

# The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012 – 2013



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# Chapter Three

## *The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World*

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# The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

## *Introduction*

The years 2012 and 2013 brought about many changes in the Arab countries, which formed a strategic environment supportive of the Palestinian issue, especially with regard to Egypt and Syria. These changes had their implications on the Palestinian issue on the popular and official levels. However, an assessment of the outcome of these implications, whether positive or negative, is not possible given that the final results of the waves of Arab changes are not yet clear, and might need some time before they crystallize.

But generally speaking, the 2012 developments showed that the Palestinian issue remains a strongly presence in the collective Arab consciousness, and it is still able to steer popular opinion to embrace broad Arab concerns and major issues despite the immediacy of local concerns. The 2012 events also showed that the Arab regimes, should they rely on their inherent sources of power and true popular will, are able to affect the track of the Palestinian issue and the conflict with Israel, although their influence is limited and needs further support.

Additionally, the political crises of 2013 and the stumbling track of the Arab uprisings have weakened the ability of the Arab peoples to express their genuine will through representative institutions. The 2013 events also raised doubts about the possibility of achieving real change towards establishing an Arab environment that would support the resilience of the Palestinian people. An environment that would support Palestinian resistance, and their ability to face increasing Israeli infringements, especially regarding settlement construction and the Judaization of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Every Arab country became preoccupied with its internal issues and concerns at the expense of major issues and regional priorities.

It seems that changes and crises in the Arab countries will continue to influence the trends of the Palestinian issue in 2014. Accordingly, it is unlikely to witness any major breakthroughs in the peace process, resistance or reconciliation tracks as long as internal concerns and control of change movements occupy the political agendas of current regimes.



## *First: Stances of the League of Arab States*

### **1. Impact of Changes and Uprisings on the Palestinian Issue**

The repercussions of the uprisings and changes in the Arab world since early 2011 have crossed local borders to affect the regional role of the countries experiencing flux. This is true whether regarding their international relations or the size and direction of their impact in international and regional organizations, namely the League of Arab States.

The turmoil that struck the political regimes in Egypt and Syria in particular led to a change in the relative weights of the influential forces within the Arab League, especially regarding the Palestinian issue. This is because these two countries used to represent the main pillars of the “moderation” and “refusal” fronts across which Arab countries were aligned, and this categorization practically vanished in 2011.

At the same time, and beside the fact that many Arab countries were occupied with own their internal concerns has weakened the Arab League and its influence in general, the escalation of the Syrian crisis in 2012 and 2013 took on an advanced position on the Arab League agenda at the expense of other issues, namely the Palestinian issue. This was manifested in the two Arab summits held in Baghdad and Doha on 29/3/2012 and 26/3/2013 respectively where the Syrian file and internal issues in some Arab countries prevailed over the meetings. The Palestinian issue was not completely absent but the summits passed without providing anything new in this respect. Apparently, the most important outcome provided in the Doha Summit was the call by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani, to establish a fund for the support of Jerusalem, and vowing Qatari participation with \$250 million for its establishment.<sup>1</sup>

The performance of the Arab League has showed some positive signs regarding the Palestinian issue during 2012 and 2013, particularly in the periods when elected parties assumed power, notably in Egypt. These signs were noticed in the Arab League’s position towards Hamas, when its Secretary General Nabil al-‘Arabi met Khalid Mish‘al, head of Hamas’s Political Bureau, on 6/1/2012. They were also noticeable in the solidarity visit by a delegate of Arab prime ministers headed by al-‘Arabi to GS, on 20/11/2012, during the Israeli offensive on the Strip. The delegates included ‘Adnan Mansur, Muhammad Kamel ‘Amr, Hoshiyar Zebari, Rafiq ‘Abdul Salam, ‘Ali Karti, and Nasser Judeh, Foreign Ministers of Lebanon,

Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, and Jordan respectively. It also included Saudi State Minister for Foreign Affairs Nizar Bin ‘Obaid Madani and his Qatari counterpart Khalid Bin Muhammad al-‘Atiyyah as well as Riyad al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Ramallah-based government.<sup>2</sup>

But in general, the role played by the Arab League during 2012 and 2013 did not deviate from the 2011 track which was limited in presence and influence, and lacked any genuine action on the ground. This was true regarding continuous Israeli violations, such as settlement building, the Judaization of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem, and the GS siege. It was also true concerning the violations against Palestinian prisoners in Israeli prisons, the inter-Palestinian division and the reconciliation file, and in the settlement file which is discussed below in detail.

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

The years 2012 and 2013 brought no new developments in the position of the Arab League regarding the peace process or the League’s ability to influence negotiations. Neither could the new elected regimes add any major changes concerning the peace process. Thus, the general trend was to continue the commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative, while providing political cover for the PA through authorizing President Mahmud ‘Abbas to pursue any steps he would deem suitable in this context.

In January 2012, the Arab League supported “exploratory talks” with Israel. Then it declared its support for the Palestinian action plan presented by President ‘Abbas to the Arab League Council at the foreign ministerial level on 12/2/2012 regarding the commitments to resume direct talks. The Council approved of the provision of a financial security network at \$100 million per month for the PA to face financial pressures and Israel’s abstinence from transferring the tax money it collects on behalf of the PA,<sup>3</sup> then it announced through the Follow-up Committee its support for President ‘Abbas’s plan to seek UN membership for Palestine.<sup>4</sup>

The following year, the stances of the Arab League remained identical with the position of the PA, where it announced its support for the peace talks that were resumed in July 2013 pursuant to the efforts of US Secretary of State John Kerry. It even explicitly agreed to the principle of a land swap within the frame of a final solution.<sup>5</sup> The Arab League also agreed with President ‘Abbas on common principles including the refusal of recognizing Israel as a “Jewish state” as well as



the Israeli presence in the Jordan Rift Valley on the eastern border of the Palestinian state, while accepting the presence of international troops in the region.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the current data, there are no signs of an imminent change in the position of the Arab League regarding the peace process or its support of the PA. In other words, the Arab League is not able to evade US demands or conditions while the Palestinian side itself is compliant with these conditions, especially while the Palestinian political schism continues.

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

### **1. Egypt**

#### **a. The Impact of Internal Changes on the Palestinian Issue**

The changes witnessed in the Egyptian arena during 2012 and 2013 had the greatest impact on the Palestinian issue compared to changes that took place in other Arab countries. Egypt has a significant strategic status at the level of Arab and regional politics, and in the conflict with Israel; it is the largest Arab country, and a neighboring state to occupied Palestine, bordering GS. The Palestinian issue was always present during these two years in the internal Egyptian scene through two main files: the relationship with the GS and the relationship with Israel.

Since early 2012, and during the preparations for presidential elections, there was almost total consensus in the Egyptian positions regarding these above two files. This accordance persisted after the Freedom and Justice Party candidate, Muhammad Morsi, won the elections in June 2012 but it soon faced two major crises. In August 2012, an attack in the Egyptian Rafah claimed the lives of 16 Egyptian soldiers in what was known as the “Rafah massacre,” and suspicions were pointed at gunmen from the GS. On 3/7/2013, a military coup overthrew the elected president and was accompanied by an unprecedented campaign against the GS tunnels, the closure with the Rafah crossing, and a high-pitched media and political campaign against Hamas in GS, and against the positions previously adopted by President Morsi towards the Palestinians.

The impact of the Egyptian changes was evident during the Israeli offensive on GS in November 2012 when Egyptian diplomacy played an important role in

ending the assault as per the conditions of the Palestinian resistance; a landmark compared to the positions of the former regime.

However, generally speaking, it is possible to say that the positive signs shown in Egypt towards the Palestinian issue since the January 25 Uprising and which implied that Egypt could provide strong, positive leverage, have faced a setback with the military coup, which was accompanied by a political and media defamation campaign against the Palestinian resistance.

The main factor in enhancing Egypt's positive role towards the Palestinian issue during the recent period was the fact that the public mood was supportive of the Palestinian issue and able to express itself. Accordingly, the danger of the changes witnessed on the Egyptian scene lies in the attempts to target this public mood through defamation campaigns rather than by changing the ruling power itself.

As for future trends, it is unlikely that Egypt will play an influential role in supporting the Palestinian issue in the foreseeable future, whether on the level of the peace process or the resistance track. This is so especially if the implications of the military coup and its consolidation persist through the political transitional process. Thus, while relations between the Egyptian authorities and the resistance factions is witnessing a deepening crisis, Egypt's occupation with its internal crises and its international isolation limit its ability to influence the track of the Palestinian issue at the political level.

### **b. Egyptian-Palestinian Relations**

The Egyptian-Palestinian relations, especially with the GS, improved from the beginning of the January 25 Uprising, and during the period, which preceded the Rafah attack, the effect of which remained limited during President Morsi's rule.

Candidates for presidential elections were inclined to improve Egyptian-Palestinian relations as the promise to work on lifting the GS siege was an important part of their platforms.

The improved relations were reflected in the facilitation of the movement of Palestinians and the passage of aid and visitors from different countries via the Rafah crossing, where the security perspective to the GS decreased noticeably. In addition, the Arab Affairs Committee in the Egyptian Parliament recommended that a legal study of the crossings between Egypt and GS and how to operate them be conducted. This study would allow the humanitarian aid to reach the Palestinian



people, and provide GS with petroleum and electricity, if Israel refrained from its commitments to provide security and services for GS as an occupied territory.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, there were talks during that period about a three-phase plan to permanently solve the GS electricity problem and connect it with the eight linkage project.<sup>8</sup>

In addition, around 50 thousand Palestinians born to Egyptian mothers received Egyptian citizenship in compliance with the ruling of the Supreme Administrative Court issued in May 2012,<sup>9</sup> while Palestinians living in Egypt, including those from Syria, were accepted in Egyptian public schools. Members of the Freedom and Justice Party in Shura Council, before its dissolution, launched an initiative to reactivate the law, which made Palestinians equal to Egyptians in obligations and rights, except for the right to run and vote in elections.<sup>10</sup>

The development of relations also led to Egypt's opening up to the Hamas movement whose leaders visited Egypt repeatedly. The relationship between Egypt and Hamas witnessed no problems in the first half of 2012 until the killing of the Egyptian soldiers in Egyptian Rafah on 5/8/2012.

Despite this incident, Egypt continued to play a positive role in GS, albeit temporarily, especially during the Israeli offensive on GS. Because of this offensive, Egypt recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv, while the Israeli ambassador and his team left Cairo after receiving a letter of protest.<sup>11</sup> Egypt also led a wide diplomatic campaign to end the offensive and the Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah crossing open, even during holidays, to facilitate the exit of the wounded.<sup>12</sup> President Morsi dispatched Prime Minister Hisham Qandil to GS in support of the Strip, and he said that "Egypt would not leave Gaza alone," warning that "Egypt today is quite different from Egypt in the past."<sup>13</sup>

Yet at the same time, it seemed that the incident of killing the Egyptian soldiers in Rafah heralded the deterioration of relations between Egypt and the GS in general, and between Hamas and the Egyptian military in particular. Still, the presence of Morsi as president prevented the explosion of relations until he was ousted by the military coup. Ultimately, the incident unveiled the different approaches pursued by the military and presidential institutions towards the GS, which extended to the Egyptian political system at large.

Following the Rafah incident, the Egyptian military started a broad campaign to destroy the Gaza tunnels.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, a wide military operation in was

launched in Sinai during which the Egyptian Air Force raided the Peninsula for the first time since 1973.<sup>15</sup> Concurrently, some political figures called for closing the tunnels permanently,<sup>16</sup> and for reconsidering the security annexes of the Camp David Accords to allow the Egyptian military to persecute “terrorism” in Sinai.<sup>17</sup>

The deterioration of the relations further crystallized with the publication of Egyptian media reports in March 2013 talking about “a war of tunnels” between Hamas and the Egyptian military.<sup>18</sup> These reports also indicated that some Hamas members were involved in the Rafah attack,<sup>19</sup> an accusation that was denied by the Egyptian military at the time,<sup>20</sup> as well as by Hamas who confirmed its absolute noninterference in Egyptian internal affairs.<sup>21</sup>

The tension in the relationship between Egypt and Hamas intensified after the ouster of President Morsi in early July 2013. Hamas-affiliated media outlets showed sympathy with Morsi and the MB against the coup, thus the coup leaders and their supporters perceived such position as another justification to escalate the media campaign against Hamas and the GS.

The Egyptian military had already enhanced its military deployment on the borders with GS in concurrence with the coup,<sup>22</sup> and also escalated its campaign to destroy the tunnels in the region.<sup>23</sup> In addition, Egyptian authorities declared the closure of Rafah crossing without explanation,<sup>24</sup> then new access procedures were implemented requiring prior security approval for all age groups rather than the age group from 18 to 40 as had been the case previously.<sup>25</sup>

The military also escalated its campaign to destroy the tunnels between Egypt and Gaza, and declared on 12/3/2014 that a total of 1,370 tunnels had been destroyed up to that date.<sup>26</sup> Destruction of tunnels was accompanied with the continued closure of the Rafah crossing for long periods in the following months and it was only opened for urgent cases and for limited groups and numbers of travelers. For example, there were more than five thousand travelers registered until mid-March 2014 after the crossing was closed for 36 consecutive days, and only a limited number of them was able to travel after the opening of the crossing.<sup>27</sup>

Simultaneously, the Ministry of Health in the GS caretaker government announced the death of three people who needed urgent travel for medical treatment, since the Egyptian authorities tightened the closure restrictions on the Rafah crossings. According to the ministry the closure has “deprived around 450 medical conditions that were formally transferred for treatment in Egyptian



hospitals” of their proper medical care. The restrictions also led to a 30% decrease in the availability of the Essential Drugs List, in addition to the halt of more than 80% of the ministry’s construction projects.<sup>28</sup>

As an indicator of the impact of the destruction of tunnels and closure of the Rafah crossing in the GS, economic indicators in the Strip showed a rise in the unemployment rate during the six last months of 2013 of 10.6%, an additional 51 thousand unemployed people. These implications were particularly noticed in the Rafah governorate, which recorded the highest rate of unemployment in Palestine: 48% in Q4 2013, a 16% increase compared to Q2, where the rate of unemployment in Rafah governorate reached 32%.<sup>29</sup>

Also worthy of mention is the fact that the Egyptian authorities began establishing a one-km-deep buffer zone along the eastern border with GS in September 2013, an area to be kept empty of buildings and plants. The measure entailed the destruction of several houses in Egyptian Rafah on the outskirts of the GS.<sup>30</sup>

Hamas later repeatedly confirmed its absolute noninterference in Egypt’s affairs, and the individual nature of such criticism by some Hamas members against the coup leader and Defense Minister Field Marshal ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.<sup>31</sup> It also reiterated that Hamas did not have any agenda for a conflict with Egypt, and it remained ready to form a joint security commission with the Egyptian side.<sup>32</sup> Nonetheless, the Egyptian media campaign intensified paralleled with an official political campaign, which launched dangerous accusations and threats including the threat of military intervention against Hamas in the GS.<sup>33</sup> Hamas’s position, which negated the Egyptian accusation, was enforced by a leaked document from the Office of Military Intelligence Services and Reconnaissance in the Egyptian military signed by its Director General Mahmud Hijazi (who remained in his position after the coup). The document, which dates back to late May 2013, was obtained by Al Jazeera and aired on its media network on 27/3/2014. The document was related to some suggestions regarding restoring security and achieving development in Sinai and it called for increasing communication with Hamas in order to preserve security and stability on the borders with GS, but it did not include any accusations against the MB movement or Hamas of an intention to harm security in Sinai.<sup>34</sup>

Reuters news agency quoted Egyptian security officials saying that the ruling authority in Egypt was planning to undermine Hamas rule in GS after the clamp

down on the MB movement in Egypt. The agency added that an eminent security official had commented on this issue, saying that “we cannot be liberated from the terrorism of the MB movement in Egypt without putting an end to it in Gaza which lies on our borders.”<sup>35</sup>

The Egyptian relationship with Hamas is still witnessing the reverberations of the trial of ousted President Muhammad Morsi and the leaders of MB movement in addition to some Hamas and Hizbullah activists in what has been known as al-Natroun prison case. The accused in this case are facing many accusations including “the agreement and cooperation with members of Hizbullah and Hamas to create chaos in order to overthrow the state and its institutions.”<sup>36</sup> Another file is trying Morsi for accusations of “contacting” Hamas, Hizbullah, and the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to commit “acts of sabotage and terrorism” in the country.<sup>37</sup>

The most important signs of tension between Hamas and Egypt following the coup, were mainly represented in the ruling issued by the Cairo Urgent Matters Court on 4/3/2014 to ban all Hamas activities in Egypt, and to ban all organizations, associations, groups and institutions affiliated with Hamas, or receiving from it any kind of support. The ruling was totally rejected by Hamas who considered the measure as “damaging for Egypt and its image and role towards the Palestinian issue” and “a free service for the Zionist occupation” stressing that it did not have any activity in Egypt to be banned in the first place.<sup>38</sup>

Questions were raised regarding the political background of the ruling, especially in light of the weak evidence, and given that the court that looked into the case was not competent in such cases, let alone the fact that the case did not satisfy any conditions of urgency.<sup>39</sup>

Other implications following the coup included a decision by Egypt’s Endowment Ministry to abolish the Jerusalem Commission affiliated to the Supreme Council of Islamic Affairs.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, a lawsuit was filed to stop a decision granting citizenship to thousands of Palestinians.<sup>41</sup>

As relations with Hamas deteriorated, the Egyptian authorities maintained good relations with the PA and its Ramallah-based leadership. Thus, President Mahmud ‘Abbas rushed to visit Cairo after the coup and met interim President ‘Adly Mansur at the end of July 2013.<sup>42</sup> He paid another two-day visit to Cairo in November and met Mansur again and Minister of Defense ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi.<sup>43</sup>



### **c. The Stance on Peace Settlement and the Relation with Israel**

Egypt's stance towards the Camp David Accords and relations with Israel was a major issue in the campaigns of presidential candidates during the first half of 2012. Thus, some candidates said that they would not recognize Israel and Camp David, while others called for a change in the agreement by amending some of its provisions. The candidates who reached the second stage of elections, Muhammad Morsi and Ahmad Shafiq, promised to observe the agreement and respect its provisions. However, and generally speaking, most candidates were cold or negative concerning the relations with Israel, and none of them declared his will to develop such relations. Even Shafiq, who expressed his readiness to visit Israel if necessitated by Egypt's interest, conditioned the development of the relations on "suitable behavior" from the other side.<sup>44</sup>

Another indicator of the general mood in Egypt regarding relations with Israel, was the approval by the Parliament in March 2012 of expelling the Israeli ambassador and recalling the Egyptian ambassador from Tel Aviv, in objection to Israel's escalated raids against Gaza during that period. The Parliament also called for halting Egypt's supply of gas to Israel and reconsidering all agreements signed with it.<sup>45</sup>

Gas exports to Israel was also present in the platforms of presidential candidates, where the gas line was blown up twice in 2012. One of these incidents<sup>46</sup> was in April, following the Egyptian decision to stop the gas supply to Israel permanently and terminate any contract with it in this respect, due to its "failure to respect its contractual obligations" as it failed to pay late financial dues.<sup>47</sup> This step was indeed another indicator of the deterioration of relations between Cairo and Tel Aviv, although the reasons provided were "purely commercial."

For its part, Israel refrained from any reaction that would further exacerbate the relations, it tried to mitigate this deterioration and show that relations with Egypt were normal. This was through sending a congratulatory messages to President Morsi on his election and on the occasion of the holy month of Ramadan, and the publishing by Israeli media of a message attributed to Morsi in response to it. Both Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Shimon Peres sent Morsi congratulatory messages on his election as president of Egypt,<sup>48</sup> and Peres sent Morsi a message on the occasion of the month of Ramadan. Israeli press published what it said was Morsi's response to Peres's messages, which was denied by the office of the Egyptian Presidency.<sup>49</sup>

At a later time, Peres's office leaked to the Israeli media the letter of credence which was handed over by 'Atef Salem upon his appointment as Egypt's ambassador in Tel Aviv. The copy of the letter, signed by Morsi, sparked Egyptian and Arab controversy at that time because of the language employed as the letter began with "Great and Good Friend" and ended with "highest esteem and consideration."<sup>50</sup> However, the Presidency spokesman Yasir 'Ali commented on the published letter saying that the wording was pure protocol and it was the same wording used to address all presidents since President Gamal 'Abdul Nasser, and did not represent any particular indications.<sup>51</sup>

Less than a month after this incident, Egypt announced the withdrawal of its ambassador from Israel in protest against the Israeli offensive on GS,<sup>52</sup> another setback in the relationship between Israel and the MB movement-led Egypt.

Yet, at the same time, Israel maintained a "minimal level" of relations with the military institution, especially after the escalation of the Egyptian military's operations in Sinai following the killing of the Egyptian soldiers in Rafah. In August 2012 Egypt's Defense Minister 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi called his Israeli counterpart Ehud Barak to discuss Israeli "concerns" regarding the Egyptian military presence in Sinai, and to coordinate with Israel regarding the military operation taking place there.<sup>53</sup>

As military operations continued in the Peninsula, an Egyptian military spokesman declared at a later time that there was an agreement with Israel to increase the military presence in Sinai to face "criminal hotbeds," stressing coordination between the two sides regarding Camp David.<sup>54</sup>

In the same context, there were news reports in March 2013 about a secret visit by an Egyptian security delegate including "senior officials" in Egyptian intelligence to Israel to meet officials in Israeli intelligence, according to *Yedioth Ahronoth*.<sup>55</sup>

Following the military coup, Israeli officials were keen not to show their (welcoming) official stance towards developments in Egypt as Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu issued directions to his ministers to refrain from commenting on those events.<sup>56</sup> Ehud Barak has expressed this inclination clearly during an interview on CNN in an answer to a question about whether Israel was happy with the coup in which he said, "we shouldn't push ourselves to the front of these internal Arab historic dramatic transformations." However, he called on the "free



world” to support Egyptian Defense Minister al-Sisi and leading liberal figures, such as Muhammad al-Baradei.<sup>57</sup>

Later statements stressed that Israel indeed welcomed the coup and the behavior of its leaders, and it considered it a strategic transformation that would serve its interests. In this context, the Israeli ambassador in Cairo described al-Sisi, during a talk with an Egyptian minister, as “a national hero.”<sup>58</sup> There was also the comment by former Defense Minister, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, regarding the accusation against ousted President Morsi of contacting Hamas, that such a step was a reassuring message from Egypt’s military to Israel and the West. The step was also perceived by Economy Minister, Neftali Bennett, as a sign that the strategic partnership between Israel and Egypt would develop in an unprecedented way.<sup>59</sup>

Shortly after the coup, Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) published a report containing several recommendations regarding the reaction Israel should assume in this respect. Among the recommendations was a call for Israel to “deepen its cooperation with the Egyptian army and continue to allow it to deploy troops in the Sinai.” The report also recommended that Israel continue “to support continued American security aid to the Egyptian army, expansion of civilian aid to Egypt by Western countries and international financial institutions, and international initiatives on Egyptian infrastructure development.” In addition, it recommended that Israel attempt to establish covert channels of coordination with the “Sunni monarchies” that hoped for the failure of MB movement rule in Egypt, after which Hamas would be among those “most severely damaged,” according to the report.<sup>60</sup>

In concurrence, Israeli press and media were rife with analyses and commentaries welcoming the coup and perceiving it as an Israeli interest. Thus for example, an article by Dan Margalit, senior commentator in *Israel Hayom*, warned that the Israelis “will cry blood for generations to come if the coup fails and MB movement is back to power in Egypt.”<sup>61</sup> In addition, a commentary in *The Jerusalem Post* described al-Sisi as the “Person of the Year in Regional Affairs.”<sup>62</sup>

On the military level, the Gaza Division Commander in the occupation army, Mickey Edelstein, welcomed the campaign launched by the Egyptian military against the tunnels, saying that “what Egypt is doing is impressive for everyone.”<sup>63</sup>

In the same vein, political and media circles in Israel welcomed the deterioration of relations between Egypt and Hamas, and the decision to ban the movement’s

activities in Egypt. Former Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Arens said that the war launched by Egypt against the tunnels minimizes Israel's need to launch a war on GS in the future. In addition, Yariv Levin, the Likud Knesset Member and head of the ruling coalition in the Knesset, commented on the ruling to ban Hamas, saying that it served as a precedent which Israel would resort to in its dealing with the supporters of Hamas in Israel, referring to Palestinians of the territories occupied in 1948 and their deputies in the Knesset.<sup>64</sup>

## **2. Jordan**

### **a. Impact of Arab Changes and Uprisings on the Palestinian Issue**

Jordan was among the Arab countries that witnessed popular action calling for change, but the size and ceiling of this movement fell short of producing tangible change in the internal political formula. This was true even though Jordan witnessed the resignation of three governments in 2012 and 2013, as well as early legislative elections on 23/1/2013 according to a new electoral law, which was boycotted by the Islamic movement, the most important side among opposition forces.

In any case, it seemed that the internal action did not have a major impact on the Jordanian political positions related to the Palestinian issue, or on Jordan's relationship with Palestine or Israel. Apparently, 2012 witnessed a temporary development of relations between Jordanian officials and Hamas, whose relation with Arab officials developed in general following the popular Arab popular uprisings.

Jordan's position towards the Palestinian issue was related to the political developments of the peace process, and the events that have direct impact on Jordan's relation with the PA leadership in Ramallah and with Israel. In contrast, the Syrian and Egyptian crises did not have major repercussions on Jordan's interest in the Palestinian issue. Thus, the impact of the former was limited to the matter of dealing with the Palestinian refugees leaving Syria towards the Jordanian borders, whereas the latter had an impact on relations with Hamas.

In the context of the Syrian issue, the decision of the Jordanian government to prevent Palestinians holding Syrian documents from entering the Kingdom was striking. The decision was described as "strategic," intended to fight the "alternative homeland" and "naturalization" projects and preserve the right of return of Palestinian refugees. Jordan's Interior Ministry denied the figures of



the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which estimated Palestinian refugees holding documents at seven thousand. It said that they did not exceed 143 refugees held in Cyber City refugee camp.<sup>65</sup>

The Jordanian position was clearly expressed by Prime Minister ‘Abdullah al-*Nsour*, who said that his government would not allow the flow of Palestinian refugees into the country in order “to protect their rights in their homeland Palestine.” He added that while international law did not allow the declining asylum seekers, some procedures were pursued to make sure that those arriving were seeking protection rather than looking to fulfil political aims, and would not change their immigration destiny, such as the case with the Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>66</sup>

Among those prevented by Jordanian authorities from crossing the borders were some 20–30 Jordanians of Palestinian origin who used to live in Syria, where Jordan found out that their national insurance numbers had been withdrawn from them during their time in Syria, so they were denied access.<sup>67</sup>

Previously, Human Rights Watch (HRW) had accused Jordanian authorities of forcibly returning some newly arriving Palestinians from Syria, and threatening others with deportation, such accusations were then denied by the Jordan government.<sup>68</sup>

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

During 2012, Jordan sought to restore its role in Palestinian-Israeli negotiations. Thus, King ‘Abdullah II took the initiative early that year to sponsor an “exploratory” round of direct talks between the two sides to bring their views closer, in a step which was supported on the international level by the Quartet. Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh said that the negotiations his country would host at that time were aimed at paving the way for serious talks leading to the final solution of the conflict, and resolving all issues directly affecting Jordanian interests.<sup>69</sup> Yet, those talks failed to achieve any progress and were stopped a month after they had begun, as Israel refused to stop settlement construction or recognize the 1967 lines as the basis for talks.

At a later date, Jordan supported the PA’s efforts seeking UN recognition as a non-member state. The Jordanian King perceived such a step as an international

message of support for the anti-violence track, and helpful in achieving a just and comprehensive peace in the Middle East according to the two-state solution.<sup>70</sup>

Jordan, an adherent to the two-state solution, stressed its rejection of the talk about “confederalism,” which spread following UN recognition of the Palestinian state. It said that Israel had to pay for resolving the Palestinian issue as Jordan would not accept the settlement of the Palestinian issue at the expense of the identity of the Jordanian state.<sup>71</sup> Statements by Jordan’s King and his Prime Minister ‘Abdullah al-Nsour reiterated that it would not be possible to talk about a Jordanian-Palestinian confederalism before Israel’s withdrawal from all occupied territories and the establishment of the Palestinian state.<sup>72</sup>

The Jordanian foreign minister refused any talk about sovereignty granted to the Israeli forces on the borders in the Jordan Valley, which was a motion discussed in the Knesset in concurrence with US Secretary of State John Kerry’s visit in the region to push the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations forwards.<sup>73</sup>

### **c. Jordanian-Palestinian Relations**

Jordan maintained its strong relations with the PA and President Mahmud ‘Abbas, especially concerning the joint coordination regarding the developments of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

To strengthen this relationship, Jordan’s King ‘Abdullah II and Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas signed a treaty at the end of March 2013 to protect Jerusalem and the holy sites. The treaty was designed for Jordan and Palestine to make joint efforts to protect Jerusalem and the holy sites from Israeli Judaization efforts, and to protect all endowment property of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>74</sup>

The signing of this treaty followed a unanimous UNESCO resolution regarding Dung Gate (*Bab al-Magharibah*) which banned Israel from pursuing any unilateral measure regarding the site given that it is occupied territory, as well as the need to obtain the approval of Jordan on any scheme for the gate.<sup>75</sup>

The following month in April 2012, many Jordanian officials visited *al-Aqsa* Mosque including Prince Hashim Bin Al Hussein, Prince Ghazi Bin Muhammad, Jordanian Interior Minister Muhammad al-Ra’oud, and Jordanian Director of Public Security Hussein al-Majali.

Simultaneously, Jordan’s official relationship with Hamas witnessed an important shift throughout 2012 until the coup against President Morsi in mid-2013. Thus, Hamas



officially resumed its relations with the Jordanian leadership following Qatari mediation. A Hamas delegation headed by Mish'al visited Jordan three times; the first of which was on 30/1/2012 when a Hamas delegate arrived into Jordan with then Crown Prince of Qatar Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani, while the two other visits took place in June 2012 and January 2013. During the meetings with Jordan's King and Jordanian officials, Hamas reiterated its refusal of all naturalization and alternative homeland projects, stressing that a new page had been opened between Hamas and Jordan.<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, the relationship deteriorated after the military coup in Egypt in concurrence with security and political measures adopted in many Arab countries against Islamic movements in the region. This meant that Jordan's official relationship with Hamas is unlikely to be resumed, at least in the foreseeable future, in light of continued negative atmosphere against Islamic movements in the region.

Concerning the situation of Palestinians in Jordan, the Jordanian government returned 192 national numbers to Jordanians of Palestinian origin, whose citizenship has been revoked by virtue of secret written interpretations issued on the basis of Disengagement Decision Instructions.<sup>77</sup> This was the first time Jordan implicitly acknowledged the presence of secret directions to withdraw citizenship, that necessitated the formation of a committee for their review, knowing that the Interior Ministry used to deny the presence of such directions.<sup>78</sup>

With the hope of improving the conditions of Palestinians in refugee camps, the government passed new directions to resolve the problem of over crowdedness suffered by camp residents by allowing expansion of construction of up to three floors.<sup>79</sup>

#### **d. The Relationship with Israel**

The cold relations between Jordan and Israel continued in 2012 and 2013 despite the appointment of a new Jordanian ambassador to Tel Aviv after two years in which the position had been left unfilled. The relationship between the two sides was affected by various factors that led to tension, the most important of which was Israel's attempts to undermine Jordanian sovereignty over *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The appointment of Ambassador Walid Obeidat in Tel Aviv came amid popular opposition, even from the tribe of Ambassador Obeidat himself. However, official sources said that the return of the ambassador did not mean the relationship was warm again, but rather was within the limits of "conventions and commitments."<sup>80</sup>

The crisis between Jordan and Israel started on the basis of continued Israeli infringements on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the daily breaking into the mosque by Jewish settlers and extremists. The crisis was exacerbated following actions by the Israeli government infringing on Jordanian sovereignty over the mosque, and Jordanian MPs called on the government to pursue escalatory measures against Israel, including the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador in Amman. In May 2013, 87 MPs supported a motion of no confidence against the government because of its “lack of action” in expelling the ambassador.<sup>81</sup> However, a number of MPs withdrew their signatures<sup>82</sup> and the government declared that the Israeli ambassador had left Jordan after being recalled and handed a “strongly worded” protest note for his government.<sup>83</sup> Yet, the Israeli ambassador still returned to Jordan at a later time.

The crisis was renewed in February 2014 after the Israeli Knesset had discussed Jordan’s sovereignty over Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, an issue addressed in the articles of the peace treaty signed between Israel and Jordan in 1994. Ultimately, the Jordanian Parliament voted unanimously for the expulsion of the Israeli ambassador from Amman and recalling the Jordanian ambassador from Tel Aviv. Some MPs demanded that the government provide a draft for terminating the Treaty of Peace Between the State of Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, known as the Wadi Arabah peace treaty. Yet, the Jordanian government did not respond to the vote given that the parliament’s role is only “legislative and regulatory” while the competence for recalling the Jordanian ambassador and expelling his Israeli counterpart “would need a sovereign decision,” meaning that only the King can handle the issue of the relation with Israel.<sup>84</sup>

Worthy of mention is that upon discussing the law of State Security Court in December 2013, the Jordanian parliament excluded any act against Israeli occupation from trial before this court, and from the definition of acts of terrorism.<sup>85</sup> However, in April 2014 the parliament cancelled this exclusion.<sup>86</sup>

On another level, the Jordanian King accused Israel of trying to foil Jordan’s peaceful nuclear program, through attempts to convince potential partners to not cooperate with Jordan in this respect.<sup>87</sup> Tel Aviv, however, denied these accusations and said that it had provided advice and help regarding the establishment of the reactor. These claims were denied by the Jordan Atomic Energy Commission (JAEC).<sup>88</sup>



In return, there was news about a secret visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to Amman in late 2012, but Jordan denied the validity of such news.<sup>89</sup>

In another context, The World Bank announced in December 2013 that Jordan, Israel and the PA had reached an agreement to divide the water resources in what is known as the Two Seas Canal (the Red Sea-Dead Sea Conduit). The deal outlined the development of a desalination plant located in Aqaba, Jordan's port on the Red Sea, and suggested conducting a study to run a water pipeline between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea.<sup>90</sup> Israeli Energy Minister Silvan Shalom said that the deal, which he described as "historic," was "a breakthrough" given its "strategic-diplomatic" aspect.<sup>91</sup>

But overall, the Jordanian-Israeli relationship is not likely to develop positively in light of these tensions, especially that there is popular and parliamentary pressure on the Jordanian government and on King 'Abdullah II to pursue genuine steps to oppose Israeli violations against *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This issue is of particular sensitivity for the Hashemite throne due to the special symbolism it has enjoyed since the kingdom was established.

### **3. Syria**

#### **a. The Impact of Internal Developments on the Palestinian Issue**

The Syrian crisis and its escalation in 2012 and 2013 had serious repercussions on the different aspects of the Palestinian issue. This was manifested in the undermining of the Syrian front vis-à-vis Israel on the political, military and strategic levels. It was also evident in the number of Palestinian casualties as a result of the conflict and the shelling and siege of the refugee camps, in addition to the fact that relations between the Syrian regime and the resistance factions, namely Hamas, became more tense. Such developments took place while the two parties to the conflict emphasized that the Palestinian issue was their priority, and confirmed their support for Palestinian rights.

The results of the ongoing crisis in Syria, which started in March 2011, were devastating for the country on all levels. Thus, the crisis did not only weaken the country for the present, but it also undermined it strategically as a front of resistance against Israel, especially after the deal reached to remove Syria's chemical weapons, which were supposed to provide it with "qualitative deterrent" to Israel.

As there is no sign of an imminent resolution of the crisis in Syria, some analysts have said that Syria with its current borders has come to a permanent end. For any political solution would lead to the division of the country, which has been de facto divided into spheres of influence; some held by the regime and others by the different opposition factions.

Palestinian refugees and their RCs in Syria have suffered enormous damage due to the ongoing crisis. Particularly, the Yarmouk RC was at the heart of the crisis, where it formed an arena for settling accounts between the combatants. It was subject to violent shelling and harsh siege starting late 2012, ongoing at the time of writing this report.

Battles between the Syrian regime, supported by the PFLP-General Command (GC) on one hand, and fighters from the Syrian opposition on the other hand, have led to the killing of lots of Palestinians by sniper bullets and shelling. In addition, tens of Palestinians were killed in the besieged camp because of famine and denial of food aid. The PFLP-GC declared on 24/11/2013 that a final resolution for the RC crisis has been achieved,<sup>92</sup> but it failed. And although the fighting parties agreed also to a truce in mid-February 2014, it collapsed two months later, thus hindering the distribution of aid packages by UNRWA among camp residents.<sup>93</sup> The Yarmouk RC remains under siege at the time of writing.

During the Syrian crisis and until 26/3/2014, 2,143 Palestinians were killed, including 136 Palestinians died because of Yarmouk RC siege, and 895 others were killed by shelling in their neighborhoods.<sup>94</sup>

### **b. Syrian-Palestinian Relations**

The years 2012 and 2013 witnessed core changes in the relations between Hamas and the Syrian regime, which had provided the main arena for the Movement abroad. With the beginning of 2012, Hamas seemed closer to disengagement from the Syrian regime given the massacres it committed against its people. This inclination was expressed in Hamas's confirmation that the departure of its leaders from Syria would depend on the security situation.<sup>95</sup> On 27/2/2012, Musa Abu Marzuq, deputy head of Hamas's Political Bureau, stressed that Hamas leaders left Syria as they opposed the security solution pursued by the government and respected Syrian popular will.<sup>96</sup>



In response, Ahmad Jibril, secretary-general of PFLP-GC, stressed that Hamas's decision to move its bureau from Damascus to Doha was a mistake.<sup>97</sup>

As criticism of Hamas's decision intensified, Mish'al clarified that he had advised President Bashar al-Assad at the beginning of the uprising to comply with the demands of his people, yet his reaction was negative.<sup>98</sup>

When in early November 2012 the Syrian regime took a revenge decision to close down Hamas's bureaus in Syria, the Movement said that the decision was expected and it was a foregone conclusion given that the bureaus had been closed in the past.<sup>99</sup> When he visited Jordan in early February 2013, Mish'al reiterated that the decision to leave Syria was made so that Hamas would not form a military cover for the regime's crimes.<sup>100</sup>

When Hizbullah interfered militarily in support of the regime, Hamas called on the party on 17/6/2013 to withdraw its forces from Syria, stressing the right of the Syrian people to achieve their rights and the need to reach a political, peaceful solution to the Syrian crisis.<sup>101</sup>

As Hamas was subject to siege in light of its isolation from its old Syrian ally, and in light of the tense relationship with the Iranian ally, some voices within Hamas called for "correcting the error" and reassessing the relation with Syria and Iran positively. Ultimately, Mish'al stressed on 18/10/2013 that Hamas's alignment with the people was an honor, and that the Movement had not committed any wrong in admitting to.

Contrarily, the relationship between PIJ and the Syrian regime was not hurt as in the case of Hamas. Rather, the PIJ maintained its presence in Syria although it declared its alignment with the demands of the Syrian people.<sup>102</sup>

The PIJ condemned the violence against the Syrians and Palestinians in Syria, and called for stopping bloodshed to protect Syrian internal affairs.<sup>103</sup> After the escalation of the crisis following Hizbullah's pro-regime interference, the PIJ denied its bias to the Syrian regime or participation in the fighting, clarifying that Ramadan 'Abdullah, secretary-general of the PIJ, shuttles between Cairo and Beirut.<sup>104</sup>

As the relationship between the Syrian regime and Hamas deteriorated, its relationship with Fatah and the PA leadership in Ramallah developed. President Assad met 'Abbas Zaki, member of Fatah Central Committee, in October 2013

in his capacity as the personal envoy of Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas. During the meeting, Zaki reiterated the Palestinian people’s solidarity with Syria against the offensive it has been subject to. Zaki also said that the targeting of Syria and the exhaustion of its resources and military come within the context of a scheme aiming to divide the region and weaken it to serve Israeli interests.<sup>105</sup>

### **c. Relations with Israel**

No change was noticed in 2012 and 2013 in the relations of any Syrian side with Israel. Thus, while both sides of the crisis exchanged accusations regarding aid received from Israel, they both denied any negotiations or rapprochement with Tel Aviv.

In this context, Burhan Ghalyoun, President of the opposition Syrian National Council (SNC), reiterated the rejection of SNC or any opposition faction, of negotiations with the West or with Israel regarding the future of the occupied Golan Heights in return for their support to overthrow al-Assad regime. He said that Syria’s sovereignty would not be completely achieved without restoring the Golan Heights, adding that the democratic revolution in Syria would be more able to restore the Golan.<sup>106</sup>

The most important development on the ground was Israel’s bombardment of three Syrian military posts to the north west of Damascus on 5/5/2013, after which al-Assad warned that the attack would turn the Golan Heights into a “resistance front.”<sup>107</sup> Nonetheless, the Golan front maintained its calm except for a shooting by a Syrian military unit at an Israeli military vehicle which trespassed the cease-fire line two weeks after the raid,<sup>108</sup> and after the opposition took temporary control of the Syrian side of al-Qunaitra border point in June 2013.<sup>109</sup> UN documents showed that Israel at that time had refrained from confronting Syrian tanks, which entered the disengagement zone in al-Qunaitra after coordination between the Syrian military and Israeli forces to ensure that the Syrian military presence targeted opposition militants only. In addition, Israel provided some opposition militants urgent health treatment in the said incident.<sup>110</sup>

## **4. Lebanon**

### **a. Impact of Arab Uprisings and Changes on the Palestinian Issue**

Although Lebanon did not witness the extensive popular action that many Arab countries had, it was drastically affected throughout 2012 and 2013 by the crisis



in neighboring Syria. This was in light of Hizbullah's participation in Syria, in addition to the displacement of large numbers of Syrians and Palestinians into its territories. Ultimately, the impact and changes of the Lebanese scene on the Palestinian issue were particularly related to these two files.

On the one hand, Hizbullah's interference in the fighting in Syria led to the loss of a major part of its popular support it enjoyed across the Arab world, seen as a resistance movement against Israel. The popular belief was that the Party's defense of the regime was contributing to the suppression of the Syrian people's revolution; a demonstration of supporting the oppressor against the oppressed. In addition, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries listed Hizbullah as a "terrorist organization" based on its interference in the Syrian fighting.

Hizbullah, for its part, insisted that its interference in Syria was to defend the resistance against a conspiracy being woven against it and against the Palestinian issue. Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah stated: "what is wanted in Syria is the head of resistance in Lebanon and Palestine, and the head of the Palestinian issue, and of the Palestinian people."<sup>11</sup>

This issue sparked talk about a deterioration in relations between the Lebanese resistance (Hizbullah) and its ally in Palestine (Hamas), based on the former's support of the Syrian regime and the latter's rejection of adopting similar stance and its consequent departure from Damascus. Sources from both sides, however, have tried to undermine the impact of the Syrian issue on their relationship. Still, it is not possible to deny the negative impact on the relation between Hizbullah and Hamas due to their different stances.

In this context, Hizbullah Deputy Secretary General Sheikh Naim Qassem stressed that "Hizbullah's relationship with Hamas is good [...] because we consider ourselves in the same trench of resistance against Israel." He also said that "he who is looking for problems between Hamas and Hizbullah will only exhaust himself [to no avail] because our relation is governed by cooperation and comprehension, and the contention over the Syrian issue is legitimate and it does not ruin our good relation."<sup>12</sup> Sheikh Qassem described Hamas as the "spearhead of resistance in Palestine, and one of the pillars of the resistance camp which did not lose the compass in facing the occupation."<sup>13</sup>

At a later time, Hizbullah political bureau member Hassan Hubballah, denied claims that Hizbullah had asked the Hamas leadership and its members in Lebanon

to leave the country, and he said that “this is the wish of the Israelis who are trying to turn resistance factions against each other, and it will never come true.”<sup>114</sup> News discussing the alleged Hizbullah demand was based on a decision by the Lebanese General Security to freeze visa applications for some Hamas members. However, General Security justified its measure declaring that some Palestinian forces had forged documents using numbers and dates provided to some Hamas cadres, in attempt to enter Lebanon.<sup>115</sup>

On another hand, the displacement of Palestinian refugees from Syria to Lebanon to escape the ongoing fighting has pushed the issue of Palestinian refuge to the forefront, in a country where this file is of particular sensitivity. The most important reactions in this sense came from Minister of Energy and Water Gebran Bassil (Free Patriotic Movement) who called for closing the Lebanese borders,<sup>116</sup> and for the deportation of Palestinian and Syrian refugees because they take the place of the Lebanese.<sup>117</sup> Bassil’s statements were faced with condemnation namely from his colleague in the government Minister of Social Affairs Wa’il Abu Fa’our (Progressive Socialist Party) who said that “there is no need for exercising any act of revenge or racism against the Palestinian people.” He also stressed on behalf of the Lebanese government that “Lebanon will not close the borders in the face of any Palestinian or Syrian refugee.”<sup>118</sup>

Yet in August 2013, and as the number of Palestinian refugees displaced from Syria’s camps reached 60 thousand, the Lebanese General Security, based on governmental instructions, launched strict legal measures to regulate the access of Palestinian and Syrian refugees passing through land borders. Consequently, HRW condemned the Lebanese authorities’ refusal to allow most Palestinians fleeing Syria entry to Lebanon.<sup>119</sup>

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

Palestinian RCs in Lebanon and the security conditions there, were the focal point of Lebanese-Palestinian relations throughout 2012 and 2013. The deterioration of the security situation in Lebanon fed this concern, especially with the outbreak of certain security incidents in which accusations were made, politically and in media outlets, at Palestinians or militants who sheltered in the RCs. The latter are generally considered “islands” lying outside the control of Lebanese central government. Indeed, Palestinians were officially accused, based on evidence and in limited incidents, including involvement in bombings that targeted Beirut’s



southern suburb (*Dahiye*), or in alleged schemes planning such attacks. But most accusations were fabricated by Lebanese media with no evidence, even before the series of bombings, in what seemed to be an orchestrated campaign, which was rejected by Palestinian factions. Thus, a counter campaign was launched to fight incitement against Palestinian refugees in Lebanon.<sup>120</sup>

Palestinian factions in Lebanon held continuous discussions with Lebanese authorities concerning security matters. The issue was also discussed when Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas visited Beirut in July 2013, and when Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah visited Beirut in November of the same year, where they both met with Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati and other Lebanese officials.<sup>121</sup>

In addition, Lebanese Prime Minister Mikati called Head of Hamas Political Bureau Khalid Mish‘al in June 2013 to thank him for his efforts to neutralize Palestinian RCs, in the midst of clashes in what was known as the case of Sheikh Ahmad al-Assir and the Bilal Bin Rabah Mosque.<sup>122</sup>

In the context of meetings between Palestinian factions and Lebanese officials, ‘Azzam al-Ahmad, senior Fatah official, discussed security issues with Lebanese officials on 16/3/2012, stressing readiness to turn in any wanted suspects who hide in Palestinian RCs.<sup>123</sup> Al-Ahmad added later that there was no Palestinian objection to the handling of the Lebanese army to RC security.<sup>124</sup>

There was a Palestinian disagreement regarding the issue of arms in the Palestinian RCs, where President ‘Abbas sought to delegitimize the presence of weapons while Hamas and the PFLP considered it an issue linked to the right of return.<sup>125</sup>

As for the stances of Lebanese parties and forces towards Palestinians in Lebanon, no remarkable change took place during this period and the issue of security conditions in the RCs remained the main point of contention. Striking in this context was a statement by leader of the Lebanese Forces Samir Geagea who called again for “disarmament in and outside the camps.” Geagea urged the government to “make this decision, and task the Lebanese army with implementing it... even if there is need for a similar war to the one that took place in Nahr al-Bared [RC].”<sup>126</sup> Geagea’s declarations came after the Lebanese army uncovered a “takfiri” cell within the military institution, where those behind it were believed to be hiding in ‘Ein al-Hilweh RC. Geagea’s declarations were similar to the

statement by deputy head of Future Movement (Tayyar al-Mustaqbal), Antoine Andraos, who called the army to enter 'Ein al-Hilweh RC saying, "Let there be al-Bared II and III."<sup>127</sup>

Also the declarations of Lebanese MP Sami Gemayyel were within the negative stances towards Palestinian refugees. He urged the Lebanese government to facilitate travel process for Palestinian refugees to work abroad; given that Lebanon is a small country, which does not accommodate such a high number of refugees. He considered other countries to be much bigger than Lebanon and better able to accommodate these refugees, adding that these countries were in need of the additional work force.<sup>128</sup> Finance Minister Muhammad al-Safadi also said that giving Palestinian refugees the right to ownership in Lebanon might cause them to forget about their return to Palestine.<sup>129</sup>

Yet in contrast to this gloomy side, the situation of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon witnessed some development. This was primarily demonstrated in the guide issued by the Lebanese Ministry of Interior and Municipalities entitled "The Palestinians and the Directorate of Political and Refugees Affairs." The guide intended to clarify and simplify administrative procedures related to the Palestinian refugees' civil status documentation in Lebanon and to contribute in supporting and improving the living conditions of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. This was the first official manual issued by the Lebanese government in this respect.<sup>130</sup> In addition, a hall was opened for Palestinian refugees to submit and receive various applications in the Directorate of Political and Refugees Affairs building after its rehabilitation. This step was intended to facilitate work and reduce time allotted for the completion of documents related to personal status of Palestinian refugees, while providing decent and respectful conditions.<sup>131</sup>

On the legal level, Labor Minister Charbel Nahhas issued a decision, which allows Palestinian refugees to acquire a three-year work permit without a work contract. It also allows them to practice all businesses that are considered to be restricted to the Lebanese, except businesses and professions regulated by laws and whose practice by Palestinian refugees requires issuing by relevant laws.<sup>132</sup>

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

There was relative calm on the Lebanese front with Israel in 2012 and 2013. But this quiet was penetrated by some rounds of limited escalation after the launching of missiles on north Israel, not carried out by Hizbullah. Yet at the same time,



the “cold war” between Hizbullah and Israel, represented in building up military capacities in anticipation of any future war, continued relentlessly.

Israel continued to warn against Hizbullah’s growing military and missile capacities, especially against the probability that the Party might obtain chemical weapons from Syria. Ultimately, it expressed a commitment to “take necessary measures to prevent that.”

In return, Hizbullah uncovered the capacities and plans it now owns and is willing to use if a war broke out with Israel. In this context, Hizbullah Secretary General Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah warned that in any future war “for every building destroyed in Dahiyeh many buildings would be destroyed in Tel Aviv.”<sup>133</sup> At a later time Nasrallah said that there was possibility for killing thousands of Israelis by a limited number of missiles owned by the Party and “erected and focused” on specific targets.<sup>134</sup>

Nasrallah also warned that Hizbullah might not only be restricted by defense stressing that “a day might come when we enter Galilee.”<sup>135</sup> Simultaneously, some Lebanese media outlets talked about the greatest maneuver in the history of Hizbullah, which lasted three consecutive days and simulated a scenario of Hizbullah’s occupation of Upper Galilee.<sup>136</sup>

Nasrallah also revealed that Hizbullah was behind the UAV or drone, which Israel shot down in October 2012. He attested that the drone, called Ayyoub, “flew accurately in its planned track and trespassed Israeli measures, reaching the Dimona reactor region.”<sup>137</sup>

As for expected developments, Hizbullah’s involvement in the fighting in Syria with a lack of an imminent resolution for the crisis there, in addition to the lack of any file that might urge Hizbullah to escalate against Israel, suggest that the Party might seek to avoid any confrontation with Israel at the current stage. This could be particularly discerned from the Party’s relatively cold reaction towards the Israeli raid on stronghold areas of Hizbullah in February 2014. Nonetheless, if Israeli escalation reaches serious levels, Hizbullah seems determined to retaliate promptly, especially that such a threat might be more dangerous for the Party in light of the Syrian crisis.

As for field developments, Israel accused Hizbullah of responsibility for the Bulgaria bus bombing in July 2012, which led to the murder of a few Israelis. But

the party denied the accusations and said that these were attempts to target the resistance through media and politics after the failure to target it through war and confrontation.<sup>138</sup> Afterwards, the EU listed the military wing of Hizbullah on the terror list.<sup>139</sup>

In return, Hizbullah accused Israel of the assassination of Hassan al-Laqis, one of the Party's leaders, near his house in the southern suburbs of Beirut. It explained that al-Laqis has survived many assassination attempts that targeted him in different areas of Lebanon.<sup>140</sup>

In another context, the conflict between Israel and Lebanon over the maritime borders and gas exploration rights in the Mediterranean continued to escalate in 2012 and 2013, and Lebanon could only safeguard the recognition of 530 km<sup>2</sup> out of 860 km<sup>2</sup> it has claimed.<sup>141</sup> However, its attempts to secure more area of the claimed region and its resources are still intact, and it is likely that the issue would continue to interact between the two sides. Nonetheless, it is not likely for this issue to be a Lebanese priority as long as the political differences between the main political forces there continue.

## **5. KSA and the Gulf Countries**

### **a. Impact of Arab Uprisings and Changes on the Palestinian Issue**

The Gulf countries, especially KSA, seemed to be more distracted from the Palestinian issue in 2012 and 2013, than they were in 2011. Thus, although Gulf countries, except Bahrain, did not witness internal political turmoil like other Arab countries, they perceived these tensions as a source of concern, which influenced their agenda of regional priorities. Thus, the Syrian crisis and its repercussions, and the political crisis in Egypt, besides the deal regarding the Iranian nuclear program, topped their agenda, and this was particularly true for KSA.

Yet it is possible to say that Qatar has tried, more than its partners did, to maintain balance between its role on the Palestinian arena and its other regional concerns, especially regarding the Palestinian reconciliation and the Qatari relations with the PA and Hamas movement. Worthy of mention is the power change in Qatar; Prince Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani assumed power after his father conceded the throne voluntarily; this did not entail any change in Qatar's role or its relation vis-à-vis different Palestinian parties.



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

Gulf states maintained the same stance towards the peace process, where they support the positions of the PA head towards negotiations with Israel, and they supported his move in the UN. Additionally, the Arab Peace Initiative launched by KSA in the Beirut Arab Summit in 2002 did not witness any change or amendment.

In this context, KSA stressed during the 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Tehran in August 2012, its rejection of any modifications of the Arab Peace Initiative,<sup>142</sup> and it called the NAM members to recognize the Palestinian state.<sup>143</sup>

At a later time, Saudi Minister of Foreign Affairs Saud al-Faisal welcomed the UN General Assembly decision upgrading the status of Palestine to a non-member observer state. He also said that such a step might have a positive change on the UN approach to the Palestinian issue.<sup>144</sup> Furthermore, the GCC Secretary-General ‘Abdul Latif al-Zayani hailed the step, asserting that it was an appropriate opportunity for the resumption of direct negotiations between the Palestinians and the Israelis.<sup>145</sup>

## **c. The Palestinian-Gulf Countries Relations**

In 2012 and 2013, among the gulf countries, Qatar was the most prominent player in the Palestinian arena. This was evident in its reconciliation efforts and its sponsorship of the Fatah-Hamas Doha Agreement, which was signed in Doha on 6/2/2012. The Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas and the Head of Hamas Political Bureau Khalid Mish‘al agreed to form a national unity government headed by ‘Abbas. Moreover, Qatar Prince Sheikh Hamad Bin Khalifa Al Thani visited GS and enhanced relations with Hamas. This was the first visit by an Arab leader to GS since Israel imposed the siege and the first by the Qatari Prince since 1999. During the visit, which included Qatari Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Hamad Bin Jassim Al Thani, many reconstruction projects were launched with Qatari funding reaching \$254 million.<sup>146</sup> Noteworthy here is that the visit sparked objections from the PA and Mahmud ‘Abbas, despite Qatari assurances that the visit would not violate Palestinian legitimacy and representation,<sup>147</sup> but it seems that these assurances were not enough.

As for news circulated in some media outlets regarding the deterioration of relations between Qatar and Hamas after the change of political leadership in Qatar

and after the military coup in Egypt, Hamas denied the validity of such news and stressed that “relations with Prince of Qatar Sheikh Tamim and with the Father Prince are strong.”<sup>148</sup>

Saudi diplomatic action towards the Palestinian issue in 2012 and 2013 was “minor” when compared to other regional files, especially the Syrian crisis, the political crisis in Egypt, and the Iranian nuclear program. But this would not necessarily mean that KSA was absent from the Palestinian scene. Rather, it was among the most important financial supporters of the PA, as well as a key political supporter in the PA’s pursuit of statehood recognition.

KSA also had an important stance in the UN as it turned down a nonpermanent Security Council seat representing the Arab Group in October 2013 in protest against the “inaction” of the Council in the Syrian and Palestinian files. Commenting on this stance, the Saudi Foreign Ministry said in a statement that: “the current continuation of the Palestinian cause without a just and lasting solution for 65 years, which resulted in several wars threatened international peace and security is irrefutable evidence and proof of the Security Council’s inability to carry out its duties and assume its responsibilities.” Yet at the same time, the statement pointed out to the “inability to subdue the nuclear programs of all countries in the region, without exception, to the international control and inspection or to prevent any country in the region from possessing nuclear weapons.”<sup>149</sup> This was understood as an expression of KSA’s dissatisfaction with the deal achieved between the P5+1 and Iran regarding the latter’s nuclear program. It is an indicator of the extent of Saudi concern with the Iranian nuclear file and the Syrian crisis, in addition to the Palestinian issue.

Another important development in the Palestinian-Gulf countries relations during 2012 and 2013 was the visit by Haniyyah to a number of Gulf countries in January and February 2012, and Mahmud ‘Abbas’s visit to Kuwait in April 2013.

Haniyyah’s round, which was in concurrence with the signing of the Doha Agreement, was the second within Hamas’s attempts to break the Gaza siege after a first round of visits which included Egypt, Tunisia, and Turkey. The round in the Gulf included Doha, Manama, and Abu Dhabi in addition to Tehran, and it was an indicator of the Gulf’s openness to Hamas, especially considering that the visits were official, Haniyyah meeting the leaders of those countries.



But this rapprochement between Hamas and the Gulf countries, except Qatar, seemed to be a temporary situation which did not last for long, especially after the military coup in Egypt which was accompanied with deterioration in relations between Hamas and the ruling authority in Egypt and its Gulf supporters, namely KSA and UAE.

‘Abbas’s visit to Kuwait in April 2013 was the first by a Palestinian leader for more than 20 years. It was meant to restore relations damaged when late leader Yasir ‘Arafat did not condemn Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990. During ‘Abbas’s visit, the Palestinian Embassy in Kuwait was inaugurated after a 22-year closure.<sup>150</sup>

#### **d. Financial Support**

Financial support remained the most important area of action for the GCC countries regarding the Palestinian issue in 2012–2013. They supported the PA budget, the GS reconstruction projects, and charitable projects supporting Palestinians in the WB, GS and countries of refuge.

KSA was the most important financial supporter for the PA, by urgently providing \$100 million in July 2012 to overcome its financial crisis,<sup>151</sup> and declaring the transfer of another \$100 million in January 2013.<sup>152</sup> It also announced in the same month, an increase in its contribution to the Arab financial safety net for the PA from \$14 million to \$20 million per month.<sup>153</sup>

Moreover, in 2013 KSA paid, through the Saudi Fund for Development, \$86 million to UNRWA to support Palestinian refugees projects in the WB, GS and Lebanon.<sup>154</sup> UNRWA said at a later time that the Saudi Fund for Development had responded to the Agency’s Syria Appeal with a donation of \$10 million for the benefit of Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>155</sup>

As for the GS reconstruction, the total amount of projects run by the Islamic Development Bank in GS, which include the GCC Countries’ Programme for the Reconstruction of Gaza, amounted to around \$460 million.<sup>156</sup> The Saudi Fund for Development provided \$88 million for the construction of housing units, including \$34 million dedicated for the third stage of the Saudi residential neighborhood project to the west of Rafah, and \$54 million as part of aid dedicated by the GCC for building 1,100 new residential units, and six news schools.<sup>157</sup>

For its part, Qatar focused its financial support on GS reconstruction and called for supporting the Strip to contend with the Israeli siege. Qatar’s reconstruction

projects that amounted to \$254 million, were declared in concurrence with Prince Hamad's visit to GS. In addition, Qatar took responsibility for securing fuel for the GS power station, where the first Qatari grant included 25 million liters of diesel that entered GS via al-Ouja crossing in June 2012.<sup>158</sup> Later, Qatar transferred the value of the diesel grant to the treasury of the Ramallah-based PA starting mid-December 2013 after the power station shut down for 45 days due to exhaustion of the diesel necessary for its operation.<sup>159</sup>

During the Israeli war on GS in November 2012, Qatar announced the provision of \$10 million to Egypt, as a contribution to the treatment of the injured who were receiving medical treatment in Egyptian hospitals.<sup>160</sup> Qatar also supported the PA budget by approving, in October 2013, a \$150 million grant to drop its debts.<sup>161</sup>

The UAE's financial aid for Palestine in 2012, through its different donor institutions, amounted to around UAE Dirham (AED) 507 million (around \$138 million) as per the foreign aid report issued by the UAE Ministry of International Cooperation and Development.<sup>162</sup>

Kuwait provided \$50 million to support the PA budget after Palestinian President 'Abbas's visit to Kuwait in April 2013,<sup>163</sup> in addition to a \$50 million grant to The World Bank to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Program.<sup>164</sup> Additionally, Kuwait donated \$15 million to UNRWA for the benefit of the Palestinian refugees in Syria.<sup>165</sup>

## **6. Other Arab Countries**

### **a. Impact of Arab Uprisings and Changes on the Palestinian Issue**

The stance towards the Palestinian issue was one of the most important questions brought about by the uprisings and changes witnessed in some Arab countries since the beginning of 2011, especially with the rise of Islamists to power. This issue was the center of focus for many studies centers concerned with the Palestinian issue. The conference held by al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut in November 2012 was one of the most important of these events. It made it possible to directly identify the position of Islamists in those countries, where the conference papers supported the Palestinian issue and rejected normalization with Israel, and these were consistent with Islamists' positions before they assumed power, especially in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Libya, and Yemen.<sup>166</sup>



On the ground, the Palestinian issue was most clearly present in Tunisia and Morocco. In Tunisia for example, the stances of President Moncef Marzouki and Sheikh Rashid al-Ghannushi, head of An-Nahda (Renaissance) Party, the main partner in the ruling coalition in Tunisia after the uprising, supported Palestinian rights and rejected recognition of Israel. Tunisian Foreign Minister Rafiq ‘Abdul Salam accompanied the Arab ministerial delegate which visited GS to show its solidarity during the November 2012 Israeli war.

Yet at the same time, the issue of including a provision in the new constitution incriminating normalization with Israel triggered debate among political parties and elites, as to whether the issue should be included in the constitution or whether it was enough to issue a law in this respect without the need to enter a confrontation with the international community. Ultimately, the Constituent Assembly voted against the article and the final draft of the constitution was void of such a provision although it was included in the first draft.<sup>167</sup>

In Morocco as well, King Mohammed VI, Prime Minister ‘Abdul Ilah Bin Kiran and the parliament supported the Palestinian issue, especially during the Israeli offensive on GS. But in return, there was controversy in Morocco regarding the participation of an Israeli Knesset member in the meeting of the eighth session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Union for the Mediterranean which was held in Rabat in March 2012. This participation urged the parliamentary bloc of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party to withdraw from the session to protest his presence.<sup>168</sup> The Moroccan government led by the Party itself, demanded that the Israeli deputy leave early, and it reiterated the previous sovereign decision to sever relations between the two countries.<sup>169</sup>

The controversy regarding normalization was sparked again in September 2013 after a visit of an Israeli academic delegation to a number of Moroccan cities, and another visit by Moroccan journalists to Israel following an invitation by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.<sup>170</sup> The two visits were revealed after four Moroccan parliamentary blocs representing Justice and Development, Progression and Socialism, Socialist Union of Popular Forces and Independence Parties presented a draft law incriminating normalization with Israel.<sup>171</sup>

Libya for its part supported GS during the Israeli war, and called on the Security Council to convene to discuss the issue. In addition, a Libyan diplomatic delegation including Vice President of the General National Congress Salah al-Makhzoum

and Deputy Prime Minister Sadiq ‘Abdul Karim visited GS in November 2012 at the behest of the Libyan Parliament.<sup>172</sup> Worthy of mention here is that the issue of smuggling weapons from Libya to GS was highlighted in the media after the Egyptian Ministry of Interior seized weapons on their way from Libya to GS, as per the ministry, in July 2012.<sup>173</sup>

### **b. Sudan**

Tension between Sudan and Israel constituted one of the prominent issues in the Arab world throughout 2012 and 2013. Sudan has accused Israel of supporting rebels fighting against the government in the west of the country, and carrying out raids and targeted attacks in south Khartoum on 24/10/2012. This raid was the third incident of its kind after the two raids Israel was accused of conducting on eastern Sudan back in January 2009 and April 2011. In his statement right after the last incident, Sudanese Minister of Information Ahmad Bilal said that four Israeli jets pounded a military factory. He explained that some sections of the plant, which produces conventional weapons, were completely destroyed, while other sections were hit in part.<sup>174</sup> Israel declined to comment on the incident, although some Israeli websites mentioned that the 13th brigade of the Israeli air force carried out the strike, arguing that the factory provides Hamas with weapons and missiles.<sup>175</sup> However, although Sudanese Foreign Minister ‘Ali Karti denied this accusation, he stressed that his country would not stop its support for Hamas despite Israeli aggression.<sup>176</sup>

Later, the ruling National Congress Party accused Israel, together with the Republic of South Sudan and the US, of involvement in a scheme aiming to fuel the situation in South Kurdufan and Darfur, through supporting the rebels there.<sup>177</sup> The Sudanese government repeatedly accused Israel of backing the rebels, an indication of the ongoing strained relations between Sudan and Israel.

Conversely, Sudan maintained its relationship with Hamas as was evident in the statements of Foreign Minister Karti, who was part of the Arab ministerial delegation that visited Gaza in solidarity during the Israeli aggression. It is also noted that Sudan hosted meetings of Hamas’s Shura Council at the end of 2011,<sup>178</sup> and denied reports of Khartoum’s alleged refusal to host Mish‘al in February 2012 after he left Damascus.<sup>179</sup>



### *Third: Developments of Normalization*

During 2012 and the first half of 2013, the public position of the 2011 Arab uprisings towards Israel continued to cripple prospects of official normalization. Despite some exceptions, Israel did not break down the barriers with hostile Arab states during that period, and there was a noticeable decline in the normalized relations between Israel and some Arab countries. However, after the July 2013 military coup in Egypt, governmental hostility retracted.

In 2012, most presidential candidates in Egypt rejected normalization with Israel. The vast majority of candidates expressed their intentions to downgrade relations with Israel and “strangle” the Camp David Accords or at least amend some of its articles. However, other candidates expressed their intention to abide by the Accords as a *fait accompli*, while maintaining the “cold peace” which does not involve any development in the relationship or even “breaking its stalemate.” Even Ahmad Shafiq, the sole candidate who showed readiness to visit Israel, did so on condition that it give him proof that it had good intentions.

Also in Egypt, the halt of gas exports to Israel in April 2012 and choosing not to resume them later was an additional indication of the decline in the relationship between Cairo and Tel Aviv, although this stoppage was attributed to a “purely commercial” reason related to Israel breaching its own contractual terms. The gas pipeline supplying Egyptian gas to Israel was bombed 14 times from the January 25 Uprising until the decision to stop exports.

In Jordan, where normalization of official relations continues, campaigns to resist it also continued in parallel, especially in boycotting Israeli products. These campaigns have obliged sellers to hide the sources of Israeli goods fearing that Jordanians would refrain from buying them. In some cases, these goods would reach the Iraqi market through indirect channels, which prompted the Iraqi government to issue memorandums protesting the entrance of Israeli products via Jordan.<sup>180</sup> Within the context of popular objection to normalization in Jordan, the Obeidat tribe urged one of its members, Walid Obeidat, to decline his appointment as Jordan’s ambassador in Tel Aviv in October 2012. Later, the tribe’s elders declared the excommunication of the ambassador after he has presented his credentials to Israeli President Shimon Peres.<sup>181</sup>

The exceptions to the rule, those normalizing relations with Israel, are mostly official authorities who have tried to keep matters covert in order not to enrage the public. These authorities are generally not affected by peoples' attitudes, and therefore were not reflective of public opposition to normalization. This confirms once again that any new governments that reflect the will of the people will increasingly reduce the chances of Arab normalization with Israel.

The most striking incident in this context was mentioned in *Yedioth Ahronoth* which said that Israel's President Shimon Peres gave an address by satellite to the participants in the Gulf States Security Summit held in Abu Dhabi in November 2013. The participants included foreign ministers of Bahrain, UAE, Kuwait, Oman, Yemen, and Qatar, along with those of other Muslim countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Bangladesh. The newspaper reported that the participating ministers refrained from talking directly to Peres who was only directly spoken to by UN-Under Secretary-General, Terje Roed-Larsen.<sup>182</sup> In the same vein, in 2012 delegations from PA affiliated organizations, academics and diplomats from Egypt, Jordan, and Qatar attended the 12th Annual Herzliya Conference, where Prince El Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan gave a keynote address.<sup>183</sup>

After the military coup in Egypt, and with the growing campaign against the MB movement in a number of Arab countries, there were several indications that official hostility towards Israel had started to retreat. This was stressed by the Director of Policy and Political-Military Affairs at the Israeli Ministry of Defense, Major General Amos Gilad, whilst evaluating the map of threats facing Israel. Gilad claimed that a "miracle" had occurred after the changes in the region, namely in Egypt and Turkey, where Middle Eastern hatred towards Israel was declining thanks to the particular role of the coup in Egypt in this respect.<sup>184</sup>

According to the opinion of former President of the Division of Military Intelligence, General Amos Yedlin, KSA's classification of the MB movement as a "terrorist" organization was part of the same context and showed solidarity with Egypt's stance, which would ultimately improve the strategic environment for Israel in an unprecedented way.<sup>185</sup>

Yedlin's embrace of this position can be comprehended in the light of press reports that talked about the overlap of interests between some Gulf states and Israel following the Egyptian coup. This overlap can be reflected in the hostile attitudes towards the "Political Islam" movements. According to *The Wall Street Journal*,



the overlapping interests between Israel and both KSA and the UAE aligned their efforts in Egypt in pursuit of promoting a coup against the MB movement. Thus, as one Israeli official expressed, an “axis of reason” was subsequently formed in spite of the lack of direct coordination between Israel and these two countries.<sup>186</sup>

Other media outlets highlighted the existence of secret channels for such coordination. In this regard, the Hebrew version of the *Jerusalem Post* ran a report on 3/1/2014 written by Yossi Melman, a specialist in national security, intelligence and strategic issues. Melman talked about the role the Saudi ambassador in Washington has played in establishing secret ties with Tel Aviv, through meetings held with the leaders of Jewish organizations in Washington, and through corresponding, coordinating, and holding intensive meetings at the executive levels in both Tel Aviv and Riyadh.<sup>187</sup>

On the economic level, the trade volume between Israel and its three most prominent Arab partners (Egypt, Jordan, and Morocco) recorded a sustained decrease during 2012 and 2013. The 2011 indicators were inconsistent with the atmosphere of growing hostility and widespread popular action against Israel in Arab countries since only a slight increase in trade volume was recorded as compared to 2010.<sup>188</sup> However, by the end of 2013, the trade volume decreased by 27.7% as compared to 2011, and by 25.7% as compared to 2010 (see table 1/3).

The decline came mainly as a result of the decline in the volume of trade with Egypt by 59.2% between 2011 and 2013. According to Israeli statistics, the Israeli export volume to Egypt declined from \$236.4 million in 2011 to \$119.4 million in 2013. In addition, Israeli import volumes hit their lowest levels by dropping 72%, from \$178.5 million in 2011 to \$49.8 million in 2013 (see table 3/3).

In Jordan, trade volume maintained its level with a slight decline of 4.5% between 2011 and 2013. However, the most prominent change was in the balance of exports and imports, where there was a decline in the Israeli export volume by almost half (52.7%), from \$210 million in 2011 to \$99.3 million in 2013. The Israeli import volume from Jordan increased by almost the same percentage (about 54.1%), from \$172.9 million in 2011 to \$266.5 million in 2013 (see table 3/3).

**Table 1/3: Volume of Trade Between Israel and Some Arab Countries  
2010–2013 (\$ million)<sup>189</sup>**

Country	2013	2012	2011	2010
<b>Egypt</b>	169.2	266.5	414.9	503.1
<b>Jordan</b>	365.8	359.5	382.9	279.7
<b>Morocco</b>	59.9	29	25.5	18.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>594.9</b>	<b>655</b>	<b>823.3</b>	<b>801.2</b>

Conversely, official Jordanian statistics showed different indicators: the volume of Jordanian exports to Israel in 2011 amounted to Jordanian Dinar (JOD) 53.2 million (\$75.1 million), as compared to JOD 58.6 million (\$82.8 million) in 2013, a 10.2% increase. Statistics also indicated a 9.3% decrease in the volume of Jordanian imports from Israel, reaching JOD 62.1 million (\$87.7 million) in 2013 after hitting JOD 68.5 million (\$96.8 million) in 2011. This means that the trade volume declined by approximately 0.8%, i.e., from JOD 121.7 million (\$171.9 million) in 2011 to JOD 120.7 million (\$170.5 million) in 2013 (see table 2/3).

Although it is not easy to reach definitive conclusions about the reasons for the difference between the Jordanian and Israeli statistics, it is clear that Israeli figures tend to be more commercial, and thus underestimate the declining volume of trade.

**Table 2/3: Volume of Trade Between Jordan and Israel According to  
Jordanian and Israeli Statistics 2010–2013 (\$ million)<sup>190</sup>**

Year	Jordanian exports to Israel		Jordanian imports from Israel		Trade volume	
	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics	Jordanian statistics	Israeli statistics
<b>2013</b>	82.8	266.5	87.7	99.3	170.5	365.8
<b>2012</b>	75.4	205.5	100.6	154	176	359.5
<b>2011</b>	75.1	172.9	96.8	210	171.9	382.9
<b>2010</b>	90.7	94.1	89.2	185.6	179.9	279.7



In contrast, the Israeli trade volume with Morocco grew by 134.9% between 2011 and 2013, as the Israeli export volume to Morocco rose from \$21.6 million in 2011 to \$53.7 million in 2013. However, the Israeli import volume from Morocco stayed relatively small, although it rose from \$3.9 million in 2011 to \$6.2 million in 2013 (see table 3/3).

This growth in trade volume was evident even after the Islamist Justice and Development Party took lead of the Moroccan government in early 2012 and formed the first coalition government post the political reforms announced by King Mohammed VI in 2011. However, it should be noted that at the end of July 2013 the Party submitted, along with three other parties in the Moroccan Parliament, a bill that criminalizes normalization with Israel.<sup>191</sup>

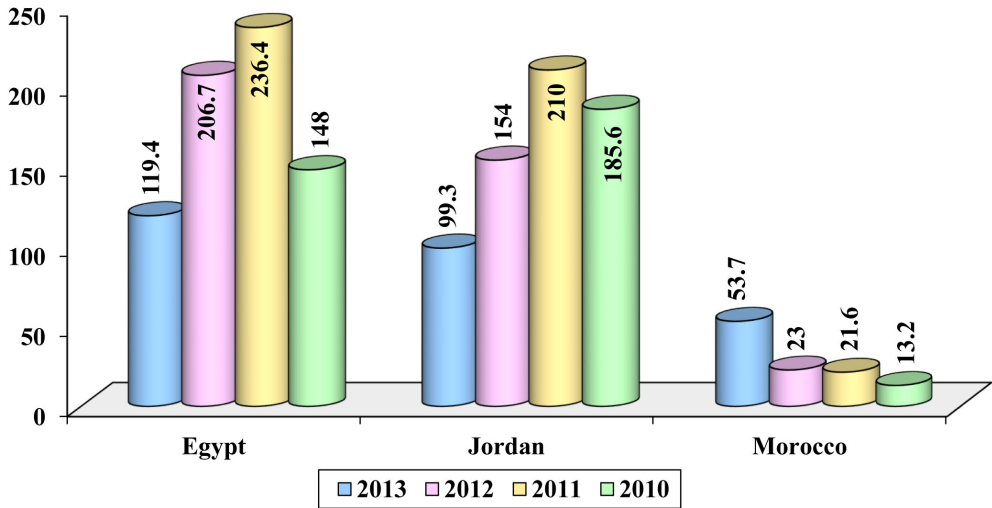
Nevertheless, the decline in the Israeli export volume to Arab countries seems likely to be temporary, especially considering that Israel started exporting gas to neighboring Arab countries, namely Egypt and Jordan, from the fields it recently discovered. It is worthy of mention here that, in February 2014, two companies in Jordan signed a gas supply agreement with Noble Energy, an American company owning 37% of the Israeli gas field, Tamar. This agreement states that the two companies import Israeli gas over 15 years starting in 2016. Estimated at about \$771 million, the agreement is expected to be put into action within two years.<sup>192</sup>

This agreement was mentioned in *The Wall Street Journal* which also wrote about talks with Egypt for a potential deal to supply it with around eight billion cubic meters of Israeli gas to alleviate its energy shortage.<sup>193</sup> However, the Egyptian Ministry of Petroleum, which confirmed Egypt's need to make up for its deficit through importing gas, denied any intention to do that through Israel.<sup>194</sup>

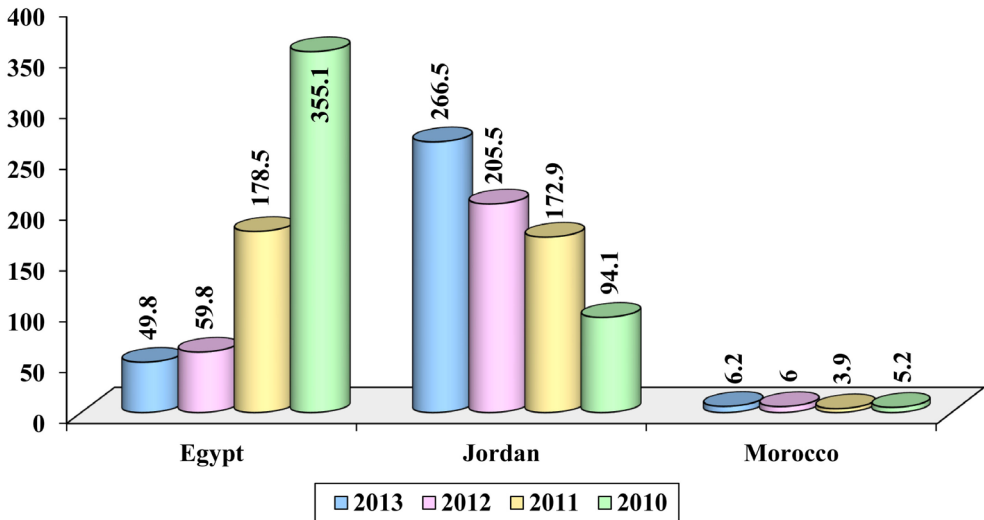
**Table 3/3: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from Some Arab Countries  
2010–2013 (\$ million)<sup>195</sup>**

Country	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2013	2012	2011	2010	2013	2012	2011	2010
<b>Egypt</b>	119.4	206.7	236.4	148	49.8	59.8	178.5	355.1
<b>Jordan</b>	99.3	154	210	185.6	266.5	205.5	172.9	94.1
<b>Morocco</b>	53.7	23	21.6	13.2	6.2	6	3.9	5.2

**Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2010–2013 (\$ million)**



**Israeli Imports from Some Arab Countries 2010–2013 (\$ million)**



### ***Fourth: Arab Public's Position and Its Directions***

The political transformations and subsequent crises witnessed in a number of Arab countries had an impact on grassroots activities in support of the Palestinian issue during 2012 and 2013, as internal concerns prevailed over popular action. Moreover, what amplified the influence of these crises is their occurrence in Egypt and Syria, which are most closely associated with the Palestinian issue, or in other words, relate to the strategic environment that is most influential for the course of the Arab-Israeli conflict in general.

A general review of popular action during these two years indicate that concern with the Palestinian issue has retreated compared to the prevalence of internal affairs in different Arab countries. However, a closer look shows that the retreat is temporary and is dictated by necessity, as Palestine is still present in the consciousness of the Arab people. This is demonstrated through four key indicators:

1. Periods of relative calm in Arab countries were associated with a rise in popular action supporting the Palestinian issue. This was evident in concurrence with prominent events including the prisoners' strike in Israeli jails, and the November 2012 war on GS. Striking in this context was the action witnessed in Egypt during the first half of 2012, including solidarity visits to GS by popular delegates as well as delegates of parties and trade unions, along with al-Azhar action of solidarity with Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

2. The Palestinian issue and normalization with Israel were strongly noticed in the foreign policy of various Arab parties and actors, particularly in Egypt and Tunisia, in the early stages of transition. Remarkably, consensus on supporting the Palestinian issue and refusing normalization were the dominant stances.

3. The Arab Opinion Index (AOI) of 2012/2013, a public opinion poll conducted by the Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies (ACRPS) in 14 Arab countries, showed that 84% of respondents believed the Palestinian issue to be an Arab cause, and not solely the Palestinians'. In addition, 87% of respondents rejected their countries' recognition of Israel.<sup>196</sup>

4. Palestinians' interaction with the Arab uprisings. The PA and various factions sought to maintain a neutral stance with regard to the internal crises of Arab countries in order to avoid adverse reactions that might harm the Palestinian

issue in general, or Palestinians living in those countries in particular. However, on several occasions, the Palestinian street witnessed popular action in support of the uprisings and the demands of the Arab peoples, where the AOI showed that 72% of Palestinians evaluated the Arab revolutions positively.<sup>197</sup>

Nonetheless, tackling the Palestinian issue in internal debates in different Arab countries has been accompanied with some negative side effects. In 2012 and 2013, some Arab countries launched campaigns of incitement against Palestinians or against certain Palestinian parties. For example, after the Syrian uprising, both Lebanese and Syrian media negatively dealt with Hamas's decision to leave Damascus by conducting accusation and defamation campaigns against the Movement.

In addition, the sympathy of Egyptian political parties with the Palestinian issue has been distorted as it was considered a violation of Egyptian national interest, especially after the July coup. Thus, some political actors and media outlets launched campaigns of incitement against Palestinians, especially Hamas and the GS, following what was known as the "Rafah massacre," where 16 Egyptian soldiers were shot to death in their camp in August 2012.

Lebanon has witnessed similar media incitement campaigns succeeding clashes in the 'Abra area, as well as the bombings in several Lebanese regions since the summer of 2013. Fingers of accusation were repeatedly pointed at Palestinian refugee camps as hubs for "terrorists."

However, it can be said that, so far, these negative attitudes remain limited and non-threatening in terms of changing the Arab public mood, which supports Palestinians and their issue. Yet, at the same time, caution must be taken to prevent their danger and address them in a serious manner.

The main events and issues that the Arab street positively interacted with are the Gaza siege, the Palestinian prisoners' hunger strike in Israeli jails, the Judaization of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the aggression on GS.

Regarding the Gaza siege, public interaction was manifested through dozens of visits paid by Arab delegates to GS. In addition, the Arab public interacted with the "Battle of the Empty Stomachs," when Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails staged an open hunger strike starting 17/4/2012 to protest the poor conditions of their imprisonment. There was also Arab public interaction with individual prisoners' hunger strikes throughout 2012 and 2013.



The Arab street also protested against the daily violations and incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. One of the most noticeable actions was the “Global March to Jerusalem” organized simultaneously in some Arab and Islamic countries, in concurrence with Land Day at the end of March 2012.

During the November 2012 Israeli war, Arab countries witnessed several demonstrations and events in solidarity with GS. This Israeli-dubbed war “Operation Pillar of Defense” was dubbed by Hamas “Operation Stones of Baked Clay,” and it lasted eight days following Israel’s assassination of the head of Hamas military wing, Ahmad Ja’bary, on 14/11/2012.

In April 2013, protests against Israeli violations headed down a new track, as a group called “Anonymous” carried out electronic attacks that targeted hundreds of Israeli private and government websites under what was called #OpIsrael.<sup>198</sup>

## ***Conclusion***

Throughout 2012 and 2013, the changes and uprisings in Arab countries, which began early 2011, intensified into internal crises. Various internal and external influential actors tried to push things towards their political orientations and interests. In the midst of it all, the Palestinian issue was always present, whether directly or indirectly. Though limited, the Arab changes influenced the course of the Palestinian issue, internally and externally.

Neither in the time being nor in the near future does it seem plausible that the internally unstable Arab countries will build stable political structures that address internal crises, or meet public aspirations at the domestic level, let alone the external level. This limits the possibilities of establishing a strategic environment that would effectively influence the Palestinian issue or defy Israeli plans. In other words, this will probably embolden Israel to enforce its schemes on the ground, and the Palestinians would have no official support to confront them, especially in light of the Arab anti-MB movement campaigns, and their negative repercussions on Hamas, the most prominent Palestinian resistance faction.

In turn, this puts the Palestinians before the test of their ability to unite internally, and to create incentives that would push the surrounding countries into keeping the Palestinian issue on their agendas.

The ongoing crisis in Syria has resulted in weakening one of the main fronts in the struggle with the Zionist project. This has shattered the “Refusal Front” and ultimately influenced the resistance in both Lebanon and Palestine. Thus, in light of the lack of a solution to this crisis in the near future, any Israeli war on any of these two fronts is foreseen to be more dangerous.

Moreover, the Egyptian crisis intensifies the danger of war on GS, especially in light of the continued Israeli siege, and the Egyptian authorities’ inclination to escalate campaigns against Hamas and the resistance in the region. Today, regional resistance is once again facing one of the most difficult stages, given the decline in its relationship with its traditional allies and the loss of the ally it had gained after the Egyptian January 25 Uprising. In addition, the deterioration of Egypt-Hamas relations reduces the former’s ability to sponsor Palestinian reconciliation.

On the official level, the Arab League does not seem to be prepared to push the peace process towards achieving Palestinian rights, rather its role is limited to providing cover for any actions the PA deems appropriate. Any US and Israeli pressure on the Palestinians to provide additional concessions would not be faced by enough rejections, leaving the Palestinian negotiator alone in his struggle.



## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See Baghdad Declaration, 23rd session of the Arab League Summit, Baghdad, 29/3/2012, site of League of Arab States, [www.lasportal.org](http://www.lasportal.org); and see also Doha Declaration, 24th session of the Arab League Summit, Doha, 26/3/2013, League of Arab States. (in Arabic)
- <sup>2</sup> *Assafir*, 21/11/2012.
- <sup>3</sup> League of Arab States, 12/2/2012.
- <sup>4</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 3/6/2012.
- <sup>5</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 18/7/2013.
- <sup>6</sup> *Assafir*, 30/12/2013.
- <sup>7</sup> PIC, 1/3/2012.
- <sup>8</sup> Sama, 19/2/2012.
- <sup>9</sup> *Elwatan*, 11/10/2012.
- <sup>10</sup> PIC, 12/6/2013.
- <sup>11</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/11/2012.
- <sup>12</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 16/11/2012.
- <sup>13</sup> *Al-Ahram* newspaper, Cairo, 17/11/2012.
- <sup>14</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 8/8/2012.
- <sup>15</sup> *Al-Akhbar*, 9/8/2012.
- <sup>16</sup> A statement by ‘Amr Moussa, see Felesteen Online, 7/8/2012.
- <sup>17</sup> *Al-Youm al-Sabi*’, 7/8/2012.
- <sup>18</sup> *Elwatan*, 13/3/2013.
- <sup>19</sup> Site of al-Ahram Gate, 14/3/2013.
- <sup>20</sup> Felesteen Online, 29/3/2013.
- <sup>21</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 5/4/2013.
- <sup>22</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 4/7/2013.
- <sup>23</sup> Sama, 5/7/2013.
- <sup>24</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 6/7/2013.
- <sup>25</sup> *Okaz* newspaper, Jeddah, 10/7/2013.
- <sup>26</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 13/3/2014.
- <sup>27</sup> Ma’an, 15/3/2014.
- <sup>28</sup> Quds Press, 16/3/2014.
- <sup>29</sup> Mahir al-Tabba’, “Catastrophic Numbers Concerning Unemployment in Palestine,” Ma’an, 26/2/2014. (in Arabic)  
For more information see PCBS, Press Report on the Labour Force Survey Results, 2nd and 4th quarters of 2013, [http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs\\_2012/PressEn.aspx](http://www.pcbs.gov.ps/pcbs_2012/PressEn.aspx)
- <sup>30</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 5/9/2013.
- <sup>31</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 3/9/2013.
- <sup>32</sup> Sama, 24/9/2013.
- <sup>33</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 24/9/2013.

- <sup>34</sup> Aljazeera.net, 27/3/2014.
- <sup>35</sup> Reuters, 15/1/2014.
- <sup>36</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 28/1/2014.
- <sup>37</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/2/2014.
- <sup>38</sup> Aljazeera.net, 4/3/2014.
- <sup>39</sup> See Fahmy Howeidy, "This is Not the Mother of the World," *al-Shorouk* newspaper, Cairo, 6/3/2014. (in Arabic)
- <sup>40</sup> *Assabeel*, 26/2/2014.
- <sup>41</sup> *Alwafid* newspaper, Giza, 1/9/2013.
- <sup>42</sup> *Alittihad*, 30/7/2013.
- <sup>43</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 11/11/2013.
- <sup>44</sup> *Alrai* newspaper, Kuwait, 3/5/2012.
- <sup>45</sup> *Sama*, 12/3/2012.
- <sup>46</sup> The second explosion in 2012, and the 15th since January 25 Uprising, took place in July, leaving suspicions that the exportation of gas had been secretly resumed, which was denied by the Egyptian government. See *al-Ahram*, 23/7/2012.
- <sup>47</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 22–23/4/2012.
- <sup>48</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 2/7/2012.
- <sup>49</sup> *Al-Ahram* and Reuters, 31/7/2012.
- <sup>50</sup> See The Times of Israel, 17/10/2012, <http://www.timesofisrael.com>; and *al-Ahram* Gate, 17/10/2012.
- <sup>51</sup> *Al-Ahram*, 19/10/2012.
- <sup>52</sup> *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 16/11/2012.
- <sup>53</sup> *Al-Hayat*, 24/8/2012.
- <sup>54</sup> *Al-Khaleej*, 23/5/2013.
- <sup>55</sup> *Sama*, 19/3/2013.
- <sup>56</sup> *Asharq Alawsat*, 3/7/2013.
- <sup>57</sup> See site of Cable News Network (CNN), 16/8/2013, <http://globalpublicsquare.blogs.cnn.com/2013/08/16/barak-world-should-back-new-egypt-government/>
- <sup>58</sup> MEMO, 19/7/2013, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/6617-israeli-ambassador-calls-al-sisi-a-national-hero-for-all-jews-q>
- <sup>59</sup> Information Report, no. 2871, Markaz Dirasat wa Tahlil al-Ma'lumat al-Suhafiyah, 27/7/2013, cited from Israeli Channel 10. (in Arabic)
- <sup>60</sup> Avner Golov et al., "The Revolution in Egypt: Recommendations for Israel," INSS Insight, no. 445, site of The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 11/7/2013, <http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=5164>
- <sup>61</sup> Felesteen Online, 20/8/2013.
- <sup>62</sup> Ariel Ben Solomon, Person of the Year in Regional Affairs: Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, *The Jerusalem Post*, 31/12/2013.
- <sup>63</sup> *Safa*, 15/11/2013.
- <sup>64</sup> See site of Arabi21, 5/3/2014, <http://arabi21.com/>
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## This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013 is the eighth 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 13 academics and experts contributed to this Report in seven chapters. They covered the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli–Palestinian relations including wars and the peace process. They also discuss 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.

Al-Zaytouna Centre, as usual, has surpassed other reports in this superlative work. It is a serious addition to the field of Palestinian studies, and those interested in this field, including specialists, experts, libraries of universities and research centers, should have their copies of this Report.

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