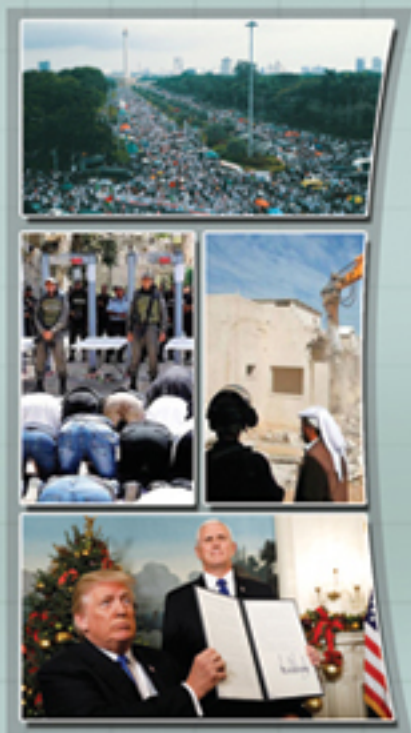


The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017



Edited By

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Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

The Most Prominent Projections for 2018–2019

In a strategic environment that still suffers instability and lacks fluidity, and with the complex overlap of regional and international interests, it is not easy to predict specific trends with a high degree of certainty. However, it appears that the issue of Palestine will maintain many of its previous crises and repercussions to the next stage. The most important possible trends can be summarized as follows:

- The peace process seems to have reached a dead end and is on its way to collapse, as the Oslo Accords have proved incapable of bringing real political solutions. If the conditions of the game remain the same, the “two-state solution,” from the Palestinian perspective, will practically collapse; there is no hope for the PA to become a full-fledged Palestinian state on the land occupied in 1967. There is also no real prospect that the status of the PA will change from being an instrument used for the purposes of occupation, more than serving the Palestinian people and their aspirations.
- Palestinian reconciliation is not expected to be achieved if it continues to be handled in the same way, and if the official Palestinian leadership does not seek to achieve a genuine, effective partnership that reflects the true weight of the Palestinian forces at home and abroad, based on a national program that enshrines the fundamental rights and needs of the population. Emphasis should be placed on pathways not controlled by the Israeli side, such as the restructuring of the PLO. There is also a better future opportunity to put the Palestinian house in order considering the peace process failure.
- The number of Palestinians exceeded the number of Jews in historic Palestine in 2018. This impressive statistic reveals the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and their endurance on their land and are undoubtedly a concern for the leaders of the Zionist project 120 years after its inception, and 70 years after the establishment of Israel, for they have failed to give a “Jewish” character to the land of Palestine. However, it is necessary to be aware of any steps that the Israelis might take to try to displace large numbers of Palestinians. Therefore, the Palestinian leadership, the Arab and Muslim countries and all supporters of Palestinian rights, bear a great responsibility in supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian people on their land, and thwarting the Israeli plans.

- The suffering of the Palestinian economy in WB and GS will continue as long as they are under Israeli occupation and siege, and under the obligations of the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol. Israeli domination of the PA's exports and imports (more than 60% of trade volume) will continue, while Israel's GDP will remain more than 20 times bigger than its Palestinian counterpart. The Palestinian budget will remain largely dependent on foreign aid and tax revenues that the Israeli occupation collects, rendering the PA budget hostage to Israel.

- It is not expected that the GS siege will be lifted if the Palestinian resistance maintains its assets and infrastructure.

Some aspects of the blockade may be lifted as the government in Ramallah takes control of GS, keeping in mind that it is not the decision-maker on this issue. Israel will ease the blockade in line with the PA's ability to control the situation and implement the Oslo Accords entitlements in GS as it does in WB. These entitlements are basically linked to the role of the PA and to its security obligations towards Israel. According to Israeli standards, such entitlements will only not be completed unless security and weapons of resistance are controlled (above and under ground). The resistance forces should not expect any gains from those who adhere to the Oslo Accords, who will continue to press, even gradually, to implement the required entitlements.

Egypt is expected to continue its pressure on Hamas to "empower" the Ramallah government in GS in order to implement its program, albeit in a "soft" and gradual manner.

- Israeli attacks, Judaization and settlement projects, especially in Jerusalem and the rest of WB, will continue; Israel will try to achieve the greatest gains and build facts on the ground, in a weak and disjointed Arab and Islamic environment. However, the Palestinian resistance, in its different forms, and which to a varying degrees continued in the Jerusalem and Lion's Gate uprising will not stop. Moreover, resistance in WB is expected to continue and escalate, as frustration with the peace process increases, and as the prospects for a two-state solution diminish. Palestinian resistance also has the chance to strengthen its qualitative capabilities in the coming year.

- The Israeli population is moving increasingly to right-wing politics and religious extremism, abandoning the peace process and the "two-state solution." Despite economic growth and high GDP and GDP per capita (about \$40 thousand

annually), mirroring Western European countries; and despite the enormous Israeli military strength and advantage; despite the state of official Arab and Islamic weakness; Israel will continue to face existential crises. This is due to the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and their resistance on their land, a popular Arab environment that refuses to deal with Israel, and an unstable strategic environment surrounding Israel, amid the growing presence of resistance forces hostile to Israel.

- Arab countries, which have official relations with Israel, specifically Egypt and Jordan, are expected to maintain these relations. Israel may attempt to make some breakthroughs in its relations with some Gulf states on the basis of the alliance against Iran and the fight against “terrorism”; however, this penetration will not be easy; Arab parties may prefer to work “under the table” with Israel because of widespread popular opposition to normalization with Israel.
- As for the Muslim countries, the OIC is not expected to improve its virtually insignificant performance towards Palestine. With the increasing threats to Jerusalem and *Al-Aqsa* Mosque, there is a chance of an increase in popular-Islamic interaction with the Palestine issue.

Concerning the two countries studied in the PSR, Turkey, under Erdoğan, will continue its active political support for Palestine, while maintaining its lukewarm political and active commercial ties with the Israeli side. Nevertheless, it will pursue its active trade with Israel, which exceeded \$4 billion in 2017.

Iran will also pursue its political and military support for the Palestinian resistance and its open hostility against Israel, but will avoid direct friction, and will focus on the implementation of its regional agenda.

- The international environment will continue to show sympathy and support by a large majority (about 140 countries) to the question of Palestine in the UN General Assembly and a number of international institutions. However, the US and the major powers that control the UN Security Council and dominate international politics, will not allow any resolutions or measures that could force the Israeli side to take steps it would reject.

There is a chance of a slow increase in global hostility to, or negative views of, Israel, and there is an opportunity to strengthen the successes of the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movements, which are causing growing concern among Israelis.

This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2016–2017, the 10th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive, objective approach, the report comprehensively details developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2017, along with analysis and forecasts running into 2018.

This report is the result of collaborative work between 14 experts and researchers. In eight chapters, it addresses the internal Palestinian scene; Palestinian demographic and economic indicators; the situation in Jerusalem and the holy sites; the specifics of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process; the complexities of Israeli-Palestinian dynamics, including the internal situation in Israel; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations. This tenth PSR volume features an advanced research map and forecasts the most prominent scenarios of relevance to the Palestine issue in 2018 and 2019.

The PSR now occupies a prominent position as an indispensable reference document, integral to Palestine studies and research. Al-Zaytouna Centre hopes the PSR will continue to make valuable contributions in this field.

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ISBN 978-9953-572-75-8



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations