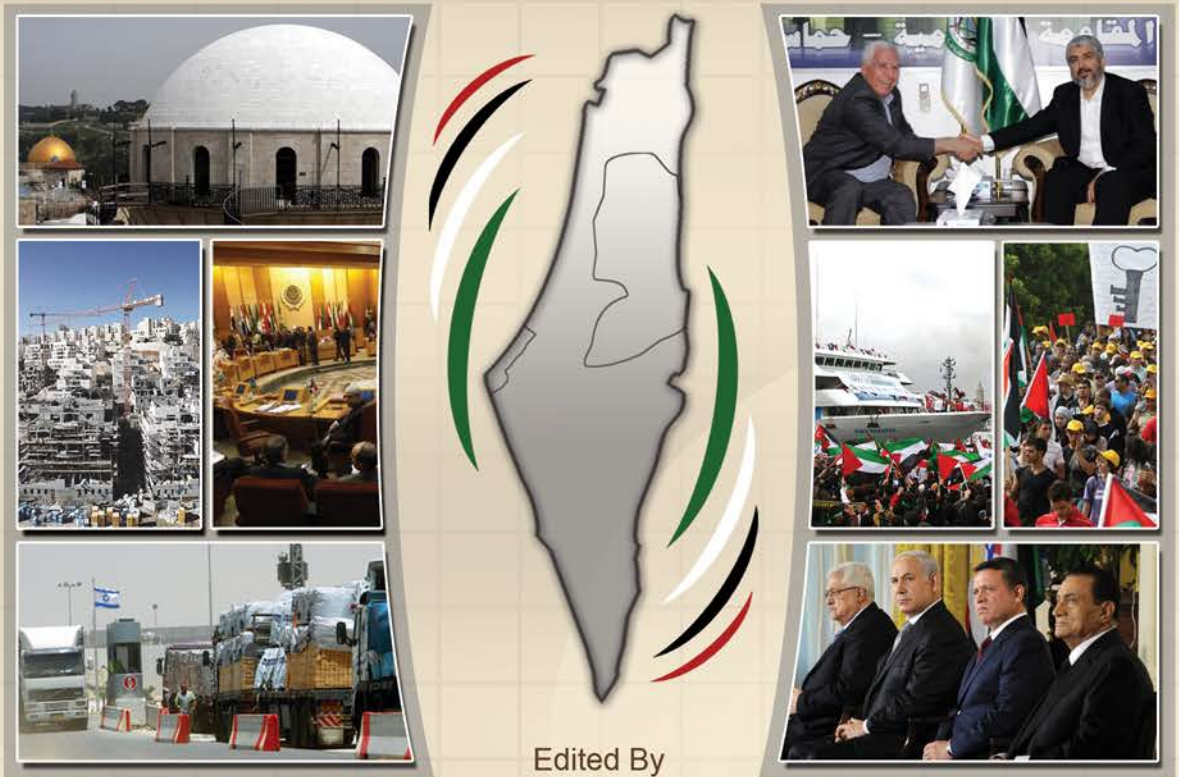


The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11



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Chapter Four

The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

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The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

During 2010, differences were evident between the public and official Muslim stances concerning Palestinian developments; mainly the Palestinian Israeli negotiations and the attempts to lift the siege of GS. The strongest official Muslim stances were demands to freeze settlement building activity and condemnations of Israel's obstruction of the peace process and its violations against the Palestinian people, their lands and holy sites. 2010 saw citizens of Muslim and non-Muslim countries risking and even losing their lives attempting to break the siege of GS; the Freedom Flotilla was assaulted by Israel on 31/5/2010. Due to such Israeli arrogance, stubbornness and disrespect for others, the year 2010 witnessed a widening of the diplomatic gap between Israel and Turkey that started with the humiliation of the Turkish ambassador in Israel and deepened with the killing of nine Turkish citizens on board the Mavi Marmara ship in the flotilla.

In this chapter, we will tackle in detail the role played by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in addition to examining the stances of the two major Muslim countries involved in the Palestinian issue during 2010: Turkey and Iran. We will also review public and official positions in Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan.

First: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation

The OIC was established shortly after the fire at the *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 1969 with the aim of defending Islamic holy sites, most urgently the *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The OIC been holding regular and emergency meetings for more than 40 years, condemning Israel's aggression towards Islamic holy sites in Palestine; condemnations that have failed to achieve even the minimum of Muslim nations' wishes. As we anticipated in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2009/10*, the OIC standing concerning the Palestinian issue did not witness any essential changes during 2010. Their influence never went beyond the condemnation and denunciation of violations against holy sites in Palestinian lands.



The OIC, represented by Secretary-General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu, continued to call for Palestinian reconciliation, meeting Khalid Mish'al, head of the Hamas political bureau, at the OIC headquarters in Jeddah in a closed meeting that lasted for three hours and covered the reconciliation process and all topics related to the Palestinian issue. In the press conference that followed the meeting, Ihsanoğlu clarified that the meeting focused on the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation and the importance of the Mecca Agreement as a solid ground for Palestinian reconciliation. He stressed the importance of the continuation of talks between the two movements due to their weight in the Palestinian arena. Ihsanoğlu denied allegations that the OIC is not sufficiently engaged with Palestinian reconciliation. He recalled the OIC's role in 2006 affirming that it had been the first to attempt building bridges of trust and communication between Damascus, Ramallah, and GS through various visits by its secretary-general. The OIC has also continued communications with all Palestinian sides, Ihsanoğlu clarified, and has remained close to the Mecca agreements which were signed between Fatah and Hamas movements under Saudi sponsorship.¹

In the final communiqué of the OIC Expanded Extraordinary Executive Committee Meeting at the Level of Foreign Ministers held on 6/6/2010, concerning the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla, the OIC affirmed their support for Palestinian reconciliation and Egyptian efforts to this aim and stressing “the need to end the Palestinian discord as soon as possible.”²

Meanwhile, the siege on GS was a key issue on the international and Islamic political scene, where Ihsanoğlu confirmed that the OIC condemns the siege on GS and continues to support the Strip and sustain the delivery of aid. According to him, several humanitarian organizations in the EU use the OIC's al-'Arish bureau in Egypt to help people in GS.³ In his address to the Ministerial-Level Extended Executive Committee Meeting, Ihsanoğlu described the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla as a “policy of piracy, criminality and state organized terrorism.” He said that:

The piracy in international waters, which has been carried out in defiance of international law, perpetrated by the Israeli forces, requires an independent, impartial, credible and transparent investigation, corresponding to international standards with the aim of identifying those responsible for their illegal acts against humanity.⁴

The secretary-general also referred in his speech to the previous resolutions, adopted by the Executive Committee, which called upon “all States to break the blockade imposed on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip,” at its expanded extraordinary meeting on 18/11/2006, or which called for drumming up “support to secure the necessary humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip,” at its expanded extraordinary meeting on 3/2/2008. He considered this to be a suitable moment for implementing these resolutions in addition to whatever other new steps and measures required under the current circumstances to put an end to this unprecedented humanitarian tragedy. He added, “there is still a lot that can be done to put an end to this Israeli contempt of International Law and disdain of our Ummah [Nation].”⁵ However, the OIC seemed unable to implement such measures.

In the same context, the secretary-general of the OIC called for setting up a group of legal experts to bring Israel to justice, saying that “the legal course needs to be duly explored in our endeavor to achieve justice and ensure the lifting of the oppression visited upon our brothers in the blockaded Gaza Strip.”⁶ The OIC Ambassadorial Group in Geneva exerted joint efforts at the UN Human Rights Council (HRC) for the adoption of a resolution condemning the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla and establishing an international investigation committee about it.⁷

Although not meeting the level of public aspirations, the OIC efforts were not limited to political statements only as the OIC continued to provide economic support to the GS. In a visit to GS, the OIC launched a package of projects including building new housing units, and restoring a thousand homes partly demolished during the 2008–2009 Israeli war. Fouad al-Mezna‘y, head of the 27-member OIC delegation and director of the Department of Humanitarian Affairs in the OIC, declared that the cost of the OIC-funded projects allocated for building and restoring housing units for those affected by the Israeli war reached around \$10 million. The funding covered—among other tasks—restoring 1,700 housing units, 700 of which have already been completed, and work commenced on the other thousand housing units, in addition to building 100 units at a cost of \$3.7 million.⁸

Despite affirmations by the Council of Foreign Ministers of the OIC on the centrality of Jerusalem to the Muslim world, the OIC role during 2010 was limited to condemnation and denunciation. It did not extend itself beyond the Arab Peace Initiative of the two-state solution entailing the establishment of an independent

Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, and finding a “just solution” to the plight of the Palestinian refugees in accordance with the UNGA Resolution 194. However, all of these demands remained below the minimum ambitions of the Palestinian people. Statements made by one of the OIC officials to *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper reveal that adopting positions outside “the Arab stances box” triggers anger among some Arab countries, which the OIC cannot afford to risk due to its reliance on these countries’ for funding.⁹ This dilemma explains the weak stances and restrained role played by the OIC in facing up to Israeli aggression against Jerusalem and the holy sites. The result was that the OIC limited itself to expressing denunciations and condemnations of Israeli policies.

During 2010, the OIC role was primarily limited to taking stands concerning the Palestinian issue at all levels. It did not affect any serious changes in the course of the Palestinian issue that would enable the OIC to realize the ambitions of the Muslim nations.

Second: Turkey

If 2009 witnessed one of the worst periods in Turkish-Israeli relations, as a result of the Davos incident at the end of January, 2010 was witness to an unprecedented level of tension when the Israelis attacked the Freedom Flotilla on 31/5/2010 in the international waters of the Mediterranean Sea. The attack was the climax of tensions between Ankara and Tel Aviv that had started at the beginning of the same year.

The Low Seat Crisis

What has been referred to as the low seat crisis marked the first of the diplomatic tensions between Turkey and Israel. On 11/1/2010 Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon summoned the Turkish Ambassador to Israel Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol to denounce the anti-Israel stances of Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and criticize a Turkish television drama that depicted Israeli security forces kidnapping children and shooting old men.

The Israeli official intentionally seated the Turkish ambassador on a sofa lower than Ayalon’s. To make things worse, Ayalon refused to shake the ambassador’s

hand when asked to do so by journalists attending the official reprimand, in addition to letting the Turkish ambassador wait a few minutes outside Ayalon's office before allowing him to enter.

Despite the fact that the Turkish ambassador was not informed of the presence of media, Ayalon invited photographers to enter the meeting room to take shots of the meeting, addressing them in Hebrew, "Pay attention that he is sitting in a lower chair... that there is only an Israeli flag on the table and that we are not smiling."¹⁰ The incident triggered angry reactions from the Turkish side, as well as varying Israeli reactions.

Erdoğan, who was on his way to Moscow, condemned Israel's behavior, saying "History is the witness that we have demonstrated the necessary tolerance to Jewish people. But any sort of an approach like that will always be retaliated by Turkey."¹¹ Moreover, the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued two consecutive statements condemning Israeli behavior and demanding an apology.¹²

Explanations for Israel's behavior varied. Erdoğan believed it was due to internal discord within the Israeli government describing it as "their internal problem." Others said that it was an attempt by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to hinder Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak's visit to Turkey which was scheduled for 17/1/2010, thus preventing any rapprochement with Turkey led by Barak. Lieberman was keen to avenge Turkey's negative stances on Israel, specifically Erdoğan's vehement speeches against Israeli policies. Yet, despite possibilities of delay or cancellation, Barak's visit was fulfilled although without meeting Erdoğan or Abdullah Gül, and without yielding any specific results.

On the Israeli side, Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer criticized Danny Ayalon's action saying that:

The Turkish ambassador's dignity should have been maintained. We have no interest in adding Turkey to the hostile countries. However, there does need to be criticism, and it is fitting to criticize the statements made by the Turkish prime minister. There is no doubt that there is a problem with him, but this must be done with respect.

Ben-Eliezer added "We have enough troubles with the Arabs. Today, we don't need to pit the entire Muslim world against us. We must remember that this is a country of 72 million people under Muslim leadership."¹³



Initially, Israel refused to apologize, but the threat to recall Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv eventually led Israel to issue a clear apology to Turkey. Turkish President Abdullah Gül described the insult to the Turkish ambassador as “unacceptable” and called on the Israeli leadership to rectify the situation. “It may have been the act of a man who does not know what he was doing,” he said, “However, in the final analysis the liability lies with the Israeli government...Israel is responsible here,” he added.¹⁴

Freedom Flotilla

The frayed Turkish-Israeli relations reached an unprecedented peak following the Israeli assault on the Freedom Flotilla at dawn on the 31/5/2010, which left nine Turkish civilians on board dead.

The incident was referred to in the Arab media as the Freedom Flotilla incident while Turkish sources called it the Mavi Marmara case, or blue Marmara, which was the largest ship on the flotilla.

The Freedom Flotilla, which set sail from Istanbul heading to GS to break the Israel-imposed blockade, was organized by several civil society organizations from different countries. Foremost among these organizations was The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı—IHH*), headed by Fehmi Bülent Yıldırım, active in most Muslim countries. Over 600 people were on board the flotilla and the majority were on the Mavi Marmara ship.

Israeli naval commandos raided the flotilla at 4:00 am in international waters, killing nine people—all Turkish—and leaving dozens injured. The ship was then towed to Ashdod Port, and its passengers—from different nationalities—were arrested.¹⁵ Investigations were made with the arrested passengers before they were deported to their home countries while the ships were sent back to Turkey weeks later.¹⁶

The assault on the Freedom Flotilla marked the first bloody confrontation between Turkey and Israel throughout their history, triggering incensed reactions in Turkey, along with similar international reactions. Turkey, its PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu as well as the Turkish parliament responded to the shock, demanding:

1. The release of ships and to allow them to deliver the humanitarian assistance to its destination.
2. The retrieval of the deceased and wounded.
3. An Israeli apology to the international community and to the families of those who have been killed and wounded in the attack.
4. Compensation for the families of the deceased, wounded, NGOs and shipping companies concerned.
5. An urgent inquiry and an appropriate international legal action against the authorities responsible for and perpetrators of the aggression
6. The ending of the blockade on GS.¹⁷

As for the American stance, Davutoğlu said that Turkey, an important US ally on issues ranging from Middle East peace to the war in Afghanistan, was disappointed that the US had not offered stronger backing. “Some of our allies are not ready to condemn the Israeli actions,” Davutoğlu said, comparing the incident to the September 11, 2001, attacks on the US.¹⁸

Turkish PM Erdoğan made an impassioned speech at the Grand National Assembly of Turkey in the afternoon of Tuesday 1/6/2010. He condemned Israeli piracy saying that “Turkey’s hostility is as strong as its friendship is valuable,” and that this attack “must be punished by all means,” and that “no one should test Turkey’s patience.”¹⁹

Turkey summoned up all its capacities facing such dangerous repercussions where, for the first time since World War I, Turkish civilians were killed as a result of a foreign military attack. Many voices demanded a declaration of war on Israel, but Deputy PM Bülent Arınç made it clear that this was not under consideration.²⁰ The Turkish reaction focused on diplomatic maneuvers, along with taking gradual steps against Israel, unless Turkish demands were met.

During the following weeks, Turkey was preoccupied with the Freedom Flotilla incident and the change in Turkish-Israeli relations that it brought. There was much analysis and speculation concerning the reasons and circumstances surrounding the assault, which may be summarized in the following points:

1. Israel started being suspicious of the repeated attempts by Arab and international civil society organizations to break the blockade of GS. Through this bloody attack, Israel wanted to deliver a harsh message to the international community that it will not allow any pressure to be exerted from then on.



2. The attack on the Freedom Flotilla seemed well planned. Available information reveals that the flotilla changed its direction from GS to al-‘Arish, and Ankara informed Israel and Washington of this change. Despite this, Israel carried out its raid, which reflects Israel’s desire to put across a retaliatory message to Turkey for its unfriendly stance toward Israel and its support of the Palestinians, particularly as expressed by Erdoğan.
3. American support of Israel added an international dimension to the incident, as American Vice President Joe Biden provided justifications for the raid saying that Israel had a right to engage in such action. American support of Israel had been made clear from the first moments when Washington vetoed any UN Security Council resolution that condemned Israel, leading Ankara to accept the non-binding presidential statement issued.²¹
4. In addition to the well known American stance giving support to Israel, there were analyses that the US also wanted to discipline Turkey for its role in Tehran’s nuclear declaration, undertaken in cooperation with Brazil on 17/5/2010,²² a declaration that makes America’s justification of its pressure on Iran less credible. Backing such theory is the prominent role which Turkey played alongside Brazil on the international scene, achieving what world powers including Russia and China had failed to achieve. Iran agreed to deposit 1,200 kg low enriched uranium (LEU) in Turkey. This LEU will continue to be the property of Iran, and both International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and Iran may station observers to monitor the safekeeping of the LEU in Turkey. Thus, the American message to Turkey had been a twofold response to the Turkish stance on Iran and GS in addition to its increasing role on the international scene.
5. The American stance on Turkey, along with its Iranian and international dimension, was affirmed as Washington attempted on 9/6/2010—only a few days after the Freedom Flotilla incident—to pass a Security Council resolution imposing tighter sanctions on Iran; Resolution 1929 despite the objections of Turkey and Brazil and the abstention of Lebanon. Reportedly, the resolution attempted to directly suspend the Tehran declaration and the Turkish role involved in it.²³

On 12/7/2010, the American Secretary of State Hillary Clinton asked her Turkish counterpart Ahmet Davutoğlu to leave Iran’s nuclear dispute to international mediators. This confirmed to many Washington’s role in the attack

on the Freedom Flotilla and its disturbance over the Turkish stance on Iran. However, a Turkish diplomatic source responded to the US demand by saying, “The participation of Turkey [in the Iran negotiations] is not necessary, but it is true that Iran wants us in the process. If Turkey is called to participate, we will consider it,” and he added, “However, no one should expect Turkey to stay indifferent to the developments in its region.”²⁴

6. The rocket attack by the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan—PKK*) on the Iskenderun naval base, which left seven Turks dead and was only four hours before the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla, also raised suspicions about a connection between the Israeli and Kurdish attacks.

In a bid to discuss the tension between Turkey and Israel, public opinion was surprised by the covert meeting held in Brussels on 30/6/2010 between Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, and Israeli Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, which was the first between two high profile officials in the two countries since the incident. Though initially secret, news of the meeting was later disclosed by the Israeli media.²⁵

In the midst of such a fierce dispute between Turkey and Israel, including Israel’s accusations to the then new Turkish Chief of the National Intelligence Organization (*Millî İstihbarat Teşkilâtı—MİT*) Hakan Fidan of being “a friend of Iran,” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon announced, on 2/8/2010, the establishment of a Panel of Inquiry on the flotilla incident. The committee comprised of four members: former Prime Minister of New Zealand Geoffrey Palmer as Chair, former Colombian President Alvaro Uribe, in addition to two members; a Turkish and an Israeli.²⁶

Ideologically and Realistically

Turkish Israeli relations remained frozen and strained in the months following the Freedom Flotilla incident. Turkish ideological discourse was heightened during this time, as reflected in the terms used by most Turkish officials, most notably Erdoğan and Davutoğlu. Palestine was at the core of the discussion, to the extent that Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu expressed his wish to pray soon at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

During his visit to Lebanon on 24–25/11/2010, Erdoğan staged a strong anti-Israel position when he asked, “Does [Israel] think it can enter Lebanon with



the most modern aircraft and tanks to kill women and children, and destroy schools and hospitals, and then expect us to remain silent?” then he added, “We will not be silent and we will support justice by all means available to us.”²⁷

With the release of the WikiLeaks documents at the beginning of December 2010, publishing more than a quarter of a million documents from US embassies all over the world and the US Department of State, eight thousand Turkey-related documents were revealed reflecting the crisis of trust in the relations between Ankara, Washington and several neighboring countries.

Parallel to the discourse condemning Israel, however, Turkish officials also sent positive messages to Israel in December 2010. Turkey sent two firefighting planes to Israel to help extinguish the fire in Mount Carmel, Haifa. The Turkish aircrafts were sent at dawn on Friday 3/12/2010 with direct instructions from Erdoğan who said, “No one should look for something else in this thing. There is nothing but our humanity and culture of solidarity involved in this.”²⁸ Moreover, Foreign Minister Davutoğlu said that Turkish assistance to Israel is, above all, their debt to the people of this region.²⁹

Turkish participation in firefighting efforts was followed by meetings in Geneva that were the first of their kind since the meeting between Davutoğlu and Ben-Eliezer on 30 June. This time, two meetings saw Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu sit down with the Israeli representative at the UN panel investigating the Mavi Marmara raid Joseph Ciechanover on 5–6/12/2010.³⁰

Turkish-Israeli Relations

The moment the raid on the Freedom Flotilla occurred, Turkey threatened, in the words of its officials, to reconsider all of its ties with Israel at all levels if Israel refused to apologize and pay compensation. The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi—AKP*) Deputy Chairman Ömer Çelik said, “Regarding Turkey-Israel relations, everything will be cancelled in the short term, from military agreements to other ties,” but then he clarified that any measure will take into account international laws and agreements.³¹

Similarly, President Gül kept a moderate stance from ties with Israel. He said:

I must also emphasize that Turkey and Israel are friends. There are strong, centuries-old ties of friendship between our peoples. Turkey was the first

Muslim majority country to recognize Israel back in 1949. Yet, we cannot pretend as if nothing happened this past May. Therefore, we expect Israel to take the necessary steps.³²

The first measure taken was to summon the Turkish Ambassador Ahmet Oğuz Çelikkol from Tel Aviv but without asking Israel to withdraw its ambassador from Ankara. In this regard, Ankara neither severed its diplomatic relations nor decreased the level of representation in Israel as previous Turkish governments had done in 1956 and 1980. Turkey cancelled three joint military exercises with Israel and the Chief of Turkish General Staff Mehmet İlker Başbuğ called his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi and described the attack of being “grave and unacceptable.”³³

Turkish Defense Minister Vecdi Gönül said that the Freedom Flotilla crisis would not pose any problems for the delivery of four Israeli Heron UAVs which would be delivered as scheduled.³⁴ On the other hand, Turkey prevented Israeli Air Force aircrafts from flying over Turkish soil on their way to other countries.

On 27/10/2010, the National Security Council (*Milli Güvenlik Kurulu—MGK*) agreed to make radical changes to the National Security Policy Document (*Milli Güvenlik Siyaseti Belgesi—MGSB*), also known as Turkey’s secret Constitution or the Red Book, in which the main threats to Turkey’s security are outlined, referring to Israel’s instability-inducing actions in the Middle East as a threat. The document draws attention to the instability in the region caused by Israel and the possibility that Israel’s actions may lead the countries in the region to be engaged in an arms race.³⁵

Turkey also proposed a draft law preventing Israelis and citizens of other nationalities from the right to own property in Turkey.³⁶ The rift between Turkey and Israel had further impact on the Jewish immigration from Turkey to Israel, though the numbers remain small.³⁷

Economic Relations

Despite the political stand off, economic relations remained outside the sphere of the impact as statistics confirmed increased trade exchange between Israel and Turkey. The Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said that Turkey’s exports to Israel reached around \$2,080.1 million in 2010 against \$1,522.4 million in 2009. Turkish imports from Israel also recorded exports to Turkey of \$1,359.6 million in 2010 in comparison to \$1,074.7 million in 2009. Overall, the trade volume between



the two countries was estimated at \$3,439.7 million in 2010 in comparison to \$2,597.1 million in 2009, an increase of 32.6%.³⁸

Though showing lower figures than Turkish statistics on the volume of trade exchange between the two countries, Israeli official data confirm the increased exchange throughout 2010, recording \$1,800.2 million in Turkish exports to Israel, \$1,324.4 million Turkish imports from Israel, and a total trade volume of \$3,124.6 million, an increase of 26.3%.³⁹

Statistics confirmed by the two sides prove that political tensions have not affected commercial relations and that to date the political tension has not been mirrored in other aspects, revealing a pragmatic attitude on both sides.

Table 1/4: Trade Exchange Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2009–2010 (\$ million)⁴⁰

Year	Turkey’s export to Israel		Turkey’s import from Israel		Trade exchange	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2009	1,522.4	1,387.7	1,074.7	1,086	2,597.1	2,473.7
2010	2,080.1	1,800.2	1,359.6	1,324.4	3,439.7	3,124.6

Data also showed that the projects which have been assumed by Turkish contracting companies in Israel amounted to nearly \$583 million in mid 2010.⁴¹ Figures published by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Tourism show that the numbers of Israeli tourists to Turkey declined five fold in 2010 compared to two years earlier. The number of Israelis arriving in Turkey numbered 558,183 in 2008, while in 2009 it was 311,582, and then in 2010 it was down to 109,559.⁴²

Palestine in Turkish Discourse

Turkish official discourse continued to offer support to the Palestinian issue, particularly the blockaded GS, throughout 2010. Speeches by Erdoğan as well as statements by Gül and Davutoğlu have all been at the forefront of such support.

In an opinion poll by the International Strategic Research Organisation (*Uluslararası Stratejik Araştırmalar Kurumu—USAK*) published on 31/12/2009, a 63% majority of Turks approved of their government’s policies toward Israel.⁴³ Erdoğan clearly decried Muslim leaders’ inadequate response to Palestinian suffering in GS, by saying that they “have failed to show the reactions that

the world's Muslims expected from them. This has been a pitiful aspect of the matter."⁴⁴ Foreign Minister Davutoğlu took Turkey's concern with Jerusalem to a more advanced stage saying that:

We need to exert maximum efforts in terms of achieving unity and reconciliation in Palestine and addressing the humanitarian tragedy in the Gaza Strip. We should also redouble our endeavors to mobilize the international community to put an end to Israel's practices that are altering the demography, status and character of Jerusalem, a city sacred for all three monotheist religions. The Islamic character of Masjid al-Aqsa, Bilal Mosque [Rachel's Tomb] and Ibrahimi Mosque in el-Halil [Hebron] should be respected and preserved.⁴⁵

Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stressed that the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Ibrahimi Mosque, and Rachel's Tomb "will never be Jewish sites, but rather Islamic ones." He said that these sites and antiquities can by no means be Israeli heritage sites, and if anything, should be considered as part of the human heritage collectively if not an Islamic heritage. He reaffirmed, "Palestine is our problem, it has never been removed even for a day from our agenda."⁴⁶

The peak of the Turkish embrace of the Jerusalem issue came at the 22nd Arab Summit in the Libyan city of Sirte on 27/3/2010 where Erdoğan, in his speech, said: "Jerusalem is the apple of the eye of each and every Muslim... and we cannot accept any Israeli violation in Jerusalem or in Muslim sites."⁴⁷

On 10/5/2010, while addressing the second extraordinary meeting of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC, Erdoğan said, "If Jerusalem burns, the Middle East burns. If Jerusalem burns, the world burns."⁴⁸

In the presence of his Arab counterparts at the Turkish Arab Economic Forum on 13/6/2010, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu also launched a slogan that was the first for a non-Arab official by promising to pray soon at the *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁴⁹

However, economic relations between Turkey and the Palestinians during 2010 less positive, the only major event being the Second Palestinian Business Forum which was held in Istanbul, on 5/10/2010, with participation of around a thousand Palestinian businessmen from 20 different countries. The forum was a step towards achieving strategic partnership with Turkish investors to support the growth and development of the Palestinian economy. At the forum, Turkish Foreign Trade Minister Zafer Caglayan declared the Turkish intention to open a trade office in

Ramallah to boost commercial ties with the PA. He said, “We will open an office in Ramallah so we can improve contacts and enable our investors to work better.” The minister added that Turkish-Palestinian trade volume amounted to some \$30 million, heavily in favor of Turkey.⁵⁰

The Peace Process

Undoubtedly, the peace process, in which Turkey tried to play a role as mediator between Israel and Syria on one hand and between Palestine and Israel on the other, was affected by Turkish-Israeli tensions in 2010; tensions that continued to hamper Turkish diplomatic efforts as they had since the war on GS at the end of 2008.

Notwithstanding this long-term problem, Turkey continued to hint throughout the year about its willingness to resume mediation between Israel and Syria as well as the Palestinians and Israel. The Turkish stance on the peace process can be summarized as follows:

1. Turkey continued to call the international community to put more pressure on Israel in order to reach a peace settlement on the basis of establishing an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital.
2. Turkey encouraged the resumption of negotiations between Israel and the PA headed by Mahmud ‘Abbas during spring 2010. In a statement issued later, Turkish Foreign Ministry said that “the decision to launch proximity talks between Israel and Palestine is a positive step.”⁵¹

On 25/5/2010, Turkey hosted the United Nations International Meeting in Support of the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process in Istanbul, organized by the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People. Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu said in his speech that “the fulfillment of the rightful aspirations of the Palestinian people to establish a homeland has become all the more essential,” going on to explain that “a political solution would only be viable if it is complemented by progress on the ground, especially in the economic and social realms, we attach utmost importance to state-building efforts in Palestine.” He added that what they had been striving to attain for a long time was “the establishment of an independent, viable and contiguous Palestinian State.”⁵² Turkey also welcomed the resumption of talks in September 2010 between the Palestinians and the Israelis.

3. Turkey stressed the importance of including Hamas movement as an integral part of any peace talks. Erdoğan expressed his conviction that Abbas’s negotiations

with Israel would not succeed as long as Hamas was not included in the process. He added that he was in agreement with the international Quartet's envoy Tony Blair in this respect. Blair said that any meeting without participation of Hamas would not yield any result.⁵³ He maintained this stance at the onset of 2011.

On 12/5/2010, President Gül asserted, in a meeting with the Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, that peace could not be achieved if Hamas was not involved. "Nobody should be excluded when these talks are held. The Hamas side won the elections in Gaza and so cannot be ignored."⁵⁴ To affirm Turkey's recognition of Hamas' legitimacy and impact, in addition to its importance in the peace process, Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoğlu met with the Head of the Hamas Political Bureau Khalid Mish'al in Damascus on 23/6/2010. In addition, Turkey continued to defend Hamas as a political movement, when Erdoğan said that "They [Hamas] won the election. You [Israelis] are always talking about democracy. You'll never let Hamas rule. What kind of democracy is this?" Then he added, "I do not think that Hamas is a terrorist organization. I said the same thing to the United States. I am still of the same opinion. They are Palestinians in resistance, fighting for their own land."⁵⁵

4. Rhetoric about lifting the GS blockade remained a priority in Turkish official and public discourse, reaching its peak and practical crystallization in the Freedom Flotilla. The lifting of the siege is a Turkish condition for resuming normalized relations with Israel since, according to Turkey's public position, the people in GS are facing an isolation policy and have no rights and that GS is a "modern ghetto."⁵⁶
5. Turkish rhetoric pinpointed the building of settlements as the greatest obstacle in the way to progress in the peace process.
6. Turkish discourse also considered the Palestinian political schism as one of the obstacles in the way of achieving a peace settlement. Turkey continued its call for the Palestinians to resolve their differences. According to Turkish officials, efforts have been made with all sides to reach Palestinian reconciliation, without any progress. Turkey was also a participant at the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee meeting in March 2010, where Davutoğlu reiterated the urgency of achieving Palestinian reconciliation, and at the same time resuming negotiations, clarifying that any one step without the other will come to naught.⁵⁷



Conclusions

1. 2010 can be seen as a turning point in Turkish-Israeli relations. For the first time in modern Turkish history, Turkish civilians were killed in a military assault by the soldiers of another country, namely Israel.
2. The assault on the Freedom Flotilla and the murder of nine Turks was aggravated by the fact that the decision to carry out the operation was taken before hand by the Israeli government; and was therefore neither an accident nor a misunderstanding.
3. The incident caused the further deterioration of official Israeli-Turkish relations, as bilateral meetings decreased among the upper civil and military ranks.
4. There were heightened anti-Israeli sentiments on Turkish streets, leading to an increase in Jewish emigration from Turkey. This small number of Jewish departures from Turkey was due to concern that an anti-Semitic campaign was at hand.
5. Turkish-Israeli tension impacted on Turkey's relations with American Jews, who started lobbying the US administration and members of Congress to put more pressure on Turkey to back down from its anti-Israel policies.
6. Economic relations between the two countries in 2010 grew by 40% since 2009, despite bilateral tensions.
7. Deteriorating relations with Israel did not affect the AKP inside Turkey. In fact, anti-Israel rhetoric helped the AKP win more votes in the referendum on reform on 12/9/2009.
8. The Turkish reaction to the raid on the Freedom Flotilla did not meet the magnitude of the assault. Turkey was satisfied with filing complaints demanding official apology and compensation, as well as recalling its ambassador from Tel Aviv. The possibility of a military confrontation in retaliation for the Israeli assault was never openly considered by the government. And despite Israeli resistance to apologizing, Ankara did not escalate matters to pressure Israel to comply with their demands.
9. Turkish feeling that in the Freedom Flotilla incident, the country had been subjected to an assault spearheaded by Israel, forced it to consider the situation rationally, preferring to refrain from taking steps that would please public opinion at home, but would open new areas for foreign pressure, particularly from the West. These are the pressures that Turkey does not

need at this stage of its rising power, as it continues to expand its influence regionally and internationally.

10. The diplomatic stand off has affected Turkish mobility, as the Turkish role reduced on a number of files, including its mediation between Israel and Syria, between Palestinian factions and between Israel and the Palestinians.
11. Turkish discourse remained closely tied to the Palestinian issue, particularly GS and Jerusalem, its emotional tone growing, Turkish initiatives toward the WB, GS and Jerusalem were reduced significantly. The reason behind this could have been the severe restrictions imposed by Israel on aid from Turkey to GS, after the low level crisis at the beginning of 2010. This was followed by the major blow dealt in the Freedom Flotilla incident, in addition to the siege imposed by Egypt on the GS with the Rafah border crossing remaining closed, preventing aid from reaching GS, except according to specific political calculations.

Future Possibilities

1. Turkish-Israeli relations will not return to the way they were prior to the Freedom Flotilla incident. The killing of Turkish citizens has a symbolism that will grow as time passes, and its impact on the Turkish psyche is likely to become more evident later on, particularly at a popular level.
2. The AKP government inherited a wide range of cultural, economic and military agreements. All the statements made by Turkish officials have indicated that Turkey respects international laws and agreements. Hence, Ankara did not annul any previously signed agreement, opting instead for specific measures that would appease Turkish public anger regarding Israel. The most prominent proof of the continuation of strong Turkish-Israeli relations is the rise in trade volume in comparison to 2009.
3. Ankara was well aware of the risk in letting the tension with Israel and the other international players in the flotilla incident—primarily the US and the West—affect its presence and role as a regional and international actor. Thus it opted to avoid any radical measures against Israel.

To elaborate, the Turkish position relies on a policy of working simultaneously on various dimensions, keeping an equal distance from all sides. Such a role cannot be advanced in the presence of difficult relations with Israel, and consequently the West. This truth prompted Turkey to leave space for



mending relations with Israel, while preserving a minimum of face-keeping before the Turkish public.

This became evident when Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu agreed to meet with Israeli Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer on 30/6/2010, despite the fact that Israeli officials had boasted that their soldiers fulfilled their duty and killed those who they said deserved to die.

The Turkish bid was also manifested in Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's personal initiative in sending aircrafts to join the fight to contain the Carmel blaze although Israel had not made any concessions. On the contrary, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu stated after Turkish aircrafts ended their mission that his country would not be offering any apology or compensation.

Based on these facts, it is not expected that Turkish-Israeli relations will make speedy progress due to the deep wounds they have sustained. It can be predicted that Ankara will continue in its attempts to repair relations within reasonable limits.

4. Israel is risking the loss of its historic Turkish ally by insisting on its extreme positions towards Ankara. However, Israel's confidence that it will not be left alone in this confrontation encourages it to maintain its stance. Israel is forewarning Turkey that it will be the loser if it holds on to its tensions with Israel, which would affect Turkey's relations with the West, and result in a lack of progress in fighting the PKK. Israel warned that it would form alliances with Turkey's rivals in the Balkans and the Mediterranean, such as Greece, Greek Cyprus, Bulgaria and Romania. There is no suggestion either that the Israeli stance is associated with Benjamin Netanyahu's government, or that a change of government in Israel will soften the Israeli stance.
5. As for Turkish-Palestinian relations, Turkey continued to provide assistance to GS and the WB, although at a reduced rate as a result of events in 2010.

On the political level, Turkey tried to achieve reconciliation between the PA and Hamas, but to no avail. This was due to the deepening Palestinian schism, Arab polarization, and Turkey's preoccupation with the repercussions of incidents that led to tensions with Israel. Consequently, it is not likely that a change will occur in Turkey's policy regarding the Palestinian internal issue unless some progress is made in repairing Turkish ties with Israel, or if the Egyptian stance towards GS—and Hamas—changes due to geographical proximity considerations.

Third: Iran

Among Muslim countries, Iran stood its ground on previous stances on the Palestinian issue. During 2010, despite the sanctions on Iran, described as the most severe available by the US; the Iranian leadership, particularly President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, affirmed on various occasions their consistent stance on Palestine, and the illegitimate nature of Israel's existence. Iran also took clear positions on all incidents facing the Palestinians: breaking the siege of GS, the Egyptian Steel Wall, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the threats of war. Consequently, Iran dissented from the official stances of Muslim states, which supported talks and called on the US to pressure Israel to freeze settlement building activities in order to allow the negotiations to succeed.

Generally speaking, Muslim countries — with the exception of Iran — supported Palestinian negotiations with Israel. At first, these same countries backed the Arab Peace Initiative, although to varying degrees, depending on whether this country has direct relations with Israel. Others, like Malaysia, Indonesia, Turkey and the OIC were content to pursue pro-negotiation stances and condemnations of Israel's continuing settlement building. Overall, Muslim state concern with the Palestinian issue does not go beyond supporting the peace process and negotiations. Objections are usually expressed when the Israeli side places obstacles in the way of these negotiations or continues to build settlements. The leaders of Muslim countries did not change their strategies and opt for resistance or boycott as means of pressure.

Condemning Judaization

Iran condemned the Judaization of Jerusalem and the listing of the city along with the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem as Jewish heritage.⁵⁸ Tehran also slammed the rebuilding of Hurva Synagogue, describing it as a "catastrophe that has distressed the Islamic world." Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast added, "We condemn the move and call on the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the Arab League and the United Nations to take appropriate measures to stop this occupying regime."⁵⁹ Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki called on the OIC to hold an emergency meeting on the issue.⁶⁰ Moreover, Iran berated Israel's settlement plans in East Jerusalem.



Mottaki also stated that the expansion of the Israeli settlements, the destruction of Islamic and Christian structures and the construction of new synagogues in Jerusalem have unveiled the Israeli plan, “which, unfortunately, has been approved by Washington.” He urged Arab states to put the issue high on the agenda of the Arab League conference, which was underway in Sirte, Libya, and said, “This has raised the alarm for people across the globe and has highlighted the necessity of taking serious measures and maximizing potential in all Muslim nations.” Mottaki also called for the formation of a committee consisting of the foreign ministers of the Arab League and the OIC member states to discuss the latest developments in Jerusalem.⁶¹

The Iranian Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei considered the removal of signs of Islam from Jerusalem as “a perilous plot which is taking place before the eyes of the world,” and added that the OIC “which is principally established for the Palestinian issue, was expected to fulfill its essential duty in defense of Palestine and mobilize the Islamic world against the Zionists’ insidious moves.”⁶²

Supporting GS

Iran called for lifting the siege of GS throughout 2010, declaring its support of the Hamas government in the GS and strongly condemning the Steel Wall built by Egypt along Egyptian borders with GS. Iranian President Ahmadinejad said that the move must have been done against Israel, adding, “I wish the steel wall was built around the Zionists so that the people of the region would have felt comfort.”⁶³

Iranian leaders did not hesitate to declare their support for the Freedom Flotilla’s attempt to break the blockade of GS. Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said that Iran voices its all-out support and backing for the efforts of the group of pro-Palestinian activists to break the Gaza sea blockade.⁶⁴ President Ahmadinejad said that the assault on the flotilla signified the imminent demise and collapse of Israel.⁶⁵ In addition, the Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Saeed Jalili said, “Under growing pressure from world public opinion, the criminal and terrorist Zionist regime has now resorted to maritime murder,” and he dismissed the attack as a “terrorist piracy.”⁶⁶ Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said in a meeting with his Indonesian counterpart Marzuki Alie “Palestine needs a joint move by the

Islamic states to restore the rights of the oppressed Palestinian people.” Larijani also underlined the important role of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in defending the rights of the Palestinian people.⁶⁷

Chairman of Iranian Parliament’s National Security and Foreign Policy Committee Alaeddin Boroujerdi also decried the Israeli attack, and called on the UN Security Council to send the case to the International Criminal Court (ICC). He said that the setting up of a committee to probe the Israeli raid on the Gaza aid convoy is only aimed at wasting time.⁶⁸

Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei described the Israeli commandos attack on the Freedom Flotilla as “another link in the chain of the great crimes committed by that criminal and evil regime.”⁶⁹

As tension mounted between Turkey and Israel in the wake of killing nine Turks on board the Mavi Marmara ship of the Freedom Flotilla, the Iranian president thanked Erdoğan for “his efforts to explain the Palestinian cause to the whole world and his support to dispatch of humanitarian aid to Palestinian people.” He also underlined that the international community is necessitated to speedily form a consensus about political sanctions against Israel and exert pressures on those responsible for its “international crimes, sea piracy and state-sponsored terrorism.”⁷⁰ In Brussels, Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki described Israeli actions against the Freedom Flotilla as “barbarian,” and praised “the strong reaction in Europe as well as in all around the world.”⁷¹ Iranians held rallies across the country calling for the trial of Israeli leaders.⁷²

According to a statement issued by the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) on 27/6/2010, “Following further Israeli restrictions on the transfer of aid to Gaza and the prevention of issuing a permit to allow the passage of the Iranian ship through the Suez Canal, the departure of the ship carrying Red Crescent aid has been postponed,” later denied by Egypt.⁷³ Cairo also rejected the visa requests of four Iranian MPs who were scheduled to visit GS.⁷⁴ As for Washington, it was suspicious about the “intentions” of the IRCS and considered Iran’s intentions vis-à-vis GS not benign.⁷⁵

As many Arab and international organizations and agencies announced their desire to send more vessels to break the blockade of GS, and in light of Israeli threats to face and prevent such vessels from approaching Palestinian shores, the semi-official Mehr News Agency (MNA) reported Ali Shirazi, representative



of the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei to the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy, as saying that “The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Navy is ready to escort the peace and freedom convoys that carry humanitarian assistance for the defenseless and oppressed people of Gaza with all its strength.”⁷⁶ He added that “If the Supreme Leader issues an order for this then the Revolutionary Guard naval forces will do their best to secure the ships,” and that “It is Iran’s duty to defend the innocent people of Gaza.”⁷⁷

On 27–28/2/2010, Tehran welcomed the leaders of the Palestinian factions in The International Conference on National and Islamic Unification of the Future of Palestine. The conference was concluded in Tehran with a final statement that condemned Judaization of the Palestinian lands, Jewish settlement construction in Jerusalem and the surrounding areas.⁷⁸ Prior to the conference opening, the Supreme Leader Khamenei met the leaders of Palestinian factions and said that most of the Arab governments failed the test they were put to during the 22-day war on Gaza and added:

These governments claim that the issue of Palestine is an issue which is related to the Arab world. But when it came to helping Palestinians, they ignored this fact and left their Palestinian brothers alone in their battle against the Zionist enemy and its supporters. This is a fact which will go down in history.

He further stressed the formation of a new and Islamic Middle East and said that supporting the Palestinian nation is an Islamic and human duty. He further stated that Islamic governments shoulder a heavier duty in this regard.⁷⁹

On another level, Israeli army radio reported Israeli military sources as saying that Iran provided Palestinian factions in GS with long range missiles that can reach strategic targets in Israel and even Tel Aviv.⁸⁰ Israeli military sources also disclosed that Hizbullah is armed with surface-to-surface missiles able to reach as far as the Dimona reactor in southern Israel. These include Fajr-5, which has a range of 33 km, and the M-600, developed by Syria from the Fateh-110, whose range is 250 km. Both are precise, propelled by solid fuel and carry 500 kg warheads of conventional explosives, as well as being able to deliver chemical, biological and radioactive materials. The sources claimed that Iran has built for Hizbullah five expanded commando brigades whose mission in a future conflict will be to capture and hold key northern Israeli towns and villages, including the town of Nahariya or

parts thereof. This tactic would force Israeli forces marching into Lebanon to turn back and recover lost land. In addition, sources mentioned that Syrian instructors trained Hizbullah men in the operation of ground-to-air weapons, including self-propelled missiles, for use against warplanes and incoming missiles and cruise missiles.⁸¹ Military sources warned of the possibility of a pre-emptive attack by Hizbullah accompanied by intense attacks from the GS. They said that the cause of the next war in which Syria, Hizbullah and GS are involved, will be in response to any attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities.⁸²

In the same context of forging a relationship between Hamas and Iran, *Haaretz* newspaper mentioned that Israeli sources confirmed a report by the Palestinian Ma'an News Agency that the Egyptian police raided three arms depots in the central Sinai Peninsula containing nearly 200 surface-to-air missiles apparently headed for GS.⁸³ *Haaretz* quoted Israeli sources as saying that a considerable number of similar armaments had probably already been transported through Sinai to Hamas, PIJ and other Islamist militant groups. Israeli experts believe that Tehran and Damascus have sent the ordnance in a bid to give Hamas more advanced weapons of the kind employed by Hizbullah. The sources also said that the weapons appear to be Russian-made SA-7 missiles. The missile, commonly known as the Strela, is not generally considered a highly advanced weapon, but its very presence in GS could have far-reaching implications for Israeli air mobility over the coastal territory. The quantity of missiles in the depots seems to indicate that Palestinians possess a higher number of projectiles than previously thought, and that in any renewed fighting with Israel, may try to shoot down not only military helicopters and fighter jets, but also civilian aircraft such as crop dusters. They also pointed out that Egyptian Bedouin and Palestinian tunnel operators in the Rafah area have been able to penetrate Egypt's Steel Wall in several places, and through it, to dig tunnels for continued weapons smuggling.⁸⁴ This implies that the Egyptian strategic bid to stop arms smuggling to GS was a resounding failure.⁸⁵

Israeli media reported that experts from both Iran and Syria arrived at GS to improve various military capabilities of resistance factions there, a claim denied by Sheikh Nafidh 'Azzam, member of the political bureau of PIJ, as reported by Sama News Agency.⁸⁶ *Haaretz* also reported that members of Hamas left GS, via the Sinai tunnels, to attend training camps in Syria and Iran, with foreign experts also entering GS. It said that the Israeli army believes that Hamas is still trying to



rearm and restore its military capabilities, damaged in operation Cast Lead, and is therefore not interested in provoking too harsh an Israeli response.⁸⁷

Condemning Palestinian-Israeli Negotiations

The Israeli military attack on the Mavi Marmara became an unresolved dispute between Turkey and Israel; while international concern with the siege has since downscaled. No other ships were able to head to GS, and Iran was not obliged to face the challenge of protecting these ships as world attention was once again turned toward UN Security Council sanctions imposed on it. If the Iranian support for lifting the siege of GS and its condemnation of Israeli actions had been normal and acceptable in light of the international condemnation of the massacre and global calls to break this siege; its negative stance toward the resumption of Palestinian Israeli talks cannot be viewed separately from the sanctions imposed on it. Many officials in Washington, Israel and even some Arab capitals, found a link between these negotiations and the sanctions imposed on Iran, especially that such a link was based on what is deemed an “Iranian interference” in the Palestinian issue through supporting resistance movements and refusing negotiations with Israel. They considered that this Iranian policy impedes talks and encourages a section of Palestinians like Hamas and PIJ to lean toward “extremism.” This is to say that sanctions on Iran will not only have an impact on limiting the progress of the Iranian nuclear program but will also be aimed at exerting economic and diplomatic pressure on Tehran to weaken its “negative” impact on the Palestinian issue. In this context, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed UN Security Council Resolution 1929 regarding the fourth round of sanctions imposed on Iran, while Israeli commentators counted the resolution at this time as a “diplomatic gift,” and nothing more than the first step on a long road.⁸⁸

The logical conclusion of the connection between sanctions on Iran and Palestinian negotiations with Israel is as follows: As long as the talks are on hold, there will be a great chance for the expansion of Iranian influence in supporting resistance movements in Lebanon and Palestine. Hence, progress in the peace process will limit tensions and block Iran from further influencing the Palestinian issue. For these reasons, *The Washington Post* newspaper expressed hope that talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leaders would be more positive than previously, since they would share a fear of Iran which had grown since talks broke off between Israelis and Palestinians in December 2008. It clarified that Israel’s fear was of the

Iranian nuclear program, while ‘Abbas also fears Iran which has crossed sectarian lines to support Hamas with money and military training. *The Washington Post* explained that “Abbas’s secular Fatah movement fought a virtual civil war with Hamas, which now runs the Gaza Strip, over several months in 2007.” The newspaper considered that Iran’s ambitions, which had cast a long shadow over the greater Middle East, may serve as a common bond keeping a frail peace process intact despite threats that have arisen even before the start of negotiations. *The Washington Post* added that a strong Hamas is a problem for Mubarak—and Iran is interested in just that. And peace between Israel and the Palestinians is perhaps the best way for Mubarak—and Jordan, Israel, the Palestinians and the United States—to counter those ambitions.⁸⁹

Dennis Ross, Barack Obama’s special adviser on the Middle East, also linked peace in the Middle East to Iran, when he said in his remarks to the Anti-Defamation League National Leadership Conference on 3/5/2010 that “pursuing peace is instrumental to shaping a new regional context,” but it is not “a substitute for dealing with the other challenges.” He pointed out that “the greatest challenge to peace and security in the Middle East lies with Iran.” He also said that “Clearly, one way that Iran exerts influence in the Middle East is by exploiting the ongoing conflict between Israelis and Palestinians.”⁹⁰

Israeli leaders did not care for the connection being made between Iran’s influence and freezing talks. Despite their affirmation of the “existential Iranian threat,” the Israelis would not accept freezing their policy of settlement building. Thus, talks were brought to a halt despite generous American military and financial aid incentives to Israel and the commitment that settlement building could resume at a later stage.

As a consequence of Israel’s hard line, Iran was handed the opportunity to criticize negotiations, while several senior officials in the PA and some Arab countries warned against Israeli obstinacy, calling for halting negotiations on the one hand, and asked Washington to pressure Israel to accept the settlement freeze on the other.

In harmony with their consistent stances on this issue, Iran criticized the negotiations and Iran’s military, spiritual and political leaders reaffirmed the futility of talks with the Israel. Previously, Iran had avoided speaking out against the Palestinian or Arab side of the negotiations; however, in 2010, President



Ahmadinejad, criticized 'Abbas for becoming a "hostage" of Israel.⁹¹ The PA responded with an attack on the Iranian president, with Spokesman for the Palestinian Presidency Nabil Abu Rudaina saying, "he who does not represent the Iranian people, who forged elections and who suppresses the Iranian people and stole the authority, is not entitled to talk about Palestine, or the President of Palestine." He added:

The Palestinian leadership and the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, who knows how to defend their rights and will not allow anyone to undermine the national president or the legitimacy of the Palestine Liberation Organization or the political and national line, on which it is.⁹²

The Iranian president met with the Syrian President Bashar Assad to declare that supporting "the resistance front not only will absorb nations and countries to this trend but also promote peace in the region."⁹³ In the annual *al-Quds* Day rally in Tehran President Ahmadinejad referred to compromise talks as stillborn and said that while no attention is paid to the rights of Palestine and regional realities, talks will fail. He added: "There is no foundation for talks and the fate of the Palestinians will be decided by their resistance in their land, not in Washington, Paris and London." As for the negotiators he questioned who had made them representatives to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians. "They are talking about what? Who has the right to sell part of the Palestinian land to the enemy?" he asked, "I announce that neither the Palestinian nation nor the regional states will allow an inch of its soil be ceded to the foe."⁹⁴

During his visit to Lebanon, Ahmadinejad again criticized the PA and said that "the existence of this entity in any form, even on one inch of Palestinian land, gives opportunities to this entity [for occupation and crimes]." He commented on the "Jewishness of Israel" by saying that "the Jewish state means a racist state."⁹⁵

Following the disruption of Palestinian-Israeli talks, the discrepancy between the American and Israeli estimates in dealing with the "Iranian threat" surfaced. The then US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates said that he disagreed with the assertion by Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu that a military threat was the only way to influence Iran's nuclear policies. He added, "We are prepared to do what is necessary, but, at this point, we continue to believe that the political-economic approach that we are taking is, in fact, having an impact on Iran."⁹⁶

In his visit to the US, Netanyahu commented on the issue and said, “The only way to ensure that Iran will not go nuclear is to create a credible threat of military action against it if it doesn’t cease its race for a nuclear weapon,” and he added, “The economic sanctions are making it difficult for Iran, but there is no sign that the Ayatollah regime plans to stop its nuclear program because of them.”⁹⁷

Gates reiterated his stance and argued that military strikes are just a “short-term solution” that would only make Iran’s nuclear program “deeper and more covert.” He said they would also unify the Iranian people around an increasingly unpopular government and would “bring together a divided nation; it will make them absolutely committed to obtaining nuclear weapons.” Gates added, “The only long-term solution to avoiding an Iranian nuclear-weapons capability is for the Iranians to decide it’s not in their interest,” whereas “Everything else is a short-term solution -is a two- to three-year solution.”⁹⁸

Throughout 2010, Iran continued asserting its position regarding the legitimacy of resistance and the illegitimacy of Israel. Contrary to the logic of other Muslim countries, Tehran continues to stress the demise of Israel, its officials expressing their optimism that this demise is nearing. In addition they declared their rejection of Palestinian Israeli negotiations, expressing doubts about the legitimacy of the Palestinian negotiator and threatening Israel with a war that would annihilate it, should it consider launching a new attack on GS or on any other country. Iran also condemned Israel’s Judaization policies and affirmed its confidence that resistance is the only way to achieve freedom.

Although mainly based on rhetoric and threats, Iran’s position certainly differed from the stances of other Muslim countries, which continued to support negotiations with Israel or called on the US to pressure Israel to stop settlement building and respect Palestinian rights. Undoubtedly, it is valid to construe that Iranian stances during 2010 were more harmonious with the logic of resistance movements than those of other Muslim countries. These stances continued to disturb Israel as well as many Arab and Muslim countries that have chosen a different path in dealing with Israel. Iran’s stances created a more volatile environment, more likely to flare up.

Presumably, Iran will continue on the above course, while Arab and Western concern, namely that of the US, over such Iranian policies toward Palestine will continue in parallel. In addition, the Arab and Palestinian sides are urged to view the success of these negotiations as urgent and to avoid the danger of letting them



freeze or fail lest Iranian influence grows. US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell said that Iran constitutes an important issue among ruling elites. He added that on his first and subsequent visits to the region:

during which I met with the leaders of, I believe, 14 or 15 countries in the region, without exception Iran was included in the conversation. And in most of them, it was the first or second item mentioned. So clearly that is an important issue and one which has an impact on this process.⁹⁹

Fourth: Malaysia

Malaysia is one of the key actors in the Asian region, and a major player in the global markets in a number of sectors. The economic revival of Malaysia has placed the country at an advanced position, especially in the fields of finance and business. Malaysia has economic relations with Israel, although they remained relatively limited throughout 2010. It is no surprise that Israel pays a great deal of attention to this developing country.

During a parliamentary session of the *Dewan Rakyat*, on 6/4/2010, Malaysian opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim claimed that there were Israeli agents present at the Federal Police or Royal Malaysian Police Headquarters. He said that he had documents that Israeli intelligence had access to the country's strategic information through a company, Asiasoft Online Sdn Bhd, which was a sub-contractor for the project to upgrade the communications system and technology at the federal police headquarters. Ibrahim clarified that the company Asiasoft is registered in Singapore and based in Tel Aviv. He claimed that the presence of two former Israeli military officers in the company was known to the country's top police officer as well as the then Home Minister Syed Hamid Albar. The latter, who was present at the parliament session, denied claims by the Malaysian opposition leader, saying that Anwar Ibrahim was making an assumption and a slanderous statement because many of the facts he had presented were not valid. Meanwhile, speaking to reporters later, Anwar Ibrahim said that he would write a letter to the King of Malaysia, Tuanku Mizan Zainal Abidin, "requesting that the Meeting of the Conference of Rulers intervene to revoke the government contract with the consultant firm, APCO Worldwide, which he claimed to have links with Israel."¹⁰⁰

APCO is a global consultancy firm that addresses clients' interests and objectives through communication and public affairs consulting. The International Advisory Council Members include among others; former US congressman Don Bonker, former US senator and congressman Donald W. Riegle Jr. and former Israeli ambassador to the US Itamar Rabinovich.¹⁰¹ APCO also has a strong partnership with Asero Worldwide, a Washington-based company that is home to a number of Israeli security experts and has a main office in Israel. Asero is a global security and risk management consulting firm.¹⁰²

Malaysia strongly condemned the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla. The Malaysian PM Mohd Najib bin Tun Abdul Razak said, "The Malaysian government and the people strongly condemn this inhumane, brutal aggression by the Israeli regime on the flotilla which is bringing humanitarian aid to the beleaguered people of Gaza" and added that he hoped that "the incident will result in a censure on Israel."¹⁰³ On 7/6/2010, speaking in parliament, the Malaysian PM referred to Israel as a "world gangster" and proposed that like-minded countries bring a resolution to the UNGA to seek an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Najib also called on like-minded countries to bring a resolution to the UN Security Council to refer the Israel's attack on the Turkish aid ship Mavi Marmara to the ICC.¹⁰⁴ Worth mentioning is that the Malaysian PM received, at a homecoming reception at his residence, the 12 Malaysian activists who were on board the Freedom Flotilla. He said that these volunteers had achieved a huge moral victory for Malaysia and its people, and that what they went through "has not only touched our hearts but has opened the eyes of the people of Malaysia and the rest of the world to the atrocities of the Zionist regime towards the people of Palestine."¹⁰⁵

On the public level, hundreds of Malaysians participated in demonstrations outside the American Embassy in Kuala Lumpur chanting slogans like "Death to Israel" after the flotilla atrocity.¹⁰⁶ Moreover, on 4/7/2010, the Malaysian organization Aman Palestin Berhad was able to send a truck fully loaded with relief aid and medicine to the GS through the Rafah border crossing in Egypt. The content of the truck was worth \$100 thousand. Egyptian Authorities denied entry to the delegation of 12 legal representatives of Malaysian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and correspondents for television channels, who were accompanying the truck.¹⁰⁷ The Kelab Putera 1Malaysia humanitarian mission was



able to enter GS in the evening of 9/8/2010. The team included 67 multinational volunteers including doctors, directors and 10 journalists. The delegation included a medical team of 10 Malaysians, 10 Indians and 10 Chinese of different specialties and worked in the hospitals in GS.¹⁰⁸ Pro-Palestine activities also continued to increase, and Malaysian organizations were active in organizing donation campaigns for the Palestinian people.

Fifth: Indonesia

2010 did not witness any significant change in Indonesian policies toward the Palestinian issue. Public and official support campaigns continued and the policy of rejecting normalization with Israel continued. This policy was best expressed when the Indonesian Ministry of Communications and Information Technology said that a company would be dropped from a tender if it had an Israeli shareholder. He said “We don’t have diplomatic ties with Israel, how can we establish a business relation that doesn’t have ties with Indonesia.” Ministry spokesman Gatot Dewa Broto said the Minister of Communication Tifatul Sembiring’s decision of “banning comes from an effort to protect the people’s interests,” and added, “It’s not because the minister is from the PKS [*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera*].” PKS means Prosperous Justice Party, known as conservative and Islamic.¹⁰⁹

In a move that increased the credibility of Indonesian diplomacy, the Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GMEF) held in Bali on 24–26/2/2010 adopted the recommendations contained in the report “Environmental Assessment of the Gaza Strip following the escalation of hostilities in December 2008–January 2009.” The report, prepared by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), clarified the extent of the environmental disaster left behind by the Israeli aggression and the ecological challenges faced by the GS population, outlining ways to deal with the problems. Thus, as GMEF member countries adopted the document, it became an official UN document. The forum was held in the absence of the Israeli delegation since Indonesian authorities did not grant approval for the security procedures set by Israel for its participation.¹¹⁰

On 20/3/2010 tens of thousands of Indonesians marched in the streets of the Indonesian capital Jakarta in support of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Around 100 thousand Indonesian citizens gathered in response to a call by the PKS, where Islamic

leaders in Indonesia were at the forefront of the gathering. The late MP Yoyoh Yusroh was the first speaker, stating that they came to stand in solidarity with the people in Palestine in their defense of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and holy sites.

The former Speaker of Indonesia People's Consultative Assembly Muhammad Hidayat Nur Wahid also addressed the crowd, urging the Indonesian government to assume its role as the biggest Islamic country in the world and work to check Israeli attacks on Islamic holy sites. Moreover, he urged the Arab and Islamic countries, especially Egypt, to play a bigger role in ending the inter-Palestinian rift. He also added that if reconciliation was not reached in Egypt, then all sides were more than welcome in Jakarta, so the Indonesians would have the opportunity to play a historic role in achieving Palestinian reconciliation.¹¹¹

The government and people of Indonesia spared no effort in supporting the Gazans and participated in bids to break the siege, by sending official and public delegations and providing financial support. In this context, the Indonesian Foreign Ministry "condemned Israel's storming of the Mavi Marmara, which was sailing in international waters." Jakarta said the attack was illegal as it took place in international waters, highlighting that Israel's blockade of GS has also violated international law. "Indonesia will work with the international community to demand accountability from Israel in accordance with international law," said Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa. "We urge the United Nations to investigate the incident."¹¹²

On 29/5/2010, in a joint press conference between the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas and the Indonesian President Susilo Bambang Yudhoyono in Jakarta, Yudhoyono asserted his support to the Palestinian people and his support for the establishment of a Palestinian state, declaring the allocation of \$2.15 million for building a hospital in GS.¹¹³ On 29/6/2010, an Indonesian parliamentary delegation, headed by the Parliament Chairman Marzuki Alie, visited GS and laid the cornerstone for the hospital.¹¹⁴ MP Agus Kartasasmitha said in an interview that the parliamentary delegation will relay to the people and parliament in Indonesia all that it had seen and heard in GS, with utmost transparency. He added that the delegation would also tell Indonesians that the people in GS have clear aims: freedom and independence.¹¹⁵



Sixth: Pakistan

Despite the unstable political and security situation and the immense suffering due to floods that Pakistan experienced, these circumstances did not prevent official Pakistani institutions from continuing to declare their support for the Palestinian people and their right to establish an independent state. Pakistani PM Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani reaffirmed these values during his reception for the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in Islamabad on 12/2/2010. He said that Pakistan supports “the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people including the establishment of an independent state with al-Quds al-Sharif as its capital.” The prime minister extended Pakistan’s full support to the peace efforts in the Middle East, including the Oslo Peace Accord, the Arab Peace Initiative and UN Resolutions 242 and 338. As for Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari, he said, “Pakistan believes that peace will remain elusive in the Middle East unless the Palestinian problem is resolved.” Zardari said that Pakistan favors an early settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict on the basis of two-state solution, and he condemned the brutal Israeli invasion of GS and its continued blockade.¹¹⁶

In a press interview with the Pakistani ambassador to Jordan Muhammad Akhtar Tufail, he stressed the fact that his country does not recognize Israel and will not recognize it until it first recognizes the Palestinians’ existence, a Palestinian state is established, Israel reached a peaceful settlement with the Palestinian people, and until the Palestinian nation achieves all its aspirations. He said that peace is in Israel’s best interests and that the absence of a “wise” Israeli leadership is harming the peace process. He added that the prospects of success of peace settlement talks are slim, and that if Israel doesn’t reconsider its policies and does not allow Palestinians to establish their independent state, it will be hurt. Moreover, he revealed a proposal presented to a number of Arab countries that suggests involving Muslim countries in the Palestinian issue and activating their role in order to solidify effective support for the Palestinians. Thus, in this interview, he affirmed the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian issue.¹¹⁷

In the context of reactions to the assault on the Freedom Flotilla, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry declared that the “killing of members of this humanitarian mission, which also included women, is brutal, inhuman and constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and norms.” Pakistani PM Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani said that he

expects the international community to take cognizance of this brutal act. Whereas, in front of the National Press Club in Islamabad, dozens of journalists, political figures and different segments of the society participated in a protest organized by the journalistic community. They demanded of the government to ensure the safe return of renowned journalist Tal'at Hussain and two other Pakistanis, while chanting slogans against Israel.¹¹⁸

Seventh: Trade Exchange

Despite the mounting level of diplomatic turmoil between Israel and Turkey during 2010, which peaked after the Freedom Flotilla attack, trade exchange between the two countries witnessed a significant boost. According to Israeli statistics, Israel's exports to Turkey increased during 2010 to \$1,324 million, 22% more than 2009. Israeli imports from Turkey also increased during 2010, a rise of 30% from 2009.

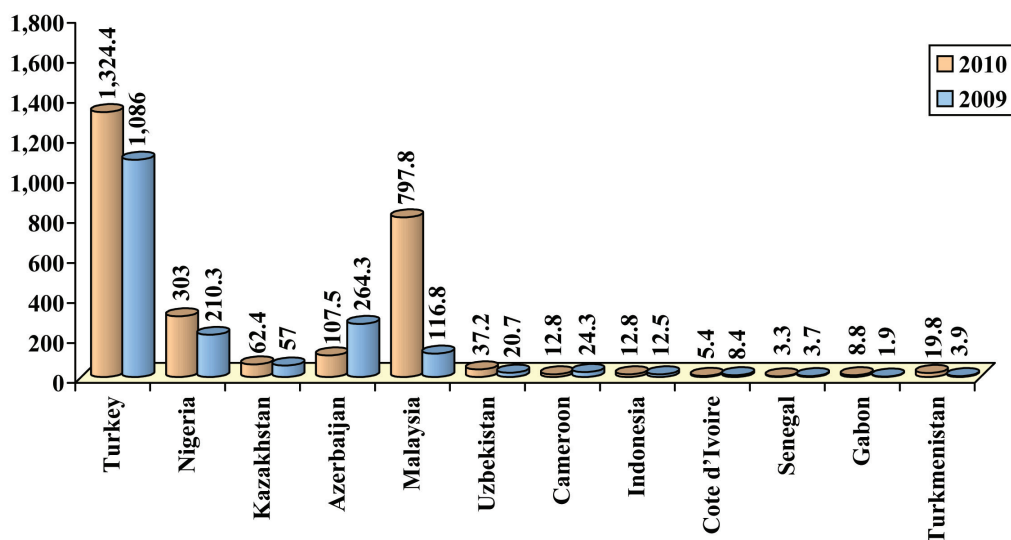
It must be noted that 2009 is not a useful measure of any economic level, as it witnessed an economic crisis that hit the world and affected the Israeli economy directly. Thus, the progress in trade exchange between Turkey and Israel during 2010 can be partially attributed to the recovery of Israeli economy from the global economic crisis. Another reason for adopting this view is the fact that military exchange plans and arms deals were not significantly affected. In addition, it should be noted that many on both sides were more inclined to neutralize economic issues, keeping them separate from political developments and repercussions. As for Malaysia, there is a significant, soaring trade volume with Israel, as Israeli exports to Malaysia skyrocketed by 583% during 2010 from 2009, taking trade back to the rate experienced before *al-Aqsa Intifadah* when Malaysia was a top trading partner with Israel. This requires a careful reading of the reasons behind this rise, which could be related to reactivating deals connected to Information technology industries and the fact that large American corporations export these kinds of services from Israel, for example the Intel Corporation. Meanwhile, the remainder of the Muslim countries recorded a relative stability in their trade exchange (see table 2/4).



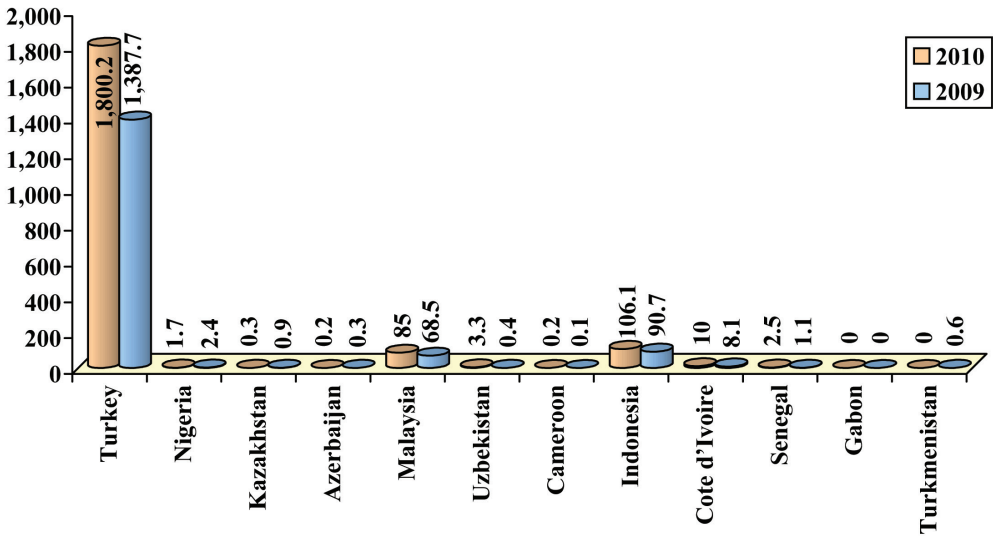
**Table 2/4: Israeli Trade with a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2007–2010 (\$ million)¹¹⁹**

Countries	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2010	2009	2008	2007	2010	2009	2008	2007
Turkey	1,324.4	1,086	1,609.9	1,195.8	1,800.2	1,387.7	1,825.3	1,606.9
Nigeria	303	210.3	304.3	205.1	1.7	2.4	1.4	0.2
Kazakhstan	62.4	57	158.6	99.6	0.3	0.9	3.4	3.3
Azerbaijan	107.5	264.3	129.4	82.6	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2
Malaysia	797.8	116.8	30.2	70.4	85	68.5	100.6	63.6
Uzbekistan	37.2	20.7	23.3	25.6	3.3	0.4	2.7	2
Cameroon	12.8	24.3	18.2	8.9	0.2	0.1	0.5	0.2
Indonesia	12.8	12.5	15.8	17.6	106.1	90.7	293.4	89.3
Cote d'Ivoire	5.4	8.4	9.3	7.9	10	8.1	8.9	5
Senegal	3.3	3.7	8.8	7.1	2.5	1.1	0.7	0.6
Gabon	8.8	1.9	2.9	1.1	0	0	0	0.2
Turkmenistan	19.8	3.9	1.7	2.2	0	0.6	0.2	0.8

**Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2009–2010 (\$ million)**



**Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2009–2010 (\$ million)**



Conclusion

The year 2010 highlighted the strong connection between the Muslim public and the Palestinian issue. The Gazans’ steadfastness in the face of Israel’s aggression and its unjust siege of GS, condemned globally and around the Arab world, unified Islamic efforts to break the siege. This reflects the return of the Palestinian issue to its central Islamic dimension. The increasing moral and financial public support of non-Arab Muslim countries, especially Turkey, Iran, Indonesia and Malaysia, is proof of the centrality of the Palestinian issue to the people of these countries.

Moving forwards we face a real dilemma when it comes to the passivity with which the OIC deals with the Palestinian issue. The OIC still suffers the commonalities and contradictions of its member countries, especially those of major Arab countries that finance the OIC and impose their political agenda regarding the Palestinian issue. Reappraising the legal articles and foundations of the OIC and reframing the basic goal for which the OIC was established is needed, but remains difficult to achieve in the absence of Arab democracy and in view of the fact that non-Arab Muslim countries remain shackled by the low level of Arab demands.

As for Turkey, with its pro-Islamic leadership, it has proved its ability to play a key role in the region and be an effective opponent of unrestrained Israeli policies. Turkey has supported the Palestinian people, and confronted Israeli arrogance; these stances were harmonious with the wishes of the Turkish people who sacrificed blood for the sake of defending the Palestinian people. Thus, Turkey was able to achieve a political detachment from its connections with the US and EU, which had prevailed during previous secular governments. However, a long road lies ahead before the Turkish leadership unties military, economic and political relations with Israel and adopts a purely Islamic agenda.

Iran continues to provide its political and financial support to the Palestinian people and the resistance movement, albeit at a slower rate, due to its preoccupation with internal economic and political events. It is likely that these pro-Palestinian resistance policies will persist, particularly in view of accelerating events and political changes that are expected to be a major factor in opening new horizons for the resistance project in the region.

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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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