

The Palestinian Strategic Report

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Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

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The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

None of the Arab countries worked, in 2009 and 2010, to become an active part of the political equation pertaining to the Palestinian issue. This was despite the continuous Israeli threats to the Palestinian issue; including the occupation and siege, the intensive plans of settlement building and Judaization particularly in Jerusalem and the rest of the WB, not to mention the Palestinian schism and the setbacks that faced the peace settlement track. It is clear that the weakness and divisions in the Arab world held the Arab regimes from achieving any positive, tangible results. The Arab efforts, in 2009 and 2010, were focused on bridging the Palestinian gap, especially by Egypt, in addition to endorsing the Arab Peace Initiative and supporting the Palestinian negotiator in the peace settlement track. On the other hand, Syria continued to embrace the “refusal front” (*al-mumana‘ah*) and resistance groups opposed to the Oslo Agreement.

This chapter displays the Arab stances vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue during 2009 and part of 2010, including the performance of the Arab League and the stances of some Arab countries, particularly KSA and the frontline countries. Moreover, it displays the popular positions and developments of normalization with Israel.

First: The Stands of the Arab League and the Arab Summit

The division in the Arab world continued in 2009 and it cast its shadows on the performance of the Arab League regarding the Palestinian issue. This was evident in the failure of the Arab League to bring the Palestinian factions together or put an end to the schism.

The year 2009 witnessed a clear Arab reaction against the Israeli offensive on GS (27/12/2008–18/1/2009). The Arab League demonstrated its inability to deal with the challenges it faces; it failed to unify the Arabs around the Palestinian issue or stand against the Israeli war machine which destroyed GS and killed its people for over three weeks.



Although the Arab League succeeded in convening an emergency meeting for the Arab Foreign Ministers, in late 2008, to discuss the Israeli aggression on the GS, the meeting which lasted over 10 hours failed to adopt a clear stand pushing to end the offensive. The final statement only condemned the aggression and called for an immediate end to the assault, while urging the continued relief efforts. The paradox appeared when the Arab League called on the Security Council to hold an emergency session to issue a resolution that urges Israel to stop its aggression, while the League meeting, which only welcomed a Qatari-Syrian-Yemeni proposal to hold an Arab emergency summit, failed to adopt one.¹

1. Gaza Emergency Summit

There was no Arab consensus regarding holding an urgent summit, while Qatar insisted that the summit be held regardless of who attends. It succeeded in mobilizing a number of Arab countries supportive for the summit, but had not achieved the necessary quorum to convene. Both Egypt and KSA rejected to attend the summit. They considered that holding a consultative meeting on the margins of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Kuwait on 19/1/2009 would be sufficient. In response, the Qatari Prince Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al-Thani said that it was “shameful” to discuss Gaza “on the margins” of Kuwait’s Arab Economic Summit.²

Gaza Emergency Summit convened on 16/1/2009 in the presence of 13 Arab countries: Qatar, Syria, Sudan, Algeria, Lebanon, Comoros, Mauritania, Iraq, Libya, Oman, Morocco, Somalia and Djibouti.³ On the other hand, the fact that some countries apologized for not attending the summit after they have essentially agreed, reflected the size of pressures exercised on these countries to discourage them from participating in the summit. In fact, the number of participants oscillated back and forth, where it reached a majority of two-thirds more than once yet backed down. For example, Yemen was among the countries that called for holding an emergency summit yet it did not attend it when it convened. Besides, the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas did not attend the meeting and justified his absence by the lack of an Israeli permit to leave the WB. In this context, the Qatari Prime Minister Hamad Bin Jassim Al-Thani declared that his contacts with the Palestinians continued until late time of 15/1/2009 to ensure the presence of the Palestinian President. Yet, the latter declined because of pressures which, as he told the Qatari PM, would have led to his slaughter from vein to vein. Moreover,

the Qatari PM reiterated that his country had to send a plane to make sure that the Palestinian factions attend the summit, after it was sure that the PA would not participate, thus emphasizing the importance of the Palestinian representation in the summit. Worth of mention here is that the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad attended the Gaza Emergency Summit.

It is important to analyze this summit and its consequences, on the Arab and Palestinian levels, since it is clear that the game of axes took its shape in the Arab official institutions including the Arab League. Whereas, the alignment of the moderate countries with the PA, did not prevent the “refusal front” countries from supporting the resistance movements which participated in this summit. In this context, the participation of Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas political bureau, who delivered the speech of the Palestinian delegation allowed Hamas to achieve a temporary and limited breakthrough within the Arab regimes.

The limited participation in the Gaza Emergency Summit impacted its outcome where it only defined the points that would be displayed in the Economic Summit of Kuwait. The summit “condemned Israel for its savage aggression” on GS and blamed it for “committing aggression, war crimes and genocide.” Besides, it also stressed the “opening of all crossings for persons and humanitarian relief materials” and “the need for lifting the illegitimate blockade against the Strip of Gaza.” The Gaza Emergency Summit meanwhile decided to establish a reconstruction fund for Gaza and appreciated the contribution of the State of Qatar to the fund (\$250 million). The summit called upon the Arab states to suspend the Arab Peace Initiative and “cease all forms of normalization including the reconsideration of diplomatic and economic relations.”⁴

2. Kuwait Economic Summit

The conflicts between the moderation and refusal front axes prevailed on the Arab political scene prior to the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit in Kuwait, which was planned in advance on 19–20/1/2009. Nonetheless, the steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance, its outstanding performance facing the aggression, the failure of Israel in achieving a decisive victory, and the weak Arab stand overshadowed the conference and the outcome of the summit. Thus, it failed to come out with strong political decisions. The Arab Peace Initiative had the greatest share of the political differences, on one hand there were the suggestions of Gaza Emergency Summit to suspend the Arab Peace Initiative and cease all



forms of normalization with Israel. On the other hand, the Arab foreign ministers presented to the Kuwait Economic Summit recommendations to proceed with the Arab Peace Initiative without mentioning severing the relations with Israel. The participants to the conference agreed at the end on the wording of a final statement which does not refer to controversial issues, thus it demanded a stable ceasefire, holding Israel responsible for the war crimes in GS and emphasizing support for the GS and its reconstruction yet without agreement on the entity authorized to receive the funds.⁵

Facing this situation, it was likely that the Kuwait Economic Summit fall short of the minimal aspirations and demands of the Arab street. Nonetheless, the Saudi and Kuwait initiative to donate a billion dollars and \$250 million respectively for the reconstruction of GS was a positive indicator of a relative sympathy with the suffering of the Gazans. On the other hand, there was no clear mechanism of how to deliver the funds to GS which has been besieged since June 2007. There was, also, no clear program for how the resolutions of the Arab League, concerning lifting the siege and reconstruction of GS, will be implemented. These facts assured once again the extent of weakness of the Arab League.

3. The Doha Summit

The Arab League had extensive activities in the first three months of 2009, where three official summits were convened. The 21st Arab Summit which convened in Doha, on 30/3/2009, was the most prominent. The level of representation was high; where 17 Arab leaders participated in addition to different levels of representation for other countries. Whereas a delegation headed by the Minister of Legal Affairs and Parliamentary Councils, Dr. Mufid Shehab, represented Egypt.

Apparently, the inter-Arab differences had a significant impact on the Arab Summit where Arab reconciliatory meetings dominated a notable part of the summit. It was reduced to one day after it was scheduled for two. The participants concluded their meeting with an emphasis on the importance of Arab solidarity and the need for dialogue to resolve inter-Arab disagreements.

The final communiqué of the Arab Summit was very similar to that issued at the end of the Kuwait Economic Summit held in January 2009. It emphasized the need to call for ending the siege of Gaza and the need to consolidate the cease-fire while giving tribute to the resistance of the Palestinian people. In addition, it condemned

strongly the Israeli aggression on Gaza while “stressing the need to identify a specific timetable for Israel to fulfill its obligation towards the peace process.” The Doha Summit further stressed the Arab League adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative while the Arab leaders demanded “halting Israel’s unilateral policies and its procedures to dictate a *fait accompli* on the ground” including the cessation of settlement activities, dismantling the Separation Wall and not tampering with the status of Jerusalem.

On the other hand, the Second Summit of South American-Arab Countries (ASPA) was held in Doha on 31/3/2009 with the participation of 22 Arab countries and other 11 countries from Latin America. The summit called in its final statement for the establishment of the independent Palestinian State with full sovereignty living in peace side by side with the State of Israel. The statement condemned the Israeli military operations in GS and called for the reopening of all crossings between GS and Israel to allow the access of essential goods and services.⁶

On the political level, the Arab League continued to interact with the events of GS and their subsequent repercussions on the international level. In this sense, the Arab League Secretary-General ‘Amr Musa stressed the importance of the UN reports concerning GS as they refer to war crimes committed by Israel in the GS. In addition, Musa realized that there was a major breach of the International Law on the Israeli side.⁷ In the same context, the Arab League delegated two commissions to GS: the first was legally competent to examine the crimes Israel committed in the GS and the other to study the way the joint Arab work establishments would reconstruct GS.⁸

Regarding the Palestinian reconciliation, there was no action on the side of the Arab League in 2009 to end the conflict between Hamas and Fatah Movements. The League and its Secretary-General continued to support the Egyptian efforts to achieve the reconciliation. In this context, Secretary-General Musa met Khalid Mish‘al, in February 2009 in Damascus, where they discussed the inter-Palestinian reconciliation via Egyptian mediation, besides the pacification between Israel and GS and the prisoner exchange deal.

Concerning the peace settlement process and the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the Arab League continued to embrace the peace process as a strategic option as well as displaying the Arab Peace Initiative as a basis



for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict. In this respect, ‘Amr Musa reiterated that the Arab Peace Initiative was still valid, and there was consensus in the Kuwait Economic Summit that the initiative was on the table, yet this situation would not last for long.⁹ In addition, the Arab League was persistent in its support for the PA which refused to return to negotiations in the light of the Israeli settlement construction campaign in the WB including East Jerusalem. However, the Arab rejection declined after 11 months, when the USA eased the pressure off Israel and started to pressure the Palestinian side. On 3/3/2010, the Arab League’s Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee has agreed on Wednesday to back one last round of indirect Palestinian-Israeli talks. However, the Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu‘allem objected to this statement and said that the endorsement by Arab ministers of indirect talks was outside their mandate. Al-Mu‘allem said, “The decision to go to indirect or direct talks is a Palestinian decision,” and added that the PA had to bear the responsibility for such a decision. Yet, the committee’s statement was later approved by the Arab Foreign Ministers.

Concerning the Syrian conflict with the members of the Initiative follow-up committee, Musa said that there was a consensus that the US did not play the expected role. He added that the disagreement was as follows; Syria said the negotiations were to no avail and hence there was no need for a new round, while the majority believed that since Abu Mazin had received certain assurances, then the US should be given another chance, yet with reservations about the Israeli stance.¹⁰

The Arab League summit which convened in Sert in Libya, on 27–28/3/2010, continued in adopting the Arab Peace Initiative and the peace settlement track. This was reassured in the Extraordinary Arab Summit held also in Sert, on 10/10/2010. The Arab countries supported the Palestinian decision to stop peace talks with Israel, unless the latter halts the activities of building settlements in the WB. The Arab leaders discussed other alternatives in case negotiations fail, these were brokered by the US which failed to persuade the Israelis to renew the moratorium. In general, the flaccid Arab regimes are incapable of pushing up the peace process to attain the minimum Palestinian and Arab demands.

Second: The Stances and Roles of Some Key Countries

1. Egypt

During 2009, Egypt has been the major player regarding the Palestinian issue. In addition to the links of Arabism, Islam, history and geography, Egypt realizes that its national security depends on the security of its east side—its gate to Asia and to the east of the Arab and Muslim worlds. The Egyptian government has acquired a status that enables it to play a strong role in the Palestinian arena. It is the leading Arab country, the center of demographic weight, its ruling regime has links with all the Palestinian forces, and has relations with Israel and the US, which make it one of the Arab moderate countries. This role was particularly clear during the Israeli war on GS, in the efforts for achieving Palestinian national reconciliation and in tackling the siege of GS particularly the Rafah crossing issue.

a. The Stance on the Israeli Aggression on GS

The position of Egypt regarding the Israeli offensive on GS faced internal and external criticism. It was accused of “being an accomplice with Israel” in its efforts to topple the Hamas government in GS, suppressing the demonstrations that support the resistance and GS siege lift, closing the Rafah crossing and preventing the aid to enter. In addition its political performance was not up to the demands and expectations of Arab public and many Arab governments. However, the ruling regime in Egypt clarified that it was acting in accordance with its regional and Arab position, its obligations towards the peace settlement and its relations on the Palestinian, Israeli, Arab and international levels.

The Egyptian official leadership, including President Husni Mubarak, the Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait and the People’s Assembly, condemned the Israeli attack on the GS and directly blamed Israel for the casualties caused by the aggression. However, the Egyptian position directly criticized Hamas for the collapse of the truce with Israel on 19/12/2008.

In an earlier time, Egypt was accused of coordinating the attack on GS with the Israelis, or at least of its prior knowledge of the attack, in the light of the Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni’s visit to Cairo on 25/12/2008, two days prior to the aggression. Livni threatened in a joint press conference with the Egyptian Foreign Minister, following her meeting with President Mubarak, “We cannot tolerate a



situation in which Hamas continues to target Israel, Israel's citizens, and this situation is going to be changed." She added, "Hamas needs to understand that our desire to live in peace doesn't mean we will allow the [rocket] fire to continue—Israel will do everything necessary to protect its citizens." On the other hand, the "London-based newspaper *Al-Quds al-Arabi* reported that Egypt has informed Israel that it would not object to a limited Israeli military operation in the Gaza Strip."¹¹ This urged Hamas spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum to declare that the Israeli aggression came following a "green light from regional parties" while the raids came after Livni's visit to Cairo and her threats to topple Hamas. Barhoum said that leaders from Hamas received calls from Cairo assuring them that 27/12/2008 (the day the aggression started) would be a calm day in GS.¹² In its turn, the Egyptian leadership denied the accusations, and its Foreign Minister declared that President Mubarak had noticed indicators for an Israeli aggression on GS and thus called Livni to warn her against launching the attack. He added that the night Livni arrived, 60 rockets were launched from the GS aiming, according to Abu al-Ghait, at delivering "a specific message that imply the failure of the Egyptian effort."¹³

The Egyptian authorities contacted the Israelis to end the aggression on GS and "take quick, effective steps in this sense since Egypt could not stand idly and watch what was going on in Gaza."¹⁴

On the other hand, the Egyptian leadership accused Hamas of bearing a part of the responsibility and causing the Israeli aggression on GS. In a televised speech broadcast on 30/12/2008, President Mubarak blamed Hamas and said that "he had warned Hamas leaders that ending the six-month truce with Israel would bring new Israeli attacks."¹⁵ In his turn, Abu al-Ghait pointed in an interview with *al-Arabiyya* TV to warning Hamas against the disastrous consequences of its military operations adding that the Israeli crimes in Gaza "were caused by Hamas's unjustified, military operations it launched against Israel."¹⁶ The ruling National Democratic Party declared in a statement that Hamas leadership "was responsible for the course of events in Gaza" and that "Hamas has tackled the situation with a spirit of adventure and irresponsibility without taking the consequences into account."¹⁷ The Shura Council Speaker Safwat Al-Sharif stated that Hamas was driven by external objectives and it did help the Palestinian cause.¹⁸ Further, Mustafa al-Faqi, head of the Egyptian Parliamentary Foreign Relations Committee and one of the top leaders in the ruling party, told the Egyptian Satellite Channel that "Hamas must be

held accountable for its behavior” which, according to al-Faqi, has prompted the region to this bloody situation.¹⁹ Striking were the efforts of Abu al-Ghait to link Hamas performance and its stands to the Iranian agenda in the region implying that Hamas was an Iranian card. In this respect, Abu al-Ghait said that during the last events of GS there was a distribution of roles among Iran, Hamas and Hizbullah. Iran wants to benefit from the regional conflicts and clashes and use its cards to face the western pressure.²⁰

Hamas leadership generally tried to avoid going into debate and exchange of accusations with the Egyptian government since Hamas is aware of Egypt’s role and its influence, besides being the only Arab gateway for the besieged GS. Hamas mainly demanded Egypt to open Rafah crossing so that it would not be an accomplice to the siege and to play an effective role in facing the aggression and defending the Palestinians and supporting them. Lifting the siege and opening the crossings became a part of Hamas’s essential demands to end the war, in addition to the full withdrawal of the Israeli troops from the GS. Hamas leaders reiterated this demand where Khalid Mish’al addressed the Egyptian President demanding the opening of the crossing and considering it a historical responsibility and trust. He stressed that Hamas is not a threat to Egypt, it is rather the Israelis and the Americans, whereas the Gazans and Palestinians would defend Egypt.²¹

Despite the wide criticism campaign against the Egyptian leadership, the latter insisted on the continued closure of the Rafah crossing during the war and opening it only under specific and exceptional conditions. It declared, through President Mubarak, that opening the crossing in the absence of the Ramallah-based PA and observers from the EU would constitute a violation to the Agreement on Movement and Access of 2005. It will cause Egypt, also, to deal with two Palestinian authorities, thus dedicating the state of schism between the WB and GS.²² In addition, opening the crossing according to Abu al-Ghait, might lead to the immigration of around 200–300 thousand Palestinians to Egypt as a result of the war and that is what Israel want.²³

These justifications were not persuasive to those who recalled how the Egyptian role was not just to supply the Gazans with their needs, but rather to protect and defend them, and even work on liberating the rest of Palestine. They considered that the least thing Egypt could do is to open the crossing in order to support the steadfast people who are facing the most vicious massacres while the siege



deprives them from their essential needs. Therefore, the angry demonstrations in the Arab and Islamic world and many other countries that were condemning the Israeli offensive, also condemned the Egyptian official attitude towards Rafah crossing while many protests headed towards the Egyptian embassies to express their anger.

The Egyptian authority found itself in an embarrassing situation which led it to soften its criticism of Hamas and to show more sympathetic stand. It opened Rafah crossing partially especially for humanitarian cases, and opened the Egyptian hospitals to receive the casualties of the Israeli offensive.²⁴ Fawzi Barhoum criticized this partial, “selective” behavior in opening the crossing saying that “originally, Egypt is supposed to open the crossing for the alive not for the dead where our wounded return in Egyptian coffins.”²⁵ It seemed that allowing some relief convoys to pass while preventing others was not clear for many, except as an effort to absorb part of the popular anger while the siege continues. However, President Mubarak declared that opening the crossing was in coordination with Israel in the presence of Israeli surveillance cameras since the GS was, officially, still under the Israeli occupation. Further, as Mubarak mentioned, Egypt was trying to avoid any clashing with the Israelis so they would not claim that we were allowing the smuggling of weapons, ammunitions or prohibited materials.²⁶ Abu al-Ghait was more explicit when he said that those criticizing Egypt and demanding that it opens the crossing were actually trying to drag it into a confrontation with Israel.²⁷

The Egyptian public sympathy with the GS against the Israeli offensive was wide, while Hamas and the resistance forces received substantial support for facing the Israeli offensive. Dozens of Egyptian cities witnessed large demonstrations where hundreds of Egyptians took to the streets protesting against their government’s stances while demanding the opening of Rafah crossing and stopping gas export to Israel besides expelling the Israeli ambassador from Cairo. The Muslim Brotherhood played a prominent role in the demonstrations supported by members from “Kefaya,” Labor Party, “Socialist Revolutionaries” and Nasserites among others. The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt called on the Arab and Muslim people to stand against what it called “complicity of most Arab and Muslim governments and regimes with the enemy in its assault against the Palestinian resistance.”²⁸ In his turn, the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Mahdi ‘Akef denounced the accusations targeting Hamas movement as “a conspiracy

on the Jihad against the Zionists.”²⁹ The opposing Labor Party condemned the Egyptian official role in the war while its Secretary-General Magdi Hussein said that “Gamal Mubarak was rising to power on the corpses of thousands of Palestinians.” Labor Party and “Socialist Revolutionaries” accused the Egyptian authorities of supporting the Israeli occupation.³⁰ Abd al-Jalil Mustafa, a senior member and the coordinator of Kefaya, declared that “Egypt’s image has hit rock bottom because of the regime’s support for Israel.”³¹

The Egyptian authorities tried to restrain the demonstrations and carried out an arrest campaign against the opposition forces, thus apprehending around 700 detainees in its third day mostly from the Muslim Brotherhood. This campaign was continued all during the war, whereas the Ministry of Awqaf warned preachers against arousing the feelings of worshippers or pushing them to raise the banners of Jihad; in addition, it prohibited cursing Arab rulers in mosques.³²

Egypt was politically active to stop the Israeli offensive while President Mubarak presented an initiative on 6/1/2009 in a joint press conference with the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, including the following points:

1. Both sides the Israelis and the Palestinian factions should accept an immediate cease-fire for a specified period, to allow the reopening of safe corridors for relief assistance to the sector citizens and to let Egypt continue to move to reach a comprehensive and definitive ceasefire.
2. Egypt’s call on both sides the Israeli and the Palestinian for an urgent meeting in order to reach the arrangements and guarantees to non-recurrence of the present escalation and to address its causes, including securing the border, ensuring the reopening of the crossings and the lifting of the blockade and its readiness to discuss these issues with the Palestinian and Israeli sides as well as the European Union and the rest of the parties of the International Quartet.
3. Egypt’s renewed its invitation to the National Authority and all Palestinian factions to cooperate with the Egyptian efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation as the main requirement for overcoming the challenges facing their people and their case at the present dangerous situation and in the future.³³

Hamas showed reservations on the Egyptian initiative because it does not clearly demand the complete Israeli withdrawal from GS after the end of the aggression. Neither does it explicitly mention lifting the siege or opening the crossings including Rafah, while it links that to requirements that might protract the siege even further. In addition, it links the Palestinian representation with the leadership



in Ramallah, without directly dealing with the party which actually rules GS and defends it. Moreover, the initiative does not include any condemnation for the Israeli aggression and does not distinguish between the aggressor and the victim.³⁴

The Egyptian authorities called on Hamas to keep low the ceiling of its demands considering that “Hamas was standing on a high horse and it should get off it... as it was wrong in its betting” stressing that Hamas leaders “should lower the ceiling of their conditions to achieve settlement before it was too late.”³⁵ Moreover, the Egyptian authorities called on Hamas to “read the initiative well and not rush into a decision which it would regret” since “if it rejected the initiative, it would miss an opportunity which might never be repeated.”³⁶ However, the Israeli unilateral ceasefire and the withdrawal of its troops from GS, without any conditions, showed that Hamas imposed better conditions than those presented in the Egyptian initiative and that Hamas’s performance was better than the Egyptian expectations.

Egypt refused to participate in the Gaza Emergency Summit which Qatar called for on 16/1/2009. It stated that the issue could be discussed on the sidelines of the Kuwait Economic Summit on 19–20/1/2009.³⁷ A few sources pointed to the role of Egypt in discouraging some Arab countries from participating in the conference, including Morocco and Libya.³⁸ Thus, only 13 Arab countries out of 22 attended the conference after some absentees have confirmed their attendance earlier. According to Abu al-Ghait in an interview with Orbit Satellite Television on 27/1/2009, Egypt “has caused the failure of the Doha Summit because it was impossible to link the joint Arab work to the consent of Comoros and Somalia,” and because in case this summit was held as an Arab summit with full quorum then “it would have caused harm to the joint Arab work.”³⁹

b. The Stance on the Palestinian Reconciliation

Egypt had the most prominent Arab role in the mediation between Fatah and Hamas and the other Palestinian factions where it exerted much pressure during the first ten months of 2009 to achieve national reconciliation. Egypt hosted six rounds of dialogue between Fatah and Hamas and the other factions, in addition to receiving many delegations from these factions. It sent also delegations to WB, GS and Syria in efforts to achieve a solution acceptable to all parties.

The first chapter of this report discussed the Palestinian reconciliation and the efforts done to achieve it. To avoid repetition, we add the following points for more clarity:

1. To achieve national reconciliation, Egypt exerted exceptional efforts in 2009 as compared to the previous years, especially with the positive Palestinian atmosphere that prevailed after the Israeli war on GS. Egypt might have been and is still aware of the dangers of the Palestinian divisions and their negative impact on its national security. It is aware also of the burden resulting from not arranging the conditions in GS in a way which is acceptable on the international and Arab levels. Whereas, closing Rafah crossing (whether willingly or against its will) could be interpreted as a participation in besieging the Palestinian people, which is distasteful on the popular level and burdensome on the official level.

The huge effort was interpreted in the communication with all Palestinian parties, and the efforts to find an environment fit for dialogue. Egypt also followed-up the organization of six rounds of dialogue, the efforts to melt away the points of disagreement and it suggested formulas that are acceptable to all parties.

2. To push towards Palestinian reconciliation, Egypt has benefited from its regional and Arab weight and position, its links with all the Palestinian parties, its leading role in the Arab and Islamic world and its relations with Israel and America. However, the Israeli and American will to prevent a reconciliation that might lead to the participation of Hamas in a national unity government, which does not recognize the Quartet's conditions or leads to hardening the Palestinian stand regarding the peace settlement process, was a disincentive that was not easy to overcome. It is also possible that the desire of the Egyptian leadership to maintain strong relations with the US, on which it relies for passing presidency to Gamal Mubarak, led to taking that into consideration in the reconciliation process.
3. The Egyptian regime has signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1978, in addition to maintaining good relations with the US and supporting a peace settlement process, thus it was practically in the same boat with President Mahmud 'Abbas and the leadership of the PLO and the Ramallah-based PA. On the other hand, Hamas model of resistance and non-recognition of Israel contradicts with the Egyptian general policy. For this reason, the Egyptian regime was not at an equal distance from the different parties in the management of the conflict and bringing the Palestinians sides together.



4. The regime in Egypt has its problems and calculations, especially in the light of the concerns about the increasing power of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Egyptian society and being the major and most organized opposition group. Since Hamas is an extension to the Muslim Brotherhood trying to present a Muslim model, its control of the GS was not welcomed by the Egyptian leadership, let alone its victory in the elections and forming the Palestinian cabinet. This affected the relations between Egypt and GS and the continuation of the siege—by closing the Rafah crossing and building the Steel Wall—which was interpreted by Hamas as an attempt to derail its model or abort it. Thus, it became difficult for the Egyptian government to establish a strong relation with Hamas or influence it in the process of decision making.
5. Egypt put forward its reconciliation paper in October 2009. This paper was considered one of the most comprehensive reconciliation papers as it addressed in details the issues related to elections, security, the PLO and the Palestinian government among others. Fatah has signed the paper, whereas Hamas refused to sign unless after taking its remarks into account. This refusal outraged the Egyptian side which refused to open the way for discussion or accept any amendments or explanatory appendices. Hence, Egypt accused Hamas of stalling the reconciliation, whereas Hamas believed that its reservations should be taken into consideration to ensure the success of the reconciliation process.

The Egyptian authorities believed that the changes demanded by Hamas were “not basic and not substantive at all” and accused Hamas of evading the reconciliation and the obligations it has made upon signing the document.⁴⁰

The Egyptian official media harshly attacked Hamas and its leadership including what *Algomhuria* Chief Editor Muhammad ‘Ali Ibrahim, has written under the title “No New Paper, O Hamas Fighters... O Musa (Abu Marzouk)... Watch your Tongue, Egypt Does not Compromise or Maneuver” where he attacked Hamas and accused it of crippling the reconciliation efforts in compliance with regional pressures from Qatar, Iran and Syria.⁴¹

c. The Stance on Lifting the Siege and Opening the Crossings

The official Egyptian stand, regarding lifting the siege of GS and opening the crossings, was founded on the following considerations and criteria:⁴²

1. GS was still under the siege and Israel was still responsible for it. Hence, the Rafah crossing should be opened according to some criteria which do not suggest the end of the occupation, and such that Israel does not elude its obligations.
2. The Palestinian legitimate government is the one in Ramallah whereas the dismissed cabinet in GS is illegal. Egypt refuses to deal with the dismissed cabinet led by Hamas so that it does not consecrate the Palestinian schism.
3. Egypt respects the Agreement on Movement and Access signed in 2005 between the PA and Israel. It believes that the PA staff appointed by the government in Ramallah should manage the Rafah crossing, while the EU observers should return so that Egypt could open the crossing normally and on a daily basis.
4. Egypt would open the Rafah crossing for humanitarian situations from time to time to alleviate the suffering of the Gazans and in coordination with the Israeli side.
5. The Rafah crossing is only meant for the passage of people, while the Egyptian Karam Abu Salem crossing is for goods and trade exchange.
6. The Egyptian authorities have officially curbed the smuggling tunnels on its borders with the GS albeit with less pressure regarding goods and foods.

The Egyptian stance was not convincing for many who saw that closing of Rafah crossing, the only Arab outlet for the GS, as an Egyptian participation in the siege and a way to put pressure on Hamas and topple it. In addition, Egypt seemed to be giving the American and Israeli considerations the priority over its national and Arab obligations, while it is unacceptable to allow the Israeli side to control the borders between two Arab countries or regions especially after its withdrawal. Moreover, in the case people were under siege, occupation and destruction, international humanitarian law which is above all regional or local treaties and arrangements calls for lifting the siege and helping the afflicted people. Kenneth Roth, the executive director of Human Rights Watch (HRW), has accused the Egyptian authorities of playing a “decisive role” in the Gaza siege. He said that Egypt’s claims about the need for EU observers to open the crossing were not enough an excuse to starve the Gazans.⁴³

For Egypt, opening Rafah crossing without restrictions or without agreement with the Americans and Israelis (and with the Ramallah-based Authority) would



cause a political crisis with these parties and maybe an Israeli military intervention. Whereas this is what Egypt was trying to avoid, especially that it officially adopts the peace project and it has official relations with Israel as well as close ties with the US. For this reason, Egypt sought to stabilize an equation which shows the official consensus with these parties regarding the Rafah crossing, yet at the same time it turned a blind eye to the smuggling of foodstuffs and commodities through the tunnels. However, this policy was put under further pressure during 2009, which led the Egyptian authorities towards the adoption of more stringent methods to curb the tunnels smuggling.

The Egyptian authorities have adopted a policy of closing the Rafah crossing since Hamas seized control of the GS in mid June 2007, and it used to open it exceptionally and in separate periods of time to allow the passage of people including patients and students. Statistics of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights show that the crossing was closed 683 days out of 719 days between 12/6/2007 and 31/5/2009, i.e., it was opened for only 36 days. In addition, a study conducted by the Centre shows that the Rafah crossing was opened 33 days out of 301 days in the first 11 months of 2009.⁴⁴ This shows how tight the siege on GS is, even on the Egyptian side, regardless of the reasons which have caused it.

The same Egyptian policy was pursued towards the activists and relief convoys wishing to enter GS via the Rafah crossing. Preventing or delaying access through the crossing was based on different pretexts and reasons. This was applicable to Arab and European deputies and parliamentarians, in addition to relief, medical, human rights and political delegations.⁴⁵ One of the incidents which received wide focus in the media was the procedures imposed on the “Artery of Life 3” humanitarian convoy in late 2009 and early 2010. The convoy which was led by the British MP George Galloway included 465 personalities from 17 Arab, Muslim and European countries and consisted of 250 trucks and ambulances with humanitarian relief such as food and medical equipment. The Egyptian authorities forced the convoy to return from the port of Aqaba and change its direction from Nuweiba Egyptian port which is close to the Red Sea to al-Arish port on the Mediterranean via Latakia port in Syria causing delay for several days and substantial damage. In addition, there was disagreement between the convoy members and the Egyptian security forces in al-Arish regarding allowing trucks into GS. When the Egyptian authorities finally allowed the access of only

158 trucks, a wide campaign of protest and public anger erupted especially in Turkey which had a major participation in the convoy. At the end, the convoy was allowed into GS where it was welcomed on the official and public levels.⁴⁶ George Galloway accused the Egyptian authorities of being a part of the siege,⁴⁷ whereas Abu al-Ghait accused the convoy members of trying to impose their will on Egypt.⁴⁸

The year 2009 has witnessed more serious and professional Egyptian efforts to curb the tunnels used by the Palestinians as urgent and necessary alternatives to get their needs. In fact, there are no accurate statistics specifying the number of tunnels, yet estimates show that there are between 500 and 1000 tunnels connected to the Egyptian side of the borders with Gaza. Estimates show also that the Gazans depend on the tunnels by 50–60% to meet their needs. The Egyptian procedures facing the tunnels could be summarized in the following:

1. Destroying a big number of tunnels.
2. Pumping wastewater or spraying toxic gases into the tunnels.
3. Installation of electronic sensors and sonar equipments to detect the tunnels.
4. Establishing advanced guard towers on the borders with GS.
5. Construction of the steel wall.

According to published reports, security apparatuses have increased the campaign against “smuggling” via the tunnels, in addition to searching all means of transportation in the region, deploying military checkpoints on the roads leading to the Suez Canal and contacting the eminent personalities in Rafah and tribe chiefs in Sinai to ensure the prevention of smuggling, especially weapons.⁴⁹ During the first eight months in 2009, some sources mentioned that the Egyptian authorities have seized and destroyed around 350 tunnels.⁵⁰ The Independent Commission for Human Rights has counted 62 deaths for different reasons,⁵¹ in addition to other 64 deaths counted by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in the period between February and November 2009 killed due to the collapse of tunnels, suffocation, electrocution and gas leaks.⁵² On the other hand, the Arab Organization for Human Rights (AOHR), which is based in England, said that “Egyptian security forces used deadly force in the ‘war’ against tunnel workers between GS and Egypt and carried out premeditated killing of people underground, and away from the eyes of the world.” According to AOHR, 54 death cases were documented as having died due to the “inhaling a poisonous gas sprayed by the Egyptian security forces inside the tunnels.” It further added that “security forces used explosives, pumped wastewater and caused artificial vibrations to destroy the tunnels over the heads of



the people working inside them, without a warning.” The Egyptian practices, as AOHR stressed, were carried out under a complete supervision and support from the US, Israel and most of the EU countries.⁵³

Palestinian sources mentioned in early April 2010 that the introduction of commodities and goods through tunnels has declined as a result of the Israeli raids and the strict Egyptian procedures. In addition, around 80% of tunnels have been destroyed according to the same sources.⁵⁴

On another level, the American Congress allocated \$50 million to “secure” the Egyptian borders with GS.⁵⁵ Additionally, there was news about American efforts, with the participation of American military experts, to support the Egyptian war on tunnels. It included, for example the installation of American systems for the detection of tunnels under the supervision of the American Air Force.⁵⁶

On 9/12/2009, *Haaretz* daily revealed—citing Egyptian sources—that the Egyptian authorities have started the construction of a massive steel wall along its borders with the GS. It will go 20 to 30 meters into the ground in an effort to eliminate the smuggling tunnels.⁵⁷ The Egyptian authorities denied the construction of the wall, and then confirmed it yet in the context of talking about architectural constructions on the border with GS. After that it justified the wall as a necessity for national security and sovereignty besides securing the borders.

The steel wall issue became a major concern in the media in that period while its construction was confirmed through reports and eye witnesses. There were widespread protests against the steel wall where it was called the “Wall of Shame” or the “Low Dam,” in addition to religious edicts issued by many scholars, including Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, declaring that the construction of the wall was *haram* or forbidden as it exacerbates the Palestinians’ suffering and isolation which they live. However, the Egyptian official media retaliated with a vigorous campaign taking advantage of many edicts issued by al-Azhar scholars claiming that the wall was an Egyptian issue and the construction is taking place inside the Egyptian territories.

Data about the steel wall mentioned that it would be 10 kilometers long out of a 13.5 kilometers long border between Egypt and the GS. Three kilometers on the sea side would be excluded as no tunnel digging could be done because of the soft soil and the possibility of collapse of the tunnels. Data also mentioned that the wall is composed of steel sheets 18 meters high, 50 centimeters wide and 5 centimeters

thick. Besides, the sheets would end with tapered head with holes which would be probably used in pumping water to cause the collapse of the tunnels. In addition, 5.4 kilometers were completed till the end of 2009 while the US funds and supports the construction of the wall.⁵⁸

Thus, 2009 ended with tension in the relation between the Egyptian government and Hamas, with increased Egyptian measures in fighting the tunnels, which is according to many Gazans a participation in besieging them.

2. Jordan

The issue of Palestine is a priority in the Jordanian political affairs since the historical relations, demographic composition and geographic boundaries of Jordan, besides its direct and fast influence on the Palestinian events make the Palestinian issue a central and vital issue for Jordan.

Jordan has defined its general political track through the disengagement from the WB, signing the peace treaty with Israel, the adoption of the peace settlement project and the Arab Peace Initiative, its support for the PA under the leadership of Mahmud 'Abbas in addition to the rejection of naturalization and the idea of the alternative homeland. Generally speaking, this track represents belonging to the so-called "moderate" Arab front.

There was a wide public reaction in Jordan against the Israeli offensive on GS, while the official authorities turned a blind eye to the huge public demonstrations that swept different cities. They expressed sympathy with the besieged afflicted Strip and with Hamas and the Palestinian resistance against the Israeli attacks. According to the Ministry of Interior, there were around 624 protests and solidarity marches with GS, 84 of them were organized by the Muslim Brotherhood. The Prime Minister Nader al-Thahabi warned before the parliament that there might be a reconsideration of the relations with Israel. He reiterated that Jordan would not tolerate the serious deterioration of the humanitarian situation in GS, nor would it overlook this threat which affects the security of this region and its stability. Moreover, 88 out of 110 MPs have signed a memorandum demanding the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador and recalling the Jordanian ambassador from Tel Aviv.⁵⁹

The popular movement in Jordan had an essential role in supporting the Gazans in addition to the efforts of charities and trade unions, especially the Jordan Engineers Association (JEA), in fund-raising and relief campaigns besides the reconstruction of GS.



The Jordanian leadership focused in 2009 on three major concerns related to the Palestinian issue:

First: Emphasis on the re-launch of serious, effective negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel to resolve the conflict, once and for all, on the basis of a two-state solution.⁶⁰ This was emphasized many times by the Jordanian King ‘Abdullah II who said that the Arab Peace Initiative guarantees the future of Israel as a partner with one third of the world (the Islamic World) which has not recognized it yet. King ‘Abdullah further emphasized the importance of the American role in prompting the peace settlement process while warning that the Israeli initiatives to establish economic peace would not solve the core problem associated with the Palestinian cause.⁶¹ In his meeting with Netanyahu, the Jordanian King said that “Israel would not enjoy security and stability unless the Palestinians achieve their right to statehood and to living in peace and security.”⁶² King ‘Abdullah also said in an interview with *Haartez* in the 15th memory of signing the peace treaty with Israel, that the relationship with Israel “is getting colder” and the status quo cannot be perpetuated since we are “sliding back into the darkness.”⁶³

The Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, declared that Jordan would not negotiate on the behalf of the Palestinian side, yet it should be a major party in the final status issues especially those related to Jerusalem, water, borders and security.⁶⁴ This is a statement that reflects the overlap between the Palestinian and Jordanian situations and the need for coordination between the two sides on common issues.

Second: Refusing naturalization and the idea of an alternative homeland: This is one of the most sensitive issues in Jordan since there are more than 3.2 million citizens of Palestinian origin living in Jordan as well as many Palestinians with temporary Jordanian passports. The Jordanian King has emphasized that “there is nothing in our dictionary called alternative homeland, and Jordan is stronger than accepting any impositions.”⁶⁵ He also said that “our stance on the issue of the refugees would not change and our adherence to the right of return and compensation is nonnegotiable.”⁶⁶

A debate in the Knesset on a draft which suggests Jordan as an alternative homeland for the Palestinians caused resentment on the official and popular levels. The National Democratic Bloc in the Jordanian Parliament issued a statement which reflected the general mood of the ruling regime in Jordan. It considered this

debate a violation of the peace treaty with Jordan and demanded the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Amman, as well as the withdrawal of the Jordanian ambassador from Tel Aviv.⁶⁷

Jordan has faced accusations from legal and humanitarian organizations on the basis of stripping Jordanians from Palestinian origin of their nationality. Human Rights Watch mentioned in its report that official statistics of the Follow-up and Inspection Department showed that 2,732 Jordanians had had their nationality withdrawn based on the disengagement instructions between 2004 and 2008.⁶⁸ On the other hand, the Jordanian government denied any systematic withdrawals of nationality from Jordanian citizens, and it reiterated that what was happening was a correction of status in the light of the decision to sever Jordan's legal and administrative ties with the WB.⁶⁹ In his turn, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Interior Nayef Al Qadi declared that Jordan was standing against a project trying to resolve the Palestinian refugees issue at the expense of Jordan. The Minister refused to use the term "citizenship withdrawal" stressing that what was happening was "a correction of status" aiming at urging those who have a "family reunification" permit, issued from the Israeli occupation authorities, to renew it and safe keep it as a precaution against the Israeli plans.⁷⁰

Amid fears of possible American-Israeli scenarios to impose a solution for the issue of the Palestinian refugees at the expense of Jordan, news disclosed that a meeting was convened between senior Jordanian officials. They formed a kind of "crisis unit" to study these possibilities and put Jordanian plans to face them.⁷¹

Third: Focus on Jerusalem and protest against its Judaization. In 2009, Jerusalem was selected as a Capital for Arab Culture where Jordan held many events on this occasion.

King 'Abdullah II emphasized the need that Israel stops its procedures and excavations in Jerusalem which aim at changing the identity of the city and emptying it of its Arab population.⁷² Later, he warned that these Israeli procedures not only threaten the relations between Jordan and Israel, but also could trigger severe reactions in the Muslim world and cause the collapse of the efforts to launch peace negotiations.⁷³ King 'Abdullah also warned that Jerusalem is "a red line" and that any Israeli tampering with its identity would lead to "disastrous consequences on regional security and stability"; he further warned the Israelis about "playing



with fire.”⁷⁴ The Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador in Amman, on 4/10/2009, and handed him a letter of protest against the repeated Israeli violations in Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* besides the holy Islamic and Christian sites there.⁷⁵

The Jordanian government maintained its official relations with the Ramallah-based PA, and it continued to provide security services to train Palestinian police members. However, it declined to host Fatah movements’ Sixth Conference in Amman. The Jordanian authorities, probably, did not want to provide a venue for an intra-Fatah conflict, knowing that Jordan has been the central meeting place for the preparatory committee of the Sixth Conference. When Secretary of Fatah’s Central Committee Faruq Qaddumi launched his statements against President Mahmud ‘Abbas from Amman, the Minister of State for Media Affairs and Communications Nabil Sharif expressed his sorrow for that. In addition, the Jordanian government asked Qaddumi not to launch any political or media statements hostile to President ‘Abbas from its territories.⁷⁶

Despite its sympathy with the Gazans, Jordan did not deviate from the Arab official stand which refused to recognize the Hamas-led government in the GS. While the relations between the Jordanian government and Hamas witnessed a significant improvement in 2008, these relations did not change much in 2009. On the other hand, the Israeli war on GS in addition to Khalid Mish‘al’s visit to Jordan to attend his father’s funeral showed the level of sympathy and popularity that Hamas enjoys in Jordan.

The dismissal of Muhammad al-Thahabi, director of the General Intelligence Department, and of his brother Nader al-Thahabi from premiership, was considered as negative indicator to the relation with Hamas or at least a freezing of the possibilities of its development to higher levels. In the same context, the appointment of Nayef al-Qadi as Interior Minister in the new government might have been a similar indicator as al-Qadi supervised in 1999 the deportation of Hamas leaders from Jordan to Qatar.⁷⁷ Al-Qadi implied the return to the state of “cold and frozen” relations, when he said that “Jordan deals with Hamas movement as a political organization on the Palestinian territories; the movement enjoys a Jordanian respect just like the other factions which Jordan treats normally, far from any claims or rights for Hamas on the Jordanian political arena”;⁷⁸ he also denied any talks or contact with Hamas, adding in an interview with *Asharq al-Awsat* daily

that “we do not interfere with the affairs of Hamas or allow Hamas to interfere with ours, and we deal with Hamas through the Palestinian legitimacy.”⁷⁹

Drawing the relation between the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Hamas was one of the issues which arouse the attention of those concerned, especially after Hamas held its internal elections and chose its leadership. There were discussions concerning the controversial relation between the two sides and how each side affects the process of decision making of the other. The discussions included, also, the effect of that relation on the Jordanian arena and political work in Jordan, in addition to the effect on the work for the Palestinian cause. Authorities did not hide their desire to separate the two sides administratively and organizationally. However, the difficulty of this separation appears in the background of Hamas emergence, the historical development in the relation between the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan and Hamas, in addition to the great number of Jordanians from Palestinian origin and the centrality of the Palestinian cause to the Jordanians. In fact, the events in Palestine directly impact the situation in Jordan which has the longest borders with the occupied Palestine.

In late 2009, King ‘Abdullah II dissolved the parliament and formed a new government which was supposed to prepare for fair elections. There were many factors behind this step including, as some analysts mentioned, the desire to accommodate the Muslim Brotherhood and Palestinian-origin citizens in the Jordanian political system in a better and broader way.

3. Syria

Syria still plays a crucial role in the Palestinian issue due to the ongoing state of hostility with Israel, the continued Israeli occupation of the Syria Golan Heights and the Syrian support to the Palestinian resistance forces. Thus, Syria maintained, in 2009, its closeness to the refusal camp which is supportive to the resistance versus the Arab moderate camp. Syria is not expected to change its stand in the foreseeable future but rather it is expected to strengthen its position in the refusal camp, especially in the absence of any indicators of a breakthrough in the negotiations between Syria and Israel. Thus, it will benefit from its support for the resistance in Lebanon and Palestine and its proximity to Iran and Turkey—the two regional powers which are currently playing an important role in the Palestinian issue.



a. The Stance on the Offensive on GS

Syria had a notable position regarding the Israeli offensive on GS, where it was among the first Arab countries to condemn the aggression. It declared its consent to attend the Arab Emergency Summit which Qatar called for. The summit was to discuss the offensive on GS and was held on 16/1/2009 under the title “Gaza Emergency Summit.” During the summit, Syria expressed its explicit support for the resistance in GS, thus refusing to accuse the resistance of any responsibility for the aggression. In this context, President Bashar Assad said in his speech before the summit that “the claims of Israel and those who support it about the Palestinian responsibility for what happened are sheer lies.” Assad also said that the Arab Peace Initiative was “as good as dead” declaring the indefinite halt of indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel which have started in 2008.⁸⁰

In addition, Damascus witnessed an active diplomatic movement as part of the efforts to stop the aggression. President Assad received his French counterpart, Nicolas Sarkozy, in Damascus and presented him with a joint Syrian-Turkish initiative for a ceasefire in GS that Hamas had already approved.⁸¹ In the same context, Assad later received the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon concurrently with the Israeli announcement of its unilateral ceasefire.⁸²

b. Supporting the Palestinian Resistance

The Syrian stand during the Israeli offensive on GS showed that Damascus continued to hold on to its stance of supporting the Palestinian resistance. In confirmation of Syria’s stance towards Hamas, Assad said in an interview with the German daily Der Spiegel on 19/1/2009 that “Hamas has the trust of the people, and anyone who wishes to destroy it must destroy an entire people”; he also called on the international community to start a dialogue with Hamas and said, “Whether you call it terrorism or resistance, and whether you like Hamas or not, it is a political entity that no one can ignore.”⁸³

In many occasions, Assad reiterated Syria’s support for the resistance where he emphasized that “resisting the occupation is a patriotic duty, supporting the resistance is our moral and legal obligation, and assisting it is our pride and honor.” He warned that the failure of negotiations in restoration of rights means the resort to resistance as an alternative solution.⁸⁴ In the opening of the Fifth General

Conference of Arab Parties held in Damascus, President Assad “concluded [his opening speech] by saying ‘We now began building a new Middle East with resistance as its essence,’ affirming that resistance in its cultural, military and other meanings is the essence of Syria’s policies today and the past, and it will remain the essence of existence in the future.”⁸⁵

c. Supporting the Palestinian Reconciliation

Although Syria appeared in 2009 to be closer to Hamas and other resistance forces, especially upon the offensive on GS, it maintained its relation with the Ramallah-based PA under Mahmud ‘Abbas albeit with frequent tension. It tried to stand at an equal distance from both sides regarding the Palestinian reconciliation. The Palestinian reconciliation was always present on the Syrian diplomatic agenda through the meetings of Assad and his Foreign Minister with the Arab and foreign leaders and diplomats. Assad highlighted this issue in an interview with *al-Khaleej* newspaper concerning the Arab reconciliation on 9/3/2009 where he said that “in every meeting we discuss the Palestinian issue and we do not want to support one side against the other.”⁸⁶

During his meeting with President Mahmud ‘Abbas in Damascus in May 2009, the Syrian President stressed the need “to resolve disputes and achieve the Palestinian reconciliation.”⁸⁷ There was news that Syria showed readiness to contribute to the efforts of internal reconciliation and achieving it. Sources cited Assad offering ‘Abbas to host a dialogue which brings together delegations from Fatah and Hamas in Damascus. He offered also to call the other Palestinian factions for a comprehensive dialogue, which should end with signing the reconciliation agreement with Syrian guarantees. It would be followed by an official signature in Cairo, after Hamas refused to sign the Egyptian reconciliation paper.⁸⁸

Foreign Minister Walid al-Mou‘alem frequently reiterated his country’s keenness on the success of the Palestinian internal dialogue saying that “we are making every possible effort through our contacts with the Palestinian factions for a successful Palestinian dialogue in Cairo.”⁸⁹ Following the reconciliation between Damascus on one hand and Cairo and Riyadh on the other hand, al-Mou‘alem said that the enhancement of Arab solidarity is necessary for the Palestinian dialogue. He hoped also to succeed in finding common ground for all the issues that cause division among the Palestinians.⁹⁰



In November and October 2010, Damascus hosted two rounds of talks between Fatah and Hamas. These talks narrowed down the differences on several issues, except for the part of security issues.

d. Syria's Stances on Israel

Despite the activity on the Syrian-Israeli negotiations track in 2008, that was represented in the indirect talks in Ankara under the auspices of Turkey. This course witnessed a setback with the beginning of the Israeli offensive on GS, in late 2008 and early 2009, where Syria announced the indefinite halt of negotiations in protest against the aggression.

On the other hand, the formation of a right-wing government in Israel led by Benjamin Netanyahu has led to further decline in the negotiations process. President Assad referred to this by saying that the failure of the peace process till now “has clearly shown that the main impediment to peace is Israel” while ruling out the possibility of achieving peace in the region in the presence of what he described as “the most radical governments in the history of Israel.”⁹¹ Tension between the two sides escalated with the advent of February 2010 till it created fear of an exhaustive war in the region. Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak warned that “the absence of an agreement with Syria could lead to an armed conflict that might develop into a full-scale war.” This triggered harsh reaction from Syria where President Assad considered that “all events showed that Israel was pushing the region towards war,” while the Foreign Minister Walid al-Mou‘alem warned that the Israeli cities would not be safe in case of a war on Syria.⁹²

At the same time, Syria did not totally close the door on negotiations to achieve a “just peace settlement” since it has implied this settlement many times. President Assad expressed that Syria could conduct direct peace negotiations with Israel if the US acts as a mediator. This stand appeared in an interview with the Japanese *Asahi Shimbun* newspaper, published on 11/3/2009, where “Assad hailed the new US administration, adding that he wanted to hold negotiations for regional peace, and also insisted on the return of the Golan Heights.”⁹³ Syria has always stressed this position, and it confirmed this also after the Knesset has decided to hold a referendum before implementing any agreement that provides for the withdrawal of Israel from East Jerusalem and Golan. Syria further rejected returning to indirect negotiations with Israel through Turkish mediation unless Israel withdraws from the occupied Golan.⁹⁴

4. Lebanon

a. The Palestinian Situation in Lebanon

Developments of the Palestinian Arena in Lebanon

There were many organizational and security developments in the Palestinian arena in Lebanon. On the organizational level, Fatah Sixth General Congress in Bethlehem led to major changes in Fatah and the representation of the PLO in Lebanon. Brigadier-General Sultan Abu al-‘Aynayn left his position, as Fatah secretary in Lebanon, after his election to the Central Committee of Fatah, while Fathi Abu al-‘Ardat replaced him.⁹⁵ As for ‘Abbas Zaki, he left his position as a representative of the PLO in Lebanon, on 24/10/2009, after he was replaced by ‘Abdullah ‘Abdullah.⁹⁶

On the security level, the most important development was the assassination of Major-General Kamal Midhat, deputy representative of the PLO in Lebanon, on 23/3/2009. The roadside bomb which targeted his motorcade near the Mieh Mieh refugee camp, south of Lebanon, killed Midhat and three of his guards and injured three others. The assassination aroused wide Lebanese and Palestinian condemnation especially that Midhat was responsible for the reconciliation and pacification file in the refugee camps, and he was well-known for his good relations with all parties in Fatah and the other factions.⁹⁷

The other prominent security development was in Haret Hreik in the southern suburb of Beirut, on 26/12/2009, when an explosion near a Hamas center led to the death of two of its members and left several others wounded.⁹⁸ There were no clear reasons for the explosion which triggered many narratives, while Hamas vowed to cooperate with the Lebanese investigation and to identify the perpetrators. However, some parties found in the incident an opportunity to raise the issue of the Palestinian presence outside the refugee camps. The General Secretariat of March 14 alliance expressed its “deep concern” over this explosion and that it has occurred in this region outside the camps.⁹⁹ Deputy Speaker of Parliament Farid Makari said that the explosion showed that Lebanon “would continue to pay the price for settling accounts as long as there are security zones in addition to the presence of Lebanese and Palestinian illegitimate weapons.”¹⁰⁰



The Lebanese-Palestinian Relations

On the Palestinian side, Mahmud ‘Abbas’s visit to Lebanon, on 7–8/12/2009, was the most prominent event in the Lebanese-Palestinian relations. However, this visit did not bring any change to the situation of Palestinians in Lebanon, especially that the issue of the Palestinian refugee camps was not on the agenda for that visit and although ‘Abbas’ talks with the Lebanese officials tackled granting the Palestinians in Lebanon their civil and social rights.

In early 2010, Head of the political bureau of Hamas Khalid Mish‘al visited Lebanon, and met with the Lebanese President Michel Suleiman and the Prime Minister Sa‘ad Hariri. He discussed with them the Palestinian reconciliation, the civil rights of the Palestinian refugee and the Palestinian weapons in Lebanon.¹⁰¹

As for the Lebanese, the approach of their government and different parties and forces to the Palestinian issue was for the most part within one of three contexts: security, naturalization and civil and social rights.

In the security context, a report published by the International Crisis Group (ICG) titled “Nurturing Instability: Lebanon’s Palestinian Refugee Camps” mentioned that the 2008/2009 “war [in GS] also revived domestic debate on various aspects of the Palestinian presence. Some March 14 leaders, citing the rocket firings, renewed calls to disarm Palestinians outside the camps.”¹⁰²

In this context, Samir Geagea, the leader of the Lebanese Forces, declared that “what was happening in Gaza was the outcome of a strategy in which the Arabs had no opinion,” adding that “it was time to collect the Palestinian weapons outside the camps even if it became necessary to call governmental forces.”¹⁰³

On the other hand, the MP of the Lebanese Social Democratic Party (*al-Kataeb*), Sami Gemayel, considered in his speech before the Lebanese community in Montreal that the essential problem facing Lebanon is “the issue of Lebanese sovereignty which is being violated by the armed Palestinians on the Lebanese territory and who impose other sovereignty in some regions and camps.”¹⁰⁴

The issue of naturalization was always present in the Lebanese arena. The Maronite Patriarch Mar Nasrallah Boutros Sfeir reiterated his rejection for naturalization, and suggested as a solution for those “who came and settled here” that “international governments consider their situation and find them another place, if not their original homeland, to settle in.”¹⁰⁵

It is striking that the issue of naturalization was the main determinant of any movement's approach to the Palestinian issue and all its developments, in addition to using it in internal political debates. In this context, the report published by the ICG noted that the "Aounist movement [Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)], depicting the war as an Israeli effort to deal advocates of the right of return a deadly blow, seized the opportunity to raise alarm bells about prospects for *tawtin* [naturalization]." ¹⁰⁶

On another hand, the leader of the FPM Michel 'Aoun, who heads the Change and Reform parliamentary bloc, commented on the delay in forming the cabinet after the parliamentary elections in mid 2009 saying that the "naturalization problem is the external dimension of the cabinet-formation crisis and it is not a scarecrow as some sides claim." ¹⁰⁷

On the sidelines of the debate regarding the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp, MP Ibrahim Kan'aan of the Change and Reform bloc stated that the funding allocated for the reconstruction and which amounts to \$300 million "changes the camp from a refugee camp to a place for permanent residence." ¹⁰⁸ In the following day, Minister Elias Skaiff warned during a dinner held by the FPM that "the day the Lebanese accept naturalization, all Middle East Palestinians would be transferred to our country." ¹⁰⁹

Regarding the humanitarian rights of the Palestinians in Lebanon, the period following the formation of the new government, and after the parliamentary elections, has witnessed recurrent talks about the need to give the Palestinian refugees their rights and alleviate their suffering. MP Bahia Hariri confirmed that "humanitarian rights of Palestinians in Lebanon would see light with the government of Sa'ad Hariri." ¹¹⁰

The leader of the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP), Walid Jumblatt, suggested the establishment of a Ministry of State for Palestinian Affairs in the new government. This ministry would take more care of the human and social issues of the Palestinians, thus keeping these issues apart from the political debates. ¹¹¹ However, he withdrew his suggestion after it became an issue of debate. ¹¹²

On 13/1/2010, PSP held a conference to support civil rights of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. It aimed at "converging and unifying perspectives between different Lebanese parties regarding the Palestinian's right to decent livelihood." The conference which was attended by most Lebanese and Palestinian political



factions, recommended taking the issue of Palestinian civil rights out of political debate and dealing with it as a national issue. It called also for the amendment of Labor and Property Laws in a way that gives the Palestinians their rights in these domains.¹¹³

Hizbullah's new political document which was approved in its eighth conference called Lebanese authorities to "establish the Lebanese-Palestinian relations on firm and legal basis," adding that the success of this mission is achieved through "the Lebanese-Palestinian direct dialogue... and giving the Palestinians their civil and social rights... while adhering to refusing naturalization."¹¹⁴

In August 2010, the Lebanese parliament passed a law, which granted the Palestinians partial rights to work and social security and within certain terms. Observers considered the bill as a step forward in improving Palestinians' status, but fell far short of attaining their full civil rights.

The Reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared Camp

The groundbreaking ceremony for the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp was held, on 9/3/2009, under the auspices of then Prime Minister Fu'ad al-Sanyurah. He was represented by Minister of Information Tarek Mitri who reiterated the Lebanese government's commitment to "the reconstruction and development in al-Bared and its neighborhood."¹¹⁵

However, reconstruction works soon stopped under the impact of debate between the government on one hand and Change and Reform bloc headed by Michel 'Aoun on the other hand. The issue under debate was that the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) charged a company to remove the debris of Nahr al-Bared Camp. On 5/2/2009, this company found ancient ruins in the old part of the camp. The Directorate General of Antiquities recommended stopping work on the site, yet the Lebanese government decided to "rebury the ruins according to the international standards."¹¹⁶ This led 'Aoun to file an official contestation with the *Shura* Council against the government's decision. On 18/7/2009, the *Shura* Council decided that the government's decision of reburying be stopped, while granting a two month moratorium, during which both sides would present their legal views.¹¹⁷

The FPM suggested that the Lebanese government appropriates the lands in the new camp and start reconstruction there, while transforming the ruins in the

old camp into a tourist site.¹¹⁸ The FPM declared that its stance is in line with its commitment to “defend the right of the Lebanese to preserve their history, heritage and culture that are represented in the ancient ruins as well as in other elements,” and also its “full commitment to the civil and social rights of the Palestinians.”¹¹⁹ However, the *Shura* Council later cancelled the contestation filed by the Change and Reform bloc for failing to present, in due time, the necessary evidence that proves the presence of ancient ruins.¹²⁰ Thus, the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp was resumed on 26/10/2009.¹²¹

b. Lebanon and Israel

In 2009, there were verbal escalation and war threats between Israel and Hizbullah. Many threats against Lebanon and Hizbullah were issued by the political and military officials in Israel, notably Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi.

In the consultations period prior to the formation of the government in Lebanon, Netanyahu warned, “If Hizbullah joins the Lebanese government, then the Lebanese government is accepting responsibility for Hizbullah’s actions, including its actions against Israel.”¹²² On the other hand, Barak stated that Israel was closely watching the growing power of Hizbullah warning that in case the fine balance was disturbed, [Israel] would study the possibility of taking measures. He stressing that Israel will not accept a separation between the responsibility of Hizbullah and the responsibility of the Lebanese government.¹²³ Ashkenazi in his turn warned that in case Hizbullah performed an attack in revenge for the assassination of its top military commander ‘Imad Mughniyyah, Israel would retaliate strongly.¹²⁴

In response to these threats, Hizbullah’s Secretary-General Hasan Nasrullah warned that “the Israeli army will be destroyed in any future war” adding that “the equations that used to apply have now changed” as now it is “the southern suburb [of Beirut] for Tel Aviv and not Beirut for Tel Aviv.”¹²⁵ Nasrullah also stressed that the resistance has become capable of targeting any place in Israel and facing its soldiers with tens of thousands of fighters, instead of thousands as in July war 2006. He also vowed to bring new surprises in any war which Israel might launch.¹²⁶

On another hand, security war erupted between the two sides after the Israeli Intelligence activity in Lebanon received painful blows. This was following the success of the Lebanese security forces in uncovering and dismantling many spy



networks which were working for Israel, notably the network working under the retired security officer Adib al-‘Alam.

In addition to the aforementioned, there was Hizbullah’s success in obtaining detailed intelligence information about the activity of the Israeli army and the Northern Command. According to *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper which mentioned on 11/12/2009 that it has got a secret internal bulletin of Hizbullah that proves the extent to which their intelligence has succeeded in infiltrating the Israeli army, and proves that the party has considerable sources of information.¹²⁷

5. KSA and Gulf Countries

The KSA safeguarded its position in the moderate front and it refused to participate in the Gaza Emergency Summit which Qatar has called for to support Gaza. The Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Sa‘ud al-Faisal commented on that summit saying that Palestinian divisions were enough rather than Arab division. This is not the first time this happens.¹²⁸ However, KSA pledged \$1 billion for reconstruction in GS. At the same time, Saudi Arabia continued to be the essential Arab financial supporter for the PA where it paid the sum it has vowed.

The KSA refused, as al-Faisal declared, the withdrawal of the Arab Peace Initiative stressing that “it was still valid, yet the Israeli side was procrastinating because it did not want peace but rather gaining more territories,” and that the initiative “allowed the Arabs to penetrate Israel’s supporters around the world.”¹²⁹

On the other hand, the KSA refused to make any concessions in its stand against Israel to meet Washington’s wishes. Following his meeting with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, al-Faisal said:

Incrementalism and a step-by-step approach has not and—we believe—will not achieve peace. Temporary security, confidence-building measures will also not bring peace. What is required is a comprehensive approach that defines the final outcome at the outset and launches into negotiations over final status issues: borders, Jerusalem, water, refugees and security.¹³⁰

Regarding the position on the Palestinian reconciliation, the KSA affirmed its keenness about achieving it. In this context, the Saudi King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz said:

The Palestine issue is currently on the verge of a dark tunnel... He also called on Palestinian leaders and individuals to beware inter-difference and hatred. The monarch frankly declared that Palestinian rivals were over

the recent history detrimental to the Palestinian issue more than the Israeli enemy. Since you are divided and warring each other, it would be impossible for the entire world community to create an independent Palestinian state.¹³¹

The year 2009 witnessed advanced Qatari stands regarding the Palestinian issue. Doha rushed to call for the Gaza Emergency Summit to discuss the Israeli aggression, where it pledged \$250 million for the reconstruction of GS.¹³² In addition, Qatar announced freezing the political and economic relations with Israel and decided to close down Israel Trade Representation Office in Doha.¹³³

Regarding the Palestinian reconciliation, the Prince of Qatar Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani reiterated his country's support for the Palestinian national unity. He called at the same time to avoid intervention in the Palestinian internal issues in a way that favors one side over the other. He also stressed that the non-recognition of the outcome of the Palestinian parliamentary elections (which were held in 2006) by many countries, and punishing the Gazans by besieging them have caused many countries to lose their credibility when talking about democracy.¹³⁴ On another hand, the Qatari Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani criticized the stands of some Arab countries which, according to him, had endeavored to inflame the Palestinian disputes particularly after Hamas won the majority in the parliamentary elections, calling at the same time to avoid "bias to one Palestinian side at the expense of another."¹³⁵

On another level, Abu Dhabi hosted on 3/2/2009 a meeting for nine Arab countries, where it launched a process to achieve an Arab consensus that puts a limit to "non-Arab" interventions and supports the Arab Peace Initiative and the PA. Foreign Minister Sheikh 'Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan said after the meeting that "we convene because we want to solidify Arab unity and mobilize support for the Arab Peace Initiative besides giving more support for the PA under Mahmud 'Abbas."¹³⁶ The United Arab Emirates (UAE) aid for the PA continued where the UAE transferred on 22/11/2009 a sum of €100 million (around \$149.2 million) to PA's treasury account.¹³⁷ In addition, the UAE donated, at the end of 2009, \$2.5 million to support the budget of the UNRWA,¹³⁸ besides the humanitarian relief convoys to GS which continued throughout the year.

Kuwait hosted the Arab Economic Summit on 19/1/2009, where the offensive on GS topped its agenda. The Prince of Kuwait Sabah al-Ahmad al-Jaber al-Sabah stressed during the summit the importance of unity and discarding divisions between



the Palestinians. He called all Palestinian leaderships for unity, solidarity and cooperation. He also pledged \$34 million to fund the UNRWA.¹³⁹ The Kuwaiti Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Muhammad al-Sabah announced in the Gaza Reconstruction Conference, which was held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2/3/2009, his country's commitment to pay \$200 million for the PA over the next five years.¹⁴⁰

In Bahrain, the Bahraini King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa received Khalid Mish'al twice in one year. On 16/3/2009, he received Mish'al with the Acting Speaker of the PLC Doctor. Ahmad Bahr, where he stressed the need to overcome internal disagreements and achieve national reconciliation. He also called for lifting the siege of GS and reconstructing it.¹⁴¹ He again received Mish'al on 5/1/2010 during the latter's Arab tour.¹⁴² On the other hand, the Bahraini Parliament passed on 27/10/2009 a bill banning all forms of dealing with Israel.¹⁴³

Third: Developments of Normalization

The Israeli attempts to penetrate the Arab official regimes and public have continued over the past decades. Normalization according to Israel is a strategic issue that is related to its presence in the Arab region. Indeed, Israel has succeeded since its existence in establishing secret political relations with some Arab leaders, while it penetrated public refusal for normalization with official peace treaties with Jordan and Egypt. In addition, the chances for normalization have increased and broadened after the beginning of direct talks between Israel and the PLO and the signing of Oslo Accords. These developments allowed Israel to have open relations with some Arab countries.

The Israeli offensive on GS, in the winter of 2008/2009, caused thousands of Palestinian victims in addition to massive destruction. Despite all that, some Arab countries continued to normalize relations with Israel regardless of the wide public refusal for such relations.

1. Egypt

The issue of Egyptian natural gas exported to Israel continued to be the main debate in Egypt since it is one of the major forms of normalization with Israel. Egypt's Supreme Administrative Court headed by Judge Ibrahim al-Saghir, overruled the decision of the State Council and decided that gas export should

continue. It must be noted that the State Council has annulled previously the decision of the Egyptian government to export gas to Israel.

In this context, *Haaretz* newspaper revealed that the Egyptian-Israeli company, East Mediterranean Gas (EMG), has signed in July 2009 a new contract to export huge quantities of natural gas to Israel for 17 years, while giving the Israeli side the right to renew the contract for five additional years. The Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum justified this issue on the basis that the contract is a commercial agreement between the company and its Israeli partners.

Haaretz clarified that EMG, which is owned by the Israeli businessman Yossi Meiman in partnership with the Egyptian government, has agreed with the Israeli Dorad Energy Ltd., which operates in the field of electricity generation, to export 12.5 billion cubic meters of natural gas in a new deal worth \$2.1–2.5 billion.

In the framework of the bilateral agreement between the two companies, EMG has to supply 750 million cubic meters (MCM) of natural gas to Dorad in return for \$125–150 million per year.¹⁴⁴

The Hebrew economic newspaper *Calcalist* revealed that the contract between EMG and Israeli companies to supply them with natural gas was worth \$10 billion. Power Expert Lior Gutman noted that the sum includes the contracts which the Israeli companies have signed with EMG. They are eight contracts concluded with eight parties in Israel: Israel Electric Corporation (IEC), Nesher Israel Cement Enterprises Ltd., Dorad Energy Ltd., Ashdod Energy Ltd., Ramat Negev Energy Ltd., Solad Energy Ltd., Haifa Chemicals Ltd. and Makhteshim Agan Industries Ltd.¹⁴⁵

The official documents about the prices of Egyptian natural gas exported to Israel in 2008–2009, which was published in *al-Masry al-Youm* newspaper in September 2009, showed that the Egyptian General Petroleum Authority exported 30 billion cubic feet of gas to Israel through the marine pipeline, thus achieving around \$90 million returns with average \$2.97 for every one million British thermal unit (Btu). According to the newspaper, the price of gas sold to Israel is less than that sold to the local market by three cents for high energy consuming industries which get the gas for \$3.¹⁴⁶

As for the economic proceeds of this deal for Israel, IEC declared that the supplies of the Egyptian gas would allow the company to achieve its goal of producing 40% of electricity in Israel from natural gas,¹⁴⁷ which is beneficial for Israel.



In 2009, there was a significant development in the value of trade between Egypt and Israel. The Israeli imports from Egypt increased from \$132.4 million in 2008 to \$270.9 million in 2009 whereas the Israeli exports to Egypt declined by 3.6% where it dropped from \$139 million in 2008 to \$134 million in 2009. Thus, trade between Egypt and Israel increased by 49%.¹⁴⁸

Normalization was not only limited to the economic domain. Israel which failed to penetrate the cultural arena during the last three decades, since the peace treaty with Egypt, succeeded to exploit the efforts of the Egyptian Minister of Culture Farouk Hosny who was trying to win the position of Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). Thus, it criticized him for his former statement that said that he was ready to burn Israeli books if any were found in The New Library of Alexandria. The requirements of winning the position besides the Israeli criticism campaign urged Hosny to express his “sorrow” for his former statement. It even made the Ministry of Culture announce Egypt’s will to sign a contract with a European publication house to translate the works of two Israeli authors, Amos Oz and David Grossman, into Arabic.¹⁴⁹

On another hand, Hala Mustafa, the editor-in-chief of *al-Democratiyyah* magazine published by Al-Ahram Center for Political and Strategic Studies (ACPSS), hosted the Israeli ambassador in Egypt, thus triggering controversy in the Egyptian media. Hala defended herself saying that there is no rule in Al-Ahram which prevents hosting any diplomat. She added that hosting the Israeli ambassador in Al-Ahram Center was not a precedent as Al-Ahram Weekly Chairman of the Board ‘Abd al-Mun‘im Sa‘id had hosted the former Israeli ambassador in the presence of Ibrahim Nafie’, the former editor-in-chief of the board.¹⁵⁰

2. Jordan

The Jordanian Interior Minister Nayef al-Qadi made an exception for those bearing the Israeli nationality from getting a visa—from the Jordanian embassy in Tel Aviv—to enter Jordan. His justification was that he wanted to avoid any obstacle that might prevent Palestinians of 1948 occupied Palestine from practicing religious rituals in the *Hajj* and ‘*Umrah*’ season. It is known that Jordan requires citizens from many Arab countries such as Sudan, Egypt and Morocco among others to get a visa to enter its territories. In return, the Israeli authorities did not

treat Jordanian citizens the same way and continued to require them to get a visa for entry into Israel.¹⁵¹ Later, Jordanian Prime Minister Nader al-Thahabi denied this and declared that “Israeli citizens are required to get a visa just like the Israeli side requires the Jordanian citizens to get one.” Jordanian parties and unions launched a campaign against the exemption decision and considered it an “exaggeration in the normalization with the enemy.”¹⁵²

A report published by Aljazeera.net showed that the Israeli ambassador in Amman, Yaakov Rosen, organized a gala dinner which was attended by a number of Jordanian businessmen and media persons. Hamza Mansur, who heads the Higher Executive Committee for Defending the Homeland and Confronting Normalization, noted that the supporters for normalization are only “a bunch of mercenaries and opportunists who are looking for a role.” Mansur added that the Jordanian official authorities “are seeking a price from Washington through a bunch of mercenaries and traders.”

However, Tariq al-Hamidi, an activist in the domain of normalization with Israel and one of the dinner attendees, refused the claims that “normalizers” were only a minority. He said that he himself knew tens of Jordanians who participate in workshops that are held throughout the year in Israel. He added also that they amount to 12 annual workshops in the domains of water, environment and others, where between 20 and 25 Jordanians participate in each.¹⁵³

On 8/9/2009, a delegation of 12 Jordanian journalists representing different official and private media corporations conducted an official visit to Jerusalem. The visit, which was the first of its kind, aimed at examining the efforts to foster the Islamic and Christian holy sites, according to the statement of the Jordanian government spokesperson Nabil al-Sharif. The Anti-Normalization Committee of the Jordanian Professional Associations (JPA) threatened that it would black list the members of the press delegation who visited Jerusalem on the basis of normalization with Israel.¹⁵⁴ On the other hand, the head of the Jordanian Press Association, ‘Abdul Wahhab Zughailat, noted that any visits conducted by Jordanian journalists to occupied Palestine do not fall within the scope of normalization. He added that the visit was an official and a professional work to emphasize the Arabism of Jerusalem, and to clarify the Hashemite and Jordanian role in the reconstruction of the Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem and preserving them.¹⁵⁵



On the economic level, trade between Israel and Jordan continued during 2009, while its value deteriorated by 23.6% which amounts to \$93.2 million. In a report by the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture, the Agriculture Minister Sa'id al-Masri revealed that Jordan has imported around three thousand tons of fruits and vegetables from Israel in the first nine months of 2009, in addition to other 60 kinds of other agricultural products.¹⁵⁶

In a communiqué circulated by the Jordan Customs in January 2010, a new list of products of Israeli origin benefited from exemption or tariff duty reduction under the Protocol annexed to the Agreement on Trade and Economic Cooperation between Israel and Jordan, which has entered its sixth phase on 1/1/2010. The Jordan Customs annexed a list of around 2,500 goods that are exempted from customs fees and taxes. Moreover, Jordan Customs reduced tariff duties and other fees by 50% on a number of items and materials of Israeli origin, when they are exported directly to Jordan.¹⁵⁷

On the security level, the Jordanian and Israeli military forces conducted military training to face earthquakes, with the participation of two to three brigades from each side.¹⁵⁸

3. Other Arab Countries

The Israeli billionaire Lev Leviev opened four stores specialized in selling luxury clothing in Dubai, which arouse angry reactions especially that he is one of the biggest supporters of settlers in the WB. Reports affirmed that Leviev has signed a contract with a French company specialized in this domain, and the company in its turn signed a contract with one of the UAE businessmen. Reports noted that opening the four stores is only the first step towards opening stores in the biggest and most luxurious malls in Dubai.¹⁵⁹ In the same context, *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper mentioned, in 23/2/2009, that many bearers of the Israeli passports enter Dubai including businessmen, diamond and food dealers. On the other hand, the UAE authorities refused to grant the Israeli tennis player Shahar Pe'er a visa to participate in Barclays Dubai Tennis Championships which was held in February 2009. Some observers referred this refusal to the Israeli offensive on GS prior to championship.¹⁶⁰

On the other hand, Israel participated in the meeting of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) which was held in October 2009 in Abu Dhabi. The UAE Foreign Ministry declared that the Israeli participation was decided by IRENA which supervised the meeting, adding that the UAE role was limited to hosting the meetings without having any responsibility for the participants. The UAE further stressed that such Israeli participation does not mean any change in its policy towards Tel Aviv or any indicator for normalization with the Hebrew state.¹⁶¹

On another level, Iraq abolished the condition of boycotting Israel for participation in the annual Baghdad International Fair upon the requirement of the EU so that European countries could participate.¹⁶² The Iraqi MP Nouredine al-Heyali confirmed that the Israelis are present in every region and the aim is to divide Iraq according to preset plans. *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper mentioned that Iraq has sealed a deal with the USA to supply Iraq with Israeli modern military equipment adding that the deal is worth \$49 million and it includes control towers, sensors and surveillance cameras and it comes in the context of Israeli-American cooperation agreements.¹⁶³

In Bahrain, the Council of Representatives passed a law, on 27/10/2009, which criminalizes and prevents dealing with Israel. The Bahraini government expressed reservations on the law while the Undersecretary of Regional and Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Affairs, Hamad al-Amer, said that “the bill constitutes interference by the legislative body in executive matters, regarding defining foreign policies and affairs which is entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.”

In the details of the law, the Council of Representative agreed that whoever violates the provisions of the draft law banning dealing with Israel is imprisoned for three to 10 years. In addition to imprisonment, the offender could be charged with a fine that does not exceed 10 thousand Bahraini Dinars (\$26.6 thousand). If the crime is committed by a moral entity, the penalty set forth in the preceding paragraph is applied to the offender and any accomplices who belong to that entity.¹⁶⁴

In Morocco, more than 200 Moroccan Jews, including Israelis, participated in an international meeting for the Jews from Fez origins. The Moroccan newspaper *Aljarida Aloula* mentioned that the meeting, which convened under the slogan “the Jews of Fez in Fez,” aimed at informing the Jewish generations about the Jewish cultural heritage of the city.¹⁶⁵

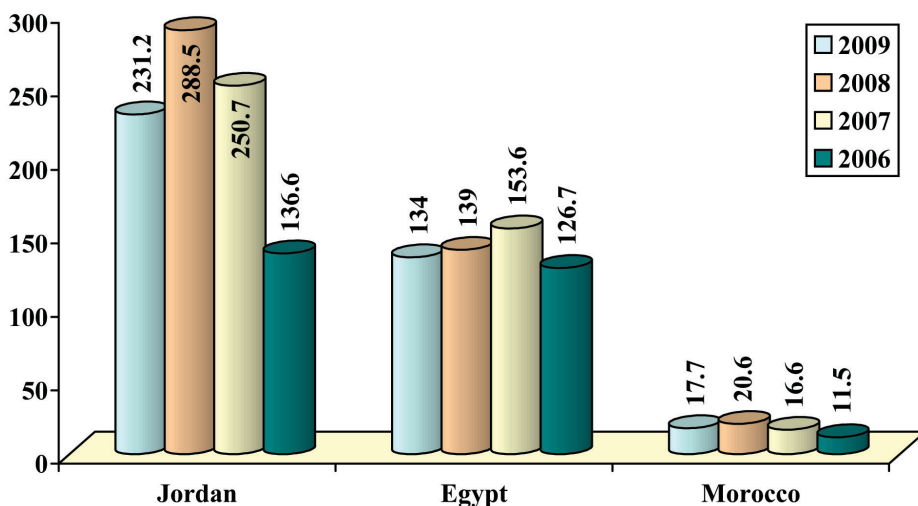


Apparently, some Israeli attempts to circumvent the laws which prevent normalization and dealing with Israel have succeeded. This was emphasized by David Arzi, Corporate Vice President of Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), who was earlier the chairman of The Israel Export and International Cooperation Institute, where he said in an interview with *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper that he did not think that there is something called boycotting Israel. He also affirmed that Israeli exports are everywhere except in countries which Israelis are not allowed to deal with, i.e., Iran, Syria and Lebanon. Arzi mentioned also that he has visited many Arab countries including the Gulf. It is not possible to know the extent of exaggeration in what he said. By and large, the Israeli capability for economic penetration remained negligible and limited in the Arab world.¹⁶⁶

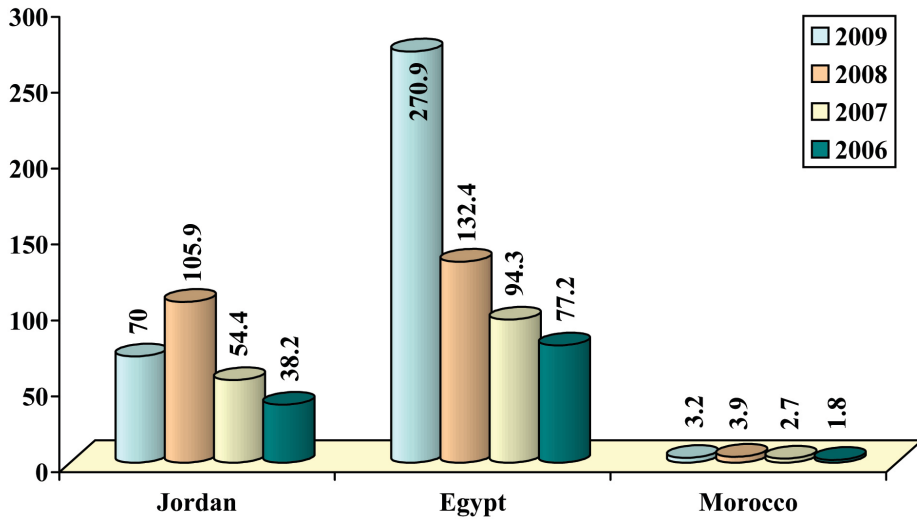
Table 1/3: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries
2006–2009 (\$ million)¹⁶⁷

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2009	2008	2007	2006	2009	2008	2007	2006
Jordan	231.2	288.5	250.7	136.6	70	105.9	54.4	38.2
Egypt	134	139	153.6	126.7	270.9	132.4	94.3	77.2
Morocco	17.7	20.6	16.6	11.5	3.2	3.9	2.7	1.8

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2006–2009 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2006–2009 (\$ million)



Fourth: The Arab Popular Stance and Its Orientations

The beginning of 2009 witnessed a remarkable Arab public support for the Palestinians following the Israeli aggression on GS, where the public events in solidarity with the Gazans continued over 2009. The steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance in GS mobilized the Arab street against the official silence over what was happening in GS. The position of the Arab street towards the Palestinian issue showed the deep rift between the official performance and the public will to support the Palestinian people directly. This, in fact, embarrassed many Arab regimes which were afraid that further development in the public movement might threaten their stability. Thus, public demonstrations supporting the Palestinian people were many times faced with arrest and prevention.

The demonstrations and different supporting events of the Arab street, during the offensive on GS, showed how much it is connected to the Palestinian issue. In addition, these protests were an Arab public referendum on the Palestinian resistance, which endorsed the right of the Palestinian people to all forms of resistance. In Egypt, demonstrations swept all governorates, while the Supreme Guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Muhammad Mahdi 'Akef, accused the Arab regime of complicity with Israel and the USA. He called for the opening of the



Rafah crossing “to pass weapons to the Palestinians” in addition to humanitarian aid. He also demanded “the severing of relations with the Zionist enemy, and to stop supplying it with gas and oil.”¹⁶⁸

On the other hand, the Popular Campaign for Stopping the Export of Egyptian Natural Gas to Israel warned the Egyptian government that if the decision of the Administrative Court to suspend gas exports to Israel were not implemented, there would be a return to the time of *fida'iyyin* (guerrillas) who would get their rights back with their own hands.¹⁶⁹ Egyptian opposition MPs accused their government of complicity with Israel. They said in a press conference, which they held after they were prevented from entering GS, that the Egyptian regime “was collaborating with Israel to starve, besiege and kill the Palestinian people besides playing a symphony of fraud and falsehood about allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza.”¹⁷⁰ Moreover, the Egyptian opposition condemned the Egyptian government’s approval of holding a race for Israeli motorcyclists and opening the Rafah crossing nine days for the contestants.¹⁷¹

Regarding the Goldstone Report, the Egyptian Bar Association called for a public trial for the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in its headquarters in central Cairo, on the basis of his stands towards the Palestinian issue, especially postponing the discussion of the Goldstone Report.¹⁷² Islamist and independent MPs demanded, through the parliament, the halt of the construction of the steel wall on the Egyptian borders with GS. The Secretary-General of the Muslim Brotherhood Parliamentary Bloc, Muhammad al-Baltaji said that “the construction of the steel wall is an Israeli and American priority, and it is never acceptable to market it as a priority for the Egyptian people.” Al-Baltaji also said that the presence of tunnels is a crime in itself for which the Egyptian government is responsible. It has forced 1.5 million Palestinians to resort to tunnels as the only way to get their essential needs, after it has closed the Rafah crossing.¹⁷³

In Jordan, public demonstrations swept the streets of Jordanian cities where hundreds of thousands denounced the Israeli offensive on the Palestinians in GS. The National Forum of Professional Associations and Opposition Parties organized a central festival in which more than 100 thousand people participated. There, President of the Associations Board and Head of Jordan Agricultural Engineers Association (JAEA), Abdul Hadi Falahat, said that the Jordanians show their solidarity with GS “because it is paying the price of freedom although it is

being burnt by the vindictive Zionist aggression, and because it is defending the whole nation, Amman and Cairo, besides all Arab cities.” Falahat reiterated the need to annul Wadi ‘Arbah Treaty, Oslo and Camp David Accords signed with Israel.¹⁷⁴ Moreover, The Jordan Engineers Association organized a campaign for the reconstruction of GS, under the motto “We will get it back more beautiful and powerful.” The campaign allows individuals or groups to purchase “shares” as a donation for GS reconstruction projects. Each “JD100 share” is equivalent to the cost of building one-half square metre, while a half-share (JD50) would fund a quarter-square metre of construction.”¹⁷⁵

The public movement in Kuwait was indeed striking, where thousands participated in angry demonstrations in solidarity with GS, chanting slogans in support for the Palestinian resistance and condemning the Arab and international silence.¹⁷⁶ The Palestine Charity Committee organized a fund-raising campaign under the banner “Gaza... We are with you.” The Committee also organized, in collaboration with civil society organizations, humanitarian and medical relief convoys for the Gazans.¹⁷⁷ Prior to the end of the Israeli offensive on GS, the Kuwaiti Committee for the Support of Gaza organized a festival where Isma‘il Haniyyah’s head-cover (*Kufiyah*) was sold in an auction for 100 thousand Kuwaiti Dinars (equivalent to \$345 thousand).¹⁷⁸ In the context of the Arab Economic and Social Development Summit, which was held on 19/1/2009 in Kuwait, 21 Kuwaiti MPs called on the Kuwaiti people to express their disapproval of Mahmud ‘Abbas’s participation in the summit on the basis of being a persona non grata. The MPs said that President ‘Abbas has taken negative and defeatist stands regarding the Israeli war on the besieged Gazans, while he showed candid position in restricting the legitimate resistance operations against the occupation.¹⁷⁹

The Moroccan capital, Rabat, has in its turn witnessed on 4/1/2009 a massive protest where roughly million demonstrators participated to express solidarity with GS. Demonstrators, who hailed the Palestinian resistance, came from different political, human rights, women and youth organizations besides trade unions.¹⁸⁰

On 14/2/2009 the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) held a conference in collaboration with Palestinian and international human rights organizations entitled “Israel: War Crimes and Genocide.” The conference concluded its work on 15/2/2009 calling for:

* JD = Jordanian Dinars.



lifting the siege, opening crossings, particularly the Rafah crossing, and facilitating access of individuals, materials and the organizations and bodies concerned with compiling crime evidence to the Gaza Strip, the purpose being to ensure a comprehensive documenting of the Israeli war crimes as a prelude to the trial of the Israeli war criminals.¹⁸¹

In the KSA, a group of scholars and preachers in Mecca issued a statement which emphasized the legitimacy of armed resistance as well as the necessity of supporting fighters through funds, arms and prayers. The statement called the Islamic and Arab governments to “back the Palestinian legitimate government elected in Gaza with all forms of political, economic and military support and to make every possible effort to lift tyranny and aggression exercised against them.” The Saudi scholars also called the Egyptian government to bear its responsibility and open the Rafah crossing permanently and without restrictions.¹⁸²

With an official initiative, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques Campaign for the Relief of the Palestinian People in Gaza was launched. The Campaign received wide public response from businessmen, traders, industrialists and stores owners where it could raise around \$55 million donations.¹⁸³

The situation was not different in Lebanon where demonstrations swept most of the Lebanese cities in support for the Palestinians in GS, as rallies moved from the Egyptian Embassy to the American Embassy. *Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah*, in addition to some Lebanese Islamic and national groups, organized a number of events in solidarity with GS. Moreover, the refugee camps in Lebanon witnessed a similar movement during the aggression on GS. Hizbullah organized a rally in Qana under the slogan “Glory for Gaza” with a wide participation from Islamic and national Lebanese and Palestinian forces. Member of Loyalty to the Resistance parliamentary bloc MP Hasan Fadlullah said in his speech that “when the war objectives collapse, and the enemy stands at the gates of cities and refugee camps not daring to enter and is forced to retreat, then we could say at the top of our voice that we are witnessing a new victory, a new dawn and a new defeat for this enemy.”¹⁸⁴

The Syrian capital, Damascus, was also among the cities which witnessed massive demonstrations that expressed solidarity with the Palestinians during the Israeli offensive on GS. The demonstrators of the political, religious, economic, social, women, students and civil society organizations denounced

the US stands, which are biased to Israel, and the impotence of the UN and the Security Council.¹⁸⁵

In Sudan, demonstrations continued all during the war. On 8/1/2009, around a million Sudanese participated in a demonstration in Khartoum, where the Sudanese National Assembly Speaker Ahmed Ibrahim al-Tahir called the participators to prepare for days similar to those of GS. Besides, the Chairperson of the Sudanese Popular Campaign in support of the people of Gaza, Fathi Khalil, called the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon to resign from his position.¹⁸⁶ On the first Friday of the Israeli aggression on GS, mosque preachers devoted the Friday sermon to denounce the Israeli aggression. They asked, also, the Sudanese to provide in-kind support for the Gazans. On the same level, Sudan Doctors Union announced a state of alert among its members for fund-raising. It also sent a medical convoy to GS at the cost of more than \$1 million with the participation of surgeons, anesthesia specialists in addition to medical assistants. Moreover, the Sudanese Popular Campaign continued to send its convoys with medical equipment, medicine and blood units compiled from the Sudanese people to the Palestinians in GS.¹⁸⁷

In Yemen, angry demonstrators stormed the headquarters of the Egyptian Consulate and raised the Palestinian flag over the building in protest against closing Rafah crossing.¹⁸⁸ The Yemeni street responded to the donation campaigns, which were launched in the mosques of Sana'a and some big cities, in a way that reflected the immensity of the Yemeni sympathy with the Palestinian people. The sum of contributions collected spontaneously in big mosques was estimated at hundreds of millions of Yemeni Rials, in addition to the striking scene where some Yemenis donated their cars and houses, while others donated jewelry.¹⁸⁹ Sheikh 'Abd al-Majid al-Zindani called for the prompt opening of training camps to prepare volunteers to fight Israel. He stressed also, in a Friday sermon, that "if volunteer camps were opened in the Arab world and millions of youths joined for training, then America would ask Israel to step back."¹⁹⁰ On the other hand, 60 MPs in the Yemeni Parliament demanded never to receive or deal with the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas, whom they accused of not supporting the resistance.¹⁹¹

The Mauritanian capital witnessed violent confrontations between thousands of protestors and policemen who tried to secure the Israeli embassy, where the protestors succeeded in destroying its façade. The demonstrators called for the



expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Nouakchott, the closure of the embassy and to recall the Mauritanian ambassador in Tel Aviv. The Mauritanian Party of Union and Change (HATEM) organized a festival expressing joy over the steadfastness of the GS. Moreover, Mauritanian Garrison for the Struggle against the Zionist Invasion organized a gala dinner in which it gathered in-kind and financial donations for the Gazans.¹⁹²

In the gulf countries, there were massive demonstrations condemning the aggression. The Bahraini capital witnessed protests where thousands participated over several days.¹⁹³ In addition, thousands of locals and residents in Qatar marched through the streets to show support and solidarity with the Palestinians in GS. Thousands of Palestinians and Arabs living in UAE participated in two rallies; the first was in the Palestinian Embassy in Abu Dhabi and the other in the Palestinian Consulate in Dubai, to express solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemn the Israeli crimes.¹⁹⁴ In Algeria, more than 140 thousands demonstrated in different cities denouncing the aggression.¹⁹⁵

Tripoli and other Libyan cities witnessed massive demonstrations in which protestors denounced the Arab negligence and called for the withdrawal of the Arab Peace Initiative. Some demonstrators attacked the Egyptian Embassy and hurled stones at it.¹⁹⁶

Conclusion

The year 2009 was one more proof of the continuous Arab official incompetence where the Palestinian issue is concerned, while the defects of the Arab regime still directly and indirectly impact this issue. There is no doubt that the ability of the Arab world to provide support has been affected by the Palestinian schism. However, the Arab weakness and impotency existed way before this schism.

The Israeli offensive on GS (27/12/2008–18/1/2009) has revealed the impotence of the Arab regime, its division and inability to defend the Palestinians there. Even worse, some regimes have prioritized the considerations of American influence and their commitment towards Israel besides their disagreements with Hamas or Islamists over the considerations of Arab national security and their obligations towards Palestine. The Arab regime did not succeed in lifting the siege imposed

on the Palestinians; neither did it succeed in fulfilling its commitments to the reconstruction of the GS. Whereas the suffering of the Gazans continued to be blatant evidence on the inability of this regime.

The steadfastness of the resistance in the GS and its impressive performance, despite its limited potentials, inflamed the enthusiasm of the Arab masses that reacted largely through fund-raising and demonstrations. Gaza Emergency Summit in Doha held on 16/1/2009 was a reflection of this reaction, in spite of the Arab boycott for the conference. Hosting Khalid Mish'al to speak, on the behalf of the resistance and Palestine, was a major political breakthrough for Hamas in which Qatar played a major role, particularly after President 'Abbas abstained from attending the summit. However, this breakthrough was only temporary and limited and the glory which Hamas has achieved soon waned. The Arab regime returned to dealing with President 'Abbas and the Ramallah-based government, and the policy of isolating Hamas and its government returned, too.

During 2009, Egypt continued to be the main Arab player in the Palestinian affairs contrary to the past two years which witnessed Saudi, Qatari, Yemeni, Sudanese... efforts. The reconciliation efforts were mainly Egyptian, where Cairo hosted many rounds of dialogue. These efforts ended with Egypt presenting a reconciliation paper on which Fatah signed and Hamas showed reservations.

It was clear that the Egyptian government dealt with Hamas and its government as a burden or a "problem." Egypt continued its closure of Rafah crossing and its restrictions on donations and relief convoys, and then it constructed the Steel Wall to eliminate tunnels which supply the GS with around 50% of its needs. All these were considered by Hamas as an Egyptian bias to Fatah and the PA in Ramallah, as well as a practical participation in weakening Hamas and overthrowing it.

In Jordan, the breakthrough in the relation with Hamas in the second half of 2008 soon became stagnant during 2009, when the Director of the General Intelligence Department Muhammad al-Thahabi was dismissed. The issue of the relation between Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan witnessed a wide internal debate. It was one of the issues which the Jordanian authorities have followed attentively for its probable impacts on the Jordanian arena. Thus, there was a clear desire to "disengage" these two parties. On the other hand, Jordan apologized for not hosting the Sixth Congress of Fatah, thus prompting the latter to hold its conference in the WB.



Syria continued to lead the Arab refusal front, and continued hosting Hamas and the other Palestinian resistance factions. Yet, it was keen to stay at equal distance regarding ending the Palestinian schism and achieving Palestinian unity. It further called for the reconsideration of the Arab Peace Initiative if Israel continued its aggression on the GS and the siege on the Palestinians. In 2009, the Israeli-Syrian negotiations which were conducted indirectly through Turkish mediation were affected by the formation of a right-wing government under Netanyahu's leadership.

In Lebanon, the suffering of the Palestinian refugees continued together with depriving them of their civil rights in labor and ownership. Despite the Lebanese and Palestinian consensus on refusing naturalization, some parties used the latter as a weapon—in depicting it as a scarecrow—to make sure that the Palestinians do not get the basic human rights. The reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared faced many hindrances, despite the availability of necessary planning and funding, and reconstruction works were not resumed except on 26/10/2009. However, in August 2010, a substantial though limited progress was made when the Lebanese parliament passed a law, which granted the Palestinians partial rights to work and social security and within certain terms.

In 2009, KSA did not play a mediatory role in the Palestinian reconciliation, but rather remained in the moderate front and did not participate in the Arab Emergency Summit in Doha. However, it remained the major Arab financial supporter for Palestine, both on the official and public levels. The Saudi relations with Hamas were cold till late 2009, when KSA agreed to receive Khalid Mish'al who visited the Kingdom in early 2010. This breakthrough was followed by similar visits by Hamas leaders to many gulf countries including UAE, Bahrain, Qatar and Kuwait.

The normalization between Israel and the Arab countries remained limited to the countries which have signed peace agreements with Israel, namely Egypt and Jordan. The state of large-scale antagonism to Israel on the public level in all Arab countries, including Egypt and Jordan, participated to confining normalization to the official level. While the Israeli aggression on GS and its siege contributed to the rise in the state of enmity and hatred towards Israel.

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This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2009/10 is the fifth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. It discusses the developments of the Palestinian issue in this period, in an objective and comprehensive manner. The meticulous analytical reading of events tries also to foresee the future. This Report has become a basic reference in Palestinian studies, it is a must to all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 14 academics and experts contributed to this Report in eight chapters. They covered the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Arab, Muslim and international stances toward the Palestinian issue. This Report focuses also on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites, whereas, the demographic and economic indicators are studied and analyzed in two separate chapters.

Undoubtedly, this Report is a serious addition to the field of Palestinian studies.

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