

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



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# **Chapter Eight**

*The Palestine Issue and the  
International Situation*

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# The Palestine Issue and the International Situation

## *Introduction*

International interdependence due to economic, technical, and other reasons related to globalization has made it impossible for any state or society to evade the repercussions of international changes. The more developed the adaptive capabilities of a state or society, the greater its ability to employ these changes for its benefit or curb their reverberations.

As Palestinian political, economic and social conditions are intricately intertwined with international and regional dynamics, the ability of the Palestinian political system with its current structure (the PLO and the PA) to use major international transformations to work in its favor is not commensurate with the depth and acceleration of these transformations.

The most important international changes which had a bearing on the Palestinians throughout 2020–2021 can be identified as:

1. The COVID-19 pandemic: The most important impact of this global pandemic on the Palestinian conditions, in addition to its health consequences, were reflected in the negative economic repercussions on the entire world and on international aid to Palestinians. International aid decreased in 2020 to \$369.7 million compared to \$538.3 million in 2019, and the largest drop was in Arab aid, which declined in 2020 from \$265.5 million to only \$40 million,<sup>1</sup> a 68.7% drop in international aid and 85% in Arab aid.

2. The increasing number of refugees in the world because of civil conflicts, wars or natural disasters: Throughout 2020–2021, approximately 82.4 million individuals sought refuge in areas outside their country or were displaced within the same country;<sup>2</sup> which made it more difficult to provide aid to Palestinian refugees due to the pressures of refugee needs in other regions. With 6.4 million Palestinian refugees receiving aid from the UNRWA,<sup>3</sup> Palestinian refugees comprised 6.9% of total refugees worldwide in 2020/2021.



Considering that 93% of UNRWA's budget is based on voluntary donations, international crises tend to have dire impacts on the budget of the Agency, which estimated its financial deficit for 2020 and 2021 at \$248 million and \$268 million respectively. While we are aware of the seriousness of these crises, we must also bear in mind that the root of UNRWA's years old financial crises is political, resulting from Israeli and US pressure.<sup>4</sup>

3. The US withdrawal from Afghanistan and its geostrategic repercussions on the world in general, and the Middle East in particular. These repercussions are as follows:<sup>5</sup>

- a. It undermined the credibility of the US with its regional allies, including Israel, and established the prevalence of US pragmatism in many international situations. Micky Aharonson, a former foreign policy director at Israel's NSC, opined that "When the US is seen as weak, in the simplest terms, it's bad for Israel." However, some researchers have a different perspective on the issue, believing that one of the repercussions of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan was the weakening of the US alliances in the region, which will make Israel an even more important pillar US interests; this enhances Israel's position.<sup>6</sup>
- b. US pressure on Iran has lessened, given that US military presence in Afghanistan meant that it was on Iran's border with Afghanistan, which is 936 km long. This made Iran more capable of maneuvering on the regional level and even in the negotiations of the nuclear agreement with the US, which Israel views as a negative development.
- c. Consolidated the idea of resistance to the US and other occupation forces. In this context, the congratulations from the head of Hamas political bureau Isma'il Haniyyah to the Taliban leadership, and the tweets of some Hamas leaders praising the Taliban confirmed that the morale of the resistance forces had been boosted at seeing the US climbdown. This belief was reinforced when some Israeli experts compared the consequences of the Israeli withdrawals from GS in 2005 and from southern Lebanon in 2000 to those of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. They pointed out that the resistance forces grew stronger because of those Israeli withdrawals, which they speculated might also happen following the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.<sup>7</sup>

## ***First: International Organizations***

International organizations can be divided into two types: the first is governmental international and regional organizations, while the second is specialized international organizations and non-governmental organizations, and the latter type will be considered in this section under section eight, International Public Opinion.

### **1. The UN and its Agencies**

Although the international resolutions issued by the UN Security Council represent a qualitative weight exceeding the significance of the decisions made by other UN branches, the resolutions of the UN General Assembly and other specialized UN agencies reflect general international trends regarding issues of the international community, and the General Assembly is a model in this respect.

Israeli literature and political statements accuse the UN of bias against Israel in most of its resolutions, often claiming that anti-Semitism was behind most countries' vote against Israel.<sup>8</sup>

#### **a. The General Assembly Resolutions on Palestine<sup>9</sup>**

In 2020, the UN adopted a total of 17 resolutions against Israel, compared to six against the rest of the world's countries combined. This approach might explain the chronic Israeli tendency to exclude the UN and its specialized agencies from playing roles in determining international policies on the Palestine issue.

At its 75th session in December 2020, the General Assembly adopted a number of resolutions, including:<sup>10</sup>

- Not recognizing any change made by Israel to the pre-1967 borders, including East Jerusalem, a decision supported by 150 countries, while seven opposed, including the US, with 17 abstentions.
- A resolution calling a Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights to "continue to investigate Israeli policies and practices in the Occupied Palestinian Territory."
- Approval of a resolution to provide "assistance to the Palestine refugees." While 169 countries voted in favor of the resolution, two opposed (the US and Israel) with seven abstentions.



- Calling on the international community to provide more aid to UNRWA. 162 countries supported the resolution, four opposed, with nine abstentions.
- Condemning the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Palestinian territories and the occupied Golan Heights by Israel.
- Criticizing Israel’s continued building of settlements in the Palestinian territories and the Syrian Golan. The resolution was supported by 150 countries, while seven opposed and 17 abstained.

It is noted here that the UN Middle East envoy Nickolay Mladenov emphasized the illegality of settlements. Israel suspended its ties with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) after it published the names of companies working in Israeli settlements in the Palestinian territories and stopped issuing visas to UN human rights workers in Palestine, forcing them to leave, including OHCHR country director, James Heenan.

- Emphasis was placed on addressing the issue of Palestinian refugees and their revenues. The resolution was supported by 160 countries, while five opposed and 12 abstained.
- Emphasizing the need for Israel to stop all its practices of violating Palestinian human rights in the occupied territories, and the need to abide by the rules of the Fourth Geneva Convention. 147 countries voted in favor of the resolution, 10 were against and 16 abstained.

As for the General Assembly’s 76th session in September 2021, the Palestine issue was included in Agenda Item 39, the UNRWA issue in Item 54, Israeli practices and settlement activities in the occupied territories in Item 55, in addition to the issue of the permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people over their natural resources, including East Jerusalem, in Item 64, and the issue of providing assistance to the Palestinian people in Item 75 (b).<sup>11</sup>

On 1/12/2021, the General Assembly adopted resolutions related to Palestine and the Middle East stipulating for:<sup>12</sup>

- Respecting the historic status quo at the holy places of Jerusalem, and considering as illegal any actions taken by Israel, the occupying Power, in imposing its laws, jurisdiction and administration on the Holy City. The resolution referred to the 2015 Security Council press statement on Jerusalem which called for upholding and not changing the historic status quo at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

- The need to urgently exert collective efforts to launch credible negotiations on all final status issues in the Middle East peace process, while calling on Israel to cease all unilateral actions in the occupied Palestinian territory and calling upon all states not to recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, and not to render aid or assistance to illegal settlement activities.

129 countries voted in favor of the resolution on Jerusalem, 11 opposed with 31 abstentions. The other resolution was supported by 148 countries, while nine opposed and there were 14 abstentions.

On 9/12/2021, the General Assembly adopted, by overwhelming majorities, five resolutions related to the Palestine issue. The first resolution, which was concerned with the support of Palestinian refugees, won the support of 164 countries, while only Israel voted against with 10 abstentions. The second resolution, concerned with UNRWA's operations, was adopted by 162 countries, while five were against (Canada, Israel, Micronesia, the Marshall Islands and the US) with six abstentions. The third resolution, on Palestinian refugee property and revenues, received the support of 159 countries, with five against and eight abstentions. The fourth resolution on Israeli settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem and the occupied Syrian Golan, was endorsed by 146 countries with seven against and 20 abstentions. The fifth resolution, concerning the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and other Arabs of the Occupied Territories, received the support of 80 countries with 18 against and 73 abstentions.<sup>13</sup>

On 16/12/2021, the General Assembly voted on a resolution endorsing the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; the resolution was adopted by a majority of 168 countries with five against and 10 abstentions.<sup>14</sup> The following day, the General Assembly adopted a draft resolution entitled "Permanent Sovereignty of the Palestinian People in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and of the Arab Population in the Occupied Syrian Golan over their Natural Resources," with 156 votes in favor, seven against and 15 abstentions.<sup>15</sup>

Upon the start of the sessions and when the issue of the UN budget was raised, both the US and Israel objected to two draft resolutions, the first dealing with the UN budget which received the support of 186 countries without any abstentions, and the second dealing with the follow-up to the efforts of the Durban Conference held in 2001 in South Africa to combat racial discrimination, which was supported by 106 countries with 14 against and 44 abstentions.<sup>16</sup>





The Israeli and US vote on these two resolutions reflects their frustration with the orientations of the UN and their work to undermine it.

### **b. Security Council Resolutions<sup>17</sup>**

On 9/5/2021, clashes erupted between the Israeli forces and the Palestinian resistance factions in what was known as the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, and the clashes continued until a ceasefire was reached on 20/5/2021. The UN Security Council took the following stances in this respect:<sup>18</sup>

- On 22/5/2021, the UN Security Council called in a statement on the belligerents to abide by the ceasefire, and its members “mourned the loss of civilian lives from the fighting” while stressing “the immediate need for humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in Gaza.” They also “reiterated the importance of achieving a comprehensive peace based on the vision of a region in which two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace with secure and recognized borders.”
- On 27/5/2021, the UN Security Council listened to UNRWA Commissioner-General Philippe Lazzarini stressed that recovery from hostilities and humanitarian assistance to Gaza would not prevent another round of fighting, adding that “the recovery phase needs to be accompanied by a genuine political track aimed at lifting the blockade on people, goods and trade.”

### **c. Other UN Bodies**

In May 2021, UN bodies and diplomats held meetings that resulted in a number of positions as follows:<sup>19</sup>

- The UN Human Rights Council (HRC) held a special session to discuss the human rights situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, and called for the formation of a committee to investigate this matter, especially with regard to the commission of war crimes in Gaza, the WB and Israel. While 24 countries voted in favor of the resolution, nine opposed it and 14 abstained.
- The Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Tor Wennesland called for a return to negotiations to achieve a two-state solution based on UN resolutions, international law and mutual agreements, with Jerusalem as the capital of each country.

- The UN Humanitarian Coordinator of the occupied Palestinian territory Lynn Hastings “launched an emergency plan to support people affected by violence in Gaza and the WB, including East Jerusalem,” following the clashes between the Palestinian resistance and the Israeli army. UN Secretary-General António Guterres and UN Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator Mark Lowcock joined Hastings’s call for all member states to contribute to providing \$95 million for the rapid and full implementation of the proposed emergency plan within three months, until August 2021.
- The Chair of the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) delivered a statement at the General Assembly meeting on the situation in the Middle East and Palestine, and he called for the “much needed medical and humanitarian aid to the affected people in Gaza” and urged international support for UNRWA and other UN agencies, in addition to holding accountable those parties which “fail to respect international humanitarian law—including the fundamental principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution.” He also called for concrete and immediate action to revive the stalled “peace process” because the:
  - cycles of Israeli-Palestinian violence can only stop with a just political resolution of the conflict addressing all final status issues including Jerusalem and the plight of the Palestine refugees, with an end to the occupation, and the realization of a two-State solution on the basis of the pre-1967 lines, in accordance with UN resolutions, international law, and mutual agreements.
- The Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF) and the opt Humanitarian Fund (opt HF) provided \$22.5 million to help improve the humanitarian situation in GS on 21/5/2021.

## 2. The Quartet on the Middle East

The Quartet includes representatives from the UN, US, the Russian Federation and the EU. It did not issue any statements regarding its mission in 2020 and was unable to hold meetings due to the complex conditions in the region and Palestine, as UN Secretary-General António Guterres said.<sup>20</sup> The activities of the Quartet in 2021 were represented in the following:<sup>21</sup>

**First:** On 8/5/2021 a statement was issued concerning the Sword of Jerusalem Battle and included the following positions:



The Middle East Quartet envoys from the European Union, Russia, the United States and the United Nations are closely monitoring the situation in East Jerusalem, including in the Old City and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The Envoys express deep concern over the daily clashes and violence in East Jerusalem, in particular last night's confrontations between Palestinians and Israeli security forces at Haram Al-Sharif/ Temple Mount. We are alarmed by the provocative statements made by some political groups, as well as the launching of rockets and the resumption of incendiary balloons from Gaza towards Israel, and attacks on Palestinian farmland in the West Bank.

The Envoys noted with serious concern the possible evictions of Palestinian families from homes they have lived in for generations in Sheikh Jarrah and Silwan neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and voice opposition to unilateral actions, which will only escalate the already tense environment.

We call upon Israeli authorities to exercise restraint and to avoid measures that would further escalate the situation during this period of Muslim Holy Days. We call on all sides to uphold and respect the status quo at the holy sites. All leaders have a responsibility to act against extremists and to speak out against all acts of violence and incitement. In this context, the Quartet Envoys reiterated their commitment to a negotiated two state solution.

**Second:** On 23/3/2021, the Quartet issued a statement that included:

- a. Suggesting a possible return to meaningful negotiations that might lead to a two-state solution.
- b. Calling for negotiations leading to tangible steps to advance freedom, security, and prosperity for Palestinians and Israelis.
- c. Confirmation that the Envoys also discussed the situation on the ground, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic, the unsustainable disparity in economic development between Israelis and Palestinians, and the need for the parties to refrain from unilateral actions that make a two-state solution more difficult to achieve.

**Third:** The activities of the representative of the Quartet in coordination with the EU and the UN in following up on the various issues of the Palestinian people, especially the issue of elections, security, and the general situation in Gaza, and emphasizing the inalienable Palestinian rights and rejection of unilateral activities.

It appears that the International Quartet has, over time, lost sight of the reason for its existence, while its supposed role in activating the peace process or enforcing “international legitimacy” has eroded significantly. Meanwhile, its statements have become friendlier to the Israeli occupation.

### 3. The United States

The most prominent US trends throughout 2020–2021 can be identified in three strategic projects and decisions:

a. The “Peace to Prosperity” document presented by US President Donald Trump in January 2020 (a continuation of the economic proposal presented at the Bahrain Peace to Prosperity Workshop in mid-2019 and known as the “Deal of the Century”). The plan sought to resolve the Palestine issue based on the following:<sup>22</sup>

**The Palestinian State:** Its most important characteristics were to be:

- The geography of the state includes WB and GS after all settlement blocs are annexed by Israel, with the possibility of linking Gaza and the WB through a corridor (above or under Israeli territories). Settlement outposts located within the territories of the Palestinian state will be linked to Israel through appropriate means of transportation.
- The Palestine state will be fully demilitarized, including the armed organizations in GS, and the Jordan Valley will remain under Israeli sovereignty.
- Controlling the airspace from the west of the Jordan River to the sea would remain Israel’s responsibility, and Israel would retain sovereignty over Gaza’s territorial waters and security responsibility for all border crossings of the Palestinian state.
- Jerusalem would “remain the sovereign capital of the State of Israel,” and some of the suburbs of Jerusalem outside the separation wall would be the capital of Palestine, while Jordanian guardianship over *al-Aqsa* Mosque would remain. The crossing points from the Israeli capital to the Palestinian capital would be under Israeli supervision.
- The “Israeli state” would have its Jewishness recognized, while predominantly Arab towns in northern Israel could be included in the Palestinian administration.
- Israel would freeze settlement construction in the WB for 4 years.
- Any Palestinian government of this state would not include members of organizations that do not recognize Israel.



- The security of the Palestine state from external threats would be the responsibility of Israel, while this responsibility would be gradually reduced in parallel with the development of the Palestinian ability to perform its security mission. Israel would maintain at least one early-warning station in the State of Palestine.

**Refugees:** The approach to the issue of refugees included:

- Cancellation of any lawsuits or claims for the right of return of Palestinian refugees to Israel.
- Searching for a settlement to the problem of the Jewish refugees expelled from Arab countries.
- Palestinian refugees would be able to choose one of the following alternatives: integration in the proposed Palestinian state, integration in the host country, subject to the country's consent, working with the OIC countries to receive about five thousand refugees annually for up to 10 years, which would mean accommodating a total of 50 thousand Palestinian refugees.

**Factors Conducive to Achieving “Peace” included:**

- Economics: Providing \$50 billion to be spent on infrastructure and investment projects over 10 years for the Palestinian state and its neighbors Jordan, Egypt and Lebanon.
- The Palestinian state would not be allowed to establish or operate a port in the GS in the first stage. Instead, Israel would provide the necessary facilities for importing and exporting goods and materials for the benefit of the Palestinian state during the first five years through the Haifa and Ashdod ports, then the Palestinian state could establish a port in Gaza after fulfilling Israel's security requirements.
- Educational and cultural: The US would assist in the development of these sectors, while ensuring that they were free from any culture of incitement of hatred towards Israel.

Trump's plan represented a complete transgression of most of what has been settled by international law and the international community, including:

- The 1967 borders are the international borders.
- East Jerusalem is part of the 1967 occupied territories.
- The Palestinian state is to be a sovereign state in the accepted understanding of international law.
- Palestinian refugees have the right of return and compensation.

Despite the transgressions of most foundations of the Palestinian question, international reactions had no effect on US policy. The PA even rejected the plan based on the Oslo Accords, as if these had replaced international legal terms of reference, which is a dangerous concession in itself.

On the US internal level, 107 representatives of the Democratic Party sent a letter to Trump in which they rejected his plan for the following reasons:<sup>23</sup>

- Failure to provide a reassuring negotiating environment for the Palestinians as the plan involves a unilateral annexation of WB.
- The unilateral annexation by Israel of its settlements and the Jordan Valley.
- The proposed Palestinian state lacked geographical contiguity between its parts.
- The plan made it impossible to achieve the two-state solution, which would lead to the renewal of violence in the region.
- The plan deepened animosity toward the US throughout the broader Middle East.

b. The second strategic decision of the US: The decision of the US military command on 15/1/2021 to shift Israel from the US European Command (EUCOM) to the Central Command (CENTCOM).<sup>24</sup> To understand this development and its impact on the policies of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which includes 30 countries, a historical look at the issue is necessary to understand its circumstances and strategic context. After Donald Trump assumed the US presidency in May 2017, he began promoting the establishment of what was termed the “Arab NATO,” an idea dating back to 2003, when US Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns, during the NATO conference in Prague, called for the deployment of military forces to the east and south because “NATO’s future, we believe, is east, and is south. It’s in the Greater Middle East.”<sup>25</sup> Also, the idea is related to the projects of former US President Jimmy Carter in 1980, following the Iranian revolution, embodied in the transformation of the US Joint Task Force (JTF) to the Rapid Deployment Joint Task Force (RDJTF), in the context of the US facing the repercussions of the Iranian revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. The US has 11 unified combatant commands, one of which is the Central Command with its main headquarters in Florida and three areas of responsibility: the Middle East, Central Asia and part of South Asia. Its regional headquarters is in al-Udeid Air Base in Qatar along with the US Naval Central Command based in Bahrain.



The importance of these commands lay in their ability to respond to events that resulted from the Iranian revolution and the Soviet expansion into Afghanistan at the time, then the Iran-Iraq war and the Iraqi attack on Kuwait and subsequent developments, in addition to the expansion of armed Islamist organizations into the Horn of Africa. In 2013, temporary CENTCOM bases were established, including one in Jordan, believed to be in response to the war in Syria. These bases included Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, the Sultanate of Oman, Pakistan, Central Asia and Saudi Arabia. It was the current US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin who commanded CENTCOM from 2013 to 2016. The only country among the 21 in the region that was outside the scope of the Central Command until the beginning of 2021 was Israel. Iran viewed CENTCOM as a terrorist organization in response to the designation of the IRGC as a terrorist organization.<sup>26</sup> Given the difficulty of integrating Israel in CENTCOM's defense system in the absence of Israeli relations with most Arab countries, coordination was impossible due to Arab countries' refusal, as Norman Schwarzkopf noted in his memoirs.<sup>27</sup>

Israel was assigned to EUCOM, a NATO arm whose focus was on controlling Russian activity in Europe. Yet developments in the Middle East, as a result of the Iranian revolution, the series of Arab-Israeli agreements and the expansion of Arab normalization with Israel provided the opportunity in 2018 and 2019, for some CENTCOM commanders such as Joseph Votel and Kenneth McKenzie Jr. to visit Israel for the first time. This came after Israeli concerns mounted about the US pulling its troops from northern Syria.<sup>28</sup> Then came Arab normalization, in 2020 and 2021, by the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco, in addition to the earlier normalization with Egypt, Jordan and the PA. It is noteworthy that the PA in WB and GS was assigned, alongside Israel, to EUCOM, which made the Israelis think that their chances were ripe for integration into the Central Command.<sup>29</sup>

Israeli experts believe that shifting Israel to CENTCOM in January 2021 would achieve strategic gains for Israel as follows:<sup>30</sup>

- Liberating Israel from the restrictions of military maneuvers and movement, in a region considered, security and strategy wise, the most important to it.
- Making US-Israeli coordination easier in terms of curbing threats, and integrating Israeli forces with Arab and US forces, considering them a strategic and logistical stockpile and part of the area of operations.

- Assigning Israel to CENTCOM and keeping it away from EUCOM eases the burdens on the latter, as happened in 2007 when the US Africa Command (AFRICOM) was established, which was affiliated with the European Command.
- Michael Makovsky, head of the Jewish Institute for National Security of America (JINSA), who is close to former Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu, believes that Israel's shift to CENTCOM represented a development he had long demanded. Makovsky perceives it as a strategic development to enable confrontation with Iran, in cooperation with Iran's Arab neighbors, who have normalized with Israel, noting that discussing the shift preceded normalization. This role to restrain Iran is reinforced through the development of the Israeli relationship with most of the former Soviet republics in Central Asia and the Caucasus, in particular Azerbaijan whose last cooperation with NATO was in 2017, through NATO's Office of International Military Cooperation on the implementation of the PfP [Partnership for Peace], Planning and Review Process (PARP) and the Individual Partnership Action Plans (IPAP) related to the Department of Defense in the Republic of Azerbaijan. We note here that Azerbaijan is one of the closest Caucasus countries to Israel, and it is the second main customer after India for Israel's arms exports.<sup>31</sup>
- The Israeli shift will make Iraqi-Iranian cooperation more complicated, especially with around 2,500 US soldiers in Iraq under CENTCOM.
- The flow of information to Israel through the Gulf military institutions would be easier, more comprehensive and more accurate, and the Gulf countries would be providing information about other Arab countries to Israel. Shifting Israel would enhance coordination between the US, Israel and the Arabs in military operations, strategic planning, early warning and protection of vital infrastructure, including coordination against nuclear and conventional threats and whatever they decide to perceive as "terrorism." It will also allow the US and Israel to expand their operational and technical achievements in missile defense to include the rest of the Middle East, which is a fundamental consideration, amidst the spread of missiles in the region by Iran, Syria, Hizbullah and the Palestinian resistance in GS, as well as Ansar Allah in Yemen and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq.
- Since the Central Command works with regional commands of the US Army, this will enable the Pentagon to cooperate and coordinate with regional partners





on strategy, training, doctrine, logistics, intelligence, technology, procurement and operations, which will enhance and expand the interdependence of Israeli and Arab interests (of normalizing countries).

- It is known that EUCOM operates under the umbrella of NATO, which makes the US decision equivalent to the European decision, something that Israel considers to be a modest gain. But the shift to CENTCOM makes the US decision the most significant, and it is known that European positions are less in harmony with Israeli policies than US ones. This means that Israel will be “free” from European requirements, every once in while. It is noted that European public opinion ranks Israel as fourth among the top 17 countries whose influence on the world is mainly negative, as published in *The Economist* and others from 2014 until now.<sup>32</sup>
- Liberating Israel from European restrictions in its future attacks on Lebanon and GS. These restrictions were demanded by Europe in 2012, 2014 and 2018, when Israel was assigned to the EUCOM.
- Future Israeli attacks on GS (large scale attacks) may mean the rest of the Arab countries under CENTCOM face accusations of betrayal and collaboration by the Palestinians and the rest of the non-normalizing Arab countries. This would increase the fractures in the Arab ranks, allowing Israel to infiltrate the Arab political body and deepen the cracks.
- Assigning Israel to CENTCOM along with the Arab countries will reduce economic and human losses in future confrontations, for they would be distributed between Arabs, Americans and Israelis instead of Israel alone.

c. The third document is that formulated by current US President Joe Biden and published by the White House in March 2021 under the title Interim National Security Strategic Guidance, in which he explains his vision for the US National Security Strategy.

The 24-page document includes several determinants and goals of US policy, and we will focus here on topics closely related to the Palestine issue as follows:<sup>33</sup>

1. Biden identified US national security challenges during the coming stage—at least four years—in six central external dimensions: authoritarianism in Russia and China (internally and internationally), the return of nationalism in many regions of the world, nuclear proliferation, climate change, the fourth industrial revolution

in such areas as artificial intelligence and quantum computing, and finally the COVID-19 pandemic.

Biden believes that the distribution of power across the world is changing creating new threats, on three levels:

- International: In this regard, he points out that China is the only “competitor potentially capable of combining its economic, diplomatic, military, and technological power to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system. Russia remains determined to enhance its global influence and play a disruptive role.”
- Regional: He considers Iran and North Korea regional actors threatening US allies in two important regions.
- Non-state actors: He considers terrorism and violent extremism, domestic and international, remain significant threats.

2. On the US domestic level in particular, and on the global level in general, Biden focused on the sources of threat to national security. First, inequality, which moved him to pay special attention to the middle class; second, the polarization of American society as a nation of immigrants; third, illiberal threats to the rule of law, along with corruption and populism.

3. In his vision to confront these internal and external challenges, Biden focused on the following:

- Seeing democracy and its human values as the solution to the problems of the US and other countries.
- The necessity of US involvement in expanding economic prosperity and opportunity, but with working families’ livelihoods replacing corporate profits or aggregate national wealth as the prime focus.
- Working to build force in its various dimensions, and to ensure an acceptable distribution of force (internationally) through:
  - Preventing adversaries from directly threatening the US and its allies.
  - Preventing the impact on the common foundations that bind the US with its allies.
  - Inhibiting the domination of powerful states in key regions.



- Reinvigorating and modernizing US alliances and partnerships.
- Strengthening the middle class.
- Regulating the rules of international trade (World Trade Organization).
- Strengthening US cyber security.
- Earning back the US position of leadership in international institutions; joining with the international community to tackle the climate crisis and other shared challenges, such as COVID-19 and arms race.
- Considering diplomacy as the US tool of first resort, with the possibility of using force if certain US interests are threatened.

4. Arrangement of geopolitical regions globally from the perspective of Biden’s strategy: The Biden document presents the importance of geopolitical and geostrategic regions, and arranges their priorities as follows:

- The first and second positions with an equal degree of priority are for each of the Indo-Pacific and Western Europe (especially NATO’s area of operation). Accordingly, military presence must be strengthened in these two regions.
- In third place are the US’s neighbors countries or the adjacent environment (Canada, Mexico and Central America).
- The Arab region (Middle East) is ranked fourth.
- Africa came last on the list of US priorities, and the approach to it focused mainly on aid and democracy.

5. In the context of the above, Biden defined his strategy toward the Middle East as follows:

- Maintaining the ironclad commitment to Israel’s security.
- Enhancing Israel’s integration with its neighbors.
- Promoting the two-state solution (he did not say the US should commit to actually ensuring it is manifested in reality).
- Deterring Iranian aggression, while addressing Iran’s nuclear program and other “destabilizing” activities.
- Disrupting terrorist organizations, ending the US’s longest war in Afghanistan and preventing an al-Qaeda resurgence.

- Resolving complex armed conflicts that threaten regional stability.
- Refraining from giving US partners in the Middle East a blank check to pursue policies at odds with US interests and values.
- Backing the UN's efforts to end the war in Yemen.
- Right-sizing US military presence to the level required to disrupt international “terrorist networks,” deter Iran, and protect other vital US interests.

Biden's document can be understood through some American political literature that has adopted its core content. Some US experts believe that the strategic position of the Middle East in US foreign policy has declined since 2010, as highlighted by President Obama's “Pivot to Asia.” President Trump did not work to change this trend substantially, and it seems that current President Joe Biden is embracing this trend, as expressed by Philip Gordon, who worked on Middle East peace negotiations at the White House then became Deputy National Security Advisor to Vice-President Kamala Harris. The Biden administration has signaled that it will promote equal rights for Israelis and Palestinians, however, no tangible improvement was noticed, except on the Israeli side.<sup>34</sup>

It is noted that the Trump term 2017–2021 (20/1/2017–20/1/2021) marked a change in US foreign policy towards the Palestine issue. Following the announcement of his “Peace for Prosperity” plan in January 2020, Trump agreed that Israel could annex about 30% of WB in 2020, including the Jordan Valley and its settlements. He also pressured the Arab sides to normalize relations with Israel, starting in August 2020, with the UAE and Bahrain through the Abraham Accords,<sup>35</sup> then Sudan and Morocco. These policies came in the wake of Trump's calls throughout 2017–2019 to consider a large number of the Israeli settlements as legitimate, in addition to moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, considering it the unified capital of Israel. Trump completely disregarded the return of Palestinian refugees, suggesting instead \$50 billion worth compensation to be distributed to their host countries, in addition to Trump's closure of the Palestinian mission in Washington and his indirect pressure on UNRWA.

Moving to the Biden era, US efforts during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021 were devoted to securing a ceasefire with an emphasis on “ensuring the survival and security of Israel,” while Palestinian rights were referred to only in terms of humanitarian considerations and without clear political content.<sup>36</sup> Still, the



US objected to a commission of inquiry called by the HRC to investigate Israeli violations during the battle. Also, “330 US Representatives wrote a letter to the chair and ranking member of the House Appropriations Committee arguing against reducing funding or adding conditions on security assistance to Israel.”<sup>37</sup>

Washington announced that it would resume some economic development and humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in 2021, amounting to \$360–\$380 million, to control the COVID-19 pandemic, contribute to UNRWA, and support humanitarian efforts in WB and GS.<sup>38</sup>

It is important to note that the US, which had officially supported the establishment of two states since the presidency of President George W. Bush, has prevented Palestine from being considered a full member at the UN through its veto in the UN Security Council, which undermines the credibility of the stated US policy under successive presidents of both parties. The US has used veto at the UN 40 times from the 1979 Peace Treaty Between the State of Israel and the Arab Republic of Egypt to 2021, to protect Israel from facing the consequences of UN Security Council resolutions.<sup>39</sup>

On 21/5/2021, the liberal US-based advocacy group J Street, which is regularly at odds with the pro-Israel lobby group American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), announced that it would urge the Biden administration and the US Congress to fundamentally reset US policy, with a focus on ending the occupation and securing a better future for Israelis and Palestinians. For J Street, this reset should include a reversal of the “destructive steps taken by President Trump,” such as reopening the US consulate in Jerusalem, committing to re-opening the PLO mission in Washington, and making clear that the US recognizes settlement expansion as illegal under international law. In addition, J Street called for pressure to ease and ultimately end the onerous restrictions on the people of Gaza; impose clear transparency requirements and restrictions on the use of US aid to Israel to ensure that US-sourced military equipment—including those purchased with US assistance—“cannot be used by Israel in connection with any acts of creeping annexation or violations of Palestinian rights”; and stop blocking legitimate and balanced critiques of Israeli actions in the UN Security Council and other relevant international bodies.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4. The EU

The most prominent feature of European policy towards the Palestine issue might be the clear disparity in the positions of the European countries, whose strength was reduced by Britain's exit from the trading bloc. Based on their political stances throughout 2020–2021, the European countries can be divided into three categories:<sup>41</sup>

- a. Countries most supportive of Palestine: Such as Luxembourg, Belgium, Ireland, Malta and Finland. The Belgian position is demonstrated, for example, in its foreign minister's request to ban travel and freeze the deposits of Israeli officials connected to the outbreak of violence between Gaza and Israel.
- b. Countries most biased to Israel: Hungary, the Czech Republic, Austria, Greece, Cyprus and Poland.
- c. Countries with oscillating stances: These include the rest of the EU members led by Germany, which often refrains from taking explicit positions against Israel, but is among the countries providing the most European aid to the Palestinians, while being the most critical among the central European countries of armed Palestinian resistance, describing it as "terrorist attacks."<sup>42</sup> France has the same orientation and it tends to give the Quartet a greater role in settling the conflict.

The 2020 session voting on UN General Assembly resolutions indicated that the EU, especially its major countries (France, Germany and Spain) supported more than two-thirds of resolutions against Israel, especially those with less strategic content.<sup>43</sup>

This trend was reflected on the Israeli public's attitude towards EU policies, as Israelis were divided in general into those who view the EU positively (37%), those with a neutral image of it (36%) and those with a negative image (23%). This indicates a significant disparity in the way Israeli mind perceives the US and the EU.<sup>44</sup>

The division in European positions was evident in the conference of the EU foreign ministers, on 18/5/2021, during the war on GS when they failed to reach a final statement calling for an immediate ceasefire. The reason for the disagreement was that Hungary considered that the European statements were "very much one-sided" (favoring the Palestinians) and they "do not help, especially not under current circumstances, when the tension is so high."<sup>45</sup>



The High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell led the press interviews at the conference, to which Hungary objected, as follows:<sup>46</sup>

- a. The priority is for an immediate cessation of all violence and the implementation of a ceasefire.
- b. Protecting civilians and giving full humanitarian access in GS.
- c. Condemning the “rocket attacks by Hamas and other terrorist groups on the Israeli territory.”
- d. Full support for Israel’s right to self-defense provided that the response is proportional and respects International Humanitarian Law.
- e. Recalling the need to respect the status quo of the holy sites and to uphold the right to worship.
- f. Supporting the importance not to proceed with evictions in Sheikh Jarrah in line with the EU position on “illegal” settlements.
- g. The holding of Palestinian elections must be considered a priority.

In May 2021, the European Coordination of Committees and Associations for Palestine (ECCP) was informed about the meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Task Force to Promote Palestinian Human Rights, which is composed of 23 legislators from 10 countries in Europe and North America. After the meeting, the group issued a statement urging the international community to “acknowledge the reality of the oppression that Palestinians are subjected to across historic Palestine and in exile” and act against Israel’s actions in the occupied Palestinian territories including holding it accountable.<sup>47</sup>

In the wake of the Gaza conflict in 2021, the EU announced increased humanitarian assistance to Palestinians, reaching €34.4 million (about \$42.1 million).<sup>48</sup>

On 21/5/2021, the EU issued a statement regarding the battle between the Palestinian resistance and the Israeli army in which it emphasized:<sup>49</sup>

- a. Welcoming the ceasefire announced on 21/5/2021.
- b. Praising the Egyptian, Qatari, US and UN roles in securing a ceasefire.
- c. Working to revive the two-state solution.

- d. The EU's readiness to cooperate with regional parties and the US to achieve a solution to the crisis in the Middle East.
- e. A call to revive the role of the Quartet on the Palestine issue.

Another aspect of the European relationship with Israel deserves attention. It is the rejection of some European countries (Cyprus and Greece) and Israel against the claims of Turkey, regarding the disputes over eastern Mediterranean gas. In addition, strong European-Israeli relations were visible when "Airbus and two Israeli air and space companies were mandated by the EU to fly drones over the Mediterranean Sea to monitor migrant smuggler ships."<sup>50</sup>

British policy remained unchanged after withdrawal from the EU. However, the British political community's support for the Deal of the Century was not encouraging for Trump. In early 2020, 133 UK parliamentarians asserted that the plan "shows contempt for the aspirations and rights of the Palestinian people and international law and provides no realistic basis for a return to negotiations. Instead, it makes peace less likely, and threatens to undermine a fundamental principle of the post-WWII international order: the prohibition of annexation and territorial conquest."<sup>51</sup>

In the current stage, British Home Secretary Priti Patel represents the most prominent defender of Israel as she has taken a decision to broaden already significant hostility against Hamas. Although the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas's military wing, was proscribed a "terrorist organization" by the UK in 2001, Patel argued that it was not possible to distinguish between Hamas's political and military wings, claiming that the Movement "has significant terrorist capability, including access to extensive and sophisticated weaponry," and that it "commits, participates, prepares for and promotes and encourages terrorism," thus, the ban should include all its wings and activities.<sup>52</sup> In this context, *Haaretz* indicated that Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett had asked British Prime Minister Boris Johnson for Britain to designate Hamas as a "terrorist movement."<sup>53</sup> Indeed, Patel put this into effect, as the government adopted her motion, which it was passed into law by the British House of Commons on 24/11/2021.

Secretary of state Patel, who has held her current position since 2019, belongs to the far right in the Conservative Party and has a Thatcherite tendency, meaning that her hostility towards the Palestinian resistance and every liberation movement in the world is an extension of Margaret Thatcher's trend. There are 78 movements



on the British terrorist lists, and this minister, who is of Indian heritage and whose family immigrated to Uganda and then to Britain, was a supporter of the British exit from the EU. Her bias towards Israel can be seen in the following indicators:<sup>54</sup>

- a. She served as vice-chair of the lobby group Conservative Friends of Israel.
- b. In 2017, she was forced to resign as UK international development secretary because of unauthorized meetings with Israeli officials when she was supposedly on vacation. Labour Party (UK) MP Jon Trickett led an uproar about that visit, with Patel claiming that the Foreign Office had known about it she then apologized for not coordinating with the Foreign Office, which meant that her first statement was a lie.
- c. Patel criticized the UK's decision to invest funds from the UK Department for International Development, which she headed, to support the Palestinian territories through UN agencies and the PA. In October 2016, she ordered a review of the funding measures, temporarily freezing nearly a third of British aid to the Palestinians during the review process. Two months later, in December 2016, she emphasized that future aid would focus “solely on vital health and education services,” in order to meet the urgent needs of the Palestinian people.<sup>55</sup> This move has been widely supported by pro-Israel groups, including the Zionist Federation, and the Jewish Leadership Council,<sup>56</sup> which includes more than 30 organizations with more than 50 thousand members, and is staunchly hostile to the global BDS movement.
- d. In 2017, on a trip to Israel, Patel recommended providing aid to the Israeli army in the occupied Golan by establishing hospitals there. Israeli reports revealed that she was concerned with the treatment of members of the Syrian opposition injured in battles with the Syrian army, rather than with the assistance of displaced Syrians as she initially claimed.

Despite the influence of Priti Patel, the decision to categorize Hamas a “terrorist movement” is a British government decision, in line with its general orientation, and not the decision of the minister, despite her enthusiasm about it.

## **5. BRICS Countries**

Joint statements of the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) issued by their presidents (17/11/2020), foreign ministers (1/6/2021),

and deputy foreign ministers or special envoys to the Middle East (26/8/2020), emphasized their time-honored positions represented in the following:<sup>57</sup>

- a. Conflicts and crises in the region must be resolved by political and diplomatic means, through comprehensive and direct dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis, in accordance with international law and non-interference in internal affairs, while respecting the independence, territorial integrity and sovereignty of all states.
- b. Welcoming the announcement of a ceasefire in GS between the Israeli army and the Palestinian resistance as of 21/5/2021, stressing the urgent need to restore complete calm and expressing sorrow for the loss of civilian lives as a result of the violence.
- c. Urging the international community to dedicate immediate attention to providing humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian civilian population, particularly in GS. They also supported the call of UN Secretary-General António Guterres for the international community to work with UN bodies, including UNRWA, and to develop an integrated and strong package of support to achieve rapid and sustainable reconstruction.
- d. Supporting the two-state solution in a way that leads to a comprehensive “peace,” with Israel and Palestine living “peacefully” side by side within secure and recognized borders, based on international resolutions, especially UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative.
- e. Emphasizing the need to formulate an international charter under UN supervision to combat all forms of terrorism.

However, a detailed look at the policies of the BRICS countries shows a discrepancy in their commitment to balanced relations with the Palestinian and Israeli sides, as evident in the following indicators:<sup>58</sup>

- a. Brazil appears to be the most favorable to Israeli policies, especially under the rule of current President Jair Bolsonaro, who considers Jerusalem the united capital of Israel. This position was reinforced by statements of Eduardo Bolsonaro, the son of the Brazilian president and a prominent right-wing politician, on the opening of a commercial office for Brazil in Jerusalem in 2019. Also, Brazilian Foreign Minister Ernesto Araújo expressed, in a joint statement with his Israeli counterpart in March 2021, his full support for the Abraham Accords and his opposition to any investigations regarding Israeli violations of human rights.



In May 2021, Brazil supported the statement of the Secretary-General of the Organization of American States Luis Almagro, labelling Hamas a “terrorist” movement, whereas Argentina, Bolivia, Mexico and Venezuela opposed the statement.<sup>59</sup>

b. India: The world’s second most populous country established relations with Israel in 1992; the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which assumed power in 2014 has generally viewed Israel favorably, and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Israel in 2017. Relations between the two countries have developed significantly, especially in the defense field. In 2020, Israel’s arms sales to India amounted to about one billion dollars, not including sales of related technology. Israel is India’s second-largest arms supplier after Russia and third largest trade partner in Asia. The memorandum of understanding signed in 2020 between India and Israel in these two areas confirms the continued development of this relationship as it heads towards being a strategic partnership.

But India is still influenced by some of its traditional positions toward the Palestinians, evident in its votes with the Palestinian side at the UN, notably regarding Jerusalem and its suburbs, as it appeared in the Security Council sessions at the end of May 2021. However, India condemned the Palestinian resistance’s rocket attacks on Israel, describing them at the Security Council as “indiscriminate firing of rockets from Gaza, which targets the civilian population in Israel.”<sup>60</sup>

c. Traditional Russian positions remain unchanged, including calling for a two-state solution through the implementation of UN resolutions and the return to negotiations through the Quartet, in addition to encouraging improvements in Palestinian infrastructure, economics and Palestinian state-building measures.

During Benjamin Netanyahu’s premiership, especially in the final years, Israel and Russia worked on strengthening their relations. Netanyahu held regular meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the beginning of 2020 (they met 13 times during Netanyahu’s tenure). However, strained US-Russian relations regarding several international issues, most notably the Crimean crisis, Ukraine and Syria, put Israeli diplomacy in a difficult position, caught between their main sponsor and another country with which they sought positive relations. Moreover, Russia did not show enthusiasm for Trump’s Deal of the Century as a way of addressing the Palestine issue. President Putin met Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in January 2020, and Russia reconfirmed its usual position, notably regarding the two-state solution with East Jerusalem considered as part of

the 1967 occupied territories. Russia also gave a \$4 million grant to the UN World Food Program (WFP) to provide food for Palestinians in GS and WB.

d. The Chinese initiative announced by Foreign Minister Wang Yi to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in March 2021 illustrated China's general trend, and was essentially a repetition of what China had previously announced in 2013. In essence, the Chinese initiative corresponded with its Russian counterpart in calling for a two-state solution and two countries living "peacefully" according to UN resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. China was more severe in criticizing the US position in the UN Security Council, when the US disrupted the Council's sessions with a statement regarding the developments in May 2021; China called on "the United States to support the 15-member organ in easing the situation, building trust and advancing a political settlement to the conflict."<sup>61</sup>

Israel continues to show great reluctance to accept the Chinese Foreign Ministry assuming mediation between the Israeli and Palestinian sides. In June 2021, Israel voted for a resolution issued by the HRC against Chinese practices towards the Muslim Uyghur minority in China, while Israeli media said the vote was cast only under US pressure. Israel was simultaneously trying to avoid voting on similar decisions against China. It is possible that China's support for the HRC decision to form an international committee to investigate Israeli practices towards the Palestinians was more of a Chinese reaction to the Israeli position on the Uyghurs' issue than a genuine principled vote.

It is necessary to note that trade, economic and diplomatic relations between China and Israel are developing remarkably quickly. The volume of trade between the two multiplied to reach approximately \$12 billion over the period 2016 to mid-2021.

China provided modest aid to the Palestinians in 2021, including one million dollars in humanitarian aid, in addition to providing another million dollars and 200 thousand vaccines to UNRWA to control the COVID-19 pandemic.

e. South Africa: In 2019, South Africa announced its intention to downgrade diplomatic relations with Israel, and has proceeded with a policy closer to the Palestinian position, as demonstrated in the angry reactions of the political elite against a judge who expressed sympathy with Israel. South Africa has assumed strong stances in support of the Palestinians through two steps in 2020 and 2021:



- Its criticism of the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel for not insisting on any commitment by Israel not to annex Palestinian land, and the UAE did not consider the inevitable negative impact of its agreement with Israel on Palestinian rights.
- South Africa believed that the Abraham Accords were made without any commitment by Israel to stopping its annexation of Palestinian land, and with the imposition of Israeli sovereignty on the occupied land and their Palestinian residents.

The above does not negate the achievement of Israeli diplomats in Africa in July 2021, when the African Union (AU) re-accepted Israel as an observer member; a breakthrough it had failed to obtain twice previously (2014 and 2018) after the transformation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) into the AU in 2002. Remarkably, the OAU had granted Israel the status of an observer member, but former Libyan President Muammar Gaddafi and Chairperson of the AU Commission Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma from South Africa, had been prominent in preventing Israel from maintaining this status in the AU. The Chairperson of the AU Commission Moussa Faki Mahamat criticized the Israeli attacks on GS in May 2021, its aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its quest to forcibly expel Palestinians from their homes in Jerusalem, declaring all these acts violations of international law and unnecessary complications of “peace” efforts. Despite all that, Israeli diplomacy still perceived the AU decision to grant observer status a prelude to normalizing relations with the majority of AU member states, especially as Israel has diplomatic relations with 46 of 55 African countries in the Union.<sup>62</sup> Algeria has made the most strenuous diplomatic efforts to discourage the AU from accepting Israel as an observer member, with the support of the Arab African countries in the Arab League, with the notable exceptions of Morocco, Sudan and Somalia.<sup>63</sup>

Despite this, the final statement issued by the AU summit in February 2020 affirmed full solidarity with the Palestinian people in rejecting the Deal of the Century. It stressed the need to find a peaceful political settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions, with an emphasis on supporting the legitimate legal status of East Jerusalem as the capital of the State of Palestine. It called on Israel to refrain from any action which could undermine this status. The statement considered all settlements in WB, East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan to be null and void.<sup>64</sup>

## 6. Japan

Besides its support of the two-state solution, where the Palestinians and the Israelis would live in “peace,” Japan is still striving to execute some of its development and economic projects in the Middle East. Japanese efforts in this respect were as follows:<sup>65</sup>

- a. The Corridor for Peace and Prosperity Initiative concerned with developing and industrializing the Jordan Valley’s agricultural fields. 33 tenants signed to work on the project with 16 factories beginning operations in May 2021.
- b. As part of its assistance to the employment of Palestinian refugees through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), in the Refugee Camp Improvement Project (PALCIP), which began in 2016, Japan decided in 2020 to increase its contribution to \$910 million and extend the term of the project.
- c. In 2021, Japan provided \$35 million to WB and GS to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and mitigate its social and economic impacts.

## 7. Chile

Leftist candidate Gabriel Boric, 35, won Chile’s presidential election after defeating his right-wing opponent José Antonio Kast by more than 10 points. Boric, whose country hosts one of the largest Palestinian communities in the world (at least 300 thousand of Palestinian origin), is staunchly pro-Palestine and a fierce opponent of Israel, while strongly backing the BDS movement. As a lawmaker, President Boric supported a bill proposing the boycott of Israeli goods. During his election campaign, Boric referred to Israel as “murderous” in a meeting with the Jewish community, and he signaled his support for the Palestine issue in a meeting with Chilean-Palestinians. In October 2021, he declared Israel a genocidal and criminal state, and that human rights should be defended no matter how powerful the abusive states are.<sup>66</sup>

The return of the left in Chile and its rise in some Latin American countries, led by Mexico, Argentina, Peru, Costa Rica, Panama and Bolivia, give a strong push for the Palestine issue in the region, and was a blow to Israel, which was hoping that right wing parties would dominate and transfer the embassies of these countries to Jerusalem.<sup>67</sup>



## 8. International Public Opinion<sup>68</sup>

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle in 2021 saw an increasing trend in international public opinion sympathizing with the Palestinian point of view, as emphasized in demonstrations in western cities (London, Brussels, Madrid, Berlin, Paris, Dublin, New Zealand, and across a number of Canadian and US cities). Comparisons between Israeli policies and those of racial discrimination in South Africa, before the collapse of its apartheid regime, were a source of concern for Israeli leaders and experts.<sup>69</sup> Western and Israeli media indicated that Israel had lost the cultural battle when it bombarded GS in May 2021, where media outlets perceived comparisons between the Palestinians and Western movements, like Black Lives Matter and Me Too, as an indication of the colonial approach in Israeli policies, which is no longer consistent with contemporary societies.<sup>70</sup> A US think tank asserted that “International criticism—or, in some cases, hatred—of Israel is now leaking into the mainstream American discourse and has become center stage on global social media platforms.”<sup>71</sup> In addition, the 1948 Palestinians’ demonstrations revealed the depth of the rift and the racist, colonial character of Israeli society and its political system, which further deepened the negative image of Israel in the world.<sup>72</sup> Even in the US, which represents the center of support for Israeli policies, during its attacks on GS in May 2021, 140 American progressive groups released a joint statement calling on the Biden administration to “condemn the Israeli government” over its policies that amount to war crimes against Palestinians. Furthermore, 25 progressive American lawmakers sent a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken urging diplomatic pressure to prevent unlawful evictions in Sheikh Jarrah.<sup>73</sup>

International governmental and non-governmental organizations continued to criticize Israel, as shown in the following table:<sup>74</sup>

**Table 1/8: Stances of International Governmental and Non-Governmental Organizations Towards Israeli Policies 2020–2021**

Organization	Stance	Date
<b>Human Rights Watch</b>	Criticized Israel for “committing crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.” Also, for demolishing homes, deporting residents, restricting movement, obstructing access to water and electricity, continuing to build settlements, and preparing to annex more Palestinian land, in addition to arbitrary arrests of hundreds of individuals, as well as the disruption of Palestinian international trade.	2021
<b>Amnesty International</b>	1. Criticized Israel for arresting the General Coordinator of BDS Mahmud Nawajaa and calling on the Israeli authorities to release him and “and ensure he is able to safely exercise his rights to freedom of expression.”	7/8/2020
	2. Criticized Israel’s settlement activities.	15/9/2020
	3. Called on governments to provide their full political and practical support to ICC’s December 2019 decision on its territorial jurisdiction, including the “Situation in Palestine,” and urged those countries that had sought to challenge this jurisdiction to reconsider their positions.	16/3/2020
	4. Criticized Israel for using “abusive and wanton force against largely peaceful Palestinian protesters” in East Jerusalem, demonstrating against the forced displacement of Palestinian civilians.	11/5/2021
	5. Criticized Israel’s shutdown of the headquarters of the Palestinian Health Work Committees despite the COVID-19 threat.	9/6/2021
	6. Criticized Israel’s raids on civilian sites in Gaza, the killing of entire families and wanton destruction of civilian property.	17/5/2021
<b>A campaign by 452 civil society organizations from all over the world</b>	Demanded the UN General Assembly investigate Israeli apartheid and impose sanctions, similar to those placed on South Africa.	22/9/2020
<b>120 gender studies departments in American universities</b>	Signed a statement labelling Israel an apartheid state.	24/5/2021
<b>ICC</b>	Confirmed the court’s jurisdiction over the situation in Palestine, enabling it to investigate crimes against humanity in the occupied Palestinian territories, a decision opposed by Israel.	5/2/2021





It is helpful to study the position of Israel in international measurement models, especially within the main dimensions that the world adopts as indicators of the state’s image in international public opinion, shown in the following table:<sup>75</sup>

**Table 2/8: Israel in International Measurement Models 2020–2021**

Index	2020	2021	Remarks
<b>Democracy</b>	7.84	7.6	On a scale of 10.
<b>Gini Index (Income distribution)</b>	36.9	39	On a scale of 100. The higher the rating, the worse the situation. (Measurement based on the income share of the richest 10% of the population)
<b>Political Stability</b>	75.1	76.5	On a scale of 100. (The higher rating indicates a worse situation)
<b>Militarization Index</b>	888.6	NA	Israel ranks first in the world in this indicator, which reflects the extent of influence of the military establishment.
<b>Corruption</b>	60	NA	There is an increase in corruption compared to the previous three years.

There has been a decline in the above five indicators, which means a deterioration in democracy, an increase in corruption, an increase in the income gap and a decline in political stability. As for militarization, which measures the weight of the military institution within the state’s interactions, internally and externally, by measuring sub-indicators, Israel is a global leader.

The position of any country in these indicators is of particular importance,<sup>76</sup> given that it affects investments of major international companies, tourism and cooperation with other countries, in addition to presenting a positive or negative image of the state to international publics.

International public opinion polls have indicated that the negative image of Israel has been increasing, albeit slowly and gradually, which is normal in public opinion trends, especially since the knowledge of Israeli policies among public opinion is neither thorough nor accurate. In a 2021 poll on the extent of knowledge about Israel, 62% of Europeans said that their knowledge was weak, while 28% described their knowledge as strong.<sup>77</sup>

Although US public opinion is the most supportive of Israel, the indicators for 2020 and 2021 reveal a continued decline in support for Israel in the US society, even among American Jews. Americans’ views on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict show the following:<sup>78</sup>

**Table 3/8: The Position of American Public Opinion 2020–2021 (%)**

	2020	2021	Remarks
<b>Favorable ratings:</b> <b>Israelis</b> <b>Palestinians</b>	74 23	75 30	Increase in support for the Palestinians is higher, although the difference in support remains large in favor of Israel.
<b>More sympathies with:</b> <b>The Israelis</b> <b>The Palestinians</b>	60 23	58 25	A slight decrease for the Israelis and a slight increase for the Palestinians.
<b>Establishing the Palestinian state:</b> <b>Favor</b> <b>Oppose</b>	55 34	52 37	An increase in support for the establishment of a Palestinian state.

**Table 4/8: US Partisan Views on Israel and the Palestinians 2021 (%)**

	Republicans	Democrats
<b>US pressure:</b> <b>More on Palestinians</b> <b>More on Israelis</b>	65 17	29 53
<b>Palestinian statehood:</b> <b>Favor</b> <b>Oppose</b>	38 50	67 22

It is noticeable that American Jews’ attitudes toward Israeli policies vary. A Pew Research Center survey released in May 2021 found that 37% of young Jews (under 30) believed that the US is too supportive Israel, while 67% of Jews (65 and older) said they were “somewhat” or “very” attached to Israel. Hence, the attachment decreases with younger age.<sup>79</sup>

As for the EU, an Israeli study issued by INSS<sup>80</sup> indicated the growing anti-Israel political discourse among European left and right-wing parties. The study revealed that the analysis of these parties’ discourse has shown that the negative view of Israel was clearly increasing in the European political discourse. The study of European political discourse in 2019 and 2020, showed that in main European countries 36% compare Israel to the Nazis, while 39% associated Jews with negative moral practices.

The negative image of Israel deepened after the disclosure of Pegasus spyware, which was developed by Israeli firm NSO, and can be secretly installed on mobile phones (and other devices), running most versions of iOS and Android. It turned out that this espionage was used against journalists, politicians, human rights activists and leaders of Western and non-Western countries, prompting calls for international meetings to be held to investigate the issue.<sup>81</sup>

Some reports and studies have indicated that the issue of Pegasus affected Israel in the following ways:<sup>82</sup>

- a. A negative effect on the image of the Israeli intelligence services and on the “ethics of Israeli businessmen,” who had been keen to reflect a positive image of their activities and methods.
- b. Increased accusations that Israel is violating human rights by hacking the cellphones of journalists, human rights activists and others.
- c. Connecting Pegasus software and the murder of the Washington Post’s Saudi columnist Jamal Khashoggi.
- d. Countries became more likely to tighten Israeli exports control standards because of security concerns.

The Israeli endeavor to redirect international public opinion trends in its favor has been supervised by a media planning office called “The Bridge” (*Gesher* in Hebrew), aimed at “creating the messages, coordinating the media appearances, coordinating digital activity, and giving answers to our embassies and consulates abroad.” This media unit, utilized to confront global public opinion, consists of the Israeli military spokesperson, Israel police, the Prime Minister’s Office, Strategic Affairs Ministry and Government Press Office. However, available indications regarding Israel’s public information campaign (called *Hasbara*) show that it has been slow and ineffective in its attempts to affect global public opinion.<sup>83</sup>

## ***Second: Israel and Globalization***

International relations literature since the 1970s has measured the globalization index of countries to determine the extent of their involvement in international affairs. The measurement models of globalization index depend on the degree of state involvement in global affairs, based on three central dimensions: economic,

political and social. Derived from these dimensions, sub-indices which, according to the adopted model, range from 40 to 45 sub-indicators. We have adopted a model which measures globalization based on 43 sub-indicators.

Measurement results for Israel according to several international measurement models indicate the following:<sup>84</sup>

**Table 5/8: Measuring and Determining the Israeli Globalization Index 2010–2020**

Year	Total globalization index (%)	Economic globalization (15 sub-indices)	Political globalization (6 sub-indices)	Social globalization (22 sub-indices)	Global rank
2010	80.37	73.54	73.04	84.84	25
2012	76.94	72.79	73.04	85.01	38
2014	76.39	71.03	72.29	85.85	39
2016	77.27	70.6	74.62	86.59	41
2018	76.88	70.86	74.33	85.44	40
2020	74.3	70.1	74.29	85.35	43
<b>General trend</b>	decline	decline	fluctuation	increase	decline

This data was collected from multiple models, each covering a specific dimension.

1. Israel ranks 43rd in globalization in 2020.
2. The general trend of globalization of Israel indicates relative stability with a slight decline throughout 2010–2020. Results indicate Israel’s expansion in social globalization, while in political globalization it fluctuated, and it could have declined further were not for Arab normalization and diplomatic recognition. In economic globalization, Israel declined, where its permanent deficit in international trade in the 2016–2020 increased by 34%.

### ***Third: Prospects for the Near Future***

Excluding sudden and difficult to predict changes, the projection of existing data of local, regional and international conditions for the next two years, 2022–2023, indicates the following:

1. It is expected that voting in the General Assembly in favor of the Palestine issue will continue at a rate of approximately 145 out of 193 countries. As for the Security Council, despite the presence of a permanent majority in favor of Palestine, the US veto is always ready to overturn any resolution not complying with US criteria or with basic Israeli interests.

2. The trend of international aid to the Palestinian people or to UNRWA indicates a serious decline from foreign and Arab contributors. This trend is reinforced by the worldwide increasing need for economic assistance of different societies. The expansion of normalization and the increasing pressure on Palestinians to accept a peace settlement, far short of their aspirations, fall within this context.

3. International pressure on Israel, with the exception of public opinion, still falls within the scope of “reproach and blame,” far from any actual serious measures. The new US administration has not retreated from any of the big moves taken by Trump in favor of Israel. It even encourages the continuation of most of them. Adding Europe’s persistence with its traditional policy, especially by the EU’s major powers, as well as Chinese and Russian pragmatism, there will be great difficulty in persuading current or future Israeli government to make concessions of importance that would tempt the Palestinians to return to negotiations, especially considering the imbalance of power in favor of Israel, the increase in Arab normalization with Israel and the increasing weight of the Israeli right in Israeli decision-making bodies.

4. The official international community, for the most part, tends not to support Palestinian armed resistance. This means that pressure on the resistance movements, especially in GS, will continue through Israeli military pressure backed by the US veto and, in best case scenarios, the abstention from voting by most European countries. Also, regional and international positions will remain limited to humanitarian support within narrower limits. Statements of most major countries criticizing Palestinian missile attacks on Israel have reinforced this perception.

5. Israel’s implementation of the Abraham Accords with several Arab countries will take place on issues that concern Israel, but it will not commit to freezing its annexation of settlements in the Jordan Valley, as promised by Benjamin Netanyahu and encouraged by the UAE. The statements of the Security Council and the Quartet may continue to condemn these steps but they will not take any actual measures.

6. The next two years may witness a change in the Palestinian leadership, and the US will try to play an important role in determining who will be president, as they did during Yasir ‘Arafat’s illness or following his death.

7. Popular sympathy with the Palestinian position is expected to increase in most countries, including the US, especially if Palestinian resistance efforts continues.

8. Israeli pressure will probably increase to thwart and neutralize boycott movements, such as BDS. However, such movements can be expected to continue their activities.

9. Israel’s tendency to accelerate the pace of Jewish immigration to Palestine may increase through coordinated media campaigns. They would focus on two pillars:

- a. Anti-Semitism, especially in European countries and the US.
- b. Attempting to link “terrorism,” wherever it may occur, with Islamic organizations.



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## This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2020–2021, the 12th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive objective approach, the report details the developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2021, along with analyses and forecasts.

This report is the result of collaborative work of 15 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 internal situation in Israel, politically, economically and militarily; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations.

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

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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