

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12



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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

Palestine remains at the forefront of the news preoccupying the Muslim world. In 2011, the presence of the Palestinian issue on the agenda of the Muslim world crystallized during a number of events, namely: the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas, the attempt to gain UN state recognition, the prisoner swap deal (Devotion of the Free), the continued Judaization of Jerusalem, as well as the continued blockade of GS.

In this chapter, we will tackle in detail the role played by the OIC, in addition to examining the stances of two major Muslim countries with regard to the Palestinian issue; Turkey and Iran. We will also review public and official actions in Indonesia and Malaysia and Israeli economic relations with Muslim countries.

First: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

The OIC, over more than four decades, has operated as the second largest international organization outside the UN, comprising 57 Muslim countries. All of these states pledged “to support the struggle of the Palestinian people, who are presently under foreign occupation, and to empower them to attain their inalienable rights, including the right to self-determination, and to establish their sovereign state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital, while safeguarding its historic and Islamic character, and the holy places therein.”¹ Notwithstanding this, the organization continued to address the Palestinian issue in a manner disproportionate with its real power as an organization that represents a Muslim world rich in human and financial resources. In the end, it remains an official gathering reflecting the achievable common goals between regimes that differ in formations, inclinations, ideologies, potentials, interests, and priorities.

It appears that the OIC was positively influenced by the changes overtaking the region, bowing to the demands of many of its members to have a more effective role by deciding to change its name and motto. The 38th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers held in Kazakhstan’s capital Astana on



28/6/2011 adopted the decision to change the name of the organization into the “Organization of Islamic Cooperation” and approve a new motto without any essential change in its strategies of operation or general structure.

During 2011, the OIC continued its traditional support of the Palestinian issue and condemnation of Israeli aggression in Jerusalem, but its official structure kept hindering it from pursuing any effective substantial procedure to stop the constant Israeli violations against the Palestinian people and the Judaization of Islamic holy sites in Palestine. In this context, the Secretary-General of the OIC Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu slammed the Israeli authorities’ confiscation of the house of the former mufti of Jerusalem Hajj Amin al-Husseini, considering the move to be a flagrant violation of international law and “added that the Fourth Geneva Convention prohibits occupying powers from changing the features of occupied territories and seizing private properties to create settlements.”²

At the same time, the organization supported the Palestinian move to gain full UN membership, with the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC) calling for a unified Islamic stance regarding the Palestinian issue in international forums, also raising the level of relations with Palestine to that of a state as well as inaugurating Palestinian embassies.³ This was also affirmed by the PUIC in its second session.⁴

As for the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people and their possessions, the Secretary-General of the OIC said that “the continued Israeli settlement expansion in the holy city constituted an open war on the Palestinians and their legitimate rights,” and added that ongoing illegal Israeli practices aimed to isolate Jerusalem.⁵ Ihsanoğlu called for addressing international public opinion and presenting the true picture of the Palestinian issue, the suffering of the Palestinian people and rectifying the distorted image presented by the Israeli media through an exchange of media material between member states and the Palestinian media.⁶

The OIC resumed its condemnation of the Israeli siege of GS; the Islamic Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ISESCO) condemned the Israeli attack on the French Ship Dignity, which was one of the ships of the Freedom Flotilla 2. ISESCO considered the attack a criminal act that proved Israel’s disrespect for international law and called on the international community to force Israel to end the siege of the Palestinian people and end its disrespect of international law and “terrorist” practices.⁷

Concerning Palestinian reconciliation, the organization welcomed the signing of the national reconciliation agreement by Fatah and Hamas on 27/4/2011 under Egyptian auspices. Ihsanoğlu expressed OIC's willingness to contribute to any step that would enhance Palestinian national unity.⁸

One of the repercussions of the Arab revolutions was the decrease in OIC's financial aid to Palestine, as the value of projects carried out in Jerusalem during 2011 reached around \$6 million out of \$30 million allocated for that year, whereas it had reached around \$12 million in 2010. Bayt Mal Alqods Asharief Agency, the Arab Islamic foundation affiliated with Al-Quds Committee, borne out of the OIC, clarified that this decrease is due to the unstable political atmosphere in the Arab world that made it difficult to launch donation campaigns.⁹

Despite the change made to the OIC name and emblem, it seems that the OIC is still unable to play a role that is commensurate with its weight as the second largest international organization, outside the framework of the UN. This is not limited to the issues related to the Palestine and Jerusalem, but extends to all Islamic, political, economic and social issues. It seems that that the OIC needs more time to have a real influence on the Palestinian issue as well as other Muslim world issues.

Second: Turkey

2011 started with Turkish-Israeli relations still strained by the repercussions of the Israeli aggression against the Freedom Flotilla on 31/5/2010. Despite all efforts exerted to reach a satisfactory settlement between the two sides, Israel continued to reject Turkish demands for an apology for the incidents and lifting the siege of GS, while expressing willingness to compensate the families of the nine Turkish citizens killed in the Israeli attack. However, during the course of 2011, there were more rigorous attempts to overcome the tension between Ankara and Tel Aviv. The fact that the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi—AKP*), led by Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, opted for a passive stance concerning the Syrian regime, and that Turkey refrained from participating in the Freedom Flotilla 2, both enhanced the chances of reaching a solution, and hence increased the frequency of meetings between the Israelis and Turks.

There is no clear indication how far these talks reached, where each party was placing stakes on the concessions made by the other side. However, during 2011, events indicated that both parties avoided any provocative act against the other. On one hand, Erdoğan's election campaign on June 12th, which he won with 50% of the votes, did not criticize any Israeli policies, and on the other hand, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu congratulated Erdoğan by letter for his win, an excerpt reading: "My government will be happy to work with the new Turkish government on finding a resolution to all outstanding issues between our countries, in the hope of re-establishing our cooperation and renewing the spirit of friendship which has characterized the relations between our peoples for many generations."¹⁰

It was noteworthy the decision of the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri ve İnsani Yardım Vakfı—İHH*), headed by Fehmi Bülent Yıldırım, that neither the Turkish Mavi Marmara (Freedom Flotilla)—nor any other Turkish ship—would participate in the Freedom Flotilla 2, whose organizers were preparing for a second campaign to break the siege of GS. The resolution to refrain from participating came after huge government pressure on the Turkish organizations that were planning to participate. Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet Daily News* reported that the "Turkish government has been discouraging the İHH through indirect channels from sailing to Gaza, indicating growing instability in Syria as the fundamental reason behind it, although the United States' pressure on Turkey to stop the flotilla is another important factor."¹¹ Turkish opposition newspaper *Radikal* mentioned that at the end of May a call between the US President Barack Obama and the Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan made the latter prevent the İHH and the Mavi Marmara from participating in the Freedom Flotilla 2. The newspaper added that Washington and Ankara wish to avoid any new tension between Turkey and Israel, and that the Turkish government was now preoccupied with the situation in Syria. Nevertheless, the newspaper analysis was not free of exaggeration since Turkish attempts to pacify matters for various strategic considerations came prior to the eruption of events in Syria. Following the İHH decision not to participate, Erdoğan received a message of double congratulation from Obama: one for his win in the elections, and the second for the decision that Turkey will not participate in the Freedom Flotilla. The newspaper also referred to increased Turkish-Western cooperation, especially after establishing İzmir as the Land Force Command of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).¹²

News spread about communications and meetings between Turkish and Israeli officials aimed at agreeing phrasing for an Israeli apology to Turkey that would end the crisis and start a new phase of bilateral relations. News around these meetings intensified in the second half of August 2011 while Turkish newspaper *Milliyet* unveiled parts of the communications between Turkish and Israeli delegates. The newspaper revealed that the secret talks started nine months earlier and that the protocol they planned to sign took the form of an international agreement, not merely a statement or declaration of apology.¹³

A senior Turkish diplomatic source told *Milliyet*, also confirmed by Foreign Ministry sources, that the secret talks started in Geneva on 5/12/2010 between Turkish Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Feridun Sinirlioglu and Joseph Ciechanover, Israel's representative on the UN panel investigating the Gaza-bound flotilla incident. The talks were resumed in New York where the two sides reached an agreement consisting of two sections relating to "compensation" and "normalization." The document also includes an Israeli apology in exchange for promoting military and economic relations. Moreover, in exchange for compensating the Turkish victims, the families of the victims would have to refrain from heading to international courts to file lawsuits against Israeli soldiers.

The "normalization" section included an apology which Turkey considered the key to solving the problem. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu could not convince his cabinet of the phrasing of the apology and thus the document was shelved.

The newspaper recalled the secret talks between Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu and Israeli Industry, Trade and Labor Minister Binyamin Ben-Eliezer on 30/6/2010, followed by Turkey's dispatch of fire fighting aircrafts to the north of Palestine, both of which created an atmosphere of ease among the Israeli public. The Turkish daily also referred to the resumption of secret talks in winter 2011, after the high level Turkish-American coordination concerning the crises in Libya and Syria when Washington recommended that Israel apologize to Turkey. At that point, Erdoğan responded to US President Barack Obama's request to halt the participation of Mavi Marmara in the Freedom Flotilla 2.

On 6–8/7/2011, talks resumed between Sinirlioglu and Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Moshe Ya'alon in New York, where Netanyahu once again agreed to reach a draft agreement, including an apology, to end the crisis between the two

countries; Ankara and Washington were informed of the phrasing.¹⁴ The phrasing was again opposed in Israel's forum of top eight government ministers that convened and failed to agree to the apology.¹⁵ Netanyahu suggested that Ankara postpones issuing the report of the committee delegated to probe the incident for six months seeing as 78% of the Israeli public opposed the apology.¹⁶

On 1/9/2011, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton met her Turkish counterpart Davutoğlu and suggested requesting from the UN secretary-general a month-long extension for the final presentation of the investigation committee report. In turn, Davutoğlu said Turkey was ready to wait until the end of September, provided the UN secretary-general accepted the request. Although Davutoğlu agreed, on that same day the *New York Times* newspaper leaked the UN report¹⁷ and the ready-to-be-signed protocol became history.

The Palmer Report

The Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident became known as the Palmer Report. The commission was formed by the Secretary-General of the UN Ban Ki-moon on 2/8/2010 and comprised of former Prime Minister of New Zealand Sir Geoffrey Palmer as its chair, former Colombian President Álvaro Uribe as vice-chair, in addition to two members: an Israeli Joseph Ciechanover and a Turkish Former Ambassador to the EU and the UK, Süleyman Özdem Sanberk.

The Palmer Report mentioned that Israel committed "an excessive reaction to the situation" but the report did not demand Tel Aviv apologize as it described the Israeli maritime siege imposed on Gaza as being both "legitimate" and compliant with the "requirements of international law."

However, the report stated that Israel "should offer payment for the benefit of the deceased and injured victims and their families" and stated that "Israel's decision to board the vessels with such substantial force at a great distance from the blockade zone and with no final warning immediately prior to the boarding was excessive and unreasonable." At the same time, it clarified that the flotilla, made up of six ships, "acted recklessly in attempting to breach the naval blockade." The report called Benjamin Netanyahu's government to issue "an appropriate statement of regret" concerning the attack and compensate the families of the nine victims killed, in addition to the injured victims.

Additionally, the report stressed that “Turkey and Israel should resume full diplomatic relations, repairing their relationship in the interests of stability in the Middle East.” It also claimed that “Israel faces a real threat to its security from militant groups in Gaza. The naval blockade was imposed as a legitimate security measure in order to prevent weapons from entering Gaza by sea, and its implementation complied with the requirements of International Law.” At the same time, the report stressed that “the loss of life and injuries resulting from the use of force by Israeli forces during the take-over of the Mavi Marmara was unacceptable.”

The report also noted that Israeli forces “faced significant, organized and violent resistance from a group of passengers” on board the Mavi Marmara, and observed that the “majority of the flotilla participants had no violent intentions, but there exist serious questions about the conduct, true nature and objectives of the flotilla organizers, particularly IHH.” The report also mentioned that Turkey made it clear that “in view of democratic rights and freedoms, Turkey could not ban people from legally leaving the country. ... It seems, however, that Turkish officials passed on the nature of Israel’s concern to the Turkish organizers of the flotilla.” The report clarified that “The Panel enjoyed no coercive powers to compel witnesses to provide evidence... The Panel was required to obtain its information from the two nations primarily involved in its inquiry, Turkey and Israel, and other affected States... It means that the Panel cannot make definitive findings either of fact or law.”¹⁸

The publication of the Palmer Report aroused the anger of the Turkish government who considered its publication prior to an agreement being reached between Turkey and Israel as putting an end to the efforts to reach a resolution. Taken as a whole, the report came contrary to the Turkish viewpoint as it considered the siege of GS complying with the “requirements of international law,” and failed to condemn Israel or demand that it apologizes. The only part that can be viewed as criticism of Israel was the comment on Israeli soldiers’ excessive use of force.

Vehemently angry reactions to the report ensued from opposition movements inside Turkey. On 7/9/2011, Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu, leader of the main opposition party, the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi—CHP*), slammed the UN panel’s report as “one of the biggest debacles” in the history of Turkish foreign policy.¹⁹ However, the Turkish member of the committee Süleyman Özdem

Sanberk accused the committee Chair Geoffrey Palmer and his deputy Álvaro Uribe of being pro-Israeli and of preparing the report in cooperation with Israel disregarding all the arguments put forward by Turkey. Özdem Sanberk considered the report to be of no legal value internationally, as the committee was not an international one but a special panel formed by the UN secretary general, thus the Palmer Report was not listed within official UN documents. Moreover, the report was not signed either by Turkey or Israel, while Özdem Sanberk accused Israel of leaking the content of the report to the *New York Times*, and noted that the leaked copy was not one that had been agreed upon.²⁰

On 2/9/2011, the day after the Palmer Report was published in the *New York Times*,²¹ Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu announced the Turkish Government has decided to take the following measures:²²

1. “Diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel will be downgraded to the Second Secretary level. All personnel starting with the Ambassador above the Second Secretary level will return to their countries on Wednesday [7/9/2011] at the latest.” This practically meant expelling Gabby Levy, the Israeli ambassador in Ankara.
2. “Military agreements between Turkey and Israel have been suspended.”
3. “As a littoral state which has the longest coastline in the Eastern Mediterranean, Turkey will take whatever measures it deems necessary in order to ensure the freedom of navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean,” without giving any clarifications.
4. “Turkey does not recognize the blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel. Turkey will ensure the examination by the International Court of Justice of Israel’s blockade imposed on Gaza as of 31 May 2010. To this end we are starting initiatives in order to mobilize the UN General Assembly.”
5. “We will extend all possible support to Turkish and foreign victims of Israel’s attack in their initiatives to seek their rights before courts.”

Davutoğlu expressed that “neither the Israeli Government who ordered the attack against the Mavi Marmara ship, nor the ones that actually carried out the attack are above or immune from the law” vowing to hold them accountable and saying that “The world is currently changing. Those who claim the lives of civilians or commit crimes against humanity are sooner or later brought before

justice and face trial for their crimes.” He also renewed the accusation to Israel of violating international law by attacking the Freedom Flotilla which he described as “not a simple offense” and stated: “Now, the Government of Israel must face the consequences of its unlawful acts, which it considers above the law and are in full disregard of the conscience of humanity.” He affirmed that “The time has come for it to pay a price for its actions. This price is, above all, deprivation of Turkey’s friendship.” Moreover, Davutoğlu noted that “Israel has wasted all the opportunities it was presented with” to repair relations with Turkey.²³ On his part, Turkish President Abdullah Gül said that the report was “null and void,” and can be viewed as “non-existent,” dubbing Israel’s current stance “a position devoid of strategy.”²⁴

Turkey did not suffice with the measures declared by Davutoğlu, as Prime Minister Erdoğan escalated the situation by declaring that “[t]rade ties, military ties, regarding defence industry ties” were completely suspended with Israel, referring to it as “a spoiled child.”²⁵ Erdoğan declared an additional step, vowing to enhance the Turkish naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean as “we will see Turkish ships more often in the international waters in eastern Mediterranean.”²⁶ Nevertheless, a spokesman for Erdoğan said that “the prime minister had been referring in his remarks only to trade in defense goods, and not to trade in general.”²⁷ Turkish Minister of the Economy Zafer Caglayan also mentioned that “no economic sanctions were taken against Israel and that ‘normal channels and normal works continued.’”²⁸

As for Israel, its officials tried to contain the Turkish measures by saying that they did not constitute boycott, as the military attaché, the consul in Istanbul and other diplomats would remain in Turkey. On the other hand, Israeli officials considered the Palmer Report a victory, and called on Turkey to avoid escalation as it has “a lot to lose from making this kind of extreme decision” according to Amos Gilad, head of the Israeli Defense Ministry Diplomatic-Security Bureau.²⁹ In addition, Israel threatened to support the recognition of the Armenian genocide and support the Kurdistan Workers Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*—PKK) in opposition to the Turkish state.

While Hamas welcomed the Turkish measures, it considered the move a natural reaction to the Israeli crime against the Freedom Flotilla, and to Israel’s refusal to take responsibility for the crime or lift the siege of GS. Hamas also declared its



condemnation of the Palmer Report which the movement described as “unjust” and lacking balance.³⁰

Notes on the Palmer Report and Turkey’s Responsibility

The Palmer Report can be viewed as a failure for Turkish diplomacy and its method of handling the Freedom Flotilla incident:

1. Turkish measures declared by Davutoğlu came exactly 15 months and two days after the date of the attack.
2. Since the moment the Freedom Flotilla incident first took place, Ankara sufficed with recalling the Turkish ambassador from Tel Aviv without taking any effective step to pressure Tel Aviv to meet the demand of apology and compensation for the victims.
3. It is likely that Turkey erred by initially accepting the Palmer inquiry panel. Very early on, it had been clear to the Turks that the New Zealander chair of the commission and his Columbian deputy were pro-Israelis. The delay in forming the commission and the manner in which it was formed by the UN secretary general should have aroused suspicions for Turkey.
4. Israel’s refusal to apologize was another reason for Turkey’s declaration that they would not leave Mediterranean waters to the hegemony of the Israeli naval force. If Israel had apologized, would that have been a reason for Turkey to refrain from making naval moves and let the eastern Mediterranean to be freely controlled by Israel?
5. The most serious details leaked concerning the secret talks between Turkey and Israel may well have been the AKP government’s willingness to sign an agreement of an international nature with Israel in exchange for an Israeli apology. This agreement would have enhanced Turkish-Israeli relations on military and the economic levels. Ankara was ready to enhance its cooperation with Israel.

The Palmer Report, the Missile Shield and Turkish Measures

The publication of the Palmer Report came on the same day as Turkey’s announcement that an early warning radar system will be deployed in Turkey within the NATO missile defense program aimed at countering ballistic missile threats, while Turkish measures against Israel came a few hours after Ankara’s declaration of agreeing to set up the system. This concurrence of announcement

reveals an interconnection between three key steps. On the morning of Thursday 1/9/2011, Turkish Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Selçuk Ünal announced that Turkey had agreed to deploy the missile shield on its land. He noted that Turkey's contribution to the alliance missile defence shield had reached "final stages." At the 2010 NATO summit of heads of state and government in Lisbon, Turkey formally backed NATO plans to build a missile defence system, saying it would also contribute to national defence against the growing threat of ballistic missile proliferation. Ünal also said that the "deployment of this [missile defense] element in Turkey will constitute our contribution to the defense system being developed within NATO's new strategic concept and it will strengthen our national defense system."³¹

The step to station an early warning radar system on Turkish lands spurred heated objections inside Turkey, particularly as it came concurrently with the declaration of Turkish measures against Israel. The two steps were discussed in parallel due to the prevailing conviction in Turkey that the early warning radar system may serve Israel; a belief that stemmed from fears that the US may grant Israel access to information provided by these radars. Some opposition parties drew a link between spreading the early warning radar system, the publication of the Palmer Report, and the Turkish measures against Israel, considering the latter two a cover for the radar system step, even if that meant escalating Turkish-Israeli tensions.

Serious concerns existed around the fact that the early warning radar system in Turkey's Kürecik military base in Malatya province allows Israel (should Israel be able to benefit from it) to operate three minutes ahead of the Israel-based radar network in spotting any Iranian missiles that can be launched against it. Although Turkey said that it received guarantees that the information of the early warning radar system would not be shared with any non-NATO country, more than one American official told *The Wall Street Journal* in mid September 2011 that they planned to fuse data from the Turkish, Israeli and other radar sites to create a comprehensive picture of the missile threat. Turkey, for its part, could also benefit from real-time data from the X-Band the US already operates in Israel.³²

Erdoğan and the GS Visit

Following Turkish-Israeli tensions, Erdoğan made a tour of the Arab Spring countries in North Africa: Egypt, Tunisia and Libya. The tour was preceded by



rumours that Erdoğan may visit the GS as a reaction to the Palmer Report and Israel's refusal to apologize to Turkey. Erdoğan confirmed that he would discuss with Egyptian officials during his visit to Cairo between 12 and 14 September whether to make the visit to GS or not. And although field security preparations were made, the visit was not. Turkish daily *Milleyet* attributed that decision to various reasons, among them:³³

First: Egypt did not want such a visit to take place at a time when relations between Israel and Turkey had reached such a stage of agitation. The newspaper mentioned that Egypt implicitly expressed its desire to Turkey that the visit not be made, particularly because the Egyptian army did not want additional tension with Israel.

Second: Erdoğan preferred to avoid taking a step that Egypt would oppose, for Turkey hoped for good relations with Egypt after the Mubarak burden had been removed.

Third: Although Erdoğan's visit to GS would win him much popularity in the Arab world, Erdoğan is well aware that it will not be welcomed in the Western world.

At that time, Turkey supported the PA in its bid for full UN membership. In a speech before the UNGA on 22/9/2011, the Turkish prime minister stressed that the "most important step... is to meet the legitimate demands of the Palestinian people for being recognized as a state and to allow the representatives of the State of Palestine to take their well-deserved place in this august Assembly, as a member of the UN." He added, "Turkey's support to the recognition of the State of Palestine is unconditional." Erdoğan filed harsh criticism at Israeli policy towards Palestine, and also criticized the UN which is "not able to take any step to stop the human tragedy suffered by the Palestinian people."

Erdoğan stated that "Nothing can be a substitute for peace," and added, "Our demands from Israel are known. Our position will not change unless Israel takes the necessary steps to redress its mistake and meet our demands." And these demands were clear: an apology, compensation to the families of the flotilla victims and lifting the siege of GS. Erdoğan stressed that the Turks "have no problem with the Israeli people. The problem emanates from the aggressive policies of the Israeli government."³⁴

In the interview with Fareed Zakaria of the Cable News Network (CNN), Erdoğan went on to accuse Israel of using the Holocaust for political and military gain. “Israelis like to remind us of the genocide that took place in history. They take advantage of that genocide, and always act as if they are the victims all the time,” Erdoğan said. As a reaction, Netanyahu described Erdoğan’s words as “false, outrageous and scandalous,”³⁵ while Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman accused Erdoğan’s government of “supporting and nurturing terror.”³⁶

Nonetheless, Israel continued to court Turkish friendship without reaching the threshold of apology. Upon the occurrence of a violent earthquake in Van region of eastern Turkey, Israel offered help, and the Turkish government, after hesitation, agreed “for humanitarian reasons” as Israel sent a number of prefabricated homes to shelter the victims of the earthquake.³⁷

This Israeli initiative, however, did not improve the continuing negative image of Israel in Turkish public opinion. A survey carried out by Turkish Kadir Has University in 2010 and published on 11/1/2011 asked which countries pose a threat to Turkey; 67.8% said the US and 51% said Israel.³⁸

Economic Relations

Economic relations between Turkey and Israel were not affected by the “tough” measures declared by Ankara against Tel Aviv following the Palmer Report and Tel Aviv’s refusal to apologize. Professor of International Relations and Political Science Soli Özel at Kadir Has University sees that, contrary to Erdoğan’s harsh discourse, the pragmatic approach to relations is still prevalent.³⁹ Turkish exports to Israel focused on textile products and marble while Turkey imports chemicals, agricultural products, and advanced technology from Israel. Official economic statistics issued by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) show growth in the volume of trade between Turkey and Israel. Despite the political tension witnessed in relations between Turkey and Israel, especially after September 2011, the volume of trade between the two countries increased in 2011 in comparison to 2010 by 29.3%. The trade volume in 2011 reached a total of \$4,449 million while in 2010 it reached a total of \$3,439.7 million. Turkish exports to Israel reached \$2,391.7 million in 2011 against \$2,080.1 million in 2010. Turkish imports from Israel reached \$2,057.3 million in 2011 in comparison to \$1,359.6 million in 2010.⁴⁰



Official Israeli data, despite showing smaller figures than Turkish statistics for the volume of trade between the two countries, confirm the ascending direction witnessed in trade exchange in 2011. According to these stats, Turkish exports to Israel reached \$2,171.1 million while its imports from Israel were valued at \$1,850.7 million, making the trade volume between the two countries \$4,021.8 million, with a 29.3% increase, compared to 2010.⁴¹

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 areas, revealing a pragmatic attitude on both sides.

Table 1/4: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2010–2011 (\$ million)⁴²

Year	Turkish exports to Israel		Turkish imports from Israel		Volume of trade	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2010	2,080.1	1,800.1	1,359.6	1,310.7	3,439.7	3,110.8
2011	2,391.7	2,171.1	2,057.3	1,850.7	4,449	4,021.8

Commercial relations were not affected either by the sanctions declared by the Turkish government against Israel, as the volume of trade rose in the four months that followed these sanctions, to December 2011 by 26% in comparison to the same period in 2010, recording \$1,493.8 million in the last third of 2011 against \$1,185.6 million in the last third of 2010.

The Future of Turkish-Israeli Relations

Turkish-Israeli relations in 2011 stood on the tip of two contradictory possibilities. Had Israel made the apology, relations would have improved in the various areas of cooperation. On the other hand, if Israel refused to apologize, relations may have gone to the verge of boycott in an atmosphere imbued with threats of war.

In view of these contradictory possibilities, Turkish-Israeli relations have entered into a complicated area, where bilateral, regional, and international factors intertwine. Hence, we find ourselves considering the following factors:

1. Turkey did not stop using the international law as their reference point for their stance on Israel and the Palestinian issue.

2. The AKP government can no longer backtrack on the demands of apology and compensations. On one hand it will affect the party's image, especially its leader Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, on a Turkish street that harbours great animosity towards Israel, and on the other hand Turkey is a major regional country with increasing leverage and power in the region.

3. The Palestinian issue continued to be a priority in Ankara's Middle East policies, being Turkey's gate to the Arab and Islamic region.

4. The Turkish role in 2011 was different from 2010 and the outbreak of Arab revolutions played a major role in this regard.

The Islamic aspect of the Arab revolutions and the emerging power of political Islam in the "Arab Spring" countries played a part in increasing Turkish power, partly through the AKP's Islamic roots. At the same time, the fact that these revolutions opened possibilities for some Arab countries, particularly Egypt, to play a more effective role. Turkey may find its expected position of strength and leadership to be threatened by of the reclaiming of roles previously played by historically strong states that had been weakened under the temporary conditions of authoritarian rule.

We see this clearly in the case of Egypt, as it started to reclaim aspects of its regional role, what might directly weaken the Turkish role in sensitive regional and Palestinian issues. Egypt has played an active part in achieving Palestinian reconciliation while Turkey, through its Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu, sufficed with playing a secondary role. The same applies to the prisoner exchange deal between Hamas and Israel, in which Egypt played a prominent role in completing, whereas the Turkish role was limited to receiving 10 detainees. But it must be noted that the harmony between the Turkish and Egyptian positions towards Israel may encourage Turkey to take more severe steps towards confronting Israeli policies.

In this framework, Turkish-Palestinian relations did not witness any major events, whether in exchanging visits or in implementing Turkish projects in the GS or the WB. However, the visit by Prime Minister Isma'il Haniyyah to Turkey on 3/1/2012 warmed the previously frozen relations. Haniyyah met with Turkish officials and leaders of all parties without exception including the leader of the

Peace and Democracy Party (*Barış ve Demokrasi Partisi—BDP*). Haniyyah's visits also included several Arab countries that Syria and Iran were not allied to. What was notable was the comment of Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu on Haniyyah's visit, in which he said that it is a proof that Palestine's route passes through Turkey.⁴³

Haniyyah's next tour, however, from 30/1–16/2/2012 included Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, UAE, and Egypt, giving the impression that Hamas wanted to promote the image of being an independent movement. At the same time, the fact that Syria was not included in Haniyyah's itinerary communicated the message that Hamas did not approve of the Syrian regime's policies towards its people.

It was also noteworthy that 20 days after the visit, news appeared of Ankara's plan to open an office for Hamas. Turkish President Abdullah Gül left the door open to the possibility of a Hamas office opening up in his country. He said, "Our contact [with Hamas] has been constant, but we will have to wait and see what has come out of the frequent visits."⁴⁴

5. As for the future of Turkish-Israeli relations, this is related to a group of interlinked and complicated factors. In the last few years, Turkey adopted policies that were pro-Palestinian, while keeping reasonable relations with Israel, the US and the West in general. Turkish President Abdullah Gül mentioned that Turkish-US relations are "the healthiest relations that we ever had with the US."⁴⁵ It has been obvious, though, that in the last two years, the Turkish anti-Israel political discourse has increased. Davutoğlu was clear when he spoke of the uprisings against authoritarian regimes in Middle Eastern and North African countries in mid-December 2011 that "Turkey had never remained silent in the face of 'oppression.' It is our policies which made Israel kneel down in the region in front of us. We have always sided with people who demand democracy, not with authoritarian and oppressive regimes," he said.⁴⁶

Although the regional ambitions of Turkey and Israel seem different it is strategically difficult for Turkey to be part of the structure of western policies in the region while taking a hostile approach towards Israel. Thus, it is not expected under the present circumstances that Turkish-Israeli relations will come to a complete halt. Efforts will continue to reach normalization which may witness some tensions related to internal calculations in both countries. These relations, however, are not likely to freeze unless Turkey changes its axis and turns completely towards the

east. Such a change seems improbable in view of the given conditions and current policies of the AKP as well as all other Turkish opposition parties.

Some believe that Turkey's policies—in harmony during 2011 with Washington's policies on most issues—contain alarming characteristics that may affect Turkey's position on the Palestinian issue, especially regarding resistance movements, the most prominent of them being Hamas. There is a contradiction between Turkey's stances and those of the Iran-Syria-Iraq-Lebanon axis on Syria and other issues, and proximity between the governing Turkish AKP and the Islamic parties that rose to power in Tunisia, Morocco and Egypt, and probably in Lebanon and Yemen. There is also complete coordination between Ankara and Washington. Therefore, some fear that Turkey, together with other Arab countries possessing political, financial and security leverage, may play a pressurising role with Hamas to move it away from the "resistance" axis on the one hand and on the other, to encourage it accept peace with Israel and abandon resistance. This may drive the Palestinian issue into a new stage in which Hamas, if it gives up its relations with the resistance axis, may find itself in a position where it is unable to withstand Arab and Turkish pressures forever.

Others believe that the reformulation of the Arab region and the dismantling of former axes representing "moderateness" and "resistance" will serve policies supporting resistance and not vice versa. According to this analysis, the change of American-allied and anti-Hamas regimes to regimes that adopt the Islamic ideology of rejecting the peace settlement with Israel, refusing to give up Palestine, and embracing the resistance stream, would add new and considerable credit to resistance forces, increase Israel's isolation and weaken American policies in the region. This in turn may force Turkish policies to adopt more powerful steps against Israel and in support of resistance movements.

Third: Iran

The Arab revolutions imposed themselves on the top of the agenda of regional and international powers as well as on the plans, programs and projects of the different parties and political movements in the Arab region. The world became preoccupied with these revolutions and the consequential strategic changes, particularly after the fall of the regimes in Tunisia and Egypt and the Islamists'



(The Renaissance Party, MB Movement and the Salafis) reaping of the majority of parliamentary seats in both countries. This has decreased the attention given to the Palestinian issue, although it reclaimed an advanced position in the second half of 2011 through the following three events:

1. Reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah under direct Egyptian auspices after the fall of Mubarak.
2. Hamas releasing Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit.
3. The PA's bid for full UN membership.

It was natural that the revolutions took center stage in popular, official, international and regional attention. The toppling of the regimes were not merely internal issues in Tunisia or in Egypt but were events that would have repercussions on the whole future of the region and its main issues, including the Palestinian issue. Thus, Palestine was one of the questions posed to the revolutionaries and Islamists who after the elections obtained positions of decision-making and influence in their countries. Questions also rose about the stances of different countries, movements, and regional and international bodies on the Arab revolutions and their view of the relationship between these revolutions and Palestine. Among those entities were Turkey, Iran, the Arab League, the OIC and of course Israel, a state that naturally does not welcome any change in the region that would make Palestine a priority in any foreign policy, or threaten the pillars of stability provided under the peace agreements with Israel, especially the Camp David Accords with Egypt.

Iran supported the Arab revolutions, as most of the world's countries did. It had an more characteristic stance in comparison to other Arab and Islamic countries through:

- Early stress on the Islamic nature of these revolutions, considering them an “Islamic awakening.”
- Linking the revolutions to threats that Israel would face in the future.

The Iranian Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution (*Murshid*) Ali Khamenei hailed the uprising of the Egyptian people against the regime of Husni Mubarak, describing it as the “explosion of sacred anger.” Khamenei, who led the praying multitude on the Friday prayer in Tehran said: “Today more than the fleeing Tunisian and Egyptian officials, Israelis and the Zionist enemies are the [ones] most worried about these events as they know if Egypt stops being

their ally and take its rightful place, it would be a great event in the region.” He added that no other country went through as many wars as Egypt had against the “Zionist entity,” although they were not crowned by victory. Moreover, he said that “For 30 years this country [Egypt] has been in the hands of someone who is not seeking freedom and is the enemy of those seeking freedom,” and added, “Not only he is not anti-Zionist, but he is the companion, colleague, confidant and servant of Zionists.”

He explained that Egypt was the flag bearer in the face of “Zionist expansion.” Yet under Mubarak, it imposed a siege on Palestinians in GS and if it had not been for Mubarak’s subordination to the Zionists, it would not have been possible to impose the siege on the GS. Khamenei said that current conditions would favour Arab and Muslim nations and could remove tens of years of tyranny and injustice in these countries.⁴⁷

The following day Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denounced the planned passage of two Iranian warships through the Suez Canal; the okay for the passage came only a week after the fall of Egyptian President Husni Mubarak. Khamenei told Iranian officials that “The fake Zionist government is a cancerous tumor and the cause of different diseases and political, economic calamity in the region.”⁴⁸

In the annual al-Quds Day rallies, which are organized by the Iranian government in the last of week of Ramadan, and on the basis that there is a link between Egypt’s revolution and the supposed Israeli degeneration, participants demanded the Arab countries that had signed peace agreements with Israel, especially Egypt, annul them. A statement released at the end of the rallies called on the Muslim nations Egypt, Tunisia and Libya to be alert and cautious and to watch out for the conspiracies of neo-colonialists and international arrogance, and not to provide them with a justification for interference. The statement continued to say that the will and revolutionary demands of these nations must decide the destiny of their countries. The statement declared its unconditional support of the Islamic resistance and the Palestinian *Intifadah*, and stressed that the only solution for the Palestinian issue was the removal of the “Zionist entity,” the departure of “Zionists” from the occupied territories, the return of Palestinian refugees to their lands and the homes of their parents and grandparents, in addition to holding comprehensive, free elections to decide the destiny of Palestine.⁴⁹



The reasons for the previously cold relations between Iran and the former Egyptian regime have faded somewhat. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad stressed the pivotal role of Egypt after the revolution, and emphasized “the importance of establishing close ties with Egypt and reiterated that if unity between Tehran and Cairo takes effect, no space would be left for Israel and hegemonic powers in the region.”⁵⁰

Meanwhile, and in the midst of international and regional preoccupation with the Arab revolutions and resulting changes, Israel continued its aggressions on GS and continued the building of settlements. In turn, Iran condemned the Israeli aggression on GS and the continuation of building settlements, while its Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast said that “Iran strongly condemns the criminal Zionist attacks against Gaza.” He added, “The Zionist regime is exploiting the climate of war in the region to achieve its nefarious objectives and spill the blood of Gaza’s innocent people.”⁵¹

Referring to Israel’s continued building of settlements, Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Naqdi, head of the Mobilization of the Oppressed organization (*Basij-e Mostaz’afin*), said that Palestinians should not worry. He added that Jerusalem would be freed and the flag that went to GS (with the Asia convoy to break the GS siege) will be raised high beside the *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁵²

Iranian leaders reiterated their view that they see a link between Arab revolutions and American and Israeli retreat. President Mahmud Ahmadinejad said that the Middle East will soon be free of the US and Israel. Ahmadinejad added, “We will soon see a new Middle East materializing without America and the Zionist regime and there will be no room for world arrogance (the West) in it.” He said that Egyptians needed to be vigilant of the US, and added, “The Iranian nation is your friend and it is your right to freely choose your path. The Iranian nation backs this right of yours.”

Ahmadinejad hit out at the US, calling it an “accomplice to the oppression of the Zionist regime.” He also said, “If you want people to trust you, first of all do not interfere in affairs of the region, including in Tunisia and Egypt. Let them be by themselves.”⁵³

Israel did not hide its concerns and fears regarding Iran’s role after the Egyptian revolution and in areas where the regional balance of power is turning against it, especially after two Iranian warships passed through the Suez Canal following the

fall of the Egyptian regime. The Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported that Iran's Deputy Army Commander Brigadier General Abdul-Rahim Mousavi said, "The Zionist regime (Israel) was shocked by the presence of Iran's naval ships in the Suez Canal" and added that "The global arrogance should know that Iran's Army is fully ready to defend the ideals of the Islamic Republic."⁵⁴

Netanyahu responded by warning that "Iran tries to exploit the situation that has been created in order to expand its influence." He also added that "Israel views this Iranian move with utmost gravity and this step, like other steps and developments, underscores what I have reiterated in recent years—Israel's security needs will grow and the defence budget must grow accordingly." As for the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, he considered the Iranian move as a "provocation that proves that the self-confidence and impudence of the Iranians is growing from day to day."⁵⁵ In *Haaretz* newspaper, Aluf Benn focused on the implications of the Iranian move: "There is growing concern in Israel that Egypt will become a hostile front," he wrote. He believed that granting the Iranian navy permission to pass symbolized "the change to the regional balance of power following the fall of President Hosni Mubarak," and added that "Egypt is signalling that it is no longer committed to its strategic alliance with Israel against Iran, and that Cairo is now willing to do business with Tehran. This is precisely what Turkey has done in recent years under Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan."⁵⁶

The Iranian president stressed his stance towards Israel on different occasions. In a meeting with participants of the Tehran International Conference on Global Alliance against Terrorism for Just Peace, he said, "The reason for our insistence that the Zionist regime should be wiped out and vanished is that the Zionist regime is the main base for imposing oppression and harbors the main terrorists of the world."⁵⁷

Following the Arab revolutions, Iran faced accusations of resuming its nuclear program for non-peaceful purposes. These accusations were accompanied by Israeli threats of targeting Iranian nuclear facilities, and waging war against Iran without even consulting the US. Many considered opting for war against Tehran by the Israelis and even the Americans, an escape from the inability to find solutions to the regional crises, which had become more complicated since the outbreak of the Arab Spring revolutions. The Israelis and Americans also magnified the Iranian danger to persuade Russia and China to impose new sanctions, instead of the war option that was fast becoming impossible, or near impossible.⁵⁸



Iran responded strongly to Israeli threats and the American “all-options-are-open” policy against Iran. The Senior Advisor to the Supreme Leader on Military Affairs General Yahya Rahim Safavi said that any military action taken against Iran would result in Iran determining the location and characteristics of the ensuing war.⁵⁹

Haaretz newspaper reported a senior Israeli official who said that Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Barak were trying to muster a majority in the cabinet in favor of military action against Iran. Responding to the threats, Safavi said that “Iran’s response to any war monger would be ‘crushing and ruthless. Any military threat against Iran would be met with an indescribable military action by Iran’s military.’”⁶⁰

A few weeks after the toppling of President Mubarak, when reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas was made in Egypt, Iran, like many Arab and Islamic countries, voiced support for the reconciliation and the Egyptian role in it. However, many Iranian officials considered the reconciliation to be insufficient and not a goal in itself, rather a step towards realizing the historic goals of the Palestinian people. They also considered it a preliminary step towards opening the Rafah crossing.

Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi described the reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas “a ‘positive step’ in line with materialization of historic ends of the oppressed Palestinians.” Salehi said that the “unity of Palestinian forces and their resistance against Zionist occupiers are two key and necessary factors for vindication of Palestinians’ rights.” Salehi called the accord the first achievement of the great Egyptian in Palestine since the uprising. He stated his hope that the agreement would lead to reopening of Rafah crossing to pave the way for Palestinians’ access to basic necessities.⁶¹

Iranian Parliamentary Speaker Ali Larijani, and Chairman of the Committee for Foreign Policy and National Security of the Islamic Consultative Assembly of Iran Alaeddin Boroujerdi also declared Iran’s support of the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah. Boroujerdi saw that Iran “has long voiced support for the establishment of unity among all Palestinian factions. This development is a leap forward towards the decline of the Zionist regime [of Israel].”⁶²

Also after the revolution, and in the absence of a president, Egypt played a role in completing the prisoner swap deal between the detained Israeli Corporal

Gilad Shalit and the Palestinian prisoners. Iran supported the exchange process and the Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast congratulated the Palestinian people on the release of Palestinian prisoners and said that Iran hoped one day to see “the return of the land of Palestine to its true owners.”⁶³ In a phone call between Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah and Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad to update him on the details of the exchange operation, Ahmadinejad said that “The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been by the side of the oppressed Palestinian nation and the resistance movement and would always support the ideals of that noble and oppressed people” adding that “Beyond doubt this prisoner exchange was a great victory for the great Palestinian nation and for all Muslims and freedom and justice seekers of the world and the independent nations, who are happy side by side with the oppressed Palestinian people.” Haniyyah in turn said that “Iran has always been a true supporter of the Palestinian people and their ideals, and is the main partner in entire victories of the Palestinian nation.”⁶⁴

However, the third Palestinian event in 2011, namely seeking full UN membership for a Palestinian state, was not welcomed by Iran, a position contrary to the stances of all Arab and Islamic countries and in contrast to Iran’s strong support for inter-Palestinian reconciliation and the prisoners swap deal. Iran justified its opposition by stating that it feared that this would be a prelude to ending the right of return and accepting the division of Palestine. For that reason, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, in a speech at the opening ceremony of the 5th International Conference On Palestinian Intifada held in Tehran on 1/10/2011, reaffirmed that:⁶⁵

- “Our demand is the liberation of Palestine, not the liberation of a part of Palestine. Any plan to divide Palestine is completely unacceptable” and that “Palestine is the land that extends ‘from the river to the sea.’”
- “Islam, jihad and martyrdom were the factors that could have encouraged an entire nation to step into the arena of resistance and turned it into an invincible force.”
- “The two-state idea which has been presented in the self-righteous clothing of ‘recognizing the Palestinian government as a member of the United Nations’ would mean trampling on the rights of the Palestinian nation, ignoring the historical right of the displaced Palestinians and even jeopardizing the right of the Palestinians settled in ‘1948 lands.’”



- Iran doesn't want to throw "Jewish immigrants into the sea," but the "Palestinian nation has the right to determine its own destiny and to elect its own government. All the original people of Palestine—including Muslims, Christians and Jews and not foreign immigrants—should take part in a general and orderly referendum and determine the future government of Palestine whether they live inside Palestine or in camps or in any other place."
- The red line of Israel's security "will be crossed by Muslim nations that have risen up" ... and the Iranian missiles "will fulfill their duty whenever the enemy poses a threat."

Khamenei also repeated the above stances on the Occasion of Imam Ayatollah Khomeini's 22nd Demise Anniversary, where he said, "The solution is to hold a referendum among the people of Palestine. Any government that receives the majority of the votes in the referendum will rule the entire Palestinian lands. Then that government will decide what to do with the Zionists who immigrated to Palestine."⁶⁶

As for President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, he called on the international community to recognize Palestinians' right to sovereignty. At the closing ceremony of the 5th International Conference On Palestinian Intifada, on 2/10/2011, Ahmadinejad said "If we recognize the right of (Palestinian) sovereignty (over the entire homeland) the issue of two state or multi-state is revoked." Ahmadinejad suggested that "the solution to this issue, according to what the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution said, is that Palestinians return to their homes and occupiers return to their own lands." He said that "Some poor people were brought to Palestine on the promise of security and jobs while they turned the Palestinian people into refugees... So now Palestinians should go home and those brought to Palestine should go to theirs."⁶⁷ On 3/10/2011, President Ahmadinejad stressed during his reception of the Speaker of Kuwait's National Assembly Mohammad Jassim al-Kharafi that the freedom of Palestine is an interaction axis between all Muslim countries, and added that all countries in the region must unite to liberate Palestine and holy Jerusalem, and that if the West is able to implant the Zionists once again, the issue will become more difficult.⁶⁸

Despite solid relations between Hamas and the Iranian leadership, the demand of UN membership was an issue of difference between the two sides. While the Iranian leadership confirmed their rejection of this step for fear of ending the right

of return or causing division, Khalid Mish'al, head of the Hamas Political Bureau said, "We cannot deny that this action has had symbolic and moral achievements." At the same time, Mish'al said, "the action should not be considered in isolation. He demanded to 'first liberate Palestinian lands and then ask the United Nations Security Council for U.N. membership.'"⁶⁹

Conclusion

During 2011, Iran did not change the essence of its previous policies and stances from the Palestinian issue, focusing on affirming resistance as a choice, supporting this choice, and rejecting the peace settlement and process with the Israelis. Iran interacted with the Arab revolution, the key strategic event in 2011, through its vision of the Palestinian issue. In this view, the Egyptian revolution was to Iran an unprecedented change in the future of Israel. And it seems that Iran was right in this regard, as Israeli leaders considered the loss of Mubarak a loss of a "strategic treasure," to move after the revolution to what they called "strategic distress." Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned that "Muslim nations in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Yemen or other countries need vigilance today. They should not allow enemies [to] confiscate the victories they've achieved." He also said, "If the imperialist and hegemonic powers and Zionism, including the U.S. tyrannical and despotic regime, manage to use the ongoing conditions in their own favor, the world of Islam will definitely face big problems for tens of years."⁷⁰

Western meddling, or attempts to dominate the revolutions are not exaggerated Iranian concerns, since there are certain economic and social conditions, in addition to poverty and unemployment that may aid such meddling and domination. There are also fears concerning the new experience of rule that the Islamists will face after the revolution, especially that their leaders stressed that internal problems will be a priority in the near future, and avoided provoking the Americans and Western powers or setting them in a position of animosity. Most of all, they linked the annulling of the Camp David Accords for example, to handing the issue to constitutional institutions and the decision of the Egyptian people.

Despite the previously mentioned valid fears of Western pressures to avoid any escalation against Israel and against American interests, we can still summarize the following:



- Israel was, and will remain, unaccepted by Arab and Islamic nations. These nations will oppose rulers that deal with Israel, and it is not expected that Israel will be accepted or kindly dealt with by new regimes.
- The Palestinian resistance (especially Hamas) is expected to gradually enjoy more political and media freedom in several Arab arenas. This means that the support for resistance, even at government level, will not be limited to Iran but will spread to Arab countries as well.
- The occupation will continue to clash with the Palestinian people on a daily basis. The settlements will remain, and settlement building, Judaization of Jerusalem and the excavations under *al-Aqsa* Mosque will continue, consequently Palestine will remain a priority even if the new Arab regimes did not wish it to be. These conditions will also dictate the need for all kinds of support of the Arab and Islamic countries, especially Turkey and Iran.
- Palestinian and regional politics will be full of challenges, first and foremost among them inter-Palestinian reconciliation. It will face this question: will reconciliation be able to reach consensus over a unified national program that will improve the conditions of resistance or improve the terms of negotiations? There is also the challenge of resuming the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that became worthless, making no progress in recent years.
- Despite the very real possibility of achieving no progress through negotiations with Israel, some still wish to drag the Arab revolutions, and with them the Palestinian resistance, in to supporting the peace process by participating in it. Others want the revolutions to be similar to Iran, which is considered a “threat to Israel.” This means that we will witness in the near future vigorous jostling between these two trends while exerting pressure on resistance movements (especially Hamas). However, whatever the nature of this gravitation between Iran that supports the resistance choice, and Turkey or Arab countries that encourage negotiation and peace settlement, and whatever the factors in play, the priorities of the Palestinian leadership and what occurs inside Palestine will determine which trend prevails. The priorities of the Palestinian leadership, especially those of the resistance, will increase the boycott of Israel, and oppose any form of normalization with it, while what occurs inside Palestine itself may be an *Intifadah*, reconciliation, resistance or even Israeli assaults. It is important to note, however, that the religious, ideological dimensions of the Palestinian

Islamic movements, especially Hamas and the PIJ make giving up any part of Palestine a red line, and mean that the current peace settlement projects are devoid of any meaning to these factions.

Fourth: Malaysia

During 2011, Malaysia continued to support the rights of the Palestinian people, in accordance with international law; refusing the Israeli siege of the GS and backing the PA in its bid for full UN membership. It also continued to refuse to have diplomatic relations with Israel in spite of some statements from some opposition figures.

The Palestinian issue enjoys a high status in popular and official circles in Malaysia. Many public and philanthropic organizations succeeded in making wide popular sectors interested in the issue, especially after some Malaysians participated in the Freedom Flotilla to break the siege of GS. Malaysian political powers have become increasingly aware of the status of Palestine in the Malaysian national conscience, and consequently they used it in internal politics.

Malaysian Foreign Minister Anifah Aman attacked opposition leader Anwar Ibrahim for his statements to *The Wall Street Journal* where he said, "I support all efforts to protect the security of the state of Israel."⁷¹ Aman called Ibrahim's statement "pathetic, an embarrassment and should be condemned."⁷² In return, the opposition unveiled a letter that was sent by former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad to the then Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak, a move considered an attempt to cover the statements attributed to Anwar Ibrahim. Prime Minister Mohd Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak clarified that the Foreign Ministry had examined the letter and found that it could be made public. He said, "This will enable the people to understand the reason why Tun Dr Mahathir wrote the letter was to champion the Palestinian struggle to establish a sovereign nation."⁷³

In the context of Malaysian political support for PA's bid to gain full UN membership, the Malaysian foreign minister promised his Egyptian counterpart on 29/5/2011 that he would broker the issue with a number of member states in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to recognize the Palestinian state. The Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the UN, Hussein Haniff, stated



that “Malaysia is of the opinion that in order to achieve a fair and peaceful solution to the conflict, the onus to compromise and make way for negotiations does not fall on Palestine alone.” He said, “Israel’s insistence that Palestine should assume direct negotiations without any preconditions does not reflect Israel’s willingness to be fair and to be more accommodating to its future neighbour.” Haniff added that despite the fact that his delegation speaks with a sense of pessimism, “we remain resolute in our commitment towards finding a lasting two state solution based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine, where both sides could live side-by-side in peace and taking into account security concerns of both sides.”⁷⁴

In addition to this, many activities and events were held in support of Palestine. On the annual al-Quds Day, on 26/8/2011, Muslims marched in the streets of Kuala Lumpur after the Friday prayer. Many key political and religious figures participated including former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, who stressed the necessity of Muslims preparing themselves to face Israel.⁷⁵

Generally speaking, many organizations are active in Malaysia, supporting charity dedicated to Palestine, for example Aqsa Syarif, Aman Palestin, Viva Palestina, and HALUAN Palestin, in addition to the Palestinian Cultural Organization Malaysia that was established at the beginning of 2011. These organizations worked on a range of activities supporting Palestine.

Fifth: Indonesia

Indonesia is one of the countries characterized by broad popular interaction with the Palestinian issue especially since *al-Aqsa Intifadah*. The Prosperous Justice Party (*Partai Keadilan Sejahtera—PKS*), participating in the government with four ministers, had an important role in this field. At the beginning of 2011, different Indonesian bodies participated in the Asia 1 convoy, in which eight volunteers carried \$1 million worth of aid. Israeli forces prevented the convoy from entering GS by sea, thus it headed to al-Arish port.⁷⁶ Head of the Indonesian delegation accompanying the convoy, Irman Abdur-Rahman announced that a voluntary organization Mer-C is planning to build a 100-bed trauma centre in Beit Lahia in the northern GS, and added that they are making arrangements for a planned visit to GS by the Indonesian president.⁷⁷

After signing a memorandum of understanding between the Islamic Development Bank and the Indonesian Health Minister, Indonesia donated \$3 million for building a cardiac surgery and cardiac catheterization center in GS, on 10/2/2011.⁷⁸

On the anniversary of *al-Nakbah*, the Indonesian government prevented the Jewish community from celebrating “Israel’s independence day.” Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa stated that his country will prohibit any such celebration simply because “Indonesia does not officially recognize the state of Israel.” He added, “Our policy on this has been crystal clear—that we will recognize the existence of [the state of] Israel only if it acknowledges [the state of] Palestine.”⁷⁹

On 27/5/2011, the ministers of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) held a conference in the Indonesian island of Bali. For the first time, the NAM Ministerial Conference dedicated a special section on Palestine and political prisoners, headed by Indonesian Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa, while the Palestinian Minister of Prisoners ‘Issa Qaraqi’ was among the participants.⁸⁰

On 29/6/2011, a conference was held in Jakarta to launch a new Asian movement for supporting the Palestinian issue, representing members of parliament and NGOs representatives from Asian and Pacific countries to defend Palestinian rights and sanctuaries. The movement was named “Asia and Pacific Societies for Supporting Palestine.” Joined by Usamah Hamdan, head of the Hamas International Relations Department, the conference discussed a number of issues related to supporting the Palestinian people on all political, humanitarian and legal levels, in addition to many projects to be implemented in Jerusalem, WB, and GS. It denounced Israeli practices against Jerusalem, the settlement projects, and Judaization schemes in addition of confiscating the rights of its citizens.⁸¹

Sixth: Trade

Turkey still occupies the highest rank in the Muslim world when it comes to the volume of trade with Israel, as it reached a total of \$4,021.8 million in 2011 while in 2010 the total was \$3,110.8 million, thus recording a 29% increase. Turkish-Israeli economic relations were tackled with some detail in the earlier section on Turkey.



As for Malaysia, in 2011 it recorded relative stability in its trade with Israel. Israeli exports to Malaysia decreased to \$716.4 million, a 10% decrease compared to 2010, while Israeli imports from Malaysia reached \$93.6 million, a 10% increase compared to 2010.

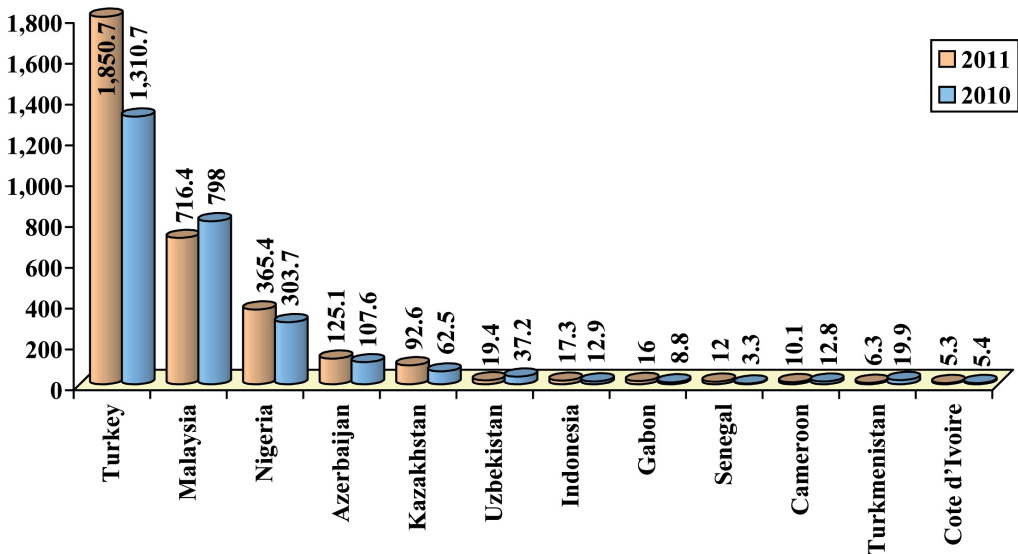
Haaretz newspaper published a report on Israeli trade with Muslim countries mentioning that years ago Israel tried establishing trade with Malaysia and Indonesia, but the disclosure of the issue led to limiting the fields of trade exchange. The report stated that “trade continues covertly with Indonesia at the lowest possible profile and without diplomatic relations. Singapore serves as a base for businessmen trying to penetrate there.” The Israelis can only get in by invitation from a local Indonesian source sponsoring the visit. If none is available, the Israeli Embassy in Singapore assists by providing a local consultant who can serve as a sponsor in a pinch. Occasionally, however, Indonesian authorities turn down requests, depending on the country’s political mood. The report mentioned that “Israel also uses businessmen and trade networks for political and commercial purposes.” It monitors the “activities of businessmen from Arab countries and enlists the help of Israeli businessmen in carrying out diplomatic missions and serving as intermediaries in clandestine intrigues.” Foreign publications claimed the Ofer family’s ships had for years assisted Israeli agents in infiltrating Iran, after it was revealed that ships belonging to the Ofer Group docked in Iran. Sources close to the Ofer family also hinted that the Ofer Group “had long played a part in the country’s security.”⁸²

Also worth mentioning is the remarkable increase in the value of Israeli exports to Nigeria, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan during 2011, despite the absence of any official relations between Israel and these Muslim countries. The value of Israeli exports to Nigeria reached \$365.4 million, a 20% increase. Israeli exports to Azerbaijan also increased by 16%, while Israeli exports to Kazakhstan soared by 42% in comparison to 2010. It is important to note here that despite the increase in trade value, it did not amount to the value it had reached in 2008 when Israeli exports to Kazakhstan reached \$159 million. Apparently, Israeli interest is increasing in these countries, where it is achieving relative penetration and success in countries that are supposed to be in a state of political and economic boycott with Israel. This reflects the stance of many Muslim countries towards the Palestinian issue. As for the rest of Muslim countries, they recorded a relative stability in their volume of trade (see table 2/4).

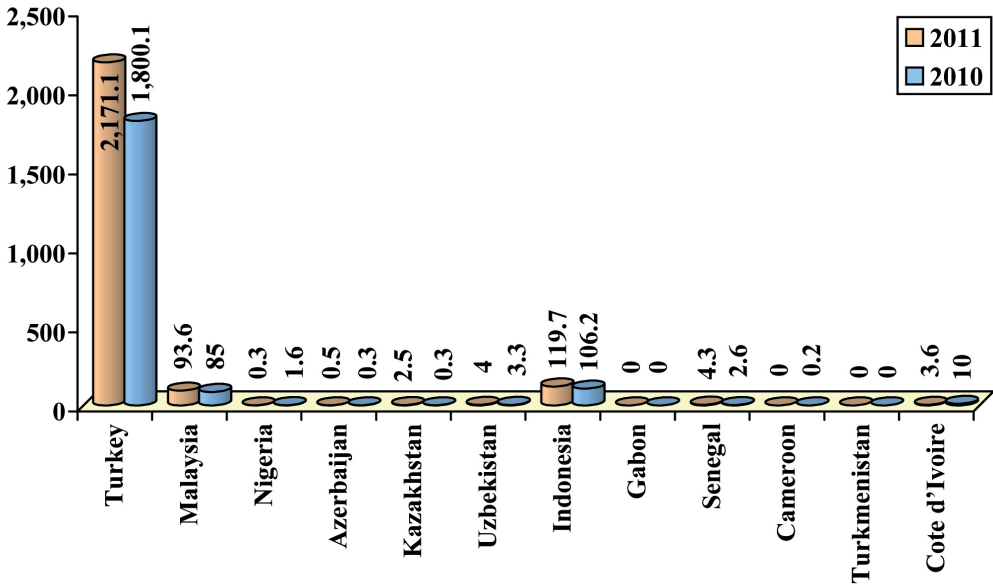
Table 2/4: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2008–2011 (\$ million)⁸³

Country	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2011	2010	2009	2008	2011	2010	2009	2008
Turkey	1,850.7	1,310.7	1,086	1,609.9	2,171.1	1,800.1	1,387.7	1,825.3
Malaysia	716.4	798	116.8	30.2	93.6	85	68.5	100.6
Nigeria	365.4	303.7	210.3	304.3	0.3	1.6	2.4	1.4
Azerbaijan	125.1	107.6	264.3	129.4	0.5	0.3	0.3	0.3
Kazakhstan	92.6	62.5	57	158.6	2.5	0.3	0.9	3.4
Uzbekistan	19.4	37.2	20.7	23.3	4	3.3	0.4	2.7
Indonesia	17.3	12.9	12.5	15.8	119.7	106.2	90.7	293.4
Gabon	16	8.8	1.9	2.9	0	0	0	0
Senegal	12	3.3	3.7	8.8	4.3	2.6	1.1	0.7
Cameroon	10.1	12.8	24.3	18.2	0	0.2	0.1	0.5
Turkmenistan	6.3	19.9	3.9	1.7	0	0	0.6	0.2
Cote d'Ivoire	5.3	5.4	8.4	9.3	3.6	10	8.1	8.9

Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2010–2011 (\$ million)



**Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2010–2011 (\$ million)**



Conclusion

Whatever the interests of the Muslim countries and their preoccupations, the Palestinian issue remains a central one, taking an advanced position in their foreign policies, keeping in mind the disparate levels of official and popular support and interaction. Despite this, the aspirations of Muslim nations towards Palestine remain unfulfilled. Including the issue on the political, economic, media and cultural agendas of the effective political powers in Muslim countries will improve this situation. The OIC has continued with its minor contribution to the Palestinian issue, which is likely to remain the case until a serious change happens in the stances of major countries towards the Palestinian issue. Perhaps the changes in the Arab world, and especially in Egypt, are a reason for optimism in this regard.

As for Turkey, indications show two levels of dealing with the Palestinian issue. On the popular level, support for the Palestinian issue continued at an increasing pace, with a surge in Turkish popular hostility towards Israel.

Nevertheless, the Turkish government maintained its anti-Israel tone, by taking measures against Israel because of its refusal to apologize for killing Turkish volunteers on the Mavi Marmara ship. However, the Turkish stance preserved diplomatic relations with Israel, although more limited than before, and continued free commercial and economic relations with Israel. Hence, Turkey tends to follow a pragmatic approach in its foreign policy towards Israel, because it always takes into consideration its membership of NATO, relations with the US, and efforts to join the EU. All of these could be affected if Turkey continued to increase its hostility towards Israel.

Despite the warm welcome for the Palestinian Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah in the Turkish parliament on 3/1/2012, official Turkish economic support to Palestine remains minute and not commensurate with Turkey’s political and economic weight in the Muslim world.

Iran continued to support the Palestinian issue politically and economically as an expression of its Islamic view of the conflict with Israel. This support is also a reflection of Iranian interests, where some parties accuse Iran of having its own ideological agenda in the region. However, when the Arab revolutions erupted, and the political map of the region reformulated, the “moderate” front suffered disintegration, and at the same time the refusal front (Iran, Syria, Hamas and Hizbullah) was also shaken, especially after Syria’s unrest. While Iran adopted a stance supporting the Syrian regime, Hamas supported the rightful demands of the Syrian people for freedom and democracy without denying at the same time Syria’s role in embracing and supporting Palestinian resistance. The gap may grow wider as events develop in Syria, but the issue of Palestine and supporting the resistance against the Israeli occupation must remain a point of consensus for all Muslims despite their differences. It must be taken into consideration that liberating the people, and the establishment of regimes that express their pride and dignity, are essential steps in an emancipation project that faces the “Zionist project.”



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This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12 is the seventh in a series of annual resourceful academic studies. It 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 near future. This Report has become a basic reference on Palestinian studies, it is a must read for all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 12 academics and experts contributed to this Report in seven chapters. They covered the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Arab, Muslim and international stances towards the Palestinian issue. This Report focuses also on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites, and the suffering of man and land under the Israeli occupation. Besides, the demographic, economic and education indicators are also studied and analyzed.

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