The Palestinian Strategic Report
2014 – 2015
Ch.5

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

2014 – 2015

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The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation[1]

Introduction

The years 2014 and 2015 reinforced the idea of the presence of a close relationship between Palestinian resistance in all its forms, and the nature and extent of regional and international diplomatic efforts to resolve the long-standing Palestinian issue. Indeed, the less momentum the resistance has in any period of time, the less of a priority the Palestinian issue becomes, falling behind other less important regional and international issues. This is while noting that international diplomatic efforts sometimes increase for other reasons, linked to the quest by Israel and major powers led by the US, to capitalize on Palestinian, Arab, and Islamic weakness to impose a settlement on their own terms.

While the Palestinian resistance was able to impose the Palestinian issue on the international agenda with the first *Intifadah* in late 1987, and *al-Aqsa Intifadah* in 2000, international preoccupation with major developments, revolutions, changes, conflicts, and attempts to draw new maps in the region led to a declining interest in the Palestinian issue. The Palestinian issue was thus dealt with in a temporary and limited manner, as long as it posed no serious threat to major powers and their allies, and could be contained by "friendly" regional powers.

International diplomatic efforts in 2014, as we will explain in the report, up until the conflict erupted in GS on 8/7/2014, decreased significantly. Then efforts began to arrange a ceasefire and the reconstruction of GS. An international conference convened in Egypt for the purpose, following previous efforts for a ceasefire between the Palestinian resistance and Israeli occupation forces.

After the Gaza conflict, the Palestinian issue faded away behind a series of regional and international issues, to the extent that Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that the lack of international diplomatic interest in the Palestinian issue was "deliberate," despite it being the central issue of the region. Lavrov's remarks in 2014 indicate that Russia has "held a clear-cut line on preventing new crises in the Middle East from putting into the background old conflicts, primarily

[1] This study is the approved English translation of chapter five of the book entitled: *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh. Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations in Beirut released the Arabic version in 2016. The first draft of this chapter was written by Prof. Dr. Walid 'Abd al-Hay.

the one between Palestine and Israel."[2] This is consistent with what Lavrov said before the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy in November 2014:

> The Arab-Israeli conflict is dead in the water. It's hard to play on several boards at a time. The Americans are trying to accomplish this, but it doesn't work for them. In 2013, they took nine months to sort out the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. I will not go into the reasons, they are known, but they failed at this as well. Now, they asked for more time to try to achieve some progress before the end of 2014, so that the Palestinians wouldn't go to the UN and sign the Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC), etc. Suddenly, it transpired that negotiations on Iran are underway. The US State Department dumped Palestine to focus on Iran.[3]

Lavrov's conclusions are consistent with the fact that the speech delivered by US President Obama Barack in the United Nations (UN) General Assembly in October 2015 contained no reference to the Palestinian issue, focusing instead on other regional and international problems.

When identifying the "new" crises that Lavrov referenced in 2014–2015, impacting the priority assigned to the Palestinian issue, we find that they were as follows:

1. The repercussions of political unrest in the Arab countries, or the so-called Arab Spring. First in Syria, where international efforts in 2014 and 2015 focused on the regional and international political and military convergence in Syria, especially the dismantling of the chemical weapons arsenal in 2014. Second, there arose the issue of the rise of the so-called caliphate state or the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS). Third, the continued fighting in Libya and the unrest in Egypt. Then in March 2015, KSA led a military intervention against Houthi rebels in Yemen, allied to forces loyal to former President ʻAli ʻAbdullah Saleh. On 30/9/2015, Russia launched a military intervention in Syria, with Russia trying to coordinate with Israel in light of the prospects for conflict between Russian and Israeli air operations above Syria, especially in the Golan Heights.

2. The influx of Arab migrants (including Palestinians) to Europe, an issue that has preoccupied much of diplomatic effort and media coverage at the expense of

[2] Site of The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, official site, 27/12/2014, http://archive.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/F991672ECE65419FC3257DBE002382A6?OpenDocument

[3] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 22/11/2014, http://archive.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/24454A08D48F695EC3257D9A004BA32E?OpenDocument

the Palestinian issue. Especially so when the financial support for Palestinians—including for the reconstruction of Gaza—was affected by the allocations given to migrants. To establish this, it suffices to compare the level of European aid to Palestine between 2011 and 2015, to see that there is a decline.[4]

3. The nuclear deal with Iran: World powers reached a deal with Iran in July 2015 regarding the latter's nuclear program. The deal led to differences and tensions in the region that influenced the level of attention afforded to the Palestinian issue. Indeed, the major powers assigned great importance to the nuclear issue, in a way that pushed the Palestinian issue to the margin of diplomatic activities. This continued until the *Intifadah* in Palestine erupted in October 2015, as Israeli assaults on *al-Aqsa* mosque and projects to divide it spatially and temporally increased.

4. The crisis in Ukraine: In February 2014, Russian forces seized the Crimean Peninsula in Ukraine, triggering an international crisis that has preoccupied the world up to the time of writing. This reinforced the marginalization of the Palestinian issue.

5. Energy issues in the region: The fluctuation then collapse in oil prices has had global economic repercussions, triggering mutual accusations among producers regarding the causes of the collapse. Furthermore, the emergence of large reserves of natural gas in the eastern Mediterranean close to Arab shores (not to mention plans to transport gas through pipelines from production areas to consumers, especially in Europe) has drawn attention to a new arena of conflict. Masood Ahmed, director of Middle East and Central Asia Department at the International Monetary Fund, said in a press conference that "the export earnings of the oil-exporting countries in the Middle East and North Africa have gone down by $360 billion[5] in 2015 compared to 2014."[6] This impacted the level of support for the Palestinian people by oil-producing nations, especially with respect to the reconstruction of GS.

6. The Israeli elections in March 2015: Diplomatic efforts become "temporarily" paralyzed in countries preparing for legislative or presidential elections, both before the elections and during the formation of new governments,

[4] Sami Abdel-Shafi, Realigning EU Policy in Palestine Towards a Viable State Economy and Restored Dignity, Middle East and North Africa Programme, site of Chatham House, 28/10/2015, p. 17.

[5] The symbol $ used throughout this book is the US$.

[6] Transcript of the Middle East and Central Asia Press Briefing, site of International Monetary Fund, 9/10/2015, https://www.imf.org/external/np/tr/2015/tr100915.htm

especially in the case of coalition governments like the ones that govern in Israel. International efforts for dialogue with Israel slowed down before, during, and after the election period.

However, it is necessary to point out that the focus of the changes in Russia's security principles, towards increasingly considering North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) a "major foreign threat" as stated on 26/12/2014, and Russia's attempts to curb NATO's attempts to expand into areas Russia considers to be of vital importance after losing its control over important areas in Eastern Europe, increased the strategic value of Western Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean area, which no doubt has an impact on the attention afforded to the Palestinian issue.

The landscape changed drastically, however, as the Palestinian *Intifadah* erupted in October 2015. The international diplomatic corps came back to life, as the media focused the spotlight once again on what is arguably the root cause for all Middle Eastern issues. This confirmed once again that resistance is the most effective method to force international interest in the Palestinian issue, regardless of the fact that the US and some major powers are constantly seeking to undermine the demands of the Palestinian people and support Israel, its occupation, and its crimes. After the success of the Palestinian resistance in repelling Israeli aggression on GS in 2014, the UN recognized Palestine as a non-member state. Later on, the Palestinian flag was hoisted at the UN, and Palestine joined the ICC and started filing documents to investigate Israeli war crimes in the occupied territories, which will be discussed in more detail later in this report.

First: The Quartet

If the Quartet on the Middle East represents the so-called "international will" (or more precisely the will of the major powers) for settling the Arab-Israeli conflict, the indications of the decline of this entity have increased every year since its inception in 2002, both in terms of the number of its statements and the extent of its diplomatic efforts and achievements on the ground.[7] In truth, the Quartet has played a negative obstructionist role against the Palestinian people's quest to fulfill its aspirations for freedom, liberation, and independence. Its presidency represented by Tony Blair has been biased in favor of Israel for years, and it

[7] Middle East Quartet statements, site of UN News Centre, http://www.un.org/apps/news/docs.asp?Topic=Middle%20East&Type=Quartet%20statement

disrupted the democratic choice of the Palestinian people in WB and GS and gave cover to the Israeli blockade of GS when it set its three impossible conditions for Hamas, which had won the 2006 election.

Perhaps the fact that in 2014 the Quartet issued almost no statements, with only four issued in 2015, is further evidence of the decline of its diplomatic efforts on the Palestinian issue. A review of the four Quartet statements shows that the one issued on 27/5/2015, was merely a protocol statement of praise, focused on the role of the Quartet representative Tony Blair after his announcement he would leave his post, which he took up in 2007. The second statement issued on 8/2/2015 reaffirmed the same issues tackled by previous statements, such as: calling for the resumption of the negotiations on the basis of UN resolutions; land for peace; guaranteeing Israeli security; emphasizing the importance of the Arab peace initiative; calling on the parties not to undertake any unilateral actions affecting mutual confidence; emphasizing the importance of providing financial support to the Palestinians; and calling on donor parties to fulfill their previous pledges, particularly those made in the Cairo Conference in October 2014, in relation to GS.

The third statement, which followed the Quartet's meetings in New York on 30/9/2015, focused on expanding consultations with regional and international parties. The Quartet reaffirmed its traditional positions stated in previous statements, and "noted with deep concern recent violence and escalating tensions surrounding the holy sites in Jerusalem and called upon all parties to exercise restraint… and preserve unchanged the status quo at the holy sites in both word and practice."[8] The fourth statement, issued on 23/10/2015, under pressure of the eruption of a new *Intifadah* in WB, expressed the Quartet's profound concern regarding the escalation of the violence, and condemned "all acts of terror and violence against civilians." The statement encouraged "Israel to work together with Jordan to uphold the status quo at the holy sites in Jerusalem in both word and practice, recognizing the special role of Jordan as per its peace treaty with Israel." The statement reaffirmed previous agreements and international resolutions and their implementation on the basis of the two-state solution and ending the occupation that began in 1967, and said the "Quartet Envoys will travel to the region in the coming period and engage directly with the parties."[9]

[8] Statement by the Middle East Quartet Principals, site of European External Action Service (EEAS), 1/10/2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151001_01_en.htm

[9] Quartet Principals' Statement, Vienna, site of US Department of State, 23/10/2015, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/10/248675.htm

This means that between September 2013 and February 2015 the Quartet did not issue any non-protocol statement. In the following year (after Blair stepped down), the Quartet met in Cairo (June), Amman (July), and Riyadh (September) without any notable impact on the peace process. This reinforces the conclusions reached by expert studies that addressed the "ineffectiveness" of the role of the Quartet in most of the tasks entrusted to them, as evident in the following points:[10]

1. The weakness of its role regarding PA reform, which is evident in the high levels of corruption, according to Transparency International indices.[11]
2. The failure of the road map, which was the central task entrusted to the Quartet.
3. The inability to separate the two sides, which was evident in the continuing confrontations and the overlap of the administrative and security agencies and public life of the two parties.
4. Its conditions for Hamas to recognize Israel and renounce "violence," and ratify the agreements signed by the PLO so that it could take its natural role in the PA. This supported the Israeli vision for Hamas, and sought to isolate and marginalize one of the largest Palestinian political forces. Consequently, the internal Palestinian situation and GS siege were aggravated.
5. Poor diplomatic performance and weak mediation efforts, which we have pointed out above, with the decline in its international activity and decline in its statements, both in terms of quality and quantity.
6. The US monopoly over the attitudes of the Quartet, which was almost the central weakness of the Quartet's work. The Quartet sought in its three meetings in Cairo, Riyadh, and Amman to expand the circle of participants in its works, especially the Arab League, because of Russian demands and because of the slow work of the Quartet that Tony Blair has contributed to. Delegates from Jordan, Egypt, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), and the Arab League were invited to take part in the Quartet's work in its conference held in September 2015. The influences of the US role in the Quartet's paralysis is clear in the American refusal to support the French proposal to submit a draft resolution at the UN Security Council specifying the parameters for achieving the two-state solution in support of the

[10] Nathalie Tocci, "The EU, the Middle East Quartet and (in)effective Multilateralism," *MERCURY E-Paper*, no. 9, June 2011, http://mercury.uni-koeln.de/fileadmin/user_upload/E-paper_no9_r2011.pdf

[11] Corruption by Country/ Territory, site of Transparency International, https://www.transparency.org/country/#PSE_DataResearch

Quartet's work.[12] This shows that the Quartet did not comply even with the bare minimum agreed upon by the Palestinian pro-peace faction.

7. The weakness of the Quartet's work in the context of international efforts is also clear in the parties' failure to comply with its appeals to implement the pledges presented at donor conferences for the reconstruction of GS, most recently the donor conference in the first week of October 2014. In that conference, donors pledged $5.4 billion, but available information suggests these pledges will meet the same fate as previous pledges made at the Paris donor conference in December 2007, where 87 countries and organizations pledged around $7.4 billion, little of which has materialized.[13]

The decline in the role and influence of the Quartet since its inception in 2002, which we also analyzed in our previous Palestinian Strategic Report,[14] became more marked in the past two years (2014–2015). In 2014, actual activity on the ground was non-existent, and the Quartet's activity in 2015 was confined to issuing four statements, one of them a protocol statement unrelated to the conflict. This reflects the choice of international forces to marginalize any interest in the Palestinian issue, in favor of other regional changes and upheavals.

Second: The United Nations

The key issues with regard to Palestine are tackled mainly at UN level by three entities: The General Assembly, the Security Council, and the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). This doesn't mean that other UN special agencies are not important, though their involvement in the Palestinian issue is smaller and their decisions are mostly consistent with the decisions of the three aforementioned bodies.

What is remarkable about the vote on resolutions related to the Palestinian issue is the huge discrepancy in support. Out of 13 resolutions at the UN General

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[12] Nimrod Goren, Revitalising the Middle East Quartet post-Blair?, site of EurActiv.com, 16/10/2015, http://www.euractiv.com/sections/global-europe/revitalising-middle-east-quartet-post-blair-318569

[13] *The New York Times* newspaper, 12/10/2014, http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/13/world/middleeast/us-pledges-212-million-in-new-aid-for-gaza.html?_r=0; and *The Washington Post* newspaper, 18/12/2007, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/12/17/AR2007121700210.html

[14] See Mohsen Moh'd Saleh (ed.), *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2012–2013* (Beirut: Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, 2015), pp. 227–264.

Assembly in 2014, the "average" number of votes in favor of Palestine was 145 countries (out of 193), while the average of votes against was 6-7 countries (the rest absentees or abstaining). Moreover, more than six countries voted against resolutions in favor of the Palestinians, which include in addition to Israel, the US, Canada, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and Nauru.[15] If we exclude the US and Canada, the remaining four states are "micro-states" with no actual weight in the international community. What this confirms is that the legitimacy of Palestinian rights is a given for the international community, despite the disparity regarding the extent of these rights between states, something that Israel has started to take seriously.

1. The General Assembly

On 10/9/2015, the UN General Assembly agreed to raise the Palestinian flag at the UN, recognizing Palestine as a non-member state. The event had symbolic and political connotations. The other resolutions in the 69th and 70th session essentially covered the following:[16]

a. Called on donor countries to meet the commitments they promised at the Cairo Conference in October 2014 for GS reconstruction. The Assembly also welcomed the conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD), which was held in March 2014, in addition to the efforts of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee for the Coordination of International Assistance to Palestinians.
b. In the same session (December 2014), the Assembly stressed the right of the Palestinian people to its natural resources and the need for Israel to cease their exploitation, and the right of Palestinians to compensation for the Israeli exploitation of their resources, emphasizing the illegality of settlements and the Separation Wall, including in and around East Jerusalem.
c. The rest of the resolutions tackled the following issues:
    1. Supporting the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.
    2. Rejecting Israeli practices affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.

[15] See 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Resolutions, site of General Assembly of the United Nations, http://www.un.org/en/ga/69/resolutions.shtml

[16] General Assembly-Quick Links, site of Dag Hammarskjöld Library Research Guides, http://research.un.org/en/docs/ga/quick/regular/69

3. The illegality of Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan.
4. The application of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (dated 12/8/1949), to the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and other occupied Arab territories.
5. Supporting the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the occupied territories.
6. Reaffirmation of the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and that they have the right to their properties and income derived therefrom, in accordance with the principles of fairness and justice.
7. Supporting the operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
8. Settlement of the question of Palestine by peaceful means, and the continuation of the work of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP), and the continuation of the Special Information Programme on the Question of Palestine of the UN Department of Public Information.

2. Security Council

The Palestinian issue did not seen a significant effort from the UN Security Council in 2014 and 2015. The only draft resolution proposed on this issue came on 30/12/2014, related to determining the timeframe (until 2017) for ending the Israeli occupation of all the territories occupied in 1967 through negotiations. However, the resolution failed, as it was opposed by the US and Australia, and the support from eight states was not enough as it was less than the required quorum of nine. The rest of the efforts of the Security Council on Palestine focused on receiving reports from UN agency or secretary-general representatives. These reports do not trigger any voting, meaning they do not include any executive measures or decisions. There were 17 such reports in the 69th session and 12 in the 70th session, all covering events or special activities concerning the Palestinian issue.[17]

[17] Security Council - Quick Links, Dag Hammarskjöld Library Research Guides, http://research.un.org/en/docs/sc/quick/meetings/2014; and Meetings Records, site of United Nations Security Council, http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2015.shtml

3. ECOSOC

The resolutions of the council in 2014 and 2015 focused on two key issues: Palestinian women's conditions and consequences of the Israeli occupation on Palestinian economic and social life, and called for:[18]

a. Provision of assistance to Palestinian women.
b. Full opening of border crossings into GS.
c. The need to preserve the territorial integrity of the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.
d. A demanding that Israel comply with the Protocol on Economic Relations Between the Government of the State of Israel and the PLO, representing the Palestinian people, which was signed in Paris on 29/4/1994.
e. Israel to repair civilian property and vital infrastructure, as well as agricultural lands and governmental institutions that were damaged or destroyed as a result of military operations in the occupied Palestinian territories, and return them to their original state.
f. Israel, as the occupying power, to cease its destruction of homes, properties, economic institutions, agricultural lands, and orchards in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.
g. The Council reaffirmed that the construction and expansion of Israeli settlements and related infrastructure in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and the occupied Syrian Golan are illegal.
h. The Council requested the Secretary-General to submit to the General Assembly through the ECOSOC, a report on the implementation of the settlements resolution, and to update the report of the UN Special Rapporteur with any emerging information on the living conditions of the Palestinian people, in collaboration with the UN agencies concerned.

There was clear weakness in the resolutions, especially with regard to condemning the Israeli position and Israel's lack of compliance with previous decisions and appeals. This reflected the weakness of the Arab and Muslim countries, and also the policy of the organization's representatives in drafting statements that would not antagonize the US and that are consistent with the peace settlement.

[18] 2015 ECOSOC Resolutions, site of United Nations Economic and Social Council, http://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/res2015.asp

4. ICC

Between January and April 2015, the PA launched efforts to sign up for the ICC and other international treaties. Ultimately, it signed up for the Rome Statute, becoming the ICC's 123rd member. On 1/1/2015, the UN-affiliated tribunal announced that the Government of Palestine lodged a declaration under article 12(3) of the Rome Statute accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC over alleged crimes committed in the occupied Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, since 13/6/2014.[19] That period covered the Israeli assault on GS in July 2014, and Israel's wide-scale crackdown in WB following the disappearance of three settlers on 13 June of the same year.

The ICC is a permanent independent judicial body that tries persons accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, and war crimes. However, accepting the court's jurisdiction does not automatically trigger an investigation into a complaint filed. The prosecutor at the ICC requires conditions stated in the Rome Statute to initiate an investigation, including the need for the case not to be on the table before other judicial bodies, and a permission from ICC judges.

Although Israel and the US are not ICC members, their citizens may be tried for war crimes. Article VIII of the Rome Statute, which governs the work of the ICC, considers the transfer, deportation, or fining of individuals under occupation illegally to be "war crimes." But the problem that may face the Palestinian party in the ICC is the potential for Israel to request a third party, such as human rights groups, to file complaints against Palestinian parties of committing war crimes, which could invite international pressure against the Palestinians.

The US opposed Palestine's accession to the ICC. The US State Department said at the time that "The United States does not believe that the state of Palestine qualifies as a sovereign state and does not recognize it as such and does not believe that it is eligible to accede to the Rome Statute."[20] The US built on this by threatening to cut off aid from Palestine should the PA continue its quest to prosecute Israel, a position also adopted by Canada. John Baird, then-Canadian Foreign Minister, told the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) his

[19] Site of International Criminal Court (ICC), https://www.icc-cpi.int/en_menus/icc/structure%20of%20the%20court/office%20of%20the%20prosecutor/comm%20and%20ref/pe- ongoing/palestine/Pages/palestine.aspx

[20] Jen Psaki, Spokesperson, Daily Press Briefing, Washington, DC, US Department of State, 7/1/2015, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2015/01/235660.htm

country would suspend humanitarian aid to Palestine if it headed to the ICC to prosecute Israel.[21] This reminds us of the conditions imposed on the PA in return for aid, which had become a restriction on its movements even within international organizations, making efforts in this regard ineffective as the PA needed to take into account the strings attached to aid.

If we add to this the fact that the court lacks the mechanisms to compel Israel to cooperate, we see that the issue will entail extensive deliberation, obstacles, and pressure on the Palestinian side. This means that threatening to resort to the ICC ultimately has little prospect of influencing Israeli policies.

5. UN Human Rights Council (HRC)

On 23/7/2014, HRC issued a resolution calling for the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to "urgently dispatch an independent, international commission of inquiry, to be appointed by the President of the Human Rights Council, to investigate all violations of international humanitarian law and international human rights law" in the 1967 occupied Palestinian Territories, including East Jerusalem, particularly in GS, after clashes broke out there on 13/7/2014. This was "to identify those responsible, to make recommendations," and to report to the Council at its 28th session, in March 2015.[22]

The mission, formed in August 2014, comprised William Schabas, from Canada, who resigned from his job in February 2015 after Israeli accusations of "bias"[23] made against him and the Councilof; and Mary McGowan Davis, a US judge who served on the commission that investigated human rights violations during the Israeli assault on Gaza in December 2008–January 2009, along with Doudou Diène from Senegal. However, the main obstacle that the committee faced was Israel's refusal to cooperate and allow its members to enter, according to a statement issued by the mission in December 2014. This prompted the commission

[21] Site of The Globe and Mail, 6/3/2013, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/palestinians-will-face-consequences-if-they-pursue-israel-at-the-icc-says-baird/article9324145/

[22] The United Nations Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict, site of Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 22/6/2015, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIGazaConflict/Pages/CommissionOfInquiry.aspx

[23] Site of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 3/2/2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-31107988

to travel to Jordan to interview witnesses. At the end of its mission, the commission issued a report that concluded:[24]

a. The commission expressed concern "about Israel's extensive use of weapons with a wide kill and injury radius."
b. "The indiscriminate firing of thousands of rockets and mortars at Israel appeared to have the intention of spreading terror among civilians there." "The idea of the tunnels traumatized Israeli civilians who feared they could be attacked at any moment by gunmen bursting out of the ground."
c. The commission expressed concern at "what appears to be the increasing use of live ammunition for crowd control by the Israeli Security Forces, which raises the likelihood of death or serious injury."
d. "Impunity prevails across the board for violations allegedly committed by Israeli forces," both in WB and GS.
e. The Commission of Inquiry is concerned by Israel's decision to close the criminal investigation into the murder of four children on a beach in GS on 16/7/2014.
f. The Israeli authorities did not respond to repeated requests by the Commission for information and permission to enter Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories.

The council has adopted a number of resolutions[25] on the affirmation of the responsibility for the achievement of justice and on violations of international law in the occupied Palestinian territories on 3/7/2015 (41 endorsed the resolution and 1 objected). It also adopted a number of resolutions in its session held on 27/3/2015, reaffirming the Palestinians' right to self-determination (supported by 45 and opposed by one) and the illegality of Israeli settlements (43 to one), and criticized the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territories (supported by 43 to one). In 2014, the Council adopted three resolutions regarding the same themes it addressed in 2015 (each one had 46 votes in favor and one against).[26]

[24] UN Gaza Inquiry Finds Credible Allegations of War Crimes Committed in 2014 by Both Israel and Palestinian Armed Groups, site of Office of the High Commissioner, United Nations (UN), Human Rights, 22/6/2015, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=16119&LangID=E

[25] Documents and Resolutions, Regular sessions, OHCHR, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/Pages/Documents.aspx

[26] 25th Session of the Human Rights Council (3–28 March 2014) Resolutions, Decisions and President's Statements, OHCHR, http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/RegularSessions/Session25/Pages/ResDecStat.aspx

Based on the above, it is possible to summarize the activities of the UN and its related bodies, during 2014–2015, with the following:

a. Affirming Palestinian rights in all UN bodies, with varying support for Palestine between one body and another, especially the extreme weakness of the role of the UN Security Council, because of the US position, which uses the veto or influences the vote by various means to alter legal texts or modify draft resolutions before submission to the Council, undermining Palestinian aspirations.
b. International support for Israeli policies at the UN is limited and weak, as reflected by the voting trends. The average proportion of votes in favor of Palestine exceeds 75%, compared to 3% for Israel, while the rest are absentees and abstainers.

Third: Major International Powers

1. The United States of America

US policy can be addressed through the following points:

a. The Decline of the Palestinian Issue in the Priorities of American Diplomatic Efforts

We previously referred to the speech of US president Obama in the 70th session of the UN General Assembly, in which he did not make any mention of the Palestinian issue. This suggests the US is preoccupied with other international issues it considers more urgent. Another benchmark is the number of official visits made by US Secretary of State John Kerry in 2014 and 2015. In this regard, we should take into account the emergence of tensions in US-Israeli relations, with the US government unable to pressure Netanyahu's government, and thus unable to propose new initiatives.

Table 1/5: Official Visits by US Secretary of State 2014–2015

Year	Official meetings abroad	Visits to Arab countries	Visits to Palestine (Ramallah)	Proportion Palestine received from total visits
2014	54	25	3	5.5%
2015	26	7	0	0%

The above table shows the extent of US diplomatic efforts on the Palestinian issue, which is marginal, sometimes occurring only on the sidelines of visits to other states to discuss other issues.

Although the US is committed to its traditional policy on the Palestinian issue, what is particularly striking is the loss of any form of credibility in American pledges. From the promises made by George W. Bush down to Obama's timetables for negotiations and the fulfilment of the two-state solution, no progress was made on any track—although the Palestinian president has met with Kerry 25 times since the latter assumed his post in February 2013. Furthermore, analysis the 2014–2015 statements of the US State Department or its spokesperson, confirms that no change took place in the US position, both at the level of word and or deed.[27] In December 2015, some media outlets also quoted the US president saying that "Washington has no tools with which to fight efforts to isolate Israel internationally," after a failed visit by Kerry to the region.[28] The US had become increasingly convinced it was unable to make any progress as long as Netanyahu and his far-right allies were governing Israel.

b. The Political Discourse of the Obama Administration on the Arab-Zionist Conflict

One of the features of this discourse was clear during the Israeli assault on GS in July 2014. At the time, the US adopted its traditional stance of justifying Israeli military actions. During the war, Obama said,

> As I've said many times, Israel has a right to defend itself against rocket and tunnel attacks from Hamas. And as a result of its operations, Israel has already done significant damage to Hamas's terrorist infrastructure in Gaza. I've also said, however, that we have serious concerns about the rising number of Palestinian civilian deaths and the loss of Israeli lives. And that is why it now has to be our focus… to bring about a cease-fire… I've instructed him [Kerry] to push for an immediate cessation of hostilities based on a return to the November 2012 cease-fire agreement between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.[29]

[27] For more details on the statements, see US Department of State, http://www.state.gov/secretary/travel/2014/index.htm

[28] See *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 10/12/2015. See also *Haaretz*, 11/12/2015, http://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-1.691246

[29] Statement by the President on the Situation in Ukraine and Gaza, Office of the Press Secretary, site of The White House, 21/7/2014, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/07/21/statement-president-situation-ukraine-and-gaza

It is noticeable that Obama's discourse does not go beyond polite criticism of Israeli violations. By contrast, the Obama administration describes the resistance's capture of an Israeli soldier during the war (July 2014) as a "barbaric" action, and the US president said that the "soldier needs to be unconditionally released."[30] At the same time, his delegate refused to approve a UN Security Council resolution that would have set a timetable for ending the occupation of Palestine, which is nearly half a century old [1967 lands].

The visit by Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu to the US to deliver a speech before Congress in March 2015, at the invitation of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives John Boehner (Republican) without any consultation with the US president, drew the ire from President Obama and his administration, increasing tensions between the Israeli and US governments. Netanyahu visited the United States specifically to convince the US Congress to reject the adoption of the Iranian nuclear deal, while the US administration was engaged in the final arrangements for the agreement. This was considered a significant and unprecedented encroachment by Netanyahu in putting pressure on the American presidency.[31]

Observers have noted that Netanyahu did not succeed in achieving his goal. Many Democratic deputies boycotted his speech or expressed annoyance at his behavior. Netanyahu's popularity, it was said, declined in the US following his speech in Congress. Nevertheless, the US administration continued its usual support for Israeli policies, taking no measures against Netanyahu, who enjoys the backing of the Israeli lobby in the US.[32]

c. The US Quest to Extend the PA's Security Reach to GS

After 15 days of fighting in GS (July 2014), on 23/7/2014 John Kerry held a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas in Ramallah. The substance of the US efforts was how to capitalize on Israeli military pressures on GS to extend the PA's powers, particularly its security forces, to GS and the crossings there between GS, Israel, and Egypt.[33] In September 2014, Kerry returned to Cairo

[30] *The guardian* newspaper, 2/8/2014; and Press Conference by the President, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 1/8/2014, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/01/press-conference-president

[31] See site of The Times of Israel, 5/3/2015, http://bit.ly/1XVY3kC (in Arabic)

[32] See The Times of Israel, 3/9/2015, http://bit.ly/1QzAOqF; and The Times of Israel, 21/3/2015, http://bit.ly/241OqaZ (in Arabic)

[33] *The Economist* newspaper, 30/8/2014.

to discuss several issues, including strengthening the ceasefire, which Egypt was able to broker on 26/8/2014 with Arab, French, Turkish, and Qatari support. Kerry pushed the idea of the PA extending its security activities to GS, which was one of the themes revealed by US officials.

The US bid to extend the authority of Ramallah to GS at the expense of resistance movements was reinforced by statements made by US officials in October 2014, including Kerry during his attendance at the Cairo conference on the GS reconstruction. In his speech, Kerry said that "the Palestinian Authority and President Abbas must be empowered in all that we do in order to define and determine Gaza's future…We can and should see Palestinian Authority customs officials at Gaza's borders. We can and should help the PA to expand its control in Gaza." He added that "this is absolutely essential, because as long as there is a possibility that Hamas could fire rockets on Israeli civilians at any time, the people of Gaza will remain at risk of future conflict."[34]

The US bid to strengthen one side at the expense of another in the Palestinian arena can be sensed through the US position on the formation of a "technocratic" national unity government in Palestine. On 4/6/2014, Kerry answered at a press conference:

> In answer to the terminology you used in your question, the United States does not recognize a government with respect to Palestine, because that would recognize a state and there is no state. This is not an issue of recognition of a government. This is an issue of whether or not, under the terms of our law, there would be any kind of contact or work with that government in some form or another…President Abbas made clear that this new technocratic government is committed to the principles of nonviolence, negotiations, recognizing the state of Israel, acceptance of the previous agreements and the Quartet principles, and that they will continue their previously agreed upon security cooperation with Israel.

He added that 'Abbas "has formed an interim technocratic government that does not include any ministers who are affiliated with Hamas," which the US considers "a terrorist organization."[35]

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[34] Remarks at the Gaza Donors Conference, Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Cairo, Egypt, US Department of State, 12/10/2014, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/10/232896.htm

[35] Press Availability in Beirut, Lebanon, Press Availability, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Beirut, Lebanon, US Department of State, 4/6/2014, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/06/227100.htm

d. The US Position on Israeli Violations Against *al-Aqsa* Mosque

What was remarkable about the statements of the US Secretary of State regarding *al-Aqsa* Mosque was his commitment to using the dual term "al-Haram al-Sharif/The Temple Mount," which suggested the US had begun to deal with the mosque as a "joint property," which constitutes a change in the interpretation of international resolutions concerning Jerusalem. Kerry said in his statements in November 2014[36] that he agreed the parties should not alter the status quo at the "Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount" and respect the Jordanian role as custodian of the mosque. The US official also said, after meeting with the PA president in Amman following clashes in Jerusalem over Israeli violations against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, that president 'Abbas "pledged his full commitment to non-violence, and said he will do all he can to restore calm and prevent incitement to violence." Kerry's notion of stopping violence essentially equates to stopping resistance to the occupation.

With the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in the occupied territories in October 2015, the US issued a statement read by the State Department spokesman,[37] condemning in the strongest terms the "terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians, which resulted in the murder of three Israelis and left numerous others wounded." It also stressed "the importance of condemning violence and combating incitement," urging "all sides to take affirmative steps to restore calm and prevent actions that would further escalate tensions."

John Kerry arrived in Jordan on 24/10/2015, after meeting with Netanyahu to follow up the developments of the *Intifadah*, meeting with 'Abbas and the Jordanian king there. Kerry summed up the meeting by saying that all the parties "expressed their strong commitment to ending the violence and restoring the calm as soon as possible," that the "Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount is obviously important to the peoples of all three monotheistic faiths; Jews, Muslims, and Christians," and that he is "pleased that Prime Minister Netanyahu has reaffirmed Israel's commitment to upholding the unchanged status quo of the Temple

[36] Remarks With Jordanian Foreign Minister Judeh After Their Meeting, Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Amman, Jordan, US Department of State, 13/11/2014, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2014/11/234054.htm

[37] Ongoing Violence in Israel, Jerusalem, and the West Bank, Press Statement, John Kirby, Department Spokesperson, Washington, DC, US Department of State, 13/10/2015, http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/10/248120.htm

Mount/Haram al-Sharif both in word and in practice." Kerry said Netanyahu was keen to emphasize certain points including:[38]

1. Israel's respect for "the special role of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, as reflected in their 1994 peace treaty."
2. Israel would "continue to enforce its longstanding policy on religious worship, religious worship at the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif, including the fundamental fact that it is Muslims who pray on the Temple Mount/Haram al-Sharif and non-Muslims who visit."
3. Israel had no intention of dividing the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount.
4. Israel "welcomes increased coordination between Israeli authorities and the Jordanian Waqf, including to ensure that visitors and worshipers demonstrate restraint and respect for the sanctity of the area in accordance with their respective responsibilities. In fact, they plan to meet soon to strengthen security arrangements on the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount."

Kerry welcomed the Jordanian proposal to install cameras at the mosque for 24-hour surveillance, to ensure transparency and to inform all sides of what is taking place there.

Analyzing US rhetoric reveals that US diplomacy was seeking to reinforce the idea of a "special status of East Jerusalem" and the special status of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in a way that detached them from the status of the 1967 occupied territories. Likewise, the PA appeared to be dealing with *al-Aqsa* Mosque on the basis that it was an "annex" rather than part of the occupied Palestinian territories. This change in the US position was not met with Palestinian, Arab and Islamic indignation for identifying with the Zionist plans for the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and for contradicting previous US policies. The Obama administration, despite strained relations with Netanyahu, has made many concessions on the Palestinian issue and adopted the Zionist narrative, beyond that of previous US administrations in this regard, and the "Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount" is part of this narrative.

[38] Remarks to the Press With Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh, Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Amman Marka Airport, Amman, Jordan, US Department of State, 24/10/2015 http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2015/10/248703.htm

e. The Political Objectives of US Aid to Palestine

A study submitted by the US Congress about US aid to the Palestinians suggested "how aid, either alone or in concert with other policies, has influenced":[39]

1. Overall Israeli-Palestinian relations;
2. Approaches to preventing or mitigating "terrorism" patterns and threats;
3. The preparation of Palestinians for self-reliance in security, political, and economic matters;
4. The promotion of regional stability; and
5. The addressing of humanitarian needs.

From the Palestinian point of view, American aid is used to influence the Palestinian political decision making process, striking the resistance and trying to prevent the escalation of the uprising, blocking Palestinians from going to international organizations and supporting the security forces and security coordination.

The value of US aid to the PA in 2014 and 2015 was around $801 million, comprising $440 million in 2014 and $361 million in 2015.[40] During the World Economic Forum in Jordan, Kerry referenced a group of business experts who studied the Palestinian economy, and who concluded that unemployment could be reduced from 21% to 8% within three years by focusing on investment and private sector development.[41]

The political objectives of the aid become clear when we see how the US conditioned aid provision on the specifications of the national government to be formed after the Hamas-Fatah agreement in April 2014. US institutions placed conditions for the continuation of the aid that included:[42]

1. Ensuring that aid in part or in whole does not go to Hamas or any other party that engages in "terrorism."

[39] Jim Zanotti, "US Foreign Aid to the Palestinians," Congressional Research Service (CRS), 3/7/2014. P. 23, https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/mideast/RS22967.pdf
[40] Ibid., p. 2.
[41] Remarks to Special Program on Breaking the Impasse World Economic Forum, Remarks, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Dead Sea, Jordan, US Department of State, 26/5/2013, http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/05/209969.htm
[42] Jim Zanotti, "US Foreign Aid to the Palestinians," p. 8 and pp. 10–11.

2. That aid to the Palestinians stops in the event they obtain full membership of the UN or any of its specialized agencies (with the exception of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, UNESCO) unless as a result of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.
3. Cutting off assistance for the PA if "the Palestinians initiate an International Criminal Court judicially authorized investigation, or actively support such an investigation, that subjects Israeli nationals to an investigation for alleged crimes against Palestinians."
4. Ensuring that no aid is permitted for PA personnel located in GS (although the PA pays the salaries of civil servants in GS).
5. No aid is permitted for the PLO or the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation.
6. No funds may be provided to support a future Palestinian state unless the Secretary of State certifies that the governing entity of the state:
   a. has demonstrated a firm commitment to peaceful coexistence with Israel.
   b. is taking appropriate measures to counter "terrorism" and "terrorist financing" in WB and GS in cooperation with Israel and others.
   c. is working with other countries in the region to "vigorously pursue efforts to establish a just, lasting, and comprehensive peace in the Middle East that will enable Israel and an independent Palestinian state to exist within the context of full and normal relationship."

f. US Voting Record at the UN

If we assume that the UN General Assembly is the closest to reflecting international trends among other UN institutions because of its broad membership, an American study submitted to Congress on voting trends at the UN General Assembly during the 69th session in 2014 indicates the coincidence rate with the United States on anti-Israel votes was 3.9%. The irony is that the congruence even with major European powers is very low on the Arab-Israeli conflict. For example, the coincidence rate with France, Germany, or Britain did not exceed 7.7% (by contrast, the coincidence rate with Australia was 63.6%, and 100% with Canada).[43]

[43] US Department of State, Voting Practices in the United Nations 2014, Report to Congress Submitted Pursuant to Public Laws 101–246 and 108–447, July 2015, pp. 57–61, http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/245163.pdf

2. The European Union

European studies are in agreement over a number of shortcomings in modern European policy on the Arab-Israeli conflict:[44]

a. The extent of European influence on the parties to the conflict is minimal compared to US influence.
b. The European political role is not commensurate with the fact that the EU and its member states together have long been by far the largest donors to the PA.
c. The internal differences in the orientations of the main European powers (Germany, France, Britain) make the ability for adopting a comprehensive unified strategy less likely. It seems this has made the European role go from trying to settle the conflict to managing the crisis by keeping alive negotiations for negotiations' sake. One example of these internal differences is a decision by the EU Court on 17/12/2014 to annul the decision to keep Hamas on a list of "terrorist groups." This prompted the EU to appeal the decision in January 2015, criticizing the foundations adopted by the court to make its decision.[45]
d. European aid to the PA with the goal of supporting the institutions of the promised state did not bear fruit, amid European reports indicating corruption, excessive bureaucracy, and a lack of performance indicators.[46]

The strategy adopted by the EU as part of the European Neighborhood Instrument (ENI) in 2006 and renewed in March 2014, in the wake of unrest in the Arab countries, determines the features of Europe's new policy vis-à-vis the European neighborhood (which includes 16 Arab Mediterranean countries, the Palestinian territories included, and former Soviet republics). This policy is based on Article 8 of the EU Treaty. The objectives of the EU focus on progressive economic integration, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms, promoting people-to-people contacts, promoting capacity-building in science,

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[44] Richard Youngs, The EU and Israeli Palestinian Conflict: Action without a Script, site of Carnegie Europe, 21/10/2014, http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=56979; and Tal Dror, "'Always the bridesmaid?' The EU role in the Middle East Peace Process," The Atkin Paper Series, The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR), June 2014, http://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/ICSR_Atkin-Series_Tal-Dror-Paper.pdf

[45] BBC, 17/12/2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-30511569; and *The guardian*, 19/12/2015, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jan/19/eu-challenge-court-ruling-remove-hamas-terror-list

[46] European Court of Auditors, *European Union Direct Financial Support to the Palestinian Authority* (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2013), Special Report, no. 14, 2013, passim, http://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR13_14/SR13_14_EN.pdf

education, and technology, … and enhancing sub-regional, regional and European Neighborhood-wide collaboration as well as cross-border cooperation.[47]

It is notable that these fields covered by the neighborhood policy restrict the concept of security to dimensions that do not include the occupation. This observation was made by the European Commissioner for European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), Johannes Hahn, who said that " 'First, we need to stabilize the neighborhood more effectively,' with a greater focus on security issues, but recognizing that the causes of instability often lie outside the 'classic' security domain."[48]

Therefore, we can identify the general features of European policy during the years 2014–2015 as follows:

a. Seeking to revive the role of the Quartet and the Arab League by re-floating the Arab Peace Initiative. This was the desire expressed by Fernando Gentilini, the EU's new Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process.[49] The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini visited Israel and WB in May 2015 to meet with officials from the two countries, after what appeared to be Netanyahu's shirking of his commitment to the two-state solution, announced during the Israeli election campaign in 2015.
b. The constancy of the traditional European position, as evident in the statement of the European Council on 20/7/2015 reaffirming European positions stated in a previous communique by the council on 31/8/2014, including the following:[50]
    1. Two states living in peace, side by side, with the warning that some practices affect the possibility of the implementation of this solution.

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[47] Regulation (EU) No 232/2014 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 March 2014, establishing a European Neighbourhood Instrument, *Official Journal of the European Union*, 15/3/2014, http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:L:2014:077:0027:0043:EN:PDF

[48] Commissioner Hahn reveals 'sneak preview' of new European Neighbourhood Policy, site of EU Neighbourhood Info Centre, 4/9/2015, http://www.enpi-info.eu/eastportal/news/latest/41926/Commissioner-Hahn-reveals-%E2%80%98sneakpreview%E2%80%99-of-new-European-Neighbourhood-Policy

[49] Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, site of Council of the European Union (CONSILIUM), 20/7/2015, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/20-fac-mepp-conclusions; and How to Revive EU Policy on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, site of European Council on Foreign Relations (ecfr.eu), 20/5/2015, http://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_how_to_revive_eu_policy_on_the_israeli_palestinian_conflict3039

[50] Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, CONSILIUM, 20/7/2015.

2. Giving the grave humanitarian situation in GS priority and expressing concern over UNRWA's severe lack of funds.
3. Welcoming steps taken by Israel to ease restrictions in GS, and criticizing the launching of rockets from GS against Israel.
4. Allowing the socio-economic development of WB including East Jerusalem.
5. Emphasizing the illegality of settlements, the EU opposition to the Separation Wall, the demolition and confiscation of property, and stating that Israeli measures in Jerusalem jeopardize the possibility of Jerusalem serving as the future capital of both states.
6. Commitment to ensuring that all agreements between Israel and the EU must unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability to the territories occupied by Israel in 1967.
7. Reiterating the council's call for the establishment of an international and regional support group to support peace efforts, as set out in the Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions of July 2014.

Regarding the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014, the European Council issued a statement that included:[51]

a. A call on the parties to halt fighting and return to the ceasefire agreement of November 2012, commending Egyptian efforts to arrange the cease-fire.
b. Condemning the firing of rockets by Hamas and others against Israeli population centers "indiscriminately," deeming these actions "criminal and unjustifiable."
c. Disarmament of all "terrorist" groups and demanding a stop to the use of civilians as "human shields."
d. While the council recognized Israel's right to defend itself, it said Israel must use proportionate force in line with international humanitarian law.
e. The need to take into account the economic and social needs of the residents of the Gaza Strip.
f. Condemnation of the abduction and brutal murder of teenagers from both sides.
g. The events in Gaza were deemed to be threatening to the security of the EU and its immediate neighbors.

[51] EU Council Conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, site of European Union Delegation to the United Nations-New York, 22/7/2014, http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_15300_en.htm

h. Calling for the implementation of international resolutions related to the conflict in the Middle East.

As for the executive dimension of the European policy of achieving progress in the peace process, this started emerging in the political sphere with European parliamentary recognitions of the Palestinian state. Until 2015, the number of countries that recognized Palestine was 136 out of 193 at the UN, including 96 that had recognized Palestine before the Oslo Accords. For their part, European countries started symbolically recognizing Palestine in their parliaments, most recently Greece in December 2015. The number of European nations whose parliaments recognize Palestine rose to nine.[52]

In July 2015, the European Council prolonged the EU police mission headed by Rodolphe Mauget to 30/6/2016. The mission had started its work in 2006 to support efforts for building the institutions of a Palestinian state, and a budget of €9.175 million (about $10.097 million) was allocated for the purpose. The Council also extended the mandate of the EU border assistance mission for the Rafah crossing point (EU BAM Rafah) until 30/6/2016.[53]

The EU continued to consult with the PA regarding human rights, women's issues, law enforcement, and the issue of executions in GS, especially after the Palestinian president signed up to 20 international human rights agreements in 2014. In January 2014, the PA signed the Guidance on Human Rights Integration into National Development Plans.[54]

The European position on the Jerusalem *Intifadah* was expressed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini, who in a statement on 28/10/2015 called on Palestinian and Israeli leaders to contain the violence harming civilians (in reference to the *Intifadah*). Federica Mogherini attributed the violence to the lack of "a political horizon," saying it was undesirable for the old conflict to mix with new conflicts in neighboring countries (in reference to the Arab Spring). She also pointed to her invitation for other parties to participate in the meetings of the Quartet, such as

[52] Site of Aljazeera.net, 14/5/2015, http://www.aljazeera.net/news/international/2015/5/14/

[53] EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories extended, CONSILIUM, 2/7/2015, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/07/02-eupol-copps-extended

[54] *Al-Hayat al-Jadida* newspaper, Ramallah, 1/1/2015; and State of Palestine, "National Development Plan 2014–16," site of Ministry of Planning and Administrative Development (MoPAD), 2014, http://www.mopad.pna.ps/en/images/PDFs/Palestine%20State_final.pdf

Egypt (given its ties to Gaza) and Jordan (given its ties to the Holy sites) and KSA (linked to the Arab Peace Initiative).[55]

The EU also condemned the burning of Palestinian toddler Ali Dawabsha, at the end of July 2015, calling for an investigation and the need for Israel to take measures to protect Palestinian civilians.[56] On the other hand, the British government through Under Secretary of State for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Tobias Ellwood stated that since 26/8/2014 (the date of the ceasefire agreement) and up until 4/9/2015, Israeli forces had violated the cease-fire in GS on at least 696 occasions.[57]

Regarding EU funding in 2014, this included: the provision of €309.5 million ($334.8 million) to the PA, where the indicative financial bilateral allocation under the ENI for the period 2014–2015 would be in the range of €508–€621 million ($549.53–$671.76 million).[58] The UNRWA and the EU signed a joint declaration for 2014–2016 that foresaw a core EU contribution during these years of some €246 million ($266.11 million).[59]

Concerning trade, the European Commission adopted a decision in November 2015 to label goods produced in Israeli settlements in the WB, East Jerusalem, and the occupied Golan Heights. The decision affected 146 trademarks. Netanyahu responded by labeling the decision "hypocritical and a double standard." The EU said the labelling was meant to identify the point of origin of products produced in settlements and did not entail sanctions or boycotting of Israel. This circumvents a European parliament resolution in September 2015 that advocated a distinction between Israel and its WB settlements, and the labeling of settlement produce, which received 525 votes in support and 70 against. Although the resolution has political value, its economic value is slight. Indeed, the value of products affected

[55] Opening Statement by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini on the Situation in Israel and Palestine at the European Parliament plenary session, EEAS, 28/10/2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/151028_01_en.htm

[56] Statement by the Spokesperson on Today's Arson Attack in the West Bank, EEAS, 31/7/2015, http://eeas.europa.eu/statements-eeas/2015/150731_01_en.htm

[57] UK Government: 700 Israeli Attacks on Gaza since 2014 Ceasefire, site of Global Research, 28/9/2015, http://www.globalresearch.ca/uk-government-700-israeli-attacks-on-gaza-since-2014-ceasefire/5478505

[58] Palestine, site of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, 9/4/2015, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/countries/palestine/index_en.htm

[59] United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and EU, "eu and unrwa: a Dynamic Partnership," European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, 2015, http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/neighbourhood/pdf/eu_and_unrwa_factsheet_compressed.pdf

by the European decision does not exceed $50 million according to Israeli estimates, of $250 million worth of goods produced in settlements. It becomes even less important when compared to $30 billion in annual trade between Israel and the EU.[60]

It is important to pause at the vision proposed by a number of prominent European figures on 11/5/2015, when 19 of The European Eminent Persons Group on Middle East issues, who served previously in senior political posts, issued a statement addressed to officials in the EU. They reaffirmed what they previously called for in an April 2014 statement, including the following themes:[61]

a. Urgent action by the European Union to resolve the Palestinian issue, after the re-election of Netanyahu in March 2015.
b. The failure of the Palestinians to form a national unity government and the continuation of Israeli settlement activities were an indicator that the Madrid-Oslo process was effectively defunct.
c. Netanyahu had little intention of negotiating seriously for a two-state solution within the term of this incoming Israeli government. And low confidence that the US Government would be in a position to take a lead on fresh negotiations with the vigor and the impartiality that a two state outcome demands.
d. That the Palestinian issue had received less attention than other issues in a very disturbed region, but conditions in the Occupied Territories remained high on the list of the world's worst crises not just in terms of political flammability, but also the denial of international justice, human rights and humanitarian standards. Israel's long-term security would be severely compromised by the current trend of events, as well as its international reputation. The continued illegal expansion of settlements in area and population only reinforce this trend.
e. "It is time for the European Council of Ministers to construct a policy on Israel-Palestine that both reflects the nature of the threat to European interests of a totally collapsed peace process and meets the EU's responsibility to take a comprehensive, independent and effective position on this primary foreign and security policy issue."

[60] BBC, 11/11/2015, http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34786607; The Times of Israel, 11/9/2015, http://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-eu-vote-to-label-israel-settlement-products-echoes-nazi-era/; and site of Reuters News Agency, 11/11/2015, http://www.reuters.com

[61] Re: A New EU Approach to Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, site of The Rights Forum, 11/5/2015, http://rightsforum.org/sites/default/files/files/EEPG-letter-calling-for-new-EU-approach-to-Israeli-Palestinian-conflict.pdf

f. "It has been a serious flaw in previous attempts at negotiations for a comprehensive settlement that the Israeli and Palestinian parties have been so unequal in international status. This was never addressed with any objectivity by American negotiating teams."
g. Criticism of the financial and political assistance given by the US and Europe to the PA, and Israel's control of key aspects of this income.
h. Pointed out how seriously European public opinion takes Israel's contraventions of international law, the perpetration of atrocities and the denial of established rights.
i. Called on the UN Security Council to adopt positions that help to modify the imbalance in the international positioning of the negotiators, through the recognition of the Palestinian government, and the setting of a deadline for the negotiation of a two-state solution.
j. "Europe should engage with the Palestinians on responsible use of the ICC, recognizing that its powers will be applicable to Palestinian just as much as to Israeli actions. Indeed, the existence of the ICC could be a primary channel for constraining abuses of human rights and war crimes on both sides in future."
k. The group identified a number of factors that weakened the European role on the Palestinian issue, including:
    1. The lack of consensus among European countries.
    2. European "focus on newer and apparently more urgent Middle East crises."
    3. European "reluctance to get out in front of the United States in an area where Washington has always insisted on prime ownership."

The group called for adopting the Arab peace initiative as one of the pillars of a new EU approach, following the failure of the two-decade-old US policy. The group proposed the elements of European policy as follows:

a. The development of relations between the EU and the parties to the conflict would depend on their attitude to progress towards a two-state solution.
b. The EU supports a UN Security Council resolution "that either i) calls for new negotiations and sets a mandatory deadline for the completion of an agreement to establish a two-state solution; or ii) creates a greater equivalence between the Israeli and Palestinian parties, including through recognition of a Palestinian state and strong support for Palestine accession to international treaties and organizations."
c. "The preparation of a new approach to comprehensive negotiations for a settlement that would accompany recognition of the equality of the parties. This

would be fully discussed with the United States, but with a view to it being taken forward by the EU alone if the US proved unable to support it."

d. Calling on Hamas to pursue a peaceful approach to resolving the conflict.
e. A much stronger insistence, backed up by implementable actions to promote accountability, on violation of human rights by both sides.
f. Pushing for an end to settlement expansion, and including existing ones in final-status negotiations.
g. Ensuring full and equal rights for all citizens within Israel regardless of their ethnic background (a reference to the Palestinians in the lands occupied in 1948 and Bedouins in the Negev).
h. Emphasizing the contents of the letter sent to the High Representative of the Union by EU Foreign Ministers on 13/4/2015, regarding taking tougher measures to contain settlement expansion and steps to operationalize the EU's policy of non-recognition of Israeli sovereignty beyond the 1967 borders across the full range of EU-Israeli relations.
i. Linking European funding to the Palestinians to commitment to "international norms."
j. Supporting civil society efforts to meet the needs of the occupied territories.

Key European Countries

a. UK

The election of the leftist Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the opposition Labour Party in Britain was a positive development for the Palestinian issue. That is, compared with former Labour leaders, this politician takes fairer positions. This matter was regarded negatively by Israeli politicians, as Corbyn was considered "empathetic" to Hamas and Hizbullah.[62]

The second development in the British position was the voting of the British parliament in October 2014 in favor of a motion (symbolic but that could have international implications) that recognized the state of Palestine. The motion was put forward by a Labour MP, and received a vote of 274 to12, which was considered an evolved position in comparison with previous British positions. However, the Conservative government led by David Cameron abided by its stand.

[62] The Times of Israel, 12/9/2015, http://www.timesofisrael.com/jeremy-corbyn-claims-victory-in-labour-leadership-race/

Moreover, Cameron did not participate in the voting and called upon his MPs to do the same.[63] It was also noted that less than half of MPs took part in the vote.

The stance of the UK parliament eventually contributed to persuading the EU Parliament (in December 2014) to vote on a resolution that supports "in principle recognition of Palestinian statehood." The resolution was passed by Parliament as a whole, by 498 votes to 88, with 111 abstentions.[64]

b. France

The French Parliament vote in December 2014 in favor of recognizing the Palestinian state (339 to 151) was a significant political development. French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said, "The Parliament has the powers to decide, and it will do so, but under our Constitution, the executive—and only the executive—is judge of the political expediency," which is in line with the positions of the Socialist Party on the Arab-Israeli conflict. He added:

> Alone, or with the United States' assistance, both parties always managed to negotiate successfully, however, they failed to come to an agreement... Therefore, we need to re-evaluate this method. We need to engage with both parties. Some suggest pressure from the international community will help the two sides reach the indispensable final consensus…

He then called for an international conference and for setting a two-year time frame for reaching a settlement.[65]

The French socialist party has long been the closest to Israel on the French political scene. The statements made by French President Francois Hollande during the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014 confirmed this point. He expressed his full support of "Israel's right to defend itself," confirming his solidarity with Israel.[66]

c. Germany

German Chancellor Angela Merkel rushed to call Netanyahu at the beginning of the Israeli aggression on GS and "condemned without reservation rocket fire on

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[63] BBC, 14/10/2014, http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-29596822

[64] European Parliament Resolution on Recognition of Palestine Statehood, site of European Parliament, 12/12/2014, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20141212IPR01105/html/European-Parliament-resolution-on-recognition-of-Palestine-statehood

[65] Alain Gresh, What Does French Vote Really Mean for Palestine?, Aljazeera.net, 3/12/2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/12/what-does-french-vote-really-m-2014123122646856708.html

[66] French Position on Israel and Palestine has Shifted, site of teleSUR, 9/8/2014, http://www.telesurtv.net/english/analysis/French-Position-on-Israel-and-Palestine-has-Shifted-20140809-0036.html

Israel," considering it an unjustified action.[67] On the other hand, Germany is one of the largest donors to Palestine among European countries, where its contribution constitutes 20% of the overall European contribution. In 2014, €215 million ($241.47 million) was donated, with €61 million ($68.51 million) allocated for humanitarian assistance and reconstruction measures in GS.[68] This reinforces the description provided by the group of European figures we mentioned earlier regarding European policy.

General Summary of US and European Stances

American and European politicians consider the occupation of the WB and GS and the settlement construction to be illegal. They adopt what they call the two-state solution. But they condition this upon negotiations, without much focus on the necessary practical implementation. They also use financial aid to pressure the PA, insisting on security coordination for the sake of paralyzing any Palestinian resistance that deviates away from the negotiations approach. That is in addition to the staunch opposition to any form of armed or violent resistance.

They insist on this policy despite the fact that 23 years have passed since the Oslo Accords, US-sponsored negotiations, Quartet efforts and bilateral negotiations began. In this context, negotiations are futile and that the two-state solution cannot be reached, especially in light of the increasing racist activities of Israel, along with settlement construction and the Judaization policy. Therefore, US and European stances regarding the illegality of the occupation and the settlements only serve to provide further political cover for the policies adopted by successive Israeli governments, including Netanyahu's government in 2014 and 2015. In brief, US and EU policies during 2014 and 2015 have effectively contributed to the continuation of the occupation and settlement construction.

3. BRICS Countries

Despite the fact that this international group (Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa) issued political statements during 2014–2015, specifying its stance on the Israeli-Arab conflict, the political distance between these countries and Israel or the Palestinian forces does not match the sentiment in the statements.

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[67] UN to Hold Emergency Talks on Israel-Hamas Crisis, site of i24news, 7/10/2014, http://www.i24news.tv/en/news/international/middle-east/36804-140710-un-to-hold-emergency-talks-on-israel-hamas-crisis

[68] Assistance for the Palestinian Territories, site of Federal Foreign Office, 15/9/2015, http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/EN/Aussenpolitik/RegionaleSchwerpunkte/NaherMittlererOsten/IsraelPalaestinensischeGebiete/ZukunftPalaestina/Uebersicht_node.html

The statements of the BRICS Summit in July 2014 and July 2015 included the traditional positions towards the Palestinian issue, such as the importance of settling the Arab-Israeli conflict using international references and the Arab Initiative, in addition to the idea that resolving the conflict will contribute to the settling of other conflicts in the region. Therefore, the BRICS countries called for the resumption of "negotiations leading to a two-state solution with a contiguous and viable Palestinian State existing side by side in peace with Israel within mutually agreed and internationally recognized borders based on 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as its capital."

Following the commendation of the Quartet efforts, the statements confirmed the following:[69]

a. Opposition to ongoing Israeli settlement construction because it threatens the concept of the two-state solution and violates international law.
b. Encouragement of all initiatives aimed at achieving intra-Palestinian unity and urging different Palestinian parties to fulfil international pledges made by Palestine.
c. A call on donor countries that participated in "the 2014 International Donors Conference on Reconstruction of Gaza Strip in Cairo to fulfill their pledges," and a call on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to take necessary measures "for channeling international aid to the people of Palestine."
d. A call on the international community to further support UNRWA and welcome the accession of Brazil to UNRWA's Advisory Commission.
e. Reassurance of the necessity of holding a summit in which all Middle Eastern countries participate, aimed at ensuring the early establishment in the Middle East of a zone free of nuclear weapons and all other weapons of mass destruction.[70]

a. The Russian Federation

Perhaps what the Russian geo-strategic thinker Aleksandr Dugin said in his debate with Olavo de Carvalho "The USA and the New World Order" is an important reference for understanding the Russian strategic approach. It is especially relevant since most researchers admit that Dugin has a deep intellectual influence on President Vladimir Putin with his geo-political theory

[69] VII BRICS Summit: 2015 Ufa Declaration, site of BRICS Information Centre, University of Toronto, 9/7/2015, http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/150709-ufa-declaration_en.html
[70] The 6th BRICS Summit: Fortaleza Declaration, BRICS Information Centre, University of Toronto, 15/7/2014, http://www.brics.utoronto.ca/docs/140715-leaders.html

of Eurasianism which is based on three levels: multipolarity in international relations, the regional convergence of Western Asian countries, particularly former soviet republics, and the local level via the merging of the liberal and nationalistic character in the relationship between the state and the community.[71]

The coordination between China and Russia in the Security Council regarding the Syrian crisis is a manifestation of the first level, while the coordination with Iran is a manifestation of the second level. That is, Dugin sees that the ideal manner in which to deal with the conflict of the strategic interests of Russia and Iran is to create a strategic alliance between the two countries. Further, the regime structure in the two countries (which is besides our subject here) is a manifestation of the third level. And as for his vision of Western Asia that extends to the Mediterranean shores, Dugin sees Israel as nothing more than a tool for the US. As a manifestation of this strategic perspective, Russia has interacted with the developments in the Palestinian matter in the following manner:

1. Considered the failure to resolve the Palestinian issue a major source of extremism in the region: that is, through the statements and discussions of the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov, it is clear that Russian officials believe there is a strong connection between the Palestinian issue and extremism. Lavrov believes that extremist organizations take advantage of the fact that the Palestinian issue has not been resolved to recruit new members.[72] He says that not reaching a settlement "for almost 70 years is one of the major arguments for those who recruit extremists into their ranks." The Russians believe that extremism has its influence on internal Russian matters reflected in the Chechen issue among others. This conviction was the motivation for the direct Russian intervention in Syria on the side of the regime.

2. The Russians considered that the creation of a national unified Palestinian government a necessary condition for achieving political results that contribute to reaching Palestinian aspirations. On 10/10/2014, the Russian government expressed its support for forming a national Palestinian government, considering

[71] Debate: The USA and the New World Order, 5/3/2011–5/7/2011, http://debateolavodugin.blogspot.com/2011/02/8-debate-structure.html

[72] Vitaly Naumkin, Russia's Middle East Policy After the G-20 Summit, site of Russian International Affairs Council, 1/12/2014, http://russiancouncil.ru/en/inner/?id_4=4875#top-content

it "an important event and a necessary step on the way of ensuring the cohesion of actions of Palestinian state bodies in the territory of the West bank of the Jordan River and the Gaza Strip." It also considers that "without the consolidation of Palestinians on the platform of the UN and the Arab Peace Initiative it is impossible to achieve the implementation of legal expectations of the Palestinian people." The Russian government "will actively interact with the Palestinian national unity government in the interests of development and reinforcement of traditionally friendly Russian-Palestinian relations in different areas."[73]

3. The Russians believe that marginalizing the Palestinian issue in favor of new causes is an American policy, a position that was explicitly stated by Lavrov as mentioned above.

In the field of executive politics, the Russians held several meetings with Palestinian officials at which they confirmed Russian support for the two-state solution. This was also confirmed in the trilateral statement issued by the Russian, Chinese and Indian foreign ministers in Beijing in February 2015. The statement called for the same stands adopted by the BRICS, mentioning that East Jerusalem will be considered the capital of the suggested Palestinian state.[74]

President Putin confirmed this stand once again in a letter he sent to the Arab League Summit on 28/3/2015. That statement was included in the discussions between the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and Lavrov in Moscow in December 2014. They discussed the attempts to resume the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the impact of the tensions in the region on the Palestinian issue.[75]

During the meeting between Lavrov and Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas in the 69th session of the UN General Assembly, Russia stressed the

[73] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 10/10/2014, http://archive.mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/F4034F95C560EFA3C3257D7F0037B3E6?OpenDocument

[74] Joint Communiqué of the 13th Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Russian Federation, the Republic of India and the People's Republic of China, site of Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 2/2/2015, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t1233638.shtml

[75] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 22/12/2014, http://archive.mid.ru/bdomp/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcbb3/3a0a51c9b8a7c3cec3257db70051b81e!OpenDocument

necessity of respecting the ceasefire by both the Palestinian and Israeli sides which was reached in GS on 26/8/2014.

4. Russian policies seem to be close to the European approach discussed earlier including the necessity to increase the number of participants in the Quartet committee. Russia proposed some suggestions in this regard, seemingly an attempt to balance out the US role in this committee.[76]

b. People's Republic of China

Some researchers believe[77] that the State Council (the highest executive branch in China) have issued White Papers on the country's foreign policy regarding a large number of issues, not including the Middle East. This motivated some people to say that China works within "general values" in its Middle Eastern policies that fall short of being a clear strategy. Chinese officials deal with the Middle East via two departments in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: The Department of West Asian and North African Affairs, and the Department of European-Central Asian Affairs.

Despite the fact that China is not a member in the Quartet committee for the Middle East, it has appointed a special envoy in the region ever since the committee started it work. Wang Shijie was appointed as envoy from 2002 to 2006, followed by Sun Bigan who was envoy till 2009. Wu Sike has been the envoy since 2009 until the time of the writing of this report.

Wu Sike held a series of meetings with Palestinian officials; meeting President 'Abbas in 2014, and meeting a number of Palestinian officials and journalists in July 2014.[78]

In May 2013, the Chinese president Xi Jinping presented an initiative, then Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi repeated the initiative again in August 2014,

[76] Zvi Magen, Sarah Fainberg and Ilan Shklarsky, Toward a New Russian Initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian Issue?, INSS Insight, no. 684, site of The Institute for National Security Studies (INSS), 14/4/2015, http://www.inss.org.il/index.aspx?id=4538&articleid=9236

[77] Kerry Brown, Mixed signals: China in the Middle East, Policy Brief, no. 190, December 2014, p. 1, http://fride.org/download/PB_190_China_in_the_Middle_East.pdf

[78] Chinese Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue Wu Sike Visits Palestine (From Office of China to Palestine), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 23/6/2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1168805.shtml; and China's Special Envoy on the Middle East Issue Wu Sike Gives Exclusive Interview to Al-Arabiya Television, From Chinese Embassy in Egypt, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 22/7/2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjbxw/t1177773.shtml

adding one point to it related to the call to stop the fighting in GS that had erupted in July. Below are the other points:[79]

1. An independent and sovereign Palestinian state to be established within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, and "Israel's right to exist and its legitimate security concerns should also be fully respected."
2. Negotiation is "the only way to peace." "The two sides should… show mutual understanding and accommodation, and meet each other half way. The immediate priority is to take credible steps to stop settlement activities, end violence against innocent civilians, lift the GS blockade and properly handle the issue of Palestinian prisoners, in addition to the necessity of comprehensive internal reconciliation."
3. Working on the land-for-peace basis, in reference to international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.
4. The international community should "increase assistance to Palestine in such fields as human resources training and economic development."
5. Ceasing construction of settlements, which was a point that the Chinese Foreign Ministry repeated in a statement issued in June 2015.

China sought to adopt a policy that reconciled the Palestinians' right to an independent state and evolving its relationship with Israel. This is evident via the following indicators:

China participated in the Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD II), held in Jakarta in March 2014. Many countries and international organizations participated in the conference such as the World Bank, the UNRWA and the Islamic Development Bank, etc. The conference statement called for the following:[80]

1. Supporting the building of a Palestinian state on the 1967 territories, including capacity development and reinvigorating the business environment towards the realization of the two-state solution based on the relevant UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.

[79] Site of Xinhua News Agency, 6/5/2013, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2013-05/06/c_132363061.htm; and China Raises Five-Point Peace Proposal on Settling Israel-Palestine Conflict, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 4/8/2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/zxxx_662805/t1180306.shtml

[80] The Second Conference on Cooperation among East Asian Countries for Palestinian Development (CEAPAD II), Jakarta, 1 March 2014, site of Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000044805.pdf

2. Affirming the importance of supporting the Palestinian private sector, and enabling it to benefit from the economic developmental expertise of East Asian countries, and to donate financial aid that includes support for the refugees.
3. Participating with the national Palestinian authority in its effort to provide the Palestinian people with all services, and to support the process of building the Palestinian state seeing as that is a major step to finding a suitable atmosphere for achieving peace.

However, the Chinese stand from the Israeli aggression on GS in July 2014 was quite diplomatic towards both parties. The Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei said:

> We believe that to resort to force and to counter violence with violence will not help resolve problems other than pile up more hatred. We urge relevant parties to bear in mind the broader picture of peace and the lives of the people, immediately realize a ceasefire, stick to the strategic choice of peace talks and strive for an early resumption of talks.[81]

Meanwhile, the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) represents an economic and political step in the management of its international relations. Israel rushed to join that bank in April of 2015.[82] If we relate the nature of this bank with the literature published on Israeli-Chinese cooperation in the field of railroads in Israel—infrastructure—we can identify the evolution of the relationship between the two countries. That is, a report was published in July of 2012 in the Winnipeg Review stating that a discussion was held between China and Israel for building a railroad that connects the Port of Eilat to the Ashdod and Haifa ports. This would allow ships to anchor in port of Eilat and of transporting goods directly via the railroads to the Ashdod and Haifa ports.

The distance between the two locations is 180 kilometers. Then the goods would be transported from there to Europe, which would mean avoiding the Suez Canal by reducing the time needed and decreasing the cost of transport and transit fees. Moreover, Chinese companies submitted competitive bids for the development and construction of new deep-water private ports in Haifa and Ashdod.[83] Delegations

[81] Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei's Regular Press Conference, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, 9/7/2014, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/t1172959.shtml

[82] Israel joins Chinese infrastructure bank, site of Globes, 15/4/2015, http://www.globes.co.il/en/article-israel-joins-chinese-infrastructure-bank-1001028755

[83] Aron Shai, *The Evolution of Israeli-Chinese Friendship*, Tel Aviv University, Research Paper no.7 (Ramat Aviv: The S. Daniel Abraham Center for International and Regional Studies and Confucius Institute, July 2014), pp. 55–56, http://www.tau.ac.il/~aashai/INSS-2014.pdf

from the Chinese companies visited Israel in mid-2015 for the sake of developing the relationship between the two sides in this regard.[84]

The commercial ties between Israel and China developed to more than $11 billion during 2014, a significant increase from $50 million when their diplomatic relationship was established in 1992. Added to that, Chinese investments in Israel tripled between 2012 and 2015.[85]

c. India

The win of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led by Narendra Modi in the Indian elections and the appointment of Modi as Prime Minister of India in May 2014 was an important detour in favor of Israeli-Indian relations against the traditional politics that are closer to the Palestinian stand which were adopted by the Indian National Congress party. This party never established a diplomatic relationship with Israel except in 1992, despite the fact that India recognized Israel in 1950.

BJP calls for abandoning the Non-alignment policy and for increasing cooperation with the US. It has also been accused of murdering Muslims in the Indian provinces in 2002, particularly in the province that was headed by Modi. That is why he only received 8% of Indian Muslim votes.[86] The changes in Indian politics are apparent in the following aspects:

1. The first meeting between India and Israel was held in October 2014; the first in a decade. Researchers explain this change from the Congress Party policies to the BJP policies with ideological and religious motivations, as well as the animosity towards what is called "Muslim Terrorism." It was also considered a token of appreciation for Israel for its support of India in 1999 against Pakistan.
2. An agreement was made for India to purchase Israeli weapons worth $662 million during the middle of the first year of Janata's rule, exceeding the amount of Indian purchases during the previous three years.
3. The Indian government refused to pass a resolution to condemn the Israeli aggression on GS in July of 2014. Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj

[84] Israel's International Relations: Israel-China Relations, site of Jewish Virtual Library, January 2016, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/ChinaIsraelRelations.html
[85] Ibid.
[86] Sreeram S. Chaulia, "BJP, India's Foreign Policy and the 'Realist Alternative' to the Nehruvian Tradition," *International Politics*, no. 39, June 2002, pp. 215–234, http://sreeramchaulia.net/publications/BJP.pdf; and Modi Revives India-Israel Ties as Terrorism Threat Grows, site of Bloomberg Business, 20/11/2014, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-11-19/modi-revives-india-s-ties-with-israel-as-terrorism-threat-grows

justified this matter by saying that "we fully support the Palestinian cause while maintaining good relations with Israel." Also, the government supported the Egyptian ceasefire offer. This caused an eruption of protests against her in India (27/7/2014).[87]

4. In July 2015, India withheld its vote on a resolution by the Human Rights Committee for forming a committee to investigate Israeli crimes during the 2014 GS war. It justified this decision by pointing out that the report called for Israel to appear in front of the ICC, which India considered an "intrusive" action.[88] Indian researchers had previously expressed that India was most likely going to withhold its vote in the UN concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. This pushed the Palestinian ambassador in India to express his "shock," relating the Indian stand to growing cooperative military relations between India and Israel.[89]

As for the Palestinian-Indian relations, they have deteriorated since BJP's win. With the exception of Nabil Sha'th's visit, as representative of the Palestinian president, to India in November 2014, the official Indian diplomatic activity to Palestine included the last visit of the Minister of State for External Affairs Shri E. Ahamed, in 2013. Moreover, during the Cairo Conference for donor countries, India pledged to donate $4 million[90] and to build a vocational training center for Palestinians.

BJP policies towards Palestine were opposed by some Indian authorities and intellectuals such as the "From India to Palestine" group. This is a group that includes Indian intellectuals who publish articles and hold sessions for supporting Palestine, explaining what Palestinians go through. They started working in 2010, and during 2015 moved towards encouraging an Indian Boycott of Israel.[91]

Finally, it is hard to identify the differences between the official positions of the BRICS countries (especially Russia, China, and India) and those of European countries especially regarding the main issues such as the position of the PA, the two-state solution or the peace process. The Israeli government has confronted these stands by developing relations on the economic, military and technological levels. That is, the relations of Russia, China and India with Israel evolved greatly,

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[87] Aljazeera.net, 27/7/2014, http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2014/07/india-israel-gaza-crisis-palestine-hamas-bjp-20147271212599984 83.html

[88] Site of The Hindu, 3/7/2015, www.thehindu.com/

[89] The Hindu, 22/12/2014.

[90] India–Palestine Relations, site of Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, December 2014, http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Palestine_December_2014_eng.pdf

[91] Site of The Indian Campaign for the Academic and Cultural Boycott of Israel (InCACBI), http://www.incacbi.in/

after being characterized with aversion and indifference prior to Oslo Accords. Therefore, the Palestinian issue lost a lot in regards to the relations between these countries and Israel. And that is why it is incorrect to consider the recognition of the Palestinian State is a criterion of evolution in international stands, or lack thereof.

d. Japan

All the data of the Japanese government relating to Japan's role in the Israeli-Arab conflict point to the fact that the Japanese Corridor for Peace and Prosperity Initiative (a project for developing the area of Jericho and Jordan Valley, a cooperation between Japan, Palestine, Jordan and Israel) is the mainstay of Japanese politics in this regard. Within the scope of the initiative, in September 2015, 21 tenants signed an agreement to run the industrial zone. Indeed, the factories were set up for operation.

Japan had participated in CEAPAD II in March 2014 in Jakarta, which focused on the development of Palestinian human resources. In 2014, the Japanese government donated $45 million to UNRWA, in addition to donating $12 million to United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF). It donated $52.5 million via various UN agencies as emergency donations for the GS in March 2014. It also donated $10 million to the PA in 2014, towards economic and social development goals.[92]

The most significant Japanese positions during 2014 and 2015 are the following:[93]

1. Condemnation of the kidnaping and killing of the three Israeli "students" in June 2014 and calling on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides to cooperate.
2. Condemnation of rocket shooting from GS to Israel and expressing deep concern over Israeli airstrikes that cause many civilian casualties (July 2014).
3. The Japanese government expressed its deep regret regarding the Israeli strikes on the UN schools which were being used as shelters for civilians, which resulted in civilian casualties (July 2014).

[92] Japan's assistance to the Palestinians, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, February 2016, http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000042388.pdf

[93] Statement by the Press Secretary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, on the abduction of Israeli students in the West Bank, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 19/6/2014, http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_000318.html

4. The Japanese government expressed its regret regarding the Israeli government decision to confiscate lands in WB and to build settlements in eastern Jerusalem (September and November 2014).
5. The Japanese government expressed regret concerning the clashes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in November 2014, and condemning the killing of a number of members in one of the synagogues in western Jerusalem (November 2014).
6. In 2015, the Japanese government was occupied with the repercussions of the kidnapping and murder of a Japanese hostage by ISIS. This motivated Japan to allocate $200 million to fighting "terrorism."
7. Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas met with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe in January 2015, and the Japanese official confirmed the commencement of the "Corridor for Tourism," part of the "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" that Japan advocates.

A Japanese study shows[94] that Japan realized the importance of reinforcing its political independence from the US especially in regards to the Middle East. This entails eventually activating Japanese diplomacy more broadly in the region for the below reasons:

1. Japanese awareness of the gradual decline of western influence globally.
2. Increasing competitiveness from East Asian importers of energy to Japan.
3. The limited "hard power" (military power) of Japan which calls for additional concentration on soft power in international relations, especially via the UN.

Fourth: International Public Opinion

An international opinion poll indicated that Israel continued to be one of the most negatively viewed nations in the world. Most countries surveyed, viewed Israel negatively including western countries. Below is the table:[95]

[94] Yukiko Miyagi, "Japan and the Middle East after the Arab Spring," *Middle East Review*, vol. 1, February 2014, site of Institute of Developing Economies, Japan External Trade Organization (IDE-JETRO), pp. 41–43.

[95] "Views of China and India Slide While UK's Ratings Climb: Global Poll," site of World Public Opinion.org, 22/5/2013, http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/2013%20Country%20Rating%20Poll.pdf; and Negative Views of Russia on the Rise: Global Poll, World Public Opinion.org, 3/6/2014, http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/country-rating-poll.pdf

Table 2/5: Views of Israel's Influence by Country 2013–2014

Country	2013		2014	
	Significantly positive	Significantly negative	Significantly positive	Significantly negative
USA	51	32	52	36
Canada	25	57	30	55
Brazil	15	58	21	58
Peru	16	40	19	41
Mexico	13	53	13	45
Argentina	-	-	12	35
France	21	63	21	64
UK	14	72	19	72
Spain	4	70	14	61
Germany	8	67	11	67
Russia	23	32	28	23
Turkey	8	81	17	44
Ghana	44	32	54	27
Kenya	42	15	47	27
Nigeria	35	38	33	48
South Korea	23	56	29	50
Australia	16	69	24	67
India	16	26	22	34
Pakistan	12	65	16	60
China	32	33	13	49
Indonesia	12	70	7	75
Japan	3	54	4	50
Poland	15	44	-	-
Greece	15	46	-	-
Chile	29	41	-	-
Egypt	1	96	-	-
Global average	**20**	**52**	**23**	**49**

The most unfavorable views towards Israel are found among European countries, as opposed to the positive viewpoint of African countries in comparison with other regions of the world.

During his lecture on 23/4/2015, the former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) David Petraeus warned that Israel is facing a strategic threat in the form of the international Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) Campaign.[96]

[96] The Times of Israel, 12/5/2015, http://www.timesofisrael.com/ex-cia-head-sees-strategic-threat-for-israel-in-boycott-campaign

This is a campaign initiated by Palestinians in 2005. Then civil organizations, universities and international organizations joined in. In March 2014, the National University of Ireland, Galway joined. In 2014, US Presbyterians church and the Dutch pension fund PGGM joined, in addition to the Danish Danske Bank that boycotted the Israeli Bank Hapoalim because of its violations of international humanitarian law, and the Sodastream company for soda drinks that closed its factory in the WB (2015). In October 2014, around 500 academics joined; they have written to the EU's head of Foreign Policy, urging the EU not to water down its new guidelines preventing EU funding from being awarded to Israeli projects and entities in WB, including East Jerusalem.

In that same month, 500 anthropologists signed a call for a boycott of Israeli academic institutions. Spain joined the boycott campaigns when it froze arms and military technology exports to Israel. Also, some British ministers called upon their government to halt arms export to Israel, until the achievement of peace in the Middle East. And in the art field, Norwegian musician Pål Moddi Knutsen cancelled his music concert in Tel Aviv in January 2014. American author Grace Lee Boggs and American actor Danny Glover, along with dozens of other actors, joined the boycott movement. In February 2015, 700 English artists announced their cultural boycott of Israel.[97]A number of universities and American academics gradually joined the campaign.[98]

Amnesty International

Amnesty International is one of the major international non-governmental organizations in the field of monitoring international performance. Following the Israeli aggression on GS in July/August 2014, the organization issued a report, that stated the following:[99]

1. Israeli forces committed war crimes and violations of human rights during the 50-day military attack on GS.
2. The Israeli attack caused mass emigration and destruction of properties and critical facilities.
3. Israel imposed a land, sea and air blockade on around 1.8 million people.
4. Israel committed illegal murdering of captives in WB, including children.

[97] For more details, see *The Independent* newspaper, London, 14/2/2015, www.independent.co.uk; *The guardian*, 13/2/2015; and *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 22/10/2015, http://www.jpost.com/

[98] *Haaretz*, 20/3/2015, http://www.haaretz.com/jewish/books/.premium-1.646593

[99] "Annual Report," Israel and Occupied Palestinian Territories 2015/2016, site of Amnesty International, https://www.amnesty.org/en/countries/middle-east-and-north-africa/israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories/report-israel-and-occupied-palestinian-territories

5. Israeli forces imposed enforced restrictions on the free movement of people.
6. Israel detained thousands of Palestinians and tortured some of them. Around 500 of those were put under administrative detention with no trial.
7. Israel continued to encourage the construction of settlements and to allow settlers to attack the Palestinians and to destroy their belongings.
8. Israel destroyed the homes of Palestinian Bedouins in Negev and evicted them.
9. Some Israelis who object to Israel's policy in the 1967 occupied territories were arrested.
10. Some armed Palestinian groups launched rockets on Israeli civilian regions.

The organization issued a report on the Israeli reaction to the ignition of the Palestinian *Intifadah* in October 2015. It noted the following:[100]

1. Israeli forces illegally and unjustifiably killed a number of Palestinians.
2. Israeli forces intentionally killed four Palestinians, even though they did not pose any threat to those forces.
3. Israeli forces let a Palestinian bleed without offering him any medical help.
4. Israeli forces shoot with the excuse that the wounded was planning to stab Israelis, while in reality they shoot without any indications that the person is planning to stab anyone.

Fifth: Prospects for 2016

Extrapolating the data on the international behavior vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue to 2016 allows us to make the following projections:

1. The US Presidential Elections

From early 2016 until November 2016, the US will become preoccupied with preparations for the presidential elections. Every candidate, especially from the Democratic and Republican parties following primaries and nominations, will rush to make statements that appease the pro-Israel lobby. It will also become difficult for the sitting US president to adopt a strategic position that influences the chances of his party in the elections, even though he is free from the pressures of lobby groups in his second term. This might make the Palestinian issue a factor in the electoral debates within the scope of the candidates' statements, without any meaningful measures materializing. Perhaps Obama's statements on 9/11/2015

[100] Israeli forces in Occupied Palestinian Territories must end pattern of unlawful killings, Amnesty International, 27/10/2015, https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/10/israeli-forces-must-end-pattern-of-unlawful-killings-in-west-bank/

during Netanyahu's visit to Washington following the eruption of the *Intifadah* suggests something of this. Obama said that Israel's security "is one of my top foreign policy priorities," and he condemned "in the strongest terms Palestinian violence against its [Israel's] innocent Israeli citizens." He added, "It is my strong belief that Israel has not just the right, but the obligation to protect itself."[101]

2. Arab Internal Developments Continue to Dominate International Agenda, Overshadowing the Palestinian Issue

It is not likely that the Arab countries experiencing severe unrest (Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, and Bahrain) will be able to contain international interferences in their internal problems in the coming year. This means that wider Arab problems and other international issues will remain the focal point for international interest, at the expense of the Palestinian issue.

3. The Implications of the Continuation of *Intifadah*

The current US Secretary of State John Kerry, in an interview with Israeli television in 2013, warned that the continuation of settlement building and failure to reach a political settlement between the Palestinians and Israelis would lead to a new round of violence.[102]

The Palestinian *Intifadah*, especially in Jerusalem and Hebron, continued after summer 2015. It is clear that the prospects of the *Intifadah* stopping are low in the near future, albeit the uprising has seen some fluctuations in terms of its effectiveness and intensity. This means that one of the ways the Palestinian issue could be returned to the top of international priorities would be to sustain the *Intifadah*, with a view to repelling the occupation. However, the PA leadership and Arab and international parties may seek to contain it through political initiatives that merely "suggest" hope in reaching political settlements.

Israel, the US, and perhaps European countries may seek to exploit attempts to designate "terror groups" in the region—given the violence in the region that has spread to Europe—to designate Palestinian resistance groups such as Hamas and PIJ and Hizbullah as "terror groups" that the international community must tackle.

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[101] Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel Before Bilateral Meeting, Office of the Press Secretary, The White House, 9/11/2015, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/11/09/remarks-president-obama-and-prime-minister-netanyahu-israel-bilateral

[102] Matthew Pulver, Bracing for the Third Intifada: Why violence in Jerusalem Signals an Ugly Future, site of Salon Media Group, 17/10/2015, http://www.salon.com/2015/10/17/bracing_for_the_third_intifada_why_violence_in_jerusalem_signals_an_ugly_future

In other words, exploit the repercussions of the Arab Spring to take action against the Palestinian resistance.

4. Expanding the Quartet

It is clear from the overview of European and some Arab positions as well as Russia that there is a tendency to expand the number of participants in the Quartet. Thus, 2016 may witness some diplomatic efforts in this direction. The US might judge that this is not worthwhile, in order to maintain its weight in the decisions of the Quartet and influence over its statements. Or Washington could accept expansion of the Quartet if it can guarantee this would expand the legitimacy of its decisions, which could entail further pressure on the Palestinian side and more gains for the Israeli side.

In the same context, this effort could take another path: instead of expanding the Quartet, an International Support Group could be established to support its work, with different results than those that would be otherwise achieved through its expansion.

5. Escalation of the Bid to Activate the Work of the ICC

Perhaps the Palestinian negotiator, especially the PA, is carefully approaching the issue of activating the ICC role. No doubt, the US and Israel and some European countries are seeking to undermine any effort in this regard. This could open the door to diplomatic battles, where international financial aid could be used as one of the weapons of confrontation to pressure the PA. For this reason, no hopes should be pinned on these ICC efforts.

There is a strong possibility that Israel and the US, who are not members of the ICC, could push certain parties to raise the possibility of prosecuting leaders of Palestinian resistance commanders in GS under the pretext of war crimes, based on the report of the International Commission of Inquiry that we mentioned earlier.

6. The Continuation of the PA's and UNRWA's Financial Problems

The donor countries, as we indicated, did not fulfill the bare minimum of their pledges during the period studied here. Furthermore, the continuation of the deficit in UNRWA's budget to the tune of $101 million by August 2015 will cast a shadow on the agency's work, as confirmed by UNRWA Deputy Commissioner-General Sandra Mitchell, in August 2015 in GS.[103] This will be accompanied by the continuation of economic difficulties for the Palestinian economy, due to the decreasing level of international support and failure to fulfill donor pledges to GS.

[103] *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 3/8/2015.

Perhaps monitoring the amount of international aid to the Palestinian economy would clearly show the total value of international aid that has been steadily decreasing between 2009 and 2015. (See Foreign Aid Section of Chapter Seven)

This means that economic pressure on WB and GS, and on UNRWA, will continue. Particularly so when economic growth in Europe (the top source of aid) will not exceed 0.3% in 2016 according to forecasts.[104] Furthermore, the collapse in oil prices will mean Arab states could be in a more difficult position to provide aid, not to mention the preoccupation of restive Arab states with their internal situations at the expense of interest in the Palestinian issue.

[104] European Union GDP Growth Forecast 2015–2020, Data and Charts, site of Knoema, http://knoema.com/mewdmh/european-union-gdp-growth-forecast-2015-2020-data-and-charts

التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2015-2014

الفصل الخامس

القضية الفلسطينية والوضع الدولي

2015-2014

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