

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11



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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

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Introduction

International diplomatic efforts in 2010 focused on three major issues, two of which were fundamental, the other procedural. The fundamental issues were: first, the extension of the Israeli 10-month settlement moratorium which began in 2009. This matter came to an end with the US declaration, on 8/12/2010, that it was ending its efforts at achieving another moratorium. The second fundamental issue was the sustained and ongoing blockade imposed on the GS. The procedural issue, meanwhile, involved the efforts to persuade the Palestinian and Israeli sides involved in the peace process to return to the negotiating table.

A review of the various diplomatic efforts shows that the members of the Quartet (the US, the EU, Russia and the UN) were concerned with a number of alternative approaches to the three issues mentioned above. The urgent obstacle was the need to convince the Israeli side to extend the moratorium on settlement building, which expired in the last week of September 2009. Should the Israeli government not respond positively, then diplomatic efforts would turn toward finding another approach, whereby the Palestinian side is persuaded to agree to return to negotiations.

With regard the blockade imposed on GS, it was clear that the efforts of international civil societies to break the siege were significantly ahead of official political stances, be they Arab, Islamic or Western. This is a trend that must be afforded a great deal of attention, given its immediate and long-term strategic implications, particularly when the prospects for its growth are clearly extant, as emphasized in *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2009/10*.

With regard to procedural issues, the strategic choice of the PA was to persist in giving way to international efforts aimed at convincing Benjamin Netanyahu of “a way out,” giving a minimal level of credibility to the PA’s negotiation policies. We shall review what international diplomats discussed as a way out. However, the failure to reach agreement over an extended moratorium on settlement building in late September revealed the PA’s multiple attempts

to postpone its decision to halt negotiations until the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee convened, or until the Sirte Summit took place in Libya, or even until the PLO made a decision. These actions reflected the Palestinian side's limited margin of maneuver.

The fading of the promising image that US President Barack Obama tried to project for his prospective policies faded. This is evident through his rapid backtracking at each juncture in the Middle East in 2010, in particular on the Palestinian issue. This has proven to be equally encumbering for Palestinian negotiators and official Arab circles alike.

First: The Quartet

The Quartet issued six statements in 2010, which focused in the main on the usual issues as follows:¹

1. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 12/3/2010: The brief statement included a condemnation of Israel's decision to advance planning for new housing units in East Jerusalem. The statement reaffirmed that "unilateral actions taken by either party cannot prejudice the outcome of negotiations and will not be recognized by the international community." The Quartet also called on "all concerned to support the urgent resumption of dialogue."²
2. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 19/3/2010: the Quartet welcomed the readiness to launch proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinians, it added that the "Quartet believes these negotiations should lead to a settlement, negotiated between the parties within 24 months, that ends the occupation which began in 1967." The statement also called on all states in the international community "to support dialogue" between the parties of the conflict. The Quartet reiterated "its call on Israel and the Palestinians to act on the basis of international law and on their previous agreements and obligations," and urged the Government of Israel "to freeze all settlement activity, including natural growth, to dismantle outposts erected since March 2001, and to refrain from demolitions and evictions in East Jerusalem." The Quartet also called on the PA "to continue to make every effort to improve law and order, to fight violent extremism and to end incitement." The Quartet said that the annexation of East Jerusalem is not recognized by the international community, and that it is aware that:

Jerusalem is a deeply important issue for Israelis and Palestinians, and for Jews, Muslims and Christians, and believes that through good-faith negotiations, the parties can mutually agree on an outcome that realizes the aspirations of both parties for Jerusalem, and safeguards its status for people around the world.

The Quartet expressed concern at “the continuing deterioration in Gaza, including the humanitarian and human rights situation of the civilian population,” and it stressed “the urgency of a durable resolution to the Gaza crisis.” The Quartet called for a solution that addresses Israel’s legitimate security concerns, promotes Palestinian unity based on the PLO commitments and the reunification of GS and the WB under the legitimate PA; and “ensures the opening of the crossings to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza, consistent with United Nations Security Council resolution 1860.”

The Quartet called for the immediate release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, captured by Hamas.

The Quartet also urged “regional Governments to support publicly the resumption of bilateral negotiations...and take steps to foster positive relations throughout the region.”³

3. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 11/5/2010: The statement welcomed “the first round of proximity talks between Israelis and Palestinians.”⁴
4. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 21/6/2010: The statement focused on the situation in the GS, wherein the Quartet believed that “efforts to maintain security while enabling movement and access for Palestinian people and goods are critical.” It also stated that it “will actively explore additional ways to improve the situation in Gaza, encourage involvement of the Palestinian Authority at the crossings and promote greater commerce between the West Bank and Gaza.” The statement also stressed its commitment “to work with Israel and the international community to prevent the illicit trafficking of arms and ammunition into Gaza.” The Quartet also reiterated its call for the release of Gilad Shalit, and condemned “the violation of Hamas’ international obligation to provide him access by the International Committee of the Red Cross [ICRC]” and it demanded that “Hamas immediately remedy the situation.”⁵
5. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 20/8/2010: The Quartet expressed its “determination to support the parties throughout the negotiations, which can be completed within one year, and the implementation of an agreement.” It

welcomed “the result of the Arab Peace Initiative Committee in Cairo on 29 July.” The Quartet also called on the Israelis and the Palestinians to join in launching direct negotiations on 2/9/2010 in Washington, D.C., “to resolve all final status issues.”⁶

6. Statement by Middle East Quartet on 21/9/2010: The Quartet noted that “the commendable Israeli settlement moratorium instituted last November [2009] has had a positive impact and urged its continuation.” The Quartet also reaffirmed “its support for the Palestinian Authority’s August 2009 plan for building the institutions of a Palestinian State within two years.” The statement made reference to the World Bank report which concluded that “If the Palestinian Authority maintains its current performance in institution-building and delivery of public services, it is well-positioned for the establishment of a State at any point in the near future.” The Quartet condemned continuing violence against both Palestinian and Israeli civilians, in particular the attack near Hebron on 31/8/2010. The Quartet also repeated its call for the release of Gilad Shalit.⁷

By examining these statements, the following inferences can be made:

1. The Quartet continue to be subservient to American wishes, which dictate its course of action. Its role remains marginal, except in those instants when the US requires the intervention of the remaining parties to salvage the situation or eliminate certain complexities.
2. Despite the utter failure of peace efforts, and the continuation of Israeli settlement building, the Quartet’s Special Envoy to the Middle East and former UK Prime Minister, Tony Blair said in an interview with the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) on 13/9/2010 that the “feeling of cynicism [regarding a peace settlement] had been significantly reduced.”⁸

However, this assessment is largely inaccurate, because the peace process has been suffering a major crisis following Israel’s refusal to freeze settlement activity, and following American backtracking on its pledges to apply pressure to halt the building. Even the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, in late September 2010, criticized the Quartet and said, “I observe that, 10 years after Camp David, we have made no progress and perhaps we’ve even gone backwards in terms of resuming dialogue. You can see there’s a methodological problem.” He also said that the “Quartet and its members must collectively and concretely carry out the supervisory role that is theirs.”⁹

3. The issue of the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit is a central issue referred to in most of the Quartet's statements, while no similar references are made whatsoever to the nearly six thousand Palestinian prisoners. This illustrates a profound lack of evenhandedness and objectivity.
4. There was agreement among all the parties that settlement activity is illegal, in addition to continued emphasis that the point of reference for the negotiations is the UN resolutions. This is despite the vagueness in explaining how these resolutions should be implemented and the limits thereof. However, the Quartet's stance on settlement activity remains ambivalent, as no practical measures are coupled with the rhetoric.
5. The Quartet stance on the siege of GS remains weak and ineffective; no influential pressure is exerted to end or ease the blockade, giving Israel cover for its ongoing conduct. The Quartet is always keen on not offending Israel in its support of the peace process, which Israel happens to be impeding and thwarting in practice.

It is worth noting that on 23/9/2010, Gary Grappo took up his post as Head of Mission for the Office of the Quartet Representative in Jerusalem. Previously, he was the Minister Counselor for Political Affairs at the American Embassy in Baghdad, in the period that followed the US occupation of Iraq. He also worked for 18 years in the US embassies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Oman.¹⁰

Second: The United States of America

It is worthwhile identifying US strategy as set out in the National Security Strategy released on 27/5/2010 by the Obama Administration. Regarding the "greater Middle East," the US has important interests, which include:¹¹

1. Unshakable commitment to the security of the state of Israel.
2. The achievement of the Palestinian people's legitimate aspirations for statehood.
3. The unity and security of Iraq and the fostering of its democracy and reintegration into the region.
4. The transformation of Iranian policy away from its pursuit of nuclear weapons, support for "terrorism," and threats against its neighbors.
5. Access to energy.
6. Integration of the region into global markets.

The document identifies the two pronged strategy that must be followed in order to implement the above plan. First, they “will draw on diplomacy, development, and international norms and institutions to help resolve disagreements, prevent conflict, and maintain peace, mitigating where possible the need for the use of force.” Otherwise, they “will seek broad international support, working with such institutions as NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] and the U.N. Security Council.”

The US sought to secure a favorable atmosphere for the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations that have been stalled over 17 months because of Israel’s continued settlement activity. It exerted diplomatic efforts so the proximity talks between the Palestinians and the Israelis were conducted, but these efforts failed. On 8/12/2010, the then Assistant Secretary of State for Public Affairs, Philip J. Crowley, said:

There was considerable thought given to moratorium as being a mechanism by which we could make the kind of progress we’re looking for and, at this point after an intensive effort, we’ve concluded that that particular course is just simply not going to bear fruit at this time and we’re going to move in a different direction.

Then he added:

We are going to shift the discussion and begin to focus intensively on the core issues and see if we can make progress on the substance itself. And we’ll be looking to see if these discussions and this effort creates the momentum that we would expect. Ultimately, we’ll have to move back into direct negotiations at some point.¹²

It appears that this failure did not come as a surprise to President Obama. On 15/1/2010, *Time* magazine interviewed Obama who said, “The Middle East peace process has not moved forward. And I think it’s fair to say that for all our efforts at early engagement, it is not where I want it to be.” He said that from Mahmud Abbas’s perspective, “he’s got Hamas looking over his shoulder and, I think, an environment generally within the Arab world that feels impatient with any process.” Obama then added that although “the Israelis, I think, after a lot of time showed a willingness to make some modifications in their policies, they still found it very hard to move with any bold gestures.” He continued, “If we had anticipated some of these political problems on both sides earlier, we might not have raised expectations as high.”¹³

Meanwhile, on 15/4/2010, the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton gave a speech in dedication of the S. Daniel Abraham Center for Middle East Peace. She said, “Those who benefit from our failure of leadership traffic in hate and violence, and give strength to Iran’s anti-Semitic president and extremists like Hamas and Hezbollah,” and described the PLO as “a credible partner for peace.” She also said:

Israel can and should do more to support the Palestinian Authority’s efforts to build credible institutions and deliver results.... If President ‘Abbas cannot deliver on those aspirations, there’s no doubt his support will fade and Palestinians will turn to alternatives—including Hamas. And that way leads only to more conflict.... So for Israel, accepting concrete steps toward peace—both through the peace process and in the bottoms-up institutions building I have described—are the best weapons against Hamas and other extremists.... So we encourage Israel to continue building momentum toward a comprehensive peace by demonstrating respect for the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinians, stopping settlement activity, and addressing the humanitarian needs in Gaza, and to refrain from unilateral statements and actions that could undermine trust or risk prejudicing the outcome of talks.¹⁴

Clinton’s stance on a settlement freeze is not consistent with US conduct, as evidenced by Clinton’s opposition to the UN HRC decision in March 2010, which called for the cessation of settlement activity, even though EU countries had endorsed it.

This means that the main focus of American peace efforts, in addition to serving Israeli goals, is to prevent the emergence of an environment that helps widen the base of Palestinian and regional factions that consider the peace process to be futile. This is not dissimilar to the recommendations posted by a team of senior intelligence officers at the United States Central Command (CENTCOM). In a “Red Team” report issued on 7/5/2010, the team stressed the need for Hamas to be integrated into the Palestinian security forces led by Fatah, and Hizbullah into the Lebanese Armed Forces. It concluded that:

The U.S. role of assistance to an *integrated* Lebanese defense force that includes Hizbullah; and the continued training of Palestinian security forces in a Palestinian entity that *includes* Hamas in its government, would be more

effective than providing assistance to entities—the government of Lebanon and Fatah—that represent only a part of the Lebanese and Palestinian populace respectively.¹⁵

Neither was failure discounted from the beginning, as evident from the results of the visit made by US Vice President Joe Biden to the region on 8/3/2010. Eli Yishai, the Israeli minister of the interior and leader of the Israeli right-wing party Shas, approved on 9/3/2010, i.e., during Biden's visit, the addition of 1,600 housing units in East Jerusalem neighborhood of Ramat Shlomo.¹⁶ While the US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell announced, on 8/3/2010, that "the Israeli and Palestinian leadership have accepted indirect talks." He added that the US encouraged "the parties, and all concerned, to refrain from any statements or actions which may inflame tensions or prejudice the outcome of these talks."¹⁷

Also, the US government welcomed the Arab Peace Initiative Follow-up Committee decision taken on 3/3/2010, putting forward a time frame of four months for negotiations between the two sides.

It is important here to stop at Biden's remarks during his visit, to determine the extent of the disagreement between the US and Israel, and whether it is tactical or strategic?

On 9/3/2010 Biden condemned the Israeli announcement regarding the construction of housing units, by saying:

I condemn the decision by the government of Israel to advance planning for new housing units in East Jerusalem. The substance and timing of the announcement, particularly with the launching of proximity talks, is precisely the kind of step that undermines the trust we need right now and runs counter to the constructive discussions that I've had here in Israel. We must build an atmosphere to support negotiations, not complicate them.... Unilateral action taken by either party cannot prejudge the outcome of negotiations on permanent status issues.¹⁸

The *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper quoted Biden who castigated his interlocutors. "What you're doing here undermines the security of our troops who are fighting in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. That endangers us and it endangers regional peace." Afterwards, Biden denied these statements.¹⁹

US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, meanwhile, called Netanyahu on 12/3/2010 "to make clear that the United States considered the announcement to be a deeply negative signal about Israel's approach to the bilateral relationship

and contrary to the spirit of the vice-president's trip." The same conclusion was reached by the Ambassador of Israel to the US Michael Oren, who said that US-Israeli relations faced their worst crisis in 35 years.²⁰

In February 2010, the US criticized Israel for adding the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem to the list of Jewish heritage sites marked for renovation and preservation. The then US Department of State Acting Deputy spokesman Mark Toner said that the administration viewed the move as provocative and unhelpful to the goal of getting the two sides back to the table. He also confirmed that Washington's position had been conveyed to senior Israeli officials by American diplomats.²¹

In the meantime, US military officials have expressed positions that are consistent with stances taken by US politicians. On 16/3/2010, CENTCOM Chief Gen. David Petraeus said before the Senate Armed Services Committee that:

The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the AOR [Area Of responsibility]. Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large-scale armed confrontations. The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of U.S. favoritism for Israel.... Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support. The conflict also gives Iran influence in the Arab world through its clients, Lebanese Hizballah and Hamas.²²

In addition, on 16/1/2010, a team of senior military officers from CENTCOM, who were responsible for overseeing American security interests in the Middle East, briefed Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The team had been dispatched by CENTCOM commander General David Petraeus to underline his growing worries at the lack of progress in resolving the issue. The briefers reported that Israeli intransigence on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was jeopardizing US standing in the region.²³

The other development which underscores the tactical divergence in US-Israeli relations was the ramifications of the Israeli attack the Freedom Flotilla, on 31/5/2010.

The assault took place at an incongruous time for US diplomatic activity when:

1. The US was making every effort to secure a 'yes' vote in the UN Security Council on a fourth round of sanctions on Iran.

2. The US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell was preparing to visit the region to initiate new peace talks, which led to the postponement of Netanyahu's trip to Washington.
3. The assault took place in the same day that President Obama called on the parties in the Middle East to show restraint.

Upon examining other statements made by Joe Biden during the same visit, the strategic nature of US-Israeli relations becomes apparent. In a joint press conference with Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, Biden assured that "the cornerstone of the relationship is our absolute, total, unvarnished commitment to Israel's security," and added that "progress occurs in the Middle East when everyone knows there's simply no space between the United States and Israel" when it comes to Israel's security. Biden also said that the US was "determined to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons," and that "Iran must also curb its other destabilizing actions in the region... that is their continued support for terrorist groups that threaten Israel, and I might add, our interests as well."²⁴

In line with this strategic relationship, the US House of Representatives approved, by a vote of 410 to 4, Obama's request to grant \$205 million in aid to Israel for the Iron Dome missile defense project. The project is being developed to protect civilians, primarily along the GS and Lebanese borders, from short-range rockets and mortar attacks. This level of support to Israel took place in the context of 78% of the American Jewish voters voting for Barack Obama in the presidential elections. Moreover, the Republican party regaining their majority in the US House of Representatives, enhancing conservative influence at the highest levels of American politics.²⁵

A statement by Howard Berman, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in the House of Representatives said, "With nearly every square inch of Israel at risk from rocket and missile attacks, we must ensure that our most important ally in the region has the tools to defend itself."²⁶

When examining the distance between the tactical approaches of the two allies (e.g., over the Israeli settlement building plans) and strategic alliance (strategic support), the following observations can be made:

1. The US did not take any concrete measures to protest the Israeli announcement on settlement building, on the political, economic or military levels, unlike what could be expected for Iran, Sudan, Hamas, Venezuela, North Korea, Cuba,

Syria or even Egypt in certain cases. The only US response was to postpone a visit by Mitchell to the region, while Clinton called on Israel to cancel the plans announced by the Israeli Ministry of Construction and Housing, to investigate the clear provocation, and to demonstrate its good intentions by encouraging the Palestinians to return to negotiations.²⁷

The US administration thus pursues a policy of “deterrence” with its opponents, while pursuing a policy of “grants” with its allies. According to *The Independent* newspaper, Netanyahu rejected:

a draft letter drawn up by the State Department and a senior Israeli official promising — in return for a 60-day extension of the moratorium — massive military aid, a veto on any UN Security Council resolution criticising Israel over the next year, and support for a continued Israeli military presence in the Jordan Valley after the launch of a Palestinian state.

The draft also offered not to ask for a further extension after the 60-day period ran out.²⁸

At the end of the meeting of the US-Israel Joint Economic Development Group (JEDG) in Jerusalem, the US Department of the Treasury announced that as of 1/10/2010, Israel has \$3.481 billion available in US loan guarantees, subject to statutory deductions.²⁹ Therefore, continued settlement activity did not impact these guarantees.

The US Congress also passed amendments to the Foreign Assistance Act governing US War Reserves Stockpiles for Allies (WRSA), where the value of US weapons to be prepositioned in Israel will reach \$1 billion in 2011, with another \$200 million added in 2012. Established as a means of US forward basing as well as a vehicle through which allies gain immediate emergency access to US stocks, WRSA content, maintenance and usage procedures are routinely updated by government-to-government agreement, at threshold levels authorized by Congress. Under the new legislation, Israel not only gains access to more US stockpiles, but will enjoy greater latitude in the categories and specific types of weaponry.³⁰

By contrast, the US Department of the Treasury announced that it imposed sanctions on two organizations in the GS linked to Hamas, the Islamic National Bank (INB), and al-Aqsa TV. Thus, it froze any assets INB or al-Aqsa TV hold under US jurisdiction and prohibited US persons from engaging in any transactions with these parties. The Treasury said that sanctions have been imposed against the INB, which was established by Hamas in April 2009,

for providing financial services to Hamas members and employees, including members of the organization's military wing. The Treasury also said that the bank lacks a legal license from the Palestine Monetary Authority (PMA), and operates outside the legitimate financial system. With regard to al-Aqsa TV, the Treasury claimed that it is financed and controlled by Hamas, and operates as the primary Hamas media outlet which "airs programs and music videos designed to recruit children to become Hamas armed fighters and suicide bombers upon reaching adulthood." The Treasury "will not distinguish between a business financed and controlled by a terrorist group, such as al-Aqsa Television, and the terrorist group itself," said Stuart Levey, the Treasury's Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, in a statement.³¹

2. The US defended Israel's boycott of the 2010 Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. It was held in New York on 3–28/5/2010, was attended by 189 nations. In a press conference held by Barack Obama on 6/7/2010, he said:

We strongly believe that, given its size, its history, the region that it's in, and the threats that are leveled against us—against it, that Israel has unique security requirements.... the United States will never ask Israel to take any steps that would undermine their security interests.³²

In a possible attempt by Israel to divert attention away from the crisis ensuing from its settlement plans, the issue of Syria sending Scud missiles to Hizbullah was raised, at a time when the US Senate was preparing to vote on posting Robert Ford as the US ambassador to Syria, after an estrangement of five years.

3. If we examine the diplomatic efforts of the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton on the Palestinian issue in particular and the Middle East in general, we find that, up until the end of October, she spent 67 days outside Washington including seven days allocated for the Middle East in general, i.e., 10.4% of her diplomatic efforts.³³ However, this does not necessarily reflect the extent of American interest in the region, if we take into account the repeated visits by the US Special Envoy for Middle East Peace George Mitchell.

The complexity of analyzing American-Israeli ties lies in the massive US military, political and economic support for Israel on the one hand, and the lack of Israeli compliance to some US dictates that are more in line with Arab demands, such as in the case of the freeze on settlement building in the WB including Jerusalem, on the other hand.

Explaining this apparent contradiction is possible when we explore the Palestinian stance in particular, then the Western stance in general. At each point where the US finds itself between two contradictory positions taken by the Arabs on the one hand and Israel on the other, the US begins putting pressure on both parties to alter their positions. In most cases, the Arab side complies faster and in a more drastic manner than the Israeli side. This can be seen very easily throughout all the issues where American and Israeli positions diverged concerning Middle Eastern affairs. When the American side senses that there is a strong Arab position, the pressure is put on Israel which would be under pressure to comply. This can be observed in many historical examples, such as Yitzhak Rabin's refusal to withdraw from certain important locations in Sinai during the negotiations with Egypt in 1975. But when the then-US President Gerald Ford realized that Egypt would never accept that these locations would remain under Israeli control, Ford threatened that "the U.S. would reassess all aspects of its relationship with Israel,"³⁴ which prompted Rabin to quickly comply and approve the withdrawal, especially as he realized the importance of Egypt for the US.

Moreover, the American side uses the financial support it provides to the PA as leverage to push the PA to press ahead with its current policy. In 2010, the US gave around \$500.4 million to the PA, in addition to nearly \$237.8 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). Then in November 2010, \$150 million in budgetary assistance were provided to the PA via presidential waiver as an advance on Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Economic Support Fund (ESF) funds.³⁵

In general, two major setbacks for the US policy towards the Palestinian issue have taken place: First, with Obama considering historic Palestine to be the historic homeland of the Jewish people, and second, with US official endorsement of the "Jewishness" of the state of Israel, even though George W. Bush had mentioned this in a speech in the past.

American relations with Israel have shifted from those experienced during the Cold War, because of the growing Jewish-Zionist influence on US decision-making bodies. This is evident in the increasingly prominent role of the religious right, the neoconservatives and the Jewish lobby, especially The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in contrast to a declining Arab and Islamic influence. It is clear that the US administration has to a large extent reconciled itself to the Israeli position, having failed at the end of 2010 to convince Israel of even a temporary moratorium on settlement building.



Third: The European Union

There can be no doubt that Israel feels less reassured by European diplomatic activity than by that of the Americans. Perhaps the reported argument between Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman and his French and Spanish counterparts Bernard Kouchner and Miguel Angel Moratinos, during their trip to the region on 11/10/2010, is indicative of this. Lieberman was quoted as saying to his counterparts, “Before coming here to tell us how to solve our conflicts, I would expect you could have at least solved all the problems within Europe.” As he traveled to Amman, Moratinos responded to Lieberman by saying, “If we didn’t have a role, if we didn’t have any weight, if we didn’t have any influence, maybe our friend Lieberman wouldn’t have reacted as he did.”³⁶

There are many such instances that suggest a gradually increasing gap between Europe and Israel. A number of examples are noted below:

- 1. The Settlement Issue:** No European country has expressed its support for settlements in any manner. On the contrary, some European countries took executive measures to express their rejection of settlements. In a statement on 16/9/2010, the EU recalled that “settlements are illegal under international law and calls for an extension of the moratorium decided by Israel. It continues to call for a complete stop to all violence, in particular rocket fire and terrorist attacks.”³⁷ Meanwhile, the Italian PM Silvio Berlusconi expressed his opposition to Israel’s decision not to extend the moratorium, and said at a press conference held in Rome with Egyptian President Husni Mubarak, “I will try to intervene with my Israeli friends and my European colleagues to convince Netanyahu to extend the moratorium” until the end of 2010.³⁸ This stance is further confirmed by other instances, such as:
 - a. The ruling by the Court of Justice of the European Union in Brussels that rejected the exemption of goods produced in settlements from custom tariffs, as settlements do not fall within “the territorial scope of Israel.”
 - b. The EU’s condemnation of plans to build 1,600 housing units in Jerusalem, and its rejection of Israel’s annexation of the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron.
 - c. Renewed boycott by European trade unions of the products originating from Israeli settlements in the WB.
 - d. Cancellation by the Netherlands of a scheduled tour by a forum of Israeli mayors, because the delegation included representatives of WB settlements.

- e. In a statement following the US announcement that it has abandoned efforts to persuade Israel to renew a freeze on settlement-building, Catherine Ashton, the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, said, "The EU position on settlements is clear: they are illegal under international law and an obstacle to peace. Recent settlement related developments, including in East Jerusalem, contradict the efforts by the international community for successful negotiations."³⁹
- f. A group of 26 ex-EU leaders urged the EU to impose sanctions on Israel for continuing to build settlements in the WB. The leaders said that Israel "like any other state" should be made to feel "the consequences" and pay a price for breaking international law. The letter asked EU foreign ministers to reiterate that they "will not recognise any changes to the June 1967 boundaries and clarify that a Palestinian state should be in sovereign control over territory equivalent to 100% of the territory occupied in 1967, including its capital in East Jerusalem." The letter, sent to European governments and EU institutions, also asks ministers to give the Israeli government an ultimatum that, if it has not fallen into line by April 2011, the EU will seek an end to the US-brokered peace process in favor of a UN solution. The letter added that the EU should link its informal freeze on an upgrade in diplomatic relations with Israel to a settlement construction moratorium; ban imports of products made in the WB settlements; and force Israel to pay for the majority of the aid required by the Palestinians. The letter also urged EU member states to send a high-level delegation to East Jerusalem to support Palestinian claims to sovereignty and reclassify EU support for Palestine as "nation building" instead of "institution building."⁴⁰

The letter was signed by Javier Solana and 10 former leaders of European countries—including Romano Prodi and Giuliano Amato of Italy, Richard von Weizsäcker and Helmut Schmidt of Germany, Mary Robinson of Ireland, Felipe Gonzalez of Spain and Norway's Thorvald Stoltenberg—in addition to 10 former ministers and several members of the European Commission (EC).⁴¹

However, in a letter of response to the former leaders, Baroness Ashton said that the EU's approach to Jewish settlement expansion would remain unchanged at that time. She also said that the demand for a peace treaty based on pre-June 1967 borders was "commonly accepted" and that she supported the US-brokered negotiations.⁴²

2. The al-Mabhuh Issue: The Mossad's assassination of the Hamas leader Mahmud al-Mabhuh in January 2010 caused a diplomatic rift between the EU and Israel, owing to the use of forged European passports by the Israeli assassination squad. The immediate results of this incident were:

- a. The EU condemned the use of EU passports.⁴³
- b. A European boycott of a session in the Israeli Knesset.⁴⁴
- c. Israel lost out on an Irish bullets contract.⁴⁵

3. The Siege of GS: European policy generally moved between a call for the siege to be completely lifted, and for the siege to be eased, with an inclination towards the second option, while aid was offered to GS. This is evident from the following policies:

- a. The endorsement of the European Parliament of the findings reached by the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, known as the Goldstone Report, on the assault on GS in late 2008 and early 2009.
- b. The visit by a number of European parliamentary delegations to GS, in addition to that of Catherine Ashton, and their calls for the blockade to be lifted. The Europeans also proposed the deployment of a European force to monitor the coast of GS, with access to the port and measures to monitor arms smuggling operations.

Meanwhile, 18 European human rights and humanitarian organizations, including Amnesty International, issued a statement in July 2010 calling on the EU to “insist on the full lifting of the blockade of Gaza, not just its easing.”⁴⁶

Dockworkers from the Swedish Dockworkers Union launched a boycott of Israeli ships and goods to protest against the raid on the Freedom Flotilla carried out by Israel in international waters.⁴⁷

During a visit to GS on 18/7/2010, Catherine Ashton said, “The position of the EU is very clear. We want to see the opportunity for people to be able to move around freely, to see goods not only coming in to Gaza but exports coming out of Gaza.” The Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz responded to Ashton by saying, “Some Europeans tend to ignore the real character of the Hamas regime in Gaza.”⁴⁸

Meanwhile, in June 2010, an op-ed by the Italian, French and Spanish foreign ministers suggested a European force to lift the GS siege. They said that:

The European Union already has a civilian mission on the spot ready to be deployed simultaneously at the Karni [al-Mintar] and Rafah frontier posts linking Gaza to Israel and Egypt. To guarantee full security of supplies, we propose that inspections supported and funded by the E.U. should be put in place there in conditions acceptable to all in order to ensure that consignments bound for Gaza contain neither weapons nor explosives. A similar regime could be considered for maritime consignments bound for Gaza, for example, by deploying E.U. monitoring teams in Cyprus. These arrangements would be implemented only against a backdrop of very substantial relaxation of the restrictions on imports and exports to and from Gaza.⁴⁹

A meeting of the EU and Asian leaders, representing 60% of the world population in 46 countries, had called for “a solution that ensures the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza.”⁵⁰

A delegation of 60 parliamentarians from 13 European countries, headed by the veteran British MP and former Minister Sir Gerald Kaufman, arrived in GS in mid-January 2010. The organizer of the visit was the European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG), which is an umbrella body of 30 NGOs across Europe. Kaufman stressed that they would put pressure on the EU to take decisive steps to end the unjust blockade on GS. At a press conference he held with Palestinian MPs upon his arrival in GS and his visit to the demolished PLC headquarters in GS, he said, “Anybody who uses white phosphorus should be arrested and should be tried for war crimes.” He also said, “We have had a fuss in our country about the inability of certain Israeli politicians to visit Britain for fear of being arrested,” adding that:

But when we read of an Israeli politician being afraid of being arrested in Britain, we remember that 1.5 million people in Gaza are under arrest every day of their lives by the Israelis, suffering deprivation, hunger, lack of satisfactory medical treatment, lack of screws to put school desks together so your children can learn.⁵¹

The Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and MPs started taking practical measures to convey the suffering they found to their parliaments and people, in the hope that parliamentary and popular pressure would take shape to push European governments to pressure the Israeli side, and end the siege imposed on GS. According to a statement issued by ECESG, the MEPs

and MPs submitted reports to the heads of parliaments in their countries, in order to inform them of the effects of the blockade they had seen firsthand. In addition, The Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) wrote an open letter, which was supported by over 70 civil society leaders, to the PM David Cameron calling for the immediate lifting of the inhumane blockade of Gaza on the back of the Gaza Aid Flotilla Attack.⁵²

Official stances in the EU must be distinguished from unofficial stances, for they remain ahead of the latter in terms of their support for the Palestinian issue. Also, the EU often announces stances without these having any practical impact when it comes to criticism of Israeli policies.

- c. The granting of financial aid to GS, including the EU's allocation of €22 million (about \$29 million) to support the private sector of GS, in addition to the allocation of €37 million (about \$48 million) to cover employees' payroll, and €58 million (about \$75.5 million) in humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in the WB and Lebanon. The Netherlands also offered support for two agricultural projects in GS worth €6 million (about \$8 million), while France gave €68 million (about \$88.5 million) in total aid in 2010, and £74 million (about \$111 million) for the year 2010/2011.

On 14/10/2010, Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb visited GS, and called for the further lifting of movement restrictions on GS. He also called on the EU and other foreign ministers to visit GS "to see what the situation is on the ground." He said, "You can only be struck personally with a sense of despair once you cross the border, when you see all the rubble, when you see all the poverty." He also called for end to Palestinian rocket attacks and demanded the release of Gilad Shalit.⁵³

Irish Foreign Minister Michael Martin also arrived in the GS in February 2010, through the Rafah border crossing with Egypt, to inspect the institutions that had been destroyed during the Israeli war on GS.⁵⁴

- d. The decision by Greece to cancel joint military exercises with Israel.
- e. The stance declared by the Archbishop of Wales Barry Morgan, who criticized the conditions in GS and said, "The situation resembles the apartheid system in South Africa because Gaza is next to one of the most sophisticated and modern countries in the world—Israel."⁵⁵
- f. The report issued by the Committees on Arms Export Controls (CAEC) called for the licenses of arms exports to Israel to be reassessed, after the British government admitted that "arms exports to Israel were almost certainly used

in Operation Cast Lead,” and that this is in “direct contravention” to the UK Government’s policy that UK arms exports to Israel should not be used in the WB and GS. The CAEC also concluded that the “revoking of five UK arms exports licences to Israel since Cast Lead is welcome, but that broader lessons must be learned from the post conflict review to ensure that UK arms exports to Israel are not used in the Occupied Territories in future.”⁵⁶

It also appeared in 2010 that European efforts were heading in the direction of recognizing the de facto state that Salam Fayyad is attempting to build, as evident from the following developments:

1. The French Foreign Ministry issued a statement on behalf of the Chair and the Co-Chairs of the International Donors’ Conference for the Palestinian state in early 2010, after the Follow-up meeting; which was attended by the French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner, Foreign Minister Jonas Gahr Stoere, High Representative Catherine Ashton, and Quartet Representative Tony Blair. The Palestinian PM Salam Fayyad and Egyptian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ahmad Abu al-Ghait also participated in the meeting. The statement pointed out that the Chair and Co-Chairs reaffirmed their support for Fayyad’s “Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State” program, and that they “urged the international community to increase its support for the implementation of this plan, at the financial as well as the political level.” They also welcomed “the reforms introduced by the PA, in particular in the areas of public finance, governance and security.” They called on Israel to take immediate further measures “in order to improve the movement of persons and goods,” and not just in the WB. In addition, “They discussed the appalling situation that the Palestinian people find themselves in as a result of the Gaza blockade. Reiterating the numerous appeals to open up the border crossing points.”⁵⁷
2. In an interview published in *Le Journal du Dimanche* newspaper, the French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner said:

What’s important at the moment is to build facts on the ground: France is training Palestinian police officers; businesses are being set up on the West Bank... Then we can envisage the rapid proclamation of a Palestinian State and its immediate recognition by the international community, even before its borders are negotiated—I’d be tempted by that—by [recognition by] European countries. I’m not sure of being followed or even of being right.⁵⁸



Both Spain and France had insinuated the idea of possible European recognition of a Palestinian state before negotiations end, which means that Europe is seeking the establishment of a de facto state, which would gradually become a recognized de jure state.

In addition, and as soon as Palestinian-Israeli talks began on 2/9/2010, Ashton declared the next day that both sides must “engage in this process with determination to overcome the obstacles and work fast and hard on all the final status issues to meet the Quartet’s call for a negotiated settlement within one year.”⁵⁹

In response to Netanyahu’s calls for the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a “Jewish state,” Maja Kocijancic, a spokeswoman for EU Diplomatic Chief Catherine Ashton, said on 12/10/2010, “We support the two democratic states living side by side in peace and security,” and added “We also stress that the future states of Palestine and Israel will need to fully guarantee equality to all their citizens,” then she said, “Basically in the case of Israel this means whether they are Jewish or not.”⁶⁰

When analyzing the many statements given by EU officials and the analyses published in the European media and press, one can conclude that the European performance in the peace process is mediocre at best, and remains mostly confined to the limits of the US position. This is clearly reflected by the statements given by Ashton. On 6/10/2010, when justifying her absence from the Palestinian-Israeli talks, which resumed after having been suspended since 2009, she said, “I went from Washington to the Middle East in order to support what George Mitchell is doing on the ground. It became clear to me that in order to support what George Mitchell does on the ground, the EU’s voice should be added.” Regarding Israel’s refusal to extend the moratorium on settlement activity following its expiration in November, she said:

What I was interested in was whether our voice (should be) added to others to try to persuade Israel to extend the moratorium, but also to find if there were other ways in which the talks could keep going, to try to deal with this issue differently... I don’t have any great solution to that. The discussions are still going on.

She justified her absence from the talks by saying that her decision in no way reflected a priority shift for the EU.⁶¹

On the other hand, Palestinian resistance operations in the WB and GS are always criticized by the EU, as was the case, for example, with the Hebron attack on 31/8/2010, which claimed the lives of four residents of the “illegal” settlements, as deemed by the EU’s own statements. Nevertheless, Ashton had the following to say about the attack:

There are forces in the region which are determined to undermine the peace process. We must not allow them to succeed. Supporters of peace must persevere through difficult times. It is very important that all relevant parties avoid provocative actions which could undermine the success of the talks. This attack underlines, above all, the urgency of a two-state solution.⁶²

In general, there appears to be a decline in the positions of France, Italy and Germany, under Sarkozy, Berlusconi and Angela Merkel, wherein European policy became subservient to US policy, and it became difficult to differentiate between the two, especially on the issues of the settlements, Jerusalem and the blockade of GS, and also with regard to the stance on Hamas, the resistance, and land swaps. At the official level, Europe still sanctions trade with settlements in the WB, and refuses to boycott them. Also, the European position regarding security cooperation with the PA has dangerous implications. This is not to mention that the Europeans’ undertaking of removing the traces of devastation resulting from the Israeli war on GS has raised many questions. This was carried out under the guise of reconstruction, while no reconstruction has actually taken place. Essentially, the ugly side of the Israeli war was removed, while the Palestinians were not aided in rebuilding their destroyed homes.

Fourth: Russia

Russian policy in the Middle East in 2010 did not witness any significant changes, and pragmatic considerations and commercial interests remain the most salient feature of this country’s policies.

The nature of Russian policy may thus be inferred from the following features:

1. Dealing with all parties to the conflict, including Hamas. In a press conference held in Moscow, this stance was elaborated by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who said, “We are positive that all parties to the conflict should be engaged in dialogue. We will continue contacts with Hamas,” and

added, “Only a united Palestine can ensure proper conditions for the talks that I hope [Palestinian President] Mahmoud Abbas will eventually resume with Israel.”⁶³

It appears that Russia’s dialogue with Hamas is motivated by the desire to bring it to the negotiating table, one way or the other, with Israel, and to try to ensure that that Hamas will not carry out any operations that may hinder the peace process. This is evident from Lavrov’s statement to journalists following his visit to Cuba, in which he said, “As for Hamas, it is difficult to hope for the Palestinians to conduct talks effectively without it. The unity of the Palestinians, which Abbas and Khaled Mashaal have clearly acknowledged, is now one of the most pressing tasks.”⁶⁴

In a telephone conversation with the Khalid Mish‘al, Lavrov said that rocket attacks from Gaza on southern parts of Israel were “unacceptable.”⁶⁵

Relations between Russia and Hamas reached their highest level when President Dmitry Medvedev visited Damascus, and met with Mish‘al, in May 2010. This implied that Russia recognized the movement’s legitimacy, and confirmed that Hamas had held out against the countries who had expected that the siege and isolation of Hamas would result in its elimination.⁶⁶ The official spokesman for the Russian Foreign Ministry Andrei Nesterenko commented after the visit, “Our contacts with this movement are regular. It is known that all the other Middle East Quartet members also maintain contacts with the Hamas leadership in some form or another, although, for incomprehensible reasons, hesitate to admit it publicly.”⁶⁷

After the meeting, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev asserted that the US Administration is not doing enough as to push the process forward. He described conditions in the Middle East as being increasingly “more tense and negative.” He also said that Russia remains willing to host a conference on the Middle East in Moscow.⁶⁸

A few days after the meeting, a Russian official said that President Medvedev discussed with Mish‘al a comprehensive Russian package for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, which would include the release of the captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit in a prisoner swap, the opening of the border crossings, and the engagement of Hamas in the peace process, whether through partnership with the PA in Ramallah, or in a separately, in order to reach binding security agreements between Israel and Hamas. In return, Hamas

would undertake not to carry out any military operations or fire rockets from GS towards Israel. The official also said that several European countries had proposed similar ideas in the past, and that there are officials in the Obama administration who are discussing these proposals behind closed doors.⁶⁹

In response to the Russian position, Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman said that Tel Aviv “will not accept any ultimatum with regard to Hamas, and we won’t let this movement take part in any peace process.”⁷⁰

2. Russian diplomacy does not exhibit any optimism regarding the possibility of a peace settlement being reached soon. The Russians are aware of Israel’s rejection of the most important prerequisites of a peace settlement, made clear by Lavrov’s statement that the prospects for peace settlement are not rosy. He added:

Unfortunately, those steps the Israeli government is prepared to take in terms of a ten-month moratorium on certain types of settlement activity are insufficient, even if going in the right direction. The categorical refusal to discontinue settlement activities in East Jerusalem worries us greatly, because a physical wall of separation is being erected there which will then be very difficult to eliminate. This is contrary to all decisions taken by the UN Security Council.⁷¹

3. Growing Russian-Israeli relations in various fields, most notably with regard to military cooperation, for example through the state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries Ltd. (IAI) and the Russian company United Industrial Corporation (UIC) Oboronprom. They announced that Russia will purchase Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) made by Israel, under an agreement signed between the two companies, wherein the UAVs are assembled in Russia. The deal is worth \$400 million, eight times the value of a preliminary deal that had been announced in April 2009, which was worth \$50 million. According to the specialized Israeli newspaper *Globes*, UIC Oboronprom will pay IAI a \$280 million down payment, and will pay the balance as the UAVs are delivered over the three year term of the contract.⁷²
4. The limited financial support to the Palestinians continued. Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister of Russia, approved a \$10 million humanitarian aid package to Palestine in 2010. The prime minister also instructed the Foreign Ministry to deliver the Russian aid package, in coordination with the PA.⁷³



Fifth: China

The general outline of China's position remained close to the Arab position, through China's continued support for "the achievement of the goal of two states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace on the basis of the relevant UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative, the principle of 'land-for-peace,' and the 'roadmap.'" China also assigned great importance to the role played by the Quartet and the UN Security Council in seeking to get both sides back to the negotiating table, as evident from a number of developments, namely:⁷⁴

1. The settlements issue: On 27/1/2010, in an open debate on the situation in the Middle East at the Security Council, China clarified its stance when its Ambassador to the UN Zhang Yesui said, "Israel should freeze all settlements activity and cease the building of separation walls." He added, "Israel should also refrain from moves that do not contribute to resumption of the peace talks on the issue of East Jerusalem." This stance was reiterated each time the issue of settlements was raised.⁷⁵
2. The Israeli attack on the Turkish Freedom Flotilla: On 1/6/2010, the Chinese Foreign Ministry urged a "quick response" from the UN Security Council to the Israeli assault. Foreign Ministry Spokesman Ma Zhaoxu said, "We were shocked by the Israeli naval attack on the Turkish flotilla carrying humanitarian goods to Gaza which led to severe casualties and condemn it." A Chinese diplomat also said that Beijing "was prepared to back quick [UN Security] council action on the raid."⁷⁶
3. Lifting the blockade of the GS: In most of its relevant statements on the Middle East, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has called for the blockade of the GS to be lifted, and all border crossings with GS to be opened. The Foreign Ministry also called for unity among Palestinian factions, and expressed its support for the Egyptian efforts in this regard.
4. China's position on Israel's nuclear arsenal: China expressed its full support for rendering the Middle East a nuclear weapons-free zone. The Chinese representative at the IAEA said, "China supports the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the Middle East and advocates that Israel join the NPT [Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty] as a non-nuclear-weapon state and place all its nuclear facilities under IAEA comprehensive safeguards." China also expressed its support for the "holding in 2012 of an international conference on the Middle East free of nuclear weapons."⁷⁷

Meanwhile, the issue of occupied Jerusalem became a point of contention between the Chinese and the Arab delegation during the 4th Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab Cooperation Forum, which was held in the Chinese coastal city of Tianjin. The dispute erupted when Chinese officials refused to sign a joint document with the delegation that included Arab Foreign Ministers, asserting that East Jerusalem is the capital of the Palestinian state. According to press sources, the Arab delegation was surprised at the last minute when Chinese officials refused to sign the document, despite all the efforts made to contain the situation.⁷⁸

This Chinese stance is completely at odds with the previous Chinese positions. The extent of this contradiction is clear in the statement given by Hong Lei, a spokesman for the Chinese Foreign Ministry, when commenting on the Israeli bill passed by the Knesset on 22/11/2010, which demands a referendum “should any Israeli government make territorial concessions in East Jerusalem to the Palestinians or in the Golan Heights to Syria,” i.e., it would require a two-thirds majority of consent in the Israeli public. Hong Lei said, “The law goes against the spirit of United Nations (UN) resolutions and cannot change the fact that East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights are occupied lands of the Arab countries.”⁷⁹

It is important to note the growing volume of trade between the Middle East and China, which was estimated at \$107 billion at the end of 2009, including approximately \$4.3 billion with the state of Israel.

Since the bulk of the trade with the Arab world involves the oil sector, China is primarily concerned for the shipping routes through which oil is transported, as the majority of these routes are controlled by US navy fleets. This prompted China to collaborate with Russia to build an oil pipeline from companies in Siberia to China, at a capacity of 15 million tons annually for 20 years. This pipeline will help China reduce its reliance on sea routes by securing oil via land.⁸⁰ This is especially important in light of the growing tension witnessed in the Gulf region throughout 2010.

In general, China and Russia benefited from the US preoccupation with “rearranging the Middle East,” and from the fact that it did not include them in the list of threats faced by the US. Russia and China (and also Brazil, Turkey, India and other countries) thus capitalized from this policy, and set out to improve their economic, military and technological capabilities.

The policy of buying time pursued by Russia and China, or their refraining from antagonizing the US in the international arena, explains what can be called Russian and Chinese political pragmatism. It is ultimately a policy of self-improvement and strengthening at all levels, focusing on regional security, but nonetheless lacking a coherent global strategy.

Sixth: Japan

It may be inferred from Japanese government statements that there is Japanese approval of the idea of supporting the “de facto state” plan mentioned above, also apparently supported by the EU. In addition to the traditional Japanese diplomatic stances, the then Japanese PM Yukio Hatoyama announced that he had agreed with the Palestinian president to offer Japanese assistance in the area of institution and capacity building of the Palestinian state, and enhance cooperation in trade and investment. Hatoyama reiterated his position that, while “Palestinians continue to abide by the cessation of all act of violence against Israelis, Israel should freeze all settlement activities in the West Bank including East Jerusalem.” Hatoyama also said that his country “would not recognize any act by Israel that would prejudice the final status of Jerusalem and territories in the pre-1967 borders.”⁸¹

The new Japanese PM Naoto Kan continued the policy of his predecessor in this regard, by reaffirming Japan’s support for the state-building efforts undertaken by the PA on the basis of the two-state solution. The Japanese prime minister also urged his Palestinian counterpart to resume peace talks with Israel, pledged to continue assisting the PA’s state-building efforts, and announced that Japan would extend assistance to the PA by approximately \$100 million within FY 2010.⁸²

Seventh: International Organizations

1. The United Nations

a. The General Secretariat

The stances of the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon concerning the implementation of UN resolutions on the Palestinian issue were vague and evasive. He failed to clearly express the wishes of the majority of UN member states. His statements were presented as equivocal and inconsequential, in line

with US policy and Israeli sensitivities to the point that some have described him as a “US Secretary of State.” His attitude was monotonous with respect to lifting the blockade of the GS, stopping Israeli settlement activities and ensuring that the Palestinians secure their legitimate demands. Stances adopted by the General Secretariat on the Palestinian question on several occasions are detailed as follows:

1. Direct or Indirect Negotiations Between the Two Sides

In his speech before the Arab Summit in the Libyan city of Sirte on 27/3/2010, Ban Ki-moon stressed his commitment to the goal of “finding a way through negotiations for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States, and a just and agreed solution for the refugees.” He urged Arab leaders “to support efforts to start proximity talks... [which] should lead to direct negotiations between the parties.” Then he said, “Our common goal should be to resolve all final status issues within 24 months.” In a press conference held the same day, Ban Ki-moon added that “This is why I strongly supported the League’s decision to provide political support for President Abbas to participate in and begin proximity talks.”⁸³

2. The Settlements

Ban Ki-moon reiterated the UN position that “settlement activity is illegal and must stop,” and said:

Like all of you, I was deeply dismayed when Israel advanced planning to build 1600 housing units in East Jerusalem. There are several other recent unilateral actions as well, including decisions on holy sites in Hebron and Bethlehem, further settlement announcements, actions in places like Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, and tensions surrounding the al-Aqsa Mosque.⁸⁴

At the opening of the 2010 session of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People on 21/1/2010, Ban Ki-moon expressed his concern that “Settlement activity and financial support for settlement expansion continues in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.” He recalled that “the international community does not recognize Israel’s annexation of East Jerusalem, which remains part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory.” He emphasized that:

The international community has repeatedly appealed to Israel to halt settlement construction throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Settlement construction violates international law and contravenes the Road Map, under which Israel is obliged to freeze all settlement activity, including the so-called “natural growth.”



He added that this settlement activity is “in no one’s interest, least of all Israel’s. Settlement activity undermines trust between the two parties, seems to pre-judge the outcome of the future permanent status negotiations, and imperils the basis for the two-State solution.” He criticized the Israeli authorities’ continued discrimination “against Palestinian residents, including by ordering house demolitions and evictions and revoking identity cards,” and also criticized local authorities, which “have also announced plans to consolidate and expand settlement infrastructure.” The UN Secretary-General said that the “question of Jerusalem is a central and highly sensitive issue to be addressed by the parties in permanent status negotiations,” and that “a way must be found, through negotiations, for Jerusalem to emerge as the capital of two States living side-by-side in peace and security, with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all.”⁸⁵ This last statement by Ban Ki-moon regarding Jerusalem indicates that there is a calm diplomatic effort, if not a secret one, to find a way out of the embarrassment to the Palestinian side in order to resolve the issue of the holy sites.

3. The Blockade of GS

Ban Ki-moon asserted that “Gaza is a priority,” and that the situation there is “unacceptable and unsustainable.” He added, “The closure is wrong and must end, and I have been working hard on that front.”⁸⁶

Ban Ki-moon also expressed regret that accountability for violations of international humanitarian and human rights law during the Israeli assault on GS “has not been adequately addressed.” He said that Israel must “end its unacceptable and counterproductive blockade and to fully respect international law.”⁸⁷

4. Armed Resistance

Ban Ki-moon condemned the operation in Hebron mentioned earlier. A spokesman for the UN Secretary-General said, “This attack must be recognized for what it is: a cynical and blatant attempt to undermine the direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations starting tomorrow [2/9/2010].” The Secretary-General “extends his condolences to the families of the victims and calls for the perpetrators of this crime to be promptly brought to justice.”⁸⁸

b. The UN Security Council

A non-binding statement issued by the UN Security Council called for self-restraint, in the aftermath of the violent clashes that erupted on 5/3/2010 between the Israeli police and Palestinian protesters in the courtyard of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Old City in occupied Jerusalem. The statement called for an early return to the negotiating table. The 15 UN Security Council members expressed their “concern at the current ‘tense’ situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.” Ambassador Emmanuel Issoze-Ngondet of Gabon, which held the rotating Council presidency for March 2010, said that the 15 member states “urged all sides to show restraint and avoid provocative acts”; they also stressed that “peaceful dialogue was the only way forward and looked forward to an early resumption of negotiations.”⁸⁹

c. The General Assembly

1. On 15/11/2010, an overwhelming majority of the Fourth Committee (Special Political and Decolonization Committee), a subordinate committee of the UNGA in New York, passed a number of important resolutions on UNRWA, Palestine refugees’ properties and revenues and the need for an accelerated return of the displaced persons. However, the US was among the minority which opposed most of these resolutions.⁹⁰

The resolutions made a reference to the critical humanitarian situation and socio-economic conditions of the Palestine refugees in the occupied Palestinian territories, particularly in the GS. The resolutions called on Israel to comply with the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, and “to cease obstructing the movement and access” of UNRWA’s staff, vehicles and supplies, and “to fully lift the restrictions impeding the import of necessary construction materials and supplies for the reconstruction and repair” of UNRWA’s facilities that were damaged or destroyed as a result of the Israeli assault on GS. The resolutions also urged “all states, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations to continue and to increase their contributions” to UNRWA, in order for it to be able to continue its work and provide assistance to Palestine refugees in all fields of operations.⁹¹

The committee also endorsed the resolution concerning the “Applicability of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of

War, of 12 August 1949, to the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and the other occupied Arab territories.”⁹² In addition, a resolution was approved reaffirming that “Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan are illegal and an obstacle to peace and economic and social development.”⁹³

2. In the resolution passed on 30/11/2010, the UNGA declared that:

All legislative and administrative measures and actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, which have altered or purported to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem, in particular the so-called ‘Basic Law’ on Jerusalem and the proclamation of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, are null and void and must be rescinded forthwith,

and it also recalled “the Security Council resolutions relevant to Jerusalem, including resolution 478 (1980) of 20 August 1980, in which the Council, *inter alia*, decided not to recognize the “Basic Law” on Jerusalem.”⁹⁴

After recalling the advisory opinion rendered on 9/7/2004 by the ICJ on the *Legal Consequences of the Construction of a Wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory*, the UNGA expressed its grave concern about:

the continuation by Israel, the occupying Power, of illegal settlement activities, including the so-called E-1 plan, its construction of the wall in and around East Jerusalem, its restrictions on access to and residence in East Jerusalem and the further isolation of the city from the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, which are having a detrimental effect on the lives of Palestinians and could prejudice a final status agreement on Jerusalem.⁹⁵

The resolution also criticized “the continuing Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes and the eviction of numerous Palestinian families from East Jerusalem neighbourhoods, as well as other acts of provocation and incitement, including by Israeli settlers, in the city.” The resolution stressed that:

A comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of the City of Jerusalem should take into account the legitimate concerns of both the Palestinian and Israeli sides and should include internationally guaranteed provisions to ensure the freedom of religion and of conscience of its inhabitants, as well as permanent, free and unhindered access to the holy places by the people of all religions and nationalities.⁹⁶

d. United Nations Human Rights Council

The HRC issued a number of resolutions throughout 2010, condemning Israel over its policies in the WB, GS and the occupied Syrian territories; however, the US voted against all these resolutions.

In its Follow-up to the report of the United Nations Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, the HRC adopted a resolution that called upon “the High Commissioner to explore and determine the appropriate modalities for the establishment of an escrow fund for the provision of reparations to the Palestinians who suffered loss and damage” as a result of the Israeli assault on GS between late 2008 and early 2009. Other resolutions urged Israel to end its occupation of Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, and to “stop the targeting of [Palestinian] civilians and the systematic destruction of the cultural heritage of the Palestinian people.” HRC strongly condemned “the Israeli military attacks and operations” in the WB and GS and demanded that “Israel, the occupying Power, immediately lift the siege imposed on the occupied Gaza Strip, and that it open all borders and crossing points.” The resolutions also called for Israel to stop building all settlements in the “occupied territories,” and to dismantle existing settlements.⁹⁷

There was a contrast between the stances of the EU and the US during HRC meetings, regarding the Report of the international fact-finding mission to investigate violations of international law during the Freedom Flotilla Israeli attack, where the investigation concluded that a “grave violation of human rights law and international humanitarian law” has been committed by the Israeli military and other personnel towards the flotilla passengers.⁹⁸ The mission spoke of “clear evidence” to support prosecutions against Israel, for practicing wilful killing and torture against the passengers of the Mavi Marmara, when it was raided by the Israeli navy. The committee based its report on Article 147 of the Fourth Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War.

The mission considered Israeli conduct towards the flotilla passengers “not only disproportionate to the occasion but demonstrated levels of totally unnecessary and incredible violence. It betrayed an unacceptable level of brutality.” The mission also considered the blockade of GS to be “illegal” since it was imposed at a time when GS has been witnessing a “severe humanitarian situation.”⁹⁹



Commenting on this before the Council's 47 members, the US spokesperson Eileen Chamberlain Donahoe expressed concern about "the report's unbalanced language, tone and conclusions."¹⁰⁰

e. UNRWA

The Commissioner-General of UNRWA Filippo Grandi raised the subject of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon, amid controversy surrounding the issue of naturalization of Palestinian refugees there. He said that the question of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon is a very sensitive matter in light of the delicate political and economic balance in this country and the naturalization of Palestinians, which many Lebanese are concerned about, is not on the table. Nonetheless, Grandi called for granting the Palestinians more rights in Lebanon, including the right to work legally. Grandi acknowledged that the dire conditions in the camps contribute to instability.¹⁰¹

Israel complied with UN demands that it should pay reparations for the material damage caused by its military against UNRWA's properties in the GS, between the end of 2008 and early 2009, despite the fact that Israel refused to acknowledge its legal responsibility for what happened.

Martin Nesirky, UN Spokesperson for the Secretary-General, said that in accordance with arrangements reached between Israel and the UN, the government of Israel paid \$10.5 million to the international body "in respect of the losses sustained by the United Nations in the incidents that were investigated by the United Nations Headquarters Board of Inquiry," despite the fact that "Israel did not admit that it was legally responsible for any of the incidents that were investigated by the Board of Enquiry." However, the UN "maintained its position that Israel was legally responsible for the losses sustained in the seven incidents for which the Board of Enquiry had found Israel responsible."¹⁰²

f. World Health Organization

Washington voted against a resolution by the World Health Organization (WHO) which demanded Israel to "immediately put an end to the closure of the occupied Palestinian territory, particularly the closure of the crossing points of the occupied Gaza Strip," while the EU abstained.¹⁰³

g. International Atomic Energy Agency

In September 2010, the members of the IAEA rejected an Arab-backed resolution calling on Israel to join the NPT.

Washington justified the US rejection of the resolution and its efforts to block it by saying that the motion “could derail broader efforts to ban nuclear warheads in the Middle East and also damage fresh Israeli-Palestinian peace talks.”

US officials had warned that approval of the resolution would erase any chance of Israel attending an Egyptian-proposed conference in 2012 toward establishing a Middle East zone free of weapons of mass destruction.¹⁰⁴

2. Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations

Certain international governmental organizations remain less responsive to Palestinian ambitions, in particular those in which the US and the EU yield considerable influence. While Palestinian demands are met with more receptiveness by other international organizations, be they governmental or non-governmental, as evident from the following:

- a. The General Assembly of the Paris-based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) voted to invite Israel to become a member, despite Palestinian and Arab attempts to dissuade major OECD members from supporting Israel’s accession, or to encourage them to postpone it. Press reports suggested that Israel had benefited from American and European pressure to accelerate its formal accession OECD.¹⁰⁵
- b. In a report entitled “Suffocating: The Gaza Strip under Israeli Blockade,” Amnesty International called for the blockade of Gaza to be lifted immediately, deeming it to constitute unacceptable “collective punishment.”¹⁰⁶
- c. The Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), which represents more than 80 NGOs, called for the immediate opening of the border crossings with GS. The Resident Humanitarian Coordinator for the occupied Palestinian territories Maxwell Gaylard, said:

The continuing closure of the Gaza Strip is undermining the functioning of the health care system and putting at risk the health of 1.4 million people in Gaza. It is causing on-going deterioration in the social, economic and environmental determinants of health. It is hampering the provision of medical supplies and the training of health staff and it is preventing patients with serious medical conditions getting timely specialised treatment outside Gaza.¹⁰⁷



- d. Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated that “Israel’s ongoing blockade of Gaza has also created massive humanitarian need and prevented the reconstruction of schools, homes, and basic infrastructure,” and that the “Israeli blockade of Gaza has prevented basic reconstruction. The only things getting built in Gaza are desperation and despair.”¹⁰⁸
- e. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) criticized Israeli restrictions aimed at protecting the settlements, and said that such measures “have a severe impact on the lives of many Palestinians in the occupied West Bank.”¹⁰⁹
- f. The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), which includes 155 members from all around the world, condemned Israeli measures and violations in the WB and GS. A report issued by the Committee on the Human Rights of Parliamentarians also discussed the conditions of detained parliamentarians in several countries, including Palestinian parliamentarians held in Israeli prisons.¹¹⁰

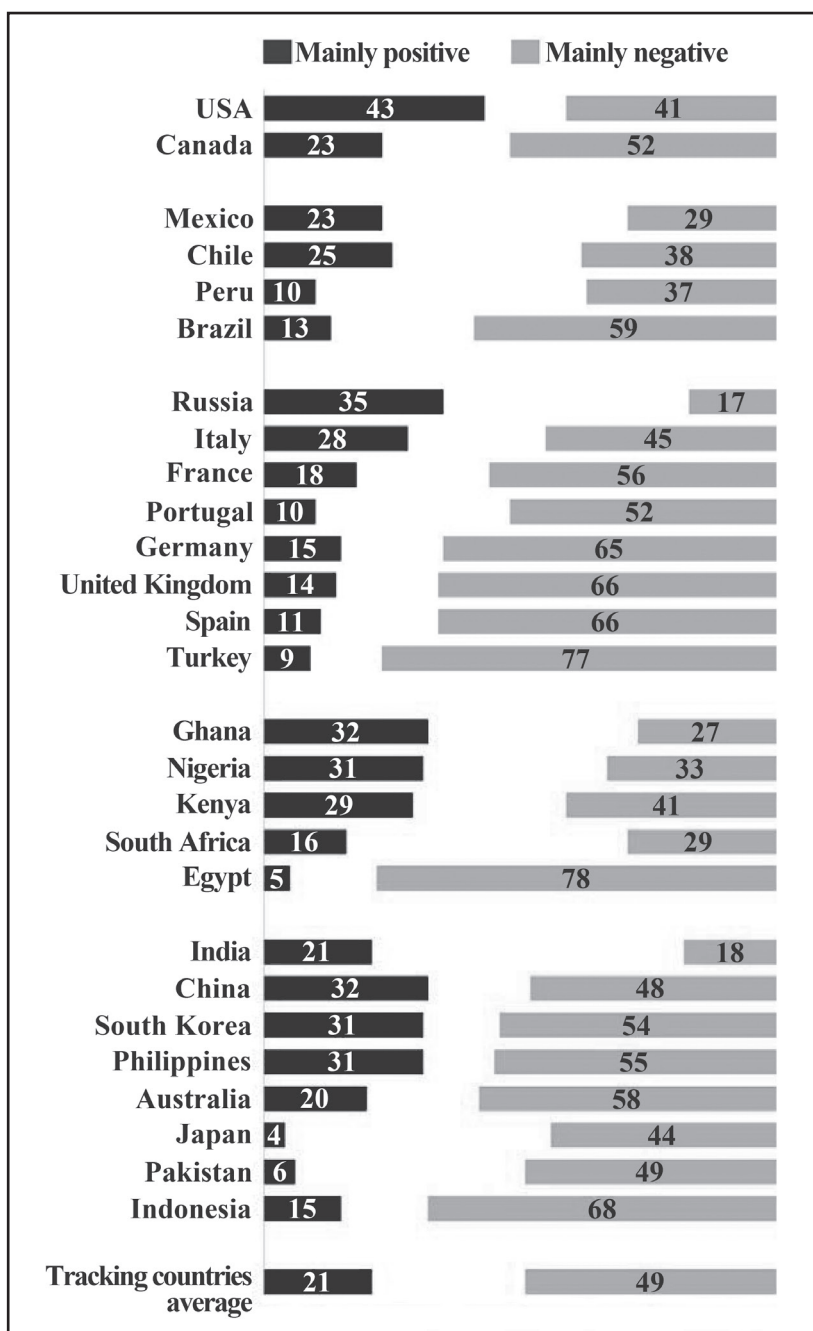
Eighth: International Public Opinion

Israel’s image during the past decade underwent a profound change in international public opinion. No doubt, the nature of Israeli policies provides the explanation for such changes, which encouraged Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to propose a major new public relations drive in Europe aimed at bolstering Israel’s flagging image. The Israeli public seems to be aware of these changes. In a poll conducted by Tel Aviv University in 2010, 56% of Israelis said they believed “the whole world is against us.”¹¹¹

International polls that tracked opinions about Israel’s influence in the world underscore the depth of these changes. A study conducted by the BBC, during the period 2/12/2010 and 4/2/2011, and included 28,619 people from 27 countries, shows that 49% gave Israel an unfavorable evaluation and 21% gave it a favorable one. Those who gave it a favorable one ranged from 4% in Japan to 43% in the US, while noting that the study only included one Arab country which is Egypt.

Of 27 countries polled in 2011, 22 viewed Israel negatively, two positively, and three are divided. Despite the static nature of the overall trend, views of individual countries have shifted in both directions. Perhaps the most interesting shift is the change in American opinion, as the US public is now divided rather than favorable in its rating.¹¹²

Views of Israel's Influence by Country 2011



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



Statements issued by a number of public bodies or figures betray a gradual decline in Israel's traditional image, as evident from the following examples:

1. Four female laureates of the Nobel Prize for Peace issued a statement that called for "divesting from companies that provide significant support for the Israeli military." The statement was signed by Mairead Maguire, Ireland's 1976 Nobel Peace Laureate, Rigoberta Menchu Tum, Guatemala's 1992 Nobel Peace Laureate, Jody Williams, US 1997 Nobel Peace Laureate, and Shirin Ebadi of Iran, the 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate.¹¹³
2. The American Association of Jurists (AAJ), refused to accept the Israeli account regarding the Freedom Flotilla attack, in which they claimed that the activists on board the ships were armed.¹¹⁴
3. The continued dispatching of international aid convoys to the GS, in particular by sea confirms international public opinion's rejection of the blockade of GS.
4. On the opposite end of the spectrum are the traditional pro-Israeli groups in American society; the Jewish lobby, Christian fundamentalists, and those associated with the military-industrial complex are now facing an opposing trend as slogans calling for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, are heard in certain unions, churches and universities.¹¹⁵

This trend is also accompanied by a creeping sense in American strategic thinking that the US-Israel strategic relationship is headed towards less intimacy. Here, it is enough to cite several reports and studies in 2010 that are related to the 2006 study *The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy*, by Stephen M. Walt and John J. Mearsheimer of Harvard University and the University of Chicago respectively.

According to the US researcher Anthony H. Cordesman, hardly anti-Israeli by any measurement, considered "the depth of America's moral commitment does not justify or excuse actions by an Israeli government that unnecessarily make Israel a strategic liability when it should remain an asset."¹¹⁶

Meanwhile, Paul Pillar, former intelligence analyst at the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and Steven Metz from the Strategic Studies Institute (SSI) of the US Army War College, both said that Israel's focus on its security considerations at the expense of those of other countries, including the US, has become a strategic problem. Martin Indyk, former US ambassador to Israel who is known for his links with the Israel lobby, agrees with this assessment, and believes that

Netanyahu is not eager to take the necessary steps to resolve the Palestinian question, and concludes that this is a strategic point of contention between the US and Israel.¹¹⁷

According to the Israeli newspaper *Maariv*, 54 US congressmen called the “Gaza 54” have become a source of ire for traditional Israel supporters in the US. The newspaper said that the time when US congressmen were pro-Israel by default has passed. The Israeli journalist Shmuel Rosner said in *Maariv* that 54 US Democrat members of Congress out of 435 is a small percentage, but is nonetheless a large enough bloc to cause astonishment, as they all signed a letter to President Barack Obama, asking him to put pressure on Israel to ease the blockade of GS.¹¹⁸

5. Members of the eminent international group, The Elders, asked the US and the rest of the international community to insist on an end to all Israeli settlement activity. Elders’ chair Desmond Tutu said, “Settlements are illegal; they contravene UN Resolution 242 and violate the Fourth Geneva Convention. The resumption of direct talks cannot be based on one side negotiating its way out of an important question of international law.”¹¹⁹

Meanwhile, former Irish President Mary Robinson refused to endorse the attempts to entice Israel into approving a temporary freeze on settlement activity, and said:

We heard repeatedly across the Arab world that the United States is no longer seen as an honest broker: Washington is perceived to be too close to Israel. This effort to do a short-term deal on settlements to restart direct talks is desperate and wrong. It betrays international law and the entire family of nations—not to mention the Palestinians.¹²⁰

Further, Gro Brundtland, former Prime Minister of Norway, said, “During the Oslo process in 1993 Israel promised to stop settlement expansion pending the outcome of final status negotiations. This deal sends us backwards instead of towards a sustainable long-term solution.” This is while former US President Jimmy Carter said that “The mistreatment of Palestinians in Gaza, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem is a gross violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This abuse cannot be condoned by the international community.”¹²¹

Meanwhile, the EU’s Trade Chief Karel De Gucht caused controversy among Jewish circles in Europe in September 2010, and was accused of anti-Semitism

when he spoke about the power that the Israel lobby has over US policy. He said, “It is not easy to have a rational discussion with a moderate Jew about what is happening in the Middle East.” However, the ensuing reactions prompted the EU to stress that De Gucht was making “personal comments.” He himself then apologized by asserting that “he did not mean ‘to cause offense or stigmatize the Jewish Community.’”¹²²

Conclusion

The most salient features of the international position of the Palestinian issue in 2010 can be identified as follows:

1. Strategic American-Israeli relations remain unshakable, especially in light of the lack of any Arab pressures on the US administration. On the contrary, there seems to be both Arab and American willingness to pressure the leadership of the PLO and the PA in Ramallah instead, to facilitate the settlement of the conflict. This is confirmed by President Obama’s backtracking on the majority of his pledges, whether to the Palestinians or Muslims. It must be noted here that the PA, and its security cooperation with the Israelis, do not make it susceptible to any more Arab pressure to go forward in the peace process, simply because the PA expresses a ceiling of demands that is in many cases lower than the Arab one.

Despite the fact that Turkish and Iranian efforts are restricting and undermining Israel’s movements in the region, and in spite of the fact that the US is undergoing a period of economic, military and political exhaustion, both at the regional and international levels, official Arab and Palestinian policies in general do not seem to be attempting to take advantage of these important shifts in 2011.

2. The Americans are very much worried about implications of the “Arab Spring” on their influence in the Arab world. With the fall, or the shaky position, of the “moderate” traditional allies of the US, it has to deal with the rising of the Islamist, the change of the strategic space around Israel and the emergence of a new map of the region, dominated by a supporting environment to the Palestinian issue and unfriendly to the American policies in the Middle East.

However, no signs of change on the political stance of the US toward the Palestinian issue, were seen in 2011 till writing this report.

3. Trends within the EU, and the policies of several other states such as Russia, China and certain Latin American countries (in particular those who declared their recognition of the Palestinian state in late 2010 such as Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador and Argentina, and later Uruguay), show that the option of the de facto state, adopted by the PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in light of the continued occupation, is the most likely future focus of European-American international efforts. This also means that Israel will further be encouraged to accelerate its settlement activity, in particular with the collapse of the idea of achieving a freeze on settlement activity, even if this freeze were to be temporary.
4. The growing negative image of Israel dictates that a great deal of care be given to the long-term effects of this shift. Due to misinformation in the media intended to improve Israel's image, no Israeli effort will be spared to attempt to continue to distort the image of the Palestinians.



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This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2010/11 is the sixth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. The Report discusses the developments of the Palestinian issue of this period, in an objective and comprehensive manner. The meticulous analytical reading of events tries also to foresee the future. This Report has become a basic reference in Palestinian studies, it is a must read for all those concerned.

An outstanding team of 14 academics and experts contributed to this Report. It is divided into eight chapters, that cover the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations, the Arab, Muslim and international stances toward the Palestinian issue. This Report focuses also on the issue of Jerusalem and the holy sites; whereas, the demographic and economic indicators are studied and analyzed in two separate chapters.

As a serious addition to Palestinian studies, those interested in this field, including specialists, experts, libraries of universities and research centers, should have their copies of this Report.

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