. This means that more than half of the Palestinian community is under the age of 18.

Therefore, the number of Palestinians, for many years to come, will continue to increase despite the regression in the fertility rate in the last few years. Palestinians, under the age of 15 represent 45.5% of the total population, while the elderly constitute only 3%. This is not different from that in 2006, when people under the age of 15 constituted 45.7% of the population. This will ensure a relative growth in the ratio of dependency. The ratio of dependency is an indicator of the economic burdens that the productive sector of the society has to bear, i.e., the ratio of people in the age of dependency (less than 15 and more than 64) to the people in working age (15–64) multiplied by 100.

The average fertility rate of Palestinians in general is 4.6 children per woman. In the WB, the rate is 4.2 children per woman, and it is 5.4 children per woman in the GS. This rate is not likely to drop significantly in the coming few years.

The average rate of normal delivery of babies by Palestinian women between the age of 15 and 54 is 4.7 babies, and this rate varies slightly between the WB women (4.6 babies) and GS women (five babies). However, there are no significant differences on the governorate level in the WB and GS.

Table 4/7: Registered Living Babies in WB and GS 1999–2006⁵

Region	1999		2001		2003		2005		2006	
	No.	%								
WB	60,546	60.3	62,535	60.3	61,488	57.7	61,194	55.8	52,265	51.8
GS	39,695	39.7	41,245	39.7	44,867	42.3	48,245	44.2	48,588	48.2
WB & GS	100,241	100	103,780	100	106,355	100	109,439	100	100,853	100

The mortality rate of nurslings in the WB and GS reached 25.3 per thousand babies. The rate in the GS reached its peak (28.8 babies) when compared to its counterpart in the WB (22.9 babies). The mortality rate of Palestinian children under the age of five reached 28.2 per thousand children; in the WB, the rate is 25.7 children, and in the GS, it is 31.7 children.

It is important to note that the Palestinian boys under the age of five have a lesser chance to live in comparison to baby girls. In the Palestinian (PCBS) issued in May 2008, Lu'ay Shabaneh noted that in the past decade no significant efforts whatsoever were made to tackle the problem of mortality among nurslings and children less than five years of age.⁶

The rate of school dropouts among youth between 15 and 29 years of age in the WB and GS is 29.4% for males and 12.6% for females. Statistics showed that 29.5% of the males in this age group have poor educational learning attainment as the main reason for them to stop learning. While 25.1% of the females drop out of school because their families are unable to pay tuition fees.

More than half of the Palestinian women are married, only 1.3% is widowed, 1.1% is divorced, 0.2% is separated, and nearly 39.3% of them are single. There is a proportion between the age of married Palestinian women and the number of marriages; the older the age range the higher the marriage rate. For example, the percentage of married women between the age of 15 and 19 is 8.9%, while 47% of women between the age of 20 and 24 are married.

The stability of marriage depends on its sustainability and continuity without divorce or widowhood. The present situation indeed reflects the coherence and solidarity of social relations, the good upbringing of children and familial unity

in Palestinian society. In general, the institution of marriage in Palestinian society is both successful and secure. Only a small ratio of marital relationships ends in divorce, separation or widowhood. It is normal that the percentage of widowhood rises with the advancement of age. The ratio of widows between the age of 45 and 49 is 6.8%. In general, the ratios of married and single women are the same in the WB and GS.⁷

With regard to the actual number of cases of marriage and divorce in the WB and GS, the survey of the PCBS indicated that the number of marriages rose from 23,492 in 1997 to 28,233 in 2006. However, the Crude Marriage Rate (CMR) dropped from 8.4 per thousand people in 1997 to 7.3 per thousand people in 2006. During the *Intifadah*, the number of marriages noticeably had a severe drop reaching its lowest in 2002, with only a total number of 22,611 marriages.

The recorded cases of divorce numbered 3,449 in 1997 and 3,756 in 2006, though the index reached 4,211 cases in 2005. The Crude Divorce Rate (CDR) hit 1.2 cases per thousand people in 1997, and dropped to one case per thousand people in 2006.⁸

With regard to the structure of the Palestinian family, statistics reveal that the percentage of the nuclear family (consists of only the couples or of a couple with one or more children) is continually on the rise when compared to extended families. In 1997, the number of nuclear families reached 73.2% families, and in 2006, it reached 78.1%. In 2004, the demographic health survey showed that the number rose to 83%. The percentage of extended families in 1997 was 23%, and it dropped to 12.6% in 2004. The difference between the two figures in each year represents families consisting of one person or compound families, which were not significantly affected by social changes.⁹

2. Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

The estimated figure of Palestinians in Israel at the end of 2007 was about 1.18 million. This was based on the rate of annual growth of 2.6% as calculated by the PCBS. This figure does not include the Arabs in the Syrian Golan Heights or the citizens in Zone J1 in Jerusalem governorate (i.e., East Jerusalem that Israel annexed). The figure also does not include the Arab Lebanese who moved

temporarily to live in Israel; as Israel counts these categories of people as its nationals under the generic term “Arab Israelis.”

Available statistics about Palestinians living in Israel¹⁰ show that gender ratio is 103.6 males per 100 females; 40.6% of those Palestinians are under the age of 15. The percentage of 65 years old or above is 3.1%. The overall fertility rate is 3.68 births per woman in 2006, and the crude birth rate is 27.9 newborns per thousand inhabitants in the same year. The average size of the Palestinian family in Israel is 5.09 people.

The crude mortality rate was 2.8 deaths per one thousand inhabitants in 2006. The mortality rate among nurslings was 7.6 deaths per thousand newborns in 2006, while it was 8 deaths in 2005. The rate of illiteracy among Palestinians of 15 years of age or above in Israel in 2006 was 6.1%. The rate of Palestinians having bachelor degree or higher was 7.9%.

3. Jordan

According to a PCBS survey estimate made in 2007, Palestinian residents in Jordan number 3.1 million. Nearly 1.9 million Palestinians are registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) on 31/12/2007 in Jordan. They constitute 377,300 families and 17.5% of them live in refugee camps.¹¹

However, a significant number of Palestinians living in Jordan are unregistered as official refugees for various reasons. In fact, 13% of the residents of Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan are not registered with the UNRWA; Moreover, about 95% of Palestinians living in Jordan has a Jordanian nationality.

Nearly 41.7% of Palestinian residents in Jordan are under the age of 15 years. However, those who are 65 years of age or above constitute only 4.2%. The total fertility rate of Palestinians in Jordan is 4.6 births per woman, and the percentage of Palestinian dependency in Jordan was 85.4% in 2000.

4. Syria

The number of Palestinians in Syria registered as refugees by the UNRWA on 31/12/2007 is 451,467, composed of 109,565 families.¹² As much as 26.9% of

them live in camps. According to statistical figures of the Syrian Central Bureau of Statistics, 68.8% of them live in the capital, Damascus and its suburbs. However, it should be noted that the above figures do not include the Palestinians who fled to Syria in 1967 and 1970, as the majority of them are not registered with the UNRWA.¹³

According to the Palestinian statistics, the UNRWA registers 95.6% of Palestinians living in the refugee camps as official refugees. They also showed that 33.1% of the Palestinians are under the age of 15, and those who are 65 years of age or above constitute 4.3% of the population. The crude birth rate was 18 births per one thousand Palestinian residents, and the total fertility rate of Palestinian women in general was 2.4 births per woman in 2006, dropping from 3.5 in 2001. These sources also mentioned that the average size of the Palestinian family in Syria is about 4.9 members.

5. Lebanon

The number of Palestinians registered by the UNRWA as official refugees in Lebanon on 31/12/2007 is about 413,962, composed of 108,676 families. Nearly 53% of Palestinians in Lebanon live in refugee camps. The average size of the Palestinian family in Lebanon is 3.8 members, and it is lower than its counterparts in Palestine, Jordan and Syria.

The total fertility rate of women is 2.3 children per woman in 2006, compared with 3.5 children per woman in 1999. As for the other features, there are not any available data yet for the year 2007. For every 100 females, there are 98.5 males. The percentage of people under the age of 15 is 33%, while those who are 65 years of age or above constitute 5.5% of the total population. The ratio of the elderly is comparatively high when compared with the number of Palestinians in other places. The crude birth rate in 2006 is 16.3 babies per one thousand people.

6. Iraq

The conditions of Palestinians living in Iraq witnessed a lot of changes and developments since 1948. Statistics showed that the number of Palestinians seeking asylum in Iraq totaled 4,300 refugees in 1948.¹⁴ Iraqi authorities at that time refused

to register them as refugees in the records of the UNRWA, and undertook caring of them, which put them under the political influence in Iraq.

In the beginning, Iraqi authorities entrusted the task of looking after the affairs of Palestinian refugees to the Ministry of Defense. Then, the Ministry of Social Affairs in Iraq established the Department of Palestinian Refugees' Affairs in Iraq to take care of them. The department defined a "refugee" as "a Palestinian who was forced to leave his occupied homeland in 1948 and came to live in Iraq before 25/9/1958." This definition left out the Palestinians who had gone to Iraq after this date from Iraqi official records in Iraq. The large number of Palestinians who came to Iraq from Kuwait at the time of the first Gulf War were not registered either. According to United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) estimates, the number of Palestinian refugees in Iraq in 2003 after the American invasion was between 35–40 thousand Palestinians.¹⁵

Iraq, under American occupation, forcibly evicted Palestinian refugees. They were the victims of kidnapping, murder and intimidation forcing them to leave Iraq at the hands of the Iraqi militia. As a result, thousands of Palestinians had to leave the country and seek refuge in a number of Arab and foreign countries, who offered them asylum. The Palestinians who fled Iraq were housed in four camps, three of them at the Iraqi–Syrian borders: al-Waleed camp, hosting 500 refugees; al-Tanf camp, with 356 refugees; and al-Hawl camp, with 305 refugees. The fourth camp was Al-Ruwayshid on the Iraqi–Jordanian border. This camp received 1,200 refugees. Later on, 500 returned to Baghdad, while Jordanian authorities permitted 350 Palestinian refugees who are married to Jordanian women to enter Jordan. The remaining 350 Palestinian refugees stayed in the camp. Yemen received around five thousand Palestinian refugees, while Sudan received about 1,700 refugees. Palestinians also gained asylum in a number of Western countries. Canada granted asylum to 46 Palestinians;¹⁶ Chile received 117 Palestinians living between the Iraqi–Syrian borders;¹⁷ Brazil received 120 Palestinian refugees; and some Scandinavian countries agreed to receive some humanitarian cases. In a statement made in March 2008, the Director of the Department of Palestinian Refugees' Affairs in the PLO, Usama al-Shinnar, the number of Palestinians remaining in Iraq was estimated around 15 thousands.¹⁸

It is worth mentioning that the actual number of Palestinians who are fleeing from Iraq is increasing due to acts of kidnapping, torturing and murder that aim at intimidating them and pushing them to leave Iraq. For example, official records in Iraq listed 45 cases of murder among Palestinians in 2007, compared with 101 Palestinians killed and another 1,200 expelled in 2006. The following table shows the number of Palestinians who were killed in Iraq since its occupation.¹⁹

Table 5/7: Number of Palestinians Killed in Iraq during 2003–2007

Year	No. of killed
2003	11
2004	20
2005	25
2006	101
2007	45

Recent years have witnessed one of the most miserable situations for Palestinians in Iraq. They are the weakest part in a country dominated by anarchy, and they have become the victims of regional, political and sectarian conflict, which has nothing to do with them; yet, they paid a great price. The closure of borders to the Palestinians living in Iraq by Arab countries helped deteriorate their already desperate conditions. It showed the indifference and narrow mindedness of the Arab countries. In spite of the fact that the Arab countries had always taken pride in being the defenders and protectors of the Palestinian cause, they did neglect the minimum demands for humanitarian aid to improve the conditions of Palestinian refugees in Iraq who are both fellow Arabs and Muslims.

7. General Comparison between Palestinians

The following table provides a summary of the most significant comparisons for some of the demographic indicators between Palestinians in 2006 (unless mentioned otherwise between brackets):

Table 6/7: Selected Demographic Indicators for the Palestinians according to Their Place of Residence 2006²⁰

Indicator	WB	GS	Total (WB and GS)	Israel	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon
% of individuals 15 years or less	43.9	48.7	45.7	40.6	41.7 (2000)	33.1	33
% of individuals 65 years or more	3.3	2.6	3	3.1	4.2 (2000)	4.3	5.5
Dependency rate (per 100 individuals 15–64 years)	89.4	104.9	94.9	77.6	85.4 (2000)	59.7	62.6
Gender ratio (male per 100 females)	103 (2007)	103 (2007)	103 (2007)	103.6	-	102.3 (2005)	98.5
Crude birth rate (newborn per 1,000 inhabitants)	33.7	41.7	36.7	27.9	-	18	16.3
Crude death rate (death per 1,000 inhabitants)	4	3.8	3.9	2.8	-	3.3 (2001)	-
Total fertility rate (birth per woman)	4.2	5.4	4.6	3.68	4.6 (2000)	2.4	2.3
Natural population growth	3	3.8	3.3	2.51	-	2 (2002)	-
Average family size (individual per each family)	5.5 (2007)	6.5 (2007)	5.8 (2007)	5.09	6.2 (2000)	4.9	3.8

N.B. (-) means data is not available.

An analysis of the above table demonstrates that the key demographic indicators of the Palestinians have not registered much basic changes. In fact, these have remained the same as those registered in 2006. The following are some key changes:

- The crude birth rate is at its peak in the WB and GS and the lowest rates are in Lebanon and Syria. Such a situation places more demographic pressure on Palestinians in particular, in the GS, which is considered as one of the most densely populated area in the world.
- The Palestinian society is a very young. Nonetheless, its age distribution exhibits some remarkable differences depending on the area of residence/ refuge. For instance, Palestinians aged 15 years or under in the GS, constitutes the largest sector of the population. However, the same age group is second in the WB. This situation increases the economic burdens on the family providers in the occupied Palestinian territories since 1967. Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon have the lowest rate of dependency. In addition, the highest percentage of elderly (65 years and above) exists in Lebanon, and the lowest is in the GS.
- The gender ratio of Palestinians at their places of residence is more than 100 males for every 100 females, with the exception of Lebanon. This is perhaps due to the immigration of more males than females and the rise in the mortality rate among males in the last few decades.
- The rise in the birth rate among Palestinians in the GS has contributed to an increase in the population in this area. The decision-makers and planners of the area should pay much attention to this fact. In 1997, the percentage of Palestinians in the GS was 35.7%, while in the end of 2007 it rose to 37.7% according to the preliminary figures available in 2007.
- The crude birth rate in Syria in 2001 was 23.3 births per thousand people, but it dropped to 18 births per thousand in 2006.
- The crude death rates were nearly stable, and remained the same in 2006. The highest rate was in the WB and GS and the lowest rate was in Israel. This was mainly due to the Israeli occupation and its suppressive policies including that of systematic assassinations. The improvement of health conditions in Israel compared to other areas, and the continued negligence

of health conditions for Palestinians in the WB and GS, had contributed to the worsening of the crude death rates. There is concrete evidence that Israel followed certain methods of racial cleansing of the Arabs in Palestine. These include, among others, the “transfer” system and other oppressive procedures that compel Palestinians to leave their country, and Israel’s refusal to the return of the Palestinians. Israel made certain medical procedures to weaken the physiological capability of fertility among Palestinian women.²¹

- The average size of the Palestinian family remained high in the WB with 5.5 people per family and in the GS with 6.5 people per family. The average smallest Palestinian family exists in Lebanon, Syria and Israel.
- The natural population growth rates will remain high in Palestinian society compared to neighboring countries, and will stay higher than 2.5% for the next decade.

Third: The Palestinian Refugees

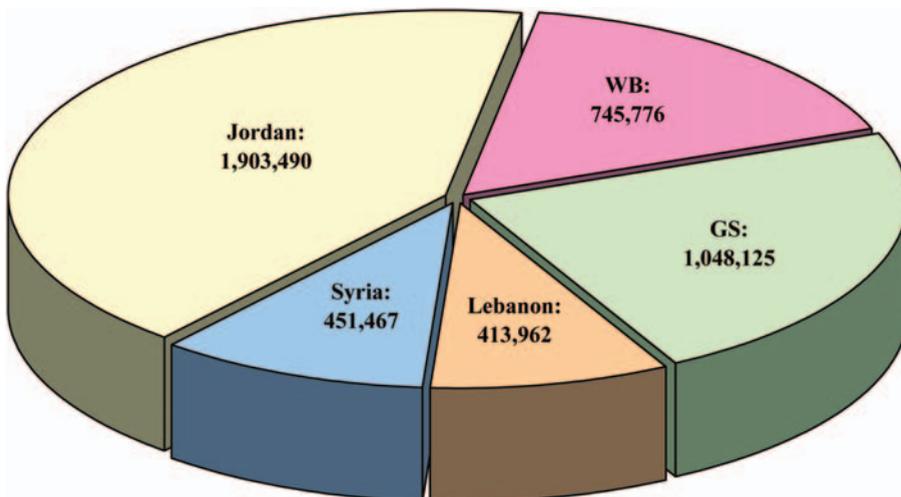
As far as the Palestinians are concerned, the concept of asylum and its criteria are very difficult to define;²² this is due to lots of reasons. The first reason is the various wars and conflicts that the region has witnessed in the last century, particularly the 1948 and 1967 wars and the consequential effects of the occupation of Palestine. The second reason is the first *Intifadah* (1987–1990) and the third reason is the second *Intifadah* or *al-Aqsa Intifadah* (2000–2005). While the fourth reason is the occupation of the Palestinian territories by several occupiers, since the time of British mandate. The fifth is the subordination of the WB to Jordan during 1948–1967; and sixth, the Diaspora of Palestinians in different parts of the world.

If we presume that the number of Palestinian refugees in the world corresponds exactly to the figures of Palestinians registered with the UNRWA, the numbers of officially registered Palestinian refugees till the date 31/12/2007 is about 4.56 million, as shown in table 7/7. However, this number may not be the exact figure as the UNRWA itself states that the figures are based on data as provided in the records of personnel that are updated regularly. However, registration at the Agency is optional, and these figures do not precisely correspond to the actual number of population.²³

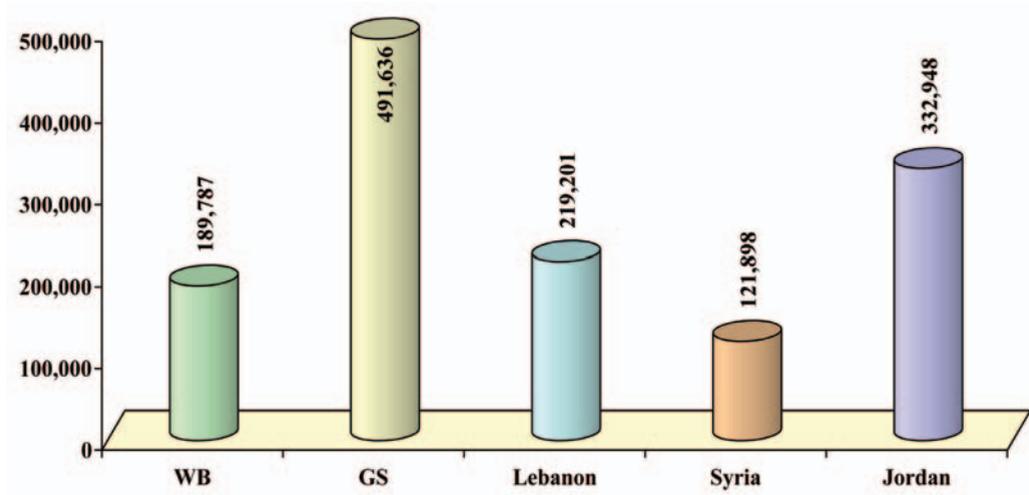
Table 7/7: Number of Individuals, Births and Families of the Palestinian Refugees Registered with UNRWA in its Areas of Operations as of 31/12/2007²⁴

Region	Individuals	Average family size	Families	Camps	Individuals living in camps	% of individuals living in camps
WB	745,776	3.86	193,091	19	189,787	25.45
GS	1,048,125	4.57	229,108	8	491,636	46.9
Lebanon	413,962	3.81	108,676	12	219,201	52.95
Syria	451,467	4.12	109,565	9	121,898	27
Jordan	1,903,490	5.05	377,300	10	332,948	17.49
Total	4,562,820	4.48	1,017,740	58	1,355,470	29.7

Number of Palestinian Refugees Registered with UNRWA in its Areas of Operation as of 31/12/2007



Number of Individuals in Camps Registered by UNRWA in its Areas of Operation as of 31/12/2007



According to the above table, the number of Palestinian refugees registered in the five areas where the UNRWA maintains its presence, is around 4.6 million. About 41.72% of these refugees live in Jordan; 39.31% live in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967 (22.97% in the GS and 16.34% in WB) and 18.97% live and are registered in Syria and Lebanon.

It is noteworthy that the process of collecting data about the estimate of Palestinian residents in different countries of the world is susceptible to many factors of impairment and other considerations. These difficulties would definitely vitiate the precision and credibility of the gathered information and render it unreliable. Therefore, the exact number of Palestinians living in different parts of the world cannot be figured out correctly.

For the aim of drawing attention to the issues and challenges facing Palestinian refugees and those who were displaced, BADIL Resource Center for Palestinian Residency & Refugees Rights conducted a comprehensive survey for the years 2006–2007. The results stated that there were nearly seven million Palestinian refugees in the world in mid 2007, in addition to 450 thousand displaced Palestinians. This constitutes nearly 70% of the total number of Palestinians in the world, estimated as 10.1 million people. However, the legal status of another 400 thousand Palestinians is not yet clear, and it is possible that they are refugees too.²⁵

When we look at the number of Palestinians registered during the period 1970–2007, we observe that their number totaled about 1.43 million as refugees in 1970. This number rose to 4.5 million in mid 2007. Thus, the rate of annual steady increase of registered refugees during the mentioned period can be calculated, and it is 3.16% per year. Based on this rate, the number of Palestinian refugees will double in a period of 22 years.

Fourth: Population Growth Trends

With the publication of preliminary results of the statistics in the WB and GS, two figures are now available about the Palestinian population growth rate. Hence, it is possible to calculate the population growth rate more accurately, with the exception of the Jerusalem governorate part that Israel had annexed immediately after the occupation of the WB in 1967.

Accordingly, the Palestinian population growth rate in the WB and GS is 2.85% per year during the period 1997–2007. This rate is relatively high when compared with the population growth rate of other nations. However, it has slightly slowed down with time due to interrelated political, social, economic and demographic factors. However, this rate differs from the past projections of the PCBS. The population growth rate in 1997 rose to approximately 4%, and it was expected to drop to 3.3% in 2006 and to 2.8% in 2015. However, during 1997–2007, the population growth rate dropped to 2.85%. Therefore, Palestinian population growth rate during the past decade dropped by 1.15%. This drop is explainable by the reasons mentioned earlier. However, a principal reason remains to be the departure and immigration of the Palestinians from their land.

Presuming that the net immigration ratio is nil, the annual increase in the population rate dropped in the period between 1997 and 2007 in the WB from 3.6% to 2.53%, and in the GS from 4.1% to 3.32%.

This information points out that despite a decrease in the expected annual increase in the population rate, there is a constant rise of the population in the GS with a relatively higher rate than that in the WB (giving the presumption that the immigration net rate is nil).

However, if we presume that this rate was only nil before 2000 and that the number of those who left the WB and GS during the period 2000–2007 (who were not included in the 2007 figures) was approximately 230 thousand people, then the actual drop in the increasing population rate will be different. Based on this presumption, if we count the number of those who departed or migrated from the WB and GS (230 thousand people) as part of the overall number of the 2007 figures (about 3.77 million), then the total number will be four million. Knowing that the total number of population according to the 1997 statistics was about 2.9 million, we realize that the actual increase in the population growth rate would be 3.285%. This is an estimated rate, yet it is significantly useful in determining the actual rate of population increase, the fertility rate and other rates. This means that Palestinian authorities must raise the awareness of Palestinians to be firmly rooted to their land and must keep the population growth rate increasing.

The rates of fertility, death and immigration are fundamental factors contributing to the increase in population in any country or region. Immigration does not have an immediate impact on the estimates of the overall number of Palestinians in the world. However, it affects their geographical distribution and places of residence. Therefore, factors affecting the directions of the de facto indicators of the growth in Palestinian population throughout the world are limited to the fertility and death rates.

Reports issued by the PBCS indicate that the fertility rate in the WB and GS dropped in the past decade (1997–2007) from 6.04 babies in 1997 to 4.6 babies in 2006.²⁶ There is a remarkable difference in the fertility rates between the WB and GS. Reports revealed that the fertility rate in the WB dropped from 5.6 births in 1997 to 4.2 births in 2005. Likewise, it dropped in the GS from 6.9 births to 5.4 births for the same period. The overall annual Palestinian population rate in the WB and GS has also dropped from 3.8% to 3.3% during the period 1997–2006. The crude birth rate also dropped from 42.7 births per thousand to 36.7 births per thousand, during the same period.

The number of Palestinians in the world was estimated at 10.35 million at the end of 2007, while their number at the end of 2006 was 10.1 million. The annual Palestinian population growth rate in the world is 2.5%. Therefore, the number of Palestinians is expected to continue to grow higher than that of the Jews. However, despite this annual increase, its rate is slightly slowing down compared with the

expected figures in the coming two decades (i.e., there is an overall rise in the population, but with an annual decreasing rate). Accordingly, the best estimate of the number of Palestinians in the world for the coming two decades is based on the assumption that the population growth rate of Palestinians (including those who live in historical Palestine) is 2.5%. However, in historical Palestine, the growth rate will be 2.8% per annum. Based on this estimate, the overall number of Palestinians in the world at the end of 2015 will be 12.6 million, and at the end of 2020, it will be 14.3 million. These figures are slightly lower than the estimate of the previous year.²⁷ Based on this assumption, it is also likely that the number of Palestinians in the world will double in 2034 and will increase to 20 million people.

The results of a study conducted by The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS), celebrating the 40th anniversary of the occupation of Jerusalem, showed that the rate of the increase in Arab population in the occupied city is four times that of the Jews. Consequently, it is expected that the number of Arab citizens will be the same as that of the Jews by 2035, if the Arabs retain their current growth rate.

Since its occupation in 1967, East Jerusalem has been witnessing a systematic process of Judaization being carried out by Israeli and American Jewish businessmen. They purchase buildings owned by Arabs and sometimes force their owners to sell them. Permits to build new houses for Arabs are usually rejected.²⁸

Fifth: Argumentation Regarding the Estimates of Palestinians within Historical Palestine, Particularly in the WB and GS

The debates and controversies regarding the demographic danger to Israel, which have dominated Israeli society since the first half of 2005, have hardly abated. Fresh debates in the beginning of 2008 flared up after the issuing of the preliminary 2007 census. These debates, which were widely covered by the media, focused on the number of Palestinians in the WB and GS. Some Israeli sources claimed that the estimated number of Palestinians for the year 2004 by the PCBS to be 3.8 million people was, in fact, no more than 2.4 million people, i.e., 1.4 million people less than the declared figure.²⁹

The present debate reopened the controversy and forced the same organizations to reassess the initial results of the 2007 data, whose figures indicate that the number of Palestinians in occupied Palestinian territories is about 3.77 million. In the meantime, various contesting views, presumptions and policies are probing the issue depending on the stage, proclaimed objective and hidden agendas at each juncture of the history of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. This conflict constitutes a double–edged sword for both the Right and Left political wings in Israel. Both sides think and operate from the same Jewish standpoint of establishing the Greater State of Israel from the sea to the river.

Debates in Israel about the growth of Palestinian population are still futile and unreliable, as the Israelis mix politics with statistics; between illusion and facts. However, these debates reflect two main trends: they both mirror a racist disposition and aim to achieve political objectives on the ground.

The first trend is lead by Yoram Ettinger who seeks to cast doubt on the above–mentioned Palestinian data. In his article, entitled “The Palestinian Census–Smoke & Mirrors,” which included a considerable number of fallacies and technical errors. He said:

The Feb. 9, 2008 Palestinian census is not a cause for fatalism. In contrast with the census, the accurate number of Judea & Samaria Arabs is 1.5 million, and not 2.3 million, and the number of Gaza Arabs is 1.1 million, and not 1.5 million. The Palestinian census is refuted by Palestinian, Israeli and international documentation of birth, death, migration, first–graders and eligible voter registration in Judea, Samaria and Gaza. (.....) The 1997 census included 210,000 Israeli Arabs, bearing Israeli I.D. cards, who were doubly–counted: as Israeli Arabs by Israel’s Central Bureau of Statistics and as West Bank Arabs by the PCBS. The 2007 census for Judea & Samaria was inflated by 53%. (.....) There is a demographic problem, but it is not lethal, there is no demographic machete at Israel’s throat, and the demographic tailwind is Jewish, not Arab. In fact, documented births, deaths and migration clarify that Jewish demography has become a strategic asset and not a liability. Hence, awareness of demographic reality could enhance the security political, strategic, diplomatic and economic options of Israeli doves and hawks alike.³⁰

However, *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2006* responded to most of these allegations. With regard to the counting of the Arabs of Jerusalem twice, it was the mistake of Israel in counting them because Israel occupied Jerusalem in 1967.

Hence, the Israeli Statistics Bureau should subtract them from its declared figure of the residents of Jerusalem and not count them twice.

Concerning the Israeli allegation that there is an extra 1.1 million people in the WB and GS, it is unfounded. In fact, primary census indicate a drop in the number of the population in 2007 by 244 thousand people, lower than the expected figures of the statistics for the period between 1997 and 2007. The estimates of the PCBS assumed the existence of some pull factors, because of the stability of the society at that time. The net immigration rate was expected to be nil but not minus, as it used to be during the *Intifadah*, which could be accounted for the temporary departure of some Palestinians seeking safety, which they are denied of under the Israeli occupation. In addition, there are the usual reasons for immigration such as studying or finding a job, especially after the freezing of the Palestinians' salaries for long time and the imposition of an economic embargo on the GS, which is a crime against humanity. It is surprisingly odd to consider that the Palestinians who temporarily left their land for some reason, such as study, are automatically immigrants, while all the Jews abroad who carry Israeli IDs are calculated and counted, no matter how long they stay outside the country.

Even when considering the new census, by the beginning of 2020 and assuming a lower population growth rate for the Palestinians (2.5%), the number of Palestinians in historical Palestine is 6.7 million compared to 6.4 million Jews. This indicates that the percentage of the Palestinians living in historical Palestine will be 51% (presuming the invariability of the other factors). These figures are proximate to previous expectations, bearing in mind that the Jewish Agency anticipates that the number of Jews in Israel in 2020 will rise to nearly 6.23 million.³¹

Rand Corporation, based in California, which is known for its conservative rightist stance that supports Israel, forecasts a drop in the Palestinian population growth rates in the WB and GS from 4% to 2.2% in a period of 25 years (till 2030). It also expects that the number of Palestinians in the WB and GS will be five million people in five years time. This nearly corresponds to the figure published by the PCBS.³²

The second trend of debate in Israel considers the Arabs as a real demographic threat to the Jewishness of Israel. Consequently, Israeli authorities have only limited options in dealing with this problem, the easiest of which is expulsion or what is conventionally known as the policy of "transfer."

In his article “A Demographic Threat on the Wane,” Meron Benvenisti stated the data (along with other figures published earlier this year by the CBS) shows that the number of Jews and Arabs living between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean is close to parity. If we subtract the 200 thousand East Jerusalem residents, who were counted twice, the number of Jews stands at about 5.4 million and the number of Arabs—both Israeli citizens and those living in the territories—at approximately 5.2 million. He went on to say:

These figures indicate that the ‘demographic revolution’—the Arabs becoming the majority in the area west of the Jordan River—will happen in a year or two. Such a dramatic development cries for a comment by those politicians and analysts who continuously nourish the idea of a ‘demographic threat,’ which they believe threatens the existence of the Jewish Zionist state.

Thereupon, The pullout from the GS improved the demographic balance, 1.5 million Palestinians were removed from the count.³³

Sixth: The Israeli Pressures and Measures to Affect the Palestinian Demographics across the Green Line, and in the WB and GS

It has been a constant theme in the international and Israeli media circles concerned with the peace process, to probe the issues of the “final status.” the Jewishness of Israel and the role of the Arab minority in Israel and the constant attempts to expel them and confiscate their land or ban them from building on it. The media also focuses on Israel’s oppressive policy of demolishing the houses of Arabs allegedly for not having building permits. The media highlights Israel’s policy of marginalization of its Arab citizens and detaching them from their people and the Arab and Muslim nations as well as all forms of pressure and procedures to dominate the Palestinian demographic situation across the Green Line.

This subject begins from where Meron Benvenisti, who depicted the demographic conflict as demographic convergence, left off. He concluded his article by blaming the skeptics of the first trend who break down Palestinian communities into smaller groups (the WB, GS, the Palestinians of 1948) through statements like, “They deal separately with them as if they were different peoples and part of one, single, threatening, mass.”³⁴

Such statements demonstrate the central role that the issue of demographic conflict plays among the Right and the Left political streams in Israel. This is done though their contrasting agendas and adoption of old and new methods of driving the Palestinians away from their land and reshaping the presumed borderlines on both sides of the Green Line in order to dominate the demographic situation of the Palestinians. These procedures coincided with probing particular issues, pertaining to the re-distribution of Arab citizens on the sides of the Green Line in a way that affects their economic, cultural and social fabric, and restrained their mobility in order to constrict their living and ambition for an honorable life in their homeland.

With regard to the index of unemployment, the official report issued by the Department of Labor revealed that the unemployment rate in August 2007 was 7.7%. However, this rate is not the same for all Palestinian sectors; it is nearly double this rate for the Palestinians of 1948, while it is only 5.5% for the Jews. The same report indicated that as many as 34 Israeli towns suffer unemployment, i.e., the index of unemployment in these towns is 9% and above. However, in reality, 32 of them are Palestinian towns where unemployment is between 13–14% compared to only two Israeli towns where the rate is between 9–10%.

We detect the same pessimistic situation, perhaps even worse, in the annual report of poverty issued in September 2007. Israel's Social Security Institute announced a very slight reduction in the poverty rate in Israel in general, estimated in 2006 at 1.65 million. However, a thorough investigation of the estimates discloses a greater amount of human misery. The poverty rate has notably receded among the Jews, but has risen among the Palestinians of 1948. The general poverty index in Israel records 24.5%, while poverty among Palestinians of 1948 strikes as much as 50% of the population. Despite the fact that Palestinian families constitute only 14% of the total families in Israel, this ratio represents 45% of poor families in the country, with a 2% rise that is higher than 2005. In general, the poverty rate of underprivileged families in Israel is within 20%, yet it is 52% among the Palestinians of 1948.

The tragedy also appears in the poverty data of children. The general poverty index among children in Israel is 35%, and of course, this ratio mainly represents the condition of the Palestinian children of 1948. The poverty rate among them is as high as 63%. This rate was 60% in 2005, recording a 3% rise. Despite the fact that the proportion of the children of 1948 against the total number of children in Israel is 24%, their ratio against the ratio of the total underprivileged children in

Israel is 50%. This means that the Palestinians of 1948 are always present in the lowest and the worst indices, but they are absent from Israeli political concerns and consideration.³⁵

The economic social survey of the Palestinians of 1948 conducted by Rikaz Data Bank of the Galilee Society, which included samples of 3,250 Palestinian families inside the Green Line, indicated that Palestinians in Israel suffer severe shortage of lands. Palestinians also lack lands for construction of homes. Figures revealed that 60.6% of Palestinian families expressed a pressing need for at least one flat in the coming 10 years. This percentage hit 72.9% in the South, and as much as 43.7% of these families are not able to build a place of residence.³⁶

The former British Secretary of State for International Development, Clare Short, during the opening session of the UN conference, warned that Israel's apartheid in the WB and GS is worse than what was practiced in South Africa. She also pointed out that Israel has actually destroyed all the potentials of establishing a Palestinian state with its oppressive policies and settlements.³⁷

The Regional Council for the Unrecognized Villages in the Negev has called upon the countries of the world, the UN and International Human rights organizations to put pressure on Israel to stop its scheme for demolishing as many as 3,600 Arab houses in the Negev in the near future. Israel exerts all kinds of pressure on Palestinians to get their consent, given against their will, to Israeli plans. The techniques of pressure, among others, would include demolition of their houses so that they give up their right to lands, which are about 800 thousand donums and consent to Israel's plans for their life and future.³⁸

Israeli figures published by The Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies (JIIS) and Jerusalem Municipality reveal that the poverty rate in the town is the highest in Israel. As much as nearly 33% of families and 56% of minors in Jerusalem live below the poverty line, and Palestinian citizens there are poorer than the Jews are. The figures also revealed that 62% of Palestinian families live under the poverty line against only 23% of Jewish families who share the same circumstances. In addition, around 76% of Arab minors live below the poverty line against 44% of Jewish minors.³⁹

The above mentioned sources affirmed that the Palestinian population growth rate in Jerusalem is three times that of the Jewish population. The percentage of Arabs in the city increased from 26% in 1967 to 34% in 2006, despite the

relocation of Jews to the town and the expulsion of Palestinians from Jerusalem. Israeli politicians view these figures as obstacles to push Palestinians out of their homeland.

The initial results of the Palestinian census in 2007 indicated that Jerusalem governorate had the lowest population growth rate during the period 1997–2007. The population of Arab residents in the city increased by only 11.3%, yet the general growth rate in the WB and GS for the same period was 30%. This, of course, reveals the extent of the Israeli attack against Jerusalem, its land, people and resources.

Seventh: The Palestinian Immigration and Brain Drain

The preliminary results of the census revealed that there was a 244 thousand drop in the Palestinian population while considering the expectations for the period 1997–2007. The results raise a question regarding the reasons for this drop. Despite the fact that the drop does not constitute more than 6.5% of the total Palestinian population and that it was recorded at a time of extreme instability due to the continuous Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people, it deserves careful investigation to find its cause.

Estimating the difference between the departing and the returning Palestinians in a given period, does not reflect the actual permanent immigration. Usually, the departure of Palestinians is from a certain temporary cause, and the majority of them return to live permanently in their homeland.

The UNs' report dated 16/2/2008 stated that UN organizations currently provide food supplies to more than 650,790 Palestinians in the WB. According to the reports of the World Bank, these appropriations are not provisional, and "undermine the existing economic infrastructure and will cause a severe disruption that can hardly be fixed." The report added that in January 2008, there were as many as 563 barriers and closures in different forms in the WB in addition to restrictions made on the age of Palestinians allowed to cross the checkpoints. This led to obstructing the flow of goods and laborers and caused a rise in the cost of transportation and obstructions for a long period.⁴⁰

The reports summarized the reasons for the Palestinians' departure from the Palestinian territories, which vividly represent the magnitude of the

troubles and hardships that the Palestinians encounter all the time and in all aspects of life.

In a report entitled, “Misery Tempts Palestinian Christians to Flee,” Alistair Lyon said:

Despairing of life under Israeli occupation, many Palestinian Christians are moving abroad, threatening their ancient links to Bethlehem and the land where Jesus was born. ‘There is a real fear that 50 years down the road, the Holy Land will be without Christians,’ said Mitri Raheb, 45 years old pastor of the Lutheran Church in Bethlehem. ...Christians have migrated from Bethlehem and nearby Beit Jala and Beit Sahour for over a century, mainly to Latin America, the United States and Canada, to escape successive wars and crises.

In the same context, it is estimated that as many as 50 thousand Christians live in the territories that Israel occupied in 1967, while a further 110 thousands live in Israel. On the economic level in general, the conditions of Palestinian Christians, despite their suffering, are relatively better than other categories in the society. However, the Christians do not suffer any religious persecution, whether from the Muslims or from Israeli authorities. Bernard Sabella, a Palestinian sociologist at Bethlehem University, estimates that 50 to 70 Christian families are leaving Jerusalem or the WB yearly for new lives abroad.⁴¹

Approximately one third of Palestinian youth consider immigration (45% of them are males and 18% are females). Some are due to the miserable economic conditions (according to 96% of males compared to 66% of females), others the lack of security (according to 80% of males compared to 73% of females) and some are due to political reasons (according to 62% of males compared to 33% of females).⁴²

Eighth: The Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return

It is obvious that the international community’s slackness in proposing and carrying out fair solutions guaranteeing the full Palestinian right of return, and the Palestinian people’s right of regaining their land, holy sites and potentials would lead the entire region to anarchy, instability, and more warfare. Palestinians living

abroad are still suffering under bad conditions and helplessness, especially in the camps established in Arab countries. For example, the Palestinians in Iraq are facing persecution, and others remained stuck at the Syrian and Jordanian borders till some of them were finally admitted to Brazil and others were sent to some Arab countries.

In *al-Quds* newspaper, As‘ad ‘Abd al-Rahman wrote an article entitled “Shedding Lights on the Dark Situation of the Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon” and said that the Palestinian people have been the victims of a multi-faceted conspiracy of annihilation. They lost all potentials of life, such as their land and possessions. Palestinian refugees (especially in the refugee camps) have suffered dispersion that no people have ever seen. They are even unaware of what the future holds for them and when their suffering will end. The international community has long considered them an obstacle toward achieving any potential reconciliation. Therefore, we can see as many as 243 naturalization plans that were all rejected by the Palestinian refugees who expressed a sincere and firm position to retain their right of return no matter when. He added that recently, in the Nahr al-Barid camp, more than 200 people were killed and hundreds more were wounded. In addition, 35 thousand Palestinian refugees decamped during the fight between the Lebanese army and Fatah al-Islam militia, which left behind massive destruction in the camp.⁴³

‘Abd al-Mun‘im Fu‘ad authored a report regarding the economic social survey of the Palestinians of 1948, which was undertaken by the Rikaz Data Bank of the Galilee Society. This survey included a sample of 3,250 Palestinian families who immigrated in or before the year of the 1967 catastrophe (*Naksah*). It indicated that the ratio of Palestinians of the inside, who reported that they had been displaced from their birthplaces, was 15.1%. The highest rate of displaced Palestinians is 77.2% and it was in the South after 1967. The proportion of Palestinians who stated that they were relocated in the midland was 20.5%, while in the north it was 12.8%. Jewish institutions during the time of the establishment of Israel relocated the majority of north and midland displaced Palestinians. They were compulsorily settled in already-existing Arab communities, in pre-built communities dedicated for this particular purpose, or in the suburbs of heterogeneous communities, of which as many as 28% of their residents are displaced people.⁴⁴

In a pilot study conducted by Mada al-Carmel, the Arab Center for Applied Social Research, the majority of the Palestinians of 1948 are inclined to solve the problem of displaced Palestinians through fair methods and not via the wielding of power. Around 70% of those who participated in the study expressed that the least acceptable solution to the existing dilemma of displaced Palestinians is to give them the right of return and live inside Israel or to give them the right to choose between the return or compensation. The results of the pilot study revealed that 75% of them believe that the responsibility of solving the problem of displaced Palestinians lies on Israel, and 86% asserted that Israel is the party that should compensate them. The solution of the displaced Palestinians inside Palestine, in the view of 51% must be settled by allowing them to return to their home villages. 81% of displaced Palestinians called on Arab leaderships in Israel to include the issue of displaced Palestinians among the top priorities of their agendas. In addition, 57% emphasized that a comprehensive solution to the Palestinian issue will not be feasible without a permanent solution to the crisis facing displaced Palestinians.⁴⁵

Activities of Palestinians Outside Palestine to Support the Right of Return:

Despite the great suffering and torment of Palestinian refugees over the past 60 years and the birth of new Palestinian generations outside their homeland, efforts to support the Palestinians' right of return never waned. Every day witnesses more wide-ranging organized, collaborated and growing activities proving that the Palestinians are growing stronger and more resolute to retain their natural and uncompromising right of return. The Palestinians expressed their insistence on this stance, regardless of the variation in their economic or social position in their host countries. This stance was clearly expressed through the activities of Palestinians in Europe, the US and anywhere they live.

The year 2007 witnessed a range of Palestinian refugees' activities to defend their right of return. The Austrian NGO "Dar al-Janub—Union for Antiracism and Peace Policy" convened a symposium in Vienna on 25–26/3/2007 under the title: "Bridges to Palestine." In this symposium, the participants emphasized the unity of the Palestinian people inside and outside Palestine and called for the end of the occupation, the allowance of Palestinians to return to their homeland and the application of UN resolutions.

The patriotic activities of Palestinians in Europe have falsified the allegation that the Palestinians would abandon their homeland, relinquish their right of return and merge with the societies of their host countries. Palestinians in Europe held their fifth annual conference on the “Right of Return” in Rotterdam, Holland, on 5/5/2007 under the slogan: “Despite the Distance and Pain ... We are a United People with a Permanent Right.” which attracted more than five thousand participants. The spirit of the conference underscored the fact that being far away from their homeland did not weaken the Palestinians’ will or make them give up their right of return to Palestine. The conference also reflected its success in rallying all Palestinians from diverse political and religious backgrounds around this unwavering right. Many Palestinian institutions, societies, unions and confederations from different parts of Europe, in addition to Arab and Muslim communities in Europe allying with the Palestinian issue, took part in this conference. They adamantly called for the unity of the Palestinian people and its fate, and invited all people to stand behind their right of return.

Palestinians in the US were no less fervent and determined in defending their right of return. On the 59th anniversary of the catastrophic Israeli occupation of Palestine, The Palestine Right to Return Coalition in the States convened its fifth conference in California during 25–27/5/2007. The conference organized a number of workshops in order to reach feasible decisions to defend the right of Palestinians to return to their homeland. The program of the conference included some live statements by Palestinian survivors from the massacres of the Israeli occupation, which revived the scenes of the eviction of Palestinians from their homeland. Coinciding with the time of this conference, a foundational conference for Palestinian communities was held in Barcelona, Spain, under the auspices of Farouk Kaddoumi. 250 representatives of Palestinian communities from 17 European countries attended this conference. The participants of the conference urged the reactivation of the PLO and the preparation for holding a national assembly with the participation of all Palestinian Muslim and national factions.

On 16–18/10/2007, the Palestinian civil society in Cyprus held a conference that hosted NGOs under the title, “Towards the Construction of a United Strategy for the Palestinian Civil Society.” The conference aimed to pool together the efforts of NGOs to defend the Palestinians’ right of return.

In Lebanon, the Palestinian Organization for The Right of Return (Thabit) held its first conference on 25/10/2007 under the title: “Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: Reality and Horizons of the Future.” In addition, the Middle East Studies Center in Amman, Jordan, organized a meeting on 10/12/2007 that discussed the Palestinian right of return in the political thought during 2007, the political plans that aim to jeopardize this right, and the Palestinian struggle for the protection of the right of return and its implementation during the period 2000–2007.

It is important to note that such activities and conferences that shed light on the right of return are not limited to Palestinians living outside. Palestinians living inside also held several conferences and similar activities. In Acre, “The Third Conference for the Right of Return and Fair Peace” was held on 29–30/11/2007. In parallel to this, a conference entitled “The Catastrophe in its Sixtieth Year” was held in Nazareth on 13/5/2007, and another one was held in Gaza during the period 31/10–1/11/2007 entitled “The Second Intellectual and Political Conference in Defense of the Right of Return.”

Those who observe the Palestinian situation in the world cannot miss the fact that the issue of the return is deeply rooted in the hearts of Palestinians, and any political differences between the Palestinians melt away when faced with any plans to take their right to return away from them.

Conclusion

The Palestinian issue plays a central role in the conflicts of the Middle East, in particular, and the international problems and conflicts, in general. As long as the international community is unable to find and execute fair solutions that ensure the Palestinians’ obtainment of their legal rights, including the right of return, and to exercise their full authority on their land without procrastination, stability will not return to the entire region and peace will not be achieved. This is a right that they inherited from their ancestors who were expelled from their land. Hence, solving the Middle East conflicts and most of the world’s conflicts begins by solving the Palestinian issue, which will not be resolved without ensuring the Palestinians’ right of return.

Endnotes

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Chapter Eight

*The Economic Situation in the West
Bank and Gaza Strip*

The Economic Situation in the West Bank and Gaza Strip

Introduction

The year 2007 marked massive political, economic and social changes that affected all aspects of life in the WB and GS. These changes swept everything away like a hurricane. At the economic level, the unrelenting Israeli policies, aimed at retaining its full control over the key sectors of the Palestinian economy in the WB and GS, led to a reduction in the performance of the Palestinian economic sectors. The Israeli policies led to serious economic crises and problems at a time when the Palestinian economy was trying to develop. The impact of these challenges intensified with the escalated intensity of the Israeli siege and military operations against the Palestinian people, institutions and economic infrastructure.

The Palestinian society faces an increased rate of poverty and unemployment in addition to the high price increase. There has been also a steep drop in investments and an increasing budget deficit (approximately \$1.4 billion in 2007). This is mainly due to the absence of an encouraging political and peaceful atmosphere, in addition to the continuous blockades and total restriction of the transport of goods and people. It is impossible to imagine that the WB would record economic growth in an environment marked by the presence of 563 Israeli military barriers in the WB, in addition to 185 settlements, 480 thousand settlers and the Separation Wall, not to mention the denial of access to Jerusalem and large areas of the Jordan Valley. The situation is much worse in the GS, where there is a total collapse of all aspects of life due to the Israeli blockade, which is in place since mid-June 2007. In GS, nearly 80% of the population live on humanitarian aids provided by various international organizations and agencies.

The Palestinian economy continued to suffer in the WB and GS in 2007 due to the economy's structural problems. For one, the economy is fundamentally dependent on the Israeli economy. WB and GS export 64% of their products to Israel, while 86% of their imports are from Israel. Palestinian economy depends

on the Israeli economy because of the Israeli occupation and military conditions on ground. The damage done to the Palestinian economy by the Israeli occupation can be seen directly on the agricultural and industrial sectors, and on the Palestinian competencies and professionals. The Palestinian economy is surviving on international aids and grants, which are by nature conditional and limited to only certain projects. If the current situation continues, this economy, and hence the Palestinian people in the WB and GS, will sink into a much deeper crisis than the current one.

Most of those who are concerned with the Palestinian economy agree that 2007 was the worst year ever since the Israeli occupation of the WB and GS in 1967. It is worth noting that the level of deterioration and slump in overall economic activities in the GS were greater than those in the WB are. The siege imposed on the WB, specifically since June 2007, affected all of its economic sectors and had an impact on all economic indicators. It also deprived the population of the most basic requirements of daily life; as the rates of poverty and unemployment surged to unprecedented levels and economic growth simply ceased to exist. Such were the immediate results of the Israeli siege of Gaza and of the political and economic positions taken by various local, regional and international parties in the wake of Hamas's control over Gaza. The World Bank's report stated that the rate of poverty exceeded 67% of the population in the GS, while other organizations brought this estimate to 80%. In contrast, the international community showed sympathy towards the PA in the WB, where the pumping of international aids was resumed. The Paris Donors' Conference held in December 2007 also promised to provide \$7.4 billion of aids and grants to the PA within the next three years.

Two other features marked the year 2007:

1. There was an unprecedented rise in prices, particularly those of basic and vital commodities in the WB and GS, as compared to those at the end of 2006. This introduced direct challenges and effects on the purchasing power of citizens and on the demand for commodities, services and production in general.

2. There was a collapse in the exchange rates of the US dollar against other currencies, particularly the Israeli shekel, with which it registered a reduction of 8% by the end of 2007 as compared to its rate at the end of 2006. This collapse

had various effects on individuals, institutions and the Palestinian economy in general. However, the continuation of this collapse without proper economic, financial or monetary policies to limit its negative effects threw the burden of facing the crisis on individuals, whether within families or institutions. This will lead to economic losses that could have been reduced if appropriate policies had been in place.

As the Palestinian economy almost totally depends on the political and security considerations of external forces, particularly those pertinent to Israel, this has led to the restriction of its chances for development and further led to its increased dependence on imports, especially those coming from Israel. At the same time, its exports have decreased dramatically because of the siege imposed on it. This has led to an increase in the trade deficit to unprecedented levels.

Since 1967, the private sector in the occupied Palestinian lands, and particularly in the GS, has been playing the major role in the Palestinian economy. In GS, the private sector is the primary driver behind the economic development and advancement process, and the generator of more than 50% of all job opportunities. For this reason, the Israeli authorities have continuously focused on targeting it with their arbitrary practices that aim at curbing the ability of this sector to grow and develop. The productivity of the private sector in the GS has decreased from 76% in 2000 to 11% after the total closure on GS was imposed in mid-June 2007.

First: National Accounts

The preliminary estimates of the national accounts issued by the PCBS for 2007 indicates a slight growth in the GDP at fixed prices in 2007; a percentage of 0.7% compared to the situation in 2006. The GDP value rose from \$4.11 billion in 2006 to about \$4.14 billion in 2007.

On the other hand, some economic activities, such as industry, mining, construction and services suffered a slight decline, while other sectors, such as agriculture, wholesale and retail trade, transport and storage, financial brokerage, general administration and defense witnessed an increase.

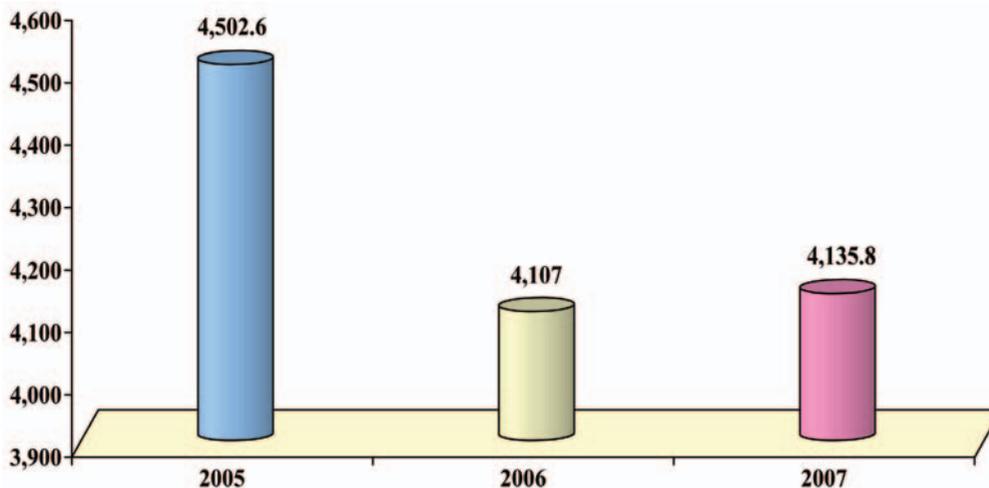
**Table 1/8: GDP in WB and GS 2005–2007 at Constant
Prices: Base Year is 1997 (\$ million)**

Year	2005	2006	2007*
GDP	4,502.6	4,107	4,135.8

Source: PCBS.

* Preliminary estimates (first release).

GDP in WB and GS 2005–2007 (\$ million)



Second: Economic Sectors

According to the preliminary estimates available on the performance of the economic sectors that comprise the 2007 GDP, the general trend is marked with confusion and unbalance due to the difference in situations, occupation conditions, and siege between the WB and GS, especially during the second half of the year. There was a relative improvement in the WB, while the siege was intensified and the suffering exacerbated in the GS.

1. Agriculture and Fishing

Agricultural production in the WB and GS is an important, productive activity. The agricultural sector plays a major role in the Palestinian economy through its significant share of foreign trade. These exports represent 25% of the overall Palestinian exports. The agricultural sector also provides many raw and primary materials to various other economic sectors.

The area of cultivated land is approximately 1.8 million donums; 91% of which are in the WB and 9% in the GS. They represent 30% of the total area of the WB and GS. The agricultural sector consumes approximately 60% of the total consumption of water, i.e., 160 million cubic meters of water for irrigation, most of which are groundwater.

Preliminary estimates available with the PCBS indicate that the total value added by agricultural and fishing economic activities in 2007 registered a growth of \$6.8 million, which represents approximately 2%. It increased from \$334 million in 2006 to \$340.8 million in 2007. The agriculture and fishing sectors' contribution to the GDP was approximately 8.2%.

2. Mining, Manufacturing, Water and Electricity

The mining and industry sectors in the WB and GS faced numerous difficulties and problems related to the structure and volume of the industry and the inability to find new markets for its products. In addition, it suffered from problems related to the shortage in the necessary funding, equipment and industrial supplies, lack of raw materials as well as the irregularity in receiving imported raw materials. The industrial sector also suffered from lower productive efficiency rates, higher production costs, a clear deficiency in the specialized and the absence of administration and planning within the industrial sector. These problems and obstacles are linked to the Israeli occupation policy that focuses on preventing or impeding any development or growth of the industrial sector in the WB and GS. The number of factories, plants and workshops that have been affected negatively in one-way or another reached approximately 3,900 industrial facilities.

According to the industrial survey conducted by the Ministry of Industry in 1998, the number of industrial facilities in the WB and GS is approximately 13,850. Most of them are small facilities of a workshop nature. Manufacturing come on the top of the list in terms of the number of facilities, followed by the mining industry.

Preliminary estimates indicate a decrease in the added value of mining, Manufacturing, water and electricity in the WB and GS in 2007; as it went down from \$531.1 million in 2006 to \$527.3 million in 2007, at a decline rate of approximately 0.7%. Manufacturing formed the major part of this sector, with a contribution of 82.7% of the total activity of mining, manufacturing, water and electricity in 2007. The mining, manufacturing, water and electricity sector contributed 12.7% of the GDP in the same year.

3. Construction

The gross value added to the construction sector in the WB and GS witnessed a slight decline in 2007, where it dropped from \$104 million in 2006 to \$103.8 million in 2007, i.e., 0.2%. It should be noted that this sector came to a halt in the second half of 2007 in Gaza after the Israeli occupation imposed a complete closure on GS thus preventing the entrance of all supplies necessary for the construction sector, and hence the suspension of construction projects in Gaza. This means that the set back in this sector in GS was covered up mainly by that in the WB. The construction sector's contribution to the GDP in 2007 was 2.5%, which is the same percentage registered in the previous year.

4. Wholesale and Retail Trade

The available preliminary estimates indicate 8.5% growth in the value added to the wholesale and retail trade in the WB and GS in 2007, increasing in value from \$382.7 million in 2006 to \$415.2 million in 2007. This sector's contribution to the GDP in 2007 was 10%.

5. Transport, Storage and Communications

According to the preliminary estimated data for 2007, the transport, storage and communications sectors in the WB and GS reported a growth of 2.7%; as it increased from \$466 million in 2006 to \$478.5 million in 2007. The contribution made by these sectors to the GDP rose from 11.3% in 2006 to 11.6% in 2007.

6. Financial Intermediation

The preliminary estimates indicate 3.1% growth in the value added on the financial intermediation activity in the WB and GS in 2007 from \$186.7 million in 2006 to \$192.5 million in 2007. The contribution of this sector to the GDP in 2007 was 4.7%.

7. Services

The total value added on the services sector has witnessed a set back for the second year in a row in 2007. The value of these activities went down from \$940.2 million in 2006 to an estimated \$906.1 million in 2007, marking a decline of 3.6%. In 2007, the service sector accounted for 21.9% of the GDP, compared to 22.9% in 2006. A detailed look at the activities in this sector shows that real estate, renting and commercial services represented 37.9% of the sector's total, at a value of \$343.2 million. Next was education, with a contribution of \$314.8 million

in value and 34.7% of the service sector's total. The health sector represented a 15.1% share of this sector's total, at a value of \$136.4 million, followed by the restaurants and hotels sector, at a value of \$67.8 million, and then the community, social and personal services activities, at a value of \$43.9 million.

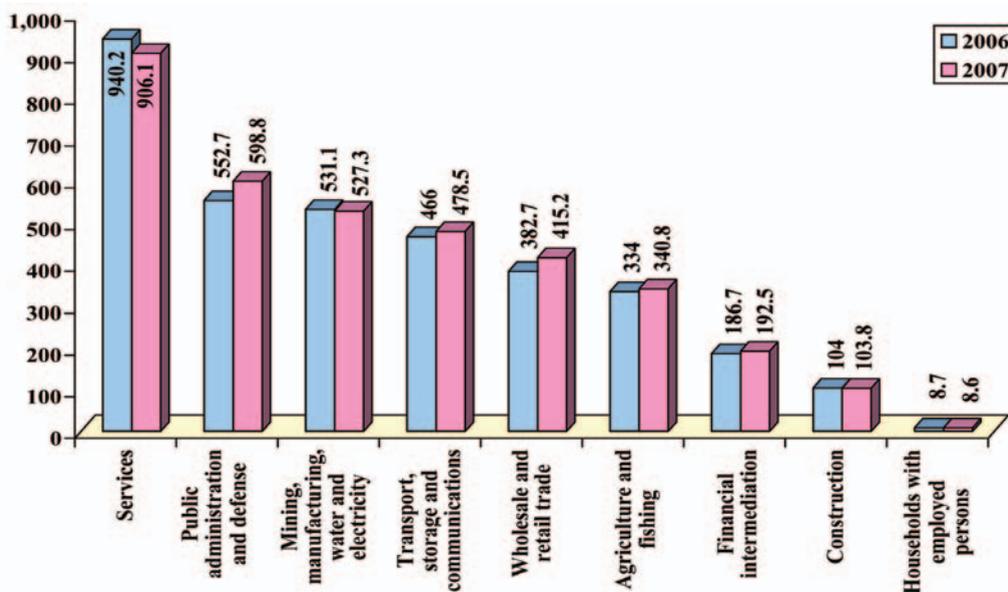
Table 2/8: GDP in WB and GS by Economic Activity 2006–2007 at Constant Prices: Base Year is 1997 (\$ million)

Economic Activity	2006	2007*
Agriculture and fishing	334	340.8
Mining, manufacturing, water and electricity	531.1	527.3
- Mining and quarrying	18	21.3
- Manufacturing	444	436
- Electricity and water supplies	69.1	70
Construction	104	103.8
Wholesale and retail trade	382.7	415.2
Transport, storage and communications	466	478.5
Financial intermediation	186.7	192.5
Services	940.2	906.1
- Real estate, renting and business services	447.8	343.2
- Community, social and personal services	43.6	43.9
- Restaurants and hotels	67	67.8
- Education	255.3	314.8
- Health and social work	126.5	136.4
Public administration and defense	552.7	598.8
Households with employed persons	8.7	8.6
Less: Financial Intermediation Services Indirectly Measured (FISIM)	-138.3	-139.8
Plus: Custom duties	284.9	284
Plus: Value Added Tax (VAT) on imports, net	454.3	420
GDP	4,107	4,135.8

Source: PCBS.

* Preliminary estimates (first release).

GDP in WB and GS by Economic Activity 2006–2007 (\$ million)



8. Public Administration and Defense

The value added on the public administration and defense sector reported an approximate growth of 8.3% in 2007 as compared to 2006. This sector grew from \$552.7 million in 2006 to approximately about \$598.8 million in 2007. Its contribution to the GDP climbed from 13.5% in 2006 to 14.5% in 2007. It is believed that the increase in the value of this sector is due to the increase in government expenditures in the form of salaries due to the public sector and security apparatus employees.

Third: The GDP per Capita

Table 3/8 depicts the change in the GDP per capita in the WB and GS during the period 2005–2007 at fixed prices according to the preliminary estimates issued by the PCBS. The GDP per capita in 2007 registered a growth of 4.3%, rising from about \$1,129 in 2006 to about \$1,178 in 2007. It indicates a drop in the GDP per capita in the GS due to the choking Israeli siege, and an increase in the WB, which caused the overall increase in the GDP per capita for both zones.

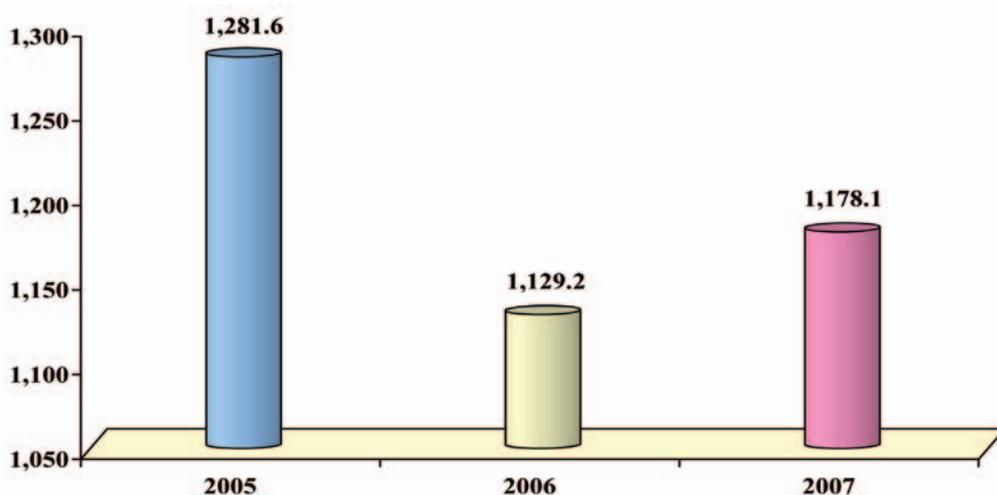
Table 3/8: GDP per Capita in WB and GS 2005–2007 at Constant Prices: Base Year is 1997 (\$)

Year	2005	2006	2007*
Estimated GDP per capita	1,281.6	1,129.2	1,178.1

Source: PCBS.

* Preliminary estimates (first release).

GDP per Capita in WB and GS 2005–2007 (\$)



Fourth: Public Finance

The financial situation of the PA in 2007 was marked by confusion and dearth in documented data. The Ministry of Finance provided its data quite late. This forced the researchers to search for relevant information in the press, from the officials of the Ministry of Finance, the PCBS, the Palestinian Monetary Authority (PMA) and various international organizations. We should note in this context that the territories of the PA have been witnessing an exceptional situation since mid-2007, with the WB is under the control of the Presidency and Ramallah’s emergency government, whereas the GS is under the control of the dismissed government headed by Isma‘il Haniyyah. In these

conditions, any improvement in the Palestinian Authority's financial situation will not necessarily reflect on both regions; While the WB witnessed a relative improvement, GS had been increasingly suffering from suffering the siege, hardships, and poverty.

1. Public Revenues

The Ministry of Finance's report on the financial operations of the PA, in terms of revenues, expenditures and finance sources on a cash basis in 2007, indicates that the total revenues were about \$1.62 billion. However, among the total revenue, local revenues were no more than \$323 million, out of which \$202 million were tax revenues. Most of the revenues were clearance revenues (resulting from Palestinian imports and exports) collected by the Israeli government. These amounted to about \$1.32 billion, but the actual clearance revenues in 2007 were no more than \$896 million, according to the PA's data. The remaining clearance balance (\$422 million) was collected from outstanding dues in 2006, which were withheld by Israel. It had refused to deliver them to the Hamas-led government. This means that the sum of revenues was about \$1.19 billion, after deducting the 2006 outstanding dues. There is a large increase in the PA revenues in 2007 in comparison to 2006 (about \$1.62 billion as opposed to \$676 million, i.e., an increase of 139.1%). That reflects the improvement of relations between the Palestinian presidency and the Ramallah's emergency government on one side and Israel and the US on the other side, brought about by the dismissal of the national unity government headed by Hamas.

2. Public Expenditure

The PA's Ministry of Finance indicated that the total spending in 2007, on a cash basis, were about \$2.57 billion, compared to \$1.39 billion in 2006, an increase of 84.7%. Salaries and wages represented 53.3% (about \$1.37 billion) compared to 47.5% in 2006 (about \$660 million), according to the data of the Ministry of Finance.

The PA's budget deficit was covered by the foreign budgetary support, which amounted to about \$1.01 billion in 2007 (see table 4/8).

Table 4/8: Report on the Financial Operations of the Palestinian National Authority: Revenues, Expenditures and Finance Resources (Cash Basis) 2006–2007 (\$ million)

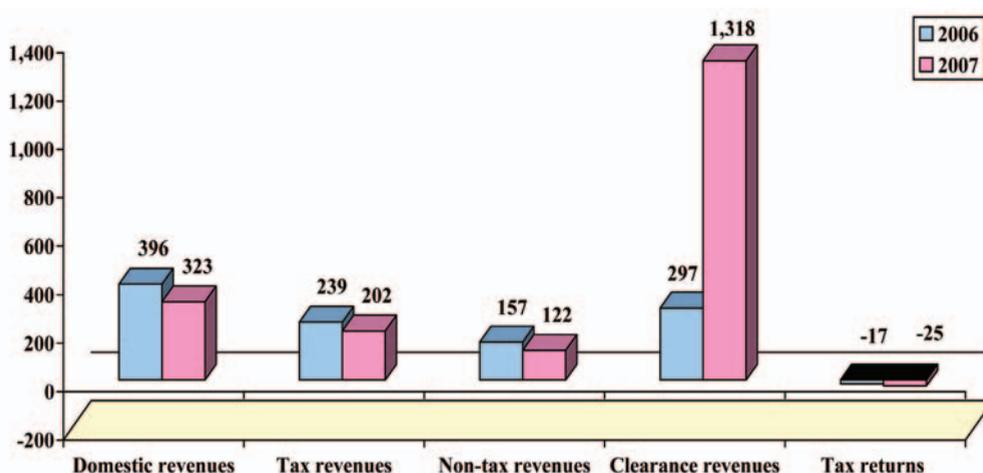
Financial Operations	2006	2007
Net public revenues	676	1,616
Domestic revenues	396	323
- Tax revenues	239	202
- Non-tax revenues	157	122
Clearance revenues	297	1,318
Tax returns (-)	-17	-25
Total current expenditure and net lending		
	1,390	2,567
Salaries and wages	660	1,369
Other current expenses*	393	663
Net lending**	337	535
Balance		
	-714	-951
Budget subsidization	741	1,012
Balance after budget subsidization	27	61
Finance of development costs	281	310
Total balance (incl. development costs)	-254	-249
Other sources of financing		
	254	249
Advances from Palestinian Investment Fund (PIF)	146	78
Net bank finance	-172	-132
External financing for development costs	281	310
External debt	0	0
Remaining balance	-1	-6
Remarks		
Dollar exchange rate, budget	4.5	4.2
Dollar exchange rate, actual (annual average)	4.46	4.1

Source: Ministry of Finance–PA.

* Includes locally funded simple development costs.

** Includes transfers related to marketing oil products.

PA Revenues 2006–2007 (\$ million)



Fifth: Grants and Foreign Aids

As is well known, a severe siege was imposed on the elected Palestinian government in early 2006 with the suspension of foreign aids and grants that were used to support the PA's budget and the Palestinian economy in the WB and GS. This is in addition to the restrictions imposed on the operation of banks to prevent them from dealing with the Palestinian government, and disallowing them to pass funds transferred from some donors to the unified treasury account. However, international aids and grants were resumed in 2006. According to the data of the Ministry of Finance, foreign aid received by the PA from various donors (EU, Arab and Islamic states, Russia, and international organizations and agencies) in 2006 amounted to approximately about \$738.2 million.

Grants and foreign aids in support of the PA's budget in 2007 amounted to about \$1.01 billion, according to the figures of the Ministry of Finance. However, the preliminary estimates indicate an increase in the overall size of grants and international aids in 2007 to approximately about \$1.42 billion.

Parts of these aids were provided without any coordination with the government. Instead, they were received in unsystematic flows of content, management, or dates; which diminished the possibility of managing, directing, planning or investing this aid on the basis of a unified plan or vision. This weakened the Palestinian Authority's financial system and reduced its capacity to influence developments in the economy.

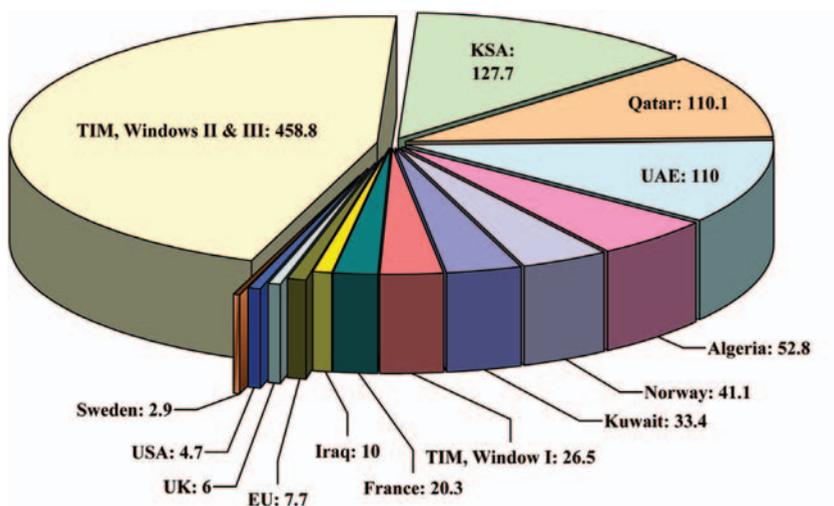
It is also noteworthy that the flow of aid from donor states and organizations resumed directly to the PA following the formation of the caretaker government. Previously, as the flow took indirect forms.

Table 5/8: Foreign Aid for the PA's Budget 2007 (\$ million)

Donor Countries	2007
Qatar	110.1
UAE	110
KSA	127.7
Algeria	52.8
Kuwait	33.4
Iraq	10
France	20.3
Sweden	2.9
Norway	41.1
USA	4.7
UK	6
EU	7.7
Temporary International Mechanism (TIM), Windows II & III	458.8
TIM, Window I, Emergency Services Support Program	26.5
Total External Funding	1,012

Source: Ministry of Finance-PA.

Foreign Aid for the PA's Budget 2007 (\$ million)



The report issued by the EU on the total European aid provided through the Temporary International Mechanism indicated that the total accrued amounts within the program was about €421.07 million (approximately \$632 million) through the three following windows:

1. Window I: It aimed at providing essential supplies and running costs of hospitals and health care centers, education and social services. through the World Bank's Emergency Services Support Program.
2. Window II: The European Commission solely funded this and it is implemented through the Interim Emergency Relief Contribution (IERC). It was used to provide access to electricity, health care, water and sanitation.
3. Window III: It provided payment of social allowances to the poorest (Social Hardship Cases) and to key workers delivering essential public services (Low Income Cases—LIC). Over 77 thousand households receive TIM social allowances under the LIC scheme. The total expenditure through this window was about €225.96 million (approximately \$339 million).

Development and Reform plan

In this context, 87 countries and international organizations pledged, during the “International Donors’ Conference for the Palestinian State” held in Paris on 17/12/2007, to give aid amounting to \$7.4 billion to the PA over a period of three years. The PA had presented the conference with a three-year fiscal framework (the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan—PRDP) that covers the course of 2008–2010. This plan gives off a rescue nature and includes reconstruction of the infrastructure and providing the salaries for the PA employees. It states three major foundations for actual development in the WB and GS:

1. The enforcement of law and order in the WB and GS; and carrying out vital reforms that enable the PA to establish a sustainable economy and active institutions that would form the nucleus of the independent state.
2. The removal of all obstacles put by Israel that hinder the progress of the government and economy, and consequently the establishment of a viable Palestinian state.
3. Requesting the continued support of the international community to the Palestinian people and their steadfastness; and providing coordinated and flexible support to the PA.

The plan promises the donors with achieving real change and development in four areas: good governance, social sector, private sector, and infrastructure. The execution of this plan is based on the implementation of the three aforementioned foundations.

Sixth: The Israeli Siege and Closure

Economic observers notice that the siege and closure imposed by the Israeli occupation on the Palestinian economy over the past years had great negative effect on all sectors of the Palestinian economy. This was due to the link and interrelationship existing between the economy in the WB and GS on the one hand, and the Israeli economy on the other. The post–Oslo years failed to reinforce the Arab and regional depth of this economy, and hence failed to end the state of subservience to and dependence on Israel.

The siege is nothing new. In fact, it is a feature of the Israeli occupation and a vital part of its policy. However, the damage and loss inflicted on the Palestinian economy in 2007 because of the Israeli siege were great. They included the following major features:

- A drop in the production capacity of working facilities.
- A large drop in the employment of the labor force.
- A large drop in sales volume.
- A drop in the construction and services sectors.
- A negative impact on the agricultural sector, due to the procedures applied by Israel to destroy and ruin Palestinian agricultural lands.
- A drop in the volume of investments, in general, and particularly, in the GS.

Following the control of Hamas of the GS on 14/6/2007, Israel intensified the siege on Gaza by sealing off all its access points and isolated it from the outside world. The Israeli government even issued a decision on 23/9/2007 declaring the GS a hostile entity. It punished its residents by allowing only limited amount of food and fuel, into the GS. The Popular Committee Against Siege (PCAS) issued a report explained the impact and results of the siege from all aspects and on all sectors, and on the 1.5 million people living in GS. The Committee mentioned that the direct monthly losses caused by the siege are over \$45 million; \$15 million for the industrial sector, \$10 million for the agricultural sector and \$20 million for

the other sectors: commercial, construction, services and fishing. According to the report, unemployment in the GS exceeded 60%.

The effects of the total closure on the GS (following Hamas's control over the GS) are summarized in the following way:

- Sealing of crossings halted the flow of exports and imports from and to the GS; this led to a negative impact on the capacity of all economic sectors and to severe suffering in all aspects of life.
- More than 90% of industrial establishments in the GS ceased to operate and the number of workers there dropped from 35 thousand to approximately two thousand workers. The same goes true for the agricultural sector, whose exports almost totally ceased. Additionally, more than 80% of the crops were damaged as fertilizers and pesticides were not allowed into Gaza. There was also a major deterioration in the construction, trade and service sectors. Hence, many workers lost their jobs and income.
- Continuous increase in the general level of prices (by approximately 10%). This led to a forced change in the patterns of consumption among Palestinian families.
- Increase in unemployment and poverty. It should be emphasized that unemployment in the GS exceeds 60% of the 300 thousand workers.
- Tourism sector was completely paralyzed. Tourism and travel companies and bureaus are on the verge of bankruptcy. Hotel owners suffered too, as the number of guests were almost nil. In general, hotel activities in the GS suffered a decline in 2007 in terms of the number of guests and nights that were booked compared to 2006. The number of hotel guests dropped by 38.3%, whereas the number of nights that were booked dropped by 17.6%.

Many economists believe that the occupation policies made the GS an unparalleled, catastrophe zone. The population is suffering from a siege that has paralyzed the movement of people and goods from and to the GS and destroyed all forms of trade exchange. Hence, the GS has depended almost totally on importing goods from or through Israel since the start of its siege. The occupation forces do not allow either the entry of any raw material into the GS or the export of any of its products.

Seventh: Work, Unemployment and Living Standard

The Palestinian community is a vigorous one, known for its high rates of fertility, economic dependence and large number of family members compared to regional and international averages. The percentage of individuals under 15 years of age is 45.5% of the population in the WB and GS. The overall fertility rate in the WB and the GS is 4.6 children per woman, with an average of 4.2 children per woman in the WB and 5.4 children per woman in the GS. This explains the high natural growth rates in the WB and GS. The rate of economic dependence has increased, due to the increased rates of unemployment from 4.8% in 2000 to 7.7% in August 2007. This rate rose in the GS to 8.5% due to the total lack of job opportunities, increased rates of unemployment, and increased and rapid spread of poverty due to the siege and tight blockade imposed by the Israeli occupation authorities. Accordingly, the rate of poverty has increased among Palestinian families. The percentage of Palestinians living below the poverty line rose from 22% in 2000 to approximately 67% in 2007, according to the sum total of the figures for the WB and GS. By the end of 2007, the rate of poverty in Gaza reached 90%. The rate of unemployment increased from 11% in 2000 to 40% in 2007. In the GS, this rate exceeded 60% after the intense blockade and siege.

It is worth noting that tens of thousands of Palestinian workers work illegally within the Green Line and without work permits. More than 50 thousand Palestinian workers work inside the line. They are extorted and not paid their full wages and given rights. Additionally, the majority of these workers live in difficult and inhumane conditions, as they live in deserted buildings, which lack basic services.

Eighth: The Banking Sector

Indicators show a 22% growth in the banking sector in the WB and GS in 2007 as compared to 2006. Total bank assets amounted to \$7 billion, the paid capital rose to \$530 million and bank deposits amounted to \$5.1 billion. The banking sector managed to avoid the political tensions resulting from the division that followed the schism in Gaza, isolating the banking system from this condition as

much as possible. Banks overcame the risks posed by the problem of failure to pay salaries and the ensuing liabilities. This situation was a threat to some banks due to the increased rate of loans provided to the employee sector, in WB and GS, in comparison to the overall lending portfolio.

Banks operating in the GS suffered grave crises and immense pressure due to the financial siege imposed by Israel on GS. This led to a shortage in foreign currencies, which are used by Palestinians in their economic dealings. However, the financial exchange transactions in GS continued to be hindered, causing a reduction in the liquidity available there. This is in addition to the threats by Israeli banks to sever their links with banks operating in the GS that dealt with the Hamas government.

Ninth: Consumer Price Index

The PCBS announced in 2007 that the Palestinian Consumer Price Index (CPI) in the WB and GS have increased by 2.69% compared to 2006. The overall CPI with its 1996 base year (1996=100) reached 156.41, as compared to 152.31 in 2006. It might be prudent to be cautious when considering this ratio, as some estimates indicate that CPI increased by 10.5% in 2007. According to the PCBS itself, comparing November 2007 with November 2006, reveals a 5.97% increase in the CPI in the WB and GS. It is also worth noting that this increase was mainly in food and basic supplies, which made the poor families more vulnerable. For example, in August 2007 the price of flour went up by 21.14%, the price of bread by 8.32%, dairy products and eggs by 4.66%, oils and fats by 5.28%, tobacco products by 8.08%, and fuel and energy by 2.35%. Prices of vital commodities increased successively during the following months, while the prices of unessential commodities dropped. Assessing the consumption in US dollar and considering the Jordanian dinar exchange rates, we find that the steep increase in the CPI doubles to 13.6% and 12.9% respectively.

Focusing on Gaza alone, particularly in the second half of 2007, we find that consumers faced tremendous suffering due to the complete siege. Gaza markets witnessed severe deficiency in basic food supplies and a large number of food commodities disappeared from the market. Gaza experienced a rise in

the prices of numerous food and essential commodities and supplies. The report issued by Al Dameer Association for Human Rights indicates that the rise in prices in six months, because of the intense siege since June 2007, ranged between 30–1,000%, depending on the availability of supplies. Following are a few examples of the severe increase in prices, according to the report developed by Al Dameer Association for Human Rights.

Table 6/8: Price Increase in the GS in the Second Half of 2007

Commodity	Weight/ Quantity	Before siege on 15/6/2007		Six months after the siege	
		Price in shekels	Price in dollars*	Price in shekels	Price in dollars*
Meat	1 kg	38	9.9	60	15.7
Chicken	1 kg	-	-	9.5	2.5
Flour	Sack (50 kg)	90	23.5	135	35.2
Sugar	Sack (50 kg)	110	28.7	115	30
Olive oil	Gallon (1 liter)	19	5	21	5.5
Regular tea	1 kg	18	4.7	26	6.8
Horse beans (Ful)	Sack (25 kg)	87.5	22.8	125	32.6
Chickpeas	1 kg	5	1.3	6	1.6
Cement	Sack (50 kg)	16	4.2	200	52.2
White cement	Sack (50 kg)	40	10.4	270	70.5
Home butane	Cylinder (14 kg)	40	10.4	59	15.4
Gasoline	1 liter	5.13	1.3	6	1.6
Diesel fuel	1 liter	3	0.8	5	1.3
White kerosene	1 liter	3	0.8	5	1.3
Cigarettes	1 pack	5–10	1.3–2.6	15–30	3.9–7.8
Molasses tobacco	Small pack	2	0.5	23	6

Source: Al Dameer Association for Human Rights.

*US\$ exchange rate: 3.83 shekels.

Tenth: Palestine Securities Exchange

In spite of the events of 2007 that rocked the different sectors of economic life in the WB and GS, Palestine Securities Exchange (PSE) was slightly affected. The yearly results showed a reasonable drop in the values of circulated shares, which was approximately \$800 million. The market capitalization value at the end of 2007 was approximately \$2.4 billion. The number of transactions exceeded 150 thousands and the volume of circulated shares was approximately 300 million. On the performance level, indicated by the major market indices, al-Quds index closed by the end of 2007 at 527.26 points, dropping 77.74 points, i.e., 12.85% less compared to the 2006 closing. This decrease is due to the fall of the indices of all the sectors, where the banking sector index fell by 23.14%, the industry sector index a drop of 40.27%, the insurance sector a drop of 3.75%, the services sector a drop of 8.82% and the investment sector a drop of 14.39%.

Eleventh: Foreign Trade

The Palestinian economy still suffers from structural disorders due to the Israeli occupation. It remains a “dependent economy,” reliant on Israeli political, security and economic developments. Israel’s control of crossing points, airports and borders greatly affects the Palestinian foreign trade. Israel also uses this situation to grant itself preferential and monopolizing advantages, forcing the Palestinian economy to deal with it as a de facto or as an inevitable choice. As such, Israel has been the origin of 86% of the imports of the PA territories in 2007, and the destination of 64% of the Palestinian exports. Even though the occupation was partially alleviated in the WB, in comparison to the suffocating siege on the GS, yet the deplorable Israeli occupation continued to pin down both areas to prevent the Palestinian economy from achieving any true growth that would actually underscore the abilities and capacities of the Palestinian people.

The figures of the PCBS show that the overall Palestinian exports in 2007 were \$397.4 million, compared to \$339.1 million in 2006. Total imports in 2007 were about \$2.61 billion, compared to about \$2.84 billion in 2006. The following table depicts the Palestinian foreign trade with the countries of the world, according to the PCBS.

Table 7/8: Total Value of Exports, Imports, Net Balance and Transaction Trade in Goods for WB* and GS 1995–2007 (\$ million)

Year	Total value of exports	Total value of imports	Net balance trade	Transaction trade
1995	394.2	1,658.2	-1,264	2,052.4
1996	339.5	2,016.1	-1,676.6	2,355.6
1997	382.4	2,238.6	-1,856.2	2,621
1998	394.8	2,375.1	-1,980.3	2,769.9
1999	372.1	3,007.2	-2,635.1	3,379.3
2000	400.9	2,382.8	-1,981.9	2,783.7
2001	290.3	2,033.6	-1,743.3	2,323.9
2002	240.9	1,515.6	-1,274.7	1,756.5
2003	279.7	1,800.3	-1,520.6	2,080
2004	312.7	2,373.2	-2,060.5	2,685.9
2005	335.4	2,666.8	-2,331.4	3,002.2
2006**	339.1	2,835.4	-2,496.3	3,174.5
2007***	397.4	2,605	-2,207.6	3,002.4

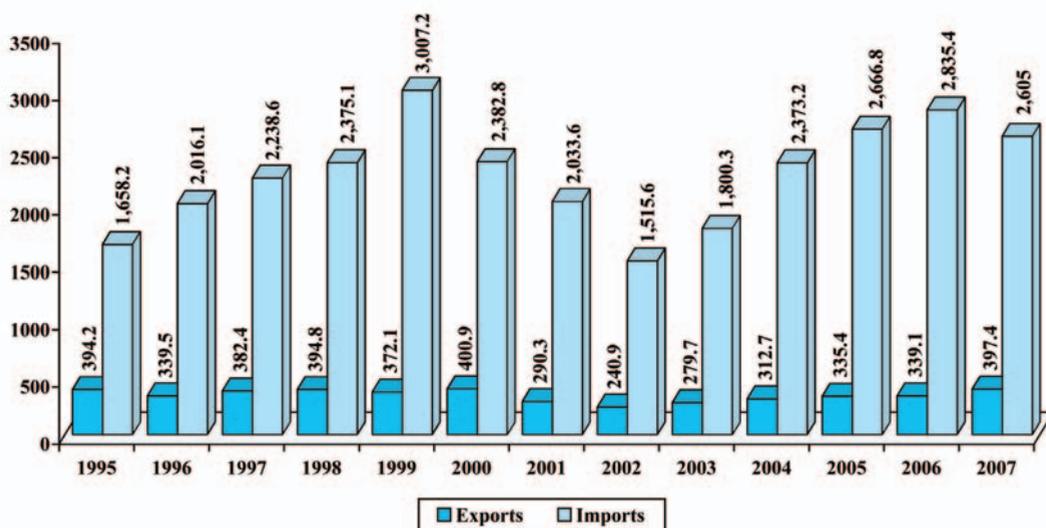
Source: PCBS.

* Excluding the areas of East Jerusalem which were annexed by Israel in 1967.

** Preliminary data–PCBS.

*** Estimated data.

Total Value of Exports and Imports of WB and GS 1995–2007 (\$ million)



Twelfth: Management of the Economic Situation by the PA and the Government

The PA has no economic and developmental vision, and this has had detrimental effects on the Palestinian economy. In fact, the economic reality in the presence of the PA has been, in many aspects, worse than the periods preceding its advent following the Oslo agreement. The major factor of the increasing economic ordeal under the PA is the absence of its sovereignty over the land and population, as it has no power to make and implement sovereign decisions on the Palestinian ground. The Paris Economic Agreement also intensified its dependence and imposed additional restrictions on the Palestinian economy to increase its dependence on the Israeli occupation authorities, who have full control of the land, borders, crossing points and barricades, and hence control of the internal and external trade sectors in the WB and GS. Following the advent of the PA, the Israeli occupation authorities continued to be the actual controller of the economy and of its capacities to develop and grow.

The PA should have developed plans to break free from the restrictions of the Israeli occupier and encourage the establishment of a public economic sector that would have worked towards producing part of the local market's basic needs and towards assisting the private sector to increase its investments in the productive sectors. This should have been done instead of building a sluggish and aged bureaucratic apparatus that set the authority's expenditure far beyond its resources and subjected it to the stipulations of donor states. This brought recipes for increasing and entrenching the dependence of the Palestinian economy in the WB and GS on the Israeli economy.

The mismanagement and corruption that are the characteristics of the PA have contributed to exacerbating the Palestinian economy's ordeal and increasing its dependence on external directives and wills. This has maximized the dependence of the Palestinian economy on the occupier and aggravated its crises. The overall indicators of this economy show a large increase in unemployment and external and internal debts. Prices have increased, the citizen's purchasing power has declined, as has their ability to save, and the Palestinian trade's dependence on the occupier has increased.

To emerge from the economic ordeal experienced by the WB and GS, the current dominant approach must be changed and different policies that will end the Palestinian economy's dependence on the occupier. This is to be done by adopting policies based on developing national production, encouraging productive investments, combating corruption, and following scientific management policies that enjoy credibility and transparency. Ending the dependence of the Palestinian economy on the Israeli economy is a process that can only succeed when there are policies, plans and actual activity on the ground that work towards linking the Palestinian economy with other Arab economies, benefiting from the abilities of the Arab markets, and realizing free and varied external economic relationships.

Thirteenth: The Economic Link with Israel

The policies and practices of the Israeli occupying authorities have contributed to deepening the dependence of the Palestinian economy on the Israeli economy, marred it with structural distortions, and made it weak, fragile and dependent. Controlling the crossing points and borders has placed external trade in the WB and GS under the full control of the Israeli occupation authorities. The Palestinian market has become the second largest market for Israeli exports. As such, the contribution made by the industrial sector remained within the same limits as it was in 1967. Because of the siege, blockade, prevention of movement of people and goods, separation of markets, destruction of the infrastructure and control of external trade, the GDP suffered fluctuations that affected the level and development of economic life in the WB and GS. A number of factors have led the Palestinian economy to be a slave economy with the following features: mandatory customs unity with Israel under an open market system; high direct taxes; dependence and reliance on Israeli economy. Furthermore, the use of the Israeli currency in the WB and GS has enabled the Israeli occupying authorities to tighten their hold on the Palestinian economy and control its development. It has also made the Palestinian economy sensitive to any fluctuations in the value of shekel and Israeli monetary policies, and it has weakened the ability of the Palestinian people to save and invest.

Conclusion

The deep economic crisis suffered by the WB and GS cannot be discussed and the attempts to solve it cannot be made unless the current Palestinian reality is taken into consideration. The features of this reality are:

- The presence of an occupier with racial practices.
- The current efforts to intensify the partition between the WB and GS.
- The resulting signs and indicators of political, economic and social disintegration.
- The ordeal of Israel's unilateral control over the form and essence of proposed solutions in accordance with its political and security aims.
- Pushing the Palestinian people towards despair and helplessness.
- The degradation and weakness of the Palestinian political system within both the PA and the PLO. A continuation of this situation will lead to the total destruction of the Palestinian national liberation endeavor.

Therefore, finding solutions for the economic crisis in the WB and GS requires working towards the development of a new formula and vision that replaces the previous means and methods, and towards the development of an equation, that concurrently combines politics and economy. This is because all the signs indicate that it would be difficult to fulfill the development and growth of the Palestinian economy under the presence of the Israeli occupation and its destructive policies.

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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



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