

The Palestinian Strategic Report

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Chapter Four

*The Palestinian Issue and the
Muslim World*

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The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

The events of 2009 and the Israeli aggression on GS during the same year have brought to the fore the various facets of the disparity between the two levels at which the Muslim world deals with the Palestinian issue. The first level pertains to the strong public support for the Palestinian people in the GS, which was reflected through demonstrations and donation campaigns aimed at consolidating the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. In some countries, there were demands that the Muslim state governments take action in stopping the Israeli aggression on GS and allow the volunteers to join the military struggle. The second level involves the official Muslim states and shows differing stances from one country to the other during the year 2009. At the time we see direct financial and political support from Iran, and we see a clear standing toward the Israeli assault from Turkey whose Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stood up at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos and described the Israelis of being murderers, then left the place. We also see the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) sufficing with criticism, condemnation and the calls to stop “violence.”

In this chapter we will review some details of the OIC position, in addition to the stances of two major countries that have played a prominent role in the Palestinian issue during 2009, i.e., Turkey and Iran. The chapter also examines some of the official and public action in Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan and their after effects during 2009.

First: The Organization of the Islamic Conference

The discourse or policies of the OIC toward the Palestinian issue have not witnessed any significant changes during 2009, ranging from disapproval to condemnation and conviction. The OIC continued these condemnations of the Israeli aggression and military operations in the GS at the end of 2008 and the outbreak of 2009, calling for the prosecution of Israel for committing war crimes in the GS. The OIC also declared its continuous support for the Palestinian people and



their rights in the WB and GS. It called for implementing international resolutions and activated its diplomatic efforts concerning the Israeli aggression on Islamic holy sites and the Israeli excavations in East Jerusalem.

The OIC scaled up its diplomatic efforts to deal with the Israeli offensive against the GS. It held a joint meeting with the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in addition to meetings with the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC), attended by a representative of the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO).

On 3/1/2009, one week after the onset of the Israeli operations in the GS, the OIC held an Expanded Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Executive Committee for the member states. The meeting strongly condemned the brutal Israeli assault on the Palestinian people in Gaza, and it expressed its dismay over the inability of the UN Security Council to take the necessary steps for a ceasefire and demanded the Council to fulfill its responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It requested “the international community to act immediately to end the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip, to secure an immediate ceasefire, return to calm, and cessation of all hostilities to provide immediate protection for the Palestinian people.” It called for “the stationing of an international monitoring mission in the Gaza Strip, following the cessation of fire, preferably under the UN umbrella, to de-escalate the conflict and stabilize the situation.” It requested “the Group of Ambassadors of OIC Member States in Geneva to finalize its effort to convene an emergency session of the Human Rights Council on the violation of human rights caused by the Israeli aggression on the Gaza Strip.”¹

Apparently, the international security and peacekeeping apparatus represented in the UN and its different international affiliations, whose decision making process is largely controlled by the USA, do not take into account the international Islamic apparatus represented by the OIC that rejects the repeated Israeli attacks on the Palestinian people. This fact may be owing to the positions and alliances between some influential Arab and Muslim countries inside the OIC and the American and European countries that foster Israel. Hence, no positive reaction was expected from the UN and its major countries to stop the Israeli aggression on the GS and carry out the demands of the OIC. Consequently, the OIC turned mainly toward providing humanitarian aid to the Gazans. It launched a humanitarian relief campaign, on 4/1/2009, to “provide the minimum requirements of the basic human needs to the population in the Gaza Strip.”² The OIC was able to allow a convoy of relief aid

to the GS through the Rafah Crossing that included 300 tons of medicine, medical equipment and food supplies. The second convoy was sent from Jeddah carrying 170 tons of medical supplies and foodstuff in cooperation with the Saudi Red Crescent Authority (SRCA). The OIC also made commitments at the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held on 2/3/2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh, to contribute \$100 million.³ Moreover, the OIC sent, on 19/4/2009, a convoy of humanitarian aid of 23 truckloads to the GS and on 6/5/2009 it sent another convoy of 43 trucks carrying around a thousand tons with an overall value of \$3.22 million.⁴ In addition, on 19/6/2009, the OIC inaugurated the first specialized eye hospital in the GS. It is worth mentioning that the overall assistance provided during the period January-June 2009, by the OIC and its partners in the field of emergency relief, has reached around \$8 million.⁵

On 15/3/2009, OIC Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu made an inspection visit to GS with a high-level delegation where he examined the destruction done by the Israeli aggression. During the visit, Ihsanoğlu and the accompanying delegation met a number of Hamas leaders and representatives of civil society organizations where he reaffirmed the necessity of completing the track of Palestinian national reconciliation.⁶

During 2009, the OIC continued its condemnations of the Israeli attacks on the Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem. In an interview with *al-Raya* newspaper, Ihsanoğlu said that the danger of the excavations under *al-Aqsa* Mosque far exceeds that of the fire of *al-Aqsa* Mosque 40 years ago. He added that these excavations expose the Mosque to severe harm, leading to its corrosion underneath and above. Thus, adding a new element to the equation; dividing the Mosque between Muslims and Jews as the case is in the Ibrahimi Mosque (The Sanctuary of Abraham) in Hebron. Ihsanoğlu attributed the OIC's inability to make a fundamental change in the de facto situation—which the Israeli occupation attempts to impose in Jerusalem—to the lack of political will on the side of the member countries as well as the Palestinian political will. He explained that the statements and diplomatic efforts made by the OIC will not effect a change in the dreadful situation that Israel has caused in Jerusalem. In his interpretation to the reactions to the Palestinian issue during the attack on the GS, Ihsanoğlu said that the Palestinian issue has lost its momentum and its supporters. He owed this to the failure to employ the historical opportunities to confirm the Palestinian national rights, and he cited the way in which the Goldstone Report was handled. He also



called for the necessity of taking action and putting pressure on international organizations and major countries to assert Palestinian rights.⁷

The Expanded Extraordinary Ministerial Meeting of the Executive Committee of the OIC was held on 1/11/2009 to discuss the Israeli assaults on *al-Aqsa* Mosque where they emphasized “that the question of the Holy Haram in Al Quds is a red line that can absolutely not be addressed with laxity or be subject of any debate.” It affirmed that:

all Israeli legislative, administrative, and colonial settlement procedures and measures aimed at altering the legal, demographic, architectural, cultural, and heritage-related status of the Holy City constitute a violation of the resolutions of international legitimacy and international covenants and conventions, in particular resolution no. 465 of the UN Security Council. It demands the UN Security Council to revive the International Supervision and Monitoring Committee to Prevent and Prohibit Colonial Settlement in *Al-Quds* and the Occupied Arab Territories, in accordance with its Resolution 446.

The meeting also wielded many resolutions calling for the protection of Jerusalem and the Islamic and Christian holy sites.⁸

The above were a few examples of how the OIC handled the Palestinian issue during 2009. It continued the habitual past-years criticism and condemnation of the Israeli attacks against the Palestinian people and holy sites. Seemingly, this condition is not bound for any essential change in the near future.

Second: Turkey

The Israeli offensive on GS at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 imposed itself on the general course of Turkish-Israeli political, economic and military relations. It had its effects, also, on the Turkish stance towards the Palestinian issue and all related issues that concern Turkey along 2009.

The offensive caused deep and large repercussions in Turkish-Israeli relations that remained as the year ended. In addition, on 31/5/2010, the Israelis attacked the Freedom Flotilla, which was trying to break the GS siege, killing nine Turks. This event was a turning point in the Turkish-Israeli relations, which deteriorated afterwards to a large extent in the second half of 2010 (We will fully discuss the event and its repercussions in the next *Palestinian Strategic Report*).

1. Bilateral Relations with Israel

Turkey was enraged, in the person of its prime minister, when the Israeli aggression on GS began only four days after the visit of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert to Turkey on 22/12/2008. On the one hand, the visit made implications that the attack was carried out with the prior knowledge of Turkey, and on the other, the aggression came contrary to Olmert's confirmations to Erdoğan that Israel would not take any action to disturb the relative stability of the situation with GS. Taking this into consideration, Erdoğan considered the attack a lack of respect to Turkey with Olmert breaching his promises.

During and after the attack, Erdoğan repeatedly and strongly condemned the aggression. On 29/1/2009, his condemnations had the well-known climax in his famous stand at the WEF. There, he objected to the way the session was moderated, where he was the guest speaker with Israeli President Shimon Peres, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon, and Secretary-General of the Arab League 'Amr Musa. Erdoğan soon left the session objecting and saying that Davos is over for him and that he will not go back to it again. Erdoğan's stand was received with waves of support in Palestine and the Arab World, and with deep indignation by the Israeli side and different circles in the West.

In the context of western reactions, the Jewish lobby in the USA sent a letter to Erdoğan, a few days before Davos, expressing their indignation at Erdoğan's stance towards Israel and its influence on the spread of anti-Semitic manifestations in Turkey.⁹

Along the days of the attack, Turkish officials were careful to express their principle stance of supporting the Palestinian people in GS. Even when the Conference on Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance in Gaza in Sharm el-Sheikh was held in January 2009, Turkish President Abdullah Gül refused to accompany the leaders of European countries to Tel Aviv saying that Turkey is not concerned with it. Gül added:

The United States and Israel reached a compromise last week to ensure control over tunnels and passages leading from Egypt to Israel. The United States undertook the control. And some European countries expressed their readiness to assist the United States to ensure that control. They went to Israel to renew their support to the process. It has nothing to do with us.¹⁰



He pointed out the specific Turkish position regarding GS saying that Turkey is not in a position to send troops to GS at that stage.

From the heart of Brussels, Erdoğan stood addressing the Turkish community and, indirectly, Israel. He asked if GS belong to Israel and what is Israel doing there. Erdoğan criticized the double standards applied by the West saying that there is no respect for human rights and law. None of them could secure a place on the agenda of the international community in the past three weeks. The UN Security Council adopts a resolution and Israel does not recognize it. He asked why was no sanctions applied and added that he need a concrete result. Then he wondered why do they apply double standards. Erdoğan added that Israel says that it said it had achieved its objectives. Then he wondered what did it actually achieve? Children and defenceless civilians were killed. He added that he is taking an emotional approach to those children, and this is not only because he is a Muslim, but also because he is a human being. There is an unrestricted and disproportionate use of force. Then he asked does Gaza belong to Israel? What is Israel doing there?.¹¹

The peak of Turkish anger against Israel was reached in Davos when Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan blasted the largest bomb in the history of Turkish-Israeli relations confronting Israeli President Shimon Peres. During the session, Erdoğan commenced his speech by saying:

Before replying to the question as to what's need to be done, I think its also important that we analyze the current situation because we need to do a proper analysis of the current situation in order to determine what steps need to be taken. I'm not going to start from forty years ago in making the situation analysis, I'm just going to go as far back as June 2008... There was a ceasefire, which was stated, agreed to, and there was no problem to the ceasefire that was to last for six months, but when the ceasefire ended, six months later, there were no rocket attacks, at that point. In the mean time, the Israeli side was to lift the embargo... However, the Palestinian territories are like an open air prison, because it is completely isolated from the rest of the world... so if you try to bring in a case of tomatoes from any crossing into the Palestinian territories you must get the permission of the Israeli side... We tried to send humanitarian aid to Turkish Red Crescent, tried to provide aid, but it took quite a while, two weeks sometimes, to have the trucks cross the crossings.

Erdoğan mentioned that Olmert refused the exchange of prisoners with Hamas. Erdoğan asked the audience to:

think of the military power of Israel including the weapons of mass destruction and whether or not there is anything that is similar in Gaza... They don't have that kind of power. The UN Security Council met and the resolution was announced, but Israel did not recognize this resolution... the UN center was also hit during the course of this war, and schools mosques were also hit, but mankind or humanity as a whole did not really act as quickly as they should have in trying to help the people there... We must definitely achieve peace in the Middle East because that's important and necessary for global peace... I think that in the National Unity government to be established in Palestine, this Party of Reform and Change must be there, and that is how the National Unity Government has to be established. Then, elections have to take place and once a new government is in place, whether or not we like them, will be and should be the government of the Palestinian people because we have to respect the will of [the Palestinian people].

He said:

President Peres, you are older than I am, and you have a very strong voice. I feel that you perhaps feel a bit guilty and that's why perhaps you have been so strong in your words, so loud. Well you killed people, I remember the children who died on beaches, and I remember two former prime ministers in your country who said they felt very happy when they were able to enter Palestine on tanks... And I find it very sad that people applaud what you have said because there have been many people who have been killed, and I think that it is very wrong and it is not humanitarian to applaud any actions which have had that kind of a result.

Despite the moderator attempting to stop Erdoğan from continuing his speech, Erdoğan insisted on speaking, using some notes he had in a file. He quoted the sixth commandment: "Thou shall not kill" and added "but we are talking about killing." Then he said, "Gilad Atzmon says that 'Israeli barbarianism is way beyond what it should be.' Then there is the International Relations professor from Oxford University Avi Shlaim has said this..." Erdoğan wrapped up saying that "I don't think I will come back to Davos after this, thank you, because you don't let me speak. The president spoke for 25 minutes, I have spoken only half of that."



Erdoğan then left his seat and the session, while ‘Amr Musa stood to congratulate him on his speech but remained in his place without following Erdoğan’s example.

After leaving the session, Erdoğan said in a statement that Davos meetings were unfair. I have a flexible mind but I am not some kind of patient sheep.¹²

The “one minute” phrase became a password and slogan tackled by Turkish websites. It became considered the new slogan of the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP), and used widely by the calling audience of television shows. They drew resemblance between the phrase and American President Barack Obama’s slogan “Yes We Can.” Erdoğan had repeated the phrase “one minute” more than once in context of asking the session moderator David Ignatius to give him the platform to comment on Peres’s speech and to stop interrupting him. He said it in English not in Turkish.

Returning from Davos a few hours after the Davos session, Erdoğan was received by thousands of people at the airport obstructing the traffic, waving Turkish and Palestinian flags and carrying banners that described Erdoğan as “Conqueror of Davos” and “New World Leader.” The crowds gathering lined up at the gates of Erdoğan’s house till the first hours of the morning throwing thousands of carnations in front of his house and the surrounding corridors to show their support for his stances.¹³

Among Erdoğan’s most important statements upon his return to Turkey were saying, “I don’t speak the same language with the retired diplomats. I come from politics not diplomacy. I have to protect the dignity of my people.” He added that “Our people would have expected the same reaction from any Turkish prime minister... This was a matter of the esteem and prestige of my country. Hence, my reaction had to be clear. I could not have allowed anyone to poison the prestige and in particular the honor of my country.”¹⁴

Later, Erdoğan prayed Dhuhr prayer at Yali Mosque in Istanbul and in a speech given at the inauguration of an Istanbul metro station, he reaffirmed that what matters is not what others say but what we say. He added that silence about injustice is an act of injustice. Our human traits come prior to the calculations of political power balance.

Erdoğan received huge backing from President Abdullah Gül when the latter said, “A Turkish prime minister of course would not put up with a disrespect if he was shown one. No one should expect that. And the prime minister did what needed

to be done and gave the answer that needed to be given.” Gül added, “Turkey is a great country, which everyone should know. Turkey is a country that always seeks peace, stability and security. And everyone should benefit from Turkey’s power. And if there is someone who does not want to benefit, then it is up to them.”¹⁵

In that wake of these incidents, the first opinion poll following the Davos incident between Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Israeli President Shimon Peres showed that 78% of Turkish people think that Erdoğan’s stance was positive and correct and a sweeping 82% supported Turkish government’s reaction to the GS attacks. A poll, by the Ankara-based MetroPOLL Strategic and Social Research Center, found that only 13% of the sample thought Erdoğan’s reaction was “incorrect,” with 75% viewing Erdoğan as a “straightforward and trusted” person, 81% viewing him as “strong and a decision maker,” and 70% as “democratic and free.” At the same time, 44% thought Erdoğan’s reaction did not encourage anti-Semitism, whereas 37% thought the opposite was true, 41% expected negative repercussions for the relations with Israel and 37% thought otherwise.¹⁶

Election-wise, 49% said they would vote for the AKP, whereas in 2007 elections 47% voted for the AKP and polls prior to Davos demonstrated 39% support. Other parties came far behind with 11% for the left-wing secular extremist Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi—CHP*), and only 5% for the right-wing extremist Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi—MHP*).¹⁷

At that time, even opposing voices inside Turkey expressed their support for Erdoğan. Head of the Nationalist Movement Party, Devlet Bahçeli, was the most scathing in condemning Israeli President’s attitude during the Davos session. He said that Peres’ attitude was an example of arrogance and rudeness that our dear nation cannot accept. At the same time, he described Erdoğan’s reaction as right, legitimate and appropriate. He added that Erdoğan’s storming out of the session was not a momentary reaction but was necessary for honoring Turkey and ending a history of the compliance policy. Bahçeli harshly condemned the gestures of Peres when Erdoğan was speaking during the session.¹⁸

For the first time, Erdoğan’s stance also won him support of the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), founded by the veteran politician Necmettin Erbakan, in a statement by its leader Numan Kurtulmuş. The party’s official newspaper *Milli Gazete* said that for the first time since taking the prime minister’s seat in 2002, Erdoğan has taken a correct stance.¹⁹



Notably enough, Erdoğan's first rival Deniz Baykal, head of the Republican People's Party, joined the list of objectors to Peres' attitude who crossed all boundaries of courtesy toward Erdoğan. However, Baykal called against steering the incident to serve internal politics, and thought it was unlikely that Israeli Turkish relations will be influenced, especially after Peres took the initiative to express to Erdoğan his regret over the incident.²⁰

Moreover, Kurdish Democratic Society Party (*Demokratik Toplum Partisi—DTP*), which is represented by 21 seats in Parliament, criticized Israel. Its deputy chairperson Emine Ayna stated that “we share the Palestinian people their grievances because we suffer the same grievances.” On the other hand, she strongly condemned Erdoğan who also knows well about killing, and knows how Kurdish lives are taken at the hands of Turkish Army.²¹

In that manner, Turkish writers with their different affiliations unanimously approved of Erdoğan's stance, and criticized Israel and its president.

Turkish Jews

From another angle, the Jewish sect in Turkey made a stance expressing their concern in a statement, by their leader Silvio Ovadia, over anti-Jewish sentiments in Turkey after the onslaught against GS and the Davos incident.

Ovadia stated that whenever similar incidents occurred in the Middle East, this tendency is unleashed in the world because Israel is the only “Jewish state” in the world, and had there been two or more, this wouldn't have happened. The second reason, according to Ovadia, is the lack of distinction between an Israeli and a Jewish person who is a citizen of another country. He explained that this is the problem they live in Turkey. Everyone regards them as part of Israel. The sentiments are similar to those between the Muslims in Turkey and the Muslims in Saudi Arabia or Palestine, there are sentiments between the Jews and Israel as a “Jewish state”; i.e., it is a religion bond, nothing more.

Ovadia further adds that the major problem for Jews in Turkey is not related to religious freedom, albeit some limitations. Although there is not one Jewish ambassador or officer in Turkey, and although we fulfill military service and all the duties of a Turkish citizen, integrate with Turkish culture, and speak Turkish, our biggest problem is that we are viewed as foreigners.

Highlighting the daily practical effects of this anti-Semitic sentiment in Turkey, he says that the percentage of synagogue attenders has decreased by 20%, although he remarks that this is temporary. However, Ovadia stresses that no Jewish person was subject to physical harassment and that security forces are allocating incredible and unbelievable numbers to protect the synagogues, to the extent that “we asked to decrease the numbers but the authorities refused.”

Ovadia says that what alarmed the Jewish community most was the proposition of a moment of silence at schools called for by the minister of education. The minister planned for an art and writing competition about GS at schools, with the participation of seven years old children. The best drawing was going to be the bloodiest. At that point, Ovadia contacted some of the AKP MPs, who called the minister of education and the competition was cancelled.²²

A Military Davos

Turkish-Israeli relations witnessed unprecedented tension in February 2009 that was more like a “military Davos” due to statements given by the then General Officer Commanding (GOC) Ground Forces Command Major-General Avi Mizrahi who attacked the person of the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan as well as Turkish people and leveled accusations at them of slaughtering Armenians and Kurds and occupying northern Cyprus. Mizrahi was quoted as saying Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan should have “looked in the mirror” before slamming President Shimon Peres.²³

Significantly, the harshest and primary reaction to these words came from the Turkish military institution followed by the Turkish Foreign Affairs Ministry’s note to Israel. This was the first time that bilateral relations witnessed a dispute at the military level between the two countries; what reflects the deep wounds caused by Mizrahi’s words in Turkish temper and awareness especially that the accusations were not merely an attack against Erdoğan but extended to national core issues in Turkey concerning the motherland case in Cyprus and the Armenian issue, not to mention an issue such as fighting the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan—PKK*) bout which there is almost unanimous agreement inside Turkey. The key point in the Turkish Army statement may be its public reference for the first time to how these remarks could harm the national interests between two countries.



The Turkish army was first to respond to the Israeli official's statements. In an official statement, it said, "These remarks, as the way they were published in the media reports, are considered to be misleading the facts, unfortunate, unacceptable and more importantly in an extent that could harm the national interests between two countries." The military also called on the Israeli army, "which is considered to be attaching great importance to its relations with the Turkish Armed Forces," to clarify Mizrahi's statement.²⁴

Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs statement said that Mirzahi's remarks violated all forms of diplomatic practices, and contradicted with the historical and current realities therefore these "accusations and nonsensical talks" targeting prime minister and the country had been protested by a note, the Turkish foreign ministry said in a statement.

"Furthermore, we have stressed that the relevant statements of Avi Mizrahi are ungrounded and unacceptable and as such we have requested an urgent explanation from Israeli authorities," the statement added.²⁵

The Israeli response was immediate as Israeli Army spokesman made it clear that Mizrahi's statements do not reflect the official position of the Israeli Army, are not binding and are personal statements.

Israeli Tourism in Turkey

Within a short period of time, the tension in Turkish-Israeli relations left its impact especially on Israeli tourism in Turkey. Israeli Ambassador in Turkey Gabby Levy spoke about how the relations between the two countries are cooling down and deteriorating.²⁶

Levy mentioned important figures reflecting the extent of such deterioration saying that Israeli air flights to Turkey were close to 10 flights per week, whereas now (February 2009) they are merely one or two weekly flights. The number of Israeli tourists in Turkey, during winter and spring, exceeded 150 thousand tourists, whereas now the number is almost a zero.²⁷ Levy added that although Turkish tourist agencies made dream offers to Israeli tourists, the tourists were not daring to come to Turkey. Some agencies offered three full days including travel expenses, residence and trip program for \$200 only. Some even offered two or three days for free. According to Levy, it can be said that the winter tourism between Israel and Turkey was completely dead.

Levy viewed that Israeli tourist's reluctance is not attributed to Prime Minister Erdogan's stance in Davos, but to the rising anti-Semitist and anti-Jewish tendency in Turkey; among the people and in the media. He cited an incident when a basketball match between a Turkish team and its Israeli counterpart in Ankara was cancelled. Due to the anger of Turkish audience the Israeli players' fled for the dressing rooms and the match was cancelled. Levi said that this incident had the largest shocking effect and was the reason for Israelis to refrain from going to Turkey for tourism.

Drill with Syria

Turkish-Israeli relations suffered serious strain due to Turkey's first-ever joint military drill with Syria at the end of April 2009.

Turkish Chief of General Staff İlker Başbuğ took personal charge of responding to the statements of Israeli researchers and officials, who expressed their concern and alarm at the joint Turkish-Syrian military drill. A comprehensive press conference in 28 April, Başbuğ referred to Israeli criticisms saying that he is not interested in Israel's reaction, and that the drills with Syria are a Turkish affair. Başbuğ affirmed the importance of the drill by saying that they are small-scale maneuvers but they are important because they are held for the first time.

İbrahim Karagül wrote in *Yeni Şafak* daily that Israel's main concern is not about the maneuver being a project of the AKP but rather, about the possibility of it being a policy of the Turkish state. Previously, Israel used to take advantage of the military-civil dispute in Turkey, but from this day on they will not be able to play that card and this is the source of its discomfort.²⁸ Karagül added that when Turkey gains more political leverage in the region, the sphere of influence for Israel there will be smaller.

In the same daily, columnist Hakan Albayrak expressed "his deep gratitude" to God that Israel is disturbed by these military drill with Syria. Albayrak reiterated that Israeli, American and Atlantic disturbance is something "that should make us glad." He revealed the falsehood of Israeli allegations—specifically those of Efraim Inbar, director of the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies—concerning the Turkish Army's discomfort about the Turkish Syrian drills. Albayrak further asked about the flag the drills were being held under, and whether they were held under the Greek flag.



Erdoğan at the UN

Turkey spared no chance to condemn Israeli practices, and among the platforms where Erdoğan voiced that stance was the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), in New York at the end of September 2009.

In his address, Erdoğan employed a human, legal, and moral approach. He defended the Palestinian issue, specifically the GS, by saying that: “People are living in tents and cannot find drinking water. In the face of this situation, are we fulfilling our humanitarian responsibility? What can the United Nations or the Security Council do? What measures have the United Nations and the Security Council really enacted?” Erdoğan accused the major powers of applying double standards in tackling the region saying that: “the security of the Palestinians is as important as the security of Israel. The Palestinian people’s quest for freedom and peace is as legitimate as Israel’s quest for stability.” Erdoğan also slammed the international community for failing to act according to the commitment they made eight months earlier to reconstruct GS when Israel refused to allow building materials into it.

Yielding weight to Erdoğan’s words is the fact that they come after his meeting with representatives of leading US-Jewish groups. There, Erdoğan said that the problem lies in the fact that Jews label Gazans as “terrorists.” They object to the reconstruction of GS so that “terrorists” will not use it. He asked them how can they declare 1,400 dead people as “terrorists?” Phosphorus was used in the killing and wounding of thousands of civilians, so how can they be declared “terrorists?” To regard Gaza with “terrorism” in mind means the impossibility of going anywhere.

Erdoğan didn’t stop at his speech at the UNGA. At a time when the world’s eyes were turned toward Iran’s declaration of a second uranium enrichment plant in Qom, Erdoğan was pointing to another topic, namely Israel. Erdoğan stated that: “Statements by Ahmadinejad are not about a nuclear weapon but are about peaceful intended enrichment.” Then he added, “We are completely against nuclear weapons in the Middle East. There is a country in the Middle East that possesses nuclear weapon: Israel. There is a difference, though; Israel is not a member of the [International Atomic Energy Agency] IAEA, while Iran is.” Erdoğan said, “Moreover, phosphorus bombs were used in Gaza. What is this? A weapon of mass destruction,” referring to the Israeli army’s deadly offensive in Gaza last

December, leaving more than 1,300 people dead. He added, “These issues are never brought to the table, and this personally annoys me as a person who is in an office [that carries with it] responsibility,” and then said. “That is to say, we need to be fairer. We have to act honestly if we want global peace.”²⁹

In a parallel move, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu cancelled a scheduled visit to Israel in October 2009, after Israel refused to allow him to enter GS through Israel.

The tension between Turkey and Israel peaked as Israeli newspapers announced, on 11/10/2009, that Turkey cancelled Israeli participation in the Anatolian Eagle joint military exercise, a drill which was cancelled completely afterwards. More importantly, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs linked the cancellation of the drill to the situation in GS, and he mentioned that their relations will not improve as long as the situation in GS hasn’t improved. An official statement of the Foreign Affairs Ministry said, “The first two stages of this year’s exercises were conducted successfully. But international part of the third stage... was cancelled in consultation with the other participating countries. But, the exercise is continuing as a national event. Therefore, it is not correct to impose political meanings to Turkey’s decision to cancel international part of the multi-national Anatolian Eagle air defense exercise.” The ministry added, “It is also impossible to accept assessments and comments published in media organs in reference to Israeli authorities. We call on Israeli officials to act with common-sense in their statements and attitudes.”³⁰

In the first comment on the postponement of Anatolian Eagle drills, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu said in a CNN interview that “We hope that the situation in Gaza will be improved, that the situation will be back to the diplomatic track. And that will create a new atmosphere in Turkish-Israeli relations as well. But in the existing situation, of course, we are criticizing this approach, [the] Israeli approach.”³¹

The first Israeli reaction came from Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak who said, “Turkey continues to be a central figure in our region. There is no place for getting drawn into fiery statements against them,” and then added, “The relations between Israel and Turkey are strategic and have existed for dozens of years.”³²

Hostile media campaigns between Turkey and Israel continued after the military drill crisis, as apparent in Turkish television drama “Separation: Palestine in Love and War (*Ayrılık - Askta ve Savasta Filistin*)” which depicts the cruelty of Israeli



soldiers in dealing with Palestinians. After Israeli Ambassador to Ankara Gabby Levy conveyed his protest to Turkish authorities saying that the series depicts Israel as a devil, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan started another barrage of criticism in the city of Kırşehir as he described Israelis, without naming them, as the unjust. In a reference to the Gazans and their children, Erdoğan said, “While some children are opening their eyes to welfare, peace, security, a quality education and a bright future, some of them are opening their eyes to tears, sorrow, a hopeless future and phosphorus bombs.”³³

In relation to the “Separation” television series, some representatives of tourist agencies in Turkey said that the current crisis, and especially due to the series “Separation,” resulted in the cancellation of many reservations on the short term. They explained that should the crisis end now, its negative impact on the arrival of Israeli tourists would continue for at least a month. Official tourism statistics showed that the number of Israeli tourists in Turkey reached 200 thousands in 2009, with an almost 50% downturn from 400 thousand tourists in 2008.

Halil Bakirci, the mayor of the Black Sea city of Rize, also signed his name on the record of protestors to Israeli policies. That happened when he directed harsh criticism to Israeli Ambassador Gabby Levy, who paid him a visit at the municipality office that lasted for five minutes, on 3/11/2009. Halil Bakirci condemned Israel’s “policies of expansion and occupation” and said that as long as these policies continue, Turkish people will not change the way they regard Israel. He added that he believes that Israel must change the way it views the world and its neighbors... Then he said that the peace treaties signed with Egypt and Jordan came by war, and he addressed the Israeli ambassador by saying that self-defense should not involve “killing children.” In another incident, students pelted Israel’s ambassador with eggs to protest Israel’s treatment of Palestinians, forcing him to cancel a visit to the university in the Black Sea port of Trabzon.³⁴

While Israeli Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer was making attempt to ease the tension in Turkish-Israeli relations and urging Turkey to act as an unbiased mediator, Israeli President Shimon Peres blasted another bomb that triggered Turkish attention and indignation. In an interview published in an American magazine, Peres said:

Turkey is the only country in the world where a nondemocratic institution, the Army, was in charge of preserving democracy. And they did it. Now the role of the Army has changed, and the question is whether Erdoğan will lead

his Muslim population toward democracy or whether democratic forces will demand a more Islamist state.

Peres added, "The Turkish leadership very much wanted to become a part of united Europe, and the Europeans dragged their feet, and there was a sense of disappointment that caused them to look for another domain where Turkey could play a role." Also, concerning Turkish mediation in Syrian Israeli talks, Peres said that if Turkey wished to act as a mediator, it should "leave its closeness to one side and go to the middle place between the two countries. So that, too, has had a certain effect. How far does Erdoğan want to go in his push in different directions? I don't know."³⁵ And when asked if Israel should be providing front-line military technology to Turkey when Ankara is seeking closer strategic ties with Syria and Iran, Israeli President said, "We need to be very careful not to undermine a cooperative, mutually beneficial relationship built up over many years. Turkey is a very important nation in our region and a respected member of NATO. We need patience and to read the map correctly and not fall victim to momentary tensions between our two countries." Then added, "I think it will be very hard for Turkey to jeopardize its world standing and discredit itself by becoming too actively aligned with the Iranian agenda."³⁶

In Turkish newspapers, some commentators considered Peres' statements as implying threats of military coups in Turkey. They pointed out the fact that some economic agreements signed by Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer were not signed with his counterpart, but with Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül!

Erdoğan's visit to the US, on 5/11/2009, was another sign of the weakening Turkish relations with the Jewish lobby in the US, as Erdoğan did not meet any Jewish official during the visit. This was the first time since the beginning of the nineties that a high profile Turkish official does not meet with any of the Jewish pressure groups in the US. In the nineties, former Turkish President Turgut Özal had established this tradition and later all presidents and premiers followed in his footsteps.

Turkish daily *Milliyet* mentioned that these visits were not included because Erdoğan deemed them unbeneficial, especially that his meetings with Jewish groups in September 2009 at the sidelines of the UNGA were not friendly. These meetings also witnessed sharp discussions especially over Turkey's stance towards GS, Israel and the cancellation of military drills with the latter.



Notwithstanding, on 18/12/2009, the annual commemoration of the Gaza attack, the first meeting between a Turkish high profile official and an Israeli counterpart took place. At the 2009 UN Climate Change Conference, in Copenhagen, Turkish President Abdullah Gül met his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres and the official meeting continued along an hour. At the end of their official meeting, the Turkish president accepted President Peres's invitation to visit Israel.

2. The Palestinian Track

Statements like “Israel will drown in the tears of Gaza children,” “the offensive is a crime against humanity,” “History will be the judge of Israel,” “Gaza massacres are a black stain on the forehead of its perpetrators,” and “A great human tragedy has been going on in Gaza... We as Turkey could not possibly have adopted a ‘wait and see’ policy,” were only examples of the general Turkish official rhetoric mostly voiced by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. If we add to these expressions Turkish Minister of Justice Mehmet Ali Şahin's statement that Israel is the first instigator of world “terror,” the picture would be complete.

It may not be sufficient to quote these phrases to elaborate the emotional stance of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. His facial reactions and gestures as he uttered these phrases say what a written word cannot express. Since the first moment, he worked toward a ceasefire to stop the onslaught first, to open all crossing to GS, and hence send humanitarian aid. He even announced that he will convey the demands of Hamas—the organization labeled as “terrorist” in the eyes of so called international community—to the UN.³⁷

Turkey was enraged when the Israeli aggression on GS began, and Istanbul was the witness to one of the largest demonstrations in its history. Demonstrators shouted slogans “Death to Israel and America” and chanted calls for Turkish army to enter GS and defend it.

Despite his inability to walk, Necmettin Erbakan did not hesitate in addressing the crowds in a video-recorded speech, in which he said that he curses Israeli injustice. He also addressed America saying that if they loved Israel that much, they should grant them one of their states. Erbakan maintained that Palestinians are defending not only their country but the whole Muslim world.³⁸

Along the Independence Street in Istanbul, Turkish artists carried signs that read: “Every Land is Gaza, We are all Palestinians.” In Istanbul, also, thousands

gathered for demonstrations at Abdi İpekçi Arena cursing Israel and carrying banners that said “Israel is a Murderer, Freedom for Palestine” and “Prayer for Palestine, Death to Israel” while shoes were hurled at pictures of American President George W. Bush.³⁹

In a celebration at Antalya, on the evening of Sunday 4/1/2009, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan declared that the screams of those who were subject to injustice will not remain without a reaction. He added that what Israel does is the epitome of injustice and that we cannot stay as spectators.⁴⁰

The initiative also passed to Emine Erdoğan, Prime Minister’s wife, who called an emergency summit gathering first ladies at the beginning of January 2009 under the title of “Istanbul Meeting in Support of Gaza.” Her speech was touching, and her eyes filled with tears, against a large background image of the Palestinian head-cover (*Kufiyah*) as she spoke about the plight of Gaza, its people, women and children. Emine Erdoğan said, “Those who remain indifferent to the killings by saying, ‘Those who die here are Palestinians and Muslims,’ should question themselves and their own consciences.” and then added, “Let there be no doubt: The death of children is the death of innocence, and the death of innocence is the downfall of humanity.”⁴¹

From Istanbul, on Saturday 10/1/2009, a march of more than two thousand cars crossed Turkey and Syria, reaching the Golan borders to express their condemnation of the attack on GS and Israel’s criminal policies. The march was arranged by “*Dayanışma Vakfı*” or solidarity endowment, whose head, Hüsni Kılıç stated that they head toward the land occupied by Israel in Golan under the slogan of “I, too, am there for Palestine.” He added that “we want to show the will of solidarity and resistance alongside our brothers and sisters in history, faith, and culture in Palestine.” The cars displayed Turkish and Palestinian flags.⁴²

Nobel Laureate in Literature, Orhan Pamuk, also made a significant stand on 17/1/2009. Although not naming GS, he said that the so called clash of civilizations only stands for the West killing more Muslims. Pamuk said in an interview to Japanese *Yomiuri Shimbun* daily that there is no clash between civilizations, there is only killing people. He said, also, that Europe is not a cultural ideal.⁴³

On 25/1/2009, “Youth Forum” organized in Istanbul “Extend Your Hands to Palestine Auction.” It had very deep implications and there was significant participation by a number of famous politicians, artists, and sports people



who offered some of their possessions for sale. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan—who vehemently slammed the attack—was the primary focus of the audience, where he offered his personal pen for sale, to be sold for a thousand dollars. A vase owned by former Parliament Speaker Bülent Arınç was also sold for nearly \$1,700, where Arınç personally attended the auction. Members of Parliament, ministers, actors and players from the main sports teams participated by offering their personal possessions like diaries, sports shirts, evening bags, suits, rings and necklaces.⁴⁴

Bülent Arınç said that he also organized a donation campaign inside the Parliament, and collected more than \$300 thousands from AKP parliamentary bloc.⁴⁵

On another occasion, Erdoğan reaffirmed that “we are always the voice of masses that have no voice and the home for those who have no home to belong to. This is our heritage that runs from Ottoman predecessors. There is something we should do, and we can’t go up the stage and watch from there all that’s going on.”⁴⁶

On 22–23/5/2009, a group of Turkish civil society organizations convened in Istanbul, in cooperation with other Islamic and Arab organizations, a conference to support the Palestinian people. The conference was headed by former Sudanese President Suwar al-Dahab. The attendees discussed during conference workshops ways to support the Palestinian people and break the GS siege. They adopted recommendations concerning Palestinian development, supporting Palestinian women and youth, stressing the urgency of lifting the siege on GS and opening the crossings, and spreading legal awareness concerning Palestinian rights as well the necessity of cooperation, solidarity and putting economic boycott into effect.

The conference also issued a number of documents; among the key ones was the “Islamic Document of Palestine” which confirmed that Palestine is the foremost issue for Muslims and it is an Islamic land. It pointed out the dangers Palestine is subjected to from the Israeli occupier. The document also stressed the right of return and compensation for refugees and migrants as well as Palestinian people’s right to resistance. In the conference also, Father Manuel Musallam, head of Gaza’s Roman Catholic community, made a call for Christians around the world. He reminded them of their duties toward the past and current situation in Palestine, and towards the decrease of the numbers of Christians there due to the oppressive occupation, he also warned against the vandalism at churches.⁴⁷

In the context of continued Turkish support for the Palestinian issue, The Palestine Platform and The Arab and International Commission to Build Gaza organized The First International Conference to Build Gaza, on 17–18/6/2009 in Istanbul. Erol Yazar, head of the Palestine Platform in Turkey and former head of the Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association (MÜSİAD), said the "Gaza Reconstruction Commission has carried out feasibility works of 460 projects for Gaza's reconstruction, prepared projects and is seeking support." The conference aimed to bring together over 1,000 Turkish and international businessmen in order to actualize \$300 million in reconstruction projects to help war-torn Gaza. Within his participation in the conference, Yazar also said, "We are trying to bring civil society organizations together to solve humanitarian problems in Gaza," Then, he added, "To date, things have been undertaken from primarily a political stance, and this takes time. But humanitarian needs are urgent. Humanitarian issues can't wait for political problems to be resolved."⁴⁸

Mahmud 'Abbas Visit

Turkish media agreed that the Mahmud 'Abbas, president of the PA, who visited Turkey on 7/2/2009 received loads of advice from Turkish leaders concerning how to deal with the coming stage. In the meeting between 'Abbas and Turkish President Abdullah Gül, the latter stated that the Palestinian issue needs a unified Palestinian government. He added that Turkey does not interfere with internal Palestinian issues but the Palestinian issue requires unifying efforts and that is a Turkish priority.⁴⁹

The longest meeting was between 'Abbas and Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, which lasted three hours. Erdoğan affirmed to 'Abbas the urgency of unifying the Palestinian lines, while 'Abbas urged Turkey to resume its efforts as mediator between all sides of the conflict.

In the same thread, Turkish Parliament Speaker Köksal Toptan, during his meeting with 'Abbas, said " Hamas should be included in the ongoing process and it should also get involved in political responsibility. We've been worried that radical components in the region could get stronger if this is not done."⁵⁰

Despite 'Abbas' requests for Turkish intervention, *Today's Zaman* daily newspaper mentioned that "President Abbas was frank and open on one point: Turkey's role in the Palestinian issue can be only in a role of assistance to Egypt."



He said, “Turkey can help Egypt in convincing Hamas to declare a cease-fire and to be part of a national unity government.”⁵¹ He was speaking to a select group of Turkish and Arab journalists at a dinner on the second day of his official trip to Turkey. He explained that the recent declaration by an Arab League meeting of foreign ministers that Arabs didn’t want non-Arab actors to intervene in “their” issues had nothing to do with Turkey. “Don’t ask me which country they were speaking about, but it was not Turkey,” he said.⁵²

‘Abbas visit was not free of a protest march by dozens of members of the Özgür-Der organizations who gathered close to Istanbul municipal headquarters. Rıdvan Kaya, one of the organization leaders, said that Hamas was the original representative of Palestinian people and that Isma‘il Haniyyah should have been invited there. Kaya said that—after the end of his term as head of the PA—‘Abbas has no legal authority, he was a collaborator with Israel in their war crimes and hence, he cannot represent the Palestinian people.⁵³ Similarly, dozens of members of the Turkish Palestine Platform gathered in demonstrations at the Red Crescent Square (*Kızılay Meydanı*) in the Capital Ankara and chanted hostile slogans against Mahmud ‘Abbas.⁵⁴

3. Turkish Political Action

Turkish diplomacy started acting from the first moment to stop the attack on GS. Erdoğan’s visit to Arab capitals was followed by action from his advisor, Ahmet Davutoğlu who arrived in Cairo, on 10/1/2009, and met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. Turkish sources mentioned that the Egyptian President is convinced that any ceasefire cannot succeed without Turkish participation.⁵⁵ Turkish President Abdullah Gül also contacted American President George W. Bush asking him to interfere for an immediate ceasefire in GS. Turkish efforts were remarkable in terms of attempting to prevent the exclusion of Hamas from the Palestinian and regional calculations. In a meeting with a number of journalists on 20/1/2009, Turkish Prime Minister’s foreign policy advisor Ahmet Davutoğlu explained the Turkish stance towards the developments in GS as follows:⁵⁶

- Turkish diplomacy intervened from the first moment of the attack on GS and played a key role in the ceasefire. It communicated with all the concerned parties, without exceptions, including Egypt, Mahmud ‘Abbas, Hamas, Israel, France and other European countries.

- Contrary to all other countries, Turkey was the only country who could communicate with Hamas and hence declaring two-sided ceasefire. Turkey did not exclude other players like Egypt and France. Rather Egypt itself wanted Turkey to guarantee Hamas' cooperation during ceasefire negotiations. Eventually, it was Turkey who guaranteed that Hamas accepts the ceasefire.
- This implies that Turkey was the country to fill the void, taking over silently and deeply the burden of explaining the Syrian and Hamas stances. It was not just a mail deliverer, but it actively convinced Hamas to take some stances.
- Turkey believes that Hamas must be part of the political process. This is closely related to the continuation of the ceasefire, and to the reconciliation between Mahmud 'Abbas and Hamas. Turkey is working on that and is at an equal distance from 'Abbas and Hamas.
- Turkey did not end all communications with Israel. Despite Erdoğan's sharp stances, Turkish Ambassador to Israel Feridun Sinirlioglu met with Ehud Olmert and other Israeli officials.
- Meanwhile, Turkish communications with Iran continued, with Turkish stances and action contributing to keeping Iran behind the stage and somewhat preserving its silence.
- Based on this picture, Turkish officials reject the notion of their bias toward Hamas, and allegations that they are distancing themselves from the West. They see these allegations as quite erroneous, and that relations with the West are firm and are not a topic for discussion according to Ahmet Davutoğlu.

Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ali Babacan rejected accusations that Turkey supports all the moves by Hamas explaining that it is an incorrect impression. He added that Ankara always advise Hamas that the solution is not with arms, and that a solution must be found within democratic frames. However, the search for a solution in Palestine cannot be without Hamas' support. He called for a Palestinian national unity government because considering 'Abbas the only representative to be addressed will not yield any results.

Concerning the Egyptian role, Turkish Minister Babacan said that Turkey is not in a competition with any one. According to him, they in fact told Egyptians that it does not matter who is at the forefront. What matters is a ceasefire, so let's work together. Egyptians said fine and a Hamas delegation arrived in Cairo following this. This was important as we succeeded in prompting a resumption of communications between Egypt and Hamas.⁵⁷



In mid July 2009, Turkish President Abdullah Gül received President ‘Abbas in a second visit. Significantly during the visit, Turkish President made a stance contradicting with decisions announced by The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The decision states that in the case of failing to reach a solution within a specific period of time, the EU would work on issuing a UN Security Council resolution declaring the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Gül commented on the situation, objecting to any resolution of this kind as long as it is not the result of coordination between key players. Such a resolution, he maintained, would be harmful in the absence of an agreement of this kind.⁵⁸ *Milliyet* newspaper viewed that Gül’s position was comforting to Israel but probably disturbing to ‘Abbas, albeit that these reactions were not declared.

Gül’s stance leaves the declarations of a Palestinian independent state to a stage not clearly viewed. This is contradictory—even if partially—with the Turkish stance from a case like Cyprus for example. Ankara views that if a solution was reached in the island by the end of 2009, each side much choose the path that suits them. Why does Ankara consider what is legitimate in Cyprus is illegitimate in Palestine?

The daily *Milliyet* newspaper also stated that Gül’s stance is not far from other examples in the region, drawing on the idea that the declaration of a Palestinian independent state may a pioneering model for the declaration of an independent Kurdish state. Ankara may be concerned about the likelihood of coordination between the US and the EU in the UN Security Council to declare an independent Kurdish state. In that light, Gül’s stance towards the declaration of an independent Palestinian state may have the goal of warning against a similar declaration elsewhere, and specifically in northern Iraq.⁵⁹

On 11/10/2009, Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmet Davutoğlu said that Israel should end the Gaza tragedy now, and should respect the religious and cultural sensitivity of some areas like *al-Aqsa* Mosque and East Jerusalem. Only then would Turkey be present for mediation between Syria and Israel. Davutoğlu reiterated that “should Israel respect these sensitivities, peace would be possible.”⁶⁰

Conclusions

The Turkish relations with Israel during 2009 can be summarized as follows:

The general course of relations was extremely negative, and relations witnessed intense deterioration on the official level as well as the public level. Turkish stance towards the Palestinian issue was based on principles. It combined several considerations; the lack of respect for the Turkish state by Ehud Olmert on the eve of the attack on GS, the ethical, humane and principled stands, and the Islamic tendencies of the AKP.

The mentioned Turkish stance was fixed along 2009. This is owing to the fact that Turkey placed changing and improving the situation in GS—a change that never happened—as a condition to changing Turkish stance towards Israel. Turkey also linked resuming its mediation between Israel on one side and Syria and the Palestinians on the other, with the same “Gaza Standard.” Turkey thinks the ball is in the Israeli court, and that had there existed an Israeli government that responded to the peace process, this tension wouldn’t have happened.

The tension in the Turkish-Israeli relations, however, will not much affect Turkey’s role as mediator in the peace process. Until the moment, Turkey remains the only country capable of playing that role—when Israel agrees on resuming it. Besides, Syria hasn’t accepted anyone other than Turkey as mediator; it refused any attempt for French mediation instead of Turkey.

Israeli attempts to create the impression that Turkish role as mediator is no longer valid can be seen in the light of putting pressure on Turkey. The reality is that Israel is ready to respond to any attempt at improving relations with Turkey. They would not wish to give up an alliance with a major Muslim country like Turkey, especially that it was the first Muslim country to recognize the Hebrew state in 1949.

The same applies to Turkish relations with the West that would not abandon Turkey; being a secular country, an ally to the West, and a NATO member, let alone its position as part of the security and stability formula in the Balkans and Caucasia. It is also another option for the alternative energy lines extending from Russia to Europe.



Apparently, the Turkish position is stronger than before, with the decreasing need for Israel and the Jewish lobby in the US, and especially following the signing of the historic agreement between Turkey and Armenia. The more Turkey solves its problems with neighboring countries, the less the need is for strong ties with Israel.

Yet in its turn, Turkey cannot go far in its tensions with Israel, since it's a member of the NATO and due to the Turkish aspirations to join the EU. As a result, Turkey must take this element into consideration while examining relations with Israel.

On another level, Turkey can never give up its solid stances regarding the Palestinian issue as it is entrenched in Turkish conscience. Defending GS and condemning Israeli attack gained the approval of all the sectors of Turkish society, the civil and military alike. At the same time, the Palestinian issue is a passport to all the Arab and Muslim world. However, Turkey supports solutions that require the recognition of Israel and putting an end to Hamas' firing of missiles at Israel. Turkey also views that Palestinian unity is a condition for solving the Palestinian issue and the schism crisis. Turkey affirms that without Hamas, there would be no solution for the Palestinian issue; especially that Hamas was democratically elected.

Third: Iran

Iran did not hesitate in declaring its support for Hamas and condemnation of the Israeli attack on the GS. Officials in Iran called on the OIC to "fulfill its historical duty of standing up to Israel."⁶¹ President Ahmadinejad contacted his Senegali counterpart President Abdoulaye Wade, chairman of 11th Islamic Summit Conference, "the two sides called on the Islamic countries to help prevent the Zionists from continuing their atrocity in Gaza. They also studied the ways to help the oppressed people of Gaza get out of the ongoing crisis."⁶²

Iranian stances were not limited to condemning the Israeli assault, but extended to criticizing Arab stances, especially Egypt, that denied entrance of aid material into the GS by refusing to open the Rafah crossing. Such Iranian stances caused tensions in the relations between the two countries along 2009, especially after the

end of the war and Iran's declaration of its desire to contribute to the reconstruction of GS and sending aid there. Iranian stances fell between declaring support for Hamas and condemning the Israeli assault on the one hand, and directing accusations and rebuke to Arab and Muslim countries on the other; in addition to a broad diplomatic activity by sending delegates to world countries to "discuss the situation in GS."⁶³

Iranian Minister of Foreign Affairs Manouchehr Mottaki called on Islamic states to team up to pressure Israel to stop air strikes on Gaza, open all border crossings, and allow humanitarian aid into the besieged territory. He criticized the Arab countries, UN Security Council and the OIC, and said that "some regional countries have 'betrayed' Palestine."⁶⁴ Iran also declared its willingness to receive Palestinian casualties in Iranian hospitals in addition to establishing a field hospital on the Egyptian territories parallel near the GS. According to Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Hassan Qashqavi, Minister Mottaki has written a letter to his Egyptian counterpart Ahmad Abu al-Ghait "asking the Cairo government to allow Iran to establish a field hospital near the Gaza Strip." The letter also "asked for the cooperation of Egypt" in this concern.⁶⁵ "Now, we are awaiting Cairo's response to the letter," Qashqavi told a news briefing.⁶⁶ Evidently, such a call was not aimed at demonstrating Iranian desire to extend a hand of help only, but was probably meant to embarrass Egypt that was expected to decline such Iranian participation in "supporting Palestinians." This call came at a time when bilateral relations were facing rising tensions and when the Egyptian government, originally, did not support Hamas, its control over GS, and its war to defend the GS. Highlighting the "embarrassment" of Egypt in this respect were subsequent Iranian statements like those of Qashqavi's who urged the Egyptian government to act according to its responsibilities, its Muslim and human duties... and open the Rafah crossing... due to the depth of the tragedy, the circumstances that the oppressed Palestinian people suffer, and the longstanding history of men of high caliber like Abdel Nasser and Hassan al-Banna, as well as the geographic location and the existence of the Rafah Crossing.⁶⁷

In supporting Hamas, Iran's position went as far as affirming "that it is impossible to defeat or annihilate" in this war. Iranian Foreign Affairs Minister Manouchehr Mottaki said in a conversation over the phone with some of his European counterparts, he called Israel's ground attacks on GS a "strategic



mistake” and that Israel will never achieve its goal of eliminating Hamas because “Hamas is a nation and a nation cannot be eliminated.”⁶⁸

In the same context, Speaker of the Islamic Parliament of Iran Ali Larijani said that Gaza will become a “cemetery” for the Israeli troops.⁶⁹ He also said “Israelis’ behavior is worse than Nazis.”⁷⁰ On a diplomatic level, Mottaki telephoned his Turkish, Libyan, Japanese and Syrian counterparts and called for efforts to immediately halt the Israeli bloody war on Palestinians in GS.⁷¹ Larijani also discussed with Syrian President Bashar Assad “the serious situation,” while Saeed Jalili, Secretary of Iranian Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), had talks with Turkish officials around the developments in the situation in the GS. Iranian Foreign Affairs Ministry spokesman said that his country sent 22 members of the cabinet as special envoys to different countries to seek an “immediate halt” to the Israeli offensive in the Gaza Strip and ending the “siege” on the coastal strip.⁷²

Iranian President Ahmadinejad did not hesitate in an interview on Aljazeera TV Channel, during the last week of the war, to call on Arab leaders to take on their historical responsibilities from human, national and Islamic standpoints because Gazans are firstly humans, secondly Arabs, and thirdly Muslims. And from a consideration that the primary duty of the Arab League is to defend the Palestinian people and work in light of the goals for which the league was established... and that it is expected from these leaders to cut all forms of ties with the Israel... and to threaten all those who provide Israel with political and military support of ending all relations with them.

Ahmadinejad made hints around his rejection of the calls that focus on the “Iranian danger” in the region. He asked the Arab leaders, why do you sometimes concern yourself with conflicts with some nations in the region that do not exist, and give them priority over the cause of confronting Israel? He added that it is a very sad matter that the governments of 22 Arab countries stand watching a corrupt gang of “Zionist criminals”...⁷³

Upon the end of the war on GS, and Israel’s failure to achieve the expected victory and extermination of Hamas, an international clamor called for preventing weapon provisions to Hamas, especially that it continued to launch missiles at Israeli settlements and cities along the 22 days of the war. Hence, the US and many European countries called for imposing a naval blockade on

GS to achieve that target. At the same time, the issue of international, Arab and Muslim participation in the reconstruction of GS was raised. The Iranian stances notably leaned toward the criticism of international stances on the one hand, and defending Palestinians' right to acquire arms on the other. Foreign Affairs Minister Manouchehr Mottaki stated that "For a government or a nation who would like to defend themselves, it is only natural that they would do their utmost to obtain weapons from whatever place possible." and that "These people [Gazans] have every right to stand against colonialists... they have a natural right to have access to weapons." He addressed the Americans by saying, "During this most recent savage attack against Gaza, you [the United States] offered 300 tons of bombs to the Zionist regime and now you have the audacity to come and say that the resistance should not have access to weapons?" Mottaki criticized Mahmud 'Abbas whose "term as PA president expired" and warned that "donations can not be given to the current Palestinian Authority government." He called for holding serious elections.⁷⁴

Regarding participation in the reconstruction of GS, Iranian authorities established the "Gaza Reconstruction Committee" that pledged to build and prepare one thousand houses, ten schools, and five mosques in addition to the reconstruction of a hospital, providing it with medical equipment. The committee also undertook the reconstruction of one of Gaza's universities besides providing the needed equipment, building 500 shops, in addition to securing aid to all families of the casualties and injured, and the needs of four thousand injury cases.⁷⁵ Iranian parliament also committed itself to the reconstruction of the PLC building which was completely destroyed during the Israeli war on the GS.⁷⁶

The war on GS ended and new policies were initiated in both Israel and Iran and the region in general. American President Barack Obama took office and started sending messages of dialogue to the Muslim world, with calls to solve unsettled problems including the Palestinian issue. Due to this policy, a sense of optimism prevailed in several Palestinian and Arab circles and some Arab analysts went as far as saying that: confronting the rising Iranian power can be achieved through an immediate ceasefire.⁷⁷ Others viewed that Obama's success in forging a Palestinian-Israeli settlement, and declaring a Palestinian sovereign state, will cut the road ahead of the Iranian agenda which is extending in the region under the pretext of supporting resistance against Israel.



Following the war of GS, Israel was preparing for new elections, and Iran, too, was on the threshold of new presidential elections. Meanwhile, the world was awaiting the results of elections in both countries to see which way the political wind is blowing in the region. Preparations to the election race, however, did not cut the chain of exchanged threats between Israel and Iran. Amos Gilad, head of the Defense Ministry's Diplomatic-Security Bureau, for instance, saw that "Iran is determined to pose an existential threat for Israel," and that Hizbullah was "turning Lebanon into a major threat for Israel because it has Iran's support." He added, "The goal is to create a balance of terror. Towards this end, what can be referred to as 'Hizbustan' is being established in Lebanon. This entity is based on a military wing—which is meant to assist Iran should Israel attack—and a rocket arsenal, which consists of some 40,000 projectiles."⁷⁸

On the other hand, the Iranians wanted to demonstrate their commitment toward the Palestinian issue, especially after some Palestinian and Arab voices loudly criticized Hamas and the "non-Arab" (Iranian) interference in the Palestinian issue. A conference was held in Tehran for supporting the GS. In his inaugural address, Iranian Supreme Leader (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei launched a fierce attack on "those who advocated a 'pragmatic' approach" in the Middle East. Khamenei raised doubts about the statement "Palestine is an Arab problem" and said that "the new American president, who came to office with the slogan of bringing change in the policies of the Bush administration, avows unconditional commitment to Israel's security... It is a policy which amounts to the same crooked ways of the Bush administration and nothing else." In his speech, he described Israel as a "cancerous tumor."⁷⁹ Khamenei viewed that "the sole path of its deliverance is through resistance and fortitude," and added, "A big fallacy which has taken control of the minds of some persons concerning the problem of Palestine is that a country named Israel is a 60-year old reality with which one has to reconcile." Then he said, "Another big fallacy is to say that negotiation is the only means of deliverance for the Palestinian nation." The Iranian supreme leader also attacked the PA by saying that this "partial and fake authority was at times trampled underfoot by the Zionists under empty excuses," and stressed that the Palestinian issue "is the most urgent problem of the Islamic world," and that Hamas' "epical resistance... is the brightest page in Palestinian history of the last hundred years."⁸⁰

The Palestine support conference and the revolution leader's stances towards Palestine and his criticism of "pragmatic approach" were concurrent with warnings

by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Commander Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari. He confirmed that his country “has missiles with the range of 2,000 km (1,250 miles), and based on that all Israeli land including that regime’s nuclear facilities are in the range of our missile capabilities.”⁸¹

Meanwhile, Israeli elections resulted in the return of the Likud Party led by Netanyahu as the Prime Minister. After that, US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell started his trips to the Middle East to discuss the prospect of peace settlement including: resuming peace talks, the two-state solution, and the freezing of settlement building activities. A Palestinian belief in the new American administration’s ability—based on Obama’s stances and statements—to cause a breakthrough in the freezing settlement process spread. These optimistic beliefs soon withered, however, following American president’s “inability” to “convince” Netanyahu or force him to freeze settlement construction and thus make the resumption of peace talks possible. He was also unable to amass Arab support for this process and to isolate Iran from the Palestinian issue and supporting the resistance.

Iran, in turn, was getting ready for its presidential elections in June 2009. The world’s attention was steered in their direction to know how much was left of Ahmadinejad’s popularity and whether he was going to hold office facing a strong reformist opponent like Mir-Hossein Mousavi.

The West (the US and Europe) were hoping for reformist Mousavi’s victory over Ahmadinejad as they knew well Ahmadinejad’s stances and policies toward Israel and the peace settlement, and his extremism when it comes to his country’s nuclear program. In contrast, Mousavi’s stances were moderate concerning these issues, as expressed in his campaign for elections. In addition, the new American administration, where Obama called for extending hands for dialogue and diplomacy, needed a resembling hand in Iran that was definitely not the hand of Ahmadinejad.

Consequently, Ahmadinejad’s victory frustrated the expectations of Arabs and many world countries who hoped in a change in Iran. But the “elections crisis” that flared out soon after and then was taken to the street made way again for pressure on the regime and bets on changing its policies concerning the nuclear program and the peace settlement process in the region. It was remarkable that protestors and supporters of Mir-Hossein Mousavi and the reformist movement in Iran carried banners that contradicted with the core values of the Iranian regime



and its policies toward the Palestinian issue. In an interview with Al Arabiya News Channel on 11/6/2009, Mousavi's wife said that Ahmadinejad's foreign policy is the policy of chaos and he goes to befriend Latin America. While, Mir-Hossein Mousavi's foreign policy will raise the issues of peace and world peace and follow Iranian national interests. Our interests will have the priority, we do not wish to go into high-cost alliances... As for Palestine, Palestinian slogan is our slogan, too, but we will try to be friends with the whole world especially in the region, surrounding and neighboring countries. We don't want there to be rigidity and "terrorization..." we want to preserve our wealth for our people.⁸²

Demonstrators' slogans when they took to the streets on the day of *Ashura* (major festival commemorating the death of Imam Hussein) were blunter than Mousavi's wife's remarks on "the priority of national interests." They declared themselves free from the burden of resistance in Lebanon and Palestine saying "Not Gaza, not Lebanon—our life is for Iran."⁸³

Some pro-Iranian opposition blogs displayed posters where, instead of the Palestine map, a hand was held up in victory sign and wearing a green ribbon. There were calls for a slogan of "Death to the Dictator" instead of "Death to America," while other calls were for a slogan of "not eastern or western, an Iranian republic" instead of the past slogan of "Islamic Republic." Another blog suggested the substitution of images of Palestinian dead and children which were held on the same occasion with images of Mir-Hossein Mousavi, Khatami and Karroubi. Activists in the Green Mousavi Movement launched an electronic attack against Hamas and the source of funding of the Palestinian movement.⁸⁴

Reformist demonstrators' slogans were accompanied with rumors that strongly spread in the Iranian street, and also were circulated in Arab media, of the participation of Hamas and Hizbullah fighters in the suppression of demonstrations in Tehran. Thus, a link was made between the movement protesting the presidential elections and the Iranian regime on the one hand, and the refusal of the regime's continued support to the Hamas and Hizbullah movements, on the other hand. The question was raised in many circles around the negative impact of the incidents inside Iran on the resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine. The Fatah Movement, for example, wondered what effect the incidents would have on Palestine, "on Hamas movement, and its position from these changes, and whether Mish'al will lose the bet and gasp to recognize Israel."⁸⁵

Iranian opposition action didn't come to a halt since the presidential elections in June 2009 until the end of the year, seizing every possible opportunity to take to the streets to demonstrate. The bet on a policy change toward the nuclear program, the Palestinian issue, the peace settlement process or the resistance movements did not continue at the same pace. Once again, the Iranian president and other regime's pillars reused the language of threat against any Israeli aggression, concurrently holding several military drills by the IRGC and the Iranian Army. Simultaneously, Israel began hinting at waging a war against Iran and its nuclear facilities, and to link in any war between Iran on one hand, and Hizbullah and Hamas on the other. *Haaretz* daily newspaper mentioned, for example, that Israel foresees the failure of the international community to stymie Iran's nuclear weapons program, and is preparing itself to launch a harsh offensive against Hizbullah in southern Lebanon or Hamas in the GS or both of them together. Israeli observers explained these speculations... due to the military trainings and the type of weapons developed in Israeli military industry.⁸⁶

The Jerusalem Post mentioned that:

The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] Operations Directorate has established a new department responsible for coordinating efforts to protect IDF bases... Hamas, Hizbullah, Syria and Iran all have the ability to fire missiles into our bases... During the Second Lebanon War in 2006 as well as Operation Cast Lead in the Gaza Strip earlier this year, Hizbullah and Hamas intentionally targeted IDF bases in the North and South.⁸⁷

In the same context, Israeli Prime Minister said that there are "three challenges to Israel's security that must be addressed to achieve our goal of a lasting peace. First, Iran must be prevented from developing a nuclear military capability. Second, a solution must be found to the threat of missile and rocket attacks. And third, Israel's right to defend itself must be preserved not only in principle but in practice."⁸⁸ Israel did not stop leaking information to several Western sources about its intention to attack Iran. Israel believed that the US doesn't want to get into a military confrontation with Iran. That's why Israel wants through military operation to disable the wings of Iran in Lebanon and GS.⁸⁹

The stances and statements made by Iran's political and military leaders were not altered concerning Israel and support for resistance movements vis-à-vis Israel despite the "presidential elections crisis" and the accompanying movement of



protests and demonstrations. As if this weren't enough, Iran also held military drills, testing rockets on 27/9/2009 and 22/11/2009 in context of preparation "to face any likely war against it" going by the rule of "escalation in return for escalation." One of these rockets is "Sejil" with a two thousand kilometer range, what places Israel and American bases in the Gulf within the range of this rocket.⁹⁰ At the same time, after the Iranian refusal of the Western conditions for proliferation outside Iranian territories, Iran, also, did not withdraw its nuclear program, or pause the testing of more developed equipment to speed up uranium enrichment. This means that Iranian leverage in the region has not receded, as some analysis proposed, after the presidential elections crisis. Nor did Iran back down from its fixed pillars of foreign policy. *The New York Times* newspaper, for example, assumed a link between the deadlock reached in the peace settlement process and US government's failure to impose a freezing of the settlement building activity on Netanyahu on the one hand, and the expanding Iranian weight against a diminishing role for Cairo and Riyadh on the other hand. The newspaper quoted Saudi and Egyptian officials and analysts saying that "Even while Iran has been focused on its domestic political crisis, and Syria has struggled with an economic and water crisis, their continued support for Hamas and Hizbullah has preserved for them a strong hand in matters like the formation of a new government in Lebanon and efforts to reconcile Palestinian factions." The newspaper mentioned that Saudi Arabia and Egypt "have been challenged by Iran, opposed by much smaller Arab neighbors, mocked by Syria and defied by influential nonstate groups like Hamas and Hizbullah."⁹¹

Undoubtedly, *The New York Times* conclusions are based on Egypt's "inability" to achieve reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, especially after Hamas refused some conditions which they thought were not suitable for them. This situation delayed the understanding, embarrassed the Egyptian regime, and showed Hamas as having more control over the reconciliation track and the future of the situation in Palestine. Undoubtedly, such conclusion is also relevant to the strong position Hamas enjoyed following the Israeli offensive on GS, in 2008–2009, that placed them in charge of the GS. At the same time, some Israeli strategic reassessments admitted the failure in dealing with Hamas, as in The Reut Institute's May 2009 report: "Reassessment of Israeli-Palestinian Political Process: Build a Palestinian State in the West Bank." The report identified one of the dilemmas regarding the political process is how to deal with Hamas. "Hamas has succeeded in consolidating its control over Gaza and in gaining partial international recognition despite

Israel's attempts to impose an international boycott." The dilemmas created by this situation include the impossibility of finding an alternative to Hamas in GS. In addition, a ceasefire will allow "Hamas to build its strategic military capacities with Iranian support while continued fighting risks inevitable escalation."⁹²

The stalemate situation in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and the hindrance of the Palestinian national reconciliation increased the accusations against Iran of exerting negative influence on the Palestinian issue. It must be noted that Iran declared its support of such reconciliation by Foreign Affairs Minister Manouchehr Mottaki who reiterated that "the Islamic Republic of Iran's [IRI] support to unity of different Palestinian groups is one of the permanent IRI strategic approaches."⁹³ In addition, during his visit to Cairo on 20/12/2009, the Speaker of the Islamic Parliament of Iran Ali Larijani declared his support of "Egypt's efforts to achieve such reconciliation." Despite all that, Fatah accused Iran of:

asking Hamas to freeze talks and create a heated atmosphere in the WB and GS. Iran also demanded Hizbullah to escalate the situation at the borders with Israel to distract it from a likely strike against Iran. Whereas, Saeed Jalili, Secretary of the Iranian SNSC, advised Hamas leaders and some Palestinian factions in Damascus not to sign the national reconciliation agreement.

Mahmud 'Abbas personally accused Iran of "obstructing Palestinian reconciliation."⁹⁴

The Goldstone Report, released at the beginning of October 2009, which the PA demanded delaying its discussion, contributed to a harsh condemnation campaign against the PA by several Arab and Islamic circles. According to some analysts, Israel is likely to employ such delay to enact a regional incident like launching an attack against Iran to burry this file and distract the global public opinion from its crimes and the Goldstone Report.⁹⁵ On the Israeli side, *Haaretz* newspaper saw that Iran and Hamas achieved by this report a huge victory beyond the political and promotional dimensions.⁹⁶ *Haaretz* political analyst Amos Harel said that Justice Richard Goldstone "effectively operated as an "unknowing agent" of Tehran. The practical significance of his report is that Israel is liable to wage its next war, against a more serious threat than the one posed by Hamas, with its arms and legs shackled." *Haaretz* established a link between the Goldstone Report and fears about similar reports in case Israel waged the next round, that will likely be "more intense than previous campaigns," thus it will lead Israeli officials into courts.⁹⁷



The Year 2009 came to an end, and no progress was seen in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process, nor in the freezing of settlement construction activity, and not even in resuming Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. The Palestinian national reconciliation was not achieved either, nor any essential progress in the Iranian file was made in regard to negotiations with the West around Iran's nuclear program; a progress that, according to some, was supposed to bring about a change in Iranian foreign policies. In a similar manner, the results of the Iranian presidential elections and the following crisis did not change Iran's stances toward Israel and its confronting resistance movements. This was clearly reflected in the visit by Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas political bureau, to Tehran, at the end of 2009, where the Iranian President assured him that the "Iranian nation and its government always back the resistance of the oppressed Palestinians."⁹⁸

The year 2009 ended and left for the new year the same old questions, possibilities and fears. Israel keeps beating the drums of war, threatening to wage it against Lebanon, Iran and GS, and planning a war that Israel believes will be a multi-front battle. There are some who believe, however, that what is Israel is doing is mere psychological war. Conversely, there are those who do not cancel out the scenarios of a war, especially against the GS, while there are attempts to choke and enclose it within steel walls here and there. This fact imposes precautions for a similar scenario at all levels, even if an Israeli return to such scenario is harder and more complicated than before. The referred to precautions imply amassing the broadest Arab and Muslim support against the policies of isolating GS, enclosing it and preventing it from acquiring weapons. This means evolving the Iranian-Palestinian relations and not restricting or retracting from it.

Fourth: Malaysia

Malaysian government exerted efforts to support the Palestinian people during 2009. It put pressure on the international community, by lobbying for a UNGA session to convene, in order to stop the Israeli Cast Lead operation against the Gazans. The then Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Bin Haji Ahmad Badawi called the UNGA more than once to convene. He also called for imposing sanctions on Israel, stating that "the international community should include outrageous breaches of basic moral standards in the list which must be subjected to international sanctions."⁹⁹

Moreover, Malaysian official interaction with the events of GS was remarkable, a scene that was not present in many Arab countries close and far from GS. On 12/1/2009, Malaysian Parliament held a special meeting to discuss the situation in GS, during which the MPs called on the UNGA to “establish an International Criminal Tribunal For Palestine to investigate and prosecute suspected Israeli war criminals.” During this session, Malaysian Prime Minister said that the Israeli attack is “a war crime in breach of the Fourth Geneva Convention 1949 Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.” The partial elections campaigns were put on hold in one of the Malaysian districts in order to unify efforts to support the Palestinian people, and stop the Israeli attack on GS.¹⁰⁰

On the public level, Malaysian organizations and parties arranged many activities in solidarity with the Palestinian people in the GS. On 10/1/2009, Aman Palestin society, and in cooperation with the Malaysian Muslim Solidarity (*Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia—ISMA*), organized a sweeping rally in Shah Alam city, the capital of Selangor state, where the speakers called for the necessary halt of “the barbarian Israeli attack” on GS, opening the crossings and breaking the siege on GS. They called on Egypt to open its borders with GS, facilitate the entrance of aids and doctors and help life go back to the normal in the GS. They also asked the Arab and Muslim countries to cut all relations with Israel, and work on putting Israeli officials on trial for charges of war crimes. Speaking to Aljazeera.net, Executive Chairman of *Aman Palestin* Abdullah Zaik Abdul Rahman expressed Malaysians’ deep empathy with the Palestinian people saying that “we are trying through the society and its activities to spread awareness among Malaysian people to do their duty toward our brothers and sisters in Palestine.” He also called Malaysian people to “continue holding activities and donating to support of the Palestinian people.”

In the same context, public action groups, parties, Islamic organizations, coalition of NGOs and doctors organized two separate marches, followed by a sit-in before the embassies of the US and Egypt. Commenting, MP Lo’Lo’ Mohd Ghazali said that “it is strange to have two sit-ins at the same time and for the same purpose, one in front of the American Embassy and another in front of the Egyptian Embassy.”¹⁰¹

The coalition of NGOs and associations organized a festival in solidarity with GS on 18/1/2009 where former Prime Minister Mahathir bin Mohamad praised the role played by the Malaysian government to stop the Israeli attack on the GS,



and to prompt the international community to put Israeli government leaders on trial for war crime charges. Mahathir referred to the necessity of differentiating between the official stance that adopts the international position on the relations with the authority in Ramallah, and the attempts to reach unity between the Palestinians. Hence, “setting matters right and dealing with whoever truly represents the people.” Mahathir also commended “the legendary steadfastness of the Palestinian people in GS” saying that “a nation that makes such sacrifices, even if their leaders give up, they will not be conquered.” Former Prime Minister underscored the importance of putting the boycott into effect against all those who provide support to Israel. He affirmed the role of governments and nations in developing mechanisms to steer the boycott into effect in this war which he described as a “long term conflict.” He further described Israeli leaders as “a band of evil bloodthirsty murderers.”¹⁰²

Along 2009, Malaysia also witnessed a rise in public action that supports the Palestinian issue, and an increase in donation campaigns for needy Palestinians, with the Malaysian government adopting a more open policy towards Hamas.

Fifth: Indonesia

Indonesian public and official reactions, along 2009, reflected the deep commitment of the largest Muslim country to the Palestinian issue. This gives a clear indication of the possibility of taking the Palestinian issue back to its Islamic context that supports the historical rights in Palestine, and rejects normalization with Israel. During the Israeli aggression on the GS at the end of 2008, the Indonesian government expressed their condemnation of this offensive. Moreover, Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono delivered a written letter to the UN and the Security Council demanding the halt of the war of GS. Aidil Chandra Salim, the director for Middle East Affairs at the Foreign Ministry, confirmed that Indonesia will support the Palestinian people according to the UN resolutions 242 and 338. He also stressed that the Indonesian stance is fixed and has not changed with regards to refusing to establish any ties with the Israeli occupation until the achievement of Palestinian independence.¹⁰³ Indonesian Foreign Affairs Ministry went further in supporting the Palestinian people as a delegation from

the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Beirut, among them the embassy's Charge d'Affaires Anindita Harimurti Axioma, participated in a rally in solidarity with the GS organized by Hamas in the 'Ein al-Hillweh refugee camp in southern Lebanon. Axioma clearly expressed his country's full support for the Palestinian people and the resistance, saying that Indonesia has supported and still supports the resistance movement in Palestine, especially in international circles for the purpose of liberating Palestine.¹⁰⁴

The Indonesian government was truly harmonious with the Indonesian people, who saved no effort in showing their support for and sympathy with the Palestinian people in the GS. Tens of thousands of demonstrators marched the streets of Jakarta condemning the Israeli attack on the GS and the American support for Israel. Islamic associations and parties also organized daily demonstrations in the different Indonesian regions, waving flags and banners that call for lifting the injustice to Palestine, and opening the Egyptian borders to allow volunteers for the defense of GS.¹⁰⁵

In November 2009, the House Caucus for Palestine in the Indonesian Parliament launched a campaign in solidarity of the Palestinian people and defense of the holy *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Established in 2004 with the aim of highlighting Palestinian people's suffering under occupation, the Caucus organized a conference entitled "*Al-Aqsa* from Perspective of the International Human Rights Law." They sought to form an Indonesian-Palestinian parliamentary coalition that coordinates joint efforts to break the siege of GS, in cooperation with international MPs, by organizing sea voyages to GS. The Caucus also played a major role in solidarity with detained MPs in Israeli prisons. In addition, it stopped the Israeli Parliamentary delegation from participating in the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) conference, in Bali.¹⁰⁶

Many factors show the commitment of the Indonesian people to the Palestinian issue, and contribute, even if partially, to returning the Palestinian issue to its natural Islamic environment. These factors include the campaigns supporting Palestinian rights by parties and public organizations, the latter's refusal to cooperate with or establish economic and military normalization with Israel, and their demand of a greater role for the Indonesian parliament to expel Israel from IPU membership.



Sixth: Pakistan

Internal disturbances in Pakistan contributed to limit its ability for major action regarding the Palestinian issue on the official and public levels. Pakistani official reactions were limited to condemning the Israeli attacks on GS, as the Pakistani Foreign Affairs Ministry sent a message to the UN through its Permanent Representative to the UN Abdullah Hussain Haroon. The message expressed Pakistani leadership's condemnation of the repeated Israeli attacks on the GS, demanded ending the "violence" acts and avoiding more human and material losses, and urged the international community to hasten the process of a peaceful and just settlement of the Palestinian issue.¹⁰⁷

Despite being late to act, public action, as well as action by the parties and political and religious movements in Pakistan, came strong and effective by directing bitter criticism to the government that sufficed with condemning and rebuking the Israeli attacks. Qazi Hussain Ahmed, the then Amir (chief) of Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan which organized pro-Palestine demonstrations, criticized Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari for giving high honor award, the crescent of Pakistan, to the elected US Vice President Joe Biden saying that "Israel kills Palestinians with American weapons, and Pakistani rulers honor American officials without the least consideration for the Palestinians and their pains." Ahmed called for boycotting American goods, and urged his fellowmen to support the Gazans. At the same time, he criticized the position of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak vis-à-vis the Rafah crossing in view of an unbearable human condition. The Chief Coordinator and Information Secretary of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Ahsan Iqbal criticized, in a demonstration organized by his party to support GS, the government's negligence toward the Palestinian people, referring to the fact that Pakistan is a nuclear country that has the ability to act on the ground if it has the will to do so, and adding that it is a shame that President Zardari is now abandoning his responsibilities as he faces a real test.¹⁰⁸

Seventh: Commercial Exchange

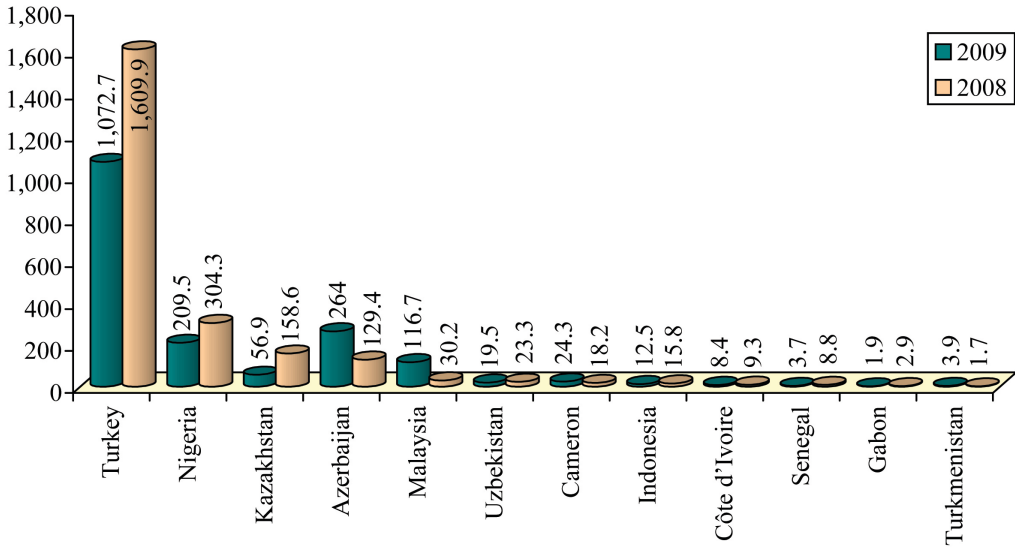
The year 2009 witnessed a significant fall in the volume of trade between non-Arab Muslim countries and Israel. Reviewing Israeli imports and exports figures for 2009 shows that Israeli exports to Turkey were estimated at \$1.07 billion,

recording a 33% decrease from 2008. It should be noted that the decline in Israeli exports to Turkey is higher than the overall decline in Israeli exports for 2009, which has fallen by 22% in comparison to 2008. Similarly, Israeli imports from Turkey retreated from around \$1.83 billion in 2008 to about \$1.39 billion in 2009 with a 24% drop. Ranking after Turkey in commercial ties with Israel are other Muslim countries like Azerbaijan, Nigeria, Malaysia and Indonesia, although at a lesser degree from Turkey (see table 1/4).

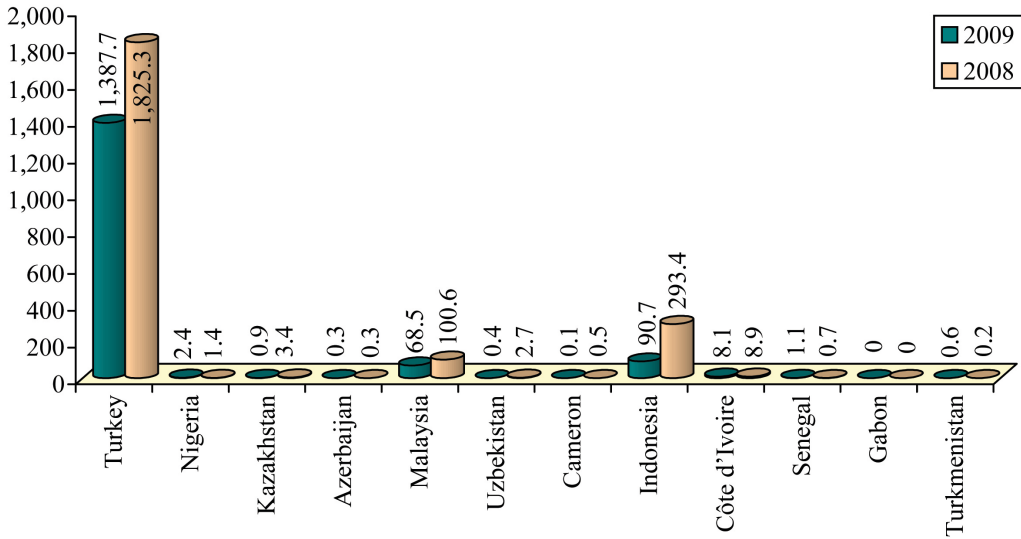
Table 1/4: Israeli Trade with a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2006–2009 (\$ million)¹⁰⁹

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2009	2008	2007	2006	2009	2008	2007	2006
Turkey	1,072.7	1,609.9	1,195.8	821.2	1,387.7	1,825.3	1,606.9	1,272.7
Nigeria	209.5	304.3	205.1	78	2.4	1.4	0.2	0.2
Kazakhstan	56.9	158.6	99.6	64.3	0.9	3.4	3.3	2.2
Azerbaijan	264	129.4	82.6	28	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.6
Malaysia	116.7	30.2	70.4	68.1	68.5	100.6	63.6	53.7
Uzbekistan	19.5	23.3	25.6	12.2	0.4	2.7	2	1.2
Cameroon	24.3	18.2	8.9	13.6	0.1	0.5	0.2	0
Indonesia	12.5	15.8	17.6	12.9	90.7	293.4	89.3	87
Cote d'Ivoire	8.4	9.3	7.9	8.8	8.1	8.9	5	2.2
Senegal	3.7	8.8	7.1	5.8	1.1	0.7	0.6	0
Gabon	1.9	2.9	1.1	1.4	0	0	0.2	1.5
Turkmenistan	3.9	1.7	2.2	0.1	0.6	0.2	0.8	1

Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2008–2009 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2008–2009 (\$ million)



Conclusion

The year 2009 witnessed more Muslim sympathy and interaction with the Palestinian issue, especially during the Israeli attack on the GS. Public non-governmental action was more apparent and organized with regards to media and political mobilization and donations especially in Turkey, Iran, Indonesia, Pakistan, Malaysia... and others. This has been an indication of the centrality of the Palestinian issue in the hearts of Muslim world nations. Notwithstanding, the Palestinian state of strife cast its dark shades on the overall Muslim interaction with the issue.

The OIC, who failed to make significant achievement during 2009 concerning the Palestinian issue, continued to issue statements condemning the Israeli attacks on the Land and holy sites, and to call for lifting the siege. Apparently, it is difficult to find common grounds for effective action for Palestine among around 56 political regimes. These regimes carry many political, economic and ideological contradictions, as well as differences in interests and priorities, what leaves a very slim possibility for their movement as one mass.

As for Turkey, it has obviously, under the leadership of the AKP of Islamic backgrounds, started to practice a more independent policy from the US and the West, leaning eastward toward a more prominent role in the Arab and Muslim region. The Turkish leadership no longer felt its need for Israel after it lined up its regional ties, especially with Syria and Iran. Such disengagement, however, will be gradual due to the deep-rooted nature of the military and economic relations between the Turkey and Israel.

In Iran, the internal confusion resulting from the Iranian elections crisis had the effect of highlighting the desire of some reformist movements for more attention to the internal issues parallel to a less support for heated files in Palestine and other. Despite this, it is likely that, in the near future, Iranian support for Hamas and the resistance factions will continue, although it may be influenced by Tehran's economic conditions, its preoccupation with internal issues, and depending on how heated the situation is in Palestine itself.



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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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