

The Palestinian Strategic Report
2012 – 2013
Ch.4



The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

2012 – 2013



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Introduction

Despite the dramatic regional changes in 2012–2013, where the map of regional powers influencing the Palestinian issue saw a reshaping, the Palestinian issue remained a priority across the Muslim world. Two regional players, Turkey and Iran, tried to play a more central role in setting a regional scene to match their interests, a matter that influenced the Palestinian issue.

In this chapter, we will review the major roles played by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) regarding the Palestinian issue during 2012–2013, in addition to two major Muslim countries, Iran and Turkey. We shall also take a closer look at public and official action in Pakistan and Malaysia, as well as Israeli economic relations with a number of Muslim countries.

First: The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Despite changing the name of the organization and its slogan in 2011—ratified in Astana, capital of Kazakhstan, based on consensus among the organization members at the Foreign Ministers Meeting—and exhibiting a slogan of cooperation among member countries, the OIC performance toward the Palestinian issue continued along the same lines with no significant change. During 2012–2013, the organization dealt with the Palestinian issue in a manner disproportionate with its international weight as the second largest international organization after the UN. At the same time, such a performance reflected the official bureaucracy of the largest Muslim organization, rendering it ineffective in impacting the state of affairs in the region and passing a rather “ceremonial” impression of its meetings and summits.

During 2012–2013, the OIC continued its international diplomatic support for the Palestinian issue, supporting PA efforts to acquire UN recognition for Palestine as a non-member observer state. In this context, OIC Secretary General Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu considered the decision to be a “historic achievement towards ending the Israeli occupation and the restoration of the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people,” and he added that this political victory “has irreversibly

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put on record the Palestinian people's right to statehood.”² The OIC Council of Foreign Ministers had called at its 39th session held in Djibouti on 15–17/11/2012 for all member states to support Palestinian efforts to expand international recognition of the Palestinian state based on the 4/6/1967 borders to all levels, including the UN.³

Regarding internal Palestinian relations, Ekmeleddin Ihsanoğlu welcomed the Doha Declaration signed on 6/2/2012 to reconcile Fatah with Hamas, and considered the move to be necessary to gain international support for the Palestinian issue.⁴

The organization continued to condemn Israeli violations against Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, and Ihsanoğlu slammed Israeli settlement building activities on the 1967 territories including East Jerusalem, asserting that it constituted a flagrant breach of international laws and resolutions. He added that such policies as well as the violations of holy sites are blatant assaults on the basic rights of the Palestinian people.⁵

During the 2012 Israeli war on GS, the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers appealed upon the UN Security Council “to assume its responsibility to safeguard international peace and security and... to take the necessary steps to bring an end immediately to Zionist aggression and raids currently being carried out against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip.” The Council observed that “these serious acts of aggression are being committed at a time when efforts are continuing to reach a military truce in Gaza Strip and accomplish a comprehensive Palestinian reconciliation.”⁶

In efforts to support the perseverance of the Palestinian people, the OIC Foreign Ministers Council held a conference at the Azerbaijani Capital Baku on 11/6/2013 dedicated to building an Islamic financial “safety net” in support of Palestine. They “committed to finance the plan and contribute to the construction of social projects and adequate infrastructure, pledging to start action on these commitments as soon as possible in coordination with the OIC General Secretariat and in close coordination with the State of Palestine.”⁷

² *OIC Journal*, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Issue No. 22, September-December 2012, pp. 4-5, http://issuu.com/oic-journal/docs/oic_journal_issue_22_english/1?e=2036438/1329853

³ OIC, Resolutions on the Cause of Palestine, the City of al-Quds al-Sharif, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, Adopted by the Thirty-Ninth Session of the Council of Foreign Ministers (Session of Solidarity for Sustainable Development), Djibouti, 15–17/11/2012, <http://www.oic-oci.org/>

⁴ Site of Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), 7/2/2012.

⁵ *Al-Youm al-Sabi'*, 26/12/2012; and *Alwafd*, 1/11/2013.

⁶ *OIC Journal*, Issue No. 22, September-December 2012, p. 21.

⁷ *OIC Journal*, Issue No. 24, April-July 2013, pp. 4-5, http://issuu.com/oic-journal/docs/oic_journal_issue24_2013_en/1?e=2036438/4470027



In 2013, Secretary General Ihsanoğlu visited the occupied Palestinian territories on 27/8/2013 as Mahmud ‘Abbas, head of the PA, awarded him the “al-Quds Star” decoration. During his stay, Ihsanoğlu visited Jerusalem and Hebron and “invited all Muslims to visit the besieged al-Aqsa Mosque, with the understanding that such an act, however modest, would offer comfort and support for the Jerusalemites and consolidate them in their steadfastness.”⁸

Second: Turkey

In the context of the Arab uprisings, Turkey redefined its regional role as the Syrian revolution had a major impact on Turkish regional policies due to the geopolitical platform which Turkey and Syria share. The Turkish “zero-problem” policy no longer ruled, as the country clearly took sides with the revolutions, negatively impacting its relations with the Syrian regime and the Egyptian regime following the coup against Morsi. These policies have also had repercussions on Turkey’s relations with Iran, KSA, and UAE.

In these circumstances, Turkish-Palestinian relations improved significantly, particularly after the Israeli assault on the Freedom Flotilla in 2010, and deterioration of Israeli-Turkish relations. Events in Syria have helped the improvement of Turkish-Hamas relations, with some Hamas leaders opting to take Turkey as their base following their exit from Syria and due to the holstility of the Egyptian authorities.

In all cases, Turkish foreign policy under the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi—AKP*), ruling since 2002, has sought to combine a number of measures that seem intertwined and at times even contradictory.

All the while, Turkey attempts to respond to the historic legacy, and the Turkish public’s desire to support the Palestinian issue, and observe the Islamic background of the ruling party. Simultaneously it deals with the Palestinian issue as a key for an active role in the Arab world and the Middle East. In addition, the AKP’s gradual approach enables it to win support and take political stances proportionate with its internal strength and robustness.

On another level, this policy took into consideration Turkish membership of the NATO alliance led by the US, and the ruling party’s desire to submit Turkey’s application for EU membership, thus making sure that certain limits are not transgressed to avoid any crisis with these powers. Concurrently, Turkey took into consideration its relations with Israel, in their economic, political and military forms, so that it could gradually decrease or dismantle the bilateral relations or even take stronger stances without disrupting the internal position of the ruling party or getting into direct confrontation with the West.

⁸ *OIC Journal*, Issue No. 25, September-December 2013, p. 11, http://issuu.com/oic-journal/docs/binder1_25_en/1?e=2036438/6097915

Relations with the Palestinian Side

Turkey's positive relations with the PA in Ramallah continued in 2012–2013. Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas visited Turkey on 29/2/2012, and met with Turkish officials to discuss Turkish-Palestinian relations, the peace process, as well as Palestinian reconciliation efforts and the developments of the "Arab Spring." On 4/6/2012, President 'Abbas visited Istanbul again, where he met separately with his Turkish counterpart 'Abdullah Gül and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, and participated in the World Economic Forum in Ankara. Over the two years, 'Abbas continued to update Erdoğan, through telephone communications, on the situation in the region, the peace process, Israeli violations in Jerusalem, particularly those related to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and Israeli attacks and violations against the Palestinian people and their property including those carried out by settlers.

In October 2013, a delegation of Palestinian businessmen participated in the Turkish business conference "The Role of Trade for the Development of Palestinian Economy," and both the National Economy Minister Jawad Nagi and his Turkish counterpart Zafer Caglayan participated at the conference. According to the head of the Palestinian Businessmen Association in GS Ali al-Hayek, an agreement was made to develop and enhance economic and commercial cooperation, increase the Palestinian-Turkish trade volume, and promote business partnership in different economic fields. The conference discussed signing two agreements related to investment and preventing double taxation, in addition to discussing the activation of the free trade agreement and promoting Palestinian products' entrance into the Turkish market.

On 20/11/2013, Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah met the Turkish envoy in Ramallah Şakir Özkan Torunlar, and signed an agreement to pay \$9.7 million in compensation to the owners of the lands in the industrial zone in Jenin. Hamdallah expressed his gratitude for Turkish keenness to end the divisions, work toward holding elections and resume the Palestinian democratic process. In November 2013, Özkan met Minister of Planning Muhammad Abu Ramadan discussing furthering cooperation between the two sides.

A Turkish delegation of the Union of Municipalities of Turkey, and the United Cities and the Local Government, Middle East and West Asia Section (UCLG-MEWA), visited WB during August 2013 in coordination with the Association of Palestinian Local Authorities. The visit was aimed at enhancing bilateral relations and exchanging expertise between the Turkish and Palestinian municipalities through signing twinning agreements.

On the ground, Turkey implemented several projects in 2012 and 2013, in Jerusalem, Hebron, Gaza, Tulkarm, Nablus, Tubas and other cities, with total Turkish support reaching around \$4 million in 2013.



On another level, Erdoğan's government adopted a positive stance toward Hamas, and had no reservations in dealing with its caretaker government. As President Gül reiterated on 12/5/2010, "The Hamas side won the elections in Gaza and so cannot be ignored."⁹ Turkey continued to defend Hamas as a political non-terrorist organization, with Erdoğan asserting that "Hamas is a resistance group fighting to defend their land. They won the elections in Palestine... I also told these [things] to U.S. officials. I don't accept Hamas as a terrorist organization."¹⁰ Erdoğan's government adopted an official stance calling for dialogue with Hamas and including it in the political and diplomatic process in order to reach a solution to the Palestinian issue. Turkey viewed the involvement of all active Palestinian powers, including Hamas who won the majority of parliamentary seats, as a condition for the success of Turkish mediation between Palestinians and Israel.

Meanwhile, Turkey became the ground for many Islamic activities and events supporting the Palestinian people, while Israel was condemned for "collective punishment," and Turkey constantly called for breaking the inhumane siege of GS. It viewed defending GS, condemning the siege, and calls to allow assistance into the Strip as an indirect support for Hamas, which has controlled the Strip since 2007.

The Turkish-Hamas relationship developed significantly during 2012–2013, with recurrent meetings being held. Parallel stances regarding the Arab uprisings as well as continued tensions in Turkish-Israeli relations have further developed Turkish-Hamas relations. Early in 2012, Prime Minister Haniyyah visited Turkey and met Turkish officials and leaders of all Turkish parties without any exception. In a noteworthy statement, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu observed that Haniyyah's visit is proof that the road to Palestine passes through Turkey.¹¹ Haniyyah's subsequent tour in the region, 30/1–16/2/2012, that included Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Iran, UAE and Egypt, sent a message that Hamas wished to be seen as an independent movement, free of exclusive allegiance to any side.

On 18/3/2012, Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas's political bureau, started a regional tour, where he met Turkish President 'Abdullah Gül and updated him on the latest developments of the Palestinian issue, the conditions of the Palestinian people, hostile Israeli practices, as well as the situation in Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the holy sites and Judaization process. On 21/4/2012, Mish'al met Davutoğlu in the Qatari capital Doha, and discussed the Arab-Israeli conflict and the latest developments on the Palestinian scene, including Palestinian national reconciliation.

⁹ *Today's Zaman* newspaper, Turkey, 14/5/2010, <http://www.todayszaman.com/news-210171-100-israel-rejects-turkish-russian-call-on-engaging-hamas.html>

¹⁰ Site of TurkishPress.com, 4/6/2010, <http://www.turkishpress.com/news/352467/>

¹¹ *Zaman* newspaper, Istanbul, 6/1/2012. (in Turkish)

Turkish diplomacy was considerably active in its support for Hamas and GS during the Israeli war, 14–21/11/2012, applying pressure in regional and international venues, and in cooperation with Egypt and Qatar, to end the attack and lift the siege. As a result, the GS received broad official and public support, thus forcing the Israelis to comply with the resistance’s conditions to end the assault, which Israelis dubbed Operation Pillar of Defense, and Hamas dubbed Operation Stones of Baked Clay.

Erdoğan arrived in Egypt on 17/11/2012 as Hamas and Israel engaged in a fervent war, and met Egyptian President Muhammad Morsi, in addition to the Prince of Qatar and Khalid Mish‘al, who demanded ending the war and the siege. Such government diplomatic initiatives were active regionally and internationally to support the demands of the resistance. Erdoğan accused Israel of “ethnic cleansing by ignoring peace in this region and violating international law,” stating that it is “occupying the Palestinian territories step by step.” He added, “Israel will answer for the innocent blood it has shed so far,” and said the UN had “turned a blind eye” on Israeli attacks against Palestinians; referring to the UN failure to impose sanctions on Israel despite the resolutions issued against it.¹²

Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu visited Gaza during the Israeli attack on 20/11/2012 along with a delegation of Arab foreign ministers. During the visit, he stated that Turkey would continue to support the Palestinian people in GS, WB and Jerusalem, to end the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital Jerusalem. He addressed Palestinians in GS, “Your pain is our pain,” he declared. “Your destiny is our destiny and your future is our future.”¹³ The visit saw a number of symbolic expressions such as Davutoğlu kissing the hand of the mother of Ahmad Ja‘bari, deputy commander of the Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades, whose assassination by Israel was the spark to the 2012 Israeli war.¹⁴ In another moving scene, Davutoğlu burst into tears at al-Shifa’ hospital in GS, when he saw the killed and wounded there.¹⁵

A Hamas delegation headed by Khalid Mish‘al and Isma‘il Haniyyah visited Turkey and met Prime Minister Erdoğan on 18/6/2013 to discuss the major Palestinian issues. The Turkish government pledged to work on ending Israeli settlement activities in the WB, oppose the Judaization of Jerusalem, and work on lifting the GS siege, while promoting Palestinian reconciliation. Meanwhile, Erdoğan reaffirmed his wish to visit GS, mentioning that he may pay a surprise visit to the Strip at any time, and clarifying that his visit was delayed due to incidents in his country (the Taksim protests).

¹² Aljazeera.net, 21/11/2012,

<http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2012/11/20121120212739934900.html> (in English)

¹³ Will the Ceasefire Lead to Peace?, *The Economist* newspaper, London, 24/11/2012,

<http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21567140-after-week-long-war-between-israel-and-palestinians-temporary-cessation>

¹⁴ *Asharq Alawsat*, 21/11/2012.

¹⁵ *Assafir*, 21/11/2012.



On other levels, Turkish support to GS continued in different forms. The President of the Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency (TIKA) Serdar Çam met the mayors of GS municipalities on 28/3/2012 to take a closer look at the suffering caused by the Israeli siege. He also examined a number of important strategic projects funded previously by the Turkish government. Furthermore, the Interior Minister Fathi Hammad met his Turkish counterpart in Turkey in April 2013, and the Minister of Justice ‘Atallah Abu al-Sabah visited Turkey in June 2013 and discussed with his Turkish counterpart Sadullah Ergin the means of joint cooperation in the judiciary sector and supporting the Palestinian issue with regards to Israeli violations and ways to press international charges against Israeli crimes.

The medical authorities in GS received a medical delegation from the Filbel White Hands Association in April 2012, who performed the largest possible number of surgeries during one week. In January 2013, the GS Ministry of Health received Cengiz Ogo Togo, Aid Program Coordinator and Communications Officer at the Turkish Kimse Yok Mu organization, where they discussed the projects implemented by the organization for the ministry. The GS Minister of Health Mufid al-Mukhalalati visited wounded Palestinians in Turkish hospitals in May 2013. Moreover, the GS Ministry of Health signed a memorandum of understanding with the Turkish Red Crescent on 1/7/2013 to implement a resumption of furnishing and equipping the Shuhada al-Aqsa Hospital in Deir al-Balah, funded by the Program of the Gulf Cooperation Council for the Reconstruction of Gaza and managed by the Islamic Development Bank.

Relations with Israel

The Israeli attack on Freedom Flotilla at dawn on 31/5/2010, leading to the death of nine Turks on board, marked a sharp downturn in Turkish-Israeli relations. The incident triggered indignant official and public Turkish reactions toward Israel, not to mention international reactions, too. Prime Minister Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu drummed up political and media sentiments against Israel, with confirmations from Erdoğan that “Palestine is our problem, it has never been removed even for a day from our agenda,”¹⁶ and “Jerusalem is the apple of the eye of each and every Muslim.”¹⁷ On 10/5/2010 Erdoğan declared even more fervently that “If Jerusalem burns, the Middle East burns. If Jerusalem burns, the world burns.”¹⁸

¹⁶ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 7/3/2010, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3858980,00.html>

¹⁷ *Hürriyet* newspaper, Turkey, 28/3/2010, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/default.aspx?pageid=438&n=israel-stand-on-united-jerusalem-madness-turkish-pm-2010-03-28>

¹⁸ Site of Xinhua News Agency, 11/5/2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2010-05/11/c_13286314.htm

Despite all efforts to reach a settlement that would satisfy both parties, Israel continued to reject Turkish demands for an apology, and a lift the GS siege, while at the same time it showed willingness to compensate the families of the nine Turks who died in the Israeli attack.

The report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident, known as Palmer Report aroused angry responses from the Turkish side. The report, prepared by a pro-Israel majority, stated that Israel gave "an excessive reaction to the situation" but never demanded that Israel apologise, even saying that "the naval blockade was imposed as a legitimate security measure in order to prevent weapons from entering Gaza by sea and its implementation complied with the requirements of international law." It, however, urged Israel to provide financial compensation to the families of the victims. On 2/9/2011, i.e., one day following the publication of the Palmer Report in *The New York Times*,¹⁹ Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu pronounced the beginning of a new phase of relations with Israel as Turkey declared a number of measures against Tel Aviv:²⁰

1. Downgrading diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel to the Second Secretary level. All personnel starting with the Ambassador above the Second Secretary level, will return to their countries.
2. Suspending all military agreements between Turkey and Israel.
3. "Turkey will take whatever measures it deems necessary in order to ensure the freedom of navigation in the Eastern Mediterranean."
4. "Turkey does not recognize the blockade imposed on Gaza by Israel."
5. Turkey "will extend all possible support to Turkish and foreign victims of Israel's attack in their initiatives to seek their rights before courts."

Moreover, Turkish Prime Minister Erdoğan declared further escalation by "suspending all trade relations related with defence" and labelling it a "spoiled child." Davutoğlu had stated in mid-December 2011 that Turkey's recent policies in the Middle East "have made Israel kneel down" in front of Turkey and isolated the Israeli state in the region.²¹

¹⁹ Report of the Secretary-General's Panel of Inquiry on the 31 May 2010 Flotilla Incident, site of United Nations (UN), September 2011, http://www.un.org/News/dh/infocus/middle_east/Gaza_Flotilla_Panel_Report.pdf; and *The New York Times*, 1/9/2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/02/world/middleeast/02flotilla.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

²⁰ Press statement by H.E. Mr. Ahmet Davutoğlu, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey, Regarding Turkish-Israeli relations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey, 2/9/2011, http://www.mfa.gov.tr/press-statement-by-h_e_-mr_-ahmet-davutoglu_-minister-of-foreign-affairs-of-the-republic-of-turkey_-regarding-turkish-israeli-re.en.mfa

²¹ *Financial Times* newspaper, London, 6/9/2011, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/0b159cb8-d8a2-11e0-9089-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3giCSBPAG>; and *Today's Zaman*, 15/12/2011, http://www.todayszaman.com/diplomacy_fm-davutoglu-turkeys-policies-made-israel-kneel-down_265810.html



The Hamas movement welcomed the Turkish measures, considering them a natural reaction to the Israeli crime against the Mavi Marmara vessel and to Israel's consistent reluctance to bear the responsibilities for their crime and lift the siege on Gaza. Similarly, Hamas declared its rejection of the Palmer Report and described it as "unfair and unbalanced."²²

Given the Turkish persistence, and in view of the changes in the region, Israel was obliged to apologise to Turkey on 22/3/2013 for the assault the Mavi Marmara. Erdoğan accepted Netanyahu's apology. In a phone call Netanyahu claimed that "the tragic consequences of the Mavi Marmara flotilla were unintentional, and Israel regrets any injury or loss of life," and also "agreed to complete an agreement to provide compensation to the families of the victims," and added that "Israel had removed a number of restrictions upon the movement of citizens and goods in all the Palestinian territories, including the Gaza Strip." Then, the two agreed to normalize relations between their countries, and to return the Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv and the Turkish ambassador to Ankara. Erdoğan added that his country would await concrete actions from Israel and would take practical steps during this stage. Netanyahu declared that the unravelling situation in Syria, and fears of al-Qaeda-affiliated militant groups resorting to the use of chemical weapons were the catalysts for such an apology in addition to the normalisation of Israeli-Turkish relations.²³

Until the end of 2013, the general Turkish stance was dissatisfaction with Israeli failure to fulfil its commitments. Turkish President Abdullah Gül clarified in an interview with Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 6/10/2013 that "Israel apologized too late [and] some of our expectations were not yet met." A senior diplomatic advisor in Ankara told the same newspaper that "even though Israel agreed to pay, an agreement still has not been reached regarding how the payment will be implemented." It is noteworthy that another condition for the normalization of relations was not fulfilled, i.e., the removal of the Israeli blockade on GS. Hence, a breakthrough is not expected in the near future.²⁴

Economic Relations Between Turkey and Israel

The pragmatic Turkish trade relations under the AKP with Israel were not affected significantly by Turkey's tendency to improve relations with the Arab and Muslim world, support the Palestinian issue and develop its relations with Hamas. Nor were they impacted by the huge political crisis on 31/5/2010 due to the Mavi Marmara assault.

²² *Al-Hayat*, 3/9/2011.

²³ *Haaretz*, 22/3/2013, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/netanyahu-phones-erdogan-to-apologize-for-deaths-of-turkish-citizens-on-gaza-flotilla.premium-1.511394>; and Aljazeera.net, 23/3/2013.

²⁴ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 6/10/2013, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4437193,00.html>

In general, the Turkish administration managed its trade relations with Israel mostly independently from its political stances and procedures. The apparent contradiction between the tense political relations and improved trade relations between the two sides may be attributed to the existence of interest networks that manage their relations separately from political relations. These render the AKP government unable to impose its power and policies, especially in an open secular and economic environment that attempts to adhere to EU standards of trade relations. In addition, the Turkish army's need for Israeli products and military technology is another factor impacting the trade between the two countries.

Thus, despite the escalating political tension, the trade volume between the two countries increased in 2011 by approximately 29.3% according to both Turkish and Israeli official statistics. However, official Turkish statistics, show generally higher trade indications than Israeli data, showing no significant changes in 2010, the year in which the Israeli attack took place, nor the following year. A 9.2% decrease can be seen in 2012, but was soon to recover in 2013 when trade volume soared by 25.4% compared to 2012, and 13.9% compared to 2011 (see table 1/4).

Israeli official reports show a decrease in trade volume by 13% in 2012 compared with 2011. Once again this rate recovered in 2013 with the volume increasing by 38.6% compared to 2012 and 20.6% compared to 2011 (see table 1/4).

These statistics confirm the pragmatic approach adopted by the two sides, as Turkey became the eighth commercial partner for Israel globally with a trade volume of \$5 billion in 2013.

Table 1/4: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2010–2013 (\$ million)²⁵

Year	Turkish exports to Israel		Turkish imports from Israel		Trade volume	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2013	2,649.8	2,354.1	2,417.9	2,503.5	5,067.7	4,857.6
2012	2,329.5	2,082.7	1,710.4	1,421.4	4,039.9	3,504.1
2011	2,391.1	2,171.1	2,057.3	1,855.7	4,448.4	4,026.8
2010	2,080.1	1,800.1	1,359.6	1,310.7	3,439.7	3,110.8

²⁵ See CBS, <http://www1.cbs.gov.il/publications14/yarhon0214/pdf/h8.pdf>; and Foreign Trade By Countries, Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046



Summary

Despite the official and public Turkish sympathy with the Palestinian issue, it's difficult for Turkey to be part of the structure of Arab policies in the region and to follow at the same time overt hostile policies toward Israel. Hence, given the current circumstances, it is not expected that Turkish-Israeli relations will drop to a complete breakdown. Turkey will continue its “calculated support” for Palestine and the Hamas Movement, demands to lift the siege on GS, and will resume its positive relations with the PA in Ramallah. At the same time, Turkey will avoid overt support for the Palestinian resistance, or stepping into a blatant support for western powers and Israel. Instead, it will opt for playing in “the grey area,” gradually raising the ceiling to the extent that it solidifies its internal, regional and international situation.

The official Turkish political stance remains under the Arab peace initiative ceiling, i.e., it calls for negotiations, recognition and normal relations, should Israel agree to retreat to the 1967 borders. In that sense, the Turkish disagreement with Israel has not changed Turkey's core European and Atlantic values regarding the existence of Israel, the necessity of recognising it, and the option of negotiations to reach peace with it.

The Arab revolutions, sparked in early 2011 in Tunisia and Egypt, and the stirring similar movements in other Arab states, which reinforced the impact of the Turkish role, brought no change to this specific Turkish strategy. The massive Turkish-Israeli trade volume highlights this pragmatic Turkish approach, which takes into account a broad and interrelated number of calculations that Turkey has skilfully utilised so far.

Third: Iran

For the third year in a row, the repercussions of the Arab uprisings have overwhelmed the Arab and regional scene. The lack of stability was the most prominent feature of this scene, forcing new governments to focus on internal issues like elections, the constitution, and the forming of cabinets.

The political, security, and strategic developments on the regional and international level led all calculations of profit and loss to revolve around these developments. They made the Palestinian issue and risks surrounding it—like Israel's Judaization plans and the forced displacement (Praver Plan)—no more of a priority. Instead, the attention was directed toward issues like the US airstrikes on Syria and the consequent strategic changes in the regional balances of power, or the impact of the Iranian-Western-American understanding over the nuclear program, on the countries of the region, their interests and alliances. Attention was particularly fixed on the future of Egypt following the coup against President Morsi and deposing the MB movement, taking Egypt to a stage

of instability on a political and security level. These events did not only reflect on GS, but on the relation between the new regime and Hamas, as well as on the Egyptian-sponsored inter-Palestinian reconciliation project.

The rising sectarian tensions in many countries of the region caused conflict to swerve significantly, whereas attention for Palestine receded in much of the literature, media discourse, speeches and the stances of movements and organizations including some political and Islamic figures. However, despite the above stated developments, the Israeli attack on GS at the end of 2012 brought Palestine back as a priority, albeit temporarily, in the Arab and Islamic worlds.

Like the rest of the Muslim and Arab countries, Iran continued to support the Palestinian issue. Yet, the idiosyncratic Iranian feature was that the Iranian leadership made a link between what they saw as an “Islamic awakening” (the Arab uprisings) and the Palestinian issue. Over the last two years, 2012–2013, in all the international conferences on this “awakening,” which were held in Iran, the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei asserted that the Palestinian issue came first. As he received state officials and ambassadors of Muslim countries on the Islamic occasion of Eid al-Fitr on 19/8/2012, he restated that “The issue of holy Quds and oppressed Palestine is... at the heart of the events that are taking place in the Middle East.” And added, “Thanks to Islamic Awakening, today the issue of Palestine has become the main issue of the world of Islam once again. You should not let this distinction and this advantage disappear and be concealed under the machinations and plots of the enemies of Muslims and the Islamic Ummah.”²⁶

At the international conference on “Women and Islamic Awakening,” Khamenei “referred to the failed efforts by the west to discourage the Islamic Republic from supporting the Palestinian nation and stressed that the Islamic Republic would continue supporting the Palestinian nation and other Muslim nations.”²⁷ Additionally, he explained at the Inauguration of Islamic Awakening and Ulama Conference, on 29/4/2013, that “one of the standards for judging whether Islamic Awakening movements are on the right path is the positions they adopt on the issue of Palestine.”²⁸

²⁶ Supreme Leader’s Speech to Government Officials and Ambassadors of Islamic Countries, site of The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 19/8/2012,

http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1666&Itemid=4

²⁷ Supreme Leader Meets Participants of International Conference on Women and Islamic Awakening, The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 11/7/2012,

http://english.khamenei.ir/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1650

²⁸ Supreme Leader's Speech at Inauguration of Islamic Awakening and Ulama Conference, The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 29/4/2013,

http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1772&Itemid=4



In his meeting with the head of the resigned Palestinian government Isma‘il Haniyyah on 12/2/2012, Khamenei stated that “recent victories in Palestine were partially responsible for the Islamic awakening in the region.”²⁹

On different occasions, other Islamic Republic officials asserted these stances and the priority given to the Palestinian issue. Iranian senior advisor to the Supreme Leader on international affairs and former Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati said, “The Islamic Awakening movement is, in fact, a reaction to governments’ ignorance of countries’ national dignity and independence, and to their dependence on the superpowers as well as their indifference to the issues of the Muslim world, especially Palestine.”³⁰ During his reception of the Palestinian leader Mahmud al-Zahhar, Saeed Jalili, Secretary of Iran’s Supreme National Security Council, expressed the view that “support for Palestine and the opposition to the Zionist regime... [are] the common goals of the Islamic Awakening movement.”³¹

The Non-Aligned Movement Summit

During this summit, Iran made sure to show their keenness for considering the Palestinian issue a priority. Hence, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi stressed that “Iran did its best to make the summit adopt powerful stances on Palestine and the final result of those efforts were quite favorable and materialized in the summit’s statement on Palestine.”³²

Although in reality the Tehran 16th Summit of the Non-Aligned Movement repeated the statements formerly adopted and called for in the previous summits regarding the core values of the Palestinian issue, this time the summit issued three statements largely focused on the Palestinian issue:

The first statement reaffirmed the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, the need to end the Israeli occupation, the independence of the Palestinian state, its capital being Jerusalem, and Palestinian refugees’ right to return according to UN resolution 194. The second statement reiterated supporting the Palestinian people to obtain their legitimate rights under the PLO umbrella, the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, as well as supporting the efforts of the Palestinian reconciliation based on the Cairo and Doha agreements.

²⁹ *The Jerusalem Post*, 12/2/2012, <http://www.jpost.com/Iranian-Threat/News/Khamenei-Palestine-Islamic-cause>

³⁰ Site of Iran Daily Brief (IDB), 11/7/2012, <http://www.irandailybrief.com/2012/07/11/leaders-international-affairs-advisor-revival-of-islamic-principles-solution-to-all-problems/#sthash.nBCqy8PM.jqm69g0U.dpuf>

³¹ Site of Press TV, Tehran, 6/9/2012, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/09/06/260214/jalili-meets-with-top-hamas-official/>

³² Press TV, 8/9/2012, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/09/08/260498/islamic-awakening-backs-palestine/>

The permanent representatives committee at the UN was assigned to help the Palestinian people achieve these goals including the upgrade to UN non-member status.

The third statement, coming as the first of its kind at the Non-Aligned summit, revolved around solidarity with prisoners, demanding their immediate release from Israeli prisons, and taking the necessary steps to this end at international venues.³³

UN Recognition of Palestine

The second event was the recognition of Palestine as a UN non-member observer state, which gained the support of Iran whose Foreign Ministry spokesman Ramin Mehmanparast affirmed that “This achievement is a good opportunity to restore the rights of Palestinians.”³⁴

Two observations can be recorded regarding the Iranian stance to this incident. Firstly, Iran considered this recognition “the first step for Palestinians towards gaining complete sovereignty over their occupied lands, returning to their homeland and continuing resistance against the illegitimate regime of Israel,” according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman.³⁵ This means that Iran, contrary to the view propagated by many who saw the recognition as a start to the diplomatic path and end of resistance, linked the international recognition to the continuation of the resistance rather than its end.

The second observation relates to the shift in the Iranian stance toward this issue, since the Islamic Republic has traditionally shown reservations toward any recognition of Palestine as a state side by side with the Israeli state. In this regard, at the “Fifth International Conference on Palestinian Intifada” held in Tehran in early October 2011, the Iranian Supreme Leader explicitly stated that “Any plan to divide Palestine is completely unacceptable,” and that the “two-state idea which has been presented in the self-righteous clothing of ‘recognizing the Palestinian government as a member of the United Nations’ is nothing but giving in to Zionists’ demands—namely, ‘recognizing the Zionist government in Palestinian lands.’”³⁶

³³ 16th Summit of Heads of State or Government of the Non-Aligned Movement, Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran, 26–31/8/2012, site of The Non-Aligned Movement (CoB-NAM), [http://namiran.org/Files/16thSummit/FinalDocument\(NAM2012-Doc.1-Rev.2\).pdf](http://namiran.org/Files/16thSummit/FinalDocument(NAM2012-Doc.1-Rev.2).pdf)

³⁴ Press TV, 30/11/2012, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2012/11/30/275451/palestine-urged-to-pursue-israeli-crimes/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ayatollah Khamenei Addresses International Conference on Palestinian Intifada, site of Iran Review, 4/10/2011, http://www.iranreview.org/content/Documents/Ayatollah_Khamenei_Addresses_International_Conference_on_Palestinian_Intifada.htm



In 2013, Arab and Muslim countries were still occupied with their internal burdens, while the Palestinian issue witnessed a number of variables. The repercussions of the Gaza war internally and on relations between Iran and Hamas Movement, the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations, the latest updates of the Palestinian reconciliation project, in addition to the reaffirmed stances of Iranian officials toward the Palestinian issue.

During this year, two major incidents took place: the election of Hassan Rouhani as Iranian president, and the Iranian-Western understanding regarding its nuclear program. The two incidents raised questions concerning the continuation of former Iranian policies toward the Palestinian issue. Some observers anticipated that the move of president's seat from conservatives to reformists would bring a policy change, since reformists have traditionally been more accepting of political solutions to this issue. Following his election, however, Rouhani's reactions to some Israeli threats demonstrated that Iranian stances remain the same regarding the illegitimacy of the Israeli state and the willingness to confront it in case the latter considered waging any war against Iran.

President Rouhani did not follow Ahmadinejad's methods or repeat his stances regarding several issues like the "holocaust," which Rouhani considered a "condemnable" crime according to CNN interview.³⁷ However, he explained that "this does not mean that, on the other hand, you can say Nazis committed crimes against a group; now, therefore, they must usurp the land of another group and occupy it. This, too, is an act that should be condemned."³⁸ Notwithstanding this, Iranian official sources denied that Rouhani mentioned the term "holocaust" and stated that the president generally condemned all crimes committed against humanity.³⁹

Repercussions of the War on GS and Relations with Hamas

The Israeli attack on GS at the end of 2012 resulted in the great moral victory achieved by the Palestinian resistance and in preventing the enemy from achieving its military and security targets. However, these ramifications raised questions about Hamas relations with Iran and the new Egyptian regime. A ceasefire was declared under direct Egyptian auspices during the President Morsi term, and Iran unveiled its military support for Hamas and the role of Iranian weaponry in "achieving victory in Gaza."

³⁷ Anderson Cooper 360 Degrees, CNN, 25/9/2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/1309/25/acd.02.html>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Exclusive: CNN Fabricates Iranian President's Remarks about Holocaust, site of Fars News Agency, 25/9/2013, <http://english.farsnews.com/newstext.aspx?nn=13920703001316>

At the Pakistani capital Islamabad, for instance, Iranian Parliament Speaker Ali Larijani said in his word before the students of Quaid-i-Azam University that “We do not conceal our support of Palestine,” and added, “We have said that Zionist regime is a cancerous tumor and we help the Palestinian people, even by supplying them weapons. And during the 8-day war, the people of Gaza defended themselves with these helps and slapped the Zionists in the face.”⁴⁰

Both Iran and Hamas avoided discussing the disagreement between them due to divergent policies and stances regarding events in Syria. Despite this no-longer suppressible difference, Iranian statements and stances asserted the continued communication between the two sides. Indeed, any official statement about differences were not released until the communication between the two sides had resumed. Thus, statements by the Iranian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Abbas Araqchi came to declare that “(Iran's) friendly relations with the movement stays strong despite some misunderstandings on regional issues, which are on the way of being resolved.”⁴¹

Highlighting the deteriorating and receding relations between Hamas and Iran, Hamas leader and member of the political bureau Mahmud al-Zahhar asserted that “Relations between Hamas and Iran have resumed,” and added that the ties had been “affected by the Syria situation, and Hamas has withdrawn from Syria so that it can't be identified with this or that side,” and added, “We've confirmed we are not interfering in the Syrian case, or in any other Arab country.” As for the relations with Iran he explained, “Our relations with Iran were not cut, and we don't wish to cut ties with any Arab countries either, even those that are fighting against us.”⁴²

The keenness to restore relations between Iran and Hamas, led Muhammad Nasr, member of the Hamas political bureau, to pay a visit to Iran. On this, Yusuf Rizqah, political advisor to Prime Minister Isma‘il Haniyyah, commented that the causes uniting Hamas and Iran are those of *al-Quds* and liberation, and they are factors that lead to unification rather than disagreement. He added that the common factors with Iran are many. For one, Iran faces American and Israeli threats that endanger them, as is the case with Hamas. In addition, Rizqah pointed out that Hamas did not interfere with Iranian internal issues and clarified that even regarding the Syrian issue, Hamas did not interfere but only expressed a stance supporting the Syrian people's right to freedom.⁴³

⁴⁰ Site of al-Alam News Network, 12/2/2013, <http://en.alalam.ir/news/1445330>

⁴¹ Press TV, 23/7/2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/23/315179/eu-move-on-hezbollah-biased-iran/>

⁴² Arutz Sheva 7, 9/12/2013, <http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/174977#.VNrysiy4FFM>

⁴³ *Al-Hayat*, 11/10/2013.



Moreover, Haniyyah asserted that they support Egypt and cannot dispense with Syria, Iran and all those who support Palestine.⁴⁴ Musa Abu Marzuq, member of the Hamas political bureau, summarized in his article “The Hamas Deadlock and National Values,” in *al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, the stance towards Syria and the resulting disagreements with Iran. He wrote that Hamas paid an expensive price for not interfering with the internal Syrian issue, and the price was leaving Syria, which was the most important arena for the movement. He added that Syrian events had their impact on the Hamas-Iran relations, and that Hamas tried to put aside their different stances, and maintain the levels of bilateral relations. Yet, he acknowledged that relations were affected and that they are trying to restore the eroded parts, for this is a way to serve the Palestinian people and cause.⁴⁵

The year 2013 ended without Iran-Hamas relations being restored. The rift between the two remained regarding the stance towards the Arab revolutions, specifically Syria, and was reflected in the feeble political communication and huge decline in Iranian financial and logistical support to Hamas. Nevertheless, both sides avoided a complete breakdown, and attempts continued to restore relations although slowly and gradually, particularly as the two sides were aware that resistance unites them, and the harsh siege and attempts to defeat Hamas in GS would significantly harm the whole resistance path should these attempts succeed. In view of this, restored relations are anticipated in the near future particularly in case of progress in the political settlement in Syria, or if Israel decides to wage new attacks on the Palestinian people in Gaza.

Palestinian-Israeli Negotiations

After a three-year freeze, and around 20 visits by US Secretary of State John Kerry, Palestinian-Israeli negotiations were resumed at the end of July 2013. It was noted that the resumption of negotiations came approximately three years after the “Arab Spring” began, which left the Arab countries unstable, and with a diminishing influence, particularly Egypt, influential among Arab countries and with an historical influence on the Palestinian issue.

The UN and most countries welcomed these negotiations, unlike Iran who was the only country to reject and condemn them, and called for “asserting the rights of Palestinians.” Instead of welcoming the move, Iran expressed its objection to the resumption of US-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian talks, anticipating that Israel would never agree to withdraw from the occupied WB. Spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Abbas Araqchi said that “Tehran ‘along with Palestinian groups expresses its opposition to the proposed plan and it's certain that the occupying Zionist regime will utterly not agree to withdraw from the

⁴⁴ Site of al-Mayadeen Channel, 19/12/2013, <http://www.almayadeen.net/>

⁴⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18/12/2013.

occupied lands.” Araqchi added that “Past experience shows that the occupying Zionist regime is basically not ready to pay the price for peace since war mongering and occupation lie at its very core.” Iran rules out a two-state solution, as Araqchi affirmed that the conclusive solution to the issue was “the end of occupation... self-determination for the Palestinians, the return of all refugees to their ancestral land, and the creation of an integrated Palestine with Al-Quds (Jerusalem) as its capital.”⁴⁶

Shura Council Speaker Ali Larijani called on “Palestinian revolutionary forces... to remain vigilant to foil the new plot” by the West and the US, who want “to revive peace talks between Israel and Palestine, saying the talks are meant to give the Zionist regime more breathing room.”⁴⁷

Some expected that the transfer of Iranian presidency from conservatives to reformists would reflect on stances regarding the Palestinian issue, particularly as President Rouhani defended the option of diplomacy and dialogue to resolve the outstanding issues with the West and the world. However, statements made by the new president prior to taking office left no room for such association when talking about the “fundamentals” of the Palestinian issue. One day prior to the assumption of his presidential duties, Iranian President-elect Hassan Rouhani questioned the value of efforts to revive peace talks. In a reference to the peace negotiations underway in Washington between Israel and the PA, Rouhani said that “Israelis show a compromising face to the world but continue their expansionism in practice.”⁴⁸

Iranian Supreme Guide Khamenei’s position was clear and decisive rejecting these negotiations, which in his words “will definitely be to the disadvantage of the Palestinians.” In his speech on the occasion of the Muslim Eid Al-Fitr, he stated that the settlement negotiations between the PA and Israel “will definitely not produce any results other than what happened during previous negotiations in which Palestinians gave up their rights and encouraged the transgressors to transgress more and stop the lawful political activities of the people of Palestine.”⁴⁹ He added that the Palestinian:

⁴⁶ Press TV, 21/7/2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/07/21/314888/israel-cannot-talk-with-palestinians/%20%29>; and site of Ahram Online, 21/7/2013, <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/2/8/77006/World/Region/Iran-opposes-IsraelPalestine-peace-talks.aspx>

⁴⁷ *Tehran Times* newspaper, Tehran, 21/7/2013, <http://tehrantimes.com/politics/109475-mideast-talks-meant-to-give-israel-more-breathing-room-iran>

⁴⁸ *The Independent* newspaper, London, 2/8/2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/iranian-president-hasan-rouhani-israel-is-a-wound-on-the-body-of-the-islamic-world-8743751.html>

⁴⁹ Supreme Leader's Sermons during Eid ul-Fitr Prayers, The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 9/8/2013, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1814&Itemid=4



oppressed nation continues to suffer from oppression and cruelty on a daily basis.... One of the disasters of today's world is that an act of clear oppression, which is a combination of tens and hundreds of oppressive acts, is supported by those who claim they support human rights and democracy and who chant beautiful and colorful slogans, but who support criminals in practice.⁵⁰

Iranian stances, ranging from condemnation to rejection of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations seem convincing and justified when we read statements by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on 5/12/2013 saying, "I have expressed my concern since Geneva [Interim nuclear agreement between Iran and six powers] that the sanctions would begin to unravel, and I think steps must be taken to prevent further erosions of sanctions."⁵¹ At the same time, Netanyahu viewed the resumption of negotiations and the peace process with the Palestinians as important for Israel, saying, "resuming the diplomatic process at this time is important for the State of Israel both in order to try to bring about an end to the conflict and given the complex reality in our region, especially the security challenges from Syria and Iran."⁵²

Inter-Palestinian Dialogue (Reconciliation)

In early 2013, the Egyptian Presidency under Morsi announced that an agreement was reached with Fatah and Hamas delegations to immediately start implementing the previously signed agreements concerning Palestinian reconciliation. The actual implementation of these agreements did not start: First, due to the events in Egypt and the coup that overthrew the MB movement; second because Fatah and Hamas made no practical moves towards such reconciliations; and third, since the PA proceeded with negotiations with the Israelis in the absence of any coordination or understanding with Hamas. Yet, the ramifications were not limited to a frozen Egyptian sponsorship of the inter-Palestinian agreement and the Egypt-Hamas relations deteriorated to their worst ever level.

Meanwhile, none of the Muslim countries objected to the Palestinian dialogue and reconciliation initiatives, rather they supported and encouraged the step. Nevertheless, the reconciliation was negatively influenced by the events in Egypt and the rest of the Arab countries, whose internal burdens and priorities overshadowed any foreign issue, including the Palestinian one.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Joint Statement by Kerry, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, site of U.S. Department of State, 5/12/2013, <http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2013/12/20131205288437.html#axzz3RVedyy4Y>

⁵² Cabinet Approves Opening of Diplomatic Negotiations, Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28/7/2013, <http://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2013/Pages/Cabinet-communique-28-July-2013.aspx>

Iran likewise welcomed Palestinian reconciliation and considered it necessary, declaring its willingness to host a dialogue between Palestinian factions. President Ahmadinejad, when receiving PA Head Mahmud ‘Abbas during the 16th Non-Aligned Movement Summit in Tehran in August 2012, announced that “the Islamic Republic of Iran is willing to provide any assistance to the Palestinians in a bid to reach national reconciliation.” Ahmadinejad further stated that “Today, Palestine is the most important regional issue which has even got international importance and the whole world is somehow involved in the issue.” The Iranian president added, “the Islamic Republic is a strong advocate of unity among Palestinians, because in such circumstances ‘their chances of liberating their lands (from Israeli occupation) will become much higher.’” Addressing President Abbas, he explained that “We will warmly welcome you in Iran whenever you and our other Palestinian brothers are ready to sit for talks with each other, and lay the groundwork for harmony and unity between all Palestinian groups.”⁵³

Receiving the Foreign Minister of the Palestinian government in GS, Muhammad ‘Awad, Iranian Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Salehi called all Palestinian factions to “remain vigilant against enemy plots and to maintain their unity.”⁵⁴

Iran and Palestine After the Nuclear Deal with the West

After around 10 years of international and Western sanctions due to its continued nuclear program, Iran was finally able early under President Rouhani’s term to sign an initial agreement on 24/11/2013 concerning this program. The agreement with what became known as the P5+1 countries, and with the US, stipulates a gradual lifting of sanctions and recognition of Iran’s right to 5% proliferation in exchange for freezing any activities that may end up with Iran obtaining a nuclear bomb.

Discussions around this agreement were not limited to the gains or compromises made by each side, but it was considered a comprehensive political US-Iran understanding concerning all controversial issues, including Syria, Iraq, Bahrain, Lebanon and Palestine. According to this analysis, Iran would change its former policies toward these issues to become more in line with US policies. In the Palestinian case, this would mean that in the near future Iran will not be unyielding about resistance, or even call for it. In the Lebanese case, the understanding would imply calling Hizbullah to be engrossed in local politics and relinquish the role of resistance to Israel. If we consider resistance to be the

⁵³ *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 31/8/2012, <http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4275383,00.html>; and *Tehran Times*, 31/8/2012, <http://www.tehrantimes.com/tehran-times-nam-coverage/101089-iran-ready-to-host-dialogue-between-rival-palestinian-groups-ahmadinejad>

⁵⁴ Press TV, 13/5/2012, <http://www.presstv.ir/detail/2012/05/13/240994/islamic-awakening-fortifies-resistance/>



core of the issue, the conclusion derived by these analyses would be that the Iranian nuclear agreement with the West would not work in favour of the Palestinian issue. Some PA-aligned viewpoints leaning toward negotiations with Israel, considered the Iranian-Western agreement a model to be followed with regards the Palestinian negotiations. However, the Israeli stance on the nuclear agreement ranged from seeing it as a “historic mistake” to criticising it as a form of “giving Iran priority at the expense of reaching a peace settlement with the PA,” while the Obama administration attempted to convince Israel that the nuclear agreement was after all in the best interests of Israel.

In Israel, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s severe criticism of this agreement was notable, voicing Israeli fears concerning the Geneva agreement with Iran.⁵⁵ Former Shabak Chief Yuval Diskin slammed the step as he considered “the ongoing conflict with the Palestinians poses more of an existential danger to Israel than Iran’s renegade nuclear program.”⁵⁶ When the agreement was forged Netanyahu considered it a “historic mistake,” at a time when the US president stated, “we cannot close the door on diplomacy, and we cannot rule out peaceful solutions to the world's problems.”⁵⁷ As for the US Secretary of State John Kerry, he affirmed on his way back from Israel that the Geneva Agreement is a positive one and said that “I would state to you unequivocally the answer is yes. The national security of the United States is stronger under this first-step agreement than it was before.”⁵⁸

In an attempt to reassure Israel, Obama “pledged to step up sanctions or prepare for a potential military strike if Tehran fails to abide by the pact.”⁵⁹

In an op-ed appearing on Bloomberg View website, American journalist and political analyst Jeffrey Goldberg wrote that “Netanyahu fears that the removal of even one brick from the wall of sanctions would cause the entire edifice to crumble. And he's right.” He adds that “the nightmare for Israel and Arabs is that Iranians... will get the relief they want without being forced to permanently mothball their nuclear facilities.” According to Goldberg, Netanyahu’s unwillingness to permanently freeze settlement growth on WB, to “make the sort of grand gesture toward the Palestinians that would advance the peace process,

⁵⁵ Joint Statement by Kerry, Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, U.S. Department of State, 5/12/2013.

⁵⁶ The Times of Israel, 4/12/2013, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/ex-shin-bet-chief-iranian-threat-dwarfed-by-danger-of-failed-peace-talks/>

⁵⁷ Aljazeera.net, 26/11/2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2013/11/obama-defends-iran-nuclear-deal-2013112614223814207.html> (in English)

⁵⁸ The P5+1's First Step Agreement With Iran on its Nuclear Program, Testimony, John Kerry, Secretary of State, Opening Remarks Before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, Washington, DC, U.S. Department of State, 10/12/2013, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/12/218578.htm>

⁵⁹ Obama defends interim Iran deal, seeks to assure Israel, Reuters, 8/12/2013, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/12/08/uk-usa-israel-idUKBRE9B60CA20131208>

has caused even those in Washington and Europe who are sympathetic to his stance on Iran to write him off as generally immovable and irrational.” Therefore, Netanyahu attempted to argue that Iran’s transformation to a nuclear state and chances of reaching an Israeli-Palestinian settlement are two separate issues.⁶⁰

In a speech on Students Day at the Beheshti University, President Rouhani pointed to the recent deal reached between Iran and six major world powers in Geneva over Tehran’s nuclear energy program and said the agreement “dealt a blow to Zionism.” He “reaffirmed the country’s entitlement to uranium enrichment as part of a civilian nuclear program.”⁶¹ Iranian leader Khamenei’s reiterated statements supported the Palestinian issue and affirmed the illegitimacy of Israel, as he once again declared unwavering support for the Palestinian issue during President Rouhani’s inauguration.⁶² Khamenei further stressed that “America is not a mediator. Rather, the Americans themselves are one side of these negotiations and they are on the side of the usurpers of Palestine, the Zionists.”⁶³ He also considered “the Zionist regime to be an illegal and bastard regime.”⁶⁴

Regardless of the Iranian stance and statements of officials about their commitment toward the Palestinian issue, the scenario of the hypothetical post-agreement comprehensive understanding between Iran and the US seems unrealistic. We have seen how American threats to Iran continued after this agreement, and how Washington prevented Iran from attending the Geneva II Conference on Syria. Besides, the complex areas of disagreement between the two sides require a lot of time to be resolved, in addition to being tied to other stakeholders that do not contribute to resolution. As for the Palestinian issue, the resistance and Hizbullah are not even on the negotiation agenda of the Iranian leadership, even if President Rouhani favours diplomacy and dialogue to resolve problems with the West.

⁶⁰ For Help on Iran, Netanyahu Must Look to West Bank, site of Bloomberg View, 7/11/2013, <http://www.bloombergview.com/articles/2013-11-07/for-help-on-iran-netanyahu-must-look-to-west-bank->

⁶¹ Press TV, 7/12/2013, <http://www.presstv.com/detail/2013/12/07/338667/rouhani-reaffirms-iran-enrichment-right/>

⁶² See Supreme Leader’s Speech at Ceremony Approving Rouhani Presidency, The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 3/8/2013, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1812&Itemid=4

⁶³ Supreme Leader’s Sermons during Eid ul-Fitr Prayers, The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 9/8/2013.

⁶⁴ Supreme Leader Meets with Students on “National Day of Fighting Against Global Arrogance,” The Center for Preserving and Publishing the Works of Grand Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei, 3/11/2013, http://english.khamenei.ir//index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1837&Itemid=4



Summary

The Palestinian issue between 2012 and 2013 saw many challenges and risks including ones that were passed along from previous years like settlement building, negotiations, and Palestinian reconciliation and unity. Other challenges emerged as a result of transformations taking place in the Arab and Israeli environment surrounding the Palestinian issue, and the impact of these transformations on the future of the resistance, which made important achievements, cannot be underestimated or disregarded.

Among the most important transformations and challenges that require strategies to be dealt with are:

- Instability in Arab Spring countries, particularly following the latest developments in Egypt, which made Hamas an enemy of the coup regime, and took relations with GS and the Rafah crossing back to their former pre-Jan 25 revolution mode.
- Sectarian instigation, which soared seriously following the Arab uprisings, so that a severe downturn is taking place when it comes to the strategic view of the Palestinian issue as a priority. This downturn places the Palestinian issue in a secondary rank that can be delayed, as some think, until national disagreements are settled or sectarian victories made.
- The Israeli side is well aware of the conditions emerging in Arab countries of division and conflict. Hence, given the lack of any power to press for a change of strategy, Israel will propose no compromises in negotiations with the Palestinian side, nor regarding the freezing of settlements.
- The Arab countries are engrossed in their internal affairs, with little room for attention to be given developments in Palestine, and the GS is facing additional besieging and closure of tunnels from the Egyptian side, leading to a depletion of the Strip's financial capacities and causing increasingly severely deteriorating economic and humanitarian conditions. Consequently it is strategically imperative for resistance movements to not only get over the disagreement with Iran, which still stresses the centrality of the Palestinian issue, but to further develop these relations. For the US strategic plans remain the same regarding the resolution of the Palestinian issue. Moreover, Israel's hostile plans toward GS in the coming stage are not hidden, but have risen to declared threats that can turn into a new war at any moment. It is also of Iranian strategic interests to explain the intricacies of its stances toward the uprisings and changes in the region, particularly in Syria; to listen to the voice of the Arab and Muslim public calling it to constantly stand by nations, their freedom and their national will in confronting corrupt and tyrannical regimes; and to give the opportunity for all sincere powers to block the road to foreign intervention in the region.

Fourth: Malaysia

Malaysia maintained its commitment to supporting the rights of the Palestinian people during 2012–2013 in accordance with international laws. It continued opposing the Israeli siege on GS, and supporting inter-Palestinian reconciliation efforts and PA efforts to secure UN non-member observer state status for Palestine. Malaysian representative to the UN Haniff Hussein reiterated his country's support of Palestine to be granted the UN non-member observer state status. He said, on the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, "I would like to take this opportunity to pay Malaysia's utmost respect and tribute to the Palestinian people for their courage and strength in continuing to demonstrate steadfastness despite the immense hardship they face on a daily basis."⁶⁵

The year 2012–2013 marked a significant progress in official and public Malaysian support for the Palestinian people in general, and for Gazans in particular. In January 2013, for instance, the Malaysian Prime Minister visited the GS accompanied by his wife and an official government delegation. The visit reflected the special status of the Palestinian Issue in Malaysian consciousness, and highlighted Malaysian rejection of the GS siege, in addition to the concrete expression of Malaysian support for the perseverance of the Palestinian people, whether through the visit itself or the agreements signed during the visit on a number of projects in GS. The Malaysian Prime Minister expressed the main reason behind his visit, saying: "We may come from thousands of miles away... but we are one Umma (Muslim nation) and we believe in the struggle of the Palestinian people."⁶⁶

On the public level in Malaysia, the Global March to Jerusalem Committee, made up of a number of non-governmental organizations, organized a rally in March 2012 that accommodated more than 10 thousand participants, and included a video-conference speech by the Palestinian Prime Minister Isma'el Haniyyah.

In April 2012, a number of Malaysian organizations launched a solidarity campaign with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, where around 20 Malaysian organizations participated following an invitation from the Palestinian Cultural Organization Malaysia (PCOM). The participants called the Malaysian people to continue their efforts to support the Palestinian people through humanitarian aid and relief, as well as political support. The campaign further demanded the media to devote part of their broadcast to highlighting this human cause.

⁶⁵ Statement by H.E. Ambassador Hussein Haniff, Permanent Representative of Malaysia to the United Nations, on Agenda Item 37: Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, New York, 29/11/2012, site of Permanent Mission of Malaysia to the United Nations,

http://www.un.int/malaysia/sites/www.un.int/files/Malaysia/67th_session/2012-11-29_palestine.pdf

⁶⁶ Site of AsiaOne, 22/1/2013, <http://news.asiaone.com/News/AsiaOne+News/Malaysia/Story/A1Story20130122-397176.html>



In the same context, Yayasan Restu held a book launch event, under the auspices of the Malaysian Minister of Home Affairs Ahmad Zahid Hamidi and in cooperation with PCOM, to launch the first al-Qur'an Mushaf Palestine, which uses the identity of Palestinian visual arts, while allocating the revenues for Jerusalem.

Within the reverberations of the Israeli war on GS in November 2012, and during their participation at the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) conference in Cambodia, Malaysian Prime Minister Muhammad Najib bin Tun Haji Abdul Razak called on US President Obama to pressure Israel to stop the war on GS. This war was covered daily by the Malaysian media, and there were public events and rallies to condemn it.

In December 2012, Malaysian Deputy Minister of International Trade and Industry Mukhriz Tun Mahathir visited the GS in the company of the Malaysian ambassador to Egypt. The delegation delivered medical aids to the Ministry of Health in GS.

A number of events were organized in 2013, in solidarity with the Palestinian people. On 15/8/2013, Perdana Global Peace Foundation organized a conference for Malaysian organizations working in Palestine, sponsored by former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Muhammad, to discuss the means of cooperation to support the Palestinian issue. In November 2013, the Kuala Lumpur Foundation to Criminalise War (KLFCW) held a tribunal for the crimes that were committed by the State of Israel and retired Israeli General Amos Yaron, in which several international judges took part. The Tribunal found the State of Israel guilty of genocide, and Amos Yaron of crimes against humanity and genocide.

Despite criticism from the Palestinian Presidency in Ramallah of the Malaysian Prime Minister's visit to GS in early 2013, neither Malaysian support to GS, nor its relations with Hamas, were affected. In fact, after receiving an official invitation, a Hamas delegation headed by Khalid Mish'al, head of the Hamas political bureau, went to Malaysia in December 2013 to take part in the general assembly of the ruling party, the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Mish'al and the accompanying delegation were warmly welcomed by the party members as well as Malaysian officials and public figures. Mish'al delivered a speech at the international forum of UMNO, in addition to a speech at the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM).⁶⁷

⁶⁷ See *Palestinian Weekly Report: Special Issue on Khalid Meshaal's Visit to Malaysia*, Palestinian Cultural Organization Malaysia (PCOM), Issue 73, 13/12/2013, http://issuu.com/p.w.r/docs/issue_no_73; site of International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM), 4/12/2013, <http://www.iium.edu.my/driicr/facilities/visit-mr-khaled-mashal-palestine-hamas-chairman>; and site of Asian Broadcasting Network (ABNxcross), Malaysia, 7/12/2013, <http://news.abnxcross.com/2013/12/hamas-fatah-request-umnos-help-in-reconciliation-talks-najib/>

Fifth: Pakistan

Pakistani politics continued its support to the Palestinian issue and the core rights of the Palestinian people, including backing the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari highlighted this during a dinner reception for President Mahmud ‘Abbas during his visit to Pakistan in February 2013. “While expressing his joy over achieving non-member observer state status by Palestine at the UN, President Zardari noted with pride that Pakistan played a pivotal role in the process,” and hoped the step would lead to “the recognition of the legitimate Palestinian rights and hoped that it would prove to be a major stepping stone to Palestine’s full membership of the UN.” At the same time, Zardari strongly condemned the building of illegal settlements in WB, and “called upon the international community to stop Israel from building new settlements,” adding that “denial of inalienable right of self-determination to the people of Indian-administered Kashmir and Palestine carried the risk of instability of the Middle East and South Asia.”⁶⁸

On another level, the Pakistani Foreign Ministry offered a \$1 million grant to the PA to build a Palestinian embassy in Islamabad. Pakistani Foreign Office Spokesperson Aizaz Chaudhry said that “This grant is another reflection of the brotherly relations between the two nations,” adding that “Pakistan has always supported the Palestinian cause and will continue to do so.”⁶⁹

In December 2013, Palestinian ambassador in Pakistan Walid Abu Ali met with the Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, who reasserted that Pakistan “would continue its unequivocal and unwavering support to the Palestine cause.”⁷⁰

As for Pakistani-Israeli relations, the parliament speaker remarked that Israel continued to make efforts to build relations with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, but the latter’s response has always been to reject such relations as long as Israel occupies the Palestinian territories. The Speaker of the National Assembly of Pakistan further asserted that Pakistan would not go forward with any relations with Israel unless a Palestinian state with full sovereignty was established, with Jerusalem as its capital.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Site of Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA), 18/2/2013, http://www.irna.ir/en/News/80548779/Politic/Pakistani_President_reiterates_unwavering_support_to_Palestinian_brothers

⁶⁹ Site of Anadolu Agency, 7/10/2013, <http://www.aa.com.tr/en/world/237430--pakistan-donates-1mn-for-construction-of-palestine-embassy>

⁷⁰ Site of AAJ News, Pakistan, 16/12/2013, <http://www.aaj.tv/2013/12/pakistan-to-continue-supporting-palestine-cause-ayyaz/>

⁷¹ Ma’an, 17/12/2013.



Sixth: Trade Exchange

The year 2012 witnessed a remarkable downturn in the trade volume between Turkey and Israel, as Israeli exports to Turkey in 2012 fell to \$1,421.4 million, 23.4% less than in 2011, while Israeli imports decreased by 4.1%. The beginning of 2013, however, saw a breakthrough in relations between the two sides, which may explain the surge in trade volume. The Israeli Prime Minister gave an official apology to the Turkish people for the Mavi Marmara incident in which nine Turks were killed. In 2013, Israeli exports to Turkey surged by 76.1% compared to 2012, while Israeli imports increased by 13% compared to 2012.

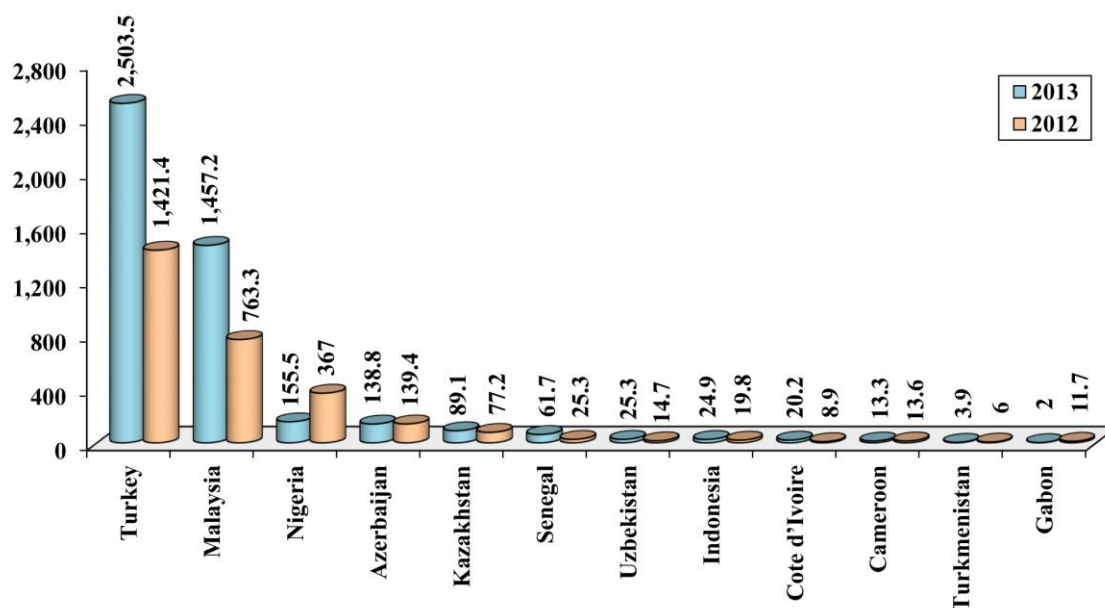
As for Malaysia, 2012 recorded a clear decrease in Israeli imports from Malaysia by 20.9% compared to 2011, while Israeli exports to Malaysia increased by 6.4%. In 2013, Israeli exports to Malaysia, reached \$1,457.2 million according to Israeli data with a 90.9% increase compared to 2012, while Israeli imports continued to decrease by around 1.5% from 2012.

Table 2/4: Israeli Exports and Imports to/ from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2010–2013 (\$ million)⁷²

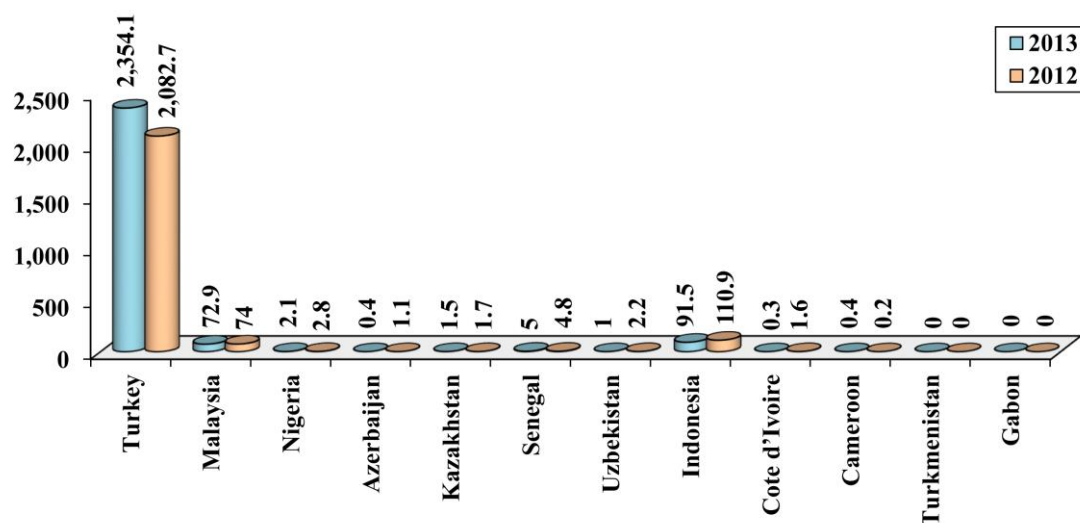
Country	Israeli exports to:				Israeli imports from:			
	2013	2012	2011	2010	2013	2012	2011	2010
Turkey	2,503.5	1,421.4	1,855.7	1,310.7	2,354.1	2,082.7	2,171.1	1,800.1
Malaysia	1,457.2	763.3	717.2	798	72.9	74	93.6	85
Nigeria	155.5	367	398.1	303.7	2.1	2.8	0.3	1.6
Azerbaijan	138.8	139.4	125.3	107.6	0.4	1.1	0.5	0.3
Kazakhstan	89.1	77.2	93.6	62.5	1.5	1.7	2.5	0.3
Senegal	61.7	25.3	12	3.3	5	4.8	4.3	2.6
Uzbekistan	25.3	14.7	19.7	37.2	1	2.2	4	3.3
Indonesia	24.9	19.8	17.5	12.9	91.5	110.9	119.7	106.2
Cote d'Ivoire	20.2	8.9	5.5	5.4	0.3	1.6	3.6	10
Cameroon	13.3	13.6	10.4	12.8	0.4	0.2	0	0.2
Turkmenistan	3.9	6	6.3	19.9	0	0	0	0
Gabon	2	11.7	16	8.8	0	0	0	0

⁷² See CBS, <http://www1.cbs.gov.il/publications14/yarhon0214/pdf/h8.pdf>

Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2013
(\$ million)



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2013
(\$ million)



Conclusion

In 2012–2013, the Palestinian issue remained at the forefront of Muslim public interest, despite the rapidly changing events of the “Arab Spring” region and the preoccupation of many Muslim countries with rearranging their priorities accordingly. Notwithstanding this, the support did not amount to the required level and was disproportionate with the weight of Muslim states and institutions. Notably, the OIC’s modest performance toward the Palestinian issue continued. It is not expected to change, unless the OIC carries out a major priority change or



the views of some countries supporting the organization change, regarding the importance of activating the Muslim world role towards Palestine, and supporting it more effectively. Thus, keeping the Palestinian issue away from the regional power struggle and conflicts between the OIC states.

As for Turkey, its support of the Palestinian issue continued during 2012–2013, providing political, economic, and media support to the Palestinian people, demanding an end to the GS siege, and playing an effective role in UN recognition of Palestine as a non-member state. In addition, Turkey facilitated the movement of some leaders of the Palestinian resistance, especially following the military coup in Egypt and the consequent tightening grip on resistance forces, particularly Hamas. As for Turkish-Israeli relations, they were eased following the Israeli apology for the Mavi Marmara incident, but they are not expected to return to their former state.

Apparently, Turkey is expected to continue its support of the Palestinian issue—particularly GS, both economically and politically—and its positive relations with Hamas. At the same time, it is expected to avoid directly supporting the Palestinian resistance or having any clash with Western powers or Israel. Some factors must be taken into account in this context, including the impact of some internal Turkish developments, the limits set by Turkish membership in NATO, and Turkish efforts to join the EU.

On the Iranian level, Iran continued its refusal to recognize Israel, seeing it instead a usurping entity, while continuing to support the Palestinian resistance and reject the peace process. Despite these facts, the Islamic republic is more engrossed in resolving its economic problems in addition to the Syrian issue and regional calculations. It decreased its support for Hamas and its GS government due to disagreements on Syrian Conflict. However, the two sides are keen on preserving a reasonable level of relations, with efforts continuing to improve these relations and develop them.

التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2013-2012

الفصل الرابع

القضية الفلسطينية

والعالم الإسلامي

2013-2012

