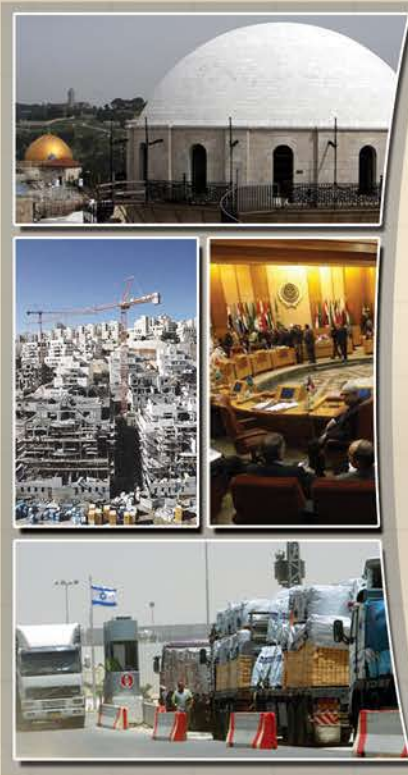


# The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11



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# **Chapter Three**

## *The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World*

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# The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

## *Introduction*

The implications of the developments on the Arab scene and their impact on the Palestinian issue were very important in 2011. It is necessary to apply caution and care when analyzing the components of this scene in order to gain a full understanding of its dimensions. Late 2010 and early 2011 have augured a new phase for the Arabs that has yet to crystallize. Undoubtedly, the new phase carries changes that certainly influence the Palestinian issue. This inevitable influence is due to the strong and reciprocal relationship between the Arab regimes and the Palestinian issue, to the extent that it would be difficult to tell which depends on the other or is affected by it. Indeed, the Arab regimes and the Palestinian issue are interrelated to the extent that the history and development of one cannot be understood apart from those of the other.

2010 was critical for the Palestinian issue. On one hand, the “moderate” Arab countries continued to deal with the peace process in line with the American will. The US wants to sponsor negotiations for a final solution, which might not satisfy the minimal demands the Palestinians have agreed on.

On another hand, it seemed that the Arab sides used Palestinian reconciliation, at least in part, to boost the peace process rather than to achieve national agreement and end the schism.

These patterns of Arab policies were likely to continue but were interrupted by the revolutions of early 2011. The Arab uprisings promised new horizons and a different approach towards the Palestinian issue. This new approach could put an end to the period of total identification with American policies which lean more and more towards adopting the plans of the Israeli right, as well as the period of normalization with Israel. In addition, the Arab public will have substantial influence on official government policies after the Arab street found its voice, as should be explained later in the chapter. However, this chapter covers the events of 2011 till March 2011. Only minor additions were added for the rest of 2011, as it will be discussed thoroughly in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*.

This chapter discusses prominent Arab stances vis-à-vis the different aspects of the Palestinian issue.



## *First: The Stances of the League of Arab States and the Arab Summit*

### **1. The Stance on the Peace Settlement**

The year 2010 witnessed intensive official Arab efforts aimed at the resumption of negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The Palestinian side seemed keen, perhaps for the first time since the Oslo Agreement, to secure Arab support for the negotiations. This prompted some observers to say that such attempts might be an indicator of an increasing Arab role in the Palestinian equation.

The PA realized the need for the Arab regimes' support for negotiations which were completely rejected at the popular Palestinian level, at least at that time. This internal rejection prompted the PA to seek the largest possible Arab cover for its strategy of reliance on the American support and promises of guarantees.

At the same time, the Arab regimes faced a predicament as the US had reneged on its promises, and then tried to shirk responsibility, stressing that the decision to enter negotiations was an internal Palestinian issue. On the other hand, the US tried to provide various limited means of support for the PA, on the grounds of regional developments.

On top of that, it seemed that there was an Arab consensus regarding the futility of resuming negotiations with Netanyahu's radical right-wing government and its policy of continued settlement building in the WB, including Jerusalem. Nonetheless, the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee issued its decisions with the consent of 12 members representing the majority of the Arab states. Syria announced that it would not be a party to the decision. Put plainly, these decisions can primarily be seen as a response to the American will to break the stalemate in the peace process and resume negotiations under any conditions. This inclination was further clear in the statements of prominent Arab officials who were involved in the making of these decisions. Qatari PM and Foreign Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani, in a joint press conference with the Secretary-General of the Arab League 'Amr Musa, said, "Although we had doubts about Israel's seriousness towards the peace process, the Arab Ministerial Committee had agreed to re-launch the peace initiative so as to give the American mediator a chance after it had found that he was keen to have peace in the region," then he added, "We want the American mediator to reach the same conclusion which we

reached 20 years ago since the Madrid talks” adding that the Israeli move to build the illegal housing units in Jerusalem is a hint to Arabs not to pin high hopes on peace talks as the Israeli leaders declared.<sup>1</sup>

The Arab regimes failed throughout 2010 to break the vicious circle of negotiations being the “only game in town.” This was evident in the series of Arab concessions regarding the conditions for starting negotiations and the switch from indirect to the direct negotiations. To begin with, and based on Obama’s pledge to unofficially stop settlement building in East Jerusalem, the Follow-up Committee conceded their demand for a complete halt to settlement building in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, as a condition for indirect peace talks. This condition was originally confirmed in the final communiqué of the Sirte Summit “Supporting the Steadfastness of Jerusalem,” in March 2010.<sup>2</sup> The committee decided to allow four months of indirect negotiations which would be followed by direct negotiations pending an assessment of progress in the negotiations of borders.

The Follow-up Committee conceded again and authorized President Mahmud ‘Abbas to enter direct negotiations with Israel on 29/7/2010, i.e., two months before the end of the period decided for indirect negotiations and without revealing their outcome. The committee left it for the Palestinian president to decide when to begin the negotiations. It was then said that the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait and the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas have asked Sheikh Hamad and ‘Amr Musa to support ‘Abbas in the resumption of direct negotiations even if he only got verbal promise from Israel or the US that Israel would recognize the borders of 1967.<sup>3</sup> However, as the American administration announced its failure to urge Netanyahu to stop settlement building for three months only, it was impossible for the Follow-up Committee to retreat or wait any longer. Accordingly, the committee agreed—in order to break the stalemate on the negotiations track—to condition the resumption of negotiations on a serious negotiations offer from the US.<sup>4</sup> The US was never likely to present such an offer in the light of its unwillingness to exercise pressure on the Israeli government on one hand, and the easing of Arab conditions on the other.

Washington would not allow matters to reach a complete deadlock and it is expected to push for support of Salam Fayyad’s plan to establish a temporary Palestinian state. This plan was expected to garner the support of America’s Arab



allies; however, the changes in the Arab landscape in early 2011 altered the official Arab approach to the peace settlement. Concern about the Arab uprisings on the Egyptian, regional and international levels might lead to a decreased interest in the Palestinian issue. However, the Palestinian issue can be expected to again be the center of interest when the Arab regimes better express the will of their peoples.

As for the PA, it will not receive the previous high level of Arab support for the peace process while it does not receive international guarantees for its strategy and as long as Israel continues with its intransigence. Some Arab regimes might prefer to leave the decision for the Palestinians themselves and open the way for Hamas and the Palestinian opposition to express their inclinations. This means that the peace settlement course would be decided in the remaining months of 2011 in light of developments in the internal Palestinian arena or changes around the Arab world. In this sense, the slogan which has echoed in different Arab regions, “The people want an end of the schism,” might change to “The people want to change the track” in the Palestinian context.

Arab governments, however, are not expected to withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative. Taking into consideration their relationship with Washington, a radical change should not be expected, at least during the remainder of 2011, and the rules of the game will not return to 1960s-style policies. However, the Arab regimes, even those untouched by change, might be able to practice some acceptable level of “political troublemaking” under the pressure of the Arab street that considers the support of the Palestinian issue one of the constants which no one can tamper with. This troublemaking might be represented in different steps, including for example:

- The escalation of the rhetoric opposing Israeli practices.
- Ending full cooperation with the American policies and refraining from giving consent to American peace plans.

## **2. The Stance on the Inter-Palestinian Reconciliation**

The Arab regimes, represented in the Arab League, did not play an effective role in 2010 regarding Palestinian reconciliation, where the Arab League was satisfied with the support and blessing of the Egyptian sponsorship of the file.

Prior to the Sirte Summit held in March 2010, there were expectations regarding a probable Arab role to be led by Libya, Qatar and the KSA in order to push the

reconciliation process forward. In addition, the Arabs offered Hamas to attach its reservations to the original reconciliation paper and sign it, along with Fatah, other factions and prominent Palestinian figures, as a solution for the reconciliation dilemma. In this context, there was news that Khalid Mish'al, the head of Hamas political bureau, would probably be invited to the Sirte Summit to discuss the reconciliation issue in the presence of the PA President Mahmud 'Abbas. The Arab League completely denied any will to invite Mish'al to the Sirte Summit stressing that the summit is limited to the states member to the Arab League and not open to factions.<sup>5</sup>

Arab endeavors, which worked partially on inter-Palestinian reconciliation, did not produce tangible results, lacking the momentum to overcome the inter-Arab conflicts.

The comments of the Arab League Secretary-General 'Amr Musa about reconciliation and its importance on many occasions throughout 2010, without presenting any plan to be executed, could be interpreted in the context of the diplomacy of dissipating Arab embarrassment. As a matter of fact, it was not possible in the previous phase, which lasted until late 2010 to present more on this level. In addition, it was not realistic to expect an official Arab role in an inter-Palestinian reconciliation when the Arabs themselves were in dire need of inter-Arab reconciliations and internal settlements.

The Arab regimes will probably not play an effective role in Palestinian reconciliation during 2011 as a result of their preoccupation with internal events. Consequently, not much can be expected from the Arab League, yet this does not mean a total absence of a positive role by some Arab countries such as Qatar, as shall be explained later.

### **3. The Stance on Jerusalem**

The official Arab approach to the issue of Jerusalem during 2010 was not sufficient to meet the challenges faced by the city. The expanding Israeli settlement building within East Jerusalem during 2009, in addition to the settlers' continued storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque demanded Arab willingness to face up to Israel's plans to occupy the city. In this context, the 22nd Arab Summit that convened in Sirte approved the allocation of \$500 million for *al-Quds* and *al-Aqsa* Funds which were established in 2000 following the second Palestinian *Intifadah*.





Moreover, the Arab leaders announced an Arab plan to save Jerusalem calling the international community and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to take responsibility for the protection of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They also decided to assign the Arab Group at the UN to request the convening of a special session of the UNGA aimed at halting Israeli measures in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> The Arab League decided to form a legal committee tasked with following up the documenting of Judaization measures and the confiscation of Arab property as well as filing cases before competent national and international courts to sue Israel and dedicated a week to explaining the Arab plan to save Jerusalem.<sup>7</sup>

So far this chapter has described how reactions from the Arab states appeared insufficient to face the challenges posed by Israel, which has continuously established new facts on the ground. Indeed, Israel has allocated hundreds of millions of dollars to activate its plans while the Arab regimes were satisfied with announcing the plan for saving Jerusalem without any Arab leader talking about the progress achieved in this context or the measures that have been taken so far. At the same time, Ambassador Hisham Yusuf, the Arab League spokesman, confirmed in a statement issued in July 2010 that the Arab League has not received the \$500 million approved at the Sirte Summit, while the secretary-general has addressed Arab foreign ministers in this respect to the missing funding.<sup>8</sup>

In September 2010, the Arab League Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and the Occupied Arab Lands Affairs Mohammad Sabih revealed that a number of Arab countries have not paid their allocation to support the PA as agreed in the Arab summits.<sup>9</sup> This failure to pay their dues raises questions about the seriousness of the Arab parties in tackling Palestinian problems.

#### **4. The Stance on Easing the GS Siege**

The first half of 2010 did not witness any positive Arab declarations regarding breaking the siege of GS. Quite to the contrary, the year started with ‘Amr Musa’s justification for the Egyptian plan to build the Steel Wall on its borders with GS as a requirement of sovereignty.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the final communiqué of the Sirte Summit included a minor reference to the need to lift the siege as if the Arabs preferred to wait the outcome of the negotiations while postponing all other key issues and rights.

However, on 1/6/2010, the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla stirred the Arab world’s quiet waters and the Arab League held an urgent session for the Arab

Foreign Ministers on 2/6/2010. At the end of their meeting, the foreign ministers recommended the withdrawal of the Arab Peace Initiative, consistent with the statement of the Saudi King ‘Abdullah Bin ‘Abd al-‘Aziz Al Sa‘ud; he hinted, in the 2009 Economic Summit held in Kuwait, that the initiative would not be on the table for a long time. However, this recommendation was met with wide Arab reluctance which led to its abortion. The opposing Arab parties justified their position on the basis that the relations with Israel can be used to push the peace process forward or be invested in times of crises; such as the Egyptian-Jordanian intervention to urge Israel to release the Arab detainees, who were seized in the attack on Freedom Flotilla!<sup>11</sup>

Talking about the withdrawal of the Arab Peace Initiative seems to have become a trend for Arab officials facing the Israeli recurrent violations. The communiqué of the Arab Foreign Ministers meeting reflected a stand which fell short of the measures taken by non-Arab countries, such as Nicaragua that severed its diplomatic relations with Israel, based on the latter’s attack on the aid convoy.

In a press conference following the meeting of the Arab Foreign Ministers, ‘Amr Musa said that the Council has decided to break the siege. Musa further added that the Council has decided to assign Lebanon and the Arab Group at the UN to urge the Security Council, in collaboration with Turkey and other friendly states, to issue a resolution which condemns the Israeli siege on the GS and urges Israel to lift it. He described the Egyptian decision to open the Rafah crossing without a timeframe as “a breaking of the siege.”<sup>12</sup>

Then came ‘Amr Musa’s visit to the GS which lasted around 10 hours in an attempt to contain popular Arab outrage triggered by the Israeli crime and to dissipate Arab embarrassment for lack of reaction. The League Secretariat considered the visit, which came four years after the imposition of the siege and produced no tangible outcome, as tantamount to breaking the blockade! On the other hand, the Libyan aid ship Hope headed to al-‘Arish Port rather than staying on course to the GS, despite previous boasts of its determination to reach Gaza Port.<sup>13</sup>

Some Arab countries have witnessed regime transformations, and it is expected that the domino effect will reach other Arab countries, as well. Thus, it is likely that a positive change will be seen in the official Arab approach towards lifting the GS siege. The Arab regimes might encourage sending relief convoys to the GS to contain and distract the outraged Arab masses away from issues of internal reform



towards another just cause. The Arab street has always considered supporting the Palestinians as a fundamental and sacred issue not to be tampered with.

### **5. The Stance on the Assassination of al-Mabhuh**

Arab reactions following the assassination of Mahmud al-Mabhuh, the leader of the Ezzedein Al-Qassam Brigades, in Dubai on 20/1/2010, did not fit with the gravity of the crime committed. On an Arab security level, the assassination amounted to a breach of the security of a moderate Arab country, the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE had hosted, 10 days before the assassination, and for the first time in its history, the Israeli Minister of Infrastructure Uzi Landau, in a conference of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA).

Most dangerous is the continuous Israeli infiltration of the UAE's national security. The military analyst Alon Ben-David outlined this in a televised report on the Israeli Channel 10, which he has filmed in the hotel where the assassination took place. In the report, Ben-David bragged about Israel's infiltration of the UAE's security apparatuses, by the assassination of al-Mabhuh and securing the offenders' exit from the country. The video also showed the hotel corridors reaching to the room where the assassination took place!

Following the crime, the Dubai Police announced their plans to file charges against Netanyahu and demanded the International Criminal Police Organization—INTERPOL issue an arrest warrant against the chief of the Mossad who had celebrated the crime in an extremely provocative manner. The measures pursued by the UAE required a strong Arab reaction, but did not exceed condemnation of the crime. In an extremely late statement issued on 21/2/2010, 'Amr Musa said that the Arab League was following the issue of assassination with sincere concern, deeming the assassination a criminal act and a violation of the sovereignty of an Arab state. He added that the Arab League was in constant contact with the UAE.<sup>14</sup> Additionally, in the 133rd regular session of the Arab League Council at the ministerial level, the Council expressed its condemnation of the abuse of the consular privileges granted to the citizens of the countries whose passports were used in the assassination.<sup>15</sup> A similar condemnation appeared in the final communiqué of the Sirte Summit held on 28/3/2010.

In the same context, there was no Arab coordination with the UAE to support its efforts to prosecute the perpetrators who entered and departed Dubai with

European passports. In addition, the Arab officials did not utilise their relations with European countries and many perpetrators managed to escape prosecution. For example, the German security authorities released the Mossad agent and the charges against him were dropped, allowing him to leave Germany and return to Israel.<sup>16</sup>

## ***Second: The Stances and Roles of Some Key Countries***

### **1. Egypt**

#### **a. The Stance on the Peace Settlement**

During 2010, the Egyptian regime continued in its stance on the Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement, and maintained its adherence with the American policy formulas.

Essentially, Cairo had an interest in active intervention on this issue for reasons concerned with Egypt's sovereignty and its internal security, as well as its status in the region. Nonetheless, the Egyptian role was governed by the need to maintain the status quo in relations with the US, the official international sponsor of peace and the strategic ally guaranteeing support for passing power to Mubarak's son. This led to a confused Egyptian position, oscillating between supporting the Palestinian steadfastness and urging the Palestinian negotiator to pursue flexibility once the US pressured Egypt to change its position.

However, during 2010, the Egyptian balance seemed to show more inclination towards urging the Palestinian negotiator to show further flexibility and tolerance as the crises which struck the ruling regime, on the internal and external levels, increased the sensitivity of the Egyptian position regarding any pressure the US might exercise. Thus, the ruling regime attempted to maintain the status quo and secure regime inheritance while suppressing the increased internal tension, which was based on the rejection of this project and eventually led to the outburst of the revolution of January 25th.

In light of such internal and external instability, the Egyptian regime was not able in 2010 to exercise a more effective role in dealing with the principal parties of the peace settlement. The Egyptians continued to wait for an American



move which might save the stalled peace process and started to talk about a new Israeli position presented by the Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu to the Egyptian leadership during his talks with the Egyptian President in early 2010.

Following these developments, Cairo presented a plan to revive the Palestinian Israeli peace talks. Despite what has been said about the independence of the Egyptian plan from any American pressure, what has been leaked in this respect shows that it remains close to the American plan.

The plan presented by the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait and Intelligence Minister 'Omar Suleiman to the American administration during their visit to Washington on 7/1/2010 included the following points:

- The American administration issues a presidential letter of guarantee for the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas.
- The letter should guarantee the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict based on pre-1967 borders with adjustments called for by demographic changes in the interim years.
- Obama will also be called upon to limit territorial swaps between Israel and the Palestinians to a minimum.
- Showing willingness to support East Jerusalem's status as capital of a future Palestinian state.<sup>17</sup>

It seems that Cairo continued its pressure on the Palestinian leadership to resume negotiations. After rounds of calls and meetings between the moderate countries and the PA, the Palestinian leadership declared that there was an Arab pressure to resume talks and to proceed after that to direct negotiations. On 18/7/2010, a meeting between the Egyptian President Mubarak and Netanyahu was also held after the latter had met with Obama in Washington earlier in July. This meeting stressed the identification of the Egyptian position with the American stance of proceeding with the negotiations to a stalemate and how this would not help achieve the American goals in the region. These goals include creating an Arab alignment to face the Iranian project. However, the Egyptian position was based on attempts to avoid angering the American side and aimed to win its contentment in order to guarantee its positive or neutral position regarding internal Egyptian issues.

The Egyptian position which was supportive of the resumption of negotiations depended on American assurances regarding Washington's commitment to the

establishment of the Palestinian state according to the two-state solution and the personal commitment from President Obama to continue his efforts to launch peace negotiations within a specific timeframe.<sup>18</sup> In addition, Egypt wanted to give Washington the chance to fulfill its promises and convince Israel to freeze settlement building for an extended period of time.

Washington's retreat and its official announcement that it have failed in convincing Israel to freeze settlement building for a three month period did not lead to any change in the Egyptian regime's position. On the contrary, the then Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait attested on the eve of the meeting of the Arab Follow-up Committee that no side had any interest in thwarting the American efforts. Abu al-Ghait attested that there was a need for more international support, in particular from the Quartet, to enhance the American role. He added that the US must reassure the world that the borders of 1967 will be the future borders of the new Palestinian state and that East Jerusalem will be for the Palestinians.<sup>19</sup> However, these principles were not accompanied by any Arab pressure on the American administration.

The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that Egypt's backing for alternative options for the peace process would not be accomplished by collision with the US or the great powers, but by coordinating with them. These options that include seeking UN Security Council recognition of a Palestinian state along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.<sup>20</sup> This means that this option, regardless of the doubts regarding its seriousness, would not be used to mount international pressure on the US.

Ironically, as the Arab Group was presenting a draft resolution in the Security Council condemning Israeli settlement building, the Mubarak regime was in its last throes under the impact of the revolution which started on 25/1/2011. Thus, Egypt did not participate in the Arab measure which failed after the US vetoed the resolution. This time, however, the non-participation of the Egyptian regime was governed by internal factors rather than the coordination with Washington.

The future prospects of the Palestinian issue in 2011 had much to do with the outbreak of the revolution of January 25th. Many questions were raised regarding the positive and negative influence of the Egyptian uprising on the Palestinian issue and Egyptian-Israeli relations, even before Mubarak stepped down on 11/2/2011. The course of the Palestinian issue has been, and always will be, dependent on



the situation in Egypt, a focal point in the region with cultural and geographic proximity. In addition, there are geo-political factors, for Palestine is the eastern gate to the national security of Egypt. Consequently, any changes on the sides of the borders will inevitably affect the other side.

Given the fact that the Egyptian regime is currently undergoing an interim phase, it is too early to outline the contours of its foreign policy in the long or medium run. It should be noted here that the transformation in Egypt is extremely critical and should not be underestimated, as neither the old regime has completely collapsed nor has a new regime been established yet. Thus, it is impossible to tell how the new regime would look, only to predict the general features of an Egyptian foreign policy in the interim period, which will last until the end of 2011 and perhaps in to 2012. In this context, it is possible to note the following:

Egypt will not pursue Mubarak's policies regarding direct and indirect negotiations with Israel and regarding the entire peace process followed since the Oslo Accords. In other words, it is very unlikely that the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces will exercise any pressure on the PA to change its stances concerning freezing settlement building and return to negotiations.

In the same vein, Egypt in the interim period would be stricter (as compared to Egypt under Mubarak) in supporting the Palestinian rights and less willing to comply with the demands of Israel and its allies in the US.

Even if the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces has announced its commitment to the Camp David Accords, this does not necessarily mean proceeding with the same old practices. Yet, between annulling Mubarak's policies and proceeding with them, Egypt would choose some other alternatives. These would put Israel in defensive position and bring to an end the intimate relation which Israel has enjoyed with Egypt under Mubarak.

It is also unlikely that Egypt would withdraw from the Arab Peace Initiative. However, it will be less tolerant of the lack of the desire for peace on the part of Israel and more critical of its policies.

If Israel pursues a new assault on the GS, this would probably lead to unprecedented tension with Egypt.

### **b. The Stance on the Palestinian Reconciliation**

In 2010, there was a renewed mobility on the level of inter-Palestinian reconciliation, in parallel with a renewed activity on the level of the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. These negotiations witnessed interventions from some Arab parties, in addition to Cairo, which presided over this key file. At their peak, these efforts showed that there was keenness on securing a calm climate for the negotiations and the negotiators.

In early 2010, Cairo persistently refused to re-discuss or amend the Egyptian paper for reconciliation. This position led to frustration after the optimism over the extensive Arab tours of Khalid Mish'al and Mahmud 'Abbas early 2010. There were also estimations about an expected Saudi role in the inter-Palestinian reconciliation file which reminded the region of Saudi endeavors to conclude the Mecca Agreement in 2007.<sup>21</sup>

However, this stance changed on the eve of *'Eid-ul-Fitr* (the Festival of Fast-Breaking) after the meeting held in Mecca between former Minister 'Omar Suleiman and Khalid Mish'al. The two agreed that Suleiman would convince Abu Mazin to send a delegation to meet a Hamas delegation in Damascus in order to agree on inter-Palestinian reconciliation, even before Hamas would sign the Egyptian paper.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, a meeting was held and a joint statement was released stressing the need for holding another meeting and commitment to the points agreed on once the Egyptian paper is signed.<sup>23</sup>

This change in the Egyptian position was meant to support Abu Mazin in the negotiations with Israel which faced wide Palestinian opposition, even within Fatah and the PLO, due to the intransigence of Netanyahu's government.

The revival of this file was also based on Saudi endeavors to bridge the gap between Cairo and Damascus and the realization that resolving the reconciliation file is not feasible while the Syrians are marginalized. This was particularly evident after the failure of Cairo Declaration in March 2005, the failure of Mecca Agreement in February 2007 and the failure of Sana'a Declaration in 2008 in addition to the failure of the Palestinian dialogue rounds in Cairo in 2009.

Cairo and Riyadh considered the revival of the reconciliation file at this time an important step toward avoiding any failure in the negotiations. Reconciliation could also be used as leverage in support of Abu Mazin, to show that he has many





options and is capable of achieving reconciliation. Thus, it would help in refuting the Israeli claims that the Palestinian president is too weak, as he does not represent all the Palestinian people or control the GS.

The purpose of these efforts was confirmed with the postponement of the session, which was scheduled for 20/10/2010 in Damascus, until further notice. The political and security officials in Ramallah got a clear message from the US and Israel that “opening the file of security forces in the WB is a red line.” The message hinted that Hamas in the WB should always be the target of the security forces and security coordination rather than being a part of the PA, its apparatuses and supervising bodies. Moreover, the PA’s divergence from this course would make it and its forces an enemy of Israel. Eventually, this file was closed before the end of the year with the failure of Arab efforts to resolve it.

With the outbreak of the Egyptian revolution, there was no more room for the Egyptian paper. The regime, which has maintained the paper and used it to pressure Hamas, has collapsed.

It is very likely that during the interim period in Egypt there will be less Egyptian focus on this file until internal matters are taken care of. Nonetheless, if the developments in the Palestinian arena imposed their logic on all sides and demanded more efforts to achieve reconciliation; it would be possible to assume that the Egyptians would show relative openness towards Hamas. This openness was particularly manifested through the meeting of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt and the Foreign Minister Nabil al-‘Arabi with Hamas delegation headed by Mahmud al-Zahhar in March 2011. This was in contrast to the approach pursued by the former regime. The communication with Hamas then was restricted to Egyptian General Intelligence, without any political contact.

### **c. The Stance on the GS Siege**

In early 2010, Egypt seemed to have lost its tolerance of aid convoys channeled into GS through the Rafah crossing, the only Arab exit for GS. 2010 started with the crisis of the Lifeline 3 relief convoy after the Egyptian authorities allowed 139 vehicles to enter GS through the Rafah crossing, about 45 km from the port in al-‘Arish, but requiring a remaining 59 vehicles to pass via Israel. The incident escalated into an exchange of fire leading to the killing of an Egyptian soldier and the injury of dozens of convoy members.<sup>24</sup>

The Egyptian authorities decided to prevent relief convoys from passing to GS via its territories regardless of their origin or organizers. The Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Ghait referred the ban to the need to thwart those intentions aiming at hurting Egypt or questioning its support for the Palestinians and their cause. He explained in a statement he issued that the Egyptian authorities were willing to develop a new procedure which allows those willing to send aid consignments to the Palestinians to hand them to the Egyptian Red Crescent and the Egyptian authorities in al-‘Arish Port. The Egyptian authorities would take all the necessary measures then to hand them to the Palestinian Red Crescent in Gaza.<sup>25</sup>

Through its management of this crisis, Egypt appeared to be mostly opposed to providing the Palestinian people with humanitarian assistance although of course it was not responsible for imposing the siege in the first place. While the aid convoy received popular and official welcome in Turkey, Syria and Jordan, the conduct of Egypt at the official level in impeding the convoy was unjustified. The Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs seemed unreasonably stubborn, and thus failed to convince public opinion with its justifications. Indeed, there was no logic in demanding that convoys go to al-‘Arish Port, which has limited capacity, instead of Nuweiba Port where the ships were supposed to dock from the outset. The repeated talk about sovereignty and respect for the laws of countries generated wide ridicule as no one was intending or trying to infringe on them.

Intercepting the aid meant for a besieged people triggered wide criticism against Egypt rather than against Israel, which is violating the rights of the Palestinians and causing their starvation. However, in the aftermath of the attack on Freedom Flotilla, Egypt announced the opening of Rafah crossing in both directions for an indefinite time and allowed the passage of aid consignments through its territory to the GS.<sup>26</sup> This step was an attempt to contain public rage prompted by the assault on the flotilla, and to prevent the recurrence of the scenario of massive popular gatherings at the Rafah crossing that occurred when GS faced total economic paralysis in January 2008.

At the same time, Egypt continued to uncover and destroy GS border tunnels in 2010. According to a press report, Egypt destroyed around 400 border tunnels in the first half of 2010.<sup>27</sup> The destruction of the tunnels increased the tension between Egypt and the Hamas government in the GS, where both sides exchanged accusations over the issue of the tunnels. Egypt continuously accused Hamas of

using the tunnels to smuggle weapons to the GS and penetrate the security of Sinai. For example, a report issued by the ruling National Democratic Party mentioned that smuggling weapons into GS has led to the creation of an indirect weapons market in Egypt, where most of these weapons fall back to Egypt and are sold at home. Further, the report added that the “terrorist” attacks in Cairo and Sinai were directly related to these tunnels, naming the al-Hussein bombings of 2009. The Egyptian authorities had evidence, according to the report, that two of the planners “took advantage of GS as a secure haven under Hamas’s control, while a Belgian of Tunisian origin used the tunnels to sneak from GS to Egypt and participate in the bombings after receiving directions from Hamas leaders in GS.”<sup>28</sup>

The tension between the two sides increased with the incoming media and legal reports. These talked about the Egyptian security forces pumping toxic gases into the tunnels before detonating bombs there in order to kill those who might be there. For example, a report by the Arab Organisation for Human Rights (AOHR) in the UK mentioned that the Egyptian authorities used lethal force in the war on the tunnels between GS and Egypt, where it pursued deliberate killings, away from the scrutiny of public or media.

The AOHR revealed in its report that 54 cases of death by suffocation were documented. Most of them died after inhaling lethal doses of toxic gas pumped by the Egyptian forces into the tunnels causing suffocation and quick death.<sup>29</sup>

On 29/4/2010, the Ministry of Interior in the GS accused the Egyptian security forces of pumping poisonous gas into smuggling tunnels, killing four Palestinians and suffocating seven. For its part, Egypt denied the charges, saying that explosions set off by security forces trying to seal the entrances to some of the hundreds of tunnels still operating may have sparked fires that sucked the oxygen out of a tunnel, causing suffocation.<sup>30</sup>

After the Egyptian uprising, the borders with GS are expected to witness a breakthrough. In this sense, the then interim Foreign Minister of Egypt Nabil al-‘Arabi, declared that during the coming stage, Egypt would ensure the end of the siege on the GS. He also described the policies of the former regime regarding the Rafah crossing and its approach to the GS as improvised and a gross breach of international humanitarian law which prohibits besieging civilians even in time of war.<sup>31</sup> These declarations show that the new Egyptian vision and its approach to the Rafah crossing would be more flexible. The indicators of such a change started

to appear with the decisions of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces to open the Rafah crossing permanently to allow the passage of those trapped on both sides of the borders, humanitarian cases and those who have stay permits. The Council has also allowed some Hamas leaders, including Mahmud al-Zahhar and Khalil al-Hayyah, to pass via the crossing. Moreover, these decisions reflect the change in the Egyptian perception of the siege. It held Israel and the international community fully responsible for the siege, while acknowledging its partial responsibility for this problem and promising to try to resolve it.

## **2. Jordan**

### **a. The Stance on the Peace Settlement**

2010 did not bring any change in the Jordanian approach to the peace process. Jordan is considered the Arab state most concerned about the non-establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital and about the return of the refugees. It is a matter that transcends geography and demography and threatens Jordan's security and even its own existence. However, there is little evidence that these concerns are having any impact on Jordan's political conduct.

In 2010, there were many risk indicators which required Jordan to interfere effectively to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The first of these indicators was the American-Israeli endeavors to revive a solution for the refugees file before starting negotiations, an approach that would likely be at the expense of Arab states, primarily Jordan. Such a solution, as some media reports said, included sending American delegations to a number of Arab countries to convince them about the naturalization of the Palestinians. These countries would receive huge financial aid to cover the needs of the naturalized refugees.<sup>32</sup>

Facing such dangerous signals, Jordan's official position was limited to denunciations, verbal accusations and confirmations refusing naturalization. On other occasions, the Israeli ambassador in Amman was called and handed over a protest note from the Jordanian government complaining about the decision of the Israeli government to transfer Palestinians from the WB.<sup>33</sup>

At the same time, Jordanian officials continued to issue statements regarding the preparations for resuming direct negotiations. Simultaneously, these statements again stressed that Jordan does not negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians or take part in the negotiations and would veto any agreement that does not meet Jordanian

interests. In fact, Jordan has expressed its willingness to participate in direct negotiations parallel to reports attesting that it was opening its archives on the WB and providing the Palestinian negotiations team under Mahmud ‘Abbas with detailed maps and aerial photos of the WB including East Jerusalem, which was under Jordanian sovereignty prior to its occupation in 1967.<sup>34</sup> However, Jordanian attempts were completely rejected by the Israeli and American sides which insisted on bilateral negotiations even with regard to the files that have direct impact on Jordanian national security, such as the issue of the Palestinian refugees.

In the light of the American and Israeli persistence with rhetoric around bilateral negotiations, Jordan did not have any useful tactics which would enable it to participate in the negotiations in a way that would serve its interests. In early May 2010, a statement was issued by the National Committee of Retired Military Personnel rejecting the American-backed Israeli plans to naturalize the refugees in a way that affects the Jordanian identity.<sup>35</sup> However, questions were raised about the validity of attributing the said statement to Retired Military Personnel, especially after a group of the retirees denied publicly before the Jordanian King that they had issued the statement.<sup>36</sup> The same thing applies to the Jordanian decision to form follow-up committees tasked with tracking the file of direct negotiations yet remaining without an effective role on the actual course of events.

Eventually, Jordan was left with one choice: waiting for the results of bilateral negotiations, no matter the outcome.

Although the turmoil in the Arab countries makes it more likely that Arab interest in the peace process file will decline, at least during 2011, the unique status of Jordan makes it unable to disregard this file. Despite the unrest in the country at the beginning of 2011, Jordan will continue to fear the creation of a *de facto* solution in accordance with the Israeli agenda.

#### **b. The Relations with the Palestinians in Jordan**

The issue of the Palestinian refugees in Jordan was the main area of concern within Jordan when it came to the Palestinians. Throughout the year, there was continued escalation regarding this file.

In early 2010, HRW published a report entitled *Stateless Again: Palestinian-Origin Jordanians Deprived of their Nationality*. The report mentioned that between 2004 and 2008, Jordan has “arbitrarily” withdrawn citizenship from 2,732 Jordanians of

Palestinian origin. It added, “Hundreds of thousands of Jordanians of Palestinian origin appear liable to have their national number revoked, including some 200,000 Palestinian-origin Jordanians who returned to Jordan from Kuwait in 1990-91.” HRW demanded that:

Jordan should halt the arbitrary withdrawal of nationality from Jordanians of Palestinian origin. The government should appoint a commission to investigate and publicly report on the legal status of Jordanians of Palestinian origin who lived outside of the West Bank at the time of Jordan’s 1988 severing of ties with the West Bank. Jordan should reinstate Jordanian nationality to those arbitrarily deprived thereof, and provide them with fair compensation.<sup>37</sup>

The Jordanian government stressed that the withdrawal of citizenship was intended to correct the situation of the Palestinians after the disengagement from the WB. It added that struggle is a part of the Palestinian identity and a source of pride for everybody.<sup>38</sup> Thus in this sense, the Jordanian government’s position appears to be based on its keenness to disengage from the WB and to respect the Palestinian refugees right of return to their homeland, as well as a reflection of its decision not to get involved in settling the refugee issue. Jordan is completely opposed to naturalization projects that Israel and some international parties stir up every now and then and which trigger Jordan’s fears of a solution that might come at its expense.

Tension between Jordan and Israel peaked after the announcement on 13/4/2010 that Israel had imposed a military order which could see tens of thousands of Palestinians deported from the occupied WB. These Palestinians will be considered as “infiltrators,” for they either “entered the Area unlawfully following the effective date,” or they were “present in the Area” and did not “lawfully hold a permit.”<sup>39</sup> This measure raised fears of mass deportation of Palestinians into Jordan. Consequently, the Jordanian Foreign Ministry summoned the Israeli ambassador in Amman and handed him a strongly worded protest note from the government regarding the Israeli decision. The note mentioned that the decision was a blunt breach of humanitarian and international covenants and laws and a violation of Israel’s obligations as the occupying power of the Palestinian territories. In addition, the note stated that any Israeli measure in this context would be considered legally void and invalid.<sup>40</sup>



Several closed meetings were held that involved prominent figures from the ruling regime and the government. Leaks from these meetings attest that Jordan perceived any unilateral measures which would lead to the mass transfer of Palestinians from the WB as a hostile act against it, and could lead to military confrontation with the Israeli occupation.<sup>41</sup>

At the same time, The Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) in Jordan stressed the need for practical measures to face Israel's apartheid policy against the Palestinians in the WB. These measures would include closing the borders to prevent the Israeli transfer policy, the abolition of Wadi 'Arabah's Treaty of Peace between the state of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the expulsion of the Israeli ambassadors from the Arab capitals hosting them, closing Israeli embassies in addition to the complete activation of boycott laws and a halting of all forms of normalization with the Israeli enemy.

HCCNOP further demanded that the Arab governments withdraw the Arab Peace Initiative and work together with the international community to exercise more pressure on Israel. They wanted both parties to thwart the aggressive settlement building projects and expose the ambitions of the Israeli government.<sup>42</sup>

On another hand, a group of the National Committee of Retired Military Personnel issued a statement stressing that Jordanians of Palestinian origin have no political rights in Jordan. The statement attested that Jordanians of Palestinian origins enjoy the same rights as other Jordanians "except for political rights, there shall be 'no political allocations,' no naturalization, and no political positions, in an effort to preserve the precious Palestinian land and to confront the Israeli agenda, and those who adopt it."<sup>43</sup> The Retired Military Personnel issued another statement in September 2010 reiterating the same point and warning that the naturalization of Jordanians of Palestinian origin was becoming a threat to the Jordanian national identity.<sup>44</sup>

Although the mother institution of the retired officers denied any relation with the statement, this does not eliminate the fact that such a declaration represents the stance of a segment of the political elite in Jordan. It is also consistent with the project adopted by the Jordanian ex-Foreign Minister Samir Habashnah, who has called for withdrawing the national number (which gives full Jordanian citizenship rights including the right to elect and be elected) from all holders of green and

yellow cards under the pretext of preserving the Jordanian national identity and supporting the Palestinian steadfastness.<sup>45</sup>

In an attempt to explain the withdrawal of citizenship, a report quoting a well-informed source in the Jordanian Interior Ministry asserted that the number of Jerusalemites living in the Kingdom without renewing the Israeli permits is increasing. According to the report this means that this category would lose any status in occupied Jerusalem as well as forcing the Jordanian authorities to correct their situation through converting yellow cards by which Palestinians enjoy all Jordanian political and civil rights to green cards which declare them as “Palestinians living temporarily on the Jordanian territories.” The source clarified that as the Israeli permit expires, the Follow-up and Inspection Department would call the concerned person and warn him against the dangers of losing the Israeli permit and the consequent loss of his historical right in Palestine. In addition the Jordanian authorities would be compelled to convert his yellow card into a green one as a response to the Israeli project. It is worth mentioning that according to the procedures of the Follow-up and Inspection Department, yellow cards are granted to Palestinians with valid Israeli permits or Palestinian ID or those who continuously renew their Israeli documents. However, the holders of the yellow card enjoy the same rights and duties of the Jordanian citizen because they preserve their Palestinian identity and land, having a valid document issued by the “occupation.”<sup>46</sup>

Granting Jordanian citizenship to the Palestinians and then withdrawing it triggered much debate in Jordan in light of claims about the naturalization of a huge number of Palestinians. In this respect, there was a particular claim that during four years (2005–2008) the number of those who restored the national number and switched from the green to the yellow card amounted to 56,939 persons compared to 2,017 whose national number was frozen and their yellow card replaced with green card.<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, official statistics published by *Addustour* newspaper about the number of persons who obtained Jordanian citizenship revealed the invalidity of these claims. The published figures showed that the number of persons receiving Jordanian citizenship from 1/1/2000 till 17/2/2011 amounted to 46,058 including 37,150 women who gained citizenship after marrying a Jordanian citizen as per the laws of nationality. According to the statistics, 1,322 Arab and foreign persons obtained Jordanian nationality based on nationality law, while 2,200 citizens





restored their Jordanian nationality after having earlier renounced it in order to claim a foreign nationality. In addition, figures showed that among the naturalized citizens only 217 were excluded from the instructions related to the disengagement decision from 2007 till mid-February 2011 by virtue of the foreign minister's decision, while the status of 5,169 citizens was corrected in accordance with the decision of disengagement.<sup>48</sup>

Deputy Prime Minister and Interior Minister Sa'ad Hayel Srour declared that in 2010 the number of cards that were converted from yellow to green was 818, while 8,473 were converted from green to yellow. He added that the allegations about naturalizing Palestinians were not true and the Jordanian authorities have not naturalized a single Palestinian while the measures taken were in the context of correction of situation of children or those who work abroad or have left via Lod Airport.<sup>49</sup>

As a sign of positive development in the relation between Jordan and Hamas, reports mentioned in summer 2011, that King 'Abdullah welcomed Khalid Mish'al visit to Jordan. It was evident that there was a Qatari effort in breaking the ice between the two sides. However, the "Arab Spring," the developments of the Jordanian internal situation, besides the continuous strong unignorable role of Hamas in the Palestinian policies, played an important role in changing the Jordanian stance.

In general, and concerning the Jordanian approach towards the issues of the Palestinians in Jordan, no radical changes are expected to take place in 2011 because of the continuing fear of naturalization. Simultaneously, it is likely that relations between Jordan and the Palestinian factions will head towards relative openness. Thus, there will be more focus on the Palestinian issue, in the context of containing internal tension and controlling the internal situation. Therefore, Jordan in 2011 is likely to seek to adjust its relations with its citizens of Palestinian origin on one hand, and on the other hand make sure that its changed approach is not be taken as a foregone outcome of a peace settlement.

### **3. Syria**

#### **a. The Stance on the Peace Settlement**

During 2010, Damascus maintained its opposition to the return of the PLO to negotiations with Israel, continuing to reject the concessions the PLO has made

to Israel. In addition, Damascus has realized that any negotiations in the light of the current conditions of weakness and division in the PA and the intransigence of the right-wing government in Israel would only lead to more concessions on Palestinian rights, such as the right of return, Jerusalem and stopping settlement building. Moreover, Syria was opposed to the decisions and measures taken by the Arab Follow-up Committee where it occasionally declared that it was not party to any statements or decisions issued by the committee. At the same time, Damascus has stressed that the issue of indirect negotiations is an internal Palestinian problem for which the Palestinian leadership is responsible. In this context, it has repeatedly criticized the PLO's pursuit of negotiations without securing any guarantees for the Palestinian rights it is duty bound to protect in the first place.<sup>50</sup>

Syria stressed that the committee's decisions regarding indirect negotiations with Israel and discussion of future steps constitute a violation of the committee's rights, the authority of the Arab Ministerial Council and the decisions of the Arab Summit. Ambassador Yusuf Ahmad, Syria's permanent delegate to the Arab League and the head of the Syrian delegation in the Summit, declared that:

Syria views responding to the US request under all these conditions as a gift to Israel, and that direct negotiations are an Israeli demand and need... Israel considers direct negotiations as the starting point for lifting the international isolation it is suffering from and a cover to continue with the settlement and Judaization policies and impose new facts on the ground.<sup>51</sup>

The difference in the stances of Syria and the Palestinian leadership on the negotiations file and the inter-Palestinian reconciliation had negative impact on the relations between the two sides. In this context, the Syrian leadership officially apologized in early March 2010 for not receiving the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas who was supposed to visit Damascus. This stance was, according to the PLO leadership, a political message reflecting a Syrian decision not to support President 'Abbas and at the same time expressing resentment of his policies.<sup>52</sup>

On 9/10/2010, tension between the Syrian and Palestinian sides reached its peak when the Syrian and Palestinian presidents had an argument over the negotiations with Israel and the resistance, during the Extraordinary Arab Summit held in Sirte. The debate between the two presidents focused on the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee which, according to President Bashar Assad, was not mandated to give the Palestinians the approval to conduct negotiations with

Israel. President Mahmud ‘Abbas replied that the Palestinian issue is essentially an Arab issue and Arabs should not give up on it. According to media sources, the Syrian president told his Palestinian counterpart that the Palestinians should stop negotiations which have proven to be ineffective and focus on resistance instead. These sources added that President ‘Abbas reiterated that the Palestinians are focused on resistance more than others in the region, in reference to the absence of any resistance in the occupied Golan Heights.<sup>53</sup>

Since March 2011, Syria witnessed a widening popular unrest calling for changing the regime and establishing a new democratic political system. Syrian officials declared that there is a “conspiracy” behind this unrest because of its role in supporting the Palestinian issue and resistance movements in the region. Hamas was put in a difficult position, as it can’t ignore the support of the Syrian regime, while in the same time it supports peaceful democratic rotation of power and the implementation of the political rights of the people. The unstable situation led several Hamas leaders to quietly leave Syria to other countries. More lights will be shed on this issue in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12*.

#### **b. The Stance on the Palestinian Reconciliation**

The reconciliation file was expected to witness some progress this year based on the rapprochement between Damascus, Riyadh and Cairo, after realizing that no advance could be achieved without cooperation between these sides. The Syrian role remains effective in this sense as Syria embraces Hamas and hosts the head of its political bureau, Khalid Mish‘al. In addition, it has stressed on more than one occasion its continuous support of Hamas. This file witnessed, in the beginning of 2010, Khalid Mish‘al’s visits to Riyadh and some other gulf countries as well as Russia. On another hand, the Saudi foreign minister visited Cairo then Damascus for the first time in years.

However, the Arab efforts related to this file have not achieved a breakthrough for a number of different reasons mentioned previously in this chapter. For Syria, it seemed that tense relations with President ‘Abbas contributed to the stalemate. While the Syrian government made an official apology in March 2010 for not receiving the Palestinian president, sources said that Syria was not satisfied with the policies of ‘Abbas who they believed was ignoring Syrian concerns.<sup>54</sup> The tension was exacerbated after the altercation between the Syrian and Palestinian presidents in the Extraordinary Arab Summit in October 2010.

Indeed, the tension between ‘Abbas and Damascus had a negative impact on the reconciliation between the Palestinian factions. Thus, the meeting scheduled for 20/10/2010 between Fatah and Hamas to discuss the security file was postponed because of the disagreement between the two sides on the place of the meeting. Fatah leadership insisted on changing the place of the meeting which was scheduled in Damascus, while Hamas refused to hold the meeting in any other capital.<sup>55</sup> Eventually, the meeting was held on 9/11/2010 after the Fatah leadership had to agree on holding it in Damascus.

### **c. Syria’s Stances on Israel**

During 2010, Syria was successful in managing the escalated Israeli threat of waging a war against it. Damascus warned against the consequences of any Israeli attack against Syria or Lebanon. Israeli officials launched provocative statements against Syria. Notably Defense Minister Ehud Barak commented that the stalemate on achieving a peace settlement with Syria might lead to war,<sup>56</sup> and Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman warned Syrian President Bashar Assad against launching a new war saying that “not only will you lose the war, you and your family will no longer be in power.”<sup>57</sup> Syria, in return, escalated its rhetoric to the extent that its Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu‘allim warned Israel in the wake of Barak’s statement that the war would reach Israeli cities if Israel decided to launch an attack against Syria. In a joint press conference with his Spanish counterpart Miguel Ángel Moratinos, al-Mu‘allim said, “Israel is indeed planting the seeds of war in the region, I would tell them stop playing the role of thugs in the Middle East,” and then added “I would say it is going to be a comprehensive war, whether it starts in the south of Lebanon or from Syria.”<sup>58</sup>

On 25/2/2010, the Syrian President responded to the Israeli verbal escalation in a joint press conference held with the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad in Damascus. He said, “We hope others will not give us lessons when it comes to our region and history... We can decide how things will proceed.”<sup>59</sup> In addition, the online edition of *The New Yorker* published an interview with Assad, where he said that the Israelis “are like children fighting each other, messing with the country; they do not know what to do.”<sup>60</sup>

Syria’s rigorous hard line succeeded in persuading the Israeli side to change its rhetoric. In an interview on Israeli Channel 1, Lieberman said, “It needs to be understood that we are not looking for either confrontation or friction with



Syria.”<sup>61</sup> Later, Netanyahu declared that he was “prepared to immediately set out for Damascus to meet with President Assad, or to invite him to Jerusalem, or to meet with him in a third country.” This was totally rejected by Syria which stressed through its Foreign Minister Walid al-Mu‘allim that Israel has first to withdraw from the Golan Heights to the lines of 4/6/1967.<sup>62</sup>

Hostility escalated in April and May 2010 after Israel’s President Shimon Peres accused Syria of giving Hizbullah long-range Scud missiles, capable of inflicting heavy damage on Israel’s cities. Israeli security reports claimed that Israel believes Hizbullah has obtained hundreds of M600 missiles, which pose a direct threat to Israeli population centers.<sup>63</sup> However, Syria denied the veracity of these reports stressing that they aim at paving the way for an aggressive act against Syria. At the same time, Syria reiterated that it would continue to support the resistance movements including Hizbullah and Hamas. This inclination was expressed by President Assad in an interview with the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS) on 27/5/2010 in which he said, “The peace process is about two parties,” but then added, “Today, we don’t have this partner so far.”<sup>64</sup>

It is possible to say that Syria was able, through warning against the repercussions of an Israeli attack, to overcome Israeli blackmail. Although it did not accept any unfair political settlement, it kept its support for the Arab Peace Initiative. The tone of the Syrian statements comes in the context of avoiding war at a time when preventing war needs strict tone, resolute conduct and better preparedness.

## **4. Lebanon**

### **a. The Palestinian Arena in Lebanon**

In February and March 2010, renewed factional conflicts witnessed the outbreak of clashes, where the Salafist-jihadist trend emerged especially in Ein el-Hillweh refugee camp. On 15/2/2010, skirmishes erupted between ‘Usbat al-Ansar and Fatah Movement which escalated into violent clashes leading to several casualties.<sup>65</sup> The Palestinian security problems were prompted by the inter-Palestinian struggles and by the ongoing tension between “moderate” Arab states and the Arab “refusal front” states.

On 10/3/2010, Abu Mazin, the leader of Fatah, issued a decree by which he appointed a new leadership for Fatah in Lebanon at organizational and military levels. Thus, Sultan Abu al-‘Aynayn, member of the Fatah Central Committee, was appointed

‘Abbas’ advisor for Palestinian refugee affairs, i.e., equivalent to a ministerial rank. This measure was meant to limit Abu al-‘Aynayn’s impact on the Lebanese arena in response to pressures exercised by the Lebanese authorities. Brigadier-General Ahmad Saleh was appointed commander of the Palestinian Armed Struggle in Lebanon to replace Brigadier-General Munir al-Maqdah who was excluded from any position. Brigadier-General Muhammad ‘Ali ‘Ubayd was appointed deputy commander of the Armed Struggle, Brigadier-General Subhi Abu ‘Arab chief of Fatah’s military forces and commander of Palestinian national security in Lebanon and Brigadier-General Muhsen al-Hallak was appointed his deputy. In addition, Colonel Mahmud ‘Isa was appointed military commander for Saida and Ein el-Hillweh refugee camp, Brigadier-General Fadl Mustafa commander in the military region of Tyre, Colonel Abu Iyad Sha‘lan commander in the Beirut region, and Lieutenant-Colonel Fakhri Tirawiyyah as the military leader for north Lebanon.<sup>66</sup> This decision sparked outrage within Fatah and even among other factions which held an extended meeting in Ein el-Hillweh with al-Maqdah at his residence in the refugee camp on 12/3/2010 with the participation of some Fatah officials. The meeting stressed the rejection of the exclusion of al-Maqdah, demanded the reconsideration of the new appointments and reiterating that al-Maqdah was a guarantee for stability in Ein el-Hillweh camp. Eventually, the participants agreed to send a letter to Abu Mazin urging him to cancel the decree.<sup>67</sup>

Fatah replied to the objections by saying that the decision was based on the recommendations of a military committee headed by Major General Yunis al-‘Ass which has visited Lebanon in late 2009. However, some sources confirmed that the decision was based on the tension between President ‘Abbas and the Arab refusal front on one hand and the rapprochement between al-Maqdah, the Arab refusal front and Iran on the other hand. Al-Maqdah did not deny this argument in an interview with *Asharq Alawsat* newspaper yet he reiterated his full loyalty to Fatah which he had served for 40 years.<sup>68</sup>

The Fatah leadership tried to resolve the disputes and delegated ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, a member of the Central Committee, for that purpose. On 6/5/2010, he announced that the internal disagreement was settled. He also attested that the new leadership of the Palestinian arena in Lebanon includes nine persons; five members of the FRC, the Regional Secretary-General, the commander of the military forces in Lebanon, the commander of the Armed Struggle and a Lebanese delegate on behalf of the Advisory Council.<sup>69</sup>



In April, ‘Abdullah ‘Abdullah, a member of the FRC and the head of the Political Committee of the PLC, was appointed as representative of the PLO in Beirut (not an ambassador for Palestine as the Palestinian leadership had hoped), to succeed ‘Abbas Zaki.<sup>70</sup>

On another level, on 8/4/2010 tension escalated between the Lebanese security forces and operatives affiliated with the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command (PFLP-GC) in ‘Ayn al-Bayda, which is located in Kfar Zabad on the outskirts of the Syrian border in the Beqa’ Valley. Reports said that light and medium weapons were used in the clashes which resulted in the killing of one Palestinian and the wounding others. According to eyewitnesses, the site came under rocket attack from the neighboring Qusaya village. In the wake of these incidents, the Lebanese Army imposed security cordon around the site, thus preventing entry or exit from that area.<sup>71</sup>

There were varied explanations for this incident from within the PFLP-GC. In a televised interview, Anwar Raja, the PFLP-GC spokesman, accused Colonel Wisam al-Hasan, the head of the Intelligence Bureau of the Lebanese Internal Security Forces (ISF) of standing behind the Beqa’ clashes. He also accused the Intelligence Bureau of trying to challenge the agreed principle of dialogue on the Palestinian arms outside the refugee camps and therefore targeted the PFLP-GC site in Kfar Zabad.

Abu Ramiz Mustafa, the head of the PFLP-GC in Lebanon, refuted Raja’s assertions and said that one of the PFLP-GC operatives had some problems with his colleagues. He tried to solve these problems in a wrong way, as he came to Kfar Zabad along with some relatives and family members where the fighting took place.<sup>72</sup>

For its part, the ISF denied what Raja said stressing that the clashes followed an attempt by a group affiliated with the PFLP-GC to take control of one of its sites (al-Jbayli site) near Kfar Zabad. After his dismissal from his position, Colonel Duraid Sha‘ban led a group who supported his position. The clashes ended with the arrest of four group members and Sha‘ban’s surrender to Lebanese army intelligence.<sup>73</sup>

#### **b. The Lebanese-Palestinian Relations**

The question of the civil rights of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is still governed by traditional political tension between different sides which raise the

fear of naturalization every time the issue is put up for discussion to abort the attempts at giving the Palestinians minimal civil rights in Lebanon.

Consequently, the bills submitted by Lebanese deputies to grant the Palestinian refugees rights pertaining to labor, ownership and social security, triggered a political debate which acquired sectarian dimensions. Thus, the Lebanese right which includes the Christians of March 14 (Lebanese Social Democratic Party (*al-Kataeb*), the Lebanese Forces and the Christians in the Future Movement) in addition to the Christians of March 8 (Free Patriotic Movement (FPM)) declared their total rejection of giving the Palestinians any civil rights in Lebanon as opposed to the supportive position of the Muslims of March 14 (Future Movement and Lebanon First parliamentary bloc) together with the Muslims of March 8 (Hizbullah, the Amal Movement and their supporters). The issue of naturalization was always present in the arguments on Palestinian civil rights between the two political sides.

On 15/6/2010, a number of deputies from the Lebanese Democratic Gathering Bloc led by Walid Jumblatt, submitted bills on giving the Palestinian refugees civil rights including the right to labor, ownership and social security.<sup>74</sup> MP Wa'il Abu Fa'ur from the Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) stressed that the PSP had submitted those bills in the context of its historical concern for the Palestinian issue and that the PSP rejects the naturalization of Palestinians and has no "internal political agenda" to that effect.<sup>75</sup> However, these motions were met with a storm of objections in which Lebanon's Christian parties opposed them for fear that they would facilitate the naturalization of the Palestinians, as the leader of the Lebanese Forces, Samir Geagea, said.<sup>76</sup> In contrast, the Muslim side backed the submitted bills while stressing that its support is not directed at encouraging the naturalization of the Palestinians but rather at giving them their normal human rights, not only because Lebanon should honor its commitment to its Arab environment but also consistent with the international covenants that it has signed in this respect.

It was not expected in the light of such controversy that these bills be wholly approved. However, a compromise was adopted whereby the Lebanese Parliament adopted on 17/8/2010 the right of Palestinians to work in all professions open to foreigners. In this sense, the Lebanese Parliament passed a proposal to amend Article 59 of the Labor Law and Article 9 of the Social Security Law. The amended text of Article 59 states, "Palestinian refugees, who are registered based





on accords, at the Ministry of Interior Affairs and Municipalities (Directorate of Political and Refugees Affairs) are exempted from the condition of reciprocity and the work permit fees issued by the Ministry of Labor.” While the amended text of paragraph 3 of Article 9 states:

Exempt the Palestinian refugee workers/laborers from the condition of reciprocity stated in the Labor Law and Social Security Law, so as to benefit from the contributions of end of service indemnity conditions which the Lebanese worker/laborer benefits from. Hereby, the Administration of the Social Security Fund should ascertain a separate independent account for the contributions belonging to the Palestinian refugees’ workers/laborers that does not bear the Treasury or the National Social Security Fund any financial obligation. Beneficiaries covered by the provisions of this law, do not benefit from the contributions of Sickness, Maternity and Family Allowances Funds.<sup>77</sup>

For its part, the PLO welcomed the decision, its representative in Lebanon ‘Abdullah ‘Abdullah describing the decision as a step forward. He further stressed the need for proper mechanisms to implement what has been agreed on especially how to manage the refugees’ security fund.<sup>78</sup> Hamas, on the other hand, perceived the step as incomplete and insufficient, as stressed by its political official, ‘Ali Barakah.<sup>79</sup> Hamas issued a statement on 18/8/2010 demanding that Lebanese officials to act immediately to approve all the civil rights of the Palestinians to ensure their wellbeing alongside their Lebanese brethren. They considered steps that improve rights to be a key factor for facing naturalization and displacement plans and to enforce the steadfastness of the refugees so they return to their homeland, Palestine.<sup>80</sup>

Fathi Abu al-‘Ardat, Fatah secretary-general in Lebanon, stressed that the continuous suffering of the Palestinians serves the naturalization project and stated that they who want the Palestinians to go back to their land must give them their rights to help them survive and prosper until the return is achieved.<sup>81</sup> The representative of the PIJ, Abu ‘Imad al-Rifa‘i, asserted in a meeting with the leader of the PSP, Walid Jumblatt, that confronting naturalization requires stopping dealing with the refugee camps from a security point of view and instead treating the refugee question as a political issue.<sup>82</sup>

The DFLP stressed that the law does not guarantee the minimum rights of the Palestinians in Lebanon but rather maintains the policy of deprivation pursued by

the Lebanese state. The DFLP stressed in a memorandum it sent in December 2010 to the political leaders, religious institutions, unions and the media that Lebanese laws have maintained discrimination against Palestinians through the work permit system and by barring them from liberal or syndicated professions. Consequently, a large proportion of the Palestinian people are deprived of the right to work.<sup>83</sup>

Regarding the security file, the Palestinian issue is still the most sensitive and ever-present file on the Lebanese political agenda. In early 2010, this issue was brought to the forefront in the wake of the bombings which occurred in late 2009 in the Hamas office in Haret Hreik, the heart of Hizbullah's "security square." In this respect, the Lebanese Social Democratic Party said that Hizbullah was violating national consensus by providing an office for Hamas within its stronghold. The Social Democratic Party also considered that the mysterious bombing would not have happened had the Lebanese authorities in the recent years completed the implementation of the Security Council resolutions 1559 and 1701 and the Lebanese decision regarding the Palestinian weapons inside and outside the camps which was issued in 2006.<sup>84</sup> In addition, on 19/1/2010, the Lebanese cabinet stressed that the issue of Palestinian weapons outside the refugee camps is non-negotiable, while emphasizing the need to implement all the decisions of the dialogue table and the commitment to the ministerial statement in this respect.<sup>85</sup>

The violence and clashes which broke out on the site of the PFLP-GC in April 2010 were an opportunity to raise the issue of the Palestinian weapons in Lebanon again, where the MP 'Uqab Saqr from the Lebanon First parliamentary bloc claimed that the PFLP-GC posed a threat to the Lebanese security and the Palestinian issue.<sup>86</sup> The weapons issue continued to be raised from time to time, dictated by the political situation and the levels of internal Lebanese tension.

### **c. Lebanon and Israel**

Throughout 2010, Israel proceeded with the escalation of its threatening rhetoric directed against Hizbullah and Lebanon. In April, for example, the Israeli president Shimon Peres accused Syria of providing Hizbullah with weapons, including Scud missiles. Peres threatened Hizbullah and the Lebanese government with the launching of another war on Lebanon in retaliation, while Lebanese PM Sa'ad Hariri stressed that talking about Scud missiles in Lebanon is comparable to the search for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq which were never found.<sup>87</sup>



On another hand, the Kuwaiti newspaper *Alrai* quoted Arab sources saying that Tel Aviv has started to mass covert forces on its borders at the points of confrontation in order to be prepared in the case of a sudden attack being ordered against Lebanon. The newspaper added that Israel was gathering intelligence information necessary for the success of its first attack against Hizbullah through the destruction of weapons depots and missile arsenal.<sup>88</sup>

Hizbullah Secretary-General Hasan Nasrullah responded to these threats by stressing that the party's resistance fighters are ready on the frontlines to defeat the Israeli enemy any time it launches an attack against Lebanon.<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the party official in south Lebanon Sheikh Nabil Qawuk declared that Hizbullah has requested thousands of its fighters to remain in full preparedness to face the Israeli maneuver which was declared in May 2010. He asserted that its timing was no coincidence but rather reflects Israel's aggressive intentions.<sup>90</sup>

Taking the threats a step further, Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon spoke of the Israeli army power of deterrence on the Lebanese border. "Our policy of deterrence is not to allow Hezbollah to act against Israel. If Nasrallah dares, he knows what the significance of this is," he said. "There will be no separation between Lebanon and Hezbollah. Lebanon will be held responsible."<sup>91</sup>

All this verbal escalation made some observers believe that a war between Hizbullah and Israel was imminent, but these expectations were proved wrong. Developments confirmed that the Israeli escalation was an attempt to tighten the noose on Hizbullah and Syria and embarrass their position vis-à-vis the US and the EU by stressing their willingness to target Israel or bring damage upon it. The escalation on Hizbullah's side was not meant in the context of launching war but rather avoiding it. Although Hizbullah's ability to hurt Tel Aviv is not questioned, the new phase following its participation in the Lebanese government required the party to drift away from talking about resisting the existence of Israel to the need for a defense strategy for Lebanon. This was the price which Hizbullah had to pay when attempting to secure internal acceptance for its arms.

## **5. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia**

The KSA (which is one of the pillars of the "moderate" Arab states and the drafter of the Arab Peace Initiative) joined the Egyptian efforts in pushing towards the PLO's return to negotiations with Israel. It has indeed played an effective role

in urging the Arab League to provide Arab cover for the Palestinian leadership for these negotiations despite the lack of any genuine guarantees other than the American promises.

As a matter of fact, Riyadh has stressed through the Saudi Prince Turki al-Faisal that indirect negotiations should generate progress and the Arab world has given President Obama until September 2010 to achieve this progress,<sup>92</sup> while the alternative to peace in the Middle East, in case negotiations failed, is to go to Security Council.<sup>93</sup> However, the KSA, along with other Arab sides including Egypt and Yemen, encouraged the Palestinian leadership to pursue direct negotiations before the deadline set by the Arab Follow-up Committee for the completion of the indirect negotiations.

Saudi support for inter-Palestinian reconciliation was based around a return to the Egyptian initiative and its goals rather any effort to replace it. In this sense, there were expectations in early 2010 of near reconciliation in the wake of Khalid Mish'al's meeting with the Saudi foreign minister. He reiterated that Hamas was still looking for a unique Saudi role, alongside Egypt and the other Arab countries, to help in achieving the Palestinian reconciliation, uniting the Palestinians and unifying the Arab stance to face Israel's intransigent leadership.<sup>94</sup>

There were also talks about a Saudi initiative aiming at achieving the reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. Mish'al, heading a Hamas delegation to KSA, asked the Saudi Foreign Minister Sa'ud al-Faisal to add Saudi efforts to the Egyptian ones in order to achieve Palestinian reconciliation. Indeed, al-Faisal initiated contacts with Cairo, Damascus and Doha to discuss the possible ways forward.<sup>95</sup> However, these attempts were thwarted because of Egypt's reluctance to open the Egyptian reconciliation paper for more discussions, and Riyadh's confirmation that Egypt was the primary official sponsor of the Palestinian reconciliation.

It is unlikely that KSA will occupy itself with the Palestinian reconciliation during the remaining months of 2011, as the KSA is concerned with the unrest in the region and focusing its efforts on containing any internal Saudi tensions or in the Gulf region. Indeed, its efforts amounted to military intervention by sending the Peninsula Shield Forces to support in curbing the opposition in Bahrain. In the meantime, it is likely that other Gulf countries, such as Qatar, which are relatively distant from the events unfolding in the Arab world and are open to the various



Palestinian parties, to exercise a more important role in Palestinian reconciliation. Doha, which maintains good relations with Hamas and the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas, can build on these relations and end the traditional Egyptian monopoly of the Palestinian file.

## **6. The Gulf Countries**

For their part, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have pursued a position similar to the Saudi stance on the peace process and the Arab Peace Initiative. However, Kuwait showed a slightly different approach when its National Assembly held an emergency session on 1/6/2010 to discuss Israel's attack on Freedom Flotilla. It submitted two recommendations: Kuwait's withdrawal from the Arab Peace Initiative and tasking the Ministry of Justice with filing a criminal case against Israel, since the attacked Flotilla included 18 Kuwaitis; five women and the Islamist MP Walid al-Tabtaba'i. However, the constitutional expert Muhammad al-Dallal explained that the recommendation made by the National Assembly and approved by the government does suggest Kuwait's withdrawal from the initiative.<sup>96</sup>

The most prominent Palestinian event in the Persian Gulf in 2010 was the assassination of Hamas leader Mahmud al-Mabhuh in Dubai, which caused shock at official and popular levels as it constituted a breach of Arab national security. Nonetheless, the official Arab reaction in general and that of the Gulf countries did not reflect the magnitude of the crime. Most statements and comments were issued from Dubai Police rather than government sources. In a televised interview, the Commander in Chief of Dubai Police, Lieutenant General Dahi Khalfan Tamim said, "If the Mossad were proven to be behind the crime, which is most likely now, Interpol should issue a red notice for the head of the Mossad because he would be a killer."<sup>97</sup> Khalfan stressed that the Mossad was planning to assassinate him because he has uncovered its role in al-Mabhuh assassination. He revealed that the syringe used to kill al-Mabhuh was strong enough to kill an elephant and he made fun of those who exaggerate the power of the Mossad, questioning whether sending or recruiting 42 persons to kill one unarmed person was a courageous act.<sup>98</sup> The authorities in the UAE refused to give an entry permit to Deputy Minister Gila Gamliel who was supposed to represent Israel in the World Economic Forum's (WEF) third Summit on the Global Agenda held in Dubai because of al-Mabhuh assassination.<sup>99</sup>

In fact, Dubai Police demonstrated great efficiency in investigating the assassination and detecting the perpetrators; however it was clear how much difficult it was to proceed to the end in the light of the Israeli world influence.

Regarding the other Palestinian files, such as the attack on the Freedom Flotilla, the position of the GCC ranged between verbal condemnation of the attack and material support of the PA. The GCC Secretary-General Abdul Rahman bin Hamad al-Ateyya, condemned the serious and continuous Israeli crimes aimed at discrediting the Islamic holy sites in the occupied Palestinian territories.<sup>100</sup> Al-Ateyya commented in a press release on the Israeli decision to deport those Palestinians in the WB who do not have Israeli IDs. He said that it proves the deliberate aggressive practices of the Israeli government, which is programmed to empty the occupied territories of their original population.<sup>101</sup>

The GCC condemned the attack on the Freedom Flotilla and described it as an act of piracy and state terrorism amounting to a war crime.<sup>102</sup>

### ***Third: Developments of Normalization***

The Arab regimes proceeded with the normalization of relations with Israel overtly and covertly despite the public attempts to boycott Israel.

In Jordan, for example, the Department of Statistics (DoS) estimated Jordanian exports to Israel in 2010 at around 64.246 million dinars (\$90.743 million) compared to 73.042 million dinars (\$103.167 million) in 2009, i.e., a decrease of 12%. In addition, the statistical data showed a decrease in the volume of Jordanian imports from Israel of 32% in 2010 where it amounted to 63.158 million dinars (\$89.206 million) compared to 92.879 million dinars (\$131.184 million) in 2009. Thus, the volume of trade exchange between the two countries decreased from 165.921 million dinars (\$234.351 million) in 2009 to 127.404 million dinars (\$179.949 million) in 2010, i.e., a decrease of 23%.<sup>103</sup>

On the other hand, Israeli official data mentioned that Jordanian exports to Israel amounted to \$94 million in 2010 compared to \$70 million in 2009 whereas its imports from Israel amounted to \$184.3 million in 2010 compared to \$231.3 million in 2009. This means that trade exchange between the two countries decreased from \$301.3 million in 2009 to \$278.3 million in 2010, i.e., by 8%.<sup>104</sup>



It is not easy to reach specific conclusions about the reasons for the discrepancy between the Jordanian and Israeli statistics. Yet it is clear that the Israeli figures reflect higher trade volume and tend to reduce the decrease in the trade exchange.

**Table 1/3: Trade Exchange Between Jordan and Israel According to Jordanian and Israeli Statistics 2009–2010 (\$ million)<sup>105</sup>**

Year	Jordan's export to Israel		Jordan's import from Israel		Trade exchange	
	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics
<b>2009</b>	103.167	70	131.184	231.3	234.351	301.3
<b>2010</b>	90.743	94	89.206	184.3	179.949	278.3

The Jordanian Agriculture Minister Sa'id al-Masri, stressed that the ministry cannot prevent the importation of agricultural products from Israel because the process of export and import is controlled by the private sector. He added that Jordan is committed to a peace agreement signed with Israel besides its commitment to the terms of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to which Jordan is a member.<sup>106</sup> In addition, Jordan Customs has issued a number of tariff exemptions and reductions on around 2,500 products of Israeli origin as of the beginning of 2010.<sup>107</sup>

The Liaison Officers of the Regional Israel Boycott Offices demanded facing the Israeli attempts to infiltrate the Arab markets through forgery, fraud and smuggling. In October 2010, and with the participation of 15 Arab countries, the Liaison Officers held their 85th conference in Damascus. They stressed the need to stick to the principles and provisions of the Arab boycott of Israel and to pursue effective measures to compel Israel to abide by the resolutions of international legitimacy.

The conferees reiterated the importance of boycott at this critical stage of the Arab-Israeli conflict, because according to international law it is a form of legitimate resistance. It is considered a means of deterring Israeli aggression and curbing its criminality. They further called upon the international community to take bold steps that would immediately end the Israeli siege on the GS and the suffering of the Gazans.<sup>108</sup>

In Egypt, the continued policy of normalization with Israel exceeded trade exchange and diplomatic and economic relations. Back doors were opened for the Israelis to work in Egypt in a way that threatens its national security. A press report mentioned that the head of The Egyptian General Tourist Guides Syndicate (EGTGS), Muhammad Gharib, revealed the presence of 203 tour guides, most of whom are Israelis, who entered Egypt via Egyptian tourist companies and worked during the last years without any supervision. According to the report, Gharib also announced that the Egyptian security forces deported 29 of them to Tel Aviv without any prosecution after they were caught red-handed in front of the pyramids informing tourists that the Jews built the pyramids while Egyptian history is faked.<sup>109</sup>

In late December 2010, a group containing hundreds of Israelis flowed into Egypt to celebrate the Abu Hasira (*Yaakov Abuhatzzeira*) festival or remembrance ceremony in al-Buhayrah Governorate. Consequently, the security forces announced a state of alert amidst fears of public rage after an official declaration of the arrest of a network spying on behalf of Israel. In al-Buhayrah Governorate, the security forces took control of Damatiuh village in Damanhur to allow the Jews coming from Israel and other countries to participate in the ceremonies. The village looked like a barrack after the spread of a large number of Central Security cars inside and outside the village, while the snipers topped the roofs of the buildings and a curfew was imposed from 26/12/2010 till 7/1/2011.

Some citizens from Damanhur had earlier filed lawsuits demanding the abolishment of the festival and the accompanying celebrations. In 2004, the Supreme Administrative Court cancelled the decision issued by Culture Minister Faruq Husni which declared the mausoleum of Abu Hasira an archeological site. The villagers said that the Court's decision means also the elimination of all manifestations of celebration related to Abu Hasira in the village.

Opponents to the celebration of Abu Hasira festival decided to organize sit-ins. Isma'il al-Khawli, the head of the General Committee of al-Wafd Party in al-Buhayrah, said that the festival was only a pretext for Israelis to come to Damanhur. He called on the Israeli authorities to take Abu Hasira's remains if they really had the sincere faith in celebrating this anonymous person as they claimed.<sup>110</sup>

Aside from this drama, normalization with Israel continued apace, not only by importing Israeli goods but also by exporting goods to Israel. In this context,





*al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper revealed that The International Union for Integrated Food Industries, Lazah, a Cairo-based food manufacture company which provided the Israeli army with food during its offensive on GS, has begun to sell its products within Israel. Similarly, *Elaosboa* newspaper revealed in a report published in early 2009 that a local company regularly provided the Israeli army with food via the al-‘Awjah border crossing during the Israeli war on GS, while the Rafah crossing was closed to the entry of relief materials and medical aid for the wounded Palestinians.<sup>111</sup>

On 13/12/2010, Israeli reports revealed that several Israel Corporation subsidiaries signed long term natural gas supply contracts with Egyptian supplier East Mediterranean Gas Company (EMG). The gas supply is for three power plants that the group intends to operate on natural gas at three companies: Israel Chemicals Ltd.’s wholly-owned subsidiary Dead Sea Works Ltd., Oil Refineries Ltd. and OPC Rotem Ltd.

EMG shareholder Ampal-American Israel Corporation said that EMG has signed a total of five gas sale agreements. It also listed IC Power Ltd. (Israel Corp’s energy arm) among the customers. Ampal said the agreements are for a total quantity of 1.4 billion cubic meters (BCM) annually for 20 years, with an option to buyers to increase the total quantity up to 2.9 BCM annually. The total value of the five contracts according to Ampal is \$5–10 billion. Gas delivery is scheduled to commence between the first and second quarters of 2011.<sup>112</sup>

On a different level, on 26/12/2010, Israeli reports revealed that a deal would be signed between EMG and Hadera Paper Ltd., one of the largest paper companies in Israel. The deal would give Hadera 300 million cubic meters (MCM) of natural gas annually over 20 years in return for \$1 billion. *Energia News*, an Israeli newspaper specialized in energy matters, mentioned that the gas pumped by EMG would benefit Hadera’s planned power plant that has an investment of \$300 million. The newspaper considered that the deals with EMG would increase the percentage of contracts between the Egyptian company and Israel by 8% and would also increase the annual amount of Egyptian natural gas exported to Israel to around five billion MCM.<sup>113</sup>

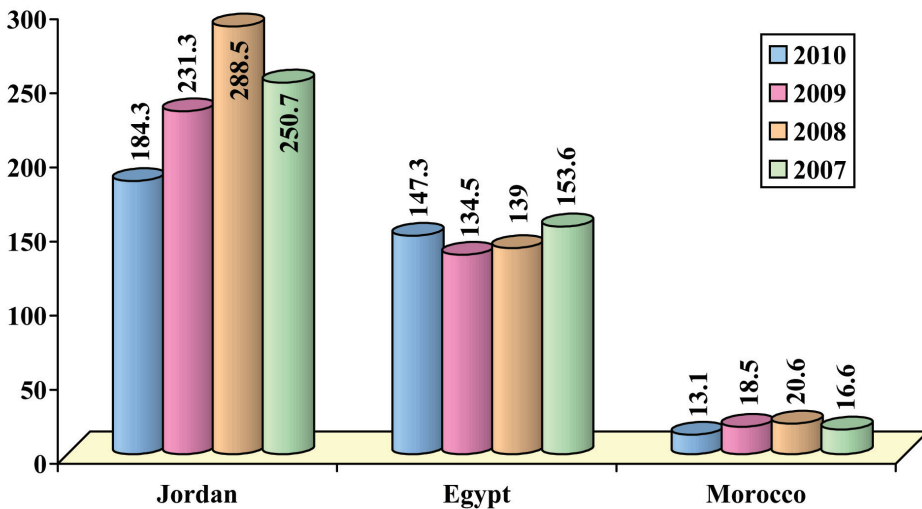
Israel’s most significant contract with the Egyptian company is a 2008 agreement to supply 2.1 BCM of gas a year to the Israel Electric Corporation. Thus, 40% of the utility’s electricity is produced from gas, and of the gas 45% comes from EMG.<sup>114</sup>

Elsewhere the UAE hosted an Israeli minister for the first time in its history when the Infrastructure Minister Uzi Landau participated in the conference of IRENA in Abu Dhabi. Landau told the Associated Press (AP) that although he did not meet any UAE official, the Israeli delegation was well received.<sup>115</sup> The Arab League declared that the participation of an Israeli figure in any international activity hosted by an Arab country is imposed by the rules of international organizations. The League added that the Arab world cannot boycott participation in international conferences if Israel is a member in various international organizations.<sup>116</sup>

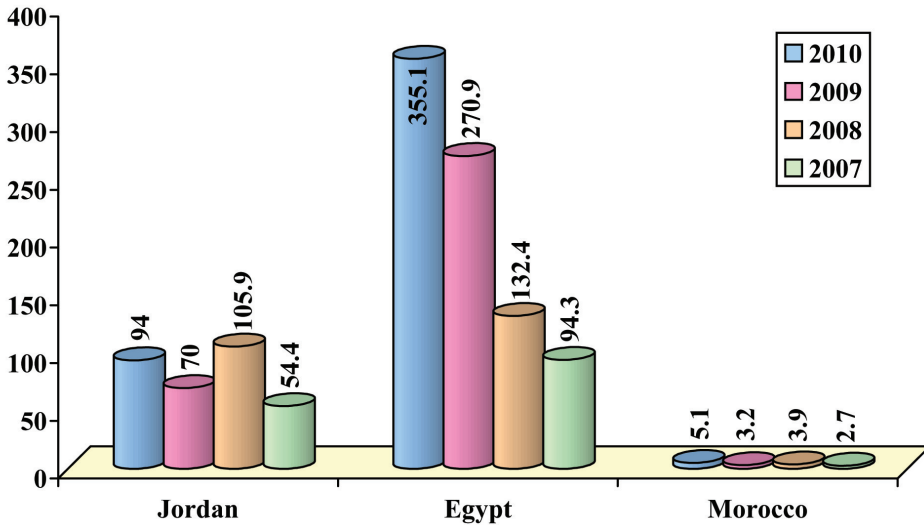
**Table 2/3: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries  
2007–2010 (\$ million)<sup>117</sup>**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2010	2009	2008	2007	2010	2009	2008	2007
Jordan	184.3	231.3	288.5	250.7	94	70	105.9	54.4
Egypt	147.3	134.5	139	153.6	355.1	270.9	132.4	94.3
Morocco	13.1	18.5	20.6	16.6	5.1	3.2	3.9	2.7

**Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2007–2010 (\$ million)**



**Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2007–2010 (\$ million)**



Generally speaking, it is expected that in the near future, there will be a significant decline in the overt and covert practices of normalization with Israel at all popular and official levels. It is perhaps possible to say that there are signs that the normalization era has come to an end. Since the early days of the Egyptian uprising, pumping natural gas into Israel stopped after the bombing of the pipeline which feeds Israel with gas in the Sinai Peninsula. With the start of the interim phase in Egypt after the revolution succeeded to overthrow Mubarak and his regime, there was much talk about the gas deal with Tel Aviv and the need to end it. Although the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces in Egypt announced its commitment to re-pump gas into Israel, the course of events pushes towards the reconsideration of the entire deal rather than just its value.

As for the exchange of diplomatic and official visits between Egypt and Israel, it is likely that 2011 will not witness any such visits as diplomatic relations between the two countries would be diminished. All forms of normalization between the two countries will likely stop and it is most probable that we witness a stage of anti-normalization at all levels where the hostile rhetoric towards Israel and its allies would be escalated, especially with the growing role of the Islamists in Egypt.

The same would apply to Jordan which would be forced to stop all overt forms of normalization with Tel Aviv and reduce official visits between the two countries to the lowest possible level consistent with the aspirations and demands of the Jordanian street. At the same time, popular rhetoric opposed to normalization will continue.

#### ***Fourth: The Arab Popular Stance***

The popular position opposed to the occupation policies and supportive of the Palestinian issue flourished throughout 2010. The Arab capitals have witnessed demonstrations against the Israeli decision to add the Ibrahimi Mosque (The Sanctuary of Abraham) and Rachel's Tomb to the list of Jewish archeological sites. Thousands of students from the Muslim Brotherhood, in eight Egyptian universities, demonstrated to denounce the decision.<sup>118</sup>

The International Union of Muslim Scholars (IUMS) expressed deep and serious concern over the decision. The IUMS issued a statement that this step is new evidence of the Israeli intention to assume full control of historic Palestine. The statement warned against the repercussions of such step and called on the Arab masses in general and the Palestinian people in particular to face these measures by all means. It also called for a third *Intifadah* to be launched from the Ibrahimi Mosque and demanded the governments in all Arab and Muslim countries, together with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) (formerly Organization of the Islamic Conference) and the Arab League, take a strong position to deter the Israeli government and urge it to reverse its decision. The statement was signed in Doha by IUMS's President Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Secretary-General Muhammad Salim al-'Awwa.<sup>119</sup>

The Egyptian People's Assembly called on the government to take all necessary steps to urge UNESCO to bear its responsibilities in preserving Islamic cultural heritage and reject Israeli attempts to Judaize Jerusalem.<sup>120</sup>

Ahmad al-Tayyib, the grand sheikh of Alazhar, reiterated that he would not visit Jerusalem or *al-Aqsa* Mosque until after their complete liberation from the Israeli



occupation. He stressed also that he would not visit them now because the visit would mean giving legitimacy to the occupation.<sup>121</sup>

The Shari‘a Scholars in GCC issued a statement which stressed that from an Islamic perspective the Arab Peace Initiative is void and the lasting peace with Israel while they are still occupying Muslim lands is forbidden. The statement stressed that the Arab and Muslim nations have to unify their efforts, exercise pressure on Israel, pray for the Palestinians and Jerusalemites in particular and above all stay prepared for Jihad. It also called on the GCC in particular to assume their usual stances in such momentous events.<sup>122</sup>

In the wake of the reports which accused the Egyptian authorities of launching internationally forbidden gas into the tunnels, MPs and figures in the opposition, including the Egyptian Movement for Change (EMC), also known as *Kefaya* (Enough), the Muslim Brotherhood, al-Karamah and Labor parties condemned such conduct. On behalf of the Muslim Brotherhood MPs, Hamdi Hasan MP said in an urgent statement in the Parliament that they regret the deplorable conditions between the Egyptians and their Palestinian brethren, which are caused by the continued siege policy, deliberate bloodshed and the use of internationally banned toxic gases. Hasan added that Egypt’s relations with its Arab neighbors have been turned into unprecedented hostile relations, contrasted to increased intimacy with Israel. This situation can be viewed uncontroversially as a violation of all common conventions which cannot be changed or altered by virtue of history, geography, religion and culture.<sup>123</sup>

Following the attack on the Freedom Flotilla, the Arab peoples as one reacted to the attack and dozens of demonstrations took place in the streets of Arab capitals and towns condemning the Israeli crime.

In Egypt, more than 60 figures representing the different national forces demanded that Egypt’s public prosecutor issues an arrest warrant against a number of Israeli figures and consider them war criminals. These include Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak, the Israeli army chief of staff and the commander of the Israeli navy. In addition, the Egyptian Bar Association demanded the cancellation of the peace treaties signed with Israel.<sup>124</sup>

## *Conclusion*

There is no doubt that 2011 is widely and accurately considered the year of the Arab peoples, for the Arab masses have proved that they are capable of change across different countries. These peoples have rebelled to demand reform and change without forgetting Palestine. This inclination was clear for example in the calls of the Egyptian people celebrating the collapse of the old regime. They chanted slogans that support the right of the Palestinian people to return to its homeland.

Based on the above, the new phase will probably witness an activation of the Arab popular position towards the Palestinian issue. In addition, new forms of support for the issue will emerge not allowed by the previous regimes. At the same time, other Arab regimes will, under pressure, allow popular forces to exercise a greater role in defending the Palestinian issue and the media role in highlighting these issues will continue to grow in significance.



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## This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11 is the sixth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. The Report discusses the developments of the Palestinian issue of 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 read for all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 14 academics and experts contributed to this Report. It is divided into eight chapters, that cover 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.

As a serious addition to Palestinian studies, those interested in this field, including specialists, experts, libraries of universities and research centers, should have their copies of this Report.

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