

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2011/12



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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

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The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

Introduction

There are two primary strategic focuses taken by the US and Western Europe with regard to the Palestinian question. The first strategy is to let the balance of power between the Palestinians and Israelis determine the outcome of negotiations, by continuously stating that a settlement of the conflict must be based on what is agreed in negotiations between the two sides, without intervention based on international law or even UN resolutions and international legitimacy. The second strategy is to prevent any developments in the region from having a positive effect on the Palestinian issue, which must be kept on the backburner for as long as possible, while diverting international attention away from Israeli political and military actions toward Palestinian land and people, providing Israel with a favorable atmosphere in which to implement its expansionist policy in a gradual but accelerating pace. This is evident from the unrelenting expansion of Jewish settlements in the WB, and even military strikes against the GS; all such developments do not receive adequate coverage in the international media, which is preoccupied with other international developments.

In 2011, a series of developments took place, providing this strategy with the opportunity to continue unabated, starting with the “Arab Spring,” which coincided with the start of the year, and which continues to unfold; or the return of international tension over the Iranian nuclear program with the possibility of military confrontation; this is not to mention the repercussions of the global financial crisis, which continues to impact the majority of capitalist countries, at political, economic and social levels in equal measure.

Add to this the suspension of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations throughout 2011; the successive resignations of US Middle East envoys (First George Mitchell, and then Dennis Ross, Obama’s adviser on the Middle East) in 2011; and the imminent US presidential election, with the Republicans holding a majority in the US House of Representatives, and more seats in the US Senate. With all this in mind, the conclusion is that the Palestinian issue is slipping further and further into obscurity, despite a faint hope resulting from reconciliation efforts between Fatah



and Hamas, wherein both sides expressed some optimism, but without this being reflected in tangible steps on the ground. This seems to be mainly due to the PA's fears over an adverse reaction by the US or some EU countries.

Despite Palestinian success in securing full membership in UNESCO, one of the UN's specialized agencies, which reflected positive shifts in international public opinion, European timidity and American political pressure at the UN Security Council, with respect to a full Palestinian membership of the UN, continue to undermine Palestinian success in political terms. Indeed, the bid for Palestinian membership of the UN has stumbled amid all the contradictory proposals and deliberations, and it seems that referral to the UNGA is currently the only possible path ahead.

First: The Quartet

The statements issued by the Quartet¹ (the UN, US, EU and Russia) reflect trends in the foreign policies of the major powers in the Middle East, with the exception of China and Japan, which both remain uninterested in taking part in a way that may compel them to adopt particular stances that may harm their relations with either side in the conflict.

Since its creation in Madrid in 2002, the Quartet has issued a total of 39 statements, in which the general principles that govern its work are often repeated, namely:

- Accepting a Palestinian state based on the borders of 1967 with agreed land swaps in certain areas.
- Rejection of settlement including in East Jerusalem.
- Leaving final status issues to be agreed upon by the Palestinian and Israeli sides.
- Rejection of so-called "terrorism," meaning armed resistance, even when armed resistance is sanctioned by international law.
- All 39 statements issued by the Quartet omitted the adoption of any actual measures against Israel, despite the latter's clear rejection of many of the stances adopted by the Quartet itself. Meanwhile several measures were approved against Palestinian parties that contravened the Quartet's stated positions on

some issues. This reflects US influence over the Quartet's decisions, which we shall refer to later, through the statements made by a number of European and Russian officials, as well as the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair.

The Quartet adopted a strategy in which fundamental issues are deferred to direct negotiations, rendering the items dealing with the Palestinian state and settlement a mere smokescreen. However, the Quartet has often intervened to prevent the situation from deteriorating into a complete impasse, and has sought to renew negotiations, thus contributing to the continuation of a negative situation. The statements of the Quartet in 2011 parroted the statements of the previous years, including the following:

1. First Statement on 5/2/2011²

The Quartet confirmed that it “took note of dramatic developments in Egypt and elsewhere in the region” and considered “the implications of these events for Arab-Israeli peace and agreed to discuss this further in upcoming meetings as a matter of high priority.” It seems that the Quartet is concerned, in following-up the developments of the Arab Spring, with the effects of changes in the Arab countries over the balance of power, and the nature of the political inclinations of the emerging Arab factions, especially the Islamist parties.

The Quartet then reiterated its traditional position that negotiations “should lead to an outcome that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and resolves all permanent status issues in order to end the conflict and achieve a two-state solution. The Quartet reiterates its support for concluding these negotiations by September 2011.” The Quartet then called on its envoys “to meet separately with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators in Brussels, as well as with representatives of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee.” This, it seems, was an attempt to create a parallel process to circumvent the suspension of negotiations.

The Quartet also stressed that efforts must focus on “how to bring about resumed negotiations on all core issues, including borders and security” going on to condemn rocket fire from GS, stressing “the need for calm and security for both peoples,” while expressing its regret for the discontinuation of Israel's moratorium on settlement activity. The Quartet reaffirmed that “unilateral actions by either party cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community.”



Despite the fact that the Quartet specified September as the end date for negotiations, it failed to address the cause of stalled negotiations, namely the continued illegal settlement building by the Israeli side, ignoring the statements of the Quartet which had not taken any practical and binding measures in this direction.

2. Second Statement on 14/3/2011³

This statement was limited to addressing a specific incident, namely an attack by the Palestinian resistance against settlers in the WB. In its statement, the Quartet stated that it “condemns in the strongest possible terms the violent murder of an Israeli family of five, including three young children, in the West Bank.” The Quartet offered its condolences to “the Israeli people,” and declared that “attacks on any civilians are completely unacceptable in any circumstance,” while calling for “those responsible to be brought to justice” and welcoming “the strong condemnation of this attack by President Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian leadership.”

There are two observations to be made with regard to this statement; the first involves the condemnation it expressed (as opposed to the regret expressed with regard to settlement activity or the killing of Palestinians). The second observation involves the Quartet’s direct call for action to be taken against those responsible, while the Quartet’s other statements on settlements contain no references to any form of action that ought to be taken against any Israeli party.

3. Third Statement on 20/5/2011⁴

This statement expressed support for the vision of Israeli-Palestinian peace outlined by President Barack Obama on 19/5/2011, which will be discussed in depth later. The Quartet agreed that “moving forward on the basis of territory and security provides a foundation for Israelis and Palestinians to reach a final resolution of the conflict.”

4. Fourth Statement on 5/7/2011⁵

Here, the Quartet expressed its concerns regarding the conditions facing the population in GS, despite efforts that improved conditions in 2010, in particular the increase in the volume of goods and materials flowing into GS. The Quartet cited the “recent approval by Israel of materials for new homes and schools to

be constructed by UNRWA.” The Quartet noted that “more needs to be done to increase the flow of people and goods to and from Gaza,” in implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009). The Quartet’s statement then called on all parties “wishing to deliver goods to the people of Gaza to do so through established channels so that their cargo could be inspected and transferred via established land crossings.”

The Quartet also recognized that Israel has “legitimate security concerns that must continue to be safeguarded” and said that it will work with “Israel, Egypt and the international community to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition into Gaza.” The Quartet expressed regret over the injuries and fatalities on board the Turkish ship in 2010, and urged all governments concerned to show restraint and to discourage additional flotillas, in light of the risk posed to the safety of participants. The Quartet also called for “an end to the deplorable five-year detention of Gilad Shalit.”

Even a cursory examination of the wording of the statement reveals the bias towards the Israeli side. Any Israeli measure, no matter how small, is praised at length, while the Quartet avoids taking any practical measures against Israel’s violations of Palestinian rights. For instance, the Quartet praised Israel’s approval of certain materials for the GS, insisting that these materials be “inspected” in line with the Quartet’s acknowledgement of Israel’s security concerns.

Furthermore, it is possible that the reference made in the statement to transferring goods bound for GS via land crossings is not isolated from the desire of Israel to stop humanitarian aid that might reach GS through ships bound for the port there, operated by civilians from different countries. This is evident in the statement’s call for “discouraging” such endeavors. And while the statement referred to the Israeli soldier held captive by Hamas, it made no reference to the thousands of Palestinian detainees in occupation prisons.

5. Fifth Statement on 16/8/2011⁶

The statement expressed several positions as follows:

- a. The Quartet was greatly concerned by Israel’s announcements regarding plans for new housing units in the settlement of Ariel and in East Jerusalem, reiterating its position outlined in its statement of 12/3/2010.



- b. The Quartet reaffirmed that unilateral action by either party could not prejudice the outcome of negotiations and would not be recognized by the international community.
- c. The Quartet said that Jerusalem in particular is one of the core issues that must be resolved through negotiations between the parties.
- d. The Quartet said that the two sides must avoid actions that undermine the very goals that they and it are trying to achieve.

To examine this statement and its many rehashed positions, it is necessary to raise questions regarding the purpose of leaving the issue of Jerusalem to be resolved “through negotiations between the parties.” This is nothing but an attempt to let negotiations between the two sides determine the mechanism for settling the most sensitive issues, in a reflection of the American and British positions in particular. The US had never allowed negotiations by the parties to any other international conflict to determine the settlement. There are ample examples of this, including Kuwait, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, Vietnam, Haiti, Somalia and so on.

All UN resolutions, despite their inherent undermining of Palestinian rights, have been rendered moot anyway, as long as the first and last reference point and determinant of the outcome is US-brokered negotiations. In this context, UN resolutions have been used only to obtain Arab and Palestinian concessions, when they were recognized, while successive Israeli governments have not recognize them, and the Quartet then shelved them, favoring continuing the negotiations.

6. Sixth Statement on 20/8/2011⁷

The statement said that the Quartet “condemns the attacks in southern Israel on 18 August 2011 and all acts of terrorism in the strongest terms.” The Quartet expressed hope that those responsible for the attacks would be brought to justice. The Quartet also expressed “concern about the security situation in the Sinai Peninsula” and said that “recent commitments by the Egyptian government to address the security situation in the Sinai are important, and the Quartet encourages the Egyptian government to find a lasting resolution to the issue of Sinai security.”

It is notable that the statement “condemns” and does not merely express “regret,” as is the case with the language used in the Quartet’s statements when the aggressor is Israel. Furthermore, there are almost always calls for measures in the case of the issues raised by Israel, something that the statements by the Quartet

fail to do when the issue is Israeli actions that contravene international law. This is made clear in the calls by the Quartet for those responsible for the attacks “to be brought to justice,” and its call on the Egyptian government to address the issue of security in the south of the Sinai desert.

7. Seventh Statement on 23/9/2011⁸

The statement mentioned the following:

- a. The Quartet took note of the application submitted by President ‘Abbas on 23/9/2011 to the UN Security Council (in reference to the Palestinian bid for full UN membership).
- b. The Quartet affirmed its determination to seek a comprehensive resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, on the basis of UN Security Council Resolutions 242, 338, 1397, 1515, 1850, the Madrid principles including “land for peace,” as well as the Road Map, and the agreements previously reached between the parties.
- c. The Quartet proposed a number of steps, including:
 1. A preparatory meeting within one month between the parties to agree an agenda and method of proceeding in the negotiation.
 2. A commitment by both sides during this meeting that the objective of any negotiation is to reach an agreement within a timeframe agreed to by the parties, but not longer than the end of 2012. The Quartet said it expected the parties to come forward with comprehensive proposals within three months on territory and security, and to have made substantial progress within six months. To that end, the Quartet said it would convene an international conference in Moscow in consultation with the parties, at an appropriate time.
 3. A donor’s conference at which the international community would give full support to PA state-building actions.
 4. The Quartet recognized the achievements of the PA in preparing institutions for statehood as evidenced in reports to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, and stressed the need to preserve and build on such measures. In this regard, the Quartet said its members would consult in order to identify additional steps they could take to actively support Palestinian statehood, individually and collectively, to secure significantly greater independence and sovereignty for the PA over its affairs.



5. The Quartet called upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions to ensure that negotiations are effective. The Quartet reiterated the obligations of both parties under the Road Map.

This statement makes it clear that the Quartet wished to bring the parties back to negotiations, overlooking the main obstacle to this, namely the cessation of settlement activities, at a time when the Israeli side wanted to return to the negotiations without preconditions, a position that the Quartet seemed to adopt as well.

The statement made an implicit link between the proposed return to the negotiations and the holding of a donors conference to provide financial support for the Palestinian state. Such a link can be viewed, as along with other measure already discussed, as a technique to subdue the Palestinian side.

In its more recent efforts, the Quartet sought to meet with the two sides to try to convince them to return to the negotiating table. However, in its last statement, the Quartet said that it has called for the two sides to resume negotiations “without delay or preconditions,”⁹ essentially telling the Palestinian side that they must abandon the demand for a cessation of illegal settlement building as a condition for returning to negotiations.

On 26/10/2011, the Quartet Representative Tony Blair met with the Palestinian and Israeli sides separately in Jerusalem, to implement the Quartet’s statement issued on 23/9/2011. In the context of their shared commitment to the objective of direct negotiations leading toward an agreement by the end of 2012, the conferees agreed “to come forward with comprehensive proposals on territory and security within three months.” The Quartet also called upon the parties to refrain from provocative actions. It was also agreed that the parties would meet regularly for the next three months following the statement in order to review progress.¹⁰

Whereas the Quartet’s statement mentions that each party must specify the political borders it accepts for its state, it was stated that the Palestinian side had indeed submitted its proposal in this regard, while the Israeli side refused to do so, saying instead that any counterproposal would be presented in direct negotiations.¹¹

In addition to the statements issued by the Quartet, it is necessary to note the efforts of the Quartet Representative, Tony Blair, who since September 2011 has been seeking to push the parties to return to the negotiating table without

necessarily meeting the condition of a cessation of illegal settlement activity. Blair's efforts were stepped up in late October 2011.¹² It is generally assumed that Blair's diplomacy took place in line with US efforts. Indeed, in an interview with *Alquds* newspaper, Blair said that the Americans were leading the political process. He also stated that political negotiations had always been traditionally led by the US, and that this was nothing new.¹³

Also noteworthy regarding Quartet policy was the bid to obtain a pledge from the Palestinian side to abandon armed resistance. Blair expressed this clearly when he said that the most important issue if a Palestinian national unity government was going to be formed was that it must possess real unity. Blair added that the position of President 'Abbas is very clear; namely that attaining the two-state solution must come about through political negotiations not violence. This was the main issue, according to Blair. If it was possible to create conditions favorable for this in the framework of a unified political position, then Blair's view was that this would be very positive. Blair believed that what would not work was a government in which half would say that resolution could be reached through negotiations, while the other would say that it would use armed resistance to achieve the goal. Blair wanted a clear commitment to nonviolent means to achieve goals, on the grounds that this would be the only basis that the international community would be prepared to deal with.¹⁴

The approach of Blair fits with the strategy that seeks to deny the Palestinian side any means to apply pressure during negotiations, including staging an *Intifadah*, or any other step unacceptable to the Israeli government.

Second: The United States of America (US)

1. Negotiations Under a Balance of Power Tipped in Favor of Israel

Perhaps the most over-used phrases in US statements concerning the Middle East are those that state that the outcome of negotiations must center on what the PA and Israel agree over, as highlighted in our review of the Quartet's positions.

However, anyone familiar with the negotiating environment will notice that the US makes concerted efforts to maintain and even increase the disparity in the balance of power between the two negotiating sides, in military, economic, political



and diplomatic terms. This means that the outcome of the negotiations can only be a reflection of this balance of power, and will only lead to a peace settlement in which all of Israel's conditions and demands are met. US reluctance to pressure on the Israeli side is clarified through what the Palestinian Chief Negotiator Sa'ib 'Uraiqat told David Hill, an adviser to Obama; that the failure of this administration in pushing for a complete freeze of Israeli settlements will damage its credibility. However, Hill rejected 'Uraiqat's inference, saying that the US cannot force a sovereign government to do anything; it can only use persuasion, negotiation and highlight shared interests.¹⁵ Yet such diplomacy of persuasion is absent when it comes to the Palestinian side, as is clear from the following events:

a. The US suspended its payments to UNESCO when the organization accepted membership of Palestine (we will return to this issue in detail later). In a statement made on 31/10/2011 following UNESCO's admission of Palestine as a full member, Victoria Nuland, spokesperson for the US State Department said:

Today's vote by the member states of UNESCO to admit Palestine as a member is regrettable, premature, and undermines our shared goal of a comprehensive, just, and lasting peace in the Middle East. The United State[s] remains steadfast in its support for the establishment of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state, but such a state can only be realized through direct negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians.... However, Palestinian membership as a state in UNESCO triggers longstanding legislative restrictions which will compel the United States to refrain from making contributions to UNESCO.¹⁶

On 5/10/2011, the US House of Representatives confirmed what that Congress had threatened in early August 2011 by suspending the payment of \$200 million in aid to the PA, which had been part of a \$358 million five-year plan to improve WB infrastructure.¹⁷

b. The reactions of official US institutions to the Palestinian bid to obtain UN membership revealed the US strategy of placing Palestinian negotiators in particular, and Arab negotiators in general, in an environment of wide and increasing disparities in the balance of power, tipped firmly in favor of Israel. This is evidenced by the calls for practical measures to be taken against the Palestinian side in a manner that keeps its negotiating power at a minimum, while foreclosing any attempts to improve its legal position. This was manifested, for example, when the US wielded the veto on February 18th against a UN Security Council

resolution that condemned the building of Israeli settlements in the WB. This had been a policy pursued by the US 42 times previously, in order to thwart resolutions condemning Israel in the UN Security Council, including 33 directly concerning the Palestinian issue and the Arab territories occupied since 1967. Conversely, the US offers legal and logistical support for Israel, for example the US House of Representatives granting \$205 million to Israel to help it deploy the Iron Dome anti-missile system.¹⁸

Furthermore, official US institutions reacted angrily to the Palestinian bid at the UN; the following are some examples of this:

1. The US House of Representatives voted with an overwhelming majority to pass a bill calling on the US administration to suspend aid to the PA, after the latter went to the UN to obtain recognition of Palestinian statehood. The bill was supported by 407 representatives, while only six objected, despite the fact that this bill was not binding for the US administration under the US Constitution.¹⁹

2. Eighty-one US representatives (26 Democrats and 55 Republicans) made a visit to Israel in August to show opposition the Palestinian bid for UN membership.²⁰

3. On 8/9/2011, Representative Joe Walsh, along with 42 Republican representatives, introduced a bill that supported Israel's right to annex the WB if the Palestinians continue to insist on seeking UN membership.²¹

4. On 12/9/2011, Representative Steve Israel, along with three other representatives, called for the US "to prohibit Foreign Military Financing program assistance to countries that vote in the United Nations General Assembly in favor of recognizing a Palestinian state in the absence of a negotiated border agreement between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority."²²

5. On 13/9/2011, the Chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the US House of Representatives Ileana Ros-Lehtinen said in an interview with *Haaretz*, "We need to stop Abu-Mazen's dangerous scheme. I hope that the U.S. Congress takes a very forceful stand against this statehood issue. It's time to tell the Palestinians: If you are going with this statehood issue and it is granted, then the U.S. must cut funding to the Palestinians."²³

Therefore, it was possible that extensive pressure exerted to suspend aid, in conjunction with the lack of opposition to it, led Congress to approve on 28/12/2011 a reduction in aid to the PA from \$187 million to \$40 million.



Mark Toner, a spokesman for the State Department, justified the fact that not all aid was suspended by saying that this “help[s] to build a more democratic, stable, and secure region.”²⁴

6. On 21/9/2011, Senator Orrin Hatch, along with 18 Republican senators, called for the US to prohibit “funding for the U.N. if the Security Council or UNGA grants Palestine a change in status in the absence of a comprehensive peace agreement.”²⁵

7. The US applied the pressure to exploit the controversy surrounding the Goldstone Report, after its primary author Richard Goldstone backtracked on his original condemnation of Israel. US Permanent Representative to the UN Susan Rice, said that the Goldstone Report on the Israeli war on GS two years ago must disappear, after Judge Goldstone reversed course with regard to his conclusions.²⁶

All the above examples confirm that the US takes particular care to ensure that negotiations take place in an environment that enables the Israeli side to achieve the greatest possible gains with minimal losses.

c. With the Arab preoccupation with the changes that have affected the regimes in Egypt, Tunisia and Libya, and the developments in Syria, Yemen and other Arab countries, the Israeli government continued to engage in large-scale settlement activities in Jerusalem and beyond. The US did not voice any practical positions with regard to this issue. Instead, the American media gave extensive coverage to the Arab Spring, while only covering expanding Israeli settlement in passing. In the speech delivered by President Obama at the US State Department on 19 May, the prime focus was praising the Arab uprisings, even after the toppling of some of the most important allies of the US in Egypt and Tunisia.

d. The US called on Israel to respond favorably to the popular uprisings in the Arab region. In a speech in Washington the US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta told Israel that “it is partly responsible for its increasing isolation and that it now must take ‘bold action’ — diplomatic, not military — to mend ties with its Arab neighbors and settle previously intractable territorial disputes with the Palestinians.” He also “called on Israel to ‘reach out and mend fences with those who share an interest in regional stability,’ specifically Turkey, Egypt and Jordan,” and urged Israel to resume talks with the Palestinians. In addition, Panetta reaffirmed the “unshakable commitment to Israel’s security” of the US. He added, “Unfortunately, over the past year, we have seen Israel’s isolation from its traditional security partners in the

region grow, and the pursuit of a comprehensive Middle East peace has effectively been put on hold.” However, at the same time he noted that “Israel is not solely responsible for this isolation,” and talked about “an international campaign underway to isolate Israel.” Panetta also added that “now is the time for Israel to take bold action and to move towards a negotiated two-state solution.”²⁷

e. Panetta pledged to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, and said that US President Barack Obama did not completely rule out military action as the administration continued the policy of using both diplomacy and economic sanctions against Iran. Panetta stated that military action should be a “last resort,” and pledged to continue offering broad military support to Israel; “the United States will ensure that Israel continues to enjoy unquestioned air superiority by delivering to Israel the advanced fifth-generation fighter aircraft, the F-35 Joint Strike Fighter.”²⁸

f. The US voiced its opposition to the rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah, and the potential for reconciliation between the two sides following their Cairo meetings in November 2011. This meant that the US preferred for negotiations to take place amid Palestinian division, a weak position for Palestinian negotiators, and a strong starting point for Israel. Indeed, US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, Jeffrey Feltman, said on 7/12/2011 that he had explained the US position to Abu Mazin in this regard; that the US understands the Palestinian aspiration for unity, but the Palestinians will not obtain statehood in partnership with a “terrorist group.” It remains the view in the US that Hamas is a “terrorist” organization.²⁹

g. The US position is increasingly clear with regard to its policy on the negotiating environment. The choice not to take any practical measures against Israel, despite its refusal to halt settlement building, which the US, the Quartet and the majority of the international community officially rejects.

h. The US supported the proposals pertaining to the protection of civilians in Libya, Syria and Sudan, as is clear from the US address at the UN Security Council on 9/11/2011.³⁰ Yet it rejected such proposals when requested by the PA. This was evidenced by the fact that the US wielded its veto to prevent the sending of international observers to the WB and GS to ensure civilians were protected on 28/3/2001, a position it continued to hold.



All the steps mentioned above confirm that the strategic outlook of the US is effectively identical to that of Israel. The US continues to boost Israeli military power, bar any resolutions condemning Israel, and consolidating the strategic disparity in the balance of power.

2. US Efforts for a Peace Settlement

It is helpful to scrutinize the main tenets of US strategy in the Middle East, according to the declared policies of US officials, and to interpret them in the context of the Palestinian question. US Under Secretary for Political Affairs, William Burns, identified these tenets under four broad titles, namely:³¹

- a. **Supporting Peaceful Democratic Change:** In practice, however, the US requires that no faction opposed to its policies take power, even if through democratic means.
- b. **Supporting Economic Modernization:** This effectively means expanding the private sector in a manner that enables the infiltration of American companies and funds in to the structure of the Arab economy.
- c. **Achieving a Comprehensive Arab-Israeli Peace:** The proviso being that this must be the result of the balance of power between the Palestinian and Israeli sides determining the outcome of the negotiations.
- d. **Boosting Regional Security:** This means, in the US lexicon, pushing Arab capabilities towards further encirclement of Iran on the one hand, and the furthering of Israeli superiority over any other force in the region, on the other.

Nevertheless, this does not negate the fact that there are deep divisions within the current US administration over how to tackle the issue of the Middle East, as confirmed by some of the following:

- a. The resignation of several American officials involved in the Middle East peace process. Despite the enthusiasm shown by US Envoy George Mitchell upon his appointment in January 2009, and his promise that he would succeed in resolving the conflict, along the lines of his success in resolving the conflict in Northern Ireland, he came to appreciate the difficulty of the task at hand in the Middle East. He ultimately resigned on 13/5/2011, and was succeeded by his deputy, David Hill. The Palestinians, represented by Nabil Sha'ath, said that Mitchell's resignation was the result of Israeli policies, which denied him any support and caused him to fail in his mission. This was while the Israelis, represented by Zalman Shoval,

special envoy for Netanyahu, claimed that Mitchell's "efforts were undermined by the Palestinians' refusal to engage in meaningful negotiations." For his part, Netanyahu "has made it clear that the turmoil in the region has heightened his country's security concerns, making a negotiated peace an unacceptably risky gamble for now."³² As regards Mitchell, he said in his resignation letter that "his original intention had been to serve two years and he had done longer than that."³³ This means that Mitchell had wagered on reaching a solution within two years, something that he failed to achieve. Mitchell's failure is reflected in the fact that the report he presented to the US administration in the year 2000, for a peace settlement of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict comprised three main points, namely the cessation of Israeli settlement activity, an end to violence, and a return to negotiations; the same topics being discussed now, 11 years later.

It also seems that Obama's appointment of Dennis Ross to the National Security Council as a Special Assistant to the President and Senior Director for the Central Region (the Middle East, the Gulf, Afghanistan, Pakistan and South Asia) six months after Mitchell was appointed had an impact on the latter's efforts. The appointment of Ross, who served for a long time as a negotiator in the Middle East, cast a shadow over Mitchell's position, particularly in the context of the disagreements within the US administration, in which Mitchell and Ross were on opposing sides. Indeed, it seems that the presence of Ross, who was named by the book *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy* by John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt as a member of the Israeli lobby in the US, made Mitchell's job more difficult.³⁴ For instance, at a time when Ross sought to persuade the Palestinian president to abandon the bid for UN membership, Mitchell showed a lesser degree of bias to Israel, when he said on the eve of his visit to the Middle East that "his country would freeze its aid to Israel if the Jewish state failed to advance peace talks with the Palestinians and a two-state solution."³⁵

It seems that failure is becoming increasingly visible in the Obama administration. For one thing, Mitchell's resignation was followed by the resignation of Dennis Ross. Although Ross justified his resignation by saying that "After nearly three years of serving in the administration, I am going to be leaving to return to private life," the American media said that it was motivated by two things: First, the Iranian issue; and second, "to avoid the U.S. pressuring Israel to take steps its government is unwilling to take."³⁶ Rather, Ross is interested in



promoting the “Jewish identity” of the state of Israel. Moreover, the institute which he previously headed, the Jewish People Policy Institute (JPPI) headquartered in Jerusalem, is spearheading a campaign to convince American Jews to immigrate to Israel to reaffirm the “Jewishness” of the state, and preempt the return of Palestinian refugees.³⁷ This was rejected by most American Jewish organizations, despite the fact that there was promotion of immigration to Israel contained in ads sponsored by the Israeli government. Opposition to these calls appeared in statements issued by organizations such as the Jewish Federations of North America and the Anti-Defamation League (ADL).³⁸

This series of resignations by US administration diplomats involved in the Middle East peace process indicated that 2012 would be a year of confusion and helplessness for US policies, which will have nothing meaningful to bring to the table regarding resolution of the conflict, especially so when the administration will probably be unwilling to take any serious steps during its presidential reelection campaign.

b. The private conversation between the US President Barack Obama and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy during the Group of Twenty (G20) summit meeting in Cannes on 9/11/2011 showed that the personal convictions of Western officials do not necessarily impact on the policies of their administrations. During the conversation, Sarkozy called Netanyahu a “liar” and Obama responded by saying, “You are fed up with him, but I have to deal with him even more often than you.”³⁹

c. According to the *Daily Telegraph*, President Obama “ordered the US intelligence services to step up monitoring of Israel to glean clues of its intentions,” especially after “Israel has refused to reassure President Barack Obama that it would warn him in advance of any pre-emptive strike on Iran’s nuclear capabilities.”⁴⁰

Despite all this, US diplomacy went ahead with its efforts to push the parties back to the negotiating table. The vision put forward by President Obama as a plan for peace in the region in a speech on 19/5/2011 comprised the following points:⁴¹

a. Two States: “A lasting peace will involve two states for two peoples. Israel as a Jewish state and the homeland for the Jewish people, and the state of Palestine as the homeland for the Palestinian people; each state enjoying self-determination, mutual recognition, and peace.”

- b. Territory:** “The boundaries of Israel and the Palestinian state should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps.”
- c. Security:** “The Palestinian state must be non-militarized, and the full and phased withdrawal of Israeli forces would be geared to the ability of Palestinian security forces and other arrangements as agreed to prevent a resurgence of terrorism; stop the infiltration of weapons; and provide effective border security.”
- d. Timeframe:** “The duration of this transition period must be agreed, and may vary for different areas like borders. But it must be sufficient to demonstrate the effectiveness and credibility of security arrangements.”
- e. Jerusalem and the Refugees:** “Once Palestinians can be confident in the outlines of their state, and Israelis are confident that the new Palestinian state will not imperil its security, the parties will be in a position to grapple with the core issues of refugees and Jerusalem.”

Therefore, the essence of Obama’s project is based on two premises:

- a. Palestinian recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state for the Jewish people.”
- b. Leaving all issues to be agreed one way or the other during negotiations, whether the issue is territories, borders, Jerusalem or the refugees, with even the time frame for all these issues to be resolved.

Israel is well versed with the intricacies of domestic American politics and reacted sharply especially to Obama’s reference to the 1967 lines, forcing him to backtrack several days later. During The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference 2011, Obama said:

My position has been misrepresented several times, let me reaffirm what ‘1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps’ means. By definition, it means that the parties themselves—Israelis and Palestinians—will negotiate a border that is different than the one that existed on June 4, 1967. That’s what mutually agreed-upon swaps means... It allows the parties themselves to account for the changes that have taken place over the last 44 years. It allows the parties themselves to take account of those changes, including the new demographic realities on the ground, and the needs of both sides.⁴²

If we bear it in mind that 2012 is an election year, and that Obama had received 78% of the Jewish vote in his first term,⁴³ then we see that Obama will inevitably refrain from taking any position that may antagonize the Israeli side. We thus



observed early on political one-upmanship in seeking Israel's favor among the US presidential candidates. For example, the Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich said in an interview with *Haaretz* that an Israeli withdrawal to the 1967 lines would be "suicidal," and he added, "An Israel that accepts 1967 borders is an Israel that accepts the demise of the country." He also said that "a growing number of American conservatives see U.S. national security and Israeli national security as faced by the same enemy."⁴⁴

In another statement, Newt Gingrich said, "There was no Palestine as a state. It was part of the Ottoman Empire." He added, "I think that we've had an invented Palestinian people who are in fact Arabs and who were historically part of the Arab community. And they had a chance to go many places, and for a variety of political reasons have sustained this war against Israel now since the 1940s, and it's tragic."⁴⁵

It seems that the US is in favor of the idea of parallel negotiations as a way out of the impasse in the direct talks over the issue of Zionist settlement. In her speech to the UN Security Council on 24/10/2011, the US Permanent Representative to the UN, Susan Rice said that:

President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu have each agreed to send negotiators to Jerusalem for preparatory meetings with the Quartet envoys on October 26th. Thus, our focus remains on laying the groundwork for these and subsequent meetings leading to the two parties exchanging comprehensive proposals on territory and security by the end of the year, as outlined in the Quartet's timeline.

Rice also said, "We believe Palestinian efforts to seek member-state status at the United Nations will not advance the peace process but rather will complicate, delay, and perhaps derail prospects for a negotiated settlement." Rice also went on to say that "the fate of existing settlements is one that must be dealt with by the parties, along with the other permanent-status issues, including the status of Jerusalem. For that reason, steps by the Government of Israel to advance significant new construction in Givat Hamatos are deeply disappointing." After referring to the illegal trafficking of weapons in GS, she said, "The United States is very pleased that Gilad Shalit has finally been reunited with his family after five long years in captivity."⁴⁶ However, Rice failed to mention more than one thousand Palestinian prisoners who were freed from Israeli prisons.

In this context, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton reiterated the US position on settlement building condemning the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem by saying, “This disturbing development undermines peace efforts to achieve the two-state solution. In particular, this move contradicts the logic of a reasonable and necessary agreement between the parties on the status of Jerusalem.”⁴⁷

3. American Public Opinion Trends

Upon examining trends in American public opinion regarding Obama’s policy vis-à-vis the situation between the Palestinians and Israel up until October 2011, the division is revealed to be sharp, with 44% approving Obama’s way of handling the situation, and 48% disapproving.⁴⁸ However, the J Street Group, which was founded in 2008 with a membership of 170 thousand American Jews and headed by Jeremy Ben-Ami, made calls for some elements of US policy in the Middle East to be reconsidered, and for greater focus on diplomatic solutions rather than resorting to the use of force. Some pundits believe that this could be a sign of relations turning sour between some segments of the Jewish-American community and Israel, in particular for Jews who support Palestinian statehood and oppose illegal settlement building.⁴⁹

A poll by Rasmussen Reports indicated that a majority of Americans want to suspend aid to all Middle Eastern countries with the exception of Israel. 58% of the respondents said that they wanted to see aid to Arab countries suspended, while 20% said that they wanted to maintain it; 21% said they were unsure. On the other hand, 51% said they support the continuation of aid to Israel, while 32% opposed it, and 17% said they were undecided.⁵⁰

In a survey conducted by Gallup on Americans’ stance on the conflict in the Middle East, 63% said that they support and sympathize with Israel. Conversely, if the results of the survey are examined closely, one can see that the percentage comes from the support of older people for Israel (67%), while among young Americans aged 18 to 34, this percentage drops to 58%, indicating a significant decline. 17% of Americans said that they supported the Palestinians and 20% said they supported both sides, compared to a previous figure of only 7% supporting the Palestinians.⁵¹

Third: The European Union (EU)

European countries did not hide their dissatisfaction with US domination of the Middle East peace process, individually and through the Quartet. The French President Nicolas Sarkozy expressed the sentiment when he said:

France will be proposing the organization of a donors' conference for the future Palestinian State, on one condition: that this donors' conference has a political dimension. Europe can no longer go on paying and being excluded from the political discussions. If the political discussions were making headway without Europe, you could say: 'That's how it is,' but on top of this things aren't moving forward..... starting to discuss the settlements was a mistake for one simple reason: there are settlements which (once the border has been mapped out) will cause a problem because they will be in territory which will no longer be Israeli and others which won't cause a problem since they will be in the part of the territory which will stay in Israel.⁵²

In truth, Sarkozy's position reflects two things: First, uneasiness regarding US domination over the negotiation process, and second, the legitimacy gifted to some settlements, since he pointed out that some of the settlements would remain in Israel.

Differences between the US and Europe can also be seen in their diplomatic conduct relative to certain aspects of the political settlement. This is reflected, for example in the position on settlement building, as seen when the UK, France and Germany voted on 18/2/2011 in favor of a proposal in the UN Security Council condemning Israel over settlement building; only for the US to veto and block the proposal.

Differences among the positions of the European countries also exist, relative to many aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. For instance, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton stated that the 27 member states of the EU would vote individually should the Palestinians unilaterally go to the UN to obtain recognition of an independent state.⁵³ Meanwhile the European Parliament ruled the PA's bid for Palestinian statehood at the UN to be "legitimate," and, in a resolution adopted by an overwhelming majority, called on the "EU's foreign affairs High Representative and Member States to find a common EU position on the Palestinian request [for full statehood and UN membership] and to avoid divisions among Member States."⁵⁴

The position of European countries vis-à-vis President Obama's announcement that borders in the Palestinian-Israeli peace settlement should be on the basis of the 1967 lines, indicates that these countries do not have the ability to take serious political initiatives independent of the US position. This is evident from the fact that these countries rushed to praise the US position, whereas they had failed to adopt such a stance themselves. Catherine Ashton welcomed "President Obama's confirmation that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps, secure and recognised borders for both sides."⁵⁵ The Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski also expressed his support for Obama's position, after a meeting with his French and German counterparts.⁵⁶ As for the Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, he lauded the "explicit" message sent out by Obama. Bildt said, "It was very good that he was so explicit on this point. It is a basic precondition for a peace process. This means that Europe and the U.S. right now can speak with one voice on this important issue."⁵⁷ In addition, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "I think the proposal of taking the 1967 border and of considering the exchange of territory—considering it and not dogmatically adhering to it—would be a good and manageable path."⁵⁸ The British also supported Obama's position, and Foreign Secretary William Hague praised Obama's "clear message that the borders of Israel and Palestine should be based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed swaps."⁵⁹ Obama later backtracked on his position, causing a great deal of diplomatic embarrassment to the European countries.

European diplomatic efforts in 2011, relative to the Palestinian question, were characterized by the following features:

1. Linking the Arab Uprisings to Efforts for Settling the Palestinian Issue

It seems that the European side, like the American side, was concerned that the transformations taking place in the Arab world may lead to boosting the Arab camp that is opposed to long-standing Arab appeasement and support towards Israel, whether as a result of the growing chances for the Islamist parties to take power, or the increasing role of the Arab street in shaping political decisions, bearing in mind that Arab public opinion is mostly opposed to offering concessions to Israeli policies. For this reason, Western countries are urging the parties to rush to reach an agreement.



Catherine Ashton visited the region in June 2011, and met with officials in Palestine, Jordan, Israel and Egypt, saying “With the momentous events going on in North Africa and following President Obama’s speech last month, it is more urgent than ever that we kick start the Middle East Peace Process.”⁶⁰

Ashton then visited Israel again in late August 2011, and met with several Israeli officials. At the end of the visit, Ashton issued a statement in which she said “I believe the changes we witnessed in the neighbourhood, changes in countries around Israel, give even more momentum to the need to try and find solution that will enable the people of Israel and the people of Palestine to live in peace and security together.” She also reiterated the EU’s condemnation of the attack in Eilat on 18/8/2011, and said, “The security of the people of Israel is a top priority for the EU.”⁶¹

2. Condemnation of Israeli Settlement in the Territories Occupied in 1967

In a statement issued on 15/10/2011, Catherine Ashton reiterated the European position on ongoing Israeli settlement activities, saying:

I deplore the decision by the Israeli Authorities to advance the plan for the construction of 2600 new housing units in the settlement of Givat Hamatos and to legalize—under Israeli Law—houses in West Bank outposts. This is unacceptable. Both actions run against roadmap obligations. Settlements are illegal under international law. These decisions should be reversed. The proposed constructions in Givat Hamatos are of particular concern as they would cut the geographic contiguity between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. The EU has repeatedly called on Israel to end all settlement activity, including natural growth, and to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001.⁶²

This European position was further reaffirmed on 2/11/2011, when Ashton said, “I am deeply concerned by the latest Israeli decisions to expedite settlement activities in response to Palestinian accession to UNESCO. Israeli settlement activity is illegal under international law including in East Jerusalem and an obstacle to peace. We have stated this many times before. We call on Israel to reverse this decision.”⁶³

On 13/10/2011, the EU delegation office in Jerusalem also condemned Israel's demolition of a mosque in the northern WB for the third time in one year, and called on "Israel to review its policy and planning system in order to allow for the socio-economic development of the Palestinian communities."⁶⁴

As noted earlier, the positions expressed by the EU did not include any reference in any statements to punitive action against Israel, similar to the measures taken against GS, Iran or Syria.

3. The "Moral" Bias to the Israeli Side

The statements issued by the EU revealed a profound bias when expressing certain facts. For example, on 10/9/2011, Ashton expressed her regret for the attack by Egyptian crowds against the Israeli Embassy in Cairo, which took place after several Egyptian soldiers were killed by Israeli forces on the border in the Sinai desert;⁶⁵ Ashton's statement made no reference to the deceased Egyptian soldiers. On 12/10/2011, she welcomed the release of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and added, "I pay tribute to the work of all those who have worked tirelessly to secure his release, and in particular the Egyptian and German negotiators."⁶⁶

4. Continued Financial Support⁶⁷

In May 2011, the European Commission (EC) announced its decision to allocate a package of additional financial assistance to the PA worth 85 million euros (around \$121.96 million) in the 2011 budget. The EC noted that this package was in addition to the 100 million euros (around \$143.49 million) that it previously approved as part of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.⁶⁸ The EC also announced additional aid in August worth 115 million euros (around \$164.95 million), distributed among several sectors (see table 1/5).⁶⁹ On the other hand, the PA and the EU agreed, on October 25, for the German government to finance youth employment programs in the context of improving training and vocational education programs, to the tune of four million euros (around \$5.48 million) over four years.⁷⁰ The UK provided 122 million pounds (around \$192.89 million) for the next three years,⁷¹ and France offered 10 million euros (around \$13 million) as a grant to the PA.⁷²

Table 1/5: EC Support to PA Sectors, August 2011

Sector	Amount (million euros)	Amount (\$ million)
UNRWA's 2011 Regular Budget	40	57.37
Water Sanitation and Re-use Program in the WB	22	31.56
Rule of Law	20	28.69
Financial Governance and State-Building	14	20.08
Private Sector and Capacity-Building for Institutions related to the economy	11	15.78
Development of Community Services in East Jerusalem	8	11.47
Total	115	164.95

5. European Public Opinion

A poll conducted by ICM Research between 19 and 25/1/2011 on a sample of adults in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain showed that 10% of respondents supported the continuation of their countries' support for Israel, while 39% believed that their countries must refrain from supporting Israel. In addition, 53% believed that the Israeli economic blockade of GS to be "illegal under international law," compared to 16% of respondents who said it is "legal under international law."

Regarding the victims of the conflict, 31% said that the Palestinians are the primary victims, while 6% said that the Israelis are the victims. Regarding the democratic character of the state, the poll showed that 34% of the respondents believe that Israel is "a democracy." 65% said that Israel "does not treat all religious groups the same," compared to 13% who said that it "treats all religious groups the same." With regard to the position on Hamas, 45% said that "Hamas should be included" in the peace process, while 25% rejected this and said "Hamas should be excluded."

Regarding whether the "European law should be changed to make it easier for those accused of war crimes to visit Europe," something that particularly affects Israeli officials accused of war crimes in GS, 58% objected to any changes, while 7% of British respondents supported them. The current Conservative-Liberal coalition government in the UK led by David Cameron had expressed its commitment to amending the relevant laws in this regard.⁷³

Furthermore, according to *The Guardian*, a poll covering the UK, Germany and France showed that 59% of British respondents, 69% of French respondents and 71% of German respondents said that “the government should vote in favour of a UN resolution recognising a Palestinian state alongside Israel.”⁷⁴

Trends in public opinion in Europe have become a source of concern for Israel, which has responded by launching a comprehensive strategy aimed at restoring its old image among Europeans.⁷⁵

Fourth: The Russian Federation

Russian foreign policy has been showing a greater degree of potency since Vladimir Putin took office in 2000. Russia seems determined to improve its position in the region, an issue that requires further elaboration.

Russia (whether with Tsarist Russia, under the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) or with the Russian Federation at present) has two main areas of interest, namely Eastern Europe and West Asia. Russia lost the first when it joined the EU and the NATO. This has prompted Russia to seek to preserve its footholds in the second area, of which Arab Asia is a key part.

Statements issued by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2011 reveal the general trends in Russian policy regarding the Palestinian issue, while bearing in mind that this policy has been increasing in scope relative to previous years. Despite the fact that Russia, similar to other countries, has refrained from taking any punitive measures against Israel, it has been gradually reducing the gap with the Palestinian and Arab sides in such a way that it appears to be putting pressure on Israel. In essence, this remains just an attempt by Russia to promote its strategic interests by not losing its second vital area.

Russian stances in 2011 have been characterized by attitudes that confirm our analysis; they are detailed here:⁷⁶

1. The Position on Settlement Building

Israeli settlement in East Jerusalem represents the impost important dimension of this issue. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov explained the Russian position towards the issue of Jerusalem by saying, “There will be no solution (to resolving



the status of Jerusalem) without the border demarcation and the resolution of the refugee problem.” He also stated that Russia believes that West Jerusalem should belong to Israel, East Jerusalem to the Palestinians, while the holy sites could be placed under international control. According to Lavrov, any statements claiming that Jerusalem would belong only to one side “will never work” on the ground; what is possible instead, he said, would be an inter-state format that reflects the existing situation in terms of sectarian relations. The Russian foreign minister also stressed that the legal status of Jerusalem should be determined as part of the general settlement to be agreed upon by the Israelis and the Palestinians, in the framework of their agreement on border issues and land swaps. Lavrov said that no one expects Israel to dismantle large settlements and evict their residents, but that the Palestinians must be given something similar to what Israel receives.⁷⁷

Lavrov’s statements indicate that Russia does not mind some large settlements remaining under Israeli control, a view that is compatible with the attitudes of certain European countries, as we noted earlier.

In a statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 16/11/2011, Russia reiterated its “deep concern” regarding the announcement by Israel that it will expedite settlement construction in areas in East Jerusalem. The statement said, “Any construction in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, is contrary to the well-known norms of international law and must be stopped.”⁷⁸

At the 16th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) in Geneva, Lavrov said, “The situation in many regions of the world, including the Balkans, Africa, South and South East Asia and the Middle East, urgently calls for a more comprehensive and thorough approach to accommodate the religious factor. As for the fate of Jerusalem, that factor is a decisive one.”⁷⁹

The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also criticized the Israeli move to approve the construction of 1,600 housing units in East Jerusalem in August, in addition to 900 units announced previously. Alexander Lukashevich, the spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that these settlements “exacerbate the complicated, volatile situation in the Middle East peace process, are illegal and go against the efforts of the international community, especially the Quartet of international mediators, aimed at finding a mutually acceptable basis for resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations.” He added, “We hope that the Israeli side will reconsider these plans.”⁸⁰

2. The Effects of the Arab Uprisings on Efforts to Resolve the Palestinian Issue

Russian analyses of the current Arab uprisings indicate confusion over the assessment of the possible repercussions for Russian policy. For example, there are concerns regarding the rise of Islamists to power in several Arab countries, in a manner that may fuel Islamic fundamentalism in the region, which may affect Russia itself, particularly in Chechnya. However, there is another current of opinion in Russia that believes these uprisings will increase the gap between the Arab and the US, enhancing Russia's chances of exploiting this gap.⁸¹

The issue of the Arab uprisings was thus raised by Russian officials in many of their foreign meetings. On 24/3/2011, a meeting was held between Lavrov and Netanyahu in Moscow in which the impact of the developments (i.e., the Arab uprisings) in the region over the peace process was discussed, as well as the issue of the Iranian nuclear program. Both sides "unanimously expressed a strong condemnation of manifestations of terrorism that claim innocent human lives," while Russia stressed the need to resolve "all the doubts concerning the nature of Iran's nuclear programme exclusively by peaceful means."⁸²

Regarding the link between the Arab uprisings and the Palestinian issue, a joint statement by EU High Representative Catherine Ashton and Foreign Minister of Russia Sergey Lavrov on 24/2/2011 said that:

Current upheavals in countries of the region should not be used as a pretext for preserving an impasse in the efforts to establish comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East. On the contrary, these efforts should be intensified. The achievement of a just settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict is a crucially important component of the efforts aimed at stabilization and sustainable development of the region as a whole.⁸³

One can assume that the "pretext" mentioned in the statement above is addressed to the Israeli side, which could use potential security threats arising from the recent developments in the Arab region as an excuse to drag its feet in implementing certain steps in the course of the peace process with the Palestinians.

3. Military Tension in the Region

There was an escalation of tension around the GS in late October 2011, including an exchange of fire between the PIJ and the Israeli military. About 40 rockets and



mortar shells were fired by the PIJ into Israel, killing one Israeli and injuring at least five. Israel responded with air strikes on GS killing nine Palestinians, and wounding 15. A spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, “The new spiral of confrontation undermines efforts being actively undertaken by the Middle East Quartet in line with its New York statement of September 23, 2011, to restart talks between Palestinians and Israelis.” The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs hoped that “the ceasefire agreement reached with Cairo’s mediation will be strictly observed.”⁸⁴

In the statement of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs concerning the attack against Israelis in Eilat on 18/8/2011, the spokesperson used the term “terrorist” to describe it, while describing the killing of Egyptian soldiers by Israeli troops over the same period by saying, “three Egyptian border guards were killed by the Israelis who mistook them for militants.” In this regard, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs took into account the statement of the Palestinian Hamas leadership on resumption of the ceasefire.⁸⁵

Concerning the demonstrations in front of the Israeli Embassy in Cairo over the killing of those border guards on 9/9/2011, the spokesperson for the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said, “We hope that the incident will not lead to a serious worsening of Egyptian-Israeli relations, which are an important factor in moving forward the Middle East peace process. We expect the Egyptian authorities to take additional necessary measures to protect foreign diplomatic missions on the territory of the country.”⁸⁶ Naturally, Russian diplomatic pressure is aimed at maintaining the ceasefire and Egyptian-Israeli relations in their current context of calm.

4. Russian Relations with the Palestinian and Israeli Sides

It is important to clarify that Russian meetings with the Palestinians and the Israelis do not address the same issues. For example, Russian-Israeli talks focus on armament in the region, the Iranian nuclear program and “terrorism.” Russian-Palestinian talks focus on peace settlement in the region, Palestinian national unity and support for Palestinian aspirations relevant to these two issues. But in both cases, the goal of the Russians is for their country to have a role in the peace process, as evidenced by Russia’s keenness on holding an international Middle East peace conference in Moscow.

a. Relations with the Palestinian Side

The Palestinian and Russian sides held a series of meetings at different levels, with the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov attending most meetings. A statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs following a meeting between Minister Sergey Lavrov and President Mahmud ‘Abbas on the sidelines of the 66th session of the UNGA in New York on 21/9/2011, said that ‘Abbas “expressed his readiness to continue searching for ways to resume talks with Israel on the well-known international legal basis, as well as efforts toward building a national inter-Palestinian consensus.” During the meeting, the Russian side welcomed the readiness to hold an international Middle East conference in Moscow “as the favorable conditions take shape for that.”⁸⁷

Lavrov later stated that forming a government of technocrats and holding Palestinian elections in 2012 would both lead to reunification between GS and the WB, through democratic measures and dialogue among all Palestinian factions, while taking into account the interests of all sides.⁸⁸

Meanwhile, the Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Bogdanov, held meetings with the Palestinian factions in Damascus on 29/8/2011, attended by representatives from Hamas, DFLP, PFLP and PFLP-GC. A statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said that the discussions laid “particular emphasis... on the task of ensuring inter-Palestinian consensus and creating an independent Palestinian state on the well-known international legal basis. The Russian side stressed the importance of maintaining calm along the perimeter of the Gaza Strip and the inadmissibility of the recurrence of violence between Palestinians and Israelis.”⁸⁹

On 5/7/2011, a meeting of the Russian-Palestinian Working Committee on the Middle East was held in Moscow. The Palestinian side, headed by Fatah Central Committee Member Nabil Sha‘th, stressed that it remains “committed to continuing the search for a mutually acceptable option for the resumption of negotiations with Israel... and the renunciation of violence.” The Russian delegation headed by Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Mikhail Bogdanov “emphasized Russia’s firm support for the Palestinian people’s right to create their independent, sovereign, geographically contiguous and viable state, whose future borders would be based on the 1967 lines with agreed territorial swaps.”⁹⁰

Regarding the Inter-Palestinian Meeting in Moscow in May 2011, Director of the Middle East and North Africa Department at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Sergey Vershinin said:

We tried to be helpful. At the same time we pursued a single goal—to enable the representatives of leading Palestinian organizations in a relaxed atmosphere to continue the dialogue on all issues of concern to them and thereby consolidate and develop the progress achieved in Cairo under very important Egyptian auspices.... The priority now is the early formation of a unified and inclusive Palestinian government of independent technocrats. It would deal primarily with the preparation and organization of general elections a year from now.... Achieving national unity will allow the Palestinians to conduct a fruitful and effective dialogue with Israel. The purpose is well known: to create an independent, viable and peaceful Palestinian state living in peace and security with Israel. Without unity, this is unreal. By the way, if you look at the final paragraph of the Moscow Statement, you'll see the parameters outlined for such a state, agreed by all Palestinian representatives, including Hamas. It talks about the borders based on the June 4, 1967 lines.⁹¹

Vershinin's statement indicates that the strategic goal behind Russia's engagement with Hamas in recent years, is to entice it into accepting the principle of settlement on the basis of the 1967 lines.

During his discussions with the Palestinian delegations participating in the Inter-Palestinian Meeting held in Moscow, Lavrov welcomed the steps to restore Palestinian national unity, and the creation of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital.⁹² On 23/3/2011, Lavrov met with 'Abbas in Moscow, where Russia stressed the importance of dialogue, saying that "the use of military force against civil population and foreign interference in contradiction to the international legal instruments are inadmissible."⁹³

Regarding the Palestinian bid for UN membership, a statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 2/11/2011 said, "We presume that the Palestinians' legitimate bids for membership in international organizations are not and cannot be an alternative to their negotiations with the Israelis, the ultimate aim of which should be to create an independent, sovereign and viable Palestinian state living in peace and security with Israel." The statement also said that the Russian government "urge[s] Israel's government to refrain from any unilateral actions

that prejudge the outcome of the negotiation process on the final status of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.”⁹⁴

On 10/11/2011, the Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov praised the efforts of The Imperial Orthodox Palestine Society, a 130 year old institution, in promoting multifaceted relations between Russia and the peoples of the region. Lavrov also made a reference to the return of some properties in Jerusalem to the Russian Federation and the PA’s transfer of some of its land plots in Jericho and Bethlehem to Russia.⁹⁵

b. Relations with the Israeli Side

Putin’s visit to the region in 2011 had no impact on moving the peace process forward. As for the talks between the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and the head of the Israeli National Security Council Ya’akov Amidror with Deputy Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov in Jerusalem, on 29–30/11/2011, they focused on topics such as arms control, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, as well as regional and international issues.⁹⁶

Relations between the Russian and Israeli sides were marred by some tension when the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs confirmed that the military attaché in the Israeli Embassy in Moscow Vadim Leiderman “was detained red-handed while receiving secret intelligence from a Russian citizen in Moscow on May 12.” The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared him “persona non grata” and ordered him to leave within 48 hours, which he did.⁹⁷

Nevertheless, it is clear that Russian policy has remained within the scope of the following stances:

1. Not taking any direct measures against Israel, with the exception of expelling the Israeli diplomat.
2. The ongoing Russian inclination towards reducing the gap with the various Palestinian factions, by helping achieve Palestinian unity on the one hand, and by working gradually to entice Hamas into accepting peace settlement and some kind of a recognition of Israel on the other.
3. Agreement with the general attitudes of the Quartet, with respect to settlement, Jerusalem, the refugees and the need for calm on all fronts.
4. Accepting the principle of land swaps, and accepting the annexation of some settlements to Israel.



Fifth: China

In the nineties, the Chinese leadership focused on finding a way to confront American plans for the international order, following the collapse of the USSR. This continued until the theory of the peaceful rise of China, advanced by Chinese political strategist Zheng Bijian, gained traction in 2003. Pursuant to Bijian's strategy, China would gradually rise to become a major player in international relations, but without threatening the security and stability of the international order, as had been the case during comparable transformations and their impact on international orders, historically.

The theory envisioned China's peaceful rise through several policies, including: Taking advantage of world peace to boost development in China, which would in turn contribute to world peace, by supporting openness and free trade. Furthermore, China must not stand in the way of the development of any country or put any country in danger. The instruments of soft power should therefore be the foundation of China's rise.⁹⁸

It is therefore important to see Chinese policy in the framework of China's pragmatism that began with modernization in 1978, on the one hand, and China's strategy of peaceful rise on the other. This means that China is uninterested in getting involved in regional conflicts (which explains its absence from the Quartet). Furthermore, China seeks to appear equally distant from each of the conflicting parties.

Based on the above, Chinese diplomatic activity was restricted to meeting with the parties, for example the meeting between Chinese Special Envoy to the Middle East Wu Sike and President Mahmud 'Abbas on 25/8/2011. On 12/7/2011, the Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi met with the special envoy of the Palestinian president, after a meeting with Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun on 11/7/2011.⁹⁹ Furthermore, Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi at the general debate of the 66th session of the UNGA reiterated several traditional Chinese stances, namely:¹⁰⁰

1. Calling for the obstacles to the resumption of the peace talks between the two sides to be overcome.
2. Reaffirming support for the two-state solution.
3. Reaffirming that East Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian state.

4. Supporting Palestinian efforts to obtain full membership of the UN.
5. Maintaining financial aid to the Palestinian side. The PA and China signed an agreement under which China will provide \$5.5 million in aid, in addition to another agreement to enhance trade and economic cooperation between the two sides.¹⁰¹

It is worth mentioning here that in 2011, China made clear overtures to Hamas. For instance, an official Chinese delegation visited Damascus in January, meeting with Khalid Mish'al, the head of the Hamas' Political Bureau. The delegation and Mish'al discussed developments in the peace process between the Palestinians and Israel as well as Palestinian national reconciliation. Mish'al also explained the suffering of the Palestinians as a result of the blockade and the Separation Wall, as well as the prisoners. The two sides then stressed the need for continued political communication between them on these issues. This visit was followed by another meeting that brought together a number of Hamas leaders and a Chinese delegation in February. The Chinese side appeared to be aware of the importance of the Palestinian issue in China's rising role globally. Moreover, the Chinese position has been positive in terms of respecting the will of the Palestinian people, including the results of the 2006 elections.¹⁰²

As for Israeli-Chinese meetings, on 30/5/2011 Vice Foreign Minister Zhai Jun attended the Opening Ceremony of the Seminar on Israel-China Relations held by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Israel in China. And on 25/8/2011 Chinese Special Envoy to the Middle East Wu Sike met with the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor.¹⁰³

On 25 May, the Commander of the Navy of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA), Admiral Wu Shengli visited Israel, and met with his Israeli counterpart Eliezer Marom¹⁰⁴ as well as Defense Minister Ehud Barak. On 14 August, the Chief of the General Staff of PLA General Chen Bingde made the first visit of its kind by a Chinese military officer of this level to Israel.¹⁰⁵ In a sign of growing ties between Israel and China, Defense Minister Ehud Barak visited China in June 2011, and the Defense Ministry stated that "it would be the first visit by an Israeli defense minister in 10 years, and that it would highlight the complex relationship between the two states."¹⁰⁶

The European and US embargo on the sale of arms to China following the events in Tiananmen Square in 1989 has made Israel the second largest exporter of arms to China after Russia.

Chinese-Israeli military ties and trade have both grown dramatically. The volume of Israeli exports increased by about 96% in 2010, according to data released by the Israeli CBS, amounting to around \$2.05 billion. Then, despite the fact that military trade between China and Israel decreased in 2011, the volume of Israeli exports to China rose to \$2.71 billion in the same year. The volume of trade between the two countries in 2010 was \$6.78 billion, compared to \$8.16 billion in 2011.¹⁰⁷

The Israeli government also discussed with China a project to build a railway between the Red Sea and the Mediterranean Sea. During his visit to China in September 2011, the Israeli Minister of Transportation, National Infrastructure, and Road Safety Yisrael Katz said that “the project is designed to function as a tunnel for the delivery of goods from Asia to the Mediterranean Sea.” The railway is planned to be 180 km long, running from the port of Eilat on the Red Sea to Nahal Tzin.¹⁰⁸

Meanwhile, it seems that the uprisings in the Arab countries have caused some concern in China over its interests in Arab countries, especially when around 37 thousand Chinese nationals had to be pulled out of Libya. This has prompted China to reaffirm its determination to maintain relations with Israel.

It is likely that China’s policies that have prevailed since 1978, which focused on developing China economically, militarily and technologically, as well as avoiding conflict with the US, except as regards Taiwan and the region bordering China, will change. This is more probable since the announcement by the Obama administration that the main focus of the US in its global strategy will shift to the Pacific, which means focusing efforts on containing China. This is a serious development in international relations unseen since the end of the Cold War.

Sixth: Japan

During 2011, the major stances of the Japanese government were: to reject settlement activities, stopping violence between the sides, and providing financial support to UNRWA and the PA. The following are stances of the Japanese government on some significant developments:¹⁰⁹

1. Regretting the Israeli decision to build more housing units in East Jerusalem and the rest of the WB. Japan said that settlement activity contravenes international law; several statements regarding this issue were also released by the Japanese government.¹¹⁰

The Japanese government condemned the demolition of the Shepherd Hotel in East Jerusalem by Israel, as well as future plans to build housing units which the Israeli government announced its intention to execute at a later time in the WB, including East Jerusalem.

The Japanese statements said that all these Israeli acts go against the efforts of the international community to resume negotiations. Japan urged Israel to refrain from any unilateral act that changes the current situation in East Jerusalem.¹¹¹

2. The Japanese government stated that it “does not recognize any act that prejudices the final status of the territories in the pre-1967 borders.”¹¹²
3. Concerning the Japanese position on military operations between the Palestinians and the Israeli side, the Japanese government stated the following:¹¹³
 - a. Japan strongly condemned the attack targeting an Israeli bus in Jerusalem on 23 March. Japan stressed that “terrorism cannot be justified for any reason,” while expressing its deep concern for the mutual attacks between the two sides in the GS.
 - b. Japan also condemned the attack on 18 August against Israelis, stressing that it is deeply concerned by rocket fire from the GS as well as Israeli military operations.
 - c. Japan welcomed the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and hoped that “this agreement will contribute to the confidence-building between the parties concerned.”
 - d. Japan said that it was deeply concerned about rocket attacks from GS against Israel, and Israel’s military operations, which “have caused death and injuries among civilians,” calling on both sides “to exercise maximum self-restraint” as problems can never be solved through violence.
4. Concerning political activities, Japanese government statements included the following positions:¹¹⁴
 - a. Japan welcomed the economic measures announced by the Quartet and Israel to improve the economic situation in the WB and GS.
Japan announced a donation of \$7.7 million to UNRWA, in addition to \$3.3 million in food aid to GS in August 2011 for the financial



year 2011/2012,¹¹⁵ and \$32 million for environmental purposes in the areas controlled by the PA in February 2011.¹¹⁶

- b. In commenting on the meeting between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo on 4 May, the Japanese Foreign Ministry expressed its hope that “the Palestinian Authority will maintain the commitment of renouncing violence against Israel.”
- c. Japan expressed its support for the efforts of the Quartet, and also stressed its support for Palestinian statehood. Japan also highlighted the importance of the Japanese initiative dubbed the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity.”
- d. Japan said it was deeply concerned that Israel has “frozen the transmission of the taxes which Israel collects on behalf of the Palestinian Authority.”

In conclusion, it seems that the Japanese position remains within the acceptable scope determined by the US, although some positions depart somewhat from American policies. Japan is unlikely to go beyond this limited scope in the foreseeable future.

Seventh: The United Nations (UN)

The UN was the scene for the diplomatic battle between the Palestinian and Israeli sides in 2011, over the Palestinian bid for UN membership as well as membership in the UN’s specialist agencies, particularly UNESCO. As a result of the categorical opposition of the US to full Palestinian membership of the UN, international efforts focused on a number of options:

1. Accepting Full Palestinian Membership: An option backed by Russia, China, the Arab countries, most developing countries, some European countries especially the small ones, and the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon.

2. Accepting “Non-Member” State Status: There are three levels of UN membership: full-membership; observer status (such as the status of the PLO); and non-member state status (such as the Vatican, or Switzerland until 2002). This status does not grant Palestine full membership, but does give it the right to join other specialized agencies of the UN. The PA may consider the upgrading of Palestinian representation to non-member state status a step forward, despite the fact that it falls short of Palestinian aspirations. It is important, however, to realize that there is a difference between recognition and admittance. Indeed, the first paves the way for the second, but does not necessarily guarantee it. Based on this,

the strategy pursued by Palestinian diplomats may focus instead on upgrading the legal status from an observer member to an observer state, effectively rendering the WB a state under occupation. It seems that several European countries, and perhaps the Quartet, are closer to supporting this option.

3. Observer Status: This is the current situation. It seems that the US is closer to this option. According to Maged Abdel Fattah, Egypt's envoy at the UN, efforts at the UN Security Council regarding the Palestinian bid are being impeded because of intense pressure exerted by the US to block the nine votes required to pass the Palestinian application in the UN Security Council. Abdel Fattah said that the US is doing so to avoid wielding an embarrassing veto against this application at a critical time internally, in the run up to presidential elections.¹¹⁷ It seems that heading to the UNGA is the only option available to the Palestinians in 2012, especially after the Committee on the Admission of New Members of the UN Security Council announced in November 2011 that it "was unable to make a unanimous recommendation to the Security Council" regarding the Palestinian application.¹¹⁸

The Palestinian bid for membership was bolstered by the acknowledgement of several international institutions of the "eligibility" of the Palestinian entity to become a state, from an economic standpoint. For example, the PA received recognition from The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) that it was fully capable of managing the economy of an independent state. In a report released on 7/4/2011, The World Bank said that if the PA "maintains its performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well-positioned for the establishment of a state at any point in the near future."¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, membership in UNESCO proved to be easier to achieve from a procedural standpoint. For one thing, it did not require going through the UN Security Council where it would face the American hurdle. As such, the Executive Board of UNESCO voted in favor of accepting full Palestinian membership to the organization in its 187th session on 5/10/2011, under the presidency of the Russian delegate, with a majority of 40 votes out of 58 member states; four countries objected (the US, Romania, Germany and Latvia), and 14 abstained (including France, Spain and Italy).¹²⁰

At the 36th General Conference of UNESCO, Palestine was granted full membership, on 31/10/2011, despite fierce opposition by the US. 107 countries



voted in favor of the resolution, most notably Russia, China, France, India, Brazil and South Africa, while 14 countries opposed it including the US, Germany, Canada and the Netherlands. This is while 52 countries abstained from voting, including the UK and Italy, while 12 countries were absent.¹²¹ Gaining membership in UNESCO does not require preexisting membership in the UN.

The following remarks can be made regarding the UNESCO vote:

- a. Major countries in the EU were divided between those who are opposed and those who abstained.
- b. If we take the vote at UNESCO's General Conference to be representative of the potential vote at the UNGA, if the Palestinian bid was presented there, then American pressure on member states may be effective, both diplomatically and financially.

Settlement Policy and the Human Dimensions

The position of the UN is consistent with the quasi-unanimous international position that rejects settlement activity, considering it a violation of international law. As such, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has made repeated calls for Jewish settlement in the WB, including East Jerusalem, to be halted.

A statement issued by the spokesperson for Ban Ki-moon read: "The Secretary-General reiterates that settlement activity in East Jerusalem and the remainder of the West Bank is contrary to international law and to Israel's obligations under the Road Map, and must cease."¹²²

On the other hand, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs-occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA-oPt) called on the Israeli authorities to abide by the advisory opinion on Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory of the ICJ, to halt construction of the Separation Wall, modify the path of the parts that were built to conform to the Green Line, while dismantling the parts of the Wall that have been already completed as well as eliminating the gates and permits system.¹²³

However, Martin Nesirky, spokesperson for the Secretary-General Ban had sent letters to the governments of countries around the Mediterranean Sea on possible flotillas to GS. In these letters Ban Ki-moon "expressed his belief that assistance and goods destined to Gaza should be channeled through legitimate crossings and established channels." Nesirky added, "The Secretary-General called on all

Governments concerned to use their influence to discourage such flotillas, which carry the potential to escalate into violent conflict.”¹²⁴ This is possibly consistent with the findings of Geoffrey Palmer’s Report of the Secretary-General’s Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident. The report issued in September 2011 reached several conclusions, including:¹²⁵

1. “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.”
2. “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.”
3. The Israeli army personnel “faced significant, organized and violent resistance from a group of passengers when they boarded the Mavi Marmara requiring them to use force for their own protection.”
4. “There was significant mistreatment of passengers by Israeli authorities after completion of the takeover of the vessels.”

But Palmer’s Report was considered odd by some international law experts and pundits familiar with the Israeli blockade on the GS. There were question marks about the credibility of Palmer himself and his pro-Zionist background. For instance, the report failed to condemn Israel for its violation of international law when it raided a civilian vessel in international waters and killed civilians. The report also justified the blockade on GS on the grounds of preventing arms smuggling, at a time when the Israelis ban the entry of more than six thousand types of foodstuffs, consumer goods, building materials and equipment for agriculture, manufacturing and infrastructure. Indeed, there are hundreds of ways to verify that a vessel contains arms or not, without the need for a suffocating Israeli blockade.

If we are to link the findings of the Palmer Report to the in April backtracking by Judge Goldstone on his own report on the Israeli assault on GS in 2008, especially as regards condemning Israel, this suggests that there may be influences prejudging the attitudes of the international community concerning the recognition of the Palestinian right to UN membership.

United Nations General Assembly (UNGA)

The UNGA began discussing the item “Question of Palestine” on 29/10/2011. Five resolutions were adopted on Palestine in the UNGA meetings on 30/11/2011, namely:

1. Peaceful Settlement of the Question of Palestine: the UNGA stressed the need to reach a peaceful settlement of the Palestine question in all its aspects through this resolution, and reiterated its full support for the peace process in the Middle East in accordance with UN resolutions. The resolution called on all parties to fulfill their previous obligations, especially as regards the implementation of the Road Map, and commitment to the two-state solution. The resolution also called for a complete halt to Israeli settlement activity in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, calling on Israel to immediately cease its construction of the Wall, and the “cessation of all provocations, including by Israeli settlers, in East Jerusalem, including in and around religious sites.”

The resolution stressed the need for “the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem; the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination and the right to their independent State.” The resolution also stressed “the need for a just resolution of the problem of Palestine refugees in conformity with its resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948.”¹²⁶

2. Jerusalem: The UNGA reiterated that “all legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purported to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, in particular the so-called ‘Basic Law’ on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, were null and void and must be rescinded forthwith.” The UNGA also expressed its grave concern about the continuation by Israel of illegal settlement activities, including construction of the Wall in and around East Jerusalem, and the “demolition of Palestinian homes, the revocation of residency rights and the eviction and displacement of numerous Palestinian families from East Jerusalem neighbourhoods, as well as other acts of provocation and incitement, including by Israeli settlers, in the city.”¹²⁷

3. Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the Department of Public Information of the Secretariat: The UNGA, having considered the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights

of the Palestinian People, encouraged the Department “to formulate ways for the media and representatives of civil society to engage in open and positive discussions to explore means for encouraging people-to-people dialogue and promoting peace and mutual understanding in the region.”¹²⁸

4. Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People: The UNGA requested the Committee “to continue to exert all efforts to promote the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including their right to self-determination, to support the Middle East peace process... and to mobilize international support for, and assistance to, the Palestinian people.” The UNGA also requested the UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine and other UN bodies associated with the question of Palestine “to continue to cooperate fully with the Committee.”¹²⁹

5. Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat: The UNGA requested “the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work,” and invited “all Governments and organizations to extend their cooperation to the Division in the performance of its tasks.”¹³⁰

United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

On 26/7/2011, ECOSOC adopted a resolution concerning the Situation of and Assistance to Palestinian Women, in which it expressed its “deep concern about the grave situation of Palestinian women in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, resulting from the severe impact of the ongoing illegal Israeli occupation and all of its manifestations.” The resolution also expressed grave concern about the difficulties that faced Palestinian women under Israeli occupation, including “the continuation of home demolitions, evictions of Palestinians and arbitrary detention and imprisonment, as well as high rates of poverty, unemployment, food insecurity, inadequate water supply, incidents of domestic violence and declining health, education and living standards.”

ECOSOC also expressed its deep concern over the critical socio-economic and humanitarian situation in the GS, due to restrictions on the movement of people and goods, and called upon “the international community to continue to provide urgently needed assistance,” and reiterated the need for Israel to abide by the rules of international law, and allow the refugees to return to their homes.¹³¹

On 28/7/2011, ECOSOC adopted a resolution that:¹³²

1. Calls for the full opening of the border crossings of the Gaza Strip, in line with Security Council resolution 1860 (2009)....
2. Stresses the need to preserve the territorial contiguity, unity and integrity of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and to guarantee the freedom of movement of persons and goods....
3. Also stresses the need to preserve and develop Palestinian national institutions and infrastructure....
4. Demands that Israel comply with the Protocol on Economic Relations between the Government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization, signed in Paris on 29 April 1994.
5. Calls upon Israel to restore and replace civilian properties, vital infrastructure, agricultural lands and governmental institutions that have been damaged or destroyed as a result of its military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
6. Reiterates the call for the full implementation of the Agreement on Movement and Access of 15 November 2005, particularly the urgent and uninterrupted reopening of all crossings into the Gaza Strip....
7. Calls upon all parties to respect the rules of international humanitarian law and to refrain from violence against the civilian population....
8. Reaffirms the inalienable right of the Palestinian people... to all their natural and economic resources....
9. Calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to cease its destruction of homes and properties, economic institutions and agricultural lands and orchards....
10. Also calls upon Israel, the occupying Power, to end immediately its exploitation of natural resources....
11. Reaffirms that the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem... are illegal....
12. Also reaffirms that the ongoing construction by Israel of the wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including in and around East Jerusalem, is contrary to international law....
13. Calls upon Israel to comply with the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War....

14. Emphasizes the importance of the work of United Nations organizations and agencies in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem....
15. Reiterates the importance of the revival and accelerated advancement of negotiations of the peace process on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions....

United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine (UNRWA)

UNRWA managed to close its \$100 million budget deficit in 2010, thanks to donations by some countries, according to the Commissioner General of UNRWA Filippo Grandi. However, it is possible that the UNRWA will not be able to address the \$60 million deficit in 2011, as some countries reduced their donations because of the global financial crisis. UNRWA's total budget for 2011 is approximately \$620 million.¹³³

Despite the fact that there had been references made, in Europe and elsewhere, to Israel easing the blockade on GS, UNRWA's Spokesman Chris Gunness said in July 2011 that "The Israeli blockade of Gaza has lasted longer than some of the most notorious sieges in human history." He also quoted the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) which said that the blockade is "a collective punishment in clear violation of international humanitarian law."¹³⁴

Gunness said that if the Israeli blockade of GS had happened in any other place, then there would have probably been meaningful political measures to put an end to it and hold those responsible accountable. It must be noted that UNRWA has only brought in a tiny fraction of the construction material needed in GS; 3,291 trucks since June 2010 (under 4% of the Agency's overall \$660 million construction plan to rebuild homes and schools in the GS over three years).¹³⁵

Eighth: International Public Opinion

Public opinion can be discussed on two levels:

1. Popular Attitudes

These are measured through opinion polls conducted by academic or political entities enjoying a certain degree of credibility. We will attempt to show these attitudes through a number of topics:



a. The Position on the Palestinian Right to UN Membership

A poll conducted for BBC World Service by the international polling firm GlobeScan during the period 3/7/2011–29/8/2011 of 20,446 citizens from 19 countries showed that 49% backed UN recognition of Palestine as a full-member state, while 21% said that their government should oppose it; 30% either said that it depends, that their government should abstain, or that they do not know what their government should do. The poll showed that support for the Palestinian bid to obtain UN recognition of Palestine as an independent state within the 1967 lines was strongest in Egypt, and that there was a majority support in the other three predominantly Muslim countries polled (Turkey, Pakistan and Indonesia). While the Chinese people were the second most likely overall to favor their government voting for recognition of a Palestinian state.

On the other hand, the highest opposition to the right of Palestine to obtain UN membership was in the US, with 45% supporting and 36% opposing the proposal. In Brazil, 41% were in favor and 26% opposed the proposal, and in India, 32% were in favor while 25% were opposed to the proposal. In the three EU member states covered by the survey, the results were as follows: France 54% in favor, versus 20% against, Germany 53% in favor, versus 28% against, and the UK 53% in favor versus 26% against. This is while in Russia the percentage of those in favor was 37% versus 13% who were against.¹³⁶

b. The Negative View of Israel

A poll conducted for BBC World Service in the period 6/12/2011–17/2/2012, which included 24,090 citizens from 22 countries, asked respondents to evaluate Israel's influence in the world. It showed that 50% of respondents have negative views of Israel's influence in the world, while 21% gave it positive views. Those who gave it a favorable one ranged from 3% in Japan to 54% in Nigeria, while the positive views reached 50% in the US. It should be noted that the poll only included one Arab country, Egypt.

However, we would like to draw attention to the following:

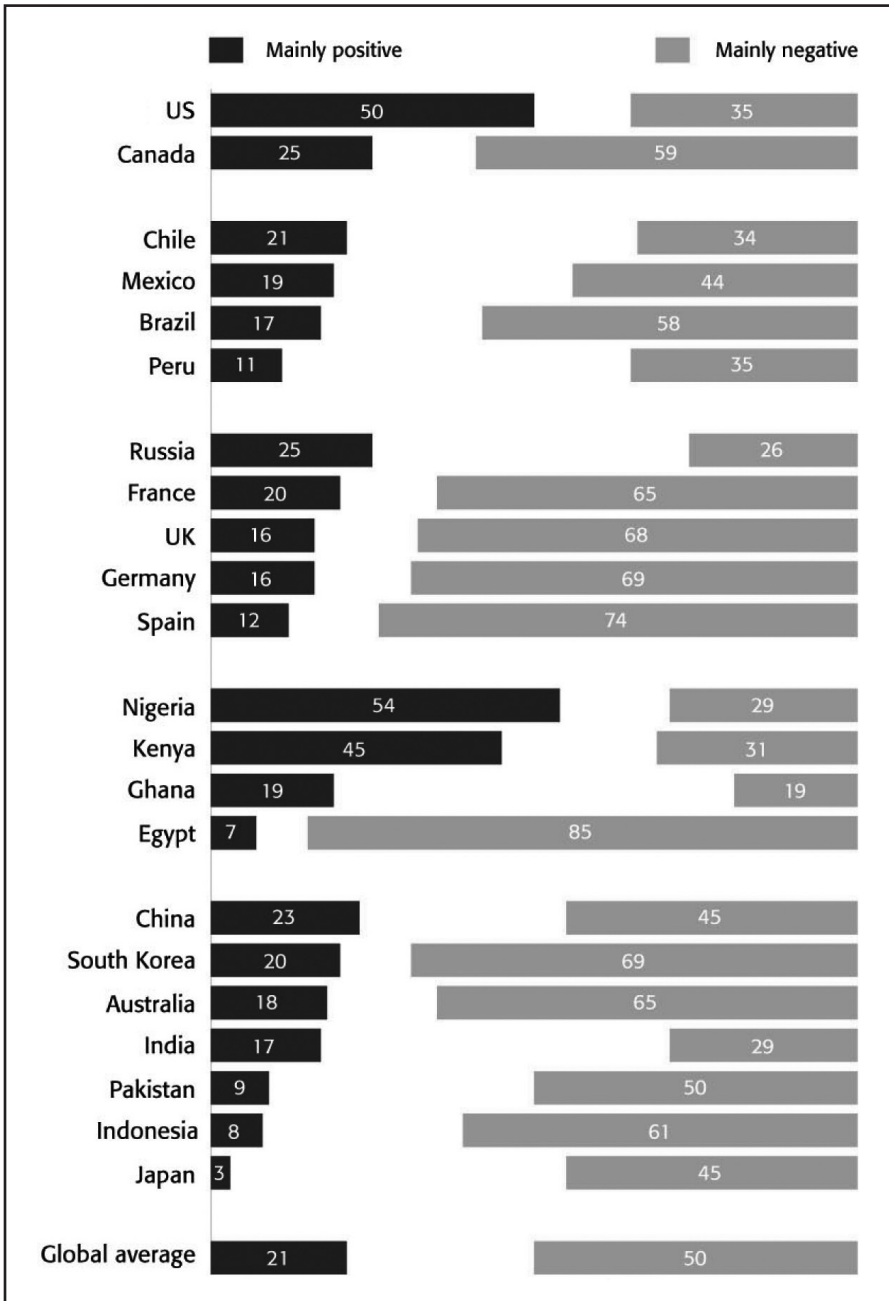
1. The positive view of Israel was predominant in only three countries, while a negative view of Israel prevailed across 19 countries.
2. There is a contrast between the conduct of the governments of major European nations and public opinion trends in these countries regarding the Palestinian

issue. For example, 69% had a negative view of Israel in Germany, 68% in the UK and 65% in France; yet the policies of these countries do not reflect the views of the populations.

Table 2/5: Views of Israel’s Influence by Country 2012¹³⁷

Country	Mainly positive (%)	Mainly negative (%)	“Depends,” “neither/ neutral” and “DK/ NA” (%)
US	50	35	15
Canada	25	59	16
Chile	21	34	45
Mexico	19	44	37
Brazil	17	58	25
Peru	11	35	54
Russia	25	26	49
France	20	65	15
UK	16	68	16
Germany	16	69	15
Spain	12	74	14
Nigeria	54	29	17
Kenya	45	31	24
Ghana	19	19	62
Egypt	7	85	8
China	23	45	32
South Korea	20	69	11
Australia	18	65	17
India	17	29	54
Pakistan	9	50	41
Indonesia	8	61	31
Japan	3	45	52
Global average	21	50	29

Views of Israel's Influence by Country 2012



The white space in this chart represents “Depends,” “Neither/neutral,” and “DK/NA.”
 Asked of half of sample.

The following remarks can be made based on the above study of international public opinion trends (both individual and organizational):

1. Regardless of the parties that conducted the polls, the results would have been perhaps different if the questions focused on supporting or opposing Israeli occupation, settlement or the Judaization of Jerusalem, or even the blockade of GS. Perhaps if that happened, the results would have better served Palestinian interests, as the extent of the opposition to Israeli policies worldwide would have been revealed.
2. Strikingly, the number of those who chose “depends,” “neither/ neutral” and “DK/ NA” options in some countries remains high. There were seven countries where their percentage exceeded 40%, a high percentage worthy of note.

2. International Non-Governmental Organizations

The activities and attitudes of popular NGOs at the international level mirror the attitudes of international public opinion. Examining the work of the most prominent such NGOs indicates that sympathy with various Palestinian campaigns continues, as illustrated by the following examples:

- a. Amnesty International: The organization called for the rejection of the Israeli request that the Goldstone Report be withdrawn. The report blamed Israel for the suffering of Palestinian civilians in GS. Amnesty International also criticized the harassment of human rights activists by Israel.¹³⁸
- b. Human Rights Watch (HRW): In its statements, the organization condemned attacks by the Israeli security forces against peaceful marches on the anniversary of the *Nakbah*. HRW also criticized Israeli calls for sanctions against those who advocate a boycott of products manufactured in the settlements; HRW also criticized incidents of torture by the PA and its crackdown against peaceful demonstrations.¹³⁹
- c. Friends of Humanity International: The organization called on the Egyptian authorities to open the Rafah crossing and lift the blockade of the GS.¹⁴⁰
- d. The European Network to Support the Rights of Palestinians Prisoners—Ufree, called on Egypt to release Palestinian prisoners in its custody.¹⁴¹
- e. Swiss human rights organizations: More than 20 pro-Palestinian rights organizations and popular organizations called for a protest against a visit by the Israeli president to Switzerland.¹⁴²
- f. Several European human rights organizations called for the dismantlement of the Separation Wall and settlements.



- g. European human rights groups criticized Goldstone's backtracking on the findings of his report.
- h. The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG): ECESG organized a flotilla bound for GS, criticizing Ban Ki-moon's call for an end to such flotillas carrying aid to GS.¹⁴³
- i. The ICRC issued several statements criticizing Israel's failure to return some Palestinian prisoners, released as part of a swap deal between Israel and Hamas, to their hometowns. The ICRC also made reference to providing medical aid to GS, and criticized the Israeli siege on health facilities in the GS.
- j. A convoy of trucks was organized, carrying aid to GS from South Africa under the name "We Are All Gaza."¹⁴⁴
- k. Twenty-two international humanitarian, development, human rights and peace-building organizations criticized the Palmer Report, mentioned earlier.¹⁴⁵
- l. Twenty-one Trade union organizations (members of the World Federation of Trade Unions) declared their support for the Palestinian for UN membership.¹⁴⁶
- m. An international coalition of 20 leading aid agencies and human rights groups called on the Quartet to put pressure on Israel "to immediately reverse its settlement policies and freeze all demolitions that violate international law."¹⁴⁷

Conclusion

If we discount unexpected developments on the international stage, there are events scheduled to take place in 2012, such as the US, Russian and French presidential elections, in addition to the possible change in Chinese leadership. This is not to mention possible Palestinian elections which were initially planned for May 2011.

It seems that the change in Russian leadership (with Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin swapping places for the second time, with the latter returning as president and the former as prime minister), and the possible change in Chinese leadership (we expect that Xi Jinping and Li Keqiang will replace the Secretary-General of the Communist Party Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabao respectively) will not lead to meaningful change in the attitudes of either nation concerning the Palestinian issue.

The victory of the leader of the French Socialist Party, Francois Hollande in the presidential election, defeating rightwing rival President Nicolas Sarkozy on 6/5/2012, has perhaps cast doubt on the French and European positions regarding the Palestinian issue. However, it does not appear that there is anything substantial regarding the possibility of a serious change in this regard. Indeed, Hollande's victory came as a result of internal factors linked to the economic and social conditions in France, and policies in the EU, rather than as a result of a desire for change in French foreign policy.

The issue of Palestinian membership of the UN and the resumption of Israeli-Palestinian talks will therefore remain the focal points for international diplomatic efforts. However, these two issues will not be immune to a number of developments, including:

1. The Results of the US Presidential Election: As the presidential election will be held in the first week of November 2012; this means that the US president may find himself caught between two options: Avoid steps that might deprive him of Israeli support and seek to maintain the status quo. Alternatively a candidate could seek a significant breakthrough that would enhance his image and therefore chance of reelection; this would mean that his policy in 2012 may take on the following features:

- a. Continued opposition to Palestinian membership of the UN, whether by threatening to wield the veto, or by intensifying pressure on new members in the UN Security Council, including Azerbaijan, Guatemala, Morocco, Pakistan and Togo (instead of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Lebanon, Nigeria and Gabon), starting From January 2012. Togo may be the country the least supportive of Palestine among the new members.
- b. Easing statements that criticize the accelerating Israeli settlement activity.
- c. Intensifying pressure on the Palestinian side to return to the negotiating table, or seeking to launch parallel talks that give the impression that some kind of a diplomatic breakthrough is being achieved.
- d. Sustaining economic pressure on Iran, and threatening to use other options from to time to appease the Israel lobby.
- e. The PA could begin an effort to expand the circle of countries participating in the Quartet, a move that may be opposed by the US, particularly if this means the inclusion of countries like Brazil, India or South Africa.



2. Developments in the EU: Two countries will share the EU presidency in 2012. In the first half, Denmark will preside over the EU and Cyprus in the second half. The strategic plans of the EU for 2012 place particular focus on two axes: First, addressing the economic crisis; and second, focusing on three regions which are, in order of priority, Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and the Caucasus.¹⁴⁸ It is necessary to note here that stability in the Middle East, according to the European plan, is not limited to the Palestinian issue, but also includes the developments of the Arab Spring in Egypt, Syria and North Africa, and the prospects of developments in Jordan.

Endnotes

- ¹ See Middle East Quartet statements, UN News Centre, <http://www.un.org/apps/news/docs.asp?Topic=Middle%20East&Type=Quartet%20statement>
- ² Statement by Middle East Quartet, Secretary-General, SG/2168, UNISPAL, 5/2/2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/fdc5376a7a0587a4852570d000708f4b/135695160a620d6985257830004c63f1?OpenDocument>
- ³ Statement by Middle East Quartet, Secretary-General, SG/2172, UNISPAL, 14/3/2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/D50BA20237F1057185257853006471DE>
- ⁴ Statement by Middle East Quartet, Secretary-General, SG/2174, UNISPAL, 20/5/2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/fdc5376a7a0587a4852570d000708f4b/5098a747c454b8ce852578960061bb30?OpenDocument>
- ⁵ Statement by Middle East Quartet, Secretary-General, SG/2175, UNISPAL, 5/7/2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/fdc5376a7a0587a4852570d000708f4b/fe8c10985494ee6852578c40044faf7?OpenDocument>
- ⁶ Statement by Middle East Quartet, Secretary-General, SG/2176, UNISPAL, 16/8/2011, <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/fdc5376a7a0587a4852570d000708f4b/eb7a830bb18c51d9852578ee005e1280?OpenDocument>
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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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