

The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



Edited By

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh



Al-Zaytouna Centre For Studies & Consultations

The Palestine Strategic Report 2020 – 2021



**Al-Zaytouna Centre
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The Palestine Strategic Report 2020–2021

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List of Abbreviations

AIPAC	American Israel Public Affairs Committee
AKP	Justice and Development Party (<i>Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi</i>)
ARIJ	Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem
AU	African Union
BDS	Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions Campaign
BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
CBR	Crude Birth Rate
CBS	Israel Central Bureau of Statistics
CDR	Crude Death Rate
CENTCOM	US Central Command
CRS	Congressional Research Service
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
EU	European Union
EUCOM	European Command
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNA	Libyan Government of National Accord
GS	Gaza Strip
HRC	UN Human Rights Council
IAA	Israel Antiquities Authority
IAI	Israel Aerospace Industries
ICC	International Criminal Court
ISA	Israel Security Agency (<i>Shabak</i>)
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
LAS	League of Arab States
MK	Member of Knesset
MoU	memorandum of understanding
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OCHA-oPt	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – occupied Palestinian territory
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
PA	Palestinian Authority
PCBS	Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics



PCC	Palestinian Central Council
PEGASE	Mecanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d’Aide Socio-Economique
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PIJ	Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine
PLC	Palestinian Legislative Council
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
PNC	Palestine National Council
PPP	Palestinian People’s Party
RC	Refugee Camp
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UAL	United Arab List (<i>Ra ‘am</i>)
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization’s
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
US	United States of America
VAT	Value added tax
WB	West Bank

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*Chapter Three:**The Land and the Holy Sites**** Jerusalem and Holy Sites**

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Introduction

This is the 12th edition of the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) series. It has come to occupy a distinguished position as a reference for Palestine studies and as an indispensable document for researchers studying the Palestinian affairs. The PSR is a source of comprehensive and well-documented information and data, presenting its material within an objective and analytical framework of academic discipline. The PSR also contains forecasts covering future scenarios in the near term. The PSR's scope covers the internal Palestinian situation, the Israeli scene, the paths of resistance and peace process, and the Arab, Islamic, and international dimensions of the Palestine issue. It also presents updates concerning the land, Jerusalem, the holy sites, and the state of Palestinian demographics and economy.

The period covered by the strategic report 2020–2021 brought great Palestinian hopes that the Palestinian reconciliation and the reform of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) would be achieved, and the legislative and executive institutions would be activated. However, the leadership of the PLO and the Palestinian Authority (PA) disrupted the elections and the reconciliation process, making this period end up with one of the greatest frustrations in the Palestine modern and contemporary history, and this leadership losing a lot of trust and credibility among the Palestinian public. As a result, the PA and PLO leadership has further insisted on continuing its dominance, weakening the PLO, and continuing the peace process and security coordination with the Israeli occupation.

At the same time, the Israeli scene is becoming more religiously extreme and radically nationalist, with the potential of further enactment of laws that entrench the Jewish-Zionist identity of Israel. This was accompanied by more settlement and Judaization plans in the West Bank (WB), particularly Jerusalem, and attempts to impose the Israeli vision on the end of the Palestine issue. The Israeli political system has experienced confusion due to holding four general elections in two years and the accession of an Arab party to the government coalition, whose cohesion depends on the rivalry with Netanyahu.

The Sword of Jerusalem battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls), in May 2021, has brought Hamas and the resistance forces to the forefront of the Palestinian scene, linked the resistance action of Gaza Strip (GS) to Jerusalem,



consolidated the unity of the Palestinians inside Palestine and abroad, and led to a decline in Israel’s international status.

Although the Palestinian people were united against the “Trump deal”; the Israeli side, with US cover and support, was able to make an official normalization breakthrough in the weak and “soft spot” of the Arab and Muslim countries, when the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco signed agreements to normalize relations with Israel. Nevertheless, Israel is still facing a broad Arab and Muslim public, who rejects normalization and supports the liberation path.

The Palestine issue is still internationally supported, as evident in the resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly and its institutions. Despite the enormous Israeli efforts to enhance its image, distort the Palestine issue and criminalize the resistance, indicators have shown a gradual and slow increase in the international public opinion sympathizing with Palestine.

As has been our policy in previous editions of the report, the names of contributors, chapter titles, or the titles of their research are mentioned at the start of the book, but not at the start of each chapter, reflecting the fact that the PSR is one collective effort and because the editing of this PSR, as in all previous editions, is above and beyond the usual task. As a result, crucial additions, amendments and updates in some chapters were made, making the responsibility for their final shape a joint responsibility.

We must extend our gratitude to the experts who have taken part in drafting the report, the advisers who have revised its texts, and the staff team at al-Zaytouna Centre, including editor’s assistants and archivists, who had an important role in providing material, revising texts and designing the report to the required standard. This edition came despite the exceptional circumstances that Lebanon is going through, and the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic on the work environment.

Finally, praise be to Allah for the good success of this report and its position as a specialized reference. We would like to thank everyone who has supported and encouraged the work behind it. We also welcome all constructive criticism, advice and suggestions.

Editor

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammed Saleh



Chapter One

The Internal Palestinian Scene

The Internal Palestinian Scene

Introduction

The years 2020 and 2021 are organically linked to what stood before, including protracted Palestinian progression since the Palestinian schism of 2007, in terms of the continued divisions, and the inability of the Palestinian leadership to confront the major challenges that together pose an existential threat to the Palestine issue. Yet these two years saw a striking number of significant developments, most importantly the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls). The confrontation mobilized Palestinians across the borders of mandate Palestine and in the Diaspora and rallied them around their option of resistance, bringing renewed hope in the possibility of the Palestine issue regaining some of its status. In stark contrast, the internal political paralysis worsened, as the Palestinian Authority (PA) leadership insisted on monopolising power. Indeed, although 2020 ended with an agreement between the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) and Fatah on establishing a national partnership through elections, 2021 ended with the gap between the two main parties in Palestine having grown much wider, after the PA leadership cancelled the elections. The gap between the PA leadership and broad segments of the Palestinians also widened, following a series of incidents that exacerbated the domestic crises of the PA and pushed it to rely more than ever on external support.

First: Overview of the Two Years

The Palestinian factions entered 2020 distant from one another in the context of the normalization of the ongoing and open-ended political schism. The dissolution of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) at the end of 2018, and the selection of Mohammad Shtayyeh, the Fatah Central Committee member, in March 2019 to form a government to succeed that of Rami Hamdallah, were both an overturning of al-Shati' Agreement between Fatah and Hamas, which stipulated the formation of a National Consensus Government. These events are key to understanding internal national relations, for they indicated what future domestic policies the

PA would adopt over the subsequent two years, affecting even the judiciary. In July 2019, President Mahmud ‘Abbas formed the Supreme Judicial Council, and in January 2021, he issued decrees forming regular courts, amending the 2002 Law on the Judicial Authority, and formed administrative courts.¹ This meant the cementing of the PA’s domination of the executive authority, which in turn is focused on supporting the Palestinian presidency, after dissolving or marginalizing other institutions and branches of power.

These measures contradicted any stated intention of the PA to pave the way for a national partnership, end the division, fortify the Palestinian society against challenges, shore up national unity or frustrate the efforts to liquidate the Palestine issue. Nevertheless, another aspect of the picture began to emerge in early 2020, when the PA leadership announced steps aiming to rally Palestinian factions behind its plan to confront President Donald Trump’s “Deal of the Century.” Indeed, the PA leadership invited Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), in addition to Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) factions naturally, to attend a “Palestinian leadership”—as the PA put it—meeting at the PA headquarters in al-Muqata‘a, Ramallah, to discuss the “Deal of the Century.”² Hamas and the PIJ agreed to attend the meeting.³

As has been the pattern for years, steps like these were followed with statements that overpromised or were unrealistic, such as claiming that the division was now over for the Palestinians who would engage henceforth in a popular struggle as one people, with one unified program, that would begin with changing the purely technocratic nature of the PA under the Oslo mandate. Such statements were made by Fatah leaders, after Hamas and the PIJ agreed to attend the 2020 meeting of the Palestinian leadership.⁴ The Hamas leadership also expressed some optimism, following the decision of President ‘Abbas to send a delegation of Palestinian factions from the West Bank (WB) to Gaza Strip (GS), saying this had laid the groundwork for a new stage of national dialogue.⁵ ‘Abbas himself was supposed to visit GS, to give these steps a higher degree of credibility. However, he changed his mind, and contented himself with the delegation attending without him.⁶ However, even the visit by the delegation was troubled, amid mutual accusations between the two sides about who was responsible for thwarting the president’s visit.⁷

While considering Palestinian internal relations in 2020–2021, we should bear in mind a set of facts and developments, and the PA’s conduct with regards to

them. These include the PA's measures in 2018 and 2019, which sought to put the control of the entire public sphere in the hands of the executive branch, which is exclusively run by 'Abbas' team and consequently Fatah. We must also think about the paralysis of the PA vis-à-vis the decisions of Donald Trump, which include: recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, in December 2017; transferring the United States of America (US) embassy from Tel Aviv to the holy city; cutting all US funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), in August 2018; attempting to revoke the status of Palestinian refugees to limit their numbers to no more than 40 thousand; closing the PLO representative office in Washington, in September 2018; and convening the Peace to Prosperity workshop held in Bahrain, in June 2019, which was seen as the economic prelude to Trump's big plans for the Palestine issue. In January 2020, Trump announced his Middle East Peace Plan, *Peace To Prosperity: A Vision to Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People*, and in May 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his government's plan to annex areas of WB, based on Trump's plan.

The PA's policies and actions did not enable the completion of the reconciliation process or building of partnership and national unity. On the contrary, the PA dissolved the PLC and reformed the judiciary in a way that made it completely subordinate to the PA. The PA's response to US-Israeli measures was ineffective, even as they targeted the core of the Palestine issue itself. An unprecedented wave of normalizations between Israel and Arab countries followed. The PA was so dominant in the Palestinian arena that its negative energy in responding to the Trump-led developments was mirrored on the Palestinian street, while the Fatah movement, the spinal cord and main political component of the PA, did not show a serious pivot towards national reconciliation and unity, the re-formation of Palestinian institutions, and the repurposing of the PA's role. Instead, Fatah carried out a calculated manoeuvre that cost the PA leadership nothing, as it waited for the results of the US elections to produce a new administration in the White House.

The PA needed to fill the political vacuum pending the outcome of the election, and as a result, reconciliation talks continued from early 2020 until mid-2021. These talks took on multiple forms, from internal national appeals to regional and international initiatives and offers, bilateral agreements between Hamas and Fatah to launch popular resistance against the "Deal of the Century," and an agreement between the two parties and all national factions on completing the reconciliation



through staggered elections—legislative, presidential and the PLO’s Palestine National Council (PNC) elections. However, the PA President (with Fatah behind him) upended this agreement with the unilateral decision to abolish the elections. Consequently, the Palestinian scene entered a new phase of deadlock, with the PA’s purely technocratic role cemented, despite the early 2020 talk from PA leaders about changing this reality.

Second: The Mohammad Shtayyeh Government in the Heart of Crises

The formation of the Mohammad Shtayyeh government represented the overturning of al-Shati’ Agreement (2014), through the dismissal of the National Consensus Government, replacing it with a new government headed by a Fatah Central Committee member. This meant that this new government’s policies represent Fatah’s approach.

It is possible to say that the two years under scrutiny in this analysis were the worst for the Mohammad Shtayyeh government, whether because of the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic, the ongoing Israeli deductions from the clearance tax revenues, or the political and security developments in the Palestinian arena, especially after the cancellation of the elections and the death of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat. The two years were marked by the increased presence of PA security forces on the Palestinian scene, especially in the second half of 2021, prompting a number of rights groups to warn against a “descent into tyranny and authoritarianism, as a result of unilateralism of power, the hijacking of state institutions by powerful individuals, narrowing the scope of work of state institutions, and the denial of citizens’ rights to freedom of expression, opinion, assembly and organization.”

The rights groups also held the PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas and the government responsible for the “dangerous violations and assault on citizens through the security forces and plainclothes officers.” They called for putting the prime minister, as head of the cabinet and minister of interior at the time, on trial to be held accountable for the failure of his government to protect citizens’ rights; exercise responsibilities under the Palestinian Basic Law; deliver commitments on protecting the freedom of journalism, the right to peaceful assembly, freedom of

opinion, expression, and personal freedom; manage the current crisis; and protect rights and freedoms. These groups called for putting several police commanders on trial for the violations committed by their officers against the right of citizens to hold peaceful assemblies, and assaulting citizens through beatings, arrests and the use of excessive force. The rights groups held the civil public prosecutor responsible for “detaining participants in peaceful assemblies and putting them on trial for the mere exercise of their constitutional rights stipulated in the Basic Law.”⁸

The rights groups’ accusation that the Shtayyeh government was powerlessness was valid, because his government had the character of a caretaker cabinet, unable to make fundamental decisions on internal political affairs. Earlier, Shtayyeh had not been able to even fulfil his promise to pay the allocations for prisoners, saying the solution to this issue lay with the Palestinian president and the chief of General Intelligence Service (GIS).⁹

It is noteworthy that 63% of respondents to a poll conducted between 15 and 18/9/2021 said they believed the death of Nizar Banat was a deliberate killing by the Palestinian political or security leadership, not an individual error, while 69% believed that the PA measures in prosecuting Banat’s killers were insufficient, and 74% believed that the arrest of protesters demanding the prosecution of Banat’s killers was a violation of their freedoms and rights.¹⁰

Many Palestinian websites were also blocked following a decision by the Magistrate Court at the request of the public prosecutor, even as the Shtayyeh government called for the reversal of this decision.¹¹ This raised questions about who has the real decision-making powers on issues of citizens’ rights.

Furthermore, the salaries of Hamas lawmakers in the PLC continued to be unpaid, unlike those of the remaining PLC lawmakers. Lately, a decision was issued by the High Court of Justice (HCJ) reversing the decision to suspend the pension salaries of Hamas lawmakers, amid fears and concerns the government would not abide by the court order, despite being unappealable and immediately enforceable. The Ministry of Finance rejected seven requests by the court to submit lawmakers’ salary statements, and did not respond until lawyers resorted to using oral evidence and taking the testimonies of lawmakers from other parliamentary blocs.¹² Not long after, the Supreme Constitutional Court, a court with disputed legitimacy, issued a ruling invalidating Paragraph 3 of Article 54 of the Decree on Administrative Courts No. 41 of 2021, which stated that “the rulings issued by



the HCJ/ Court of Cassation, as an administrative court, do not accept appeal by any means of appeal.” The court made its ruling effective from the beginning of 2021, which effectively means cancelling the obligation of the HCJ’s ruling to the Minister of Finance to pay the salaries of Hamas deputies, without the possibility of appeal.¹³ This equated to the executive authority seeking further subjugation and domination of the judiciary.

As mentioned above, the Shtayyeh government came under sharp criticism following the killing of activist Nizar Banat by the PA’s security forces, with many parties calling for the sacking of the government and for it to be held legally accountable. Observers noted the PA’s confusion and dithering in dealing with the ramifications of Banat’s killing.¹⁴ After Banat’s killing, many reports talked about the possible sacking of the Shtayyeh government and appointment of another prime minister.¹⁵ Reports also spoke of potential cabinet reshuffles.¹⁶ However, the PA did not carry out a broad or even limited reshuffle, and did not appoint ministers to the interior and religious endowments ministries which had been vacant since the formation of the Shtayyeh government, and remained unfilled at the time of writing in early 2022.

In this context, it was noteworthy that the director of the Preventive Security Service (PSS) Ziyad Hab al-Reeh was appointed interior minister but was not replaced in the PSS.¹⁷ This suggested that the arrangements made resulted from the competition among the power centres in Fatah, involving the security establishment. Observers spoke about the rivalries between centers of powers inside Fatah and the PA over the succession of President ‘Abbas. This may partly explain the confusion around how to deal with the government’s crisis. Observers also speculated that a cabinet reshuffle may not have been sufficient for the PA to overcome the major dilemmas it was facing, especially considering the failures of its grand political project.¹⁸

Israeli media sources reported that the US, under new President Joseph (Joe) Biden’s administration, sent a “warning message” to President ‘Abbas demanding reforms in the PA and that he replaces the Shtayyeh government with another that would represent all Palestinians. The US administration, according to these Israeli sources, also demanded ‘Abbas to stop threatening to suspend agreements signed with Israel and stop playing games with Hamas, which had agreed to a technocratic government that would not force them to agree to the conditions of

the International Quartet. ‘Abbas has insisted that Hamas recognizes international resolutions and the Quartet’s conditions before forming a government of national unity. This suggests that one of the reasons for postponing a cabinet reshuffle was US and European opposition. The media reports said that the US proposal sent to the PA revolved around forming a technocratic government acceptable by Hamas, able to govern GS in a way that would facilitate reconstruction and the financial arrangements for Arab or international aid.¹⁹

With the year 2021 nearing its end, more reports came in of a financial crisis ravaging the PA. The PA needed \$400 million to overcome its financial crisis, amid warnings it may not be able to fulfil its commitments and would be forced to cut PA employees’ salaries,²⁰ despite having borrowed money from Israel at an earlier date. Shtayyeh’s government had also borrowed \$400 million in the first quarter (Q1) of 2020 from local banks to finance its emergency budget.²¹ The income of the tax authority had fallen from February to September 2020 by 70%, and in that same period foreign aid had dropped by 50%, leading to an increase in the volume of debt held by local banks by 7 billion shekels (about \$2 billion) up to that date, and 4.5 billion shekels (about \$1.3 billion) in external loans owed by the PA. This was in addition to 13 billion shekels (about \$3.8 billion) arrears to the private sector and the pension fund. The total debt of the PA up to that date was about 24.5 billion shekels (about \$7.1 billion),²² which rose to \$8 billion by August 2021.²³

This crisis and policy of cutting PA employee salaries came at a time of price inflation that raised the concerns of Palestinian citizens.²⁴ A report was later published by the State Audit Administrative Control Bureau (SAACB) on the presence of irregularities in many institutions of the PA, notably in the Anti-Corruption Commission, and the “Waqfet Ezz Fund,” which was formed by the Shtayyeh government to collect donations to confront the COVID-19 crisis.²⁵ The reports about a financial crisis and cuts to PA employees’ salaries was accompanied by the continuation of promotions to higher posts,²⁶ which steadily escalated the Treasury’s annual burden. Among what observers considered the major failures of the Shtayyeh government was the nearly expired COVID-19 vaccine deal made with Israel.²⁷

In the same context, President Mahmud ‘Abbas had issued a Decree Law in February 2020, amending the law on Salaries and Allowances of PLC members,²⁸ government members and governors; and another in April 2020 amending the



Public Retirement Law,²⁹ which, according to the Independent Commission on Human Rights,³⁰ gave additional financial and non-financial privileges to a category of senior state employees, specifically minister-rank posts of commission, public institution, and equivalent chairpersons. This added additional burdens on the Treasury and undermined the financial position of the Palestine Pension Fund Authority (PPFA), at a time when the public budget was undergoing a crippling financial crisis and dangerous deficits, due to malicious Israeli measures and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. President ‘Abbas subsequently repealed the decrees.³¹

Politically, paradoxically, the Shtayyeh government participated in the Dubai Expo event,³² which prompted the Palestinian [Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions] BDS National Committee (BNC) to denounce them, considering participation to be an encouragement of Arab states’ official normalization with Israel, in violation of PLO resolutions supporting boycott of, and ending normalization with, Israel.³³ The PA government’s participation in the Dubai Expo took place after the Shtayyeh government itself had said it would not attend the event, in line with the PA’s backtracking on its political positions, such as its claim of suspending security coordination and agreements signed with Israel.

Local Elections

The Shtayyeh’s government issued a decision on 6/9/2021 to hold the first phase of the Local Council Elections in WB and GS in 387 localities, which are classified as C and village councils. It was later decided to exclude local bodies in GS (numbering 11) from the first phase, to be included instead in the second phase from 26/3/2022, bringing the number of localities covered in the first phase elections to 376 in WB, to be held on 11/12/2021.³⁴

Hamas and PIJ, in separate statements, rejected the PA’s decision to hold local elections after cancelling the legislative elections, saying the decision had not resulted from a national agreement, and instead indicated a continuation of the policy of unilateralism.³⁵ The PIJ said that any elections under occupation constituted a new distraction, and an escape from the most important obligation, which was rebuilding the national project according to a new and comprehensive strategy to manage the conflict with the enemy on the one hand, and form a national reference to manage internal affairs,³⁶ on the other hand.

However, as observers note, Hamas participated in several local elections in an unofficial capacity, to enhance the presence of its cadres and elements in social and civil circles. Therefore, its rejection was a political rejection, to delegitimize the PA's unilateral decisions.³⁷ This meant that the results may not reflect the true popularity of the political parties, as much as they reflect social complexities in civil societies and the influence of clan circles, which made the political presence weak in these elections. A very limited presence by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), the Palestinian National Initiative Movement and the Palestinian People's Party (PPP)³⁸ was observed. It is noted that the PA's decision to hold these elections was taken to fill the political vacuum with general elections that were cost-free, politically and helped improve the PA's image locally and internationally following the cancellation of the general elections. Remarkably, the PA organized the elections in stages, by holding elections for village councils in which the Fatah movement had higher chances of success first, before the cities, whose elections were postponed to the next stage.³⁹

The results of the local elections came contrary to Fatah's hopes, as independent lists won 71%, while the partisan lists won just 29%. Some lists affiliated with the Fatah movement won by acclamation. The results showed that the elections of 154 local bodies took place in different WB regions, while 162 local bodies were won by acclamation.⁴⁰ Despite this, Fatah declared victory in these elections, which Hamas circles responded to by saying that there was no competition between Fatah and Hamas, but rather between Fatah lists and lists belonging to families and independents in which some members of Hamas participated in their personal capacities. However, according to circles in Hamas, it was the independents and family lists in which some elements of the movement participated that really won, and these circles read the result a resounding defeat for the PA-affiliated movement, and an indication of the popular rejection of its economic, political and social policies.⁴¹



Third: The Path of Reconciliation and Putting the Palestinian Political House in Order

The Palestinian president called for national meetings aimed at coordinating efforts to confront the “Deal of the Century,” which, had the step been serious and truly facilitated by the PA bureaucracy and its ruling elite, would have been able to end the schism and build a national process for the struggle against common enemies. These calls were followed by optimism that the schism would be overcome, that President ‘Abbas would visit GS, and a GS delegation would visit WB in return. Regional and international mediation initiatives between the two movements also re-emerged, as happens from time to time, including the meeting between Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov with two separate delegations from Fatah and Hamas, with the aim of “advancing the reconciliation file” and “discussing developments on the Palestine issue.”⁴²

In early March 2020, Hamas presented four proposals to the Russian mediators to achieve Palestinian reconciliation: The first proposal was the holding of legislative and presidential elections to be followed by PNC elections. The second was to hold a national meeting outside Ramallah, that is, away from Israeli control, so that the Palestinian factions could participate freely. The third was to hold a meeting of the secretaries-general of the Palestinian factions, and the fourth was to form a national unity government with the agreement of all the Palestinian factions.⁴³

Other efforts not far from regional and international tracks also took place, including popular efforts, such as the initiative of Palestinians in Europe,⁴⁴ and the initiative to end the Palestinian division, launched by the “Arab Peace Group.”⁴⁵ Despite the significance of these initiatives, and the continuation of work on this issue, the same ideas continued to be repeated, including Hamas’ proposals to the Russians. In other words, the crisis was not only a crisis of ideas, vision and paths, but also a crisis of will, due to the complexity of the Palestine issue, where the peace process led to the consolidation of the PA as a technocratic entity and an end in itself rather than a means for achieving an independent Palestinian state capable of preserving the Palestinian fundamentals.

The complications of the Palestinian political scene intensified due to the policies pursued by the PA following the Palestinian schism, the emergence of a ruling elite who benefited in these circumstances, and the repercussions of these

dynamics on the overall national political, social and economic situation. Such conditions played a role in hindering the will and ability of people to carry on the national struggle.

However, a shift emerged and appeared to be more serious, based on the Palestinians' objective need to confront the plans of the Trump administration, its allies on the Israeli right and some Arab countries. Palestinians also needed to confront the annexation plan announced by Benjamin Netanyahu, who had threatened to annex the Jordan Valley and large areas in WB.

This shift appeared in a press conference held on 2/7/2020 between Hamas's Deputy Chief Saleh al-'Aruri and Jibril Rajoub, a member of the Fatah Central Committee. Its speech, formulations and initiatives appeared coherent, as if they were the results of previous meetings and arrangements. Observers' hopes were raised that this time there might be better opportunities to end the Palestinian division on a new basis.

The agreement announced in that press conference was based on confronting challenges together, requiring the rearrangement of the Palestinian street to launch popular resistance against annexation and settlement expansion plans, after neutralizing internal Palestinian contradictions.⁴⁶ This was seen as an opportunity to develop national relations on the basis of resistance, not rivalry over an Authority controlled by Israel, although the need to agree on a mechanism for elections was also noted at the press conference.⁴⁷ This meant certain aspects of the dialogue remained within the traditional scope of Hamas-Fatah talks. However, the talk about popular resistance, and the optimistic tone in the speeches of the two movements' leaders, boosted optimism among observers, a boost that failed to consider the history of differences between the two movements, and the PA's policies on the ground that contradicted this rhetoric and its optimistic tones.

After this meeting, contacts continued between Fatah and Hamas to end the division.⁴⁸ Leaders in the two movements later expressed even more optimism, talking about coordinating to organize movements on the ground in WB and GS, and arrange a joint program of popular resistance.⁴⁹ This affected the prisoners affiliated to the two movements in Israeli prisons. Fatah prisoners declared a series of joint protest actions inside prisons alongside other prisoners including Hamas prisoners.⁵⁰ After that, a joint statement by the two movements was issued from inside Israeli prisons, blessing the "steps towards rapprochement and understanding



between the leaders of the two movements to confront the Zio-US annexation plan.”⁵¹ Profound insight was not required to realize that the prisoners’ actions were linked to the arrangements reached by the leaders of the two movements, led by the Rajoub-al-‘Aruri talks.

Nevertheless, these steps remained symbolic, according to Hamas Chief Isma‘il Haniyyah.⁵² Haniyyah saw these steps as important but emphasized the need for direct dialogue between the two movements to continue without mediation. He noted the importance of reaching a detailed agreement on steps to confront the annexation plan. There were subsequent talks about building on the symbolic steps towards more practical ones, such as ‘Abbas and Haniyyah addressing the Palestinian people in a popular rally,⁵³ or national festival in GS, which did not happen⁵⁴ despite prolonged talks about organizing it. Leaders in Hamas said that the delay in holding the rally was due to technical and logistical issues,⁵⁵ while popular protests were held in WB and GS against United Arab Emirates (UAE)-Israel normalization, which both movements attended.⁵⁶ Fatah’s leadership accused the UAE of seeking to thwart rapprochement between Hamas and Fatah.⁵⁷ Up until that time, there was Palestinian consensus on denouncing the UAE normalization with Israel, with both ‘Abbas and Haniyyah denouncing it in a phone call.⁵⁸

These efforts developed into more serious steps with a meeting of secretary-generals of Palestinian factions in Ramallah and Beirut simultaneously, with the participation of all Palestinian factions without exception.⁵⁹ This was an old idea agreed initially during the Palestinian dialogue conference in Cairo in March 2005, when a committee was formed out of the secretary-generals of the factions called the Interim Leadership Framework, tasked with rebuilding the PLO. President ‘Abbas was entrusted with the power of convening this committee,⁶⁰ which happened only twice in the following years.⁶¹ The idea of an Interim Leadership Framework was cemented in the agreements of 2011⁶² and the Doha Declaration in 2012,⁶³ as well as al-Shati’ Agreement in 2014.⁶⁴ However, the meeting of the secretary-generals this time (2020) did not convene as stipulated in those agreements, in that it was not convened to rebuild the PLO as the supreme institution that organizes the policies related to the conflict with Israel and the affairs of the Palestinian people. Instead, it was convened to enhance rapprochement between the factions, especially Fatah and Hamas, and pave the way for building a national consensus on confronting the challenges of the current stage.

The repeated experience of disrupting the Interim Leadership Framework leads us to question the seriousness of the PA/Fatah leadership to hold this meeting after waiting for many years, and whether it reflected serious shifts in the political choices of this leadership, or perhaps it was just a manoeuvre pending the results of the US elections. One way to know is by examining the speech given by President ‘Abbas during the meeting and see whether it contained a shift in policies based on this national cover. ‘Abbas’s speech affirmed the same old policies, calling for an international “peace” conference under the umbrella of the United Nations (UN), that would lead to negotiations on the basis of international resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative. The speech rejected the exclusivity of US mediation, interpreting the current deadlock as the fault of the US administration and the Israeli government. In other words, ‘Abbas did not see the problem in the peace process per se, and at the same time called for the formation of a unified leadership of “popular resistance.”⁶⁵

‘Abbas’s speech was in harmony with his declared positions since the start of the rapprochement with Hamas, and the theoretical announcement of a shift in the PA’s policies. Indeed, President ‘Abbas previously affirmed his adherence to this political path, in a meeting of the “Palestinian leadership” convened in Ramallah in August 2020. ‘Abbas renewed his commitment to what he calls “international legitimacy,” international agreements signed, the resolutions of Arab and Islamic summits and the fight against “terrorism,”⁶⁶ without explaining his understanding of “terrorism,” a label used by Israel and some international powers against the Palestinian resistance. Moreover, the signed agreements that the Palestinian president is committed to, compel the PA to crackdown on the Palestinian resistance. This indicates that the PA does not intend to alter its path, or at least is unable to pave the way for a shift in this direction, even rhetorically, even when based on a national consensus established by the meeting of secretary-generals.

Hamas Chief Isma‘il Haniyyah and PIJ Secretary General Ziad Nakhleh, gave markedly different speeches. Haniyyah called for adopting comprehensive resistance, including military resistance, and withdrawing from the Oslo Accords.⁶⁷ For his part, Nakhleh⁶⁸ renewed his movement’s Ten-Point Initiative,⁶⁹ which it proposed back in 2016. The initiative calls for renouncing the Oslo Accords, withdrawing recognition of Israel and giving priority to the resistance, including armed resistance.



We can also evaluate this meeting through its outcomes: It was agreed to adopt popular resistance for the current stage, form a unified national committee for its leadership, form a committee of national figures who can present a strategic vision for ending the division, and implement reconciliation and partnership within the PLO framework in no more than five weeks. This committee must present its recommendations to the forthcoming session of the Palestinian Central Council (PCC) with the participation of secretary-generals.⁷⁰

The communique of the meeting unanimously adopted the outcomes of the National Conciliation Document of the Prisoners of 2006, affirming the establishment of an independent, fully sovereign state on the borders of June 1967, with Jerusalem as its capital. The communique also affirmed the need for a solution to the refugee question and to implement Resolution 194 which stipulates the right of refugees to return and to be compensated.⁷¹

The importance of this meeting lay in its uniqueness. Indeed, it was the first of its kind to be convened in many years. Its outcomes were an opportunity to explore whether a real shift had taken place in the PA's policies or not. For this reason, the decisions and speeches revealed a clear disparity in the evaluation of the meeting, between those who saw it, despite the different stances expressed in it, an opportunity to seek a shared destiny, and capitalize on the moment to build a serious and effective popular resistance; and those who saw it as the continued domination of "peace process" thinking.⁷² In general, the outcomes of the meeting appear to be result of bilateral agreements between Hamas and Fatah. According to some observers, this made it seem as though the pro-peace process leaders had become the political reference for Palestinian political action, apparent from the remarks by Isma'il Haniyyah who said that the reference point for the committees would be President 'Abbas. The meeting also failed to demand the PLO withdraw its recognition of Israel or renounce the Arab Peace Initiative,⁷³ albeit PIJ affirmed its rejection of the two-state solution and any references in the final communique to Palestinian statehood being limited to the borders of 1967.⁷⁴

The practical results of the meeting did not satisfy expectations. Indeed, the meeting, given the level of the challenges that prompted it (Israel's annexation plan, Trump's plan and the normalization with Arab countries) was expected to produce serious shifts, not to be a rhetorical exercise that deferred important decisions to committees and rehashed the same tired political ideas.⁷⁵ In the practical context,

the self-styled Unified National Leadership of Popular Resistance issued its first statement on 13/9/2020, calling for a number of symbolic events on 15, 17, and 18/9/2020.⁷⁶ In the view of some observers,⁷⁷ this reflected a poor awareness of the serious situation and the requirements for serious popular resistance. Consequently, there was a poor popular response, which had already been weakened in previous years owing to the PA's policies, including the dismantlement of resistance factions and the general frameworks of patriotic action. It exposed the lack of seriousness and the adherence to the same old politics, as part of a calculated manoeuvre pending the results of the US elections.

It should be noted here that among the preludes to this meeting was that in May 2020, the PA declared the suspension of security coordination with Israel, in response to the annexation plan and Israel's continued deduction of PA's clearance tax revenues. Other preludes included positive statements; a meeting of the "Palestinian leadership" in Ramallah attended by Hamas and PIJ; the joint press conference of al-'Aruri and Rajoub; and finally, the meeting of the secretary-generals, which declared the suspension of security coordination. This raised the expectations of some observers that a shift could take place in the Palestinian situation, in addition to media announcements in this direction made by the two major parties' leaders.⁷⁸ However, the facts on the ground linked to the PA's infrastructure, policies and operational role, continuously lowered expectations, the bleak outlook confirmed by subsequent developments, including the return to security coordination as will be tackled later.

The bilateral dialogue between Hamas and Fatah continued, culminating with a major shift that covered managing the reconciliation process based on popular resistance and altering the function of the PA, to holding general elections. Indeed, on 20/9/2020, Fatah leader Jibril al-Rajoub announced that legislative elections would be held followed by presidential elections, and the PNC's re-formation, followed by a national coalition government.⁷⁹ This meant that their agreement went beyond previous reconciliation accords, which had stipulated simultaneous legislative, presidential, and PNC elections, meaning that Hamas had given up its demand for simultaneous elections.

Indeed, an agreement was later announced between Fatah and Hamas in Istanbul, Turkey, that there would be legislative elections on the basis of proportional representation, followed by PA presidential elections, and PNC elections on an



“interlinked, gradual” basis within six months.⁸⁰ But while the Fatah Central Committee ratified the Istanbul accords,⁸¹ Hamas went back to demanding comprehensive and simultaneous elections, contrary to what had been agreed in Turkey.⁸² This could have been caused by the lack of prior agreement within the leadership of Hamas on al-‘Aruri-Rajoub accords. According to statements made by Fatah leaders⁸³ and the PLO,⁸⁴ Hamas put forward new demands related to the elections and civil servants in GS, reigniting rows and accusations regarding the obstruction of reconciliation. Indeed, while Fatah leaders held Hamas responsible for disrupting reconciliation,⁸⁵ media sources published information showing that Fatah had backtracked from the reconciliation efforts following the victory of Joe Biden in the US election.⁸⁶ The round of talks between the two sides in Cairo failed to solve the crisis, and the chances of reconciliation lowered further after the PA resumed security coordination with Israel,⁸⁷ less than six months after declaring its end.

The two movements continued to exchange accusations about the obstruction of reconciliation, until January 2021, when Hamas agreed to hold elections in stages, without the condition of simultaneity that it had been trying to uphold.⁸⁸ President ‘Abbas received a letter from Haniyyah reflecting this new position, after Hamas said it had received guarantees from Egypt, Qatar, Turkey and Russia that the PA would hold the outstanding elections—presidential and PNC elections—within six months.⁸⁹

At this, on 15/1/2021, President ‘Abbas issued a presidential decree⁹⁰ setting the date for elections, which would start with PLC elections on 22/5/2021, followed by presidential elections on 31/7/2021, and PNC elections on 31/8/2021. The decree was followed by a meeting of the Palestinian factions in Cairo on 8–9/2/2021, which released a final communique containing recommendations based on the same ‘Abbas decree. This meant that the Palestinian factions agreed to this decree becoming their reference point. Indeed, President ‘Abbas’s decree, which set the dates for elections, was based on the decision of the Constitutional Court that dissolved the PLC, and Decree No. 1 of 2007 on General Elections and its Amendments. In other words, the factions, especially Hamas, had made a huge compromise.

The result of the factions’ compromise was the legitimacy of the dissolution of the PLC and the legitimacy of the Constitutional Court was implicitly recognized,

after it had been a subject of legal doubts, not just by Hamas and the other factions, but also by the majority of legal organizations in Palestine.⁹¹ The statement also dealt with President ‘Abbas as though he was the reference for the factions. For example, the statement recommended to President ‘Abbas to “look into amending the following points of the Electoral Law: Reducing the registration fees and security deposits, resignation requests, non-conviction certificates, women’s participation and lowering the voting age,”⁹² despite the fact that President ‘Abbas, as representative of Fatah, is one of the partisans.

The communique overall meant an agreement between Hamas and Fatah was reached. But while Fatah was insisting on its vision of staggered elections, President ‘Abbas as the reference frame, and the legal reference frames of the entire process, Hamas appeared to be reassured by the promises of Fatah leadership. For this reason, neither in that meeting nor in the one that followed on 16/3/2021,⁹³ did Hamas secure any of its demands, such as PA payment of its deputies, whose salaries were suspended. This suggests Hamas had an incentive at the time to hold elections based on bilateral agreements with Fatah. Multiple sources reported an implicit agreement between the two to run for elections on a shared list,⁹⁴ in return for Hamas backing ‘Abbas in the presidential election. While this may have been understandable at a certain moment, when the PA declared the suspension of security coordination with Israel, it is no longer so after the PA resumed this coordination and returned to the same path that is fundamentally contradictory to the path of Hamas and most factions, led by the PFLP and PIJ. At any rate, this was never a realistic prospect.⁹⁵ Eventually, each side decided to form a separate electoral list.

We should recall here that there was a boost for this direction when President ‘Abbas issued a decree to strengthen public freedoms, where the articles provide for “banning the detention, arrest, prosecution of, or holding to account individuals for reasons relating to the freedom of opinion and political affiliation”; “the immediate release of detainees or prisoners held in custody against the backdrop of practicing the freedom of opinion, political affiliation or for any other partisan reasons in all of the territories of Palestine”; and “consolidating the freedom to kick-start an election campaign of all its traditional and electronic forms, including publishing, printing, and holding and funding political and election-related meetings and conferences, in accordance with the law.”⁹⁶



As the electoral blocs began to register themselves for the elections, 36 lists were registered, including independent and partisan lists.⁹⁷ In these elections, the Palestinian left was divided into four main lists, and the Fatah movement was divided into three lists; one loyal to President Mahmud ‘Abbas, another represented the dismissed deputy of Fatah, Muhammad Dahlan, and the third represented an alliance between the two members of the Fatah Central Committee, Nasser al-Qudwa, and Marwan Barghouti, the prisoner in Israeli prison. Al-Qudwa was subsequently dismissed from Fatah.⁹⁸

However, the enthusiasm ended on 30/4/2021, with President Mahmud ‘Abbas postponing the elections, in a formula that was closer to cancellation, under the pretext of an inability to hold them in Jerusalem.⁹⁹ Naturally, Hamas rejected the decision, and considered it sabotage of the path of partnership and national consensus, taking the entire national situation and the popular and national consensus for the agenda of a particular faction hostage. Hamas called for imposing elections in Jerusalem on Israel and discussing ways to do so, rather than just surrendering to the will of the occupation.¹⁰⁰ The decision was also rejected by most of the Palestinian factions, electoral lists, and the Palestinian people at home and abroad. This undermined the sliver of trust and credibility ‘Abbas and the PA leadership had left among Palestinian political factions and in the general population. Paradoxically, the decision to postpone the elections came during the Damascus Gate Uprising, when it was possible, according to many forces, to exploit the situation in Jerusalem to impose elections in the city. Many independent blocs¹⁰¹ and Palestinian parties¹⁰² agreed with Hamas, in rejecting the cancellation of elections.

The decision to postpone the elections was criticised by many observers, given the division of Fatah, and the fragmentation of the votes of its electoral base in favor of multiple lists, while Hamas presented one coherent list after the failure of the idea of a joint list, through which President ‘Abbas could have guaranteed the results of the electoral process in advance.¹⁰³

Many observers were also skeptical about the seriousness of President ‘Abbas’ call for elections, given a number of factors, including his history of calling for elections without actually holding them; the nature and structure of the PA and its emerging ruling elite; and the PA’s decisions that excluded the legislative authority with its political and consensual role, and re-engineered the judiciary to ensure

the enforcement of the decisions of the executive authority, whose power remains concentrated in ‘Abbas’s hands. In addition, the PA did not take any actual steps indicating a practical shift in policies. The salaries of Hamas deputies remained suspended, as did the salaries of several Hamas prisoners, in addition to the PA blocking a number of websites affiliated with Hamas, Muhammad Dahlan’s faction, and other independent websites.

Many observers believed that the elections would not be a valid entry point for reconciliation, because the PA’s domain in WB remains entirely under Israeli hegemony, which may mean reproducing the schism again once the PA regains its legitimacy through legislative elections, without proceeding with the rest of the electoral commitments.¹⁰⁴

The cancellation of the elections was the conclusion of this long story, which began with convergence and a change in rhetoric, proceeded to the agreement on popular resistance and ended with the cancelled elections. This conclusion not only restored the acrimony between the two movements, but also brought the Palestinian scene to stalemate again. It renewed the PA’s functional role, by strengthening security coordination with Israel and returning it to a policy of political prosecutions, accelerated by the cancellation of the elections being swiftly followed by the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, which had significant repercussions at the national level, and huge implications for the interactions of the Palestine issue with the region and the world.

The path of reconciliation and elections, with their milestones and outcomes, are a prelude to the rest of this chapter’s sections, especially the internal conditions of the factions, their internal relations, and the issue of security coordination, which were touched on in this section. We next discuss national relations, then security coordination in 2020–2021.

Fourth: The National Relations of Palestinian Factions and Forces

The previous section on the national reconciliation, and the next section on security coordination, give a glimpse of how the failure of the reconciliation process and the continuation of security coordination with Israel have contributed to the deterioration of the general national situation. This is both in terms of national



relations between forces and factions, and in terms of the overall Palestinian situation, including the internal conditions of Palestinian factions. Matters were not limited to relations between Hamas and Fatah, and they went beyond security coordination and included political manipulation to weaken or blackmail national forces, including some PLO members. Indeed, the issues analyzed in the previous two sections and the issues analyzed in this section should not be viewed as separate, given the interplay between them.

As previously mentioned, in early 2020, Hamas and the PIJ attended a meeting of the “Palestinian leadership,” a term used by PA leaders and Fatah to describe a meeting that usually brings together members of the PLO Executive Committee, Fatah Central Committee, and the secretary generals of some factions as well as the leaders of security forces. Sometimes, Hamas and Fatah leaders are also invited to this framework meeting. In May 2020, Hamas and the PIJ refused to attend this meeting called by the PA leadership.¹⁰⁵ This has reflected as fluctuations in the reconciliation process and how stakeholders had dealt with it. It also reflected a lack of conviction in the seriousness of the PA’s policies and the usefulness of such meetings, which did not produce consensus on the steps required to confront the huge challenges faced, despite the fact that 2020 was rife with optimistic rhetoric about concluding reconciliation and unifying the Palestinian efforts to confront Trump’s plan.

Hamas and the PIJ demanded the convening of the PLO leadership framework, to agree on a national strategy to confront the annexation plan and the US project.¹⁰⁶ This reflected the two movements’ shared conclusion that the previous meeting had not been fruitful, and that attending such meetings gave legitimacy to the tactics of stalling and waiting, pursued by the PA leadership. Moreover, the PFLP representative withdrew from the meeting after a row with President ‘Abbas. The PFLP said it withdrew from the meeting “in objection against the political statement that remained trapped in the quagmire of negotiations and the singular focus on the international community, while renouncing resistance and unity” and to protest what the PFLP called “bullying by the president and his bodyguard.”¹⁰⁷

The PFLP had complained of a financial embargo imposed by the “powerful leadership,” as it termed it, with the aim of weakening, blackmailing and forcing it to compromise on the rights of the Palestinian people and their fundamental rights, calling on the “powerful leadership” to depart from the Oslo approach and

instead implement decisions of national consensus, especially “rebuilding the PLO on patriotic, democratic bases that restore the national project and end the state of monopoly and domination over the destiny of the Palestinian people.”¹⁰⁸

The row between the PFLP and Fatah came amid press reports about a “Fatah war on the PFLP,” citing a persistent campaign by the PA and its security forces against PFLP cadres. The media reports claimed that the campaign reached the point of “security collaboration with the occupation and a regular exchange of information on all issues related to the PFLP, both at the level of its structure and organization, and its acting leadership in the West Bank, after the wide arrests made by the occupation against its leaders and influential cadres following the Bubin attack that hurt the occupation.” This was in addition to the PA’s efforts to “dry up the financial resources of the PFLP,” according to the reports. The media reports claimed that the arrest of PFLP leader Khalida Jarrar by Israel came in this context, in which she paid a price for her opposition to Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas.¹⁰⁹ The PFLP had accused Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas of cutting the financial allocations from the PLO to PFLP, describing it as an act of piracy.¹¹⁰

Interestingly, this row and tension came alongside rhetoric about a climate of rapprochement and reconciliation, and talk of working to hold legislative elections, as explained previously. This reinforces the view that PA rhetoric against Israel, the US administration, or regarding favouring reconciliation with Hamas was a manoeuvre to stall for time, as evidenced in the meeting of the Palestinian leadership mentioned above (May 2020). Indeed, the sources said that the meeting witnessed a verbal altercation, with attendants silenced and threatened with the use of force to stop them from speaking. During the meeting, President ‘Abbas refused to answer questions about how he intended to implement the decisions he announced, including security coordination with Israel. In addition to what happened with the PFLP representative, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) representative was prevented from speaking at the meeting, while ‘Abbas Zaki, Fatah Central Committee member, was prevented from continuing his remarks that focused on the practical steps towards implementing those decisions.¹¹¹

These tensions in national relations decreased later following the meetings between Rajoub and al-‘Aruri, the Istanbul accords, the meeting of the secretary-generals, and the agreement to hold elections. Tensions returned later,



after the PA decided to resume relations with Israel, including security coordination, a decision denounced by all Palestinian factions. Hamas deemed the decision an affront to all national values and principles and the decisions made at the meeting of the secretary-generals of Palestinian factions, and a blow to national efforts to build a partnership and develop a resistance strategy against the occupation, annexation, normalization, and the “Deal of the Century.” Hamas demanded the PA backtrack from the decision and stop making bets based on speculation about the possible approach of the Biden administration.¹¹²

Similar to Hamas’ position, the PIJ deemed the PA’s resumption of relations with the Israel a violation of all the sincere efforts made for a genuine national partnership, and it stated clearly that the PA had chosen an alliance with Israel instead of a national alliance. The PIJ described these relations as criminal and unlawful, a violation of the decisions of national consensus, and a betrayal of the outcomes of the meeting of the factions’ secretary-generals, adding that their resumption disrupted efforts to achieve internal reconciliation and served the treasonous path of normalization with Israel that the factions had unanimously agreed to renounce and resist.¹¹³

In turn, the PFLP saw the PA’s announcement of their resumption of relations with Israel as weakness and surrender, and a betrayal of PNC and PCC decisions to withdraw from agreements signed with Israel, and the outcomes of the meeting of the secretary-generals in Beirut. The PFLP held that the resumption of relations with Israel also undermined reconciliation efforts, which the factions had agreed required the pursuit of a political path fundamentally opposed to the Oslo Accords.¹¹⁴ For its part, the DFLP called for ending “the dangerous deterioration of the political position,” and for respecting the decisions of the last PNC session held in 2018, the PCC’s decisions, the decision of the Palestinian leadership on 19/5/2020, and the decisions of the secretary-generals’ meeting on 3/9/2020.¹¹⁵

Early in 2021, the Palestinian factions continued to prepare for elections. Talks were held between Hamas and Fatah to form a joint list, despite the PA’s resumption of relations with Israel. The positive developments in national relations, such as the work towards holding elections, was not reflected on the state of political freedom or general climate of political action at that time. Indeed, according to Hamas leaders in WB, political detentions, assaults and the crackdown on free speech continued, while the salaries of liberated prisoners continued to be cut, and Hamas be persecuted.¹¹⁶

National relations deteriorated after the PA cancelled the elections, amid the rising popularity of Hamas. Indeed, Hamas was the leading faction in the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem, which erupted in response to Israeli assaults on Palestinians in Jerusalem, beginning with the Damascus Gate clashes, then the Israeli efforts to evict the residents of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the attempts to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque in late Ramadan 2021. Remarkably following that battle, the PA security forces launched a crackdown on dozens of protesters who were active during the Jerusalem clashes.¹¹⁷ The killing of activist Nizar Banat at the hands of PA security forces further eroded national relations and signalled an inclination by the PA to resort to security options for factional political reasons, triggering protests in WB, in turn suppressed violently by the PA security forces and Fatah operatives. According to observers, using Fatah elements to suppress protests further widened the gap of distrust between the Palestinian street and the PA.¹¹⁸ The protests subsequently called for the downfall of the PA regime and the resignation of Mahmud ‘Abbas.¹¹⁹

National relations continued to deteriorate with the Palestinian president rejecting dialogue with Hamas, following mediation by independent figures. ‘Abbas insisted on Hamas recognizing what he called “the decisions of international legitimacy” as a precondition of any dialogue.¹²⁰ The security crackdown then intensified, amid rising resistance activity in WB, and the growth of the phenomenon of fugitives and militants in some WB regions, especially the Jenin refugee camp (RC). The PA also resumed its crackdown on all patriotic activities of a popular or symbolic nature, along with all resistance activities, carried out by all rival Palestinian factions,¹²¹ not just Hamas.

Observers believe that this reimposition of the security approach was due to the PA’s declining popularity, and the impasse faced by its political program, for it has lost its foundational legitimacy and reason for existing, be it political legitimacy, electoral legitimacy, or the legitimacy that comes with its ability to carry out its social and economic function in strengthening the steadfastness of the Palestinian people. These conditions meant the PA resorted to leaning into its security function to prove its worth to Israel and regional and international backers.¹²²

These practices made a dent in Fatah’s popularity as the movement was once again exploited to protect the official line of the PA. It eroded the popularity of Fatah’s current leadership, in favor of Hamas leaders or other Fatah leaders who



distanced themselves from the current PA leadership, according to opinion polls carried out by institutions not known for bias towards the PA's political rivals. Indeed, in a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research, on 9–12/6/2021, after the cancellation of the election and the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem, 77% of respondents said they believed Hamas had won that confrontation with Israel, with 75% saying its performance was “excellent.” By contrast, only 13% said Fatah's performance was “excellent,” 11% said the PA government's performance was “excellent” and 8% said President ‘Abbas’ performance was “excellent.” Interestingly, more people in WB (80%) assessed Hamas' performance as excellent than in GS (67%).¹²³

In the same poll, 65% said they were opposed to President ‘Abbas’ decision to postpone the elections, while 59% supported Isma‘il Haniyyah as president if he ran against ‘Abbas, who got the support of only 27% of respondents. If legislative elections were to be held, Hamas' bloc would get 41% of the seats, compared to 30% for Fatah, 12% for all other third parties combined, and 17% were undecided. Of the respondents 36% said they would vote in for Hamas in the cancelled elections, compared to 19% for Fatah, 9% for al-Qudwa-Barghouthi alliance, 3% for Dahlan's list, with the remainder distributed among the remaining lists: The Palestinian National Initiative Movement List obtained 2%, while the People's Pulse List of the PFLP, the Together We Can List led by Salam Fayyad, the Democratic Change List led by Ibrahim Abu Hijlah, and the Palestine For All List led by Mufid al-Hasayneh were able to cross the electoral threshold simulated by the poll. The remaining lists failed to cross the numerical threshold.¹²⁴

It is clear from the above that the project of the cancelled legislative elections cast a heavy shadow on Fatah, which splintered into three main blocs: The first was the official list representing President ‘Abbas’ faction. The second was the list of the alliance between imprisoned Fatah Central Committee member Marwan Barghouthi and Fatah Central Committee member Nasser al-Qudwa, who headed the list registered under the name Freedom List. The Freedom List members included Fadwa Barghouthi, Fatah Revolutionary Council member and wife of Marwan. The list cost al-Qudwa his membership in Fatah.¹²⁵ The PA also suspended funding to the Yasser Arafat Foundation managed by al-Qudwa,¹²⁶ and later sacked him from this post.¹²⁷ The third list was the list of expelled Fatah leader and deputy Muhammad Dahlan, running under the name Future Bloc, led by Samir al-Mashharawi. Other Fatah figures also ran in independent lists.

The splintering of Fatah and its voter base into several lists, in comparison with Hamas' unified list, would have made the elections a serious gamble for Fatah's leadership, as analysts argued.¹²⁸ Polls conducted prior to the cancelled elections had given Hamas the support of 32.4% of respondents, while Fatah's official list received 17.2%, Dahlan's list 13.9%, and the Barghouthi-al-Qudwa list received 8.6%.¹²⁹

Hamas' list was registered under the name Jerusalem Is Our Promise. The Palestinian left, for its part, registered four official lists: The PFLP People's Pulse list; the DFLP's Democratic Change list; the Palestinian National Initiative Movement's list (Palestinian National Initiative for Change and Ending the Division list); and the Palestinian Democratic Union (Fida) party-PPP alliance's "United Left" list.

In a poll held prior to the cancelled elections, 4.1% of respondents said they would vote for the PFLP's People's Pulse list; 3% said they would vote for the Palestinian National Initiative Movement; and 1.8% said they would vote for the Together We Can list (Salam Fayyad). The remaining lists failed to get the minimum electoral threshold of votes in the poll.¹³⁰ This gives an indication of the overall impotence of the national situation, and the polarization between Fatah and Hamas. Indeed, the Palestinian left is still unable to unify its ranks and has continued to haemorrhage popular support to the point that the DFLP, PPP and Fida party cannot even meet the electoral threshold.

With the cancellation of the legislative elections, and the erosion of Palestinian politics, student elections were also cancelled primarily because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption of in-person learning. This is particularly consequential in Birzeit University, whose student election usually signals the weight of Palestinian forces on the Palestinian street.¹³¹ The last student election in Birzeit was held in 2019. After the shift to online learning, the student council was suspended and elections put on hold.¹³² As a result, the sphere of political activity in Palestine became limited to elections such as the Engineers Association elections, which were won by Nadia Habash, who headed a coalition between Hamas and the PFLP.¹³³ This was in addition to the first round of the local elections analysed above.

At the internal level of Palestinian factions, the most prominent event was Hamas' regular regional and general election, which concluded in the third quarter



of 2021. The elections produced the cadres of the leadership office in GS, for which Yahya al-Sinwar was elected as president for a second term; for the leadership of the office abroad, Khalid Mish'al was elected; and for the leadership of WB office, Saleh al-'Aruri was re-elected. Hamas re-elected Isma'il Haniyyah as president, Saleh al-'Aruri as vice president,¹³⁴ and held the elections of its Central *Shurah* Council, formed its Executive Committee (political bureau), and distributed the working committees in the movement. This is considered an ongoing achievement for Hamas, amid the general deadlock experienced by the national movement, particularly considering the conditions of siege and persecution against Hamas and the geographical divisions between all Palestinians.

Fifth: The Impact of the General Situation on the PLO and PA Institutions

The above makes clear the status of Palestinian public institutions, be it within the PLO or the PA, and their position in the general political circumstances, both in terms of the struggle against the occupation and the shifts of the PA's rhetoric with regards to Israel; and in terms of internal national relations and the failure of reconciliation talks and the elections. The election project was not launched, preventing the rebuilding of these institutions as promised by the interlocutors, particularly Fatah and Hamas. The Shtayyeh government continued to be divisive, lacking consensual national support, as mentioned previously. The PLC was dissolved by the PA based on the Constitutional Court verdict of December 2018. Yet the Executive Committee of the PLO was unilaterally formed with new appointees, and President 'Abbas elected as its chairman, in consultation with PLO factions present, while the PFLP boycotted the meeting in May 2018.¹³⁵ We can say that the state of public institutions remained under the influence of this general situation, despite all the huge developments and events that took place during the two years in question.

The PCC's last meeting was its 30th session convened on 28/10/2018. There is no information about any upcoming sessions on the National Council website¹³⁶ or the Palestine News and Information Agency (Wafa). The council did not convene again in subsequent years, in contravention of its bylaws that require it to convene regularly at the invitation of its chairman, every three months, or in extra-ordinary

sessions at the invitation of its chairman based on a request from the Executive Committee or a quarter of the council's members.¹³⁷ The PCC, according to the Wafa website, convened three times in 2018 after a three-year hiatus, its last meeting before that having been convened in March 2015.¹³⁸ This means that the flouting of the PCC bylaws has become routine, which means, in turn, the disruption of the PLO. Indeed, the PCC is the intermediary institution between the PLO Executive Committee and the PNC, which last convened between 30/4/2018 and 3/5/2018.¹³⁹

The PLO is practically suspended, its institutions convene at intervals, in certain internal and political contexts without its decisions having any impact on public policies, such as the decision of the PCC's 27th session on 4–5/3/2015: "Suspending security coordination in all its forms with the Israeli occupation authority, in light of its non-commitment to the agreements signed between the two sides."¹⁴⁰ However, the PLO Executive Committee later decided to convene a new session of the PCC by no later than January 2022.¹⁴¹

In November 2020, Hanan 'Ashrawi resigned from the Executive Committee, saying the committee was marginalized. She called for reforms and the activation of the PLO, which she said must restore its full powers and functions. President 'Abbas accepted her resignation later.¹⁴²

With the de-facto suspension of the PLO; the dissolution of the PLC; the restructuring of the judiciary; the continuation of a government that has no legislative or consensus legitimacy, and is loyal to the president and headed by a Fatah Central Committee member; and with the collapse of reconciliation, the cancellation of the elections, and the increased reliance on security forces to maintain order, it is possible to summarize that the general trend in Palestinian political administration has been towards totalitarian security approaches led by a small number of individuals.¹⁴³ Those observing Palestinian affairs have been warning against this trend for years,¹⁴⁴ yet the PA has steadily marched towards cementing this approach to governance, making it structural and systemic.

The Civil Society Team for Enhancing Public Budget Transparency had in October 2021 revealed that the PA security forces received the biggest share of the PA budget. Indeed, in the first half of 2021, more than 50 million shekels (\$16 million) were spent on reforming the PA security forces. The PA security forces received 1.675 billion shekels (\$538 million), over 22% of the PA budget,



of which 88% was allocated to salaries, marking an increase of 115 million shekels (\$37 million) compared to the first six months of 2020.¹⁴⁵ It is no surprise then that 56% of respondents in polls said that the PA is a burden on the Palestinian people, compared to 35% who viewed it as an asset for the Palestinian people.¹⁴⁶

While the PA dissolved the PLC, Hamas' deputies in GS continued to convene legislative sessions and pass decisions.¹⁴⁷ This continued even after Hamas and Fatah agreed to hold (subsequently cancelled) elections, and after a statement of the factions' meeting in Cairo in February 2021 issued recommendations based on President 'Abbas' decree on the dates of consecutive elections. This decree was in turn based on the ruling of the Constitutional Court that dissolved the PLC, revealing the extent of paradoxes and spiteful moves in the Palestinian arena. This report had previously provided an overview of the state of the Shtayyeh government. Taken altogether, we can see a clear image of the state of Palestinian national institutions, and the Palestinian situation in general.

Sixth: Security Coordination Between Maneuvring and Reactivation

On 19/5/2020, President 'Abbas announced that “The Palestine Liberation Organization and the State of Palestine are absolved, as of today, of all the agreements and understandings with the US and Israeli governments and of all the obligations based on these understandings and agreements, including the security ones.”¹⁴⁸ If taken at face value, the announcement meant a decision to go into a confrontation, as it required withdrawing recognition of Israel, abandoning economic agreements signed with Israel, and unleashing the Palestinian masses to take the initiative to resist occupation. However, none of this came to pass.

This announcement came in the context of a major crisis crippling the PA project, after then-Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu declared a plan to annex parts of WB. Practically, this meant the death of the peace process and the end of the PA's reason for existence, as Israel's occupation moved to consolidate the colonial facts on the ground and formalize them in law. This inevitably means the impossibility of establishing a meaningful Palestinian state in WB, including East Jerusalem, instead perpetuating the purely operational role of the PA in protecting

the occupation, and removing any substance and value in future negotiations as long as the colonial facts on the ground continue to be the reference frame for such negotiations. These conditions coincided with UAE-Israel normalization and Trump's plan for the Palestine issue, prompting 'Abbas' rapprochement with Hamas, declaration of withdrawal from agreements, and suspension of receiving tax clearance funds collected by Israel.¹⁴⁹

Refusing to receive tax funds was not just linked to the political position, but also Israel's decision to deduct from the funds the equivalent of what the PA pays in allocations to prisoners and martyrs' families. This is an old problem that predates the PA's decision to refuse clearance funds; in February 2019, the PA had also refused to receive the funds for the same reason.¹⁵⁰ This caused an economic crisis for the PA, forcing it to cut 50–60% of its employees' salaries above two thousand shekels (\$550) per month.¹⁵¹ However, in October 2019, the PA unilaterally decided to resume receiving the funds, despite Israel's continued deductions.¹⁵² The PA's decision to stop receiving the clearance funds then backtracking is nothing new, and was repeated this time as well.

In addition to refusing to receive the clearance funds, with its inevitable implications on people's purchasing power given the effect on the PA's ability to pay salaries in full,¹⁵³ and the economic crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the decline in the PA's revenues, the other implication of suspending security coordination with Israel was the PA's withdrawal of its forces from Areas C and B, where the PA's presence requires the approval of the Israeli occupation under the agreements signed. The PA Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh, in conjunction with this, announced that the suspension of agreements signed with Israel had come into force, implemented by the official Palestinian institutions during a meeting with Nickolay Mladenov, then the UN Middle East Peace Envoy, in Ramallah.¹⁵⁴

Beyond that, there weren't any clearer implications for the suspension of security coordination, especially on the ground, as the PA continued operating in ways that were inconsistent with the suspension of security coordination and with the reconciliation process. For example, the PA continued to not pay the salaries of Hamas-affiliated prisoners and the pensions of Hamas-affiliated deputies in the dissolved PLC. The PA also failed to activate a comprehensive popular resistance in the WB, other than a timid statement of the so-called Unified Leadership of



Popular Resistance, which in turn was limited to calling for some symbolic steps such as raising flags and black banners of mourning and holding sit-ins,¹⁵⁵ all superficial steps that Israel assigns no importance to.

The manifestations of the suspension of security coordination with Israel were limited to the refusal to receive clearance funds, withdrawing forces from Areas B and C, and being unable to issue or renew official personal documents for Palestinians, including identity cards and birth certificates, which require submitting civil status records to the Israeli occupation that controls all aspects of Palestinian life and movement. Therefore, there is no practical value in any document issued by the PA that Israel does not recognize.¹⁵⁶ There were also reports that the PA security forces had stopped sharing information with Israeli counterparts and destroyed secret documents to avoid having them fall into Israeli hands if their buildings were raided.¹⁵⁷

The most important aspect of security coordination was in fact sharing information with Israel, which prevented any change to security coordination at this level. According to Israeli media reports quoting Israeli security officials, the Palestinian president cannot suspend security coordination as this would put his political rivals and opposition forces at an advantage, notably Hamas and the PIJ. The Israeli security sources also said the Palestinian president was not serious about this bid, citing the gap between his previous declarations about this, and his actions on the ground. These sources confirmed that security coordination continued.¹⁵⁸ However, other Israeli army sources said that PA security forces stopped answering calls from the Israeli army and no longer engaged in security coordination with Israel,¹⁵⁹ but said that this was probably a tactic pursued in the context of the rivalry with Hamas, predicting that coordination would soon resume.¹⁶⁰ The *New York Times* quoted Hussein al-Sheikh, PA Minister of Civilian Affairs, as saying that the PA would arrest anyone planning to attack Israelis,¹⁶¹ later confirmed on the ground. In other words, the PA's functional role did not change, regardless of whether phone calls with Israel stopped. Israeli sources also said that the PA arrested a Hamas cell in Hebron as it planned to carry out a military operation against Israeli targets.¹⁶²

To be sure, a real suspension of security coordination would necessarily invite a reaction from Israel, which the Palestinians would not notice happening. As a result, some observers raised questions about the seriousness of the decision, especially

since the suspension of security coordination would “mean the dissolution or collapse of the PA.”¹⁶³

In addition, as observed by Israeli security sources, the PA leadership had a history of not implementing decisions or threats of this kind. Indeed, since 2010, the Palestinian president had been threatening to dissolve the PA.¹⁶⁴ At other times, the Palestinian president would say the opposite.¹⁶⁵ In addition, the PLO and even Fatah, since at least 2015, had been issuing multiple decisions, recommendations and calls to suspend security coordination or withdraw from agreements signed with Israel.¹⁶⁶

Regardless of the truth about the suspension of security coordination and no matter at which level this would be enacted, the PA announced the resumption of coordination with Israel on 17/11/2020 through Fatah Central Committee member and PA Minister of Civil Affairs Hussein al-Sheikh, who justified the announcement by saying: “In light of the contacts made by his excellency the president regarding Israel’s commitment to the agreements signed with us, and based on the official written and verbal messages we obtained confirming Israel’s commitment, the relations with Israel will return to how they were.”¹⁶⁷ The PA subsequently resumed receiving tax funds from Israel,¹⁶⁸ reopened the offices and departments of the General Authority of Civil Affairs in WB and GS,¹⁶⁹ which are charged with contact with Israel.

Later, it was revealed that Hussein al-Sheikh had, on 7/10/2020, sent a message to the Israeli Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT), which included a question from al-Sheikh about whether “the government of Israel is committed to the agreements and accords signed with the Palestinians and the PLO or not, as they are the reference frame for the bilateral relations between the two sides since 1993.”¹⁷⁰ COGAT’s answer was:

Regarding your letter of October 7th, 2020, Israel has previously stated that the bilateral Israeli-Palestinian agreements continue to form the applicable legal framework governing the conduct of the parties. On financial and other matters. Therefore, in accordance with these agreements, Israel continues to collect taxes for the Palestinian Authority. Unfortunately, it was the Palestinian Authority which decided not to receive these collected funds from Israel.¹⁷¹



It is noted that this correspondence took place with a low-level Israeli official, the coordinator, who is considered the WB Israeli governor, revealing the nature of the relationship between Israel and the PA. This correspondence also entails recognition of COGAT, which is considered a de-facto alternative to the Israeli Civil Administration required to be dissolved under the Oslo Accords. Moreover, Hussein al-Sheikh's letter to COGAT was sent a month before the US elections. In other words, the PA did not wait to see who would win the US election, meaning that the decision to suspend security coordination was neither strategic nor real, but was rather a manoeuvre, as many observers had stated from the beginning.¹⁷² This was consistent with the PA's unwillingness to change path or confront Israel and further indicates that the PA wanted to resume relations with Israel in conjunction with the election of a new US administration, be it a returning Trump administration or a new Biden administration.

It is also noted that the correspondence included a question from the PA to Israel about whether it was committed to the agreements, when according to the PA's own official announcements, it was supposed to have withdrawn from its own commitments to these agreements. In other words, there was no point asking the "other side" about its position vis-à-vis the agreements if the Palestinian strategic choice was to withdraw from them. No less important was the timing of the resumption of relations with Israel, which came amid talks between Hamas and Fatah to resume the plan to hold legislative elections. In other words, the PA's move towards elections was not based on a shift in policy, which raised concerns that the elections would legitimize the PA's path, including by Hamas, without this leading to real reconciliation or alteration to the political path.

It should be noted that the PA has a precedent in suspending contacts with the US, in November 2017; after the Trump administration's decision to relocate the US embassy to Jerusalem and the closure of the PLO office in Washington.¹⁷³ The PLO office was actually closed later. Those PA announcements coincided with talks with Hamas that led to the Cairo Agreement on 12/10/2017.¹⁷⁴ However, the agreement collapsed on 13/3/2018, when the convoy of then PA Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah was the target of an explosion.¹⁷⁵ The two sides blamed each other for the attack, with relations between them becoming deadlocked between escalation and estrangement, until rapprochement returned in early 2020 as explained previously. However, it is important here to note the relative similarity

between the events of 2017/2018 and 2020/2021, in terms of sharpening the rhetoric and the rapprochement with Hamas, before backtracking on both counts.

The experience of 2020 ended with the resumption of security coordination, echoing the end of 2019 during which PA security forces committed 4,703 violations against political freedoms, including 1,079 cases of detention.¹⁷⁶ In the same context, Israeli sources said the PA had, in 2019, shut down around 300 associations and foundations affiliated to Islamic groups.¹⁷⁷ As for the Israel Security Agency—ISA (*Shabak*), it said that the PA's stability served Israel's interests, warning against any attempts to undermine it, and against the effects of deductions from tax clearance funds.¹⁷⁸

In fact, the *Shabak's* stance sheds light on how the relationship with the PA has been rooted in security coordination, which is consistent with remarks by then Israeli FM Yair Lapid, in September 2021, that 90% of Israel-PA relations revolve around security coordination.¹⁷⁹ This pattern of relations continued until at least May 2020, with US security backing, as evidenced by a secret visit to Ramallah undertaken by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director Gina Haspel.¹⁸⁰ Again, this contradicted the PA's self-declared decision to suspend contacts with the US. This pattern of relations was then renewed in November with the PA's official resumption of relations with Israel.

As soon as security coordination resumed, according to Israeli sources, the PA told Western counterparts it was ready to amend the law governing prisoners' salaries.¹⁸¹ However, the PA had no solution to the prisoners' issue except to integrate them into its civilian and security institutions and refer those who did not meet the conditions to retirement in accordance with a decree issued by President 'Abbas in early 2021. Later, 'Abbas expressed readiness to discuss sensitive Palestinian issues, including the prisoners' salaries, with the Israeli government, if the Israeli government agreed to talk to him.¹⁸² Moreover, the PA continued to deduct the salaries of a number of liberated prisoners and others still inside prisons,¹⁸³ meaning that the steps towards rapprochement, or raising the rhetorical ceiling against the occupation did not positively impact the PA's policy vis-à-vis the issue of deducted prisoners' salaries.

After the resumption of relations with Israel, multiple meetings were conducted between Palestinian and Israeli officials at various civilian levels, such as health officials.¹⁸⁴ On the security side, from the resumption of coordination until the end



of 2020, the PA invariably stopped popular confrontations with the occupation¹⁸⁵ and thwarted stabbing attacks,¹⁸⁶ irrespective of Israeli claims that security coordination never stopped and that the announcement to that effect was little more than politicking.¹⁸⁷

After the resumption of security coordination, high-level officials in the PA described it as a form of sovereignty and defense of the people.¹⁸⁸ Yet the security crackdown would peak straight after the cancellation of Palestinian elections, and following major events, which some observers saw as a momentous failure of the PA, further eroding its popularity and legitimacy. This applied to the negative, disruptive role played by the PA during the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem, the deal of nearly expired COVID-19 vaccines between the PA and Israel,¹⁸⁹ and the killing of Palestinian activist Nizar Banat at the hands of PA security forces.¹⁹⁰ These rapid developments prompted the PA to rely increasingly on security forces to consolidate its power and assure its backers of its continuing value, with sources talking about the PA having played a role in pursuing the militants responsible for an attack against Israeli troops at the Za‘tara checkpoint near Nablus,¹⁹¹ as well as cracking down on broader popular protests against Israel.¹⁹² In this context, the PA, according to Israeli sources, asked Israel to supply it with crowd control equipment to use against protesters.¹⁹³

And in what appeared to be various international powers and Israel sensing threats to the PA’s stability following the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem, the new CIA Director William Burns visited the PA headquarters in Ramallah, in August 2021, to discuss financial and political support for the PA, and ways to head off the Hamas movement.¹⁹⁴ This was preceded by a visit by Hady ‘Amr, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs at the Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, to Ramallah in July 2021,¹⁹⁵ where he stressed, in a meeting with Israeli officials, that “the combination of the financial and political crises puts the Palestinian Authority in a very precarious situation. ‘It is like a dry forest waiting to catch on fire’ ” proposing “several measures the Israeli government can take to help the Palestinian economy and the Palestinian Authority’s budget, and ultimately strengthen its standing.”¹⁹⁶ In the same context, the chief of British intelligence (MI6) Richard Moore visited Ramallah and met with PA officials.¹⁹⁷ These arrangements paved the way for a meeting between President ‘Abbas and Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz, after which Israel took steps to provide economic support to the PA, including a loan of \$155 million and an increase in

the number of work permits for Palestinians inside Israel, but without any revival of the peace process on the political horizon as the PA would have desired.¹⁹⁸

There were other normalization meetings held at different levels. For example, the PLO held a meeting with Israeli figures in the town of al-Bireh,¹⁹⁹ following events in Jerusalem, starting from those of the Damascus Gate, Sheikh Jarrah, *al-Aqsa* Mosque and then the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem. Moreover, the PA Communication Committee met with Israeli writers,²⁰⁰ and artists and President ‘Abbas met with a delegation from the Israeli Meretz Party, headed by Israel’s Health Minister Nitzan Horowitz, at the PA presidency headquarters in Ramallah.²⁰¹ Media reports said that President ‘Abbas asked the Meretz delegation to convey a message to Israel’s Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked expressing his desire to meet her. Shaked later rejected the request.²⁰² Media reports claimed that the PA had agreed to collaborate with Israel to search for the prisoners who escaped from Gilboa prison,²⁰³ who were later recaptured. However, the most important meeting was perhaps the one between President ‘Abbas and the new Shabak Director Ronen Bar in November 2021.²⁰⁴ The meeting was held in secret and was the first of its kind with the new director, but not the first with a Shabak director since the sides started their security cooperation. Indeed, ‘Abbas had met with the ex-Shabak director Nadav Argaman in Ramallah in March 2021. At the time, the meeting was described as tense, after Argaman asked ‘Abbas to cancel the legislative elections.²⁰⁵ The elections were cancelled a month after that meeting.

Media sources and observers linked the intensifying crackdown by the PA in WB, against activists and rival Palestinian factions, with ‘Abbas’ meeting with the new Shabak director. The meeting came on the heels of increased resistance activity in WB, especially in Jenin, of which one manifestation was the appearance of armed militants of Hamas and other factions, during the funeral of former minister and Hamas leader Wasfi Qabha. PA-affiliated forces tried to raid the Jenin RC but were repelled by locals inside the camp.²⁰⁶ Jenin’s deputy governor at the time, speaking on behalf of the PA, expressed concerns over the armed manifestations of resistance, describing them as a “dangerous indicator.”²⁰⁷

The PA then stepped up its crackdown on activities by rival factions, confiscating Hamas banners and taking down banners celebrating the return of a liberated prisoner from the village of Zawata near Nablus. PA forces also confiscated Hamas banners during the reception of a liberated prisoner from Ramallah. Remarkably,



the crackdown was not restricted to Hamas, but also included a convoy celebrating the return of a liberated prisoner from the PIJ in Tammun near Tobas. PA forces seized banners of the PFLP during the funeral of Amjad Abu Sultan in Bethlehem,²⁰⁸ all amid continued politically motivated detentions.²⁰⁹ In 2021, The Committee of the Families of Political Detainees in the WB recorded 2,578 violations committed by the PA forces, related to human rights and public freedoms, including political arrests. The committee described the year by the black year of freedom suppression.²¹⁰ In December 2021, the PA ended the year with further political detentions,²¹¹ targeting several sectors of public activism, including student activism, as the PA raided the dorms of students of the Islamic Bloc.²¹²

The PA's security crackdown spread to Lebanon, when Hamas accused a group affiliated with the PA National Security in Ramallah of firing at the funeral of Hamza Shahin, a Hamas operative, who—according to Hamas—died in an explosion following an electric fire at a warehouse containing materials used in COVID-19 response, including oxygen tanks.²¹³ The shooting killed three further Hamas operatives at the funeral and injured 20 others.²¹⁴ The growing security crackdown and general security policies, in addition to their effect on the broader national situation, overviewed in this report, portend a dark period of time where freedoms are further restricted and the security forces are further relied upon by the PA.

Conclusion

The years 2020 and 2021 were characterized by huge contradictions between, on the one hand, the necessities of that stage acknowledged by all Palestinian factions, and the challenges facing the Palestine issue, people, and forces—including Trump's plan, Arab normalization projects, the annexation plan, and the death of the peace process—and, on the other hand, the facts, and practices on the ground. The period saw sharper rhetoric by the PA, which also remained committed to the peace process. It also led to a dialogue and rapprochement efforts between Fatah and Hamas, which underwent several phases, from talks about agreeing on a unified leadership of the popular resistance, to agreeing on holding staggered legislative, presidential, and PNC elections. However, the PA leadership backtracked on all

these agreements, setting the Palestinian internal landscape back to the now-usual crisis mode, deadlock and stalemate, as had been the case after 2007.

The PA also backtracked from its agreements with Hamas, cancelling the elections and resuming security coordination, the suspension of which it had announced between May 2020 and November 2020, amid scepticism about the seriousness of the claim. The resumption of coordination followed a series of major events, starting with the Damascus Gate Uprising in Jerusalem, then the events of Sheikh Jarrah and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and then the military confrontation of the GS resistance forces with Israel, which increased the popularity of Hamas, the PIJ and other resistance factions. The PA thus relied on security forces to consolidate its power, especially after it was hit by scandals, such as the deal for the near-expired COVID-19 vaccines with Israel and the killing of activist Nizar Banat.

With the disruption of the elections, the reconciliation efforts, and the PLO, the PA effectively re-consecrated its commitment to the path of the Oslo Accords. It also cemented a repressive authoritarian approach and monopolistic governance, tainted by accusations of corruption and lack of transparency, and evidenced by the PA's financial crisis and incomprehensible financial policies, such as promotions in high positions accompanied by deductions from civil servants' salaries.

Because of these practices, relations between the leadership of the PA and Fatah, and most national forces, soured thereafter, especially with Hamas, the PIJ, and the PFLP. The PA launched a crackdown on these factions' activities in WB, including their symbolic and popular activities. The PFLP also accused the PA of financially embargoing it.

The PFLP entered an alliance with Hamas in the elections for the Engineers Association, a rare political development in the two years under study, which witnessed very little political progress, with the disruption of student elections because of the COVID-19 pandemic and the cancellation of legislative elections. At the end of the year, the PA said it would hold staggered local council elections, but these were boycotted by Hamas and the PIJ, while leftist parties participated in a limited way.

The overall policies of the PA moved towards cementing a security-based totalitarian approach to governance, which portends further restrictions on freedoms and political life, and the entrenchment in power of a cabal of oligarchs made up of security leaders, powerful Fatah figures, and influential local allies. Inevitably, this



prevents any real reconciliation and produces scepticism and distrust whenever the PA raises the ceiling of its political rhetoric or invites its rival for rapprochement. Indeed, by doing so, it is understood that they are likely be stalling for time and political legitimacy, before again returning to the same political paths. More dangerously, this trend puts the ruling elite in the corner, forcing them to seek protection from international and regional backers, and empowerment from the security functions of the PA, deepening the organic links to Israel and regional and international powers.

Due to the lack of institutions, and the monopoly of administration by this small elite, amid division and subjugation to Israel's dominance of the PA's spheres of control in WB, it is likely that the battle for the succession of Mahmud 'Abbas will play a key role in shaping the Palestinian political landscape in the next two years. That is, unless new major events move beyond the plans of the actors in the Palestinian arena, which remains a distinct possibility given the regional and international state of flux and renewed Palestinian uprisings against Israeli occupation.

Therefore, given the aforementioned factors, the PA's policies, and its structure, ruling elites and relationships, as well as the overall national situation and relations between Palestinian factions following the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem, the following may be forecasted for the year 2022:

1. The continuation of the crises of the PA, which can be summarized as follows:
 - a. A crisis of political legitimacy, with the total deadlock of the peace process, leaving the PA without a political horizon, turning power into a goal in its own right. This crisis forces the PA to adopt a repressive security approach to consolidate itself and pushes it further away from a commitment to popular resistance to confront the Zionist colonial challenge that would otherwise lay the ground for national unity on the basis of popular resistance.
 - b. The crisis of electoral legitimacy, and the related crises of arranging the Palestinian leadership and preparing for the succession of Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas, given the cancellation of the legislative elections, and the need of the Fatah power centers to maintain legitimacy to share influence and organize the post-'Abbas phase. This crisis will also necessarily reflect on the relationship of the PA and the Fatah movement, with the Palestinian masses and the national forces.

- c. The deepening economic crisis, for which the PA leadership does not have radical solutions, forcing it to postpone tackling the crisis, through internal and external borrowing. Consequently, its need for economic facilities on the part of Israel could grow, which would increase the link between the PA's policies and Israeli goals.
2. The above crises will lead to:
- a. Seeking protection from external forces, and proving the PA's competence through the security function, which will be the most visible during the next phase, among the PA's tools of managing the Palestinian scene, at all levels.
 - b. Attempting to provide political legitimacy for the internal arrangements of the PA frameworks, through the PLO, which is considered the reference that founded the PA. There were precedents in this regard, as happened in 2009, when the PCC was summoned to grant legitimacy to both President 'Abbas and the PLC.
 - c. Despite internal disagreements that hindered the convening of the PCC, the Eighth Conference of Fatah, and the filling of vacancies in the Executive Committee of the PLO, especially after the death of Saeb Erekat and the resignation of Hanan 'Ashrawi, Fatah will be forced to convene these institutions to resolve the conflict within its ranks and therefore it needs to reach compromises. In this regard, it is likely that the elite surrounding President 'Abbas will go on to lead the Fatah movement, especially since it is this entourage that is regulating the relationship with Israel and the US, whether in terms of security or economic arrangements.
 - d. If Fatah manages to hold these conferences and manages to allocate centers of power and authority among its various political wings, then Shtayyeh's government may be changed, or a wide reshuffle of it pursued.
 - e. It is not expected that large-scale positive transformations will occur at the level of internal political relations, and the political scene may not go beyond holding a second round of local elections, in which the PA would continue the same political approach, adhering to the peace process with its rapidly dwindling prospects of success.
 - f. This will mean either a stalemate in the reconciliation process, or a further deterioration in national relations, with the increasing alienation of national and popular forces from the Fatah movement and the PA, the continued



emergence of hotbeds of tension and rebellion against the PA, amid further erosion of the PA's popularity.

3. The two years under study witnessed a notable rapprochement between Hamas and the rest of the national forces, not only in the field of resistance in GS, but also at the level of political discourse, amid convergences of opinion on criticisms of the PA, and joint cooperation in some fields such as in the Engineers Association elections, and other events related to the student movement. This can be built upon, to form a national framework that develops national relations within the framework of resistance and the rejection of the political line of the PA. Those who expressed interest in this proposal grew in number after the cancellation of the legislative elections and following the Battle of the Sword of Jerusalem.
4. Intensifying resistance in WB may lead to surprises that radically alter the scene during the next stage, which could upend some of the forecasts mentioned above. This depends on unforeseeable transformations, yet these remain a possibility in view of the expansion of the struggle and the intensification of provocative elements in the Palestinian arena (attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, attacks by settlers in WB, prisoners, events inside the territories occupied in 1948 and the escalation of the GS resistance), in addition to the decline of the PA's ability to control and crack down, or to provide economic and development services to the Palestinians.
5. If the resistance factions and forces opposed to the PA's line succeed in forming a national framework, reinforcing their ability to exploit the rise of popular resistance in WB, and taking advantage of the erosion of the PA's popularity and legitimacy, then they might be able to apply pressure and form an interim leadership. This framework would take the necessary measures to put the Palestinian political house in order, or to transfer its authority to a neutral party with full and indisputable powers. However, the implementation of this is met with great challenges because the influential forces in Fatah will resist a trend of this kind, and the Arab and international environment still supports the peace process and the political line of Fatah, and still rejects the progress of the resistance movement and the Islamic movement to take over the leadership, despite it having a strong chance of winning elections. Moreover, the Israeli factor obstructing any national solutions is an important one, given its complete dominance over the vital sphere of the PA, and given the nature of the influential elite in the PA and its network of interests.

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Chapter Two

Palestinian Demographic and Economic Indicators

Palestinian Demographic and Economic Indicators

Introduction

Seventy-four years have passed since the *Nakbah* and the displacements of the 1948 war, and the Palestinian people, at home and abroad, are still patiently insisting on their right to their land and holy sites and continuing with their endeavors to liberate and return to their land.

This chapter attempts to present general statistics concerning the Palestinian people at home and abroad. However, this process faces real difficulties, due to the fact that about half of the Palestinian people are under occupation and siege in their historical land, while the other half are refugees and displaced in various parts of the world. Nevertheless, through academic methods, available information and data were used to reach the most accurate results possible.

The second part of this chapter presents a study of the economic situation in WB and GS, where a reasonable amount of information and data is available, particularly from the PA's official institutions.

First: Demographic Indicators

1. The Palestinian Population Worldwide

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS) available figures indicate that the number of Palestinians worldwide reached 14 million in 2021 compared to 13.68 million in 2020, an increase of 2.3% (see table 1/2).

Based on 2021 estimates, Palestinians in historic Palestine are estimated at 6.965 million, constituting 49.8% of Palestinians worldwide. Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories are estimated at 5.291 million and constitute 37.8% of Palestinians worldwide, while Palestinians in territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) are estimated at 1.674 million, constituting around 12% of Palestinians worldwide (see table 1/2).

Palestinians in the Diaspora were estimated at 7.037 million at the end of 2021, comprising 50.2% of Palestinians worldwide. According to data available to al-Zaytouna Centre researchers, the Palestinians in Jordan (most of whom are holders of Jordanian nationality) are estimated at 4.493 million, representing 32.1% of Palestinians worldwide (about 63.8% of Palestinian Diaspora). As for other Arab countries, the number of Palestinians is estimated at 1.795 million, 12.8% of Palestinians worldwide, mostly living in neighboring Arab countries: Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and the Gulf countries (see table 1/2).

Table 1/2: Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate by Place of Residence at the End of 2020 and 2021 (thousands)¹

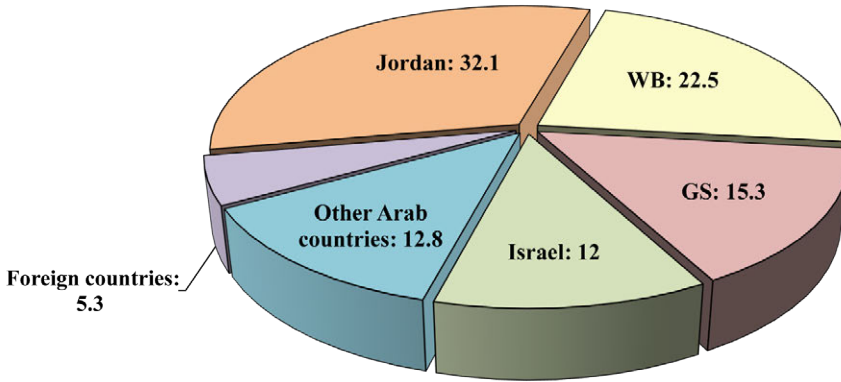
Place of residence		2020		2021	
		Population estimates	Percentage (%)	Population estimates	Percentage (%)
Palestinian territories occupied in 1967	WB	3,086.8	22.6	3,154.4	22.5
	GS	2,077.4	15.2	2,136.5	15.3
Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) [*]		1,634.5	11.9	1,673.6	12
Palestinians in historic Palestine		6,798.7	49.7	6,964.5	49.8
Jordan ^{**}		4,388	32.1	4,493	32.1
Other Arab countries		1,757.2	12.8	1,794.6	12.8
Foreign countries		738.4	5.4	749.4	5.3
Palestinians in diaspora		6,883.4	50.3	7,037	50.2
Total		13,682	100	14,001.6	100

^{*} For the Palestinian population in the 1948 occupied territories, the number excludes the Palestinians in the 1967 occupied territories including the Jerusalem governorate, Arab Syrians and Lebanese, non-Arab Christians and those classified as “Others.” Israeli statistics publish figures different from PCBS figures, and show that the number of Arab Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories reached about 1.995 million in 2021, and if we deduct the 370 thousand East Jerusalem citizens and the number of citizens in the Golan Heights which is around 25 thousand, the number becomes about 1.6 million.

^{**} The number of Palestinians in Jordan is based on 2009 PCBS statistics reaching 3,240,473, and on the annual growth rates between 2009–2020, issued by the Jordanian Department of Statistics, Population and Housing, Demographic Statistics, ranging between 3.1% and 2.3%.

<http://dosweb.dos.gov.jo>

**Palestinian Population Worldwide Estimate by Place of Residence
at the End of 2021 (%)**



According to PCBS, the Palestinians in foreign countries are estimated at 749 thousand, 5.3% of Palestinians worldwide, most of them are living in the US, Latin America, Canada, United Kingdom (UK), and the rest of the European Union (EU).

It should be noted that these estimates are not updated, and may not be accurate. For if we consider the number of Palestinians who left Arab countries in the past three decades (countries surrounding Israel, the Gulf countries and Libya), and from Palestine itself to the rest of the countries, the previous estimates of Palestinians worldwide have many discrepancies. For example, some estimates consider the number of Palestinian in South America more than 600 thousand, of whom at least 300 thousand are in Chile; While the number of Palestinians in Europe is not less than 350–400 thousand, and the Palestinians of North America are about 300–350 thousand, and in the rest of the countries they are not less than 100 thousand. According to these estimates, the number of Palestinians worldwide (excluding Palestine and the Arab world) is about one million more than the estimates of the PCBS. Perhaps researchers and specialists have a difficult, but necessary, task to have more accurate estimates.

At the end of 2020, according to PCBS statistics, Palestinians worldwide reached 13.682 million, of whom 5.164 million were living in WB and GS, and around 1.635 million in the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel), compared to 6.883 million living abroad; 4.388 million in Jordan, 1.757 million in other Arab countries and 738 thousand in foreign countries (see table 1/2).

2. The Demographic Characteristics of the Palestinians

a. The WB and GS

At the end of 2021, the number of Palestinians in WB and GS was estimated at 5.29 million, of whom about 3.15 million lived in WB (59.6%) and 2.14 million (40.4%) in GS. This means that the annual growth rate reached 2.5%, given that the number of Palestinians in WB and GS was 5.16 million at the end of 2020.

As for population count by governorate for the year 2021, Hebron has the largest population (792,200 or 15% of the WB and GS population), followed by the Gaza Governorate with 722,350 or 13.7% of the WB and GS population, then the Jerusalem Governorate with a population of 476,949 or 9% of the WB and GS population. As for the Jericho and Rift Valley Governorate, it is the least populated with 1% of the WB and GS population. Table 2/2 shows the estimated population count in the WB and GS governorates based on PCBS estimates:

Table 2/2: Estimated Population Count in WB and GS by Governorate 2020–2021 (thousands)²

Governorate	2020		2021	
	Estimates	Percentage (%)	Estimates	Percentage (%)
WB	3,086.8	59.8	3,154.4	59.6
Jenin	335.5	6.5	342.4	6.5
Tubas and Northern Rift Valley	65.2	1.3	66.6	1.2
Tulkarem	197.1	3.8	200.6	3.8
Nablus	411.7	8	419.6	7.9
Qalqilya	120.4	2.3	123	2.3
Salfit	81.2	1.6	83.1	1.6
Ramallah and al-Bireh	351.5	6.8	358.9	6.8
Jericho and Rift Valley	52.8	1	53.8	1
Jerusalem	466.7	9	476.9	9
Bethlehem	232.3	4.5	237.3	4.5
Hebron	772.4	15	792.2	15
GS	2,077.4	40.2	2,136.5	40.4
North Gaza	410.2	7.9	423.7	8
Gaza	704.7	13.6	722.3	13.7
Dayr al-Balah	298.4	5.8	306.7	5.8
Khan Yunis	407.7	7.9	419.9	7.9
Rafah	256.4	5	263.9	5
Total (WB & GS)	5,164.2	100	5,290.9	100

The Palestinian community in WB and GS is young with more than a third of its individuals (38%) aged under 15, with a stark difference between WB and GS, reaching 35.8% in the former and 41.1% in the latter. Statistics indicate that the median age (the age dividing the population into two numerically equal groups, i.e., half of the population is below that age and half is older) in the WB and GS has increased throughout 2000–2021 from 16.4 years to 21 years. Comparing the data of the WB and GS separately over the same period shows that the median age in WB increased from 17.4 years in 2000 to 22.1 years in 2021, while in GS it increased from 14.9 years in 2000 to 19.3 in 2021.³

Although the median age is lower in GS than WB, it increased over 2000–2019 by 29.5% in GS compared to 27% in WB.⁴

As for the elderly (65 years and over), they constitute a small percentage of the total population, estimated at 3.3%, with 3.7% in WB and 2.8% in GS in 2021. Here again, it is noted that the Palestinian community in GS is younger than that in WB.⁵

In 2020, 21% of households were headed by an elderly person (60 years and over), 23% in WB and 17% in GS. Also, the average size of households headed by an elderly person was usually relatively small reaching 3.4 individuals (3.1 in WB and 4.3 in GS) compared with 5.5 individuals for households headed by a non-elderly person.⁶

As for the COVID-19 impact on elderly, about 78% of deaths are among the elderly (60 years and above), and the percentage of the elderly infected reached 6% of the total number in WB and GS, by the end of 25/9/2021.⁷

Educational status data for the year 2020 showed that 34% of the elderly (60 years and over) in WB and GS did not complete any educational stage (20% males and 47% females), while the elderly who completed diploma degrees and higher did not exceed 15%. Notably, 26% of the total population aged 18 years and above obtained diploma and higher (24% males and 28% females).⁸

As for the distribution of population by sex, the number of males at the end of 2021 in WB and GS reached 2.69 million compared to 2.6 million females with a sex ratio 103.4 males per 100 females. In the GS, the number of males reached 1.08 million males compared to 1.05 million females with a sex ratio of 102.7, while the number of males in the WB reached 1.61 million compared to 1.55 million females with a sex ratio of 103.8.⁹



Data shows that the dependency rate (number of dependent persons per 100 individuals of working age, 15–64 years) in WB and GS decreased from 100.6 in 2000 to 69.9 in 2021. Remarkably, there is a big difference in dependency rate for WB and GS, where it decreased in WB from 94.3 in 2000 to 64.9 in 2021, while in GS it decreased from 112.8 in 2000 to 77.8 in 2021.¹⁰ Also, 2020 data shows that 11% of households are headed by females in WB and GS, with 12% in WB and 9% in GS.¹¹

As for Life expectancy, it has increased in WB and GS, from 70.7 years in 2000 to 73.1 years in 2021 for males, and from 72.2 years in 2000 to 75.3 years in 2021 for females. In GS, life expectancy was 73.8 years (72.7 years for males and 74.9 years for females), while in WB, it reached 74.5 years (73.4 years for males and 75.7 years for females) in 2021. The higher life expectancy is mainly due to improved health care, and lower infant mortality rates (see table 3/2).

Available data indicates a decline in Crude Death Rate (CDR) in WB and GS, where it decreased from 4.5 deaths per thousand population in 2000 to 3.7 deaths per thousand population in 2021. A slight difference is noted regarding the CDR between the WB and GS, where in 2021 it reached 3.9 deaths per thousand population in WB compared to 3.4 deaths per thousand population in the GS (see table 3/2).

Natural population growth (the difference between birth and death rates) in the WB and GS decreased from 3.6% in 2000 to 2.4% in 2021. In GS, the natural population growth rate decreased to 2.8% compared to a 2.2% decrease in WB (see table 3/2).

There are indications that the fertility rate of Palestinian women has decreased, especially since last decade of the twentieth century, although it remains in the short and medium term higher than its Jewish counterpart. Based on the results of the Palestinian Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey (PMICS) 2019–2020, the total fertility rate in the WB and GS has decreased, where there were 3.8 births per woman during 2017–2019 compared to 5.9 in 1999. Comparing WB with GS shows slight difference in fertility rate at the same period; where in GS there were 3.9 births per woman compared to 3.8 births during 2017–2019. This rate was higher in GS compared to WB in 1999, where it reached 5.8 births in GS compared to 4.1 births in WB.¹²

In 2020 reveals a decline in the average household size in WB and GS compared to 2010, where it decreased from 5.5 persons in 2010 to 5.1 in 2020. The average household size in WB declined from 5.2 persons in 2010 to 4.7 in 2020, and in GS from 6.4 persons to 5.7 at the same period (see table 3/2).

In addition to the decline in the average household size, a decrease is also observed in the Crude Birth Rate (CBR) in WB and GS, as it deteriorated from 40.9 births per thousand in 2000 to 29.5 in 2021. An obvious difference is noted regarding the CBR rate between WB and GS; in WB, it was estimated at 27.2 births per thousand compared to 32.9 in GS in 2021 (see table 3/2).

As for housing density (persons per room), in 2019, it was high in GS compared to WB, where it was 1.6 persons/room in GS compared to 1.3 in WB, while the total average housing density in GS and WB was 1.4 persons/room. The percentage of Palestinian households in which a family member owned a housing unit was approximately 87.7%, with 87.3% in WB and 88.4% in GS.¹³

Available data shows that 39.5% of households in WB and GS, in 2019, use safe drinking water, with 66.2% in WB and only 4.3% in GS.¹⁴ This triggers concerns regarding the health of Palestinians, particularly in GS.

The registered marriages in 2020 indicate a decline in the number of marriage contracts compared to 2019, as they decreased from 44,320 in 2019 to 41,221 in 2020. The general marriage rate decreased to 8.1 marriages per thousand in 2020 (6.7 cases in WB and 10.1 cases in GS) compared to 10 marriages per thousand in 2017.¹⁵

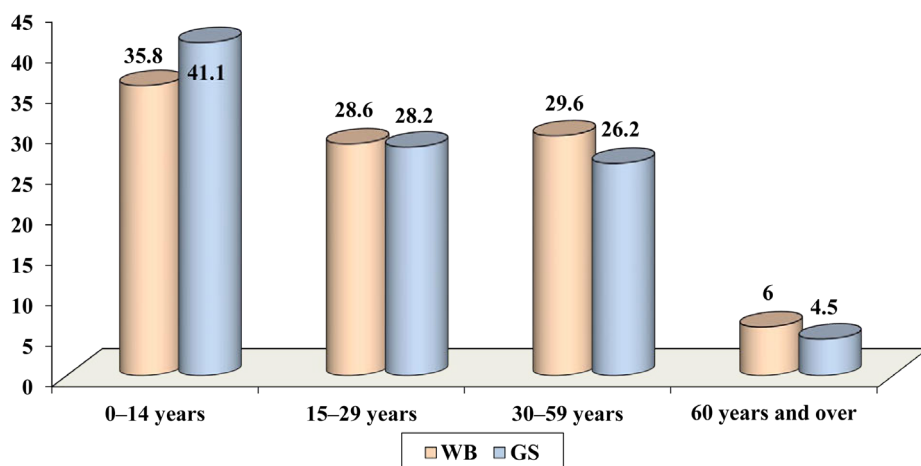
As for the characteristics of the population related to education, the 2020 data revealed that 21.7% of the population (15 years and above) in WB and GS have completed high school. The illiteracy rate for individuals aged 15 years and over is 2.5%. This rate is among the lowest rates in the world, where illiteracy rates for individuals aged 15 years and above reached 19.7% in the countries of West Asia and North Africa, according to the data of the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Institute for Statistics in 2019. It is noted that the illiteracy rate has decreased among females and males, although the female illiteracy rate remained higher when compared with males, reaching 3.8% for females and 1.2% for males in 2020, compared to 20.3% for females and 7.8% for males in 1997. This represents a significant decline over 20 years, especially among females. As for the illiteracy rate among the Palestinians aged 15 and above, it was 2.8% in WB compared to 2% in GS in 2020.¹⁶



Table 3/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians in WB and GS¹⁷

Indicator	WB	GS	WB & GS	
Population density (persons/ km2) (mid 2021)	551	5,773	868	
Population growth (2021)	2.2	2.8	2.4	
Average family size (2020)	4.7	5.7	5.1	
Life expectancy at birth (males) (years) (2021)	73.4	72.7	73.1	
Life expectancy at birth (females) (years) (2021)	75.57	74.79	75.3	
CBR (births per thousand population) (2021)	27.2	32.9	29.5	
CDR (deaths per thousand population) (2021)	3.9	3.4	3.7	
Infant mortality rate (deaths per thousand live births) (2015–2019)	11.7	12.7	12.1	
Average number of rooms in the housing unit (2019)	3.6	3.6	3.6	
Age structure (%) (mid 2021)	0–14 years	35.8	41.1	38
	15–29 years	28.6	28.2	28.4
	30–59 years	29.6	26.2	28.3
	60 years and over	6	4.5	5.3
Average housing density (persons/ room) (2019)	1.3	1.6	1.4	

Age Structure in WB and GS mid 2021 (%)



b. The Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1948 (Israel)

PCBS has indicated that Palestinians living in Israel at the end of 2021 were estimated at 1.67 million compared to 1.63 million in 2020. Available data shows that they are a young community, where individuals aged under 15 represent 32% of males and 31% of females, while those aged 65 years and over amounted to 4.6% of males and 5.6% of females (see table 4/2).

Available estimates for 2020 indicate that the fertility rate for Palestinians residing in Israel was 2.8 births per woman, almost equal to the fertility of Jewish women, noting that the fertility of religious Jews women is 7 births. As for the average Palestinian household size, it was 4.4 persons. The CBR and CDR reached 21.9 births and 3.3 deaths per thousand respectively, while infant mortality rate was 5 deaths per thousand live births. Notably, these figures exclude Arab citizens in the Syrian Golan Heights, citizens in J1 of the Jerusalem governorate, as well as, Lebanese Arabs who have moved to live temporarily in Israel, for it considers all these within its population and as part of the Arab population as a whole (see table 4/2).

A study on the high rate of murders in the 1948 occupied territories indicated an unprecedented increase in the rate of murder among Arab Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories. The year 2020 witnessed the murder of 111 Arab Palestinians, an increase of 23.3% compared to 2019.¹⁸ The Abraham Initiatives, which monitors and campaigns against violence in the Arab community revealed that the “killing brings the number of Arabs killed in Israel in 2021 as a result of violence and crime to 126.”¹⁹

According to the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) data at the end of 2020 (which also include East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights), Muslims in the 1948 occupied territories counted for 1.671 million comprising 85.4% of the population, while Druze counted for 146.8 thousand and Christians 137.6 thousand comprising 7.5% and 7% respectively.²⁰

c. Jordan

Palestinians living in Jordan at the end of 2021 were estimated at 4.5 million from 4.39 million at the end of 2020, most of whom hold Jordanian citizenship (Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent) (see table 1/2).

According to the Jordanian Department of Statistics, annual population growth was 2.4% in 2020, a percentage that included Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent as well. Statistics also reveal that in 2017–2018, the total fertility rate in Jordan was 2.7 children per woman, the infant mortality was 17 deaths per thousand live births, and the under-5 mortality rate is 19 deaths per thousand live births. These statistics include all Jordanians.²¹ Jordanian citizens of Palestinian descent most likely have the same rates.

According to a study by FAFO Foundation regarding the living conditions in Palestinian refugee camps (RCs) in Jordan in 2011, 39.9% of RC residents were under 15 years old, while those aged 65 and above comprised 4.3%. The average household size was 5.1 persons per household.²² It's worth noting that there are no documented scientific updates of these information at the time of writing this report.

According to UNRWA, there were 2,463,130 Registered Persons (RPs) in Jordan as of 31/12/2020 compared to 2,376,481 RPs in February 2019.²³

d. Syria

According to UNRWA figures, the total RPs in Syria was 655,729 as of 31/12/2020 compared to 643,142 in February 2019. It is worth noting that these are estimated figures due to the unstable situation of Syria.²⁴

Although the Palestinian gatherings in Syria were among the most stable, yet, the events that erupted since 2011 have had a tremendous impact on them. The 2020 estimates indicate that out of 656 thousand, about 200 thousand were forced to leave Syria. More than 120 thousand immigrated to Europe, about 10 thousand moved to Turkey, and tens of thousands left to Lebanon; where a number of them resided temporarily in order to arrange their immigration, some of them returned to Syria, while about 25 thousand remained in Lebanon.

Moreover, about 40% of those who remained in Syria were internally displaced (more than 180 thousand) after their RCs were destroyed, especially the following camps: al-Yarmouk, Dera'a, Handarat, and Khan al-Shiekh. They live in a tragic state where they suffer from unemployment, poverty and instability, threatening them with more misery. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA Philippe Lazzarini revealed that over 90% of the Palestinian refugees in Syria live below the poverty line.²⁵ UNRWA also announced in a statement in March 2021 that,

“ten years after demonstrations started in Syria, over half of the Palestine refugees in the country have been displaced at least once because of the brutal conflict that ensued, including 120 thousand who have sought safety in neighbouring countries, mainly Lebanon and Jordan, and beyond.” The agency adds that “since the start of the conflict, many UNRWA installations inside Syria, such as schools and health centers, have become inaccessible or sustained severe damage,” where “40% of UNRWA classrooms have been lost and almost 25% of the Agency’s health centres are currently unusable due to the conflict. UNRWA in Syria has also lost 19 staff members during the 10-year conflict.”²⁶

According to UNRWA report “Syria Regional Crisis Emergency Appeal 2021,” the vulnerability of Palestine refugees in Syria is increasing. In July 2020, UNRWA assessed the socioeconomic impact of COVID-19 on Palestine refugees in Syria, and found that close to 80% had reduced the number of meals or quantity of food consumed. The report also revealed that as of 10/12/2020, more than 8,600 confirmed COVID-19 cases, including 465 deaths had been reported in Syria.²⁷

The Syrian conflict had its impact on the Palestinian refugees. The Action Group for Palestinians of Syria (AGPS) revealed on 2/10/2021 that more than six thousand physical violations perpetrated against Palestinian refugees since the launch of the Syrian conflict. Of those 1,797 have been secretly held in Syrian dungeons, among them 110 women and girls.²⁸

AGPS documented in February 2022 “the death of 4,116 Palestinian refugees in Syria, including 493 women and girls, since 2011 as a result of war-related incidents.”²⁹ Moreover, 620 refugees were killed under torture in Syrian prisons until December 2020.³⁰

AGPS also indicated that 57 Palestinians from Syria, mostly women, children, and elderly refugees, drowned onboard the death boats to Europe, fleeing the tattered Syrian territories.³¹

Because of the current political situation and the war in Syria, the available data on the social and family conditions of Palestinians in Syria cover only the period 2009–2010. They indicate that the Palestinian community in Syria is a young one and that, as of 2009, individuals aged under 15 years comprised 33.1% of the total population, while those aged 65 years and above comprised 4.4%. The 2010 data indicate that the total Palestinian fertility rate in Syria was 2.5 births per woman



and the CBR was 29.2 births per thousand, while the annual growth rate was 1.6%. Palestinian Infant mortality rate in Syria was 28.2 deaths per thousand live births, while the mortality rate among children aged under 5 years reached 31.5 deaths per thousand live births.³²

e. Lebanon

According to UNRWA figures, RPs residing in Lebanon as of 31/12/2020 constituted a total of 543,284, compared to 533,885 until February 2019.³³ However, the census in Palestinian RCs and gatherings in Lebanon for 2017 revealed that there are only 174 thousand refugees residing in Lebanon.³⁴ Even if we assume that there is a higher margin of error in this census; the estimates that most researchers agree on are 200–250 thousand, with a high percentage of the rest is willing to immigrate if given the opportunity. This means that the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have been suffering from a high rate of migration, which has increased in recent years with the continued work restrictions on the Palestinians, and emergence of the political and economic crises in Lebanon. ‘Abdelnasser el Ayi, the office director of the Lebanese Palestinian Dialogue Committee (LPDC) stated that “the wave of Palestinian immigration from Lebanon has been on the rise since 2005, but the numbers doubled in the last two years, 2020 and 2021, both through legal and illegal immigration.” He added that in 2020 between 6 and 8 thousand Palestinians left Lebanon without return, whereas in 2021 and until the end of October, 12 thousand Palestinian travelers were recorded and did not return to Lebanon. This is a higher number than the average of previous years.³⁵

The Lebanese government “estimates that the country currently hosts 1.5 million people who have fled the conflict in Syria,” of whom about 866 thousand are registered with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and about 28 thousand are registered with UNRWA as Palestinian refugees from Syria (PRS).³⁶ The UNRWA report, “Emergency Appeal 2021,” stated that 87% of Palestine refugees who fled from Syria to Lebanon live below the poverty line, while this percentage reached 65% of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. The report counted more than 104 thousand confirmed COVID-19 cases, including more than one thousand deaths during 2020.³⁷

The Palestinian Association for Human Rights “Witness,” conducted a study concerning the Lebanese crisis and its impact on the Palestinian refugees. The study monitored the dismissal of hundreds of Palestinian workers from their jobs, noting that 65% of the Palestinian refugees in Lebanon are already unemployed. As for the income of Palestinian families, the results showed that 49% of families have a monthly income that is below the minimum wage, noting that 38% of the Palestinians in Lebanon suffer food insecurity. The study stated that 72.4% of the refugees surveyed confirmed their inability to pay the substitution in the medical bill, according to the UNRWA treatment system.³⁸

According to the Population and Housing Census in the Palestinian RCs and Gatherings in Lebanon 2017, people aged under 15 comprised 29% while those aged 65 years and above comprised 6.4%. The average household size of the Palestinian family in Lebanon was 4 members and families headed by women comprised 17.5%. The fertility rate among Palestinian women in Palestinian RCs and gatherings in Lebanon was 2.7 births per woman.

f. General Comparisons Among Palestinians

Before comparing the major demographic indicators summarized in table 4/2, we would like to point out that, occasionally, some data are used for different years, which may disturb the comparison process. Nonetheless, they remain useful as general indicators, according to the latest available statistics. The following are the main observations:

- The percentage of Palestinians under the age of 15 is highest in GS and lowest in Lebanon
- The percentage of Palestinians aged 65 and over is highest in Lebanon followed by the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel) and Syria, and it is lowest in GS.
- CBRs are highest in GS, then in Jordan and Syria, followed by WB then Lebanon, and the lowest are in the territories occupied in 1948 (Israel). This rate is consistent with the general trend of births in the past years, where GS remained the area with the highest rate of the CBRs, which leads to demographic pressure on the besieged GS, which has a limited capacity.
- CDR remained high in WB and GS reaching 3.7 deaths per thousand in 2021. This was due to Israeli policies pursued over decades, particularly the killing of Palestinians.

Table 4/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence³⁹

Indicator	WB 2021	GS 2021	WB & GS 2021	Israel 2020	Jordan 2011	Syria (2009–2010)	Lebanon 2017
% of individuals under 15 years	35.6	40.9	37.7	32 males 31 females	39.9	33.1	29
% of individuals 65 years and over	3.7	2.8	3.3	4.6 males 5.6 females	4.3	4.4	6.4
Sex ratio (males per 100 females)	103.8	102.7	103.4	102.7 (2015)	–	100.4	102
CBR (births per 1,000 population)	27.2	32.9	29.5	21.9	29.2 (2010)	29.2	25.8 (2010)
CDR (deaths per 1,000 population)	3.9	3.4	3.7	3.3	–	2.8 (2006)	–
Total fertility rate (births per woman)	3.8 (2017–2019)	3.9 (2017–2019)	3.8 (2017–2019)	2.8	3.3 (2010)	2.5	2.7
Average household size (individuals per house)	4.7 (2020)	5.7 (2020)	5.1 (2020)	4.4	5.1	4.1 (2010)	4

3. Palestinian Refugees

Although it is difficult to accurately determine the number of Palestinian refugees in the world, it is possible to benefit from the data available to estimate approximate numbers. According to PCBS, the number of Palestinians abroad at the end of 2021 are estimated at 7.04 million, while the PCBS statistics in 2017 have indicated that the Palestinian refugees in WB and GS are estimated at 42.2% of the population. This means that their number has reached 2.242 million at the end of 2021, of whom 830 thousand are living in WB, and 1.412 million in GS representing 26.3% and 66.1% of its population, respectively.⁴⁰ These figures are close to UNRWA's, which stated that the number of registered refugees was about 872 thousand in WB, and about 1.477 million in GS at the end of 2020. Probably the reason for the differences is that some refugees have left WB and GS. Furthermore, a number of Palestinians living abroad are from WB and GS, they have the Palestinian "citizenship" and can return to reside there (see table 5/2). Furthermore, it is estimated that there

are at least 150 thousand Palestinians from the 1948 occupied territories, who were displaced from their historical cities and villages, but remain within the geographical borders of occupied Palestine in 1948. Therefore, the total number of Palestinian refugees at the end of 2021, is estimated at 9.432 million, constituting 67.4% of the Palestinians worldwide.

There might be problems of replications, due to changes of residence where the refugee is registered or holds his/her passport; However, this affects only a limited amount of the large proportion of refugees.

It's worth noting that UNRWA statistics have been limited to registered refugees in its five areas of operation: WB, GS, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. Thus, these statistics do not accurately reflect the refugee population worldwide as they exclude many refugees residing outside UNRWA's operation areas, and even do not include a lot of those residing in its areas of operations, because they did not need to register with the Agency and benefit from its services. Also, UNRWA's figures exclude the Palestinian refugees who took refuge after the war of 1967 (*Naksah*). Besides, there are refugees who had to flee Palestine under different circumstances (other than war) and were prevented from returning. As a result, UNRWA statistics are incomplete and should not be dealt with as factual numbers reflecting the reality of the refugee population in 1948 (except in Syria and Lebanon to some extent). These numbers only reflect those who have registered with UNRWA, and can receive its aid and services, rather than all Palestinian refugees.

The number of registered refugees in UNRWA's five areas of operation on 31/12/2020 is estimated at 6.389 million of whom about 2.463 million live in Jordan (38.6%); 2.726 million in the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 (42.6%), where 1.643 million live in GS (25.7%) and 1.083 million live in WB (16.9%); and the rest constitutes 1.2 million (18.8%), who are registered in Syria and Lebanon. The number of families registered in UNRWA's five areas of operation reached 1.5 million, while the average household size was 4.3 persons.⁴¹

Refugee numbers remain estimated figures, especially when it comes to Palestinians abroad, outside UNRWA's operation areas, where there are no official statistics, nor accurate knowledge of growth rates. There is also the difficulty of resolving problems of replication due to changes in country of residence or citizenship, as is the case with the Palestinians of Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, and Palestinians in historic Palestine residing abroad.



**Table 5/2: UNRWA-RPs According to Their Area of Operation
as of 31/12/2020⁴²**

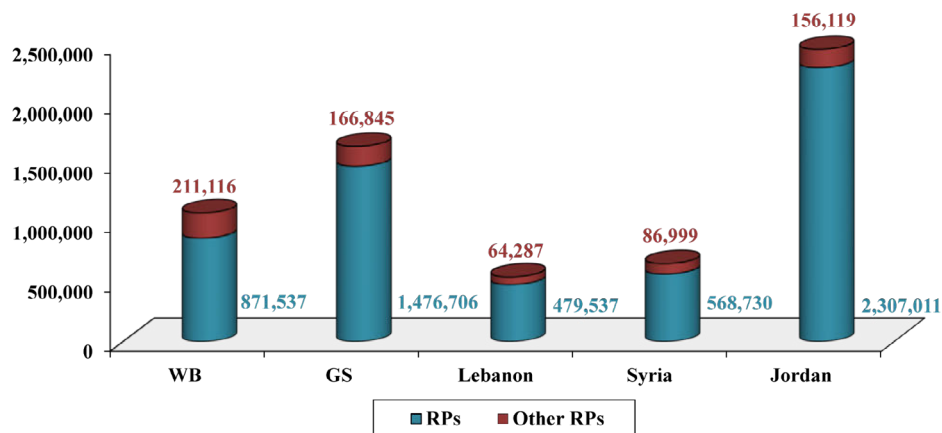
	WB	GS	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Total
RRs	871,537	1,476,706	2,307,011	568,730	479,537	5,703,546
Other RPs*	211,116	166,845	156,119	86,999	64,287	685,366
Total RPs	1,082,653	1,643,551	2,463,130	655,729	543,284	6,388,887
Families	278,707	358,043	558,842	192,105	145,078	1,532,696
Official camps	19	8	10	9	12	58
Schools	96	278	169	102	65	710
Pupil enrolment	45,883	286,645	119,047	50,609	37,586	539,770
Primary health-care facilities	43	22	25	23	27	140
Area staff	3,849	12,132	6,094	3,014	3,046	28,563**
International staff	17	16	16	13	13	193***

* Other RPs: include non-refugee wives, non-refugee husbands, non-refugee children, Frontier villagers, Jerusalem poor, Gaza poor, and Compromise cases.

** Agency total includes staff in UNRWA headquarter, Amman.

*** The number of Agency-wide international staff in 2020 includes 11 international staff based in UNRWA liaison offices, including UNRWA headquarter, Amman.

UNRWA's Figures as of 31/12/2020



UNRWA–Total RPs by Area as of 31/12/2020

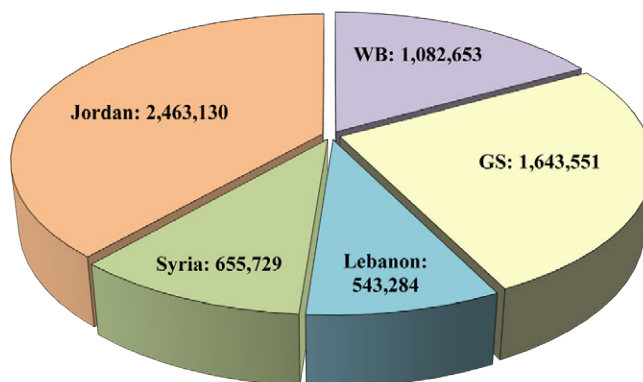


Table 6/2 indicate that the UNRWA refugee communities, like the Palestinians in general, are young, where 30% of refugees registered with the Agency are children under the age of 18, with highest rate in the GS (41.3%) and lowest in Lebanon (22%).

The data shows that fertility rates among refugees in WB and GS are the highest among UNRWA’s five operation areas (3.6 births per woman), as is the case for the average family size in WB and GS (5.6 individuals per household). The dependency ratio (number of dependent persons per 100 individuals of working age, 15–64 years) among registered refugees is significantly high in the GS (75.6) mainly due to the high percentage of people aged under 15, which may be challenging in light of the high unemployment rates and deteriorating economic conditions.

Table 6/2: Selected Demographic Indicators of Palestinians by Residence 2020⁴³

Indicator	GS	WB	Jordan	Syria	Lebanon	Agency
Children below 18 years (%)	41.3	27.5	25.8	28.3	22	30
Average household size (individual per house) (2015)	5.6	5.6	5.2	4.8	4.7	5.3
Fertility rate	3.6	3.6	3.2	2.7	2.7	3.2
Dependency ratio	75.6	50.5	46.4	49.5	47.5	54.1



Regarding education, figures showed that refugees are better educated than non-refugees in WB and GS, where the illiteracy rate was 2.5% among refugees (15 years and over) compared to 3% among non-refugees, while holders of a bachelor's degree and above comprise 16% for refugees and 14% for non-refugees.⁴⁴

4. Demographic Growth Trends

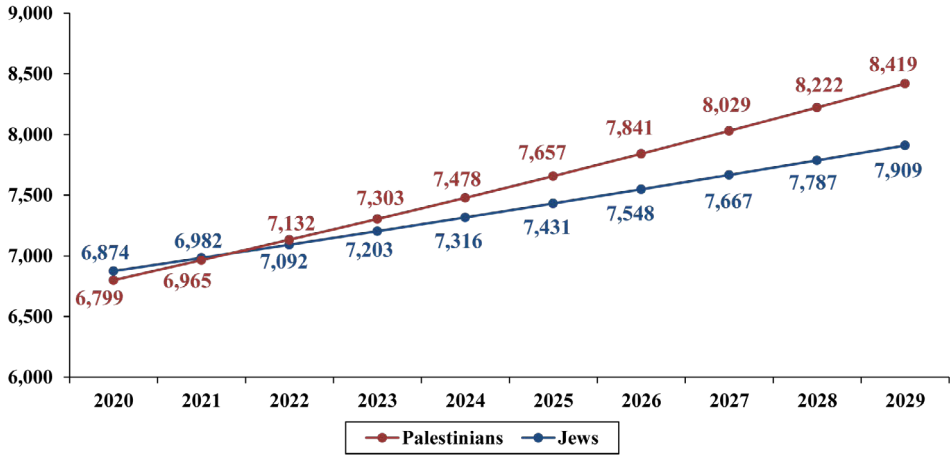
Despite the relative decline in the rate of natural population growth among the Palestinian population, the rate remains high compared to other populations including the Israelis. Based on PCBS estimates, Palestinians in historic Palestine reached 6.965 million at the end of 2021, while Jews reached 6.982 million according to Israel's CBS estimates.

Based on annual growth rates, the Palestinian and Jewish population in historical Palestine is expected to be equal at the end of 2022, reaching approximately 7.1 million. Palestinians are expected to outnumber Jews in historic Palestine in 2029 by about 510 thousand.

Table 7/2: Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2020–2029 (thousands)⁴⁵

Year	Palestinians in historic Palestine	Jews
2020	6,799	6,874
2021	6,965	6,982
2022	7,132	7,092
2023	7,303	7,203
2024	7,478	7,316
2025	7,657	7,431
2026	7,841	7,548
2027	8,029	7,667
2028	8,222	7,787
2029	8,419	7,909

Estimated Population Count of Palestinians and Jews in Historic Palestine 2020–2029 (thousands)



From a Palestinian point of view, the positive interpretation of these projections, confirms that the Palestinian people, despite suffering oppression, displacement and occupation, are still steadfast in their land. Moreover, it shows that after the establishment of the World Zionist Organization by 125 years, and after the establishment of Israel by 74 years, this Zionist project is facing the fact that the Palestinian population inside Palestine exceeds the number of Jews there, whom were gathered throughout those years from more than a hundred countries. This is undoubtedly a disturbing fact for Israel. However, talking about the Palestinian “demographic bomb” should not make Palestinians swept up in the euphoria of victory or make them feel relaxed. For Palestinian steadfastness and population growth are important phenomena, but they are not enough. History has shown that, in many cases, colonialism was able to deal with and overcome such phenomena.

Second, the Israelis are aware of the risk this phenomenon poses, they have been working on it for decades. Hence, their disengagement from GS in 2005. Their plan in the WB was to annex the largest area of land that has the smallest number of inhabitants, keeping the Palestinians in “cantons” that have the form of a distorted self-rule and nominally bear the title of a state. This is what actually has been happening, after the collapse of the peace process and the two-state solution.

Moreover, Israel has made the living environment for the Palestinians unbearable. Some statistics indicate that about 415 thousand Palestinians left WB and GS during 1967–2003, in addition to tens of thousands of people

from each WB and GS in the past years, for which accurate statistics are not available. In addition, the displacement and “transfer” files are still on the Israeli decision-maker’s desk, whose society is developing to become more extreme, more religious and nationalistic.

Although the Israeli population growth rate was in 2021, around 1.57%, i.e., less than its Palestinian counterpart, however, the fact that the number of Palestinians would exceed the number of Jews in historical Palestine must be placed within an objective context, and must be viewed within a framework of many challenges and dangers facing the Palestinian people inside Palestine.⁴⁶

5. Palestinians Outside Palestine and the Right of Return

The Palestinian people abroad continued to resist all attempts to liquidate the Palestine issue, by reiterating the right of return and liberating their land, and by rejecting the Deal of the Century and normalization. They continued to hold activities and events that emphasize their association with Palestine, and which remind the emerging generations of the right to land and return.

On 25/9/2021, the Palestinians in Europe Conference held its 19th annual conference online, under the slogan “Jerusalem Unites Us till We Return,” with the participation of prominent Palestinian, Arab, and European figures. The conference called for the reform of the PLO, the suspension of “absurd negotiations” and the prevention of normalization with the Israel. Moreover, it confirmed in its closing statement, the adherence of the Palestinian people, everywhere, to their inalienable rights, especially the right of return. Furthermore, it valued the Palestinian people unity in their last confrontation against the Israeli aggression on Jerusalem and the holy sites.⁴⁷

The first Palestinians in Europe Conference was held in London in 2003, and then it was held annually in several European capitals and cities, the last of which was the 18th Conference in Paris in April 2020, which was canceled due to COVID-19 pandemic.⁴⁸

On 11/1/2022, in the first meeting of its coordinating office, the “European-Palestinians Initiative for National Action” announced the formation of a pressure group in favor of the Palestine issue in Europe, consisting of the initiative’s members, who are more than 200 figures from 18 countries. It is noteworthy that the “European-Palestinians Initiative for National Action” was established by Palestinians from various European countries, it is based in Brussels, and was

launched in March 2020.⁴⁹ In its founding statement in October 2020, the initiative reported that it was founded to unite “all national efforts across Europe to serve the Palestinian cause, developing national action in proportion to the size of risks and in order to achieve a work methodology aimed at protecting legitimate national rights, and calling for true national unity.”⁵⁰

On 5/3/2021, The Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad organized a three-day conference entitled “The National Dialogue for Palestinians Abroad,” with the participation of more than 200 Palestinian figures from 26 countries of six continents. It discussed the future Palestinian leadership scene and the pivotal role of Palestinians abroad.⁵¹

Furthermore, in solidarity with Palestine, the Palestinian Forum in Britain (PFB) organized the annual Palestine Festival 2021, which kicked off with the participation of thousands from the Palestinian and Arab communities. The festival witnessed the honoring of a number of pro-Palestine figures in UK, most notably Jeremy Corbyn, the former leader for the British Labour Party.⁵²

The activities of the second annual Return Week, held by the Palestinian Return Centre, kicked off on 3/12/2021, with an art exhibition displaying paintings by Palestinian artists, whose theme is the Palestinian refugees’ adherence to the right of return.⁵³ It is noteworthy that “Return Week” is an annual event that was organized for the first time in 2020. It aims to commemorate the UN Resolution 194 regarding the return of Palestinian refugees.⁵⁴

Latin America is witnessing growing solidarity with the Palestine issue, due to the continuous efforts of the Arab and Muslim community, especially the Palestinian one. They have been informing the public about the suffering the Palestinians under Israeli occupation, while emphasizing the right of return.

The PLO had sponsored the establishment of the Confederation of Palestinian Organizations in Latin America and the Caribbean (COPLAC), but its impact declined in recent years due to the weak performance of the PLO and the PA abroad. Therefore, in order to reactivate the role of the Palestinians there, the Palestinians of Latin America established in 2017 the Palestinian Union of Latin America (Unión Palestina de América Latina—UPAL), whose elected leader is Siman Khoury.

Communities in Latin America organized activities in support for the Palestine issue, including the week of solidarity with Palestine (27/11/2020 to 2/12/2020),



coinciding with the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People.⁵⁵ The organizers were the Latin Palestinian Forum (FLP), a non-governmental organization based in Sao Paulo, Brazil; the Friends of Palestine, an Argentinean organization founded by a number of Palestinian activists residing in Latin America; and the Middle East Monitor website.⁵⁶ After the normalization deal between Israel and the UAE, the FLP called for launching a campaign to support humanitarian work in WB and GS.⁵⁷

Several European capitals and cities, in addition to US, Canada, Brazil and other countries, witnessed dozens of demonstrations and protests in solidarity with Palestine, emphasizing the right of the Palestinians to their land and their right of return. These activities also rejected the Deal of the Century, the displacement of Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem, the GS siege, the May 2021 aggression, and the violations against Palestinian prisoners. In January 2020, dozens of demonstrations and protests took place in European and non-European countries, rejecting the Deal of the Century.⁵⁸ On 18/2/2020, Palestinian and Dutch institutions supporting the Palestine issue protested in front of the Dutch parliament, States General of the Netherlands, in the Hague, rejecting the Deal of The Century.⁵⁹

On 7–9/8/2020, the “Days of Resistance” activities were launched in several cities and capitals in Europe and the Americas, to perpetuate the culture and concept of the Palestinian resistance against colonial policies, Zionism and the plans of liquidation and normalization.⁶⁰ Moreover, in May 2021, tens of thousands of Palestinians, Arabs, Americans and Europeans participated in demonstrations and activities in several US states and European and Canadian cities, in rejection of the Israeli aggression on GS.⁶¹

Second: Economic Indicators in WB and GS

1. GDP in PA Territories (WB and GS)

Gross Domestic Product (GDP) reflects the overall economic activity carried out by all institutions producing goods and services in the public, private and other sectors in a country over one year. It is a widely used indicator employed locally, regionally and internationally on different levels. It shows the state of economic

development and growth, and the PCBS measures it periodically and presents its current data and future forecasts.

a. GDP Growth Rate

Table 8/2 shows that 2020 saw the lowest economic growth for the Palestinians throughout 2015–2021, as GDP growth witnessed unprecedented decline. This was due to several reasons, most notably COVID-19, which brought the application of a state of emergency, restrictions on economic activity and productive work which was strictly limited to activities meeting essential needs, as well as health services, police and local government units. There was noticeable GDP growth improvement in 2021, reaching, in preliminary estimates, 6%,⁶² close to the PMA forecasts ranging between 5.3–7.1% based on the base and optimistic scenarios.⁶³

In sum, the general trend of 2015–2021 showed limited relative growth at an average of 1.6%, for economic growth took a sharp turn after 2017, and it was reflected in the significant decline of growth in 2021, and in the downward general trend.

This growth was the result of what was achieved in WB and GS, with large differences in their rates in favor of WB. It is reflected in the general trend until 2023 reaching 2.7% and –1% for WB and GS respectively. Gaza's contribution to the GDP during the same period would witness significant decline from 20.8% to 16.6%, which implies the significant obstacles preventing growth, which based on the indicator of the share of the GS in the total population of WB and GS, must be 40–42%.⁶⁴

Moreover, according to a report prepared by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the cumulative economic cost of tighter Israel restrictions during the period 2000–2019 was estimated at \$58 billion, with an annual average \$2.9 billion, equivalent to 3.7 times the 2019 GDP of the occupied Palestinian territory.⁶⁵

As for growth prospects for 2022–2023, they remain subject to interventions, most of which are beyond Palestinian control, and based on the estimates announced by the PCBS for the base and optimistic scenario of 2022, and that growth would range between 2.5–10.4%,⁶⁶ as well as based on the joint forecasts of the PMA and PCBS, the 2022 growth is anticipated to be limited to just 3%.⁶⁷

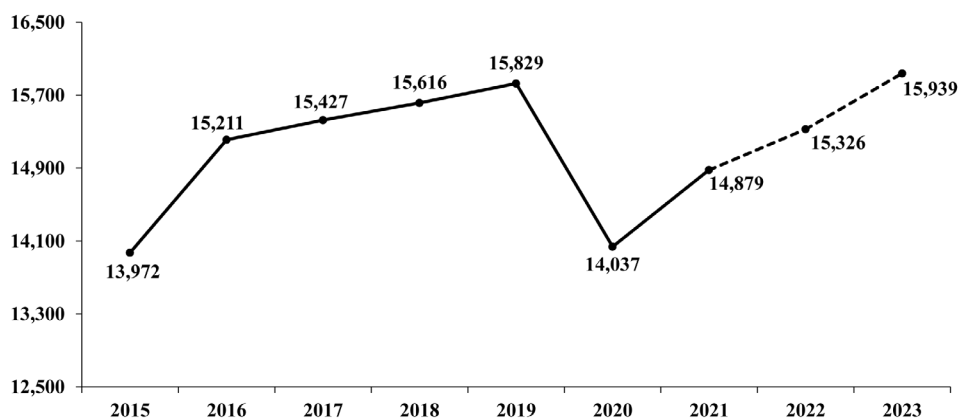
The Palestinian context continues in terms of division, blockade, obstacles, deductions of clearance revenues and health instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic, whereas relative improvement is expected due to external support and the expansion of local tax collection. Accordingly, and based on the UNCTAD report on the prospects of economic development in the 1967 occupied Palestine throughout 2019–2025, the growth in 2023 could reach 3.7%.⁶⁸ As positive factors are expected to occur in terms of increasing and stimulating performance, we expect that growth in 2023 will reach 4%, although there are expectations from other parties that may agree or disagree with what we have presented, based on available data.

Table 8/2: GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁶⁹

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GDP	13,972	15,211	15,427	15,616	15,829	14,037	14,879	15,326	15,939
Average annual growth (%)	+3.7	+8.9	+1.4	+1.2	+1.4	-11.3	+6	+3	+4
						-2.7		+3.5	

Note: The data excludes those parts of Jerusalem, which were annexed by Israel in 1967. The base year is 2015. This will be applied to all the following tables in this chapter.

GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$ million)



b. GDP Growth in WB and GS

There was significant variation in GDP growth rates between WB and GS in 2020 and 2021. In GS, GDP decreased by 12.6% in 2020 and increased by 2.3% in 2021, compared with growth in WB by 11% and 6.8% in 2020 and 2021 respectively. As for the share in GDP by region, the decline of the GS share continues, which was 17.6% in 2020 and 17% in 2021, indicating weak GDP growth in GS. Therefore, there is an urgent need to increase the Palestinian GDP growth rate significantly, especially in GS, in order to adjust the growth balance in WB and GS. In return, the WB share was 83% of total GDP in 2021, although its share of the population is 60% compared to 40% in GS.

Table 9/2: GDP in WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁷⁰

Year	WB		GS		WB and GS	
	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)	GDP	Percentage (%)
2015	11,072.3	79.2	2,900.1	20.8	13,972.4	100
2016	12,046.1	79.2	3,164.9	20.8	15,211	100
2017	12,505.5	81.1	2,921.4	18.9	15,426.9	100
2018	12,797.3	81.9	2,818.9	18.1	15,616.2	100
2019	12,998.8	82.1	2,830.2	17.9	15,829	100
2020	11,564.1	82.4	2,473.3	17.6	14,037.4	100
2021	12,349.6	83	2,529.4	17	14,879	100



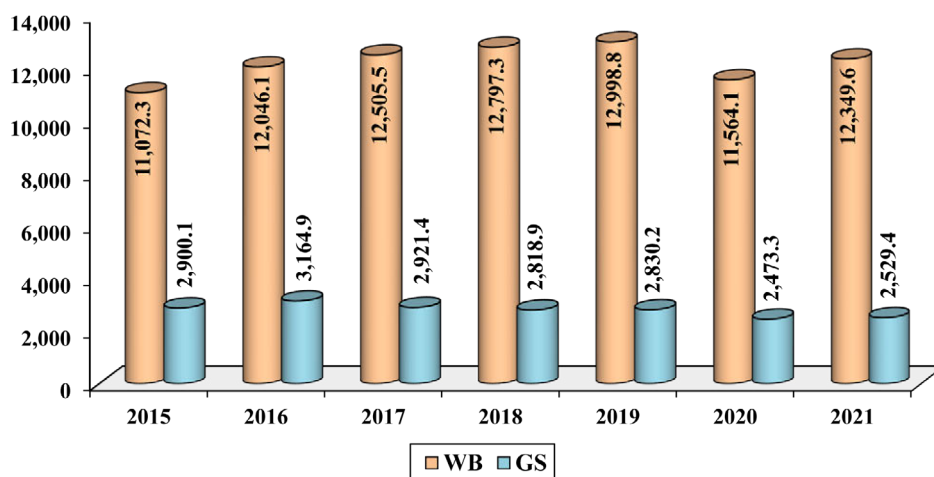
GDP in WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices (\$ million)


Table 10/2: GDP Growth in the WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices (\$ million)⁷¹

		Actual						Estimates
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
WB	GDP	11,072.3	12,046.1	12,505.5	12,797.3	12,998.8	11,564.1	12,349.6
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+4.4	+8.8	+3.8	+2.3	+1.6	-11	+6.8
GS	GDP	2,900.1	3,164.9	2,921.4	2,818.9	2,830.2	2,473.3	2,529.4
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+1.4	+9.1	-7.7	-3.5	+0.4	-12.6	+2.3

c. GDP in PA Territories and Israel

Examining the Israeli GDP at current prices, which reached \$407.78 billion in 2020 and \$481.3 billion in 2021, we notice that it is more than 26 times the size of its Palestinian counterpart in 2020 and more than 27 times in 2021. This is a clear indication of the nature of the Israeli occupation and its impact on the Palestinian economy, the extent to which it exploits Palestinian resources, and

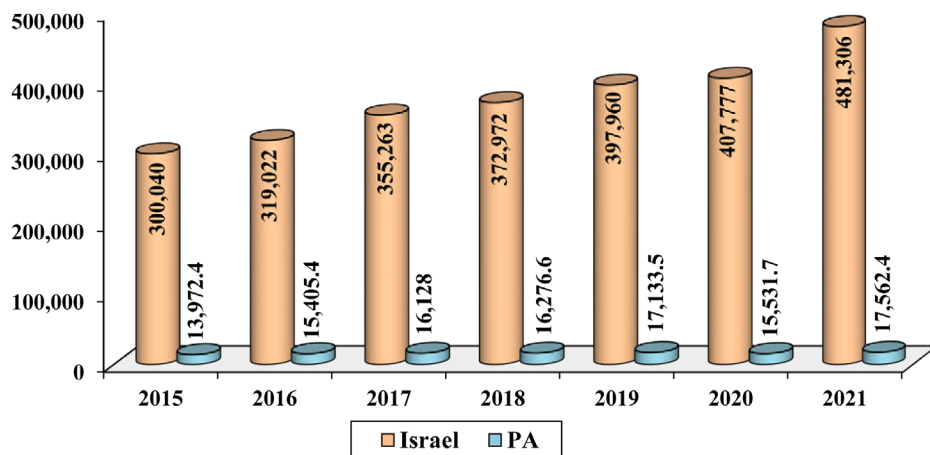
prevents Palestinians from realizing the free and efficient use of their energies and potentials. The population of Israel for 2021 was 9.45 million compared to 5.29 million in WB and GS, a reality which should be taken into consideration.

**Table 11/2: GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021
at Current Prices (\$ million)⁷²**

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP to Israeli GDP
2015	13,972.4	300,040	4.7
2016	15,405.4	319,022	4.8
2017	16,128	355,263	4.5
2018	16,276.6	372,972	4.4
2019	17,133.5	397,960	4.3
2020	15,531.7	407,777	3.8
2021	17,562.4*	481,306	3.6

*Based on estimates of the first three quarters of 2021.

GDP in PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)



2. GDP per Capita

This indicator reflects the overall development and growth of GDP at constant prices, after excluding inflation rates and population growth rates. It refers to the average per capita share of the GDP over time, which is being reformulated as an average per capita income or disposable income that reflects as a purchasing power per person. It is affected by remittances received from abroad and deductions from the individual.

a. Average Growth of GDP per Capita

The GDP per capita of 2020–2021 was unusually low compared to previous years as shown in table 12/2. It amounted to about \$3,025 in 2021 compared to about \$2,923 in 2020 and \$3,378 in 2019, with an average decline of 5% during 2020–2021 compared to 2019.

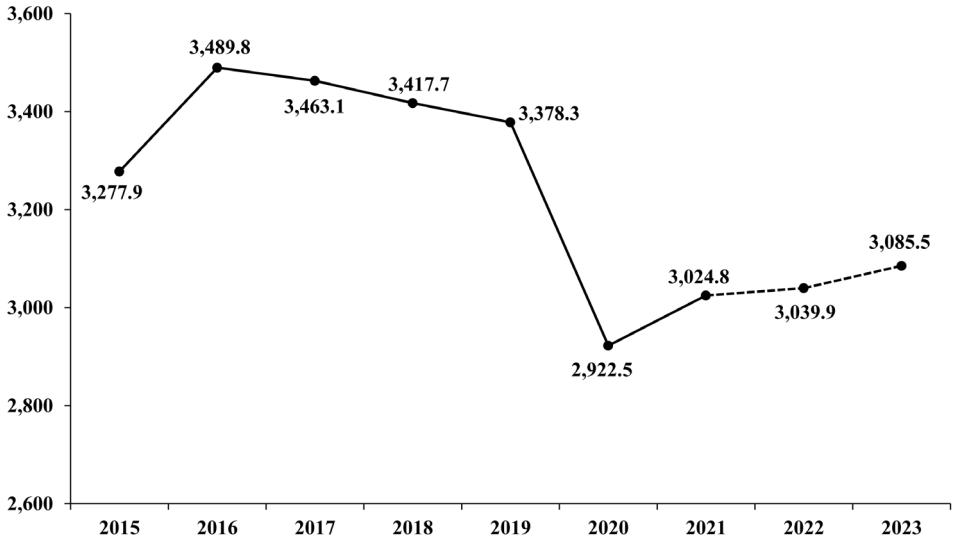
The WB GDP per capita could have reached \$6,964 in 2019, but Israeli closures caused this level to deteriorate by 44.5% in the said year.⁷³ In general, the large differences between the levels of production and income constitute a significant gap between the rich and the poor and make the poor the largest segment in the country, with a few of the rich possessing most of the wealth.

As for the 2022–2023 estimates, there will be a growth of about 0.5% and 1.5%, respectively, based on the state of GDP growth. However, it is an improvement compared to the low levels of 2021; therefore, it is not expected to bring about a tangible breakthrough in the purchasing power of individuals or families.

**Table 12/2: Average GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2015–2023
at Constant Prices (\$) ⁷⁴**

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
GDP per capita	3,277.9	3,489.8	3,463.1	3,417.7	3,378.3	2,922.5	3,024.8	3,039.9	3,085.5
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+1.4	+6.5	-0.8	-1.3	-1.2	-13.5	+3.5	+0.5	+1.5

GDP per Capita in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$)



b. Average GDP per Capita in WB and GS

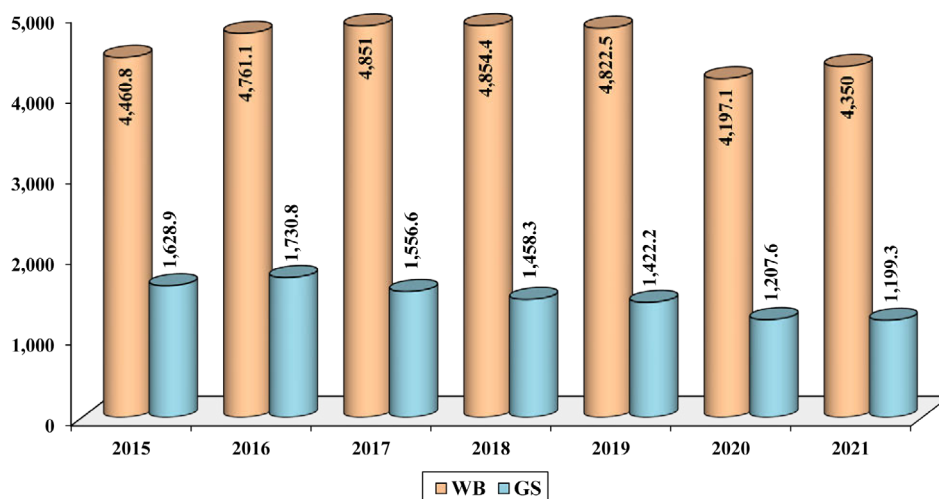
In 2020, the GDP per capita was high in WB compared to GS, amounting to \$4,197 in WB versus \$1,208 in GS, with a difference in their respective growth rates relative to the previous year. According to estimates, there was an increase in the GDP per capita in WB in 2021 to \$4,350, or 3.6%, compared to 2020, and a decrease to \$1,199 in GS, by 0.7% (see table 13/2). This is a reflection of the GDP volume in WB and GS and the consequent huge differences in the GDP per capita, as it was 3.6 times higher in WB than in GS in 2021, while it was 2.7 times higher in 2015. It also remained below its level compared to previous years, with a general decrease trend and negative growth, and this was due to the GS’s harsh conditions of high unemployment, low wages, the ban on working in Israel as well as the blockade and the internal Palestinian schism, which have all had sharp impacts on living standards, purchasing capabilities and society’s ability to meet the population’s basic needs.

The above dynamics demand attention is given to the causes of this gap, identifying how wealth is concentrated and distributed, and highlighting the need to adopt appropriate economic policies to improve output and performance to correct the current situation.

**Table 13/2: Average GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2015–2021
at Constant Prices (\$) ⁷⁵**

		Actual						Estimates
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
WB	GDP per capita	4,460.8	4,761.1	4,851	4,854.4	4,822.5	4,197.1	4,350
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	+2.3	+6.7	+1.9	+0.1	-0.7	-13	+3.6
GS	GDP per capita	1,628.9	1,730.8	1,556.6	1,458.3	1,422.2	1,207.6	1,199.3
	Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-1.4	+6.3	-10.1	-6.3	-2.5	-15.1	-0.7

GDP per Capita in the WB and GS 2015–2021 at Constant Prices (\$)



c. Comparison of GDP per Capita Between PA Territories and Israel

There is a significant gap between GDP per capita in PA territories and Israel. At current prices, it was \$3,234 and \$3,570 in the PA territories in 2020 and 2021 respectively, while in Israel (at current prices) it was \$44,255 and \$51,386 for the same period. This means the latter was 14 times higher than the former. This is primarily due to the Israeli occupation and its policies that prevent the normal growth of the Palestinian economy, leading to a decline in Palestinian GDP. This has happened at a time when Palestinians experienced higher rates of population growth than the Israeli side and worked in harsher conditions under occupation,

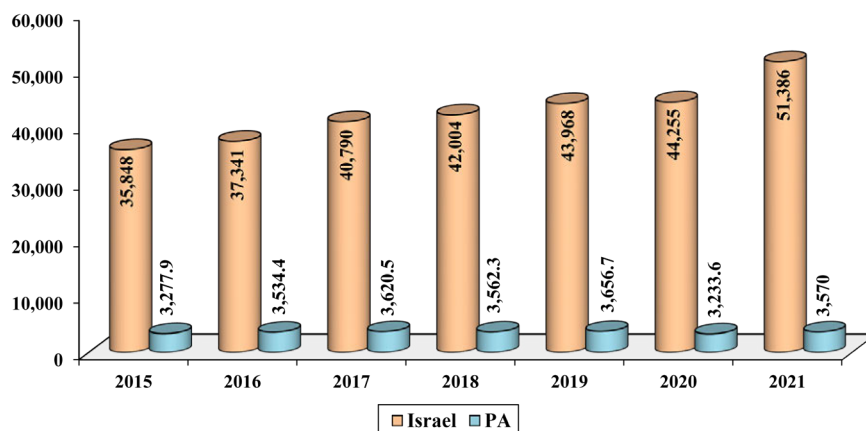
which had a negative impact on wages, living standards, and savings. Furthermore, the huge gap between the two sides has allowed Israelis to enjoy a far higher standard of living than Palestinians.

Table 14/2: GDP per Capita in the PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices (\$)⁷⁶

Year	PA	Israel	% Palestinian GDP per capita of Israeli GDP per capita
2015	3,277.9	35,848	9.1
2016	3,534.4	37,341	9.5
2017	3,620.5	40,790	8.9
2018	3,562.3	42,004	8.5
2019	3,656.7	43,968	8.3
2020	3,233.6	44,255	7.3
2021	3,570*	51,386	6.9

*Based on estimates for the first three quarters of 2021.

GDP per Capita in the PA Territories and Israel 2015–2021 at Current Prices (\$)



3. Public Debt

Public debt, both domestic and external, was linked to the great expansion of government expenditures and consequently the chronic budget deficit. A significant decline in unstable external aid was also noticed since 2009,⁷⁷ then there were

increased obligations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to unjust Israeli deductions. Consequently, the PA to borrowed, especially from local sources, such as the banking system and public bodies, including the Palestinian Pension Agency.

Table 15/2: PA Government Public Debt 2015–2023 (\$ million)⁷⁸

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Domestic debt	1,467	1,440	1,501	1,338	1,577	2,325	2,529	2,874	3,199
Annual growth rate (%)	+30.1	-1.8	+4.2	-10.9	+17.9	+47.4	+8.8	+13.7	+11.3
						+28.1		+12.5	
External debt	1,071	1,044	1,042	1,032	1,218	1,325	1,320	1,359	1,397
Annual growth rate (%)	-1.6	-2.5	-0.2	-1	+18	+8.8	-0.4	+3	+2.8
						+4.2		+2.9	
Total public debt	2,538	2,484	2,543	2,370	2,795	3,650	3,848	4,233	4,596
GDP at current prices	13,972.4	15,405.4	16,128	16,276.6	17,133.5	15,531.7	17,562.4*	16,001	16,241
Total public debt as % of GDP	18.2	16.1	15.8	14.6	16.3	23.5	21.9	26.5	28.3

* Based on estimates for the first three quarters of 2021.

PA Government Public Debt 2015–2023 (\$ million)

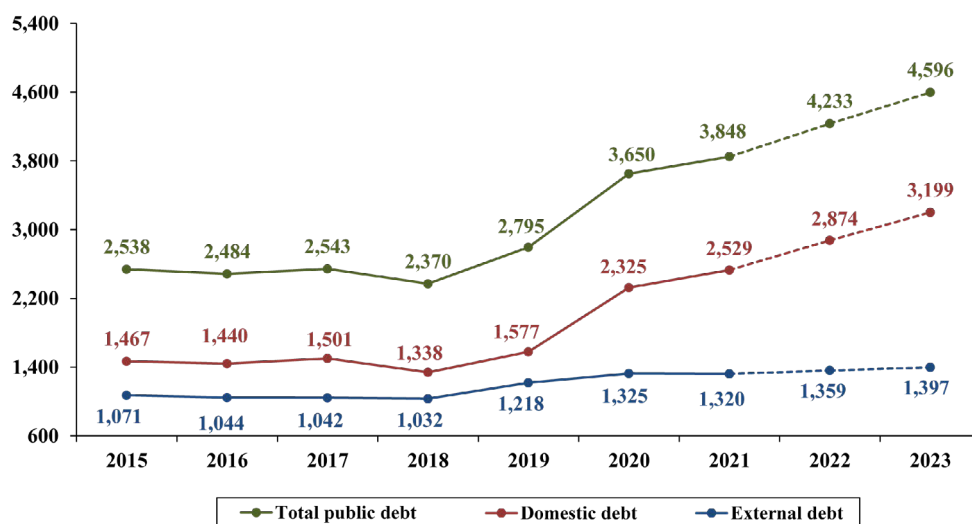


Table 15/2 shows that public debt took two paths throughout 2015–2021, at first decline until 2018, and then a rise during 2019–2021, at 17.9%, 30.6% and 5.5% respectively. This was affected by the size of deductions from the clearance funds and the decline of foreign aid and grants, which led to the exacerbation of financial crisis forcing the government to increase debt as a means to carry out its public services.

Domestic debt constituted the largest part of total public debt, at 57.8% and 65.7% in 2015 and 2021 respectively. The banking system was the largest provider of this debt by virtue of its surplus liquidity and the desire to invest it, where the government was committed to fulfill them and pay their interests at time. This borrowing was also done in the local currency, which enables local banks to maintain sufficient cash liquidity, on the one hand, and on the other hand, helps the PA avoid the risks of currency exchange rate fluctuations.

There remains another aspect of indebtedness represented in “arrears,” which are additional public debts that the government does not set a binding period for their repayment. They are the PA’s resort to hide the real volume of its debts, where it would exceed the legally permissible percentage of public debt, i.e., 40%. In addition, these arrears have negative, harmful repercussions on service providers needed by the PA, such as hospitals,⁷⁹ suppliers of goods, construction companies and others. Government arrears at the end of Q2 2021 amounted to \$5,076 million. This sharp rise in arrears is due to the critical escalation of domestic debts which increased in pace during Q2 and Q3 of the year,⁸⁰ in the wake of the clearance crisis and the protest of the PA and its reluctance to receive the collected amounts believing the Israeli deductions to be unfair. This brought the total public debt, including arrears, to \$8,924 million, representing 50.8% of the GDP, a ratio that remains high and unprecedented, while exceeding the legally permissible rate, which deepens the government’s financial crisis with ongoing negative repercussions. However, local borrowing has maximum limits that cannot be exceeded, especially regarding the banking system, which made the PA resort to temporarily reduce the salaries of public employees in late 2021.⁸¹

Debt forecasts for 2022–2023 will be affected by the actual budget deficit, which in turn depends on the growth of both revenues and public expenditures, as well as external aid, and also on the government’s will to repay the arrears which have time limit, given the reverberations on creditors and the services



they provide. With the possibility of an improvement in financial performance, including an increase in total net domestic revenues, clearance taxes, and external aid, which would be within the US and European vision, i.e., humanitarian, and economic considerations, the total public debt is expected to reach \$4,233 million and \$4,595.7 million in 2022 and 2023 respectively, where the growth rate for the aforementioned two years deteriorates to 10% and 8.6% respectively.

4. The PA's General Budget

The general budget reflects the government's financial activity in a country during a given year. It includes revenues and expenditures in their various forms, the state of the total balance in terms of surplus or deficit, how the surplus is used and ways to cover the deficit.

Table 16/2: PA Fiscal Operations 2015–2023 Cash Basis (\$ million)⁸²

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
– Domestic revenues	913	1,317	1,222	1,346	1,210	1,210	1,537		
– Clearance revenues	2,047	2,332	2,483	2,255	2,219	2,400	2,775		
– Tax returns	–68	–97	–53	–138	–138	–84	–91		
Total net revenue	2,891	3,552	3,652	3,463	3,291	3,526	4,221	4,263	4,348
Annual growth rate (%)	–	+22.9	+2.8	–5.2	–5	+7.1	+19.7	+1	+2
– Salaries and wages	1,760	1,927	1,954	1,658	1,678	1,891	1,986		
– Non-wage expenditure	1,352	1,421	1,533	1,688	1,590	1,659	1,621		
– Net lending	301	270	266	268	320	351	373		
– Earmarked payments	33	44	42	46	73	54	50		
Total expenditures	3,445	3,662	3,795	3,660	3,660	3,955	4,030	4,473	4,786
Annual growth rate (%)	–	+6.3	+3.6	–3.5	0	+8.1	+1.9	+11	+7
Current balance	–554	–110	–143	–197	–369	–429	191	–210	–438
Development expenditures	176	216	258	277	200	169	167	209	220
Overall balance excluding grants and foreign aid (deficit)	–730	–326	–401	–474	–569	–598	24	–419	–658
Grants and aid	797	766	720	664	492	464	317	650	800
Overall balance including grants and foreign aid	67	440	319	190	–77	–134	341	231	142

PA Fiscal Operations 2015–2023 Cash Basis (\$ million)

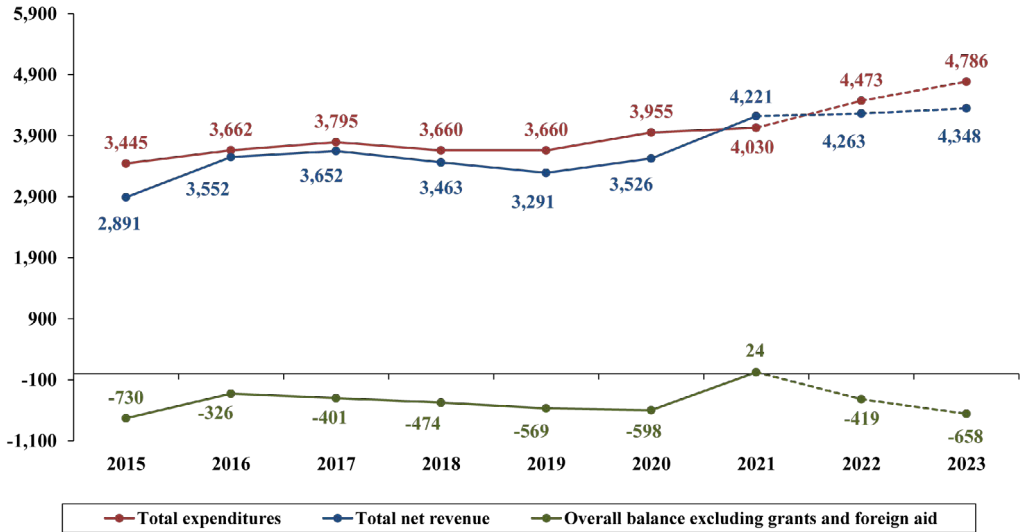


Table 16/2 shows that the government’s finances have gone through fluctuations in terms of growth. In 2020, there was a noticeable increase in total revenues by 7.1% due to a large increase in clearance revenues amounting to 8.1%, due to their retention for several months. Total expenditure also witnessed a significant increase of 8.1%, which led to a deficit in the current balance amounting to \$429 million with a larger deficit in the overall balance, excluding grants and foreign aid, amounting to \$598 million, after calculating development expenditures.

As for 2021, the overall balance, excluding grants and foreign aid, turned into a surplus of \$24 million as an exceptional precedent,⁸³ due to a significant increase in clearance revenues by 15.6%, arising from their retention or delay in disbursement, and a greater increase in domestic revenues by 27%. This happened despite the persistence of unfavorable conditions, specifically Israel’s withholding of large sums of clearance revenues; the commitment to pay government obligations towards the banking system and high interest payments, which in Q1 and Q2 amounted to \$93 million and \$34.3 million respectively, at interest rates close to 6% annually;⁸⁴ the 31.7% sharp drop in aid between 2020–2021; and other unfavorable conditions outside Palestinian control. Unless specific policies and a clear strategy for financial reform are adopted, this pattern is likely to reoccur.

To systematically expand revenues and reduce expenditure growth, the PA can take the following steps:

- Make demands for Palestinian rights, including issuing Palestinian sovereign currency, whose income at the lowest estimates would be about 0.31–1.68% of GDP annually.⁸⁵
- Expand domestic tax collection from the wealthy and high-income earners, as it amounted in 2020 to only 20.9% of total revenues compared to 65.8% of clearance proceeds.⁸⁶
- Re-issue the Social Security Law (Decree Law No. 19 of 2016 issued on 29/9/2016) after amending it on systematic and fair bases, while considering the needs of the various relevant parties. The law was suspended after sharp criticism, bearing in mind that its application provides protection for hundreds of thousands of workers who are in dire need, whether working locally or in Israel, in addition to the potentially large public revenues that can be invested in beneficial projects.⁸⁷
- Perform a comprehensive review of the expenditures of various ministries and public authorities, including that of the Palestinian Ministry of Interior and National Security, which accounted for 22.1% of total expenditures in 2021 on commitment basis,⁸⁸ compared to around 13.3% of the 2022 approved budget in Israel,⁸⁹ which faces severe criticism whenever there is inclination to increase its allocations. Accordingly, it is necessary to conduct systematic evaluations of such cases to reach fair allocations, while benefiting from the experience of others.
- Address cases of financial corruption that many parties have talked about, such as the reports of State Audit and Administrative Control Bureau 2020, the Coalition for Integrity and Accountability—AMAN and other reports published in the media.⁹⁰

Instead of examining the possibility of benefiting from any of the steps proposed above, the PA prepared a decree on the “new value-added tax” law, which includes imposing a tax of 16% on all commercial activities and on all goods, regardless of their importance to consumers.⁹¹

As for growth forecasts for 2022–2023, they depend on the actual reforms that can be introduced to the government’s structure and spending, the efforts made to address outstanding issues and cases of corruption, and on the commitment to financial rules; i.e., preparing and approving the annual general budget estimated

six months before the start of the new fiscal year. Our estimates show that growth of revenues will remain at about 1% and 2% in 2022 and 2023 respectively, since they made leaps in 2020–2021 that may not be repeated at the same level later, and the growth of expenditures would be about 11% and 7% respectively, especially since there are many government obligations which are overdue.

5. Work, Unemployment and Poverty

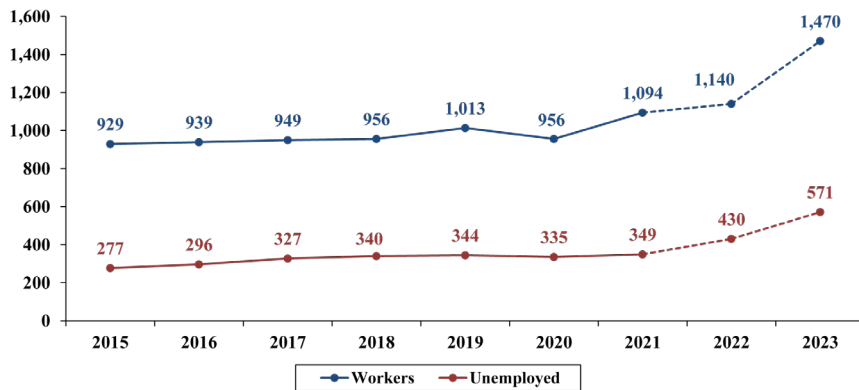
The human element represents the basis of economic activity and its production processes taking the form of multi-skilled employment, including craftsmen, professionals, and specialists in various disciplines in the government sector, the private sector and non-profit institutions, along with other elements such as land and investments. The human element is directly related to the population count with the new labor force turning to the labor market in the hope of obtaining an appropriate opportunity to avoid unemployment and falling into poverty.

Table 17/2: Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2015–2023 (thousand)⁹²

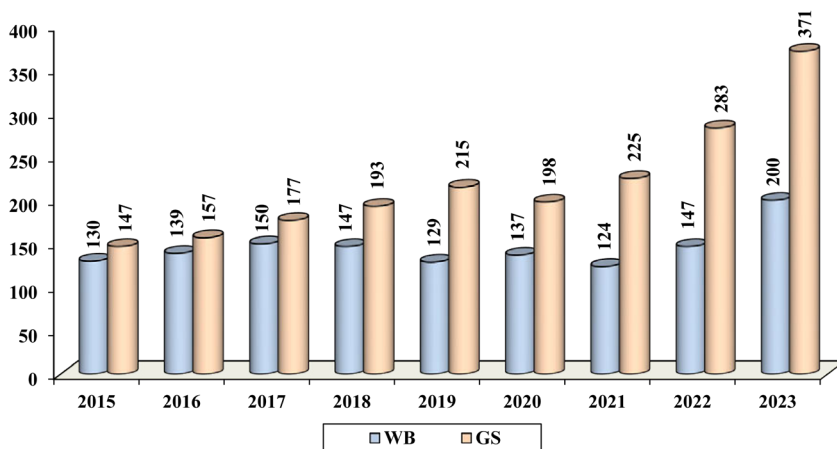
		Actual							Forecasts	
		2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
WB	Labor force	783	792	820	849	881	867	940	1,014	1,318
	Workers	653	653	670	702	752	730	816	867	1,118
	Unemployed	130	139	150	147	129	137	124	147	200
	% of unemployment	16.6	17.5	18.4	17.3	14.6	15.7	13.2	14.5	15.2
GS	Labor force	423	443	456	447	476	424	503	556	723
	Workers	276	286	279	254	261	226	278	273	352
	Unemployed	147	157	177	193	215	198	225	283	371
	% of unemployment	34.8	35.4	38.8	43.1	45.1	46.6	44.7	50.9	51.3
WB & GS	Labor force	1,206	1,235	1,276	1,296	1,357	1,291	1,443	1,570	2,041
	Workers	929	939	949	956	1,013	956	1,094	1,140	1,470
	Unemployed	277	296	327	340	344	335	349	430	571
	% of unemployment	23	23.9	25.7	26.2	25.3	25.9	24.2	27.4 ⁹³	28
Workers in Israel and the settlements		112.3	116.8	122	127	133	125	145		
Workers in the settlements		22.4	20.8	21	22	23	–	22		



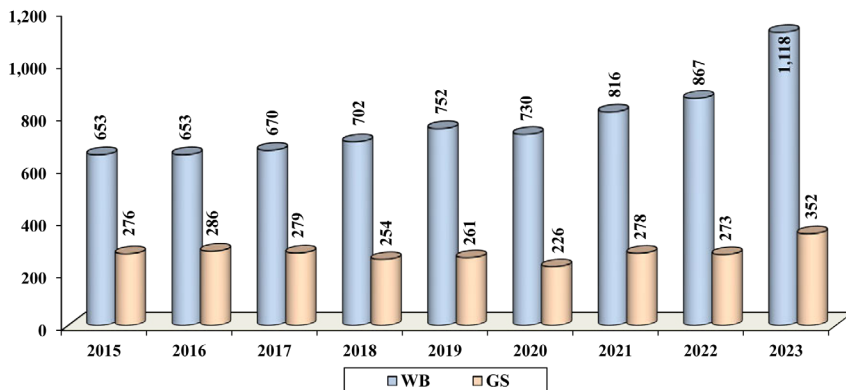
Distribution of Palestinians Aged 15 Years and Above in the WB and GS by Labor Force and Unemployment 2015–2023 (thousand)



Unemployed Palestinians in WB and GS 2015–2023 (thousand)



Palestinians Workers in WB and GS 2015–2023 (thousand)



a. Work and Unemployment

Table 17/2 shows that 2020 constituted an exceptional situation regarding the number of unemployed, as most activities during the COVID-19 pandemic did not generate new jobs. On the contrary, there was a reduction of 46 thousand existing jobs and a decrease in the Israeli labor market by approximately 8 thousand job opportunities, causing a state of frustration among workers. As a result, the number of workers decreased and there was a limited increase in unemployment rates between 2019–2020 from 25.3% to 25.9%,⁹⁴ all in the absence of a policy that would positively affect the labor market, quantitatively and qualitatively, as indicated in:

- The registered unemployment rate in WB and GS remained among the highest levels in the world, with an increase in its rates among females reaching 40.1%. It is also higher in the camps compared to urban and rural areas. In addition, there has been a decline in labor productivity, especially in intensive activities in the WB and GS in favor of the WB.⁹⁵
- The great discrepancy and vast differences in the Palestinian labor market between GS and WB in unemployment reached 44.7% and 13.2% respectively in 2021, resulting mainly from the opportunities available to WB residents to work in Israel and the settlements. Also, the unemployment rate in GS has continued to increase, compared to a relative stability at a low level in the WB.
- High unemployment rates among youths (18–29 years; around 1.16 million individuals representing 22% of the total population), reaching 64% for females and 33% for males, which is higher in GS (67%) than in the WB (24%).⁹⁶
- Most employees were classified as working in the informal sector⁹⁷ in 2000, with 410 thousand employed people or 62% of the total workforce. Also, 138 thousand employees, or 14% of the total workers, were absent from their work in 2020.⁹⁸
- The continuation of the state of contradiction in the field of public service that emerged from the division between the WB and GS in 2007. Its manifestations include the fact that tens of thousands of government employees in GS receive their salaries from Ramallah, without going to work, in addition to others who have been deprived of their salaries without any rulings being issued against them, compared to tens of thousands of Gaza government employees who do not receive their full salaries.



- Adopting a government policy amidst these conditions represented in the approval of the National Employment Strategy 2021–2025, as a unified reference for priorities in the PA territories, which was prepared by all partners to achieve positive transformations in the economy.⁹⁹ The question remains about the objectives included in this strategy concerning unemployment reduction, and what has been achieved of them.
- Seeking to hold an international donor conference to support employment in WB and GS, expected to be held in Geneva in March 2022, with the aim of reducing poverty and unemployment rates and responding to the requirements of the National Employment Strategy.¹⁰⁰

b. Poverty and Food Insecurity

Poverty is a global problem, and it is prevalent in poor and rich countries alike. Given its seriousness, the world has designated an International Day for the Eradication of Poverty since the issuance of UN General Assembly resolution in December 1992. Then the call was renewed more broadly at the beginning of the third millennium to adopt the first goal of sustainable development which aims to eradicate extreme poverty for all people everywhere by 2030, currently measured as people living on less than \$1.25 a day.¹⁰¹

It is natural to link the state of poverty to unemployment rates and prevailing wage levels. The PA was keen to determine a wage level that would prevent workers from falling into poverty and thus issued a decision setting the minimum wage at 1,450 shekels per month (about \$448); however, in 2021, 29% of wage employees in the private sector received monthly wages less than the monthly minimum wage.¹⁰² As the government was convinced that wage levels were low and unfair, it sought again to increase the minimum wage to 1,880 shekels (about \$580), to be implemented in April 2022. According to the latest official statistics in WB and GS, the poverty line and extreme poverty for a family consisting of five members (two adults and three children) are 1,947 shekels (about \$609) and 2,470 shekels (about \$762) respectively. Accordingly, the new minimum wage, if applied, does not protect those who are at the poverty line or in extreme poverty, especially in terms of providing bare necessities. In 2020, the number of food-secure families was less than half of the total number of Palestinian families, with wide differences between the WB and GS, and from one governorate to another, as well as from one residential complex to another.¹⁰³

The problem of poverty remains much deeper by measuring its general rates, as the GDP per capita may be high and the minimum wage high as the case of Israel, but the poverty rate (without calculating the direct repercussions of COVID-19 pandemic) increased significantly throughout 2019–2020, as it rose for poor families from 36.7% to 40.8%, among individuals from 32.2% to 36.3%, and among minors from 36.5% to 40.9%.¹⁰⁴ The minimum wage in Israel is 5,300 shekels (about \$1,636).¹⁰⁵ This is an example of a rich country getting richer at the expense of the poor. Poverty levels automatically affect purchasing power and nutritional levels that in turn maintain public health and physical safety, and unless this level is treated, health impacts are severe, and the cost of treatment is high.

The Ministry of Social Affairs, which provides financial allocations to poor families within the general budget, and in line with the Ministry's strategy for 2017–2022, has directed its efforts towards strengthening social protection, which ostensibly should have a positive impact on the poor, by launching the national registry with the support of the World Bank.¹⁰⁶ However, the positive impact, if it occurs, remains partial and limited and does not cover the poor and the marginalized.

Poverty causes hunger and lack of food locally and globally, and malnutrition causes inefficiency in the stages of production, manufacturing, distribution, local conflicts, extreme climatic conditions, slowdowns and economic downturns, as the food crisis is exacerbated by poverty and its expansion, income inequality, production capacity, education, health and technology.¹⁰⁷

In 2022–2023, labor force conditions are expected to remain within the general trend of growth, where unemployment rates will range between 27–28%, with a significant difference between the WB and GS in favor of the WB, which means that this catastrophic situation continues to worsen, whether concerning the unemployed, expansion of poverty or food insecurity. The question remains about the feasibility of the National Employment Strategy, as well as the feasibility of relying on the business sector to create job opportunities for graduates within this strategy,¹⁰⁸ or the feasibility of what the international conference of donors can offer to increase employment levels and job opportunities. In practice, despite their importance, the ability of these factors to reduce high unemployment and poverty rates remain severely limited, and will remain so while the occupation and schism remain.



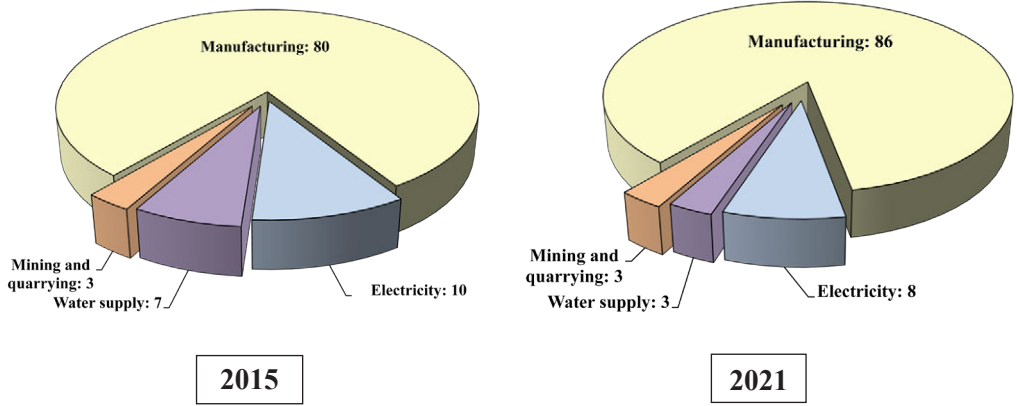
6. Industrial Activity

The successive industrial revolutions were accompanied by global economic development, by which modern production methods were introduced, hence markets were flooded with new products. These modern methods impacted the manufacturing and operation of machinery and equipment, the energy used in these operations, and the ways of exploring minerals, oil, gas and other industrial materials. As a result, many countries developed. The 1967 occupied Palestinian territories possess many elements for industrial development, however but remain unused.

Table 18/2: Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023
at Constant Prices (\$ million)¹⁰⁹

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Mining and quarrying	48.7	46.4	43	66.7	68.7	49.9	52.6	53.4	55.2
Manufacturing	1,302.4	1,499.6	1,756.8	1,762.8	1,779	1,500.7	1,583.2	1,605.4	1,660
Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply	158.2	158.6	171.2	165.9	164.1	138.6	146.2	148.3	153.3
Water supply, sewerage and waste treatment	120.4	124.8	123.2	61.2	62.9	55.2	58.2	59.1	61.1
Total	1,629.7	1,829.4	2,094.2	2,056.6	2,074.7	1,744.4	1,840.3	1,866.2	1,929.6
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-5.3	+12.3	+14.5	-1.8	+0.9	-15.9	+5.5	+1.4	+3.4
% of GDP	11.7	12	13.6	13.2	13.1	12.4	12.4	12.2	12.1

Industrial Sector Activities of GDP 2015 and 2021 (%)



Industrial GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$ million)

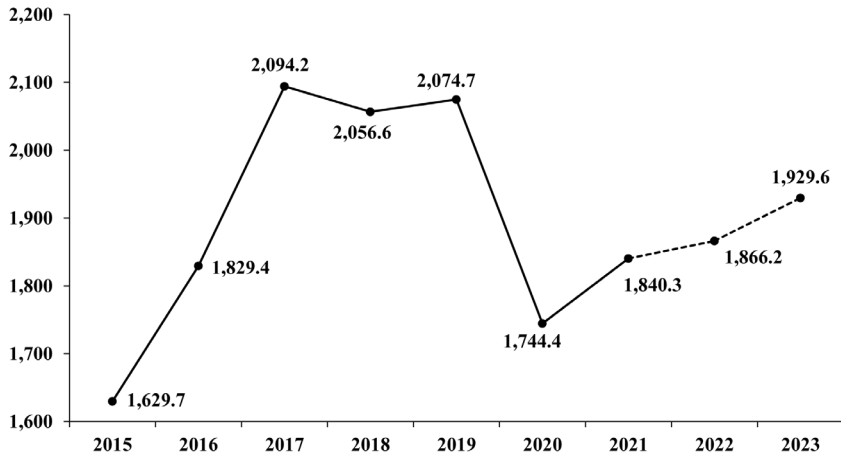


Table 18/2 reveals that manufacturing ranks first at 86% of productivity, an indication of its utmost importance in terms of its broad capability to generate new products and serve other sectors, especially agriculture, with a promising role of solid waste treatment, hence making landfills disappear. Then comes electricity, gas, steam, and air conditioning supply at 7.9%, followed by water supply, sewerage, and waste treatment at 3.2%, and finally mining and quarrying at 2.9%, according to 2021 estimates. The decline in the contributions of other non-manufacturing activities reflects inadequacies in addressing them, despite their increasing importance.

It appears that there remains a decline in the mining and quarrying industries despite the huge reserves such as stones, marble, and granite, as this item is the first on the list of the top ten categories of Palestinian exports. The Gaza coast is also rich in large reserves of natural gas whose flare was lit in September 2000, without the Palestinian side being able so far to obtain its right to benefit from it.

The development of industrial activity remained limited and fluctuated from year to year, and its contribution to the GDP remained with an average of 12.7% for 2015–2019, compared to 15.4% for 2000–2004,¹¹⁰ despite what was mentioned regarding the adoption of a policy of disengagement from Israel and the desire to expand the national product and encourage investment in industrial cities. The reliance of the PA on clearance funds as the most important source of public revenue has prevented any noticeable forward leap in industrial activity, in addition to the abolition of the Ministry of Industry, established with the emergence of the PA.

In 2021, the industrial sector in PA territories is considered small or very small, as the number of its establishments is 21 thousand, with 109 thousand employees, a 10% decrease compared to 2019, with 5.2 workers/institution, with heavy dependence on unpaid employees (owners of enterprises and their household members) constituting 22.6% of the total workforce. Throughout 1994–2020, the contribution of industrial activity to the GDP declined from 22% to 13%.¹¹¹ Growth in 2021 witnessed a relative increase of about 5.5%, while expectations for 2022 show that it would increase by only 1.4%.¹¹²

Growth in 2023 is expected to remain within the general average growth throughout 2015–2022, estimated at 3.4%, close to the average growth rate of industrial GDP of 2021–2022. This reflects the failure to disengage from the occupation and implement cluster development policies, which would include industrial clusters. Such steps require increasing public investment, regulating and developing the industrial sector, protecting the national product, applying the anti-dumping law and implementing the 10-year national strategy for industry.

7. Agricultural Activity

Agricultural activity has an important role in achieving self-sufficiency by producing many agricultural crops, thus responding to the local market needs of food and other essential products. It is a traditional production activity that depends on available agricultural land, the abundance of irrigation water, and the ability to keep pace with technological developments that increase productivity and take

advantage of narrow and limited spaces. In the Palestinian case, there is an urgent need to exploit all cultivable areas, intensify this activity as a consolidation of the Palestinian identity and curb the relentless settlement expansions, which have continued despite the sacrifices made by Palestinians to stop it.

Table 19/2: Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$ million)¹¹³

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Agricultural GDP*	1,035.2	1,142.9	1,074.1	1,091.1	1,100.7	1,001	970	1,013	1,054
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-4	+10.4	-6	+1.6	+0.9	-9.1	-3	+4.4	+3.9
% of GDP	7.4	7.5	7	7	7	7.1	6.5	6.6	6.6

* Includes forestry and fishing activities.

Agricultural GDP in PA Territories 2015–2023 at Constant Prices (\$ million)

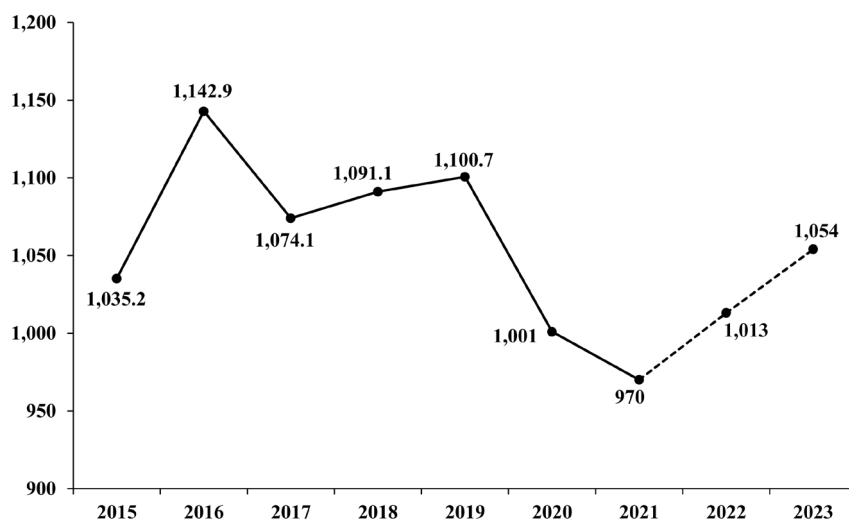


Table 19/2 shows that agricultural growth is fluctuating and that there is generally slow growth, but its contribution to GDP is decreasing. Despite the ability of agricultural activity to absorb the labor force, it is noted that the percentage of employed persons in agriculture has decreased, where it was 14.1% in 2008, falling to 6.4% in 2020.¹¹⁴

This decline in the contribution of the agricultural sector to the GDP is due to several reasons, such as the decrease of government financial allocations within the annual general budget appropriations to 0.9%,¹¹⁵ settlement expansion and its accompanying aggression in addition to the deprivation of farmers from cultivating large areas of their lands.

This has happened despite the decisions adopted in favor of the Palestinians regarding the right to permanent sovereignty over their natural resources.¹¹⁶ Therefore, there is a strong need to activate these decisions through a unified approach in the context of popular resistance and through national unity.

Agriculture remains a potentially hopeful area of the economy as it deals with various segments of landowners, farmers and professionals who have unlimited capabilities. It is a diversified activity covering various types of crops, livestock and poultry, which receive wide input from non-profit organizations at home and abroad that have vast experience and creative solutions to challenges.¹¹⁷

The Palestinian Agricultural Credit Institution might have a role in the renaissance of agricultural activity through its vision of seeking sustainable agricultural development with distinguished financing services, and through its mission to improve the level of food security and raise its contribution to the GDP.¹¹⁸

Based on the share of agricultural activity to the GDP, PCBS estimates the growth of agricultural activity in 2022 will be 4.4%. Estimations for 2023 remain subject to the serious government support of this activity in all possible ways, increasing its allocations and investment needs such as irrigation water, clean energy, and necessary compensation, while embracing small farmers and exporters, stimulating volunteer youth work and curbing settlement. Unless such factors are available, growth expectations will remain limited and under the previous year's 3.9%.

8. Trade

Trade is one of the most prominent forms of international economic relations. Because of the importance of trade, the international community has been keen to organize it through the World Trade Organization (WTO). The PA has sought to be part of this system, by concluding several trade agreements with many Arab and foreign countries and seeking WTO membership.

**Table 20/2: Commodity Trade Balance in PA Territories 2015–2023
at Current Prices (\$ million)¹¹⁹**

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Trade volume	6,183	6,290	6,919	7,695	7,717	6,116	7,878	7,755	7,862
Exports	958	926	1,065	1,155	1,104	1,094	1,458	1,470	1,495
Imports	5,225	5,364	5,854	6,540	6,613	5,022	6,420	6,285	6,367
Deficit	-4,268	-4,437	-4,789	-5,384	-5,510	-3,928	-4,962	-4,816*	-4,872
% Exports to GDP	6.9	6	6.6	7.1	6.4	7	8.3	9.2	9.2
% Deficit to total imports	81.7	82.7	81.8	82.3	83.3	78.2	77.3	76.6	76.5
% Deficit to GDP	30.5	28.8	29.7	33.1	32.2	25.3	28.3	30.1	30

*There are limited differences due to approximation.

PA Trade Indicators 2015–2023 at Current Prices (\$ million)

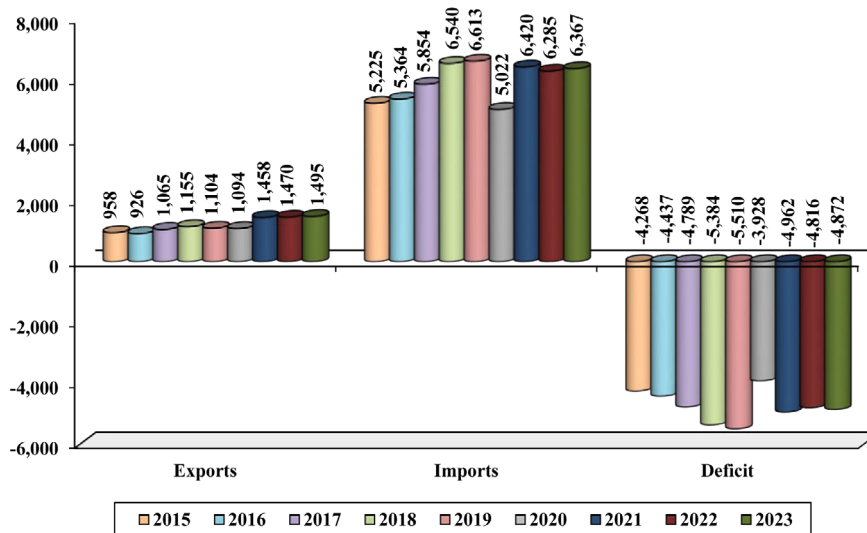


Table 20/2 shows that trade volume tends to increase with fluctuations in exports or imports. In general, the volume of exports for 2020 was low compared to imports, and it declined in GS. This was attributed to many factors, notably the weakness of Palestinian products in foreign markets, due to the high cost of production caused by Israel's imposition of obstacles and restrictions on free movement and access,



and the destruction of infrastructure, as well as internal factors related to the levels of technology used, economies of scale and other obstacles.¹²⁰

If the PA's relationship with the outside world is developing significantly, it remains more connected to Israel, at 84% for exports and 55% for imports in 2020 as exports to Israel amounted to about \$886 million and imports reached \$3,343 million.¹²¹ The general trend of exports and imports is growing with some fluctuation, which reflects the importance of these exchanges, the advantages they entail and the challenges they face. However, the dominant feature of this trade is the severe deficit in the Palestinian trade balance, which constitutes a high percentage of GDP. The ratio of exports to imports have also remained at a low level.

The continuing deficit is a sign of low productivity and high unemployment rates. In general, the balance of trade deficit reflects the weaknesses of the economy and its inability to meet the needs of the domestic market, which leads the Palestinians to look abroad to meet these needs, particularly Israel, which allows its goods to flow freely, legally, and illegally, into the Palestinian market in exchange for many restrictions limiting the access of Palestinian exports to the external market.¹²²

Turkey had the second highest share of Palestinian imports with 10.1%, then China with 6.8%. As for PA exports, Jordan ranked second, with 6.5% in 2019 (see table 21/2).

Apparently, the National Export Strategy (NES) still faces many obstacles in terms of what it seeks to achieve. Several objectives have already been set for this strategy, the most important of which is generating overall growth in productive export sectors over the period 2014–2018 by 67% with an annual growth rate of 13% and increasing the value of Palestinian exports during the same period by about \$722 million.¹²³ However, the situation on the ground does not indicate tangible achievements in this regard.

These results may have subsequently constituted an incentive for the government to consider the energy sector a priority. Thus, on 6/9/2021, the Palestinian Cabinet took a decision to establish the Palestine Natural Gas Station in the hope of liberalizing the energy sector, facilitating the exploitation of natural resources, and managing gas pipelines and distribution lines.¹²⁴ This was alongside a focus on renewable energy, seen as a symbol of sovereignty over the land and its resources, and also as part of the global trend in favor of developing clean energy sources.¹²⁵

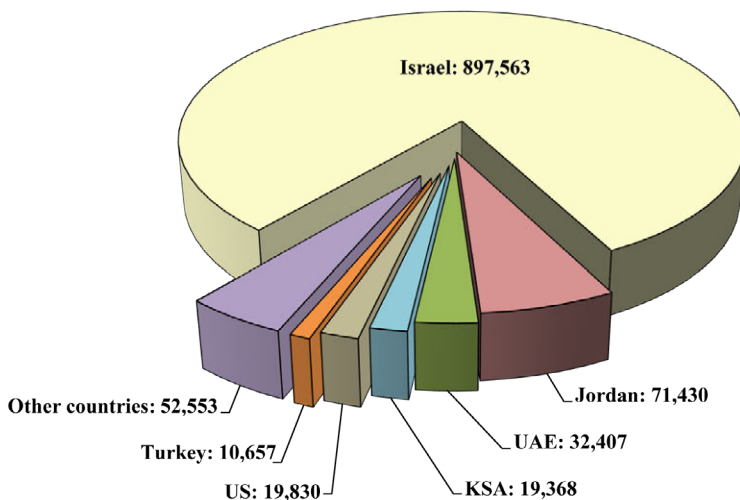
As for the growth expected in 2022–2023, there is no indication of the possibility of a real breakthrough beyond the current rates of the trade balance deficit, especially the large gap between exports and imports. Hopes remain for an awakening regarding activating trade agreements concluded with dozens of countries, which can be only realized through great efforts and continuous hard work in confronting the policies and practices of the occupation. Unless this is achieved, trade exchange in 2022 will remain within the PCBS estimates represented in the expansion of exports by 0.8% and the reduction of imports by 2.1%. Expectations for 2023 tend towards stimulating exports relatively and keeping the growth of imports at a low level, with a growth rate of 1.7% and 1.3% respectively.

Table 21/2: Volume of Palestinian Trade, Exports and Imports in Goods in PA Territories to/ from Selected Countries 2018–2019 (\$ thousand)¹²⁶

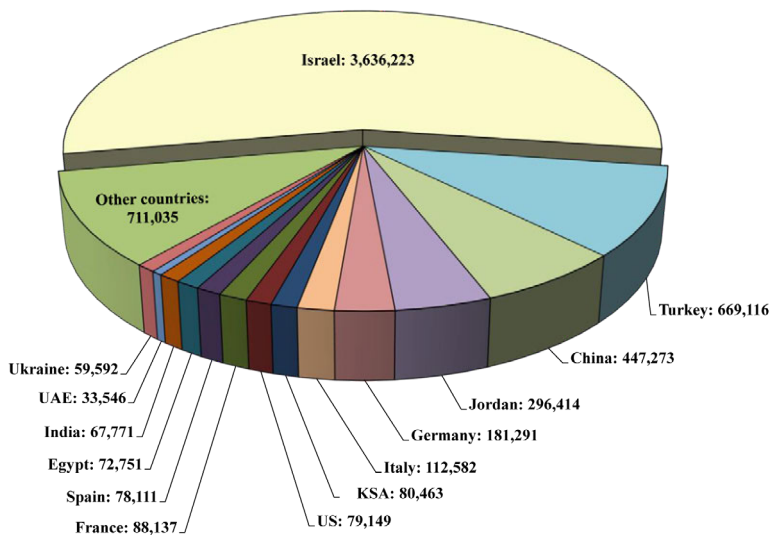
Countries	Trade volume		Palestinian exports to:		Palestinian imports from:	
	2019	2018	2019	2018	2019	2018
Israel	4,533,785	4,573,307	897,563	967,462	3,636,223	3,605,845
Turkey	679,773	665,572	10,657	7,760	669,116	657,812
China	447,470	425,407	197	489	447,273	424,918
Jordan	367,844	272,975	71,430	73,953	296,414	199,022
Germany	183,521	211,409	2,230	2,090	181,291	209,320
Italy	114,010	111,415	1,428	1,108	112,582	110,308
KSA	99,831	108,655	19,368	21,009	80,463	87,647
US	98,979	82,665	19,830	14,532	79,149	68,134
France	89,785	111,124	1,648	878	88,137	110,246
Spain	78,250	82,036	139	127	78,111	81,909
Egypt	72,766	93,799	15	9	72,751	93,789
India	68,697	66,658	926	444	67,771	66,214
UAE	65,954	60,267	32,407	26,413	33,546	33,854
Ukraine	59,592	88,594	–	–	59,592	88,594
Other countries	757,006	741,341	45,970	39,360	711,035	701,978
Total	7,717,263	7,695,224	1,103,808	1,155,634	6,613,454	6,539,590



Palestinian Exports in Goods to Selected Countries 2019 (\$ thousand)



Palestinian Imports in Goods from Selected Countries 2019 (\$ thousand)



9. External Financing and Foreign Aid

External financing has always been important to Palestinian economic conditions, especially with the establishment of the PA under the occupation, and the PA’s urgent need for this financing which was mainly linked to its plans for

economic and social development. However, the expansion of public spending and the growing budget deficit led to directing the bulk of this financing towards covering the indicated deficit, with less or a limited part directed towards development projects.

Table 22/2: External Financing to the PA 2015–2023 (\$ million)¹²⁷

	Actual							Forecasts	
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
External budgetary support	707	608	545	506	496	346	186	500	600
External financing for development expenditures	90	158	175	158	-4*	118	131	150	200
Grants and foreign aid	797	766	720	664	492	464	317	650	800
Average annual growth or deterioration (%)	-35.2	-3.9	-6	-7.8	-25.9	-5.7	-31.7	+105	+23.1
% of Development expenditures out of total external financing	11.3	20.6	24.3	23.8	-0.8	25.4	41.3	23.1	25

* This was because the Ministry of Finance returned \$125 million (according to data) to the US Consulate in response to the US position on Jerusalem.

External Financing to the PA 2015–2021 (\$ million)

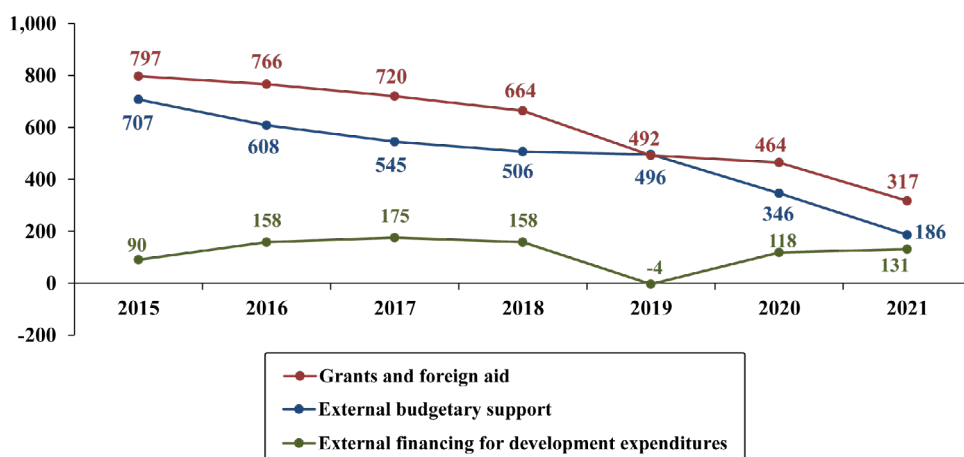


Table 22/2 shows that the decline in grants and foreign aid was the dominant feature throughout 2015–2021, reaching an unprecedented limit in 2021 of 31.7%, with a severe fluctuation in external financing for development expenditures. The impact of these developments was severe in terms of fulfilling public services entrusted to the PA, with significant increase of domestic debt to compensate for this shortfall. This entailed recognizing that external financing is not binding to the donor countries, since it is done voluntarily and is subject to their conditions, including their capabilities, conviction and mostly whether it serves their political agendas.

In 2022–2023, external financing is expected to remain dependent on the internal scene, in terms of failure or success in reaching a national accord, with Israel exploiting the prevailing situation to force the PA to make more concessions regarding the final solution of the conflict. In practice, the possibility of meeting the humanitarian needs and improving the economic conditions of the Palestinians as a priority are high, for it is a policy that has become internationally more acceptable, while also considering Israel's interests. The donor countries are encouraged in that direction. Accordingly, this financing is expected to increase in 2022–2023, to reach, in our estimation, about \$500 million and \$600 million respectively, and external financing for development expenditures to about \$150 million and \$200 million respectively, in light of encouraging beginnings of financing in early January 2022 by signing agreements with the Islamic Development Bank worth \$33 million for infrastructure.¹²⁸ It remains for this conviction to be reinforced by what may result from subsequent developments in Palestinian endeavors and supporting efforts.

In 2021, Algeria topped the list of donors with \$97.3 million, then the World Bank with \$48.4 million, followed by the Mécánisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion et d'Aide Socio-Economique (PEGASE) with \$29.9 million. In 2020, the PEGASE mechanism topped the donor countries with \$221.1 million, followed by the World Bank with \$86.9 million, then the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) with \$31.3 million. It is noted that special grants have been added to mitigate the coronavirus pandemic starting with \$300 thousand in 2020, then increased to \$83.3 million in 2021. A sharp decline in Arab funding in 2020 is also noted, reaching \$38.6 million compared to \$267.9 million in 2019 (table 23/2).

Table 23/2: Sources of External Financing for the PA 2018–2021 (\$ million)¹²⁹

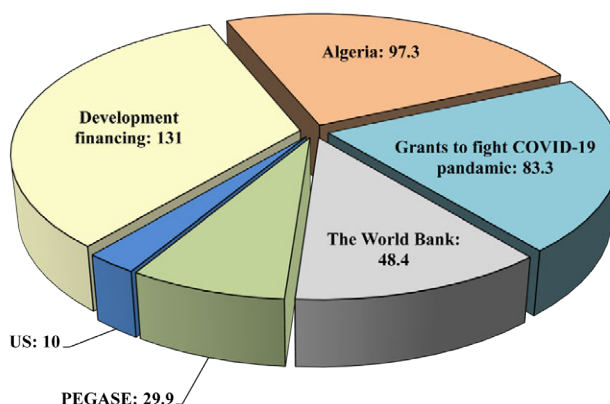
Donor	2018	2019	2020	2021
Arab donors	305.5	267.9	38.6	97.3
– KSA	222.4	176.4	31.3	–
– Algeria	26.7	28.7	–	97.3
– Qatar	–	52	6.3	–
– Oman	–	–	1	–
– Egypt	3.6	–	–	–
– Kuwait	52.6	–	–	–
– Iraq	–	10.8	–	–
International donors	210.1	275.3	317.1	88.3
– PEGASE	183.8	196.1	221.1	29.9
– World Bank	10.4	64.9	86.9	48.4
– US	–	–	–	10*
– France	9.5	9.4	9.1	–
– Turkey	6.4	4.9	–	–
Development financing	160	–9.4	131.5	131
Grants to fight COVID-19 pandemic	–	–	0.3	83.3
Total	675.6	533.8	487.5	399.9**

Note: External financing and development financing figures are different in tables 22/2 and 23/2 because of the difference in shekels exchange rate adopted as an annual average between the PMA and PA Ministry of Finance.

* Financing Jerusalem hospitals.

** The Ministry of Finance fixed the total financing at about \$316.6 million, excluding grants allocated to confront the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, which were included in the total.

Sources of External Financing for the PA 2021 (\$ million)



10. Economic Repercussions of the GS Siege

The GS is economically dependent on the outside world through travel and exchanges via available crossings. However, the tightening of the Israeli siege by land, sea, and air with a complete rationing of the permitted movement had severe economic and social repercussions as GS represents a border strip with a small area, limited resources, high fertility and high population growth of 32.9 births per one thousand people,¹³⁰ which made the population jump to 2.137 million people by the end of 2021.

Regarding the movement of people, Gazan workers, estimated at tens of thousands, have been completely prohibited from working behind the Green Line since 2005, with travel abroad being limited for most purposes. This has led to a significant increase in unemployment, reaching about 225 thousand unemployed persons by 2021. Consequently, this segment is deprived of job opportunities and income, coupled with poverty and food insecurity.

The siege has also affected the supply and distribution of electricity of which only 8 hours at most are available per day, with harm to consumers and producers who are burdened with additional expenses to obtain a minimum number of alternatives, and frequent fire accidents and casualties. Also, 30% of Gaza residents have been deprived of their right to water because of the continuous power cuts, in addition to more than 95% of Gaza's water becoming contaminated, despite the investments directed towards desalinating seawater and underground water. Moreover, the desalination projects have not prevented the pollution of water, making the residents of Gaza vulnerable to slow poisoning, as the Israeli occupation and siege remain an obstacle against any genuine improvement.¹³¹

The Water and Environmental Quality Authority in Gaza issued a distress call to find a solution to the crisis of water which suffers from severe and dangerous pollution of the aquifer's water because "more than 97% of the water pumped from the coastal aquifer in Gaza Strip does not meet the water quality standards of the World Health Organization."¹³²

The siege's repercussions extended to the poor state of infrastructure such as sewage which was directed towards the soil and into the aquifers, and beaches have become polluted by 75%, nitrates in water wells by 124%, and bacteria in desalination plants by 65%.¹³³ Consequently, Gazans have been deprived

of spending time in nature and engaging in recreational activities, especially in summer.

This is happening despite the role of the EU which has expressed its willingness to support any viable step forwards, in light of many challenges that have not yet been addressed. This is while noting that the blockade, the siege and the schism need more EU efforts in order to be solved.¹³⁴

Other forms of suffering include:

- Strict restrictions on the import of 62 items considered by Israel to be dual-use, designations that contribute to the deterioration of the infrastructure, economic, health and educational conditions as well as the lack of pumps, communication equipment, large electric generators, various types of wood, cranes, heavy equipment, electric elevators, and x-ray imaging equipments.¹³⁵
- Farmers have been deprived of the ability to cultivate their lands, especially along the GS border, where “the ‘off-limits’ land represented about 35% of the Gaza’s land suitable for agriculture.”¹³⁶
- The unemployment rate reached 48%, poverty 53% and food insecurity 68%, which constitutes a collective punishment for the GS residents.¹³⁷
- Imposing a ban on the export of Gaza’s products while Israel allows, with limited exceptions, the export of small quantities of goods, mostly to the WB and a few to Israel and abroad. November 2021 exports were equivalent to only 13.8% of the monthly exports volume before the imposition of the blockade in June 2007 which used to reach 4,500 trucks.¹³⁸
- The value of GS exports in 2019 was very small in comparison to that of WB exports, where the former reached \$11.1 million, while the latter \$1,092.7 million. Thus, GS exports constituted only 1% of total Palestinian exports.¹³⁹
- Fishermen were greatly affected by the blockade as 95% of them live below the poverty line. Although they have the right to fish within 20 nautical miles, what is permitted by the occupation does not exceed 12 miles in the best conditions.¹⁴⁰
- Successive wars left massive destruction on buildings, residential towers, public and private utilities and infrastructure besides agricultural, commercial and industrial facilities, with the imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of construction.



- The losses resulting from the war on GS in May 2021 amounted to about \$190 million, where losses are estimated in the flows of the economy that arise from the temporary absence of the damaged assets. In addition, the cost of meeting recovery and reconstruction needs for 24 months starting June 2021 was estimated at \$485 million.¹⁴¹
- There is still a significant shortfall in the funds needed for reconstruction following the first three wars, at about 72% of the value of the pledges, which made the GS an environment unfit for investment or life. Many businessmen were forced to move their activities abroad in search of a safe and attractive environment for investment. Moreover, in 2020, unemployment rates in GS were three times those in WB, hence a wide gap between them which increases from time to time. In addition, young people leave the Strip as individuals and in groups, in search of job opportunities abroad amidst unfavorable conditions and great risks.¹⁴²
- There are indications that reinforce the desire for immigration. In November 2021, for example, 11,923 travelers left GS through the Rafah crossing, and 8,477 passengers returned with a difference of about 28.9% between those who departed and returnees.¹⁴³
- Gazans are still victims of various forms of collective punishment imposed by the Israeli siege, whose intensity is periodically exacerbated through military operations and various forms of aggression.¹⁴⁴

The direct translation of the damages of the economic siege, schism and wars made most of the population subsist on social protection and poverty-alleviation programs. During the first half of 2021, 297 thousand families benefitted from such programs, which means 1.5 million individuals representing about 70% of the total population of the Strip, at a cost of \$107 million, and an average of only about \$360 per family during six months.¹⁴⁵ This contrasts with other poor segments of society, whose needs are no less than these categories, but did not benefit from these limited allocations. GS remains a large prison in which the basic rights guaranteed by local and international laws for prisoners are not met.

11. Outlook for the PA Economic Performance 2022–2023

Based on the economic performance of the PA since the Oslo Accords until now, one can predict its future performance. From the beginning, an economic approach based on development planning was absent. Although in 1993, prior to the establishment of the PA, experts, and specialists under the supervision of the PLO Economic Department in Tunis prepared the “Development Program for the Palestinian National Economy 1994–2001,” in the hope that it would be a beacon to an economic and social strategic path. However, it was replaced by programs and plans that depend mainly on external aid to support the annual general budget and part of the needs of development projects.

Over more than 25 years, until 2017, external financing to the PA exceeded \$35.4 billion.¹⁴⁶ However, these funds were not directed towards addressing core problems, such as unemployment, poverty, lack of job opportunities and the reality which urged about 22 thousand WB workers to work in Israeli settlements,¹⁴⁷ considering feverish settlement expansion. Also, the public debt and its arrears exceeded 50.8% and reached unprecedented limits, with many violations, including the absence of an effective supervisory role and the disruption of the legislative authority.

Negative indicators included the absence of a clear strategy that would benefit from the past and mobilize domestic efforts and potentials, with a speedy change of course whenever a new government was formed. One example of this was the preparation of the PA’s National Policy Agenda 2017–2022: Putting Citizens First, in December 2016, as the fourth national plan and an extension of the three plans since 2008, which aimed to leads towards the efficient and effective use of available resources to improve the quality of life for citizens, with ten priorities identified, starting with ending the occupation and achieving independence.¹⁴⁸ However, the current government has ignored this agenda, and turned instead to a strategy of disengagement from Israel and development by clusters, which was accompanied by low economic performance.

There are many unsettled issues with Israel about clearance and deductions, as it still seizes millions of dollars, equivalent to the allowances of the wounded, prisoners and families of the martyrs, in addition to unilateral deductions without informing the Palestinian side, which costs the treasury huge losses and exorbitant money.



There is also a disregard for the law, such as the Diplomatic Corps Law No. 13 of 2005, which limits the maximum period a diplomat can spend abroad to no more than five years in one country. Notably, there are explicit and exaggerated violations in many countries, including the representation of the Palestinian Embassy in Iran which lasted for about 39 years, and in China for about 30 years.¹⁴⁹

The integrity of governance continues to face challenges, most notably the non-respect for the principle of separation of the legislative, executive, and judicial powers, which has negatively affected integrity, weakened the confidence of citizens, impeded efforts to combat corruption and kept the executive authority without real oversight and accountability.¹⁵⁰

This explicit acknowledgment by AMAN reflects the current situation. Knowing that the “State of Palestine” has signed the International Convention against Corruption, on top of which are the rights of access to information and more transparency and openness.¹⁵¹ There was also the formation of several investigation committees in various cases, and months and years go by, without a decision on any of them.

Decades of occupation, intertwining and overlapping, and more than 14 years of schism have created an integrated environment in which some groups became interested in maintaining the status quo, whose change strips them of the influence, ranks and wealth they acquired under division and occupation.¹⁵² The US and EU have frequently warned that the PA is on the verge of collapse, in an attempt to entrust the task of saving it to Israel, which hastened to respond.¹⁵³

It seems that the policy of the new US administration does not differ from previous ones, where Israel is fully supported, and no pressure is put on it to make concessions concerning settlement expansion and land seizure. This makes it impossible to implement the two-state solution and forces the PA to accept subsidies, relief, and facilities as an alternative to addressing the main issues, while remaining committed to holding an international conference that may come up with recommendations that do not go beyond resolutions of the General Assembly. Although these are renewed annually without receiving attention from any party.

In general, the performance of the PA represented by the current government has been accompanied by a tangible decline and negative growth reaching a peak in 2020 at about 11.3%, with its repercussions on the various segments of society, especially regarding living and the ability to satisfy the minimum needs.

On the international level, the economic and fiscal situation is described as dire, which makes “it increasingly difficult for the PA to cover its minimum recurrent expenditures, let alone address outstanding arrears and make critical investments in the economy and the Palestinian people.”¹⁵⁴

As for the expected PA performance in 2022–2023, and based on the above, this performance will remain low in general, especially regarding core issues such as slow economic growth rates, high unemployment, poverty and food insecurity levels. Also, there will be a widening trade deficit, public budget deficit and an increase of the public debt and its arrears. The violation of regulations and legislation will continue to be ignored, settlement expansion and the departure of landowners and youth will continue, while investments will search for a safe environment. As for the main actors, they will continue to provide facilities in the humanitarian and economic fields away from the issues of final resolution.

Conclusion

Despite the presence of about half of the Palestinian people in forced asylum and Diaspora, the remaining half in historic Palestine have continued their steadfastness on their land facing the Israeli occupation and siege. Their numbers have increased, which reflects the expectations of the statistical studies, that the number of Palestinians will exceed the number of Jews in historical Palestine by the end of 2020. This means that the Israelis have failed to resolve their dilemma of the identity of the inhabitants of the land, even after 125 years since the launch of their Zionist project, and after 74 years since the establishment of Israel. Although two thirds of the Palestinian people are refugees inside and outside Palestine, most of those abroad are still residing in the countries surrounding Palestine, which indicates their attachment to their land and their aspiration to return. However, the study of the numbers of Palestinians, their population growth and presence, has indicated that there is a gradual decrease in the birth rate and population growth. It also reflects what the Palestinians in Syria and Lebanon are suffering, because of exceptionally difficult conditions they are living in. This means that all efforts must be made to support the steadfastness of the Palestinian people and end all forms of their suffering at home and abroad.



As for the economic indicators of WB and GS, they reflect the continued hegemony of the Israeli occupation and the consolidation of PA dependency on the Israeli economy. They also show how the Palestinian economy is being depleted because of the unjust Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol, which perpetuated a state of injustice and dependency. Therefore, it was not surprising that the PA's trade depended mainly on the Israelis; most of the PA's revenues are subject to the Israeli mood, as they are "clearance" revenues collected by Israel; the Israeli GDP is about 26 times the Palestinian one; and that the Israeli GDP per capita is 14 times the Palestinian one. What added insult to injury was the significant decline of external support to the PA, thus making it unable to carry out any real development projects or pay the full salaries of its employees.

At the same time, despite the stifling siege and the very high rates of poverty and unemployment, GS sets an example of steadfastness and resilience, using available resources and employing all potentials and capabilities to support the resistance. This calls for great Palestinian, Arab, Islamic, and international efforts to lift the unjust GS siege and support its steadfastness.

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Chapter Three

The Land and the Holy Sites

The Land and the Holy Sites

Introduction

US President Donald Trump attempted to resolve the issue of the identity of Jerusalem by declaring it the capital of Israel, which coincided with the centenary of the British occupation of Jerusalem, and the start of conflict over the land of Palestine and Jerusalem's identity, since the city is considered the religious and cultural center of this conflict. Over the past four years, the battle for Jerusalem took a meandering course, with Israel able to advance on certain fronts but forced to retreat on others.

In 2018–2019, the period covered by the previous Palestine Strategic Report, Jerusalem witnessed the progress of the Judaization plan on three fronts: targeting symbols of the Palestinian sovereign presence in Jerusalem; major demolitions took place in Wadi Hummus and Shu'fat RC; and major Judaization projects were approved, such as the cable car project surrounding the Old City. This progress was countered by Israeli withdrawal on three tracks: the retreat from modifying the borders of Jerusalem due to the failure to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar, east of the city, under international and popular pressure; the failure to take over the Gate of Mercy building and to impose the spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, under the pressure of the popular uprising that managed to restore the building as a *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer); and the failure to control the Mercy Cemetery, which is the necessary gateway to control the *Musalla* and paving the way for opening the gates closed with stones.

This meandering path between progress and setbacks continued in 2020 and 2021, as Israel managed to advance on five fronts: utilizing the COVID-19 pandemic to suppress the popular will and prevent even small gatherings; continuing its demolition policy at a high rate with relative decline compared to 2019; imposing biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and using courts to grant them legal legitimacy; imposing and starting to implement the “land registration” project, which would make the Jerusalem municipality a partner in most of the Jerusalem properties under the “Absentee Property Law”; and controlling the entrance of the Yusufiyah Cemetery, bulldozing Muslim graves and turning part of the cemetery into a park. In



return, the Israeli occupation was forced to retreat on three major tracks: reversing the attempt to close Damascus Gate Plaza under the pressure of the popular will; reversing the displacement of the families of Karm al-Ja‘ouni area in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood; and the failure of the major attempt to storm *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 10/5/2021, the 28th of Ramadan.

The outcome of the four years was Israeli progress on eight fronts and regression on six, in addition to the inability to resolve the most important issues, namely: the identity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the displacement of Jerusalem’s central neighborhoods, and the modification of the borders of Jerusalem. The Israelis were able to inflict greater costs on the Jerusalemites, namely: demolishing homes and settling property. The battle over the past four years has been between Israel’s attempts to resolve the identity of Jerusalem and the will to prevent this resolution, as demonstrated by the popular action, armed resistance, and international solidarity movements. The following pages will present the details of this confrontation.

First: Islamic and Christian Holy Sites

1. *Al-Aqsa* Mosque

The Zionist right and Temple groups target *al-Aqsa* Mosque with a religious replacement agenda aspiring to remove the Mosque from existence and to establish the alleged temple in its place and over its entire area, as is evident in the literature, drawings and models of the Temple Institute.¹ With the rise of the right-wing and its dominance, especially over the past 20 years, the activities, programs and pressures of Temple groups escalated to achieve the temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and impose control over it, benefitting from US support, especially during the Trump term. However, such attempts faced strong resistance from the Jerusalemites, which thwarted or impeded many of their plans.

Since 2019, Temple groups have sought to formulate a phased plan focusing on the establishment of the intangible temple, by performing the entire biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and dealing with the Mosque as if it had become the alleged Zionist temple. These have happened although its buildings are still Islamic and the spatial division failed to allocate a private space for biblical rituals, however, in 2020–2021, the Temple groups tried to continue with their plans.

a. Control of the Mosque's Administration

• Strengthening the Political Ascent of Temple Groups

The period covered by the report witnessed two elections, the first was in March 2020, during which the Temple groups won a weighty bloc of 21 seats in the Knesset, which means that they acquired 17.5% of its seats, and 29% of the 73 seats on which the government coalition was forged between Netanyahu and Gantz, on 17/5/2020.² Since the government was a coalition, and it is based on a wide parliamentary base, the bloc of Temple groups declined from 19 ministers in Netanyahu's second caretaker government to 13 in this coalition government.³

The second elections came in March 2021, after the government alliance between Netanyahu and Gantz broke up, and this round resulted in the extremist Temple groups gaining 25 seats in the Knesset, the largest parliamentary bloc these groups have ever had.⁴ However, the formation of the government on 13/6/2022, according to what is known as the "Norwegian law," led to the decline of that bloc to 23 seats, after some Knesset members who entered the government resigned to make room for other members of their parties who came from outside Temple groups. Thus, the bloc reached its second-largest number, like that recorded in the 22nd Knesset of the September 2019 elections.⁵ The most important change here is that for the first time since their participation in the 33rd government (March 2013), most of the Temple bloc members joined with the opposition. For 19 of its members, who are in the Likud and Religious Zionism, moved to the opposition, while four joined the coalition government, they belong to two parties: Yemina headed by Naftali Bennett, and New Hope, a dissident party from Likud led by Gideon Sa'ar.

The analysis of the governmental influence of extremist Temple groups reveals two paradoxes. The first relates to the structure of the government itself, as its president, Bennett, recorded a precedent being the prime minister with the smallest bloc in the history of Israel. His bloc doesn't exceed 10% of the coalition government,⁶ which was mostly formed from central nationalist forces headed by a small rightist force falling—more right than the Likud. This makes the government susceptible to quick dissolution and any attack against *al-Aqsa* Mosque is considered one of the primary causes for its contradictions to appear. The second paradox is the contradiction of quantity and quality as this government witnessed the most important qualitative development in the political history



of Temple groups with one of their members assuming premiership. Yet, it was through a coalition that was not approved by most of their representatives, who still consider Netanyahu their most important ally and the sponsor of their political rise. Consequently, Temple groups got five portfolios only.

Table 1/3: Political Ascension of Extremist Temple Groups in the Knesset and the Government⁷

Date	Knesset	Temple bloc	Percentage (%)	Government	Temple bloc portfolios	Percentage (%)
2003	16	2	1.7	30	–	–
2006	17	3	2.5	31	–	–
2009	18	7	5.8	32	–	–
2013	19	13	10.8	33	5	17
2015	20	17	14.2	34 – original	15	47
April 2019	21	13	10.8	34 – first caretaking period	16	50
Sept. 2019	22	23	19.2	34 – second caretaking period	19	60
2020	23	21	17.5	35	13	35
2021	24	23	19.2	36	5	15

• Foundation of the Intangible Temple: The Third Phase of the Plan

Israel covered up the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque during *al-Adha Eid*, on 11/8/2019, with several political stances focusing on the Jews’ performance of religious rituals in the Mosque. In an interview with a local radio station, Minister of Public Security Gilad Erdan called for a change in public policy toward *al-Aqsa* Mosque “so in the future Jews... can pray at the Temple Mount,” and that such a change “needs to be achieved by diplomatic agreements and not by force,”⁸ adding that Jews’ prayers should be permitted individually or collectively, whether in an open or closed place.⁹ Then, Netanyahu reassured Yehuda Etzion, founder of the Alive and Well organization (*Chai V’Kayam* in Hebrew) which is an advocacy group concerned with “restoring the rights of Jews” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, where he said:

The right of the Jewish people to their holy place, the Temple Mount, is unquestionable... I believe that the right of prayer for Jews in this place should be arranged, and even more so that we should provide for the freedom of worship for all religions in Jerusalem... It is clear that we should do this with the proper sensitivity... I believe we can do this properly after we return to the leadership of the state.¹⁰

In response to a question about allowing Jews to pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, during his visit to Ukraine at the end of August 2019, Netanyahu said, “Don’t worry, it will happen, and before the arrival of the Messiah.”¹¹

The first time this transition to the imposition of rituals was demonstrated as an interim priority was in the Hebrew New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*) and Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) holiday in 2019, when an Israeli police officer informed *al-Aqsa* guards on 10/10/2019, in threatening language, that Jewish prayer in the Mosque had become acceptable, and any objections by the guards would not be answered.¹² Indeed, that season witnessed dozens of collective public prayers, which were documented by audio and video.

Throughout 2020–2021, Jewish holidays witnessed peak escalation in imposing biblical rituals on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the extremist Temple groups tried on each holiday to impose the biblical rituals designated for that holiday or to call for their performance to pave the way for their imposition in the following years. However, this phased plan was interrupted by closures to prevent the spread of COVID-19, which accumulated frustration among extremists, who tried to compensate for delays by escalating aggression on *al-Aqsa* Mosque as soon as the restrictions were lifted. These events in 2020 were as follows:

The Jewish Passover (*Pesach*) (8–15/4/2020) and the anniversary of the occupation of the eastern side of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (22/5/2020): The period of comprehensive closure due to the COVID-19 pandemic included the two occasions, and *al-Aqsa* Mosque was closed for Muslims as well.

“*Tisha B’Av*” (Temple destruction anniversary) (30/7/2020): It was the first Jewish holiday after the wave of closures, and it coincided with the Day of ‘*Arafah* or the first Day of *al-Adha Eid*. According to Temple groups, Member of Knesset Ariel Kallner called the Minister of Public Security Amir Ohana demanding that settlers be allowed to publicly and collectively¹³ perform the *Shema* prayer in *al-Aqsa* Mosque.¹⁴ Raiding the Mosque on the Day of ‘*Arafah* witnessed the entry



of more than 50 groups, each comprising 20 Jews, where almost all groups publicly and collectively performed the *Shema* prayer, while dozens of extremists performed complete prostration. However, only part of the aggression was documented,¹⁵ probably due to a circular issued two days earlier by ‘Azzam al-Khatib, Director General of Jerusalem Awqaf Department, preventing *al-Aqsa* guards and Awqaf employees to publish news of *al-Aqsa* Mosque on social media or in any media, except with his official permission,¹⁶ which circular is still in effect as of the time of writing.

Hebrew New Year and Sukkot (September–October 2020): Temple groups identified trumpet-blowing as the next objective of the rituals to be enforced in this season; and on 25/8/2020, extremist Rabbi Yehudah Glick began blowing the trumpet in front of the gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to mobilize Zionist extremists towards this goal.¹⁷ However, the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and the accompanying closure disrupted the desires of these groups, as the Israeli government announced the second closure starting Friday 18/9/2020, and for three weeks.¹⁸ Thus, the longest Jewish holiday season came amid this closure from the Hebrew New Year to the end of the eighth day of Sukkot.

The Festival of Lights (*Hanukkah*) (10–18/12/2020): Although this holiday is secondary in religious standing and the observed practice of “temple groups,” those groups have mobilized and employed it as an alternative to the most important holiday season they missed. Temple groups launched a campaign entitled the “Jewish Winter” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and allocated a day for each of their rabbis to lead the incursions,¹⁹ which is the practice they devoted in all the following incursions in 2021, where their members were keen to perform religious rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Yet, this holiday came amidst the partial lifting of restrictions, and before the return of the third wave of closures which began on 27/12/2020 until 7/2/2021, the longest of closures. Temple groups have considered moving the menorah inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque as their utmost goal for this holiday, they started in 2018 to light it at al-Ghazali Square near Lions’ Gate. Temple Forum addressed a letter to Prime Minister Netanyahu asking him to sponsor the ritual of lighting the menorah inside *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Then, the menorah was lit directly in front of the Lions’ Gate twice; the first on the evening of 13/12/2020, and the second on the evening of 14/12/2020.²⁰ Notably, this is the closest point to *al-Aqsa* Mosque the ritual of igniting the menorah took place since the occupation of the Mosque.

**Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah at the Lions' Gate on the Evening of
14/12/2020**



In 2021, closures were less frequent and intense, and did not reach total closure at any time, which enabled the increase of Jewish rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque:

The Jewish Passover (28/3/2021–1/4/2021): This holiday, which marks the start of the successive Hebrew holiday seasons, came during the phase of the relative easing of the closure procedures between 7/3/2021 and 18/4/2021, following the third wave of closures and when restrictions limited gathering in public places to no more than 50 people.²¹ Temple groups were keen to benefit from the easing of measures as much as possible, hence, announcing a schedule of storming led by their rabbis and historical leaders to mobilize their audience. They were also keen to perform public collective rituals at *al-Aqsa* Mosque within these groups, and even their members and rabbis celebrated their ability to perform these public collective prayers without the objection of the Israel Police or the Jerusalem Awqaf Department as they claimed.²²

Anniversary of the complete occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar (10/5/2021): The storming of 10/5/2021 (the 28th Ramadan) and the repercussions of Ramadan events and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle:

By April 2021, it was clear that Israel was heading toward restoring normal life, as it seemed that the early massive vaccination campaign will allow a return to open all facilities and restore full normalcy, which took place on 18/4/2021.²³ Therefore, Temple groups dealt with the storming of “Jerusalem Day” on 10/5/2021, the 28th of Ramadan, as the milestone to regain the impetus for the agenda of imposing biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They believed that it would compensate for all the frustrations they experienced on previous religious occasions, which were celebrated during closure and thus disrupted the momentum of founding the intangible temple.

Based on that, Temple groups organized on 4/4/2021, a preparatory conference for raiding *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 10/5/2021. This was the first time these groups have held a preparatory conference for their incursions,²⁴ which shows how much the incursion was relied upon as a milestone for the foundation of the intangible temple. The importance of the event was demonstrated by announcing the participation of their senior rabbis and historical leaders, and mobilizing the efforts of their political leaders, such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, in advocacy and mobilization, in addition to the direct coordination with Minister of Public Security Amir Ohana to facilitate it. As a result, Temple groups confirmed to their audience that the storming was in progress and on time.²⁵ They even set up a daily countdown to the date of the storming,²⁶ and the Temple groups ensured that the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque would take place in early Ramadan to the first days of its last ten days.²⁷

The Israeli government was a full partner in the storming attempt on the 28th of Ramadan, as Israeli forces stormed the Mosque and attacked the worshippers and forcefully dispersed them three times throughout 7–9/5/2021, the 25th–27th of Ramadan. On Ramadan 28, Israeli forces tried over hours to secure raiding the Mosque, and they insisted to hold the March of Flags according to its designated route passing through the Old City, on the same day of the incursion. Then the authorities were forced to change the route under the pressure of the street, and the march dispersed with the sound of sirens in Jerusalem and the involvement of the Palestinian armed resistance in the confrontation from GS.

With the failure of raiding the Mosque and the frustration of Temple groups, they moved confrontations to the Lod area, hoping to vent their anger and frustration against the Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories. The Lod Mayor Yair Ravivo, who is close to Ben-Gvir, contributed to transmitting the spark and so did the Israeli police who killed Musa Hassouna on 11/5/2021.²⁸ Also, the spokesman for Temple groups Asaf Farid published a picture of him carrying a weapon in Lod with his companions, and he invited supporters of the extremist Temple groups to engage in the confrontation.²⁹ Once again, the outcome of the escalation in Lod was contrary to what Temple groups desired, as the Palestinians of the city rose to defend their existence and their lives, and the entire 1948 occupied territories launched a massive uprising, which gave the Palestinian resistance a boost. Consequently, the attempted aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque in Ramadan 2021, and the efforts to make up for the accumulated frustration among Temple groups made Israel face successive failures.

These events led to the extension of the announced prevention of *al-Aqsa* Mosque incursions, which started on Tuesday 4/5/2021 until 23/5/2021,³⁰ of which Israel tried to exclude 10/5/2021 but failed. Netanyahu reallocated incursions two days after the cease-fire³¹ to try to belittle the achievements of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. However, preventing incursions for 19 days, under the pressure of the street and the resistance, was the longest period of preventing settler incursions since they were allowed in June 2003.

“Tisha B’Av” (18/7/2021): It coincided with the Day of *Tarwiyah* (which precedes the Day of *‘Arafah*). The foundation of the intangible temple remained a central goal for Temple groups on this holiday despite the fragmentation of the political bloc supporting them. Most of its members moved to the opposition, while Naftali Bennett, one of the closest political allies to those groups, became prime minister. This raid was closer to a “compensation” for what happened on the 28th of Ramadan. Temple groups, led by their rabbis and senior activists, performed collective religious rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which was considered an unprecedented change in the Jewish prayer there,³² while Israeli media celebrated the “great change” that took place.³³

On the eve of this raid, Bennett disclosed the tacit intention to impose biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, a first by a prime minister. His office issued a statement in Hebrew and English saying that Bennett “thanked the public security minister



and the Israel Police [chief] for managing the events on the Temple Mount with responsibility and consideration while maintaining freedom of worship for Jews on the Mount.”³⁴ Notably, the statement contradicted Israeli practice for years, which sought to impose changes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque parallel to verbal emphasis on respecting the status quo after each change and using this tactic as a smokescreen to avoid a reaction. This statement drew a protest by Jordan, a threat by the resistance and an internal opposition by the leaders of the Israeli government coalition. Foreign Minister Yair Lapid made it clear directly that “There is no change to the status quo on the Temple Mount,” and Bennett’s office issued a clarification stating that “There is no change in the status quo,” where the “status quo” refers to allowing non-Muslims to visit, but not to pray.³⁵

Jewish New Year, the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), and Sukkot (7–8/9/2021, 16/9/2021, and 21–28/9/2021): This holiday season constitutes the longest period of escalation against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and historical observation indicates that it is usually the fiercest and most severe.³⁶ This season witnessed an unprecedented dedication to the biblical rituals in *al-Aqsa*, as *al-Aqsa* guards and the *Murabitun* (*al-Aqsa* Mosque defenders) reported hearing the trumpet blowing inside the Mosque. After the end of the Jewish New Year holiday, the extremist Returning to the Temple Mount foundation (*Beyadenu*)³⁷ confirmed that its members blew the trumpet during the two days, and the leaders of the extremist Temple groups, such as Arnon Segal and Tom Nissani, celebrated this development.³⁸ This is the first time the trumpet was blown in *al-Aqsa* Mosque since the attempts of Judaizing the Mosque and changing its identity started in 1996. Before that, the blowing of the trumpet in *al-Aqsa* Mosque happened upon its occupation and during the Israeli military presence in it from 7–15/6/1967,³⁹ when the chief rabbi of the Israeli army Shlomo Goren and of several soldiers blew the trumpet more than once.⁴⁰

This season witnessed a simulated performance of the “atonement sacrifice” on 16/9/2021, and the trumpet was blown again in the synagogue located in al-Tankaziyya School building—occupied by Israel—overlooking *al-Aqsa* Mosque square from the side of the western portico.⁴¹ The *lulav* consisting of palm fronds, willow branches, and citron were taken to the Mosque on Sukkot, which saw the participation of 2400 settlers in its two peak days.⁴² As these biblical rituals were imposed in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in this unprecedented way, *al-Aqsa* guards and the

Murabitun could not document the aggression, and even what they could document was captured from long distances, which shows the extent of the decline in the role of Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the progress made by the Israeli police in the Mosque, as was documented in a detailed statement by Al-Quds International Institution.⁴³

Based on the above positions and practices, it can be concluded that the extremist Temple groups and the Zionist right have considered the imposition of the biblical sacrificial rites in *al-Aqsa* Mosque as the third phase of their plan, after temporal and spatial division. They are moving on with the third phase while trying to implement the spatial and temporal division whenever possible. The decision of the Magistrate's Court in Jerusalem on 5/10/2021 agreed with such intentions, as it ruled that Jews have the right to "quietly pray" in *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was in the context of a ruling to stop the distancing by the Israel Police of Rabbi Aryeh Lipo, Secretary of the religious organization "The New Sanhedrin" from entering the Mosque campus, given that he did "not violate police instructions."⁴⁴ After accepting an appeal by the Israel Police, the Jerusalem District Court considered Rabbi Lipo's act a violation of the rule that forbids "religious/ritual activities having external, visible characteristics" and that his prayers were noticeable.⁴⁵

• Hijri-Hebrew Calendar Crossover

The Hebrew calendar is based on solar years and lunar months, which requires a realignment between months and years according to the solar calendar. This is achieved through cycles known as "Metonic cycles," where one cycle consists of 19 years. To fix the discrepancy, leap years (pregnant years in Hebrew) are added where an almost complete crossover between the lunar months and the solar calendar is achieved in the 19th year of each cycle.⁴⁶ This leads, in sum, to the movement of the Hebrew holidays back and forth within 33 days compared to the solar calendar.

As for the Islamic Hijri year, it is lunar in years and months, which makes it move in a complete circular motion against the solar calendar, which is completed once every 33 years. The difference between these two calendars leads to frequent correspondences in holidays, noting that these analogies are difficult to calculate and predict due to the hybrid nature of the Hebrew calendar. With the beginning of the Hebrew year 5779 on 10/9/2018, it was clear that a Hijri-Hebrew crossover would occur at two specific points; the first is the crossover between

Ramadan 28th and the completion of the occupation of Jerusalem according to the Hebrew calendar, known as “Jerusalem Day,” which led to storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Ramadan 28 in 2019 and 2021; and the other is the crossover between *al-Adha* then the Day of ‘*Arafah* and the Day of *Tarwiyah* with the religious holiday known as “*Tisha B’Av*,” which led to storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque on *al-Adha Eid* on 11/8/2019, then on the Day of ‘*Arafah* on 30/7/2020, and the Day of *Tarwiyah* on 18/7/2021.

With the entry of the Hebrew year 5782 on 7/8/2021, a month is added to the current Hebrew year, thus creating a new crossover that continues over 2022 and 2023, and includes four important occasions on both sides, namely:

Table 2/3: Hijri-Hebrew Crossover Over 2022–2023

Islamic holiday	Hijri date	Hebrew holiday	Gregorian crossover
Mid-Sha‘ban	15 Shaban	Purim	17–18/3/2022 7–8/3/2023
Ramadan	1 – 30 Ramadan (Intersection: 3rd week)	Passover	16–22/4/2022 6–12/4/2023
‘Ashurah	10 Muharram	<i>Tisha B’Av</i>	7/8/2022 27/7/2023
Birth of the Prophet	12 Rabi‘ Awwal	Between the Day of Atonement and Sukkot in the long holidays season	8/10/2022 27/9/2023

Examining the expected Hijri-Hebrew crossover over 2022–2023, the following can be concluded:

1. The increase of crossover, as there will be four annual occasions rather than two. However, these crossovers come on Islamic occasions less central than *al-Adha Eid*, which is no longer a point of intersection.
2. The crossover during Ramadan will increase, as the seven days of the Hebrew Passover intersect with the third week of Ramadan. If one day of crossover in 2019 and 2021 was enough to trigger a comprehensive confrontation, then the seven days of the Ramadan intersection may be enough to renew the confrontation, especially since the factors towards confrontations are increasing in various parts of historical Palestine, albeit in varying degrees.

The Hijri-Hebrew crossover has previously played a role in launching al-Buraq Revolution in 1929, which witnessed a similar intersection between the Hebrew “*Tisha B’Av*” and the Hijri birthday of the Prophet Muhammad.

• **Employing the Covid-19 to Target *al-Aqsa* Mosque**

On 22/3/2020, the Council of Jerusalem Awqaf Department issued a statement saying that it has held an emergency meeting and that after “being informed of the developments of the health conditions that Jerusalem and the rest of the country is going through,” it decided to “suspend the entry of worshipers from all gates of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, starting from the dawn of Monday 23/3/2020” with the continued presence of *al-Aqsa* guards and employees, stressing that it “feels bitterness about making this decision.”⁴⁷ This closure of the Mosque continued until Sunday 31/5/2020, the longest closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque since the end of the Crusades. As a result of this closure, the following setbacks were revealed:

1. Negotiating the administration of *al-Aqsa* Mosque: These negotiations included implicit acknowledgment of the legitimacy of the occupation over the Mosque, as *Haaretz* newspaper reported on 22/3/2020 that there were talks between the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the Israeli authorities to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque to worshipers, and at the same time prevent Jewish incursions through the Moroccan Gate which is controlled by the Israeli forces.⁴⁸ On 29/4/2020, al-Monitor website published an article in which it quoted Temple groups activists rejecting the political agreement between Israel and Jordan which prevented Jews from entering *al-Aqsa* Mosque, stating that “Netanyahu sold us out as part of a deal with Abdullah.”⁴⁹ On 11/5/2020, Arabi21 website quoted a senior source in the Jordanian government saying that there was an agreement between the Jordanian and Israeli ministries of foreign affairs to close the Mosque, justifying this by “protecting worshipers from the transmission of the virus to them from the Israelis.”⁵⁰ The response of the Israel government to the High Court of Justice on 13/5/2020 regarding the existence of this agreement confirmed the validity of these statements, as the state requested a closed-door hearing with the High Court to respond, “due to the sensitivity [of the matter]... which has implications for the national security and foreign affairs of the state.”⁵¹

2. New restrictions on the endowments: The Israel Police took advantage of the decision to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque to impose new restrictions on the Jerusalem Awqaf Department. Thus, it took over the authority to open and close the Mosque gates, and allowed the entry and exit through two gates only during the closure period, namely the Lions’ Gate and the Chain Gate, while reinforcing the presence of the police in their vicinity. The police closed the Council Gate as well, which



leads to the headquarters of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department in Jerusalem located in al-Manjakiyah School, and obligated the Awqaf to hand over a list of its employees and their work shifts to allow them to enter *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Thus, the police acted as if they were the “original administration” of the Mosque putting the Awqaf under their supervision, while the list was indeed handed over to the police by the Department.⁵²

3. The scene of simultaneous entry upon opening the Mosque: The long closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque has been the subject of widespread controversy and opposition, especially since the Mosque is mostly an open area, and achieving distancing in it is feasible. It was even the first mosque to witness distancing at the initiative of worshippers starting from 18/3/2020. Yet, it remained closed under Israeli pressure until after the Eid and the month of Ramadan, even though the Jerusalem municipality lifted all movement restrictions in Jerusalem markets starting from 10/5/2020.⁵³ The decision to open *al-Aqsa* Mosque on a Sunday came as a practical implementation of a promise made by the Israel Police to Itamar Ben-Gvir, after rejecting the petition he submitted to the High Court of Justice demanding the opening of *al-Aqsa* Mosque to Jews on 22/5/2020, which coincided with the “Jerusalem Day” in the Hebrew calendar. In the response, the Israel Police pledged to “open Temple Mount to Jews once it is opened to Muslims,”⁵⁴ and this is what happened as *al-Aqsa* Mosque was opened to worshipers at dawn prayer on Sunday 31/5/2020, while the Moroccan Gate was opened for intruders two hours later and Rabbi Yehudah Glick raided the Mosque, along with 150 intruders.⁵⁵

With the start of the second wave of closure, the Israeli authorities tried to impose this closure on *al-Aqsa* Mosque. They tried to pressure the Jerusalem Awqaf Department to announce the closure of the Mosque on 16/9/2020, thus perpetuating the opening and closing of *al-Aqsa* Mosque per the decisions of the Israeli government. They wanted to reiterate Israeli sovereignty over the Mosque and absorb the pressure of the Temple groups who were opposing this closure that coincided with the long season of Jewish holidays. Therefore, the attempt to close *al-Aqsa* Mosque came as a sort of “compensation” for these extremist groups that the Mosque would be closed to Muslim worshipers as well. Indeed, Hatem ‘Abdul Qader announced the decision of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department to “suspend” worshipers’ entry to *al-Aqsa* Mosque for three weeks,⁵⁶ but the strong popular and media opposition to this decision led to its reversal.⁵⁷

After failing to impose the closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque on Muslims, the Israel Police intensified the use of closure procedures against worshipers, while imposing fines on those who move away from their places of residence more than the permitted distance. They also imposed fines on worshipers who were not wearing masks, maintaining social distancing, or hosting gatherings, whether throughout the second wave of closures, where only 1,200 worshipers performed Friday prayers on 25/9/2020,⁵⁸ or during the third wave of closures.⁵⁹

• The Usurpation of the Powers of Restoration and the Speaker Parallel System

Since 2003, the Israeli courts have been renewing the decision to close Gate of Mercy, while the police rely on this decision in its aggression against the *Musalla* (area allocated for prayer) of the Gate of Mercy. On 26/1/2021, Al-Quds International Institution, relying on inside sources from the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, revealed that Israeli Police were disrupting reconstruction teams in the Dome of the Rock and for several days to exchange reconstruction for the re-closure of the Gate of Mercy.⁶⁰ The Israeli Police continued arresting and deporting those who insisted on being at the *Musalla*, and one of their main targets was Nizam Abu Ramouz of the Jerusalemite *Murabitun*, who was arrested at the *Musalla* on 7/2/2021, then deported for six months.⁶¹ A few days after his return to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, on 17/8/2021, the police forces re-arrested him at the Gate of Mercy.⁶² The occupation authorities have not yet accepted the final opening of Gate of Mercy, and it seems that they will reclose it as soon as there's an opportunity.

At the same time, the Jerusalem municipality continues to monopolize the repairs of the southwestern wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque for the third year in a row, without informing the Awqaf of the ongoing work, which is originally the exclusive competence of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department, and not of Israel.

An extremely dangerous development during the period monitored by the report was the installation of a speaker system that qualifies the Israeli Police to direct the crowds of worshipers in *al-Aqsa* Mosque in parallel to the original speaker system of the Mosque. On 6/9/2020, the Israel Police installed a loudspeaker on the roof of *al-Aqsa Shariah* High School, west of the minaret of the Lions' Gate.⁶³ On 9/9/2020, a second speaker was installed on the roof of the Ablution Gate above the western hallway in *al-Aqsa* Mosque,⁶⁴ added to a previously installed sound system on the roof of al-'Umariya School south of the Mosque in August 2017.



Thus, the Israeli authorities now had a sound system capable of reaching the northern and western sides of *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The system was activated on 19/2/2021 under the pretext of the COVID-19 pandemic and “instructions” were given to worshipers about social distancing, so it became clear that these three sound systems were connected, and that they were linked to the police station at al-Tankaziyya School. The Israel Police intentionally gave these instructions interrupting the Friday *adhan* and also during prayers.⁶⁵ Also, with the intersection of Israel’s “Independence Day” celebration in the Western Wall Plaza with the Tarawih prayers on the first night of Ramadan in 2021, the Israeli forces stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 13/4/2021 and broke the minarets’ doors of the Moroccan and Chain Gates, then cut the audio and electric wires there.⁶⁶ All of this indicates that Israel is dealing with *al-Aqsa* Mosque as a place it manages.

• Undermining the Role of *al-Aqsa* Guards

Targeting the role of *al-Aqsa* guards is a constant Israeli practice, because it undermines the managing role of the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and weakens the Islamic presence in the Mosque, especially after banning the institutions that organized Ribat in *al-Aqsa* (defense of Islamic land) in 2013–2014, then banning the Islamic movement of the 1948 occupied territories completely in 2015, which led to a decline of the number of full-time *Murabitun*. Hence, *al-Aqsa* guards, counting around 283,⁶⁷ according to Jordanian official data, became almost the only full-time human mass in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which led to increased Israeli pressure on them.

Throughout 2020–2021, deportation and physical assault against *al-Aqsa* guards continued, and the Israel Police continued to oblige the guards to stay away from groups of intruders and maintain more than 60 meters distance in some cases, which prevented them from documenting what these intruder groups were doing. Notably, important changes in the situation of the guards developed during this period:

1. Submission of indictments and long prison sentences: The guards Fadi ‘Alyan and Lu’ay Abu al-Sa’d were arrested and transferred to prison, then they were brought to court.⁶⁸ The arrest of Abu al-Sa’d was because he stood against the Israel Police during an extremist group raid of the Mosque.⁶⁹ While not new, enhancing this approach increased in 2020–2021.

- 2. House demolitions:** During the reporting period, the Israeli authorities demolished the homes of two guards because of their work at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, despite invoking the usual pretext of “building without permit.” An Israeli intelligence officer threatened the guard Fadi ‘Alyan to demolish his home because of his stances at *al-Aqsa* Mosque.⁷⁰ Three months after the demolition of his home, ‘Alyan was removed from the Mosque,⁷¹ then he was arrested and referred to the court. The Israeli authorities expedited the file of demolishing the home of the guard Ahmad Dallal, in al-Ashkariya neighborhood in Beit Hanina,⁷² and after the demolition of his home, he was arrested and expelled from the Mosque.⁷³ Further, the National Insurance of Israel (NII) suspended the allowances of his sick son, which confirms the systematic targeting of Dallal to break his will.
- 3. Decline in the number of *al-Aqsa* guards:** In addition to these mounting pressures, *al-Aqsa* guards face living dilemmas exacerbated by the rise in the exchange rate of the Israeli shekel against the dinar by nearly 20% in five years, which led to the erosion of their salaries amounting to minimum wages before this rise. Indeed, most of the guards are forced to work in other jobs besides their work in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, which has led with time to taking long leaves without pay to be able to work outside the Mosque and provide income. This makes the number of guards in some shifts limited to barely 20.⁷⁴ While the Jordanian government decided to raise their salaries, the final instructions for this increase stipulated its distribution over two years and were only for the basic salary,⁷⁵ which makes it a very limited increase, because their basic salaries are very low.

The Jerusalem Awqaf Department tried to appoint 50 new guards to make up for this shortage in their actual number, but the Israel Police prevented them from starting their work.⁷⁶ This led to the unveiling of another hidden fact, although known to those following up the issue, which is that Israel has been preventing the Awqaf from appointing any new guards since 2017.⁷⁷

b. Constructions and Excavations Under *al-Aqsa* Mosque and in Its Vicinity

• Constructions in the Vicinity of the Mosque

Since 2007, Israel has put successive plans to change the skyline of the Old City of Jerusalem and to find a Jewish foothold or birth certificate in it. To this end, it presented several projects serving two directions: the first direction is the



establishment of major Jewish religious and cultural centers in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, such as the headquarters of the Temple Institute's Holy Temple Museum and the Burnt House Museum, as well as, Strauss House project. These Judaization centers are established and open for visitors and efforts are underway to reinforce them with Beit Haliba (Core House) to the west of the Western Wall Plaza, and Kedem Center, the largest center in the plans, to the south. The second direction was the attempt to "revive historical synagogues" established in the early waves of the religious Zionist immigration to Jerusalem in the second half of the 19th century. A project that began with the Ohel Yitzhak Synagogue (Isaac's tent) located above Hammam al-Ain endowment, which was opened in 2009 and is considered the smallest of these synagogues, then Hurva Synagogue which is located above the endowment of the Great Omari Mosque and was opened in 2010, in addition to the largest and most important synagogue Tiferet Yisrael (Glory of Israel).

Today, although the announcement of the projects of Beit Haliba and Tiferet Yisrael, west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and Kedem Center, south of the Mosque, took place throughout 2010–2013, these buildings are still in the stages of excavation or establishing the foundations at best. The progress is disrupted due to several considerations including the differences among the sides executing them, the sensitivity and sanctity of the place in which these projects try to change the landscape, as well as the external and internal opposition facing them.

This disruption and slowness in achieving set goals led the Israeli government to explore a different approach, which is to bring a large Jewish population to the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem, by strengthening the transportation network,⁷⁸ to cast legitimacy on plans and centers serving settlers. Still, this approach is inherently weak as the Old City and its surroundings remain with most of the Arab Jerusalemite population, while the numerical presence of Jews is limited to the Jewish Quarter in the Old City, and the Jews remain in the category of visitors rather than residents.

Based on this, and specifically from the point where the extremist Bezalel Smotrich took over the transportation portfolio in 2019, projects to change the surroundings of *al-Aqsa* Mosque began to focus on infrastructure:

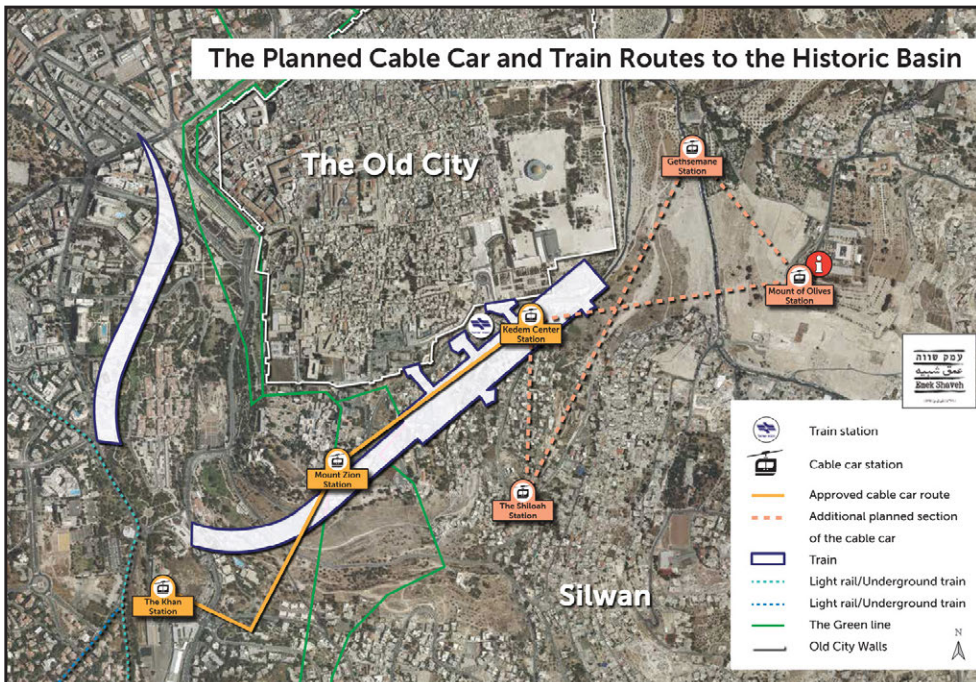
1. The Jerusalem Express Train and the "Trump Station" Project

In June 2019, Israeli Minister of Transportation Israel Katz presented a plan to connect the Jerusalem express train from its station on Jaffa Street, west of

Jerusalem, to *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall, and to establish a new station at the Western Wall Plaza, claiming that this constitutes a public transportation solution that facilitates access to the *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall. Yet, the National Infrastructure Committee (NIC) rejected the proposal with eight votes to one due to the lack of real passenger pressure, which requires such a transportation line.

When Smotrich assumed the Ministry of Transportation and Road Safety, he put a strategic plan to develop the transportation in WB to promote settlement building and turn Jerusalem into a civil center for WB settlers. He resubmitted the above project to the NIC and succeeded in passing it on 17/2/2020, exactly a month after President Trump presented his plan known as the Deal of the Century. The Committee approved the establishment of a station near the Western Wall Plaza called “Trump Station,” in appreciation of President Trump’s efforts in supporting the occupation and changing the identity of the city of Jerusalem.⁷⁹ Exploratory excavations began in favor of the project in the vicinity of the Old City in May 2020,⁸⁰ and the following map of the train route was presented showing a large intersection between the route of the cable car. This confirms that the repetition of projects of the same objective without a real need comes for purely Judaizing purposes:

Map 1/3: The Intersection of the Proposed Cable Car and Train Routes South of the Old City⁸¹



2. Developments of the Old City Cable Car Project

The cable car project in the vicinity of the Old City received a great boost when the NIC approved its route on 1/2/2019, then on 3/6/2019, it rejected all objections to it. On 4/11/2019, the project was approved by the Ministerial Committee for Housing Affairs, which paved the way for its implementation. Given the seriousness of the project and the deliberate sabotage it causes to the skyline of the Old City and its historical heritage, and the lack of an objective need for it, the left-wing Emek Shaveh organization submitted a petition, on 27/11/2019, against the project to the Israeli High Court of Justice in conjunction with 520 Israeli architects and archaeologists.⁸² The Court held a session to discuss the case on 29/6/2020, then on 26/7/2020, and designated 6/9/2020 as a deadline for the government to provide its response.⁸³ As of that date, the government submitted an 81-page document that the Court appeared to have not been convinced of, so it gave the government a new deadline on 1/10/2020. Also, it gave the objectors a deadline of 22/11/2020 to respond to the Israeli government's justifications for the project.⁸⁴

The East Jerusalem Development Company, the governmental arm responsible for implementing the project, seemed indifferent to this judicial path and announced on 4/11/2020 that it would start foundational excavations for the cable car. However, the High Court of Justice issued a precautionary order to stop the project on 23/2/2021, causing work to stop again.⁸⁵

• Excavations

The numbers are no longer sufficient to report the development of the tunnel network surrounding *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Old City of Jerusalem, especially since these tunnels and excavations are expanding and interconnecting after they entered, since 2001, the rehabilitation phase. They changed from being excavations to being shrines receiving visitors and controlling the underground space of the Mosque. Throughout 2020–2021, work persisted in two central directions, while digging continued in various other sites:

First direction: Connecting the Herodian Road and the southern tunnels network to the Western tunnels network through a long tunnel passing under the Old City wall. This direction is a priority for the government and extremist groups, because it achieves geographical contiguity underground between what they call the “City of David,” which they claim is located under Silwan’s Wadi Hilweh neighborhood, and the network of tunnels under *al-Aqsa* Mosque’s Western Wall, located under the Old City. The director of excavation operations in this area,

archaeologist Ari Levi of the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA), stated that the excavation operations were taking place in two shifts per day, and they continued from 7 am to 10 pm with 15 working hours per day.⁸⁶

Second direction: Expanding excavations west of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in every direction, as excavations expanded from their path adjacent to the Western Wall of *al-Aqsa* Mosque further to the west under Beit Straus, which is located to the west of al-Tankaziyya School. Those excavations reached a depth of 7–10 meters, which means strengthening the tracks of the previous excavations in Wilson’s Arch and the Chain of Generations Center with another underground area under Beit Straus.⁸⁷ The Israeli authorities started intermittent deep excavations at the far western edge of the Western Wall in 2021, and it seems that these excavations are linked to the creation of large areas underground to serve Beit Haliba, which will form the central landmark at the western end of the Western Wall Plaza.

Excavations Under Beit Straus to the West of Western Wall



2. Jerusalem’s Islamic Holy Sites

The occupation continued targeting the Islamic cemeteries surrounding the Old City, which is in the context of religious replacement similar to that targeting *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Islamic landmark would be obliterated and removed, and instead, a Jewish landmark would be established, however, there’s a slight difference in the case of the targeted cemeteries near the Old City, they are targeted in favor of expanding a Jewish cemetery on the southern slope of the Mount of Olives to suggest that Jerusalem was historically Jewish. The development in this respect throughout 2020–2021 is the change of target, from the Mercy Cemetery to the Yusufiyah Cemetery opposite it from the north:



a. The Yusufiyah Cemetery

On 29/11/2020, the Jerusalem municipality bulldozers began demolishing a historic staircase adjacent to the wall of the Old City of Jerusalem from its northern side near Burj al-Luqluq and heading south towards the Yusufiyah Cemetery, which was established at the end of the Mamluk era, specifically in 1467. When visiting the cemetery, the visitor first enters an annexed space known as the “Martyrs’ Memorial,” which is a wooded area in which a white stone edifice was erected in memory of the martyrs of the Jordanian army who were killed in the 1967 war. Despite the uproar over the demolition that took place on endowment land and within the property of a 553-year-old historic cemetery adjacent to the Old City wall, the Jerusalem municipality bulldozers, on 14/12/2020, resumed razing the staircase and the corridor to the cemetery’s gate, and demolishing the cemetery’s wall from the east, destroying with it a group of tombstones adjacent to the fence.

According to Google Earth, the area of the targeted land is 4,200 m², which makes it an important area in a vital location, while the area of the Yusufiyah Cemetery is 36,700 m². In terms of numbers, this means that the Jerusalem municipality is trying to seize around 10% of the endowment land of the Yusufiyah Cemetery.

Map 2/3: Al-Yusufiyah Cemetery and the Martyrs’ Memorial Targeted with Bulldozing⁸⁸



Despite the success of lawyers Muhannad Jbara and Hamzeh Qutteineh in stopping the initial bulldozing work through a precautionary decision by the Magistrate’s Court in Jerusalem on 24/12/2020,⁸⁹ the Israel Nature and Parks Authority (INPA) succeeded in securing the court’s approval to resume bulldozing work in the cemetery on 25/7/2021⁹⁰ and resumed work on 10/10/2021.⁹¹ The immediate popular response was performing prayers in front of the cemetery and the families of those buried in that part of the cemetery tried to defend the graves, matters reached a point of burning the caravan of the workers, who are bulldozing the cemetery, and destroying their tools.⁹² However, this action did not reach a point of sit-in and popular gathering, which allowed the authorities to continue bulldozing. On 25/10/2021, the INPA team surrounded the cemetery with a metal fence to isolate it and prevent protesters from reaching it,⁹³ thus completing works of bulldozing this part of the cemetery on 3/11/2021.

Lawyers Jbara and Qutteineh tried to appeal against the demolition of the cemetery before the court on 17/10/2021, but the court rejected the appeal, contrary to its previous position. This renews the question regarding the feasibility of resorting to the Israeli courts concerning endowment cases, when the long-standing position maintained by the Jerusalem Awqaf Department and the Jordanian government—managing these endowments—was not to recognize these courts or their authority over endowments and Islamic affairs in Jerusalem. Indeed, this position was one of the bases of confrontation to restore the Gate of Mercy and reject court decisions regarding storming or performing “quiet prayers” in *al-Aqsa* Mosque, whereas it is being violated regarding cemeteries, based on the consideration that they are supervised by an endowment affiliated committee, a matter which should be reconsidered given the facts of targeting cemeteries in the past years.

b. Targeting Mosques by Demolition

On 16/12/2021, the Jerusalem Municipality threatened those in charge of al-Rahman Mosque in Beit Safafa to demolish its golden dome which was renewed during restoration and expansion operations four years ago. This threat was against the background of the complaints of neighboring settlers over the dome scene, which was met with a position refusing to change the state of the golden dome from townspeople.⁹⁴ On 3/1/2022, the Jerusalem Municipality notified those building al-Taqwa Mosque in al-Issawiyah of the intention to demolish the mosque during its construction.⁹⁵



Beit Safafa's al-Rahman Mosque Whose Dome is Threatened with Demolition



3. The Islamic Holy Sites in the Rest of Palestine

a. The Ibrahimi Mosque

The occupation began its measures to divide the Ibrahimi Mosque immediately after its occupation in 1967. These measures were reinforced by concentrating settlement building on the eastern side of the Old City of Hebron, which enhanced the presence of settlement outposts and religious schools in the vicinity of Ibrahimi Mosque. Following the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre on 25/2/1994, Israeli authorities imposed military measures in favor of the settlers, which strengthened their presence in the Mosque under the pretext of security. The Protocol Concerning the Redeployment in Hebron (aka the Hebron Protocol) signed on 17/1/1997 between the PLO and Israel contributed to perpetuating the results of the Ibrahimi Mosque massacre and paved for Israeli progress in the city. As a result, Hebron was divided into two areas: H1 and H2; H2 is under full Israeli control, and it includes al-Shuhada Street, al-Hisba, Tel Rumeida, the Old City, and the Ibrahimi Mosque all the way to the settlements of Kiryat Arba' and Givat Harsina,⁹⁶ while H1 is under Palestinian administration and includes the rest of the city's neighborhoods.

In 2020–2021, there were 1,358 Israeli attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque detailed as follows:⁹⁷

Table 3/3: Israeli Attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque in 2020–2021⁹⁸

Attacks	2021 ⁹⁹	2020 ¹⁰⁰
Intrusions and performing biblical rituals	28	28
Excavations and constructions altering its surrounding features	18	16
Mosque Closure	13	36
Arrests in the Mosque's vicinity	5	7
Beating worshippers and the <i>Murabitun</i>	5	2
Attacks on infrastructure	8	4
Interfering in crews' work	23	9
Preventing public events and religious occasions	3	2
<i>Adhan</i> ban	581	453
Worshippers entry obstructions	41	66
Total	725	633

In 2020–2021, the attacks on the Ibrahimi Mosque witnessed a qualitative escalation in two directions. The first was the approval to construct an elevator for settlers, which then-Israeli Defense Minister Naftali Bennett greenlighted on 24/2/2020.¹⁰¹ Israel issued a tender for the project on 15/7/2020.¹⁰² In return, on 18/6/2020, the leftist Emek Shaveh, in coordination with the Hebron Municipality and the residents of the Old City of Hebron, submitted an objection against the project.¹⁰³ The Planning Committee rejected the petitions on 19/11/2020 and authorized the continuation of work with the implementation of the elevator.¹⁰⁴ On 10/8/2021, the foundational excavations of the elevator started.¹⁰⁵ According to the Hebron Reconstruction Committee, the elevator project will deduct 91 m² of the Mosque's space, in addition to 300 m² as external spaces and corridors leading to it.¹⁰⁶ It is noticed that, as in the mixed prayer square next to *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the corridor ascending from the Jewish Quarter settlement to the Western Wall Plaza, the Israeli authorities claim that these Judaization projects are for humanitarian purposes, intended for the elderly and people with special needs.



Scheme of the Ibrahimi Mosque Elevator Project as Published by the Occupation Authorities



The second dangerous development concerning the Ibrahimi Mosque is deliberately taking it as a center for Israeli sovereignty, in an overlap between the religious and political scenes, reflecting the social and political dominance of the national-religious Zionist trend. Before the September 2019 elections, then-Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stormed the Ibrahimi Mosque,¹⁰⁷ and three months later, on 29/12/2019, Naftali Bennett, then-Defense minister, lit the eighth candle of Hanukah at the Mosque.¹⁰⁸ Netanyahu again used the storming of the Ibrahimi Mosque in an electoral context, as he stormed it before the elections on 23/2/2020, stressing that if he won, he would apply Israeli sovereignty over Hebron within the framework of the Deal of the Century.¹⁰⁹ On 28/11/2021, Zionist leaders affiliated with the centrist current joined the incursions trend, as Israeli President Isaac Herzog stormed the Ibrahimi Mosque on 28/11/2021 to lit the first candle of Hanukkah.¹¹⁰

b. Al-Isaaf Cemetery in Jaffa

It is one of the few endowments that have parts remaining on the waterfront of the historic city of Jaffa. It is located 1,100 meters from Hassan Bek Mosque, one of the few remaining mosques in Jaffa that dates back to the early 1900s, and less

than 300 meters to the north of Clock Tower Square in the center of the historic city of Jaffa. The remaining area of the cemetery, according to Google Earth, is about 670 m² only, but it gains its importance from being one of the last remaining endowment lands in the historical center of Jaffa. The Israel Land Authority has historically confiscated endowment lands, authorized itself the ownership of the cemetery, and then sold it to a real estate company to build a housing project on it, which the municipality said would provide housing to “the homeless.” For years, attempts have been made to bulldoze this part of the cemetery; on 25/4/2018, the owner company tried to start bulldozing it, then renewed its attempt on 16/4/2019, but was confronted by the people of Jaffa and Palestinians from the 1948 occupied territories who held prayers and protests.¹¹¹ On the morning of 8/6/2020, the bulldozing attempts returned with greater momentum, and a large part of the cemetery’s land was bulldozed before the Palestinians of Jaffa gathered and began to perform prayers and demonstrate in front of the cemetery.¹¹² The Jaffa Islamic Council, an elected civil body for the defense of endowments and holy sites in the city, together with Al Mezan Centre for Human Rights, filed a petition to the Tel Aviv District Court to stop the bulldozing works and obtained a decision to freeze the bulldozing work and oblige the municipality to issue a new construction permit.¹¹³

c. Al-Istiqlal Cemetery in Haifa

This cemetery bears a symbolic dimension for the Palestinians, as Sheikh Izz al-Din al-Qassam was buried in it, which makes it a target of continuous aggression by Zionist extremists, the latest of which was on 23/8/2019, when the cemetery and its tombstones were vandalized.¹¹⁴ On 17/5/2021, during the Uprising of Honor held by the Palestinians of the 1948 occupied territories, in concurrence with the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, settlers set fire to the cemetery.¹¹⁵ In return, the Southern Islamic Movement, in cooperation with al-Istiqlal Endowment Committee, organized a voluntary day for the reconstruction of the cemetery, where volunteers re-identified the graves and renewed the tombs, and painted them.



Al-Istiqlal Cemetery After the 2019 Arson



Al-Istiqlal Cemetery After the 2021 Restoration



d. Holy Sites in GS During the 2021 War

On 21/5/2021, immediately after the ceasefire, the GS official authorities announced the toll of losses resulting from the intensive Israeli bombing of the Strip, including the destruction of three mosques, partial destruction of 40 others and severe destruction of a church.¹¹⁶

4. Christian Holy Sites in Jerusalem and Palestine

The number of Palestinian Christians has been steadily declining parallel to the domination of a class of foreign clergy over the three major Christian denominations; The Greeks over the Orthodox who make up the largest denomination; the mostly Italian and French monks of the Custody of the Holy Land “Terra Santa” over a sector of Catholics; besides Armenian Orthodox and Catholics. With this reality in place, the ecclesiastical property, constituting around 17% of Jerusalem during the British mandate of Palestine, has become a space for barter and exchange of interests for a class of clergy, who are not nationally affiliated with Palestine and do not belong to the culture of the Arab nation and the Palestinian people. Some clergymen even seek interests with the Israeli government which pays a generous price to rent ecclesiastical properties for decades or buy them. This trend continued throughout 2020–2021, although this time focus shifted to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate:

a. The Entrance to the Armenian Monastery

On 20/12/2020, author Daoud Kuttab revealed a lease deal between the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, through his lawyer Mazen Qubti, and the Jerusalem municipality. The agreement stipulates that a company affiliated with the Jerusalem municipality shall evacuate the trash and rehabilitate the land of the Patriarchate, located outside the wall of the Old City and directly adjacent to the Jaffa Gate from the south and that it shall pave it and convert it to a parking lot accommodating 180 cars. This would be in return for the Patriarchate to grant parking rights to 90 cars belonging to the municipality or the Jerusalem Development Authority for ten years, as payment for cleaning and preparing the land, estimated at two million dollars.¹¹⁷ In other words, this contract provides for the lease of half of the land for ten years to the Jerusalem municipality and the Jerusalem Development Authority in exchange for removing the rubble and establishing parking. Most dangerous in this agreement is that it complements the targeting of the Jaffa Gate, as the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate has previously leased Omar Square overlooked by the Jaffa Gate inside the wall, and according to this agreement, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate would lease the land overlooked by the Jaffa Gate from outside the wall.



The same documents revealed that the Higher Presidential Committee of Churches Affairs in Palestine was aware of this agreement in the final stages of its negotiation and before it entered into force, as Dr. Ramzi Khoury, Chairman of the Committee, sent a letter to the Armenian Orthodox Patriarch, on 7/7/2020, demanding, along with other church leaders, not to conclude the deal and to adhere to the position of international law.¹¹⁸ Yet, the Armenian Orthodox Patriarchate proceeded to sign and implement the agreement and later denied that this was a contract of sale or lease considering it merely a sort of paying back “a loan” to the Jerusalem municipality, where the loan is the cost of cleaning and preparing the land.¹¹⁹

b. Attacks on Churches and Monasteries

On 4/12/2020, a Zionist extremist infiltrated the mass held in the Gethsemane Church at the foot of the Mount of Olives, carrying a bottle that the guard thought contained water but turned out to contain a highly flammable substance. The settler poured the liquid inside the church and set it alight, but the fire was contained before it spread and the settler was arrested.¹²⁰ On 4/2/2021, a Zionist extremist broke down the door of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and surveillance cameras recorded this attack.¹²¹ On 19/5/2021, extremist settlers severely beat three Orthodox clergymen, one of whom was injured in the eye and rushed to the hospital.¹²² The extremist Lehava organization and settler Price-Tag groups are believed to be responsible for the three attacks within a continuous trend targeting Christian holy sites and symbols in Jerusalem.

c. Decrease in the Number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem

By the end of 2020, the number of Arab Christians in Jerusalem was 12,900, comprising 3.4% of Arab Jerusalemites and 2.1% of the residents of eastern Jerusalem. Adding 3,400 non-Arab Christian residents, the number becomes 16,300 (see table 4/3). If this number is compared to the total population of the two sides of Jerusalem, Christians in the city in 2020 would comprise 1.7%, the lowest ratio of Christian presence in Jerusalem since the emergence of the church in the city, 2000 years ago.

Table 4/3: The Ratio of Christians to Jerusalem’s Population 2010–2020¹²³

Year	Arab Christians	Ratio to Jerusalemites (%)	Christians in general	Ratio to the population of both sides of Jerusalem (%)
2010	11,356	4		
2011	11,720	4		
2012	12,008	4		
2013	12,300	4		
2014	12,300	3.9	15,600	1.8
2015	12,600	3.9	15,800	1.8
2016	12,600	3.8	15,800	1.8
2017	12,600	3.7	15,800	1.8
2019	12,900	3.6	16,200	1.7
2020	12,900	3.4	16,300	1.7

Second: Population Under Occupation

1. The Reality of the Demographic Battle

In 2001, Sergio DellaPergola, the most famous Jewish demographer around the world, published a reference study on the shape of the expected population balance in Jerusalem during 1995–2020,¹²⁴ in which he extrapolated the expected population growth based on previous behavior. His expectations formed the basis for the Jerusalem Master Plan 2020, which was prepared by the Jerusalem municipality at that time to reflect its vision of Jerusalem by 2020, and the last version of the plan was presented in 2004.

The Jerusalem Master Plan was based on DellaPergola’s expectations, which indicated that Arab Jerusalemites in 2020 would make up 40% of the population of both parts of Jerusalem. Planning focused on how to avoid reaching a ratio of 40% Arabs to 60% Jews. Previous plans were based on a recommendation by the Inter-ministerial Committee to the Rate of Development for Jerusalem, which set a binding policy for the Israeli government approved by the Knesset to prevent Jerusalemites from increasing to 30% compared to 70% for Jewish settlers. Chapter seven of the plan titled “Population and Society” stipulated maintaining a solid Jewish majority, considering it the main policy goal around which most development proposals in the various chapters revolve.¹²⁵



In sum, DellaPergola put forward five scenarios based on which he predicted the population of Jerusalem, and he gave preponderance to the fifth scenario, which assumes limited Jewish immigration from abroad, with internal immigration continuing to drain Jewish settlers and the decline in fertility among Palestinians and settlers. Actual figures for 2019–2021 were as follows:

Table 5/3: Demographic Balance in Jerusalem 2019–2021¹²⁶

		East Jerusalem (Occupied in 1967)		West Jerusalem (Occupied in 1948)		Total for both sides of Jerusalem	
		Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews	Arabs	Jews
2019	Number	354,000	227,100	4,800	350,500	358,800	577,600
	Percentage (%)	61	39	1.4	98.6	38.3	61.7
Total		581,100		355,300		936,400	
2020	Number	361,900	229,800	4,900**	354,600	366,800	584,400
	Percentage (%)	61.2	38.8	1.4	98.6	38.6	61.4
Total		591,700		359,500		951,200	
2021*	Number	369,900	232,550	5,000**	358,850	374,900	591,400
	Percentage (%)	61.4	38.6	1.4	98.6	38.8	61.2
Total		602,450		363,850		966,300	

* The figures for 2021 were calculated based on the growth rates in Jerusalem published by Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), which amounted to 2.2% for Arabs and 1.2% for Jews.

** An approximate number.

It appears from the actual numbers at the end of 2019 that DellaPergola's expectations were almost in place concerning Arab citizens; however, fertility among Arabs did not decline as much as he expected. The figure he expected in 2020 was practically realized in 2019. The numbers of Jews were lower than what he expected by about 26 thousand, meaning that external immigration was relatively less than he assumed, even with the addition of the expected growth for 2020. Yet, numbers, in general, were closer to the fifth scenario which he considered at the time to be the most likely.

In sum, all the policies of segregation and expulsion tailored to prevent reaching this percentage have practically failed. Even if taken literally as trying to prevent Arab citizens from reaching 40% of the city's population by 2020, they succeeded

in slowing down 1% of this percentage only, and due to the rate of change of the ratio in favor of the Arabs, the percentage will be realized by the end of 2022.

According to a CBS press report, Jerusalem has the largest number of Muslims, reaching about 354 thousand or 37.1% of the city's population, in both the eastern and western parts. The report pointed out that they are a young society, as 32.9% of them are under 14 years old, while the elderly (65 years and over) comprises about 4.5%.¹²⁷

2. Attempts to Expel the Palestinian Population

a. Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood

The Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood was the first new neighborhood to be established in Jerusalem, as the elite families began to establish urban neighborhoods of modern architectural style in the second half of the 20th century. Sheikh Jarrah was essentially established by al-Husseini family joined later by al-Nashashibi and Jarallah families, besides some other elite families in Jerusalem. This made the neighborhood the political center of Jerusalem, as it witnessed public meetings, and even demonstrations and marches, due to the presence of the Mufti of Jerusalem's home in it.

The Jewish presence in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood began nearly two decades after its establishment. The early religious Zionist migrations after 1870 tried to match the geography of Jerusalem with the biblical description. Thus, a group of immigrants claimed that the tomb of Sheikh Mohammad al-Sa'di, the grandfather of al-Sa'di Jerusalemite family, and the cave attached to it and containing a tomb dating back to the Roman era, matched the biblical description of the tomb of Simeon the Just, claimed to be the last of the alleged priests of the Second Temple. So, they consecrated this tomb and singled it out for sanctification on the spring festival called "Lag BaOmer," which is usually celebrated in May. The passage of these Jewish immigrants through the cultivated lands in Hijazi al-Sa'di endowment led to the damage to the summer crop grown by farmers who imposed an allowance on Jewish immigrants to compensate for the damaged crops. Then, settlers' leaders developed the offer to turn the allowance into an annual rent.

After the 1948 war and the unification of the two banks and the entry of Jerusalem under Jordanian rule, the Jordanian government enacted a law according to which it decided to manage the property of the Jewish settlers by a special



body called the Custodian of Enemy Property. Accordingly, Jordanian Ministers of Interior enumerated Jewish individuals and entities who left the WB during the war and assigned their properties to the Custodian of Enemy Property by virtue of “vesting orders.” By reviewing these orders, it was revealed that they were based on a list of individuals and entities rather than on checking the origin of the properties. Accordingly, many of the authentic and private family endowments were referred to the Custodian of Enemy Property, because they were occupied by Jews who rented them and did not return them to the endowment’s possession as was supposed to happen. Among them, the properties that were used by the Oriental Jews Committee and the Western Jews Committee, by virtue of the vesting order issued in 1954 by the Jordanian Minister of Interior Wasfi Mirza, and among them also was the land of the Jerusalemite family of Hijazi al-Sa’di in Sheikh Jarrah, known as Karm al-Ja’ouni, in reference to the family cultivating it.

By 1956, UNRWA was trying to limit the scope of its operations to specific camps and gatherings, so it concluded a settlement with 28 families in cooperation with the Jordanian government, where the latter would allocate the land to these families, while UNRWA would build them housing units for which they pay a symbolic rent, with a promise to own them in the future, in exchange for giving up the UNRWA blue cards and preserving their right to return. UNRWA built the housing units and the initial lease period expired, but the bureaucracy of the Jordanian government has led to the failure to fulfill the promise to transfer the properties by 1967. After the Israeli occupation of East Jerusalem, the occupation government classified the lands under the “Custodian of Enemy Property” as belonging to it, with the recognition of the Jordanian government. It transferred them to the Israeli “Custodian General,” who in turn allowed those whom he considered the original owners of those lands to “restore” them. Bodies calling themselves the “Committee of the Jews of East Jerusalem” and the “Committee of the Jews of West Jerusalem” submitted a request to “restore” the land of Karm al-Ja’ouni which they originally leased. Hence, the Israeli “Custodian General” registered the lands in the name of these two committees in 1974 without the knowledge of the people of the neighborhood, and this is when the struggle began. Successive courts have refused to discuss the original ownership of the land of Karm al-Ja’ouni and treated its people as “protected tenants” under Israeli law.

The two committees sold the land of Karm al-Ja‘ouni to a settlement company called Nahalat Shimon, which acquired licenses to build settlement units in the neighborhood, and since it licensed new construction, it began demanding the eviction of the people of the neighborhood under the terms of the “Protected Tenant Law.” In 2008, the family of Umm Kamel al-Kurd was expelled, then in 2009, the families of al-Ghawi and Hanoun were expelled as well.

Eviction attempt: In March 2021, an Israeli court warned four additional families of displacement and demanded their homes be handed over to the Nahalat Shimon Company. These families, along with the rest of the neighborhood, began reminding people of their grievance, and among them were the members of al-Kurd family, who excelled in addressing the media and in using social media platforms. The Jerusalemites and the people of the 1948 occupied territories responded to their calls, and neighboring al-Issawiyah youth supported them. Over two months, the neighborhood turned into a focus of confrontation and defense and the people of the neighborhood submitted an appeal to the Israeli High Court of Justice requesting a halt to the eviction until the decision on real estate ownership was issued, which the courts had refused to discuss for four decades. However, this pressure, which the resistance joined in May 2021 through threats to prevent the displacement of the people of the neighborhood by armed force, led the court to procrastinate its decision and seek the opinion of the government’s Attorney General who, after the end of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, stated that he will not weigh in on the case and would leave the case to the court.

Deception attempt: As the Attorney General rejected to interfere, the Israeli court tried to play the role of mediator and presented a proposal to the residents of the neighborhood and the settlers, which was closer to deception. The proposal stipulated for the people of the neighborhood to temporarily accept their status as “protected tenants” and pay the rent to the lawyers of Nahalat Shimon, until the ownership is decided by the settlement committees of the Israeli Justice Ministry. This means that the people of the neighborhood would acknowledge that they are tenants and the settlement company is the original owner. This ploy almost led the neighborhood issue to undermine the results of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle with all the sacrifices involved, but marathon efforts were made by the National and Civil Action Committee in Jerusalem, and several Jerusalem jurists, to prevent this. Then, Al-Quds International Institution put direct pressure on the lawyers



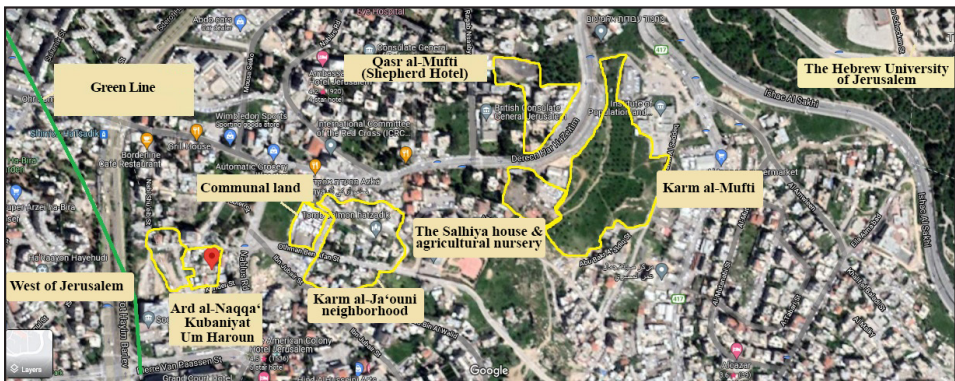
to abide by the national decisions, which led the people of the neighborhood, on 2/11/2021, to reject the court's maneuver.

Circumvention attempt: Given the failure of the displacement attempt, the occupation authorities attempted to encircle the Karm al-Ja'ouni case, by resolving the status of other areas near Sheikh Jarrah—to the east and west—which would make uprooting it easier. In this context, the work on Sheikh Jarrah's four other fronts was accelerated:

- 1. The front of Qasr al-Mufti and Karm al-Mufti:** To the east of Karm al-Ja'ouni and opposite the Hebrew University. The occupation hastened work to build settlement units in Qasr al-Mufti and transform Karm al-Mufti into a biblical park.
- 2. Salhiya land front:** It is a land of six donums (about 6,000 m²), adjacent to Karm al-Mufti from the west. It includes a house and an agricultural nursery owned by the Salhiya family, which were destroyed by the occupation in January 2022, under the pretext of establishing a school for people with special needs.
- 3. Communal land front:** It is located directly to the west of the Karm al-Ja'ouni area, on which Umm Kamel al-Kurd erected a protest tent following her forced displacement in 2008. The land was confiscated by the final decision of the Israeli High Court of Justice in November 2021, after it was at the disposal of Kamal 'Ubeidat, who built a parking lot and a car wash there. The occupation ultimately confiscated the land as green areas in exchange for Palestinian investors on the other side of the land obtaining a hotel permit.
- 4. Ard al-Naqqa' front:** It is the complementary part of Karm al-Ja'ouni of the endowment of the Hijazi al-Sa'di family. It is located directly to the west of it, facing the borders of the 1948 occupied territories, and is known as the "Kubaniyat Um Haroun" section, after a Jewish woman who rented it and built housing units on it for immigrant Jewish families at the end of the 19th century. These units were transferred to the Jordanian Custodian of Enemy Property, who in turn leased them to these families. Today, 40 Jerusalem families reside in the "Um Haroun" section and they face a legal status different from that of Karm al-Ja'ouni, because they fully rented the houses from the Jordanian government and they are considered "protected tenants." The Israeli authorities and the extremist right-wing associations are looking for any loopholes to annul this status, and they started with Fatima Salem's family, given that she was

not at the house of her father Mahmud Salem upon his death in 1986. Thus, she was considered unworthy of protection even though she and her children and grandchildren live in the house. By February 2022, the home of the Salem family and the Ard al-Naqqā‘ area turned into a new arena of confrontation in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood.

Map 4/3: Fronts of the Sheikh Jarrah Neighborhood Between the Hebrew University in the East and the Borders of the 1948 Occupied Territories in the West¹²⁸



b. Silwan

While Sheikh Jarrah is the northern front of the settlement penetration into the central fabric of Jerusalem, Silwan constitutes the southern front of it. However, it is still predominantly Arab with limited settlement penetrations. Under pretexts and means customized for each of its six neighborhoods, adjacent to the Old City, the occupation targets Silwan, seeking to annex most of it. Targeting Silwan is carried out as follows:

1. **Wadi Hilweh neighborhood:** It is the neighborhood located directly to the south of the Old City, and Israeli authorities are trying to seize it by intensifying excavations that have led to cracks in a large number of its properties, leaving them uninhabitable. They have also intensified purchases and fraud deals.
2. **Al-Bustan neighborhood:** It consists of around 100 properties inhabited by about 1,500 people. In 2008, it received a collective eviction order because the Jerusalem municipality considered its land a historical park under the name “King’s Garden” based on the alleged biblical narrative regarding the area.



- 3. Baten al-Hawa neighborhood:** It is the foothill located above al-Bustan neighborhood in the southeast, and the occupation targets it under the pretext of “the heritage of Yemini Jews.” In 1882, Zionist organizations persuaded several Yemeni Jews to immigrate to Palestine, but the emerging settlement community, which was purely European, did not accept them. Thus, they were stranded, and they resorted to renting some inns and warehouses in Silwan to live among the Arabs, who constitute their natural cultural depth. In 1929, al-Buraq Revolution and the ensuing polarization led to their emigration from Silwan, so the Ateret Cohanim settler organization claimed ownership of the properties they were renting.
- 4. Wadi al-Rababa neighborhood:** It is the neighborhood adjacent to the wall of the Old City in the southwest, and it is the last neighborhood of Silwan before Mount Zion whose ecclesiastical property forms part of its remaining area to the west. The Israeli authorities consider all the neighborhood’s houses unlicensed and try to transform it into a park. Every year, they deliberately raze its surroundings hoping for the collapse of some of its properties due to the nature of its overcrowded, random construction.
- 5. Wadi Yasoul neighborhood:** It is the valley that complements Wadi al-Rababa from the southwest side. The Israeli authorities claim that all of its houses are built without permits and have threatened them with their demolition.
- 6. ‘Ain al-Lawza neighborhood:** It is the furthest of these neighborhoods from the Old City wall. It is located to the south of Mount Baten al-Hawa. It is also threatened with demolition by the INPA, which seeks to turn its homes into a park claiming that they are built without permits.

The most prominent dilemma in the case of the six neighborhoods in Silwan is that each of them is fighting its battle on its own rather than uniting the fronts or the points of mass protest. This makes Silwan less present than Sheikh Jarrah although it has more population, where the population of Karm al-Ja‘ouni in Sheikh Jarrah is about 300 people and Ard al-Naqqa‘ is about 400 people (700 combined), while the residents of the six neighborhoods of Silwan threatened with displacement are home to about 7,500 Jerusalemites, ten times those of Sheikh Jarrah. This renders Silwan front more difficult for the occupation should the confrontation be unified and organized, instead of having dispersed legal tracks that may fail at any moment due to the absence of a national reference following up on them.

c. Renewed Attempt to Evacuate Khan al-Ahmar

The attempt to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar dates back to a military order issued by the Israeli army in 2012, but it collided with the steadfastness of the communities, whose owners re-established them every time Israeli authorities destroyed them. After Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Israel thought the opportunity was ripe to expand the geographical area covered by this decision, so it tried to evacuate Khan al-Ahmar to complete the wall around the Adumim settlement bloc, east of Jerusalem, and announce the expanded borders of the city in line with the path of the wall, with an area of approximately 290 km². This way Trump would have recognized “Greater Jerusalem” rather than Jerusalem only. This attempt faced two main difficulties; the first is the international rejection represented mainly by the Russian and European positions, and even the position of the US Democratic Party, as these parties consider the expansion of Jerusalem to the east, until the Jordan Valley, practically a comprehensive end to the two-state solution. The other obstacle was popular action, especially in the Bedouin community in Abu Nuwar village and its surroundings. This community was the center of this confrontation, although it includes only 180 citizens,¹²⁹ while the total area threatened with eviction is home to around 2,400 people. The action was backed by the PA given the political sensitivity of Khan al-Ahmar file, and groups of foreign activists, which strengthened the position of this community.

On 24/5/2018, the Israeli High Court of Justice issued a final decision to demolish the communities of Khan al-Ahmar.¹³⁰ Israeli army bulldozers tried to remove the Abu Nuwar community and its surroundings several times during the period 23/6–19/10/2018 but failed under popular and international pressure. Even Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC), Fatou Bensouda, announced on 17/10/2018 that she would consider the extensive destruction of Khan al-Ahmar “without military necessity and population transfers in an occupied territory constitute war crimes under the Rome Statute” and that she would “not hesitate to take appropriate action” in this context.¹³¹ Consequently, the Israeli government announced the postponement of its plan to demolish Khan al-Ahmar indefinitely.¹³²

This retreat has turned into a constant headline of the right-wing opposition to Netanyahu, and the current Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has been the loudest in demanding Netanyahu demolish Khan al-Ahmar,¹³³ which puts him today under pressure to implement what he was demanding before. On 23/7/2021, after the



extremist right-wing organization Regavim had petitioned the High Court of Justice to force the state to demolish the Khan al-Ahmar structures, the court gave the Bennett government a deadline to render its opinion on the pending demolition.¹³⁴ The government responded on 5/9/2022 by requesting an additional six-month deadline ending on 5/3/2022, which threatens to return the Khan al-Ahmar case to the fore again in 2022.¹³⁵

d. Land Registration Project¹³⁶

On 13/5/2018, the Israeli government issued Decision 3790 titled “Narrowing Socioeconomic Gaps and Promoting Economic Development in East Jerusalem.” The most important item was the land registration arrangement in the city. This decision came to invest in successive decades of ownership uncertainty, lack of registration and property fragmentation among heirs, as 10% of the lands of East Jerusalem were registered in the Land Registry upon completion of its occupation in 1967. The “Absentees’ Property Law” considered whoever was residing outside occupied Palestine at the time of the war as “absentee” and his property was placed under the “Custodian of Absentee Property.” Thus, Jerusalemites refrained from registering their property so that the Israeli government would not become a partner in their ownership. For decades, “irrevocable agency” has become a common method for expressing the sale of real estate. Also, the property became fragmented among a large number of heirs, some of whom remained in Jerusalem and some left, in addition, there are many leased endowment properties with occupants acting as if they were owners, although they do not have any document proving their ownership except by way of adverse possession.

Decision 3790 sought to invest in the complex reality caused by Israeli government procedures. It would allow the transfer of large properties to the state treasury due to the absence of their owners or the lack of sufficient proof documents. It would also turn Israelis into potential partners when the relatives of the owner are traveling or are refugees outside Palestine. The Israeli settlement committees have worked on sensitive areas, including Ard al-Naqqā‘ in Sheikh Jarrah besides large areas in Sur Baher, Beit Hanina, and Beit Safafa, which necessitates adopting a collective and national stance rejecting the land registration project and any cooperation with its committees, so that the “Custodian of Absentee Property” does not become a partner in most of the properties of Jerusalemites.

e. Deportation Policy

Israeli authorities use the deportation from *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the Old City, parts of Jerusalem, or even the city of Jerusalem in general as a primary tool to suppress activists and community leaders, trying to deprive them of influence. They consider deportation from *al-Aqsa* a deterrent that would alter the behavior of *Murabitun* and make them avoid confrontation to ensure their ability to reach the Mosque. It would also get rid of clashes scenes in *al-Aqsa* Mosque that incite people against the Israeli authorities. This was particularly true after the 2015 events, in which the attacks against the female *Murabitun* instigated the stabbing operations in Jerusalem. In addition to deportation, the Israeli authorities issue orders preventing Jerusalemite activists from communication and travel, which means isolating them from their natural Palestinian depth in WB, and from their Arab and Muslim depth, hence reducing the level of Arab and Islamic popular interaction with the confrontations in Jerusalem.

The Palestinian National Information Center has cited Wadi Hilweh Information Center—Silwanic for statistics on orders of deportation and prevention of communication throughout 2020–2021, as follows:

Table 6/3: Deportation Orders From Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* and Prohibition of Communication and Travel Targeting Jerusalemites 2020–2021¹³⁷

Deportation orders	Deportation and ban orders	2020	2021
	Deportation from <i>al-Aqsa</i>	315	357
	Deportation from the Old City	33	110
	Deportation from Jerusalem	15	31
	Total	363	498
Ban orders	Ban on entry to WB	4	11
	Travel ban	8	NA
	Total	12	11

3. Demolition of Homes and Structures

According to the figures of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs – occupied Palestinian territory (OCHA-oPt), the number of structures demolished over the past four years was as follows:

Table 7/3: Demolished Structures in Jerusalem 2018–2021¹³⁸

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
No. of structures	178	206	175	181

By adding the outcome of these years to the demolition of facilities throughout 2000–2017, which amounted to 1,352 structures,¹³⁹ the total demolition in Jerusalem throughout 2000–2021 becomes 2,092, mostly residential buildings.

Third: Settlement Expansion in the WB

It is difficult to determine accurate numbers of Jewish settlers in WB, as Israeli statistics deliberately omit the numbers of settlers in East Jerusalem. Some discretion is also applied to statistics concerning the rest of WB, perhaps to assuage Palestinian and international reactions to the settlement programs. According to a 2021 report issued by Ya'akov Katz, in charge of Settlement Affairs and the former head of the National Union party, the number of settlers in WB (including eastern Jerusalem) was 800 thousand, with an increase of 2.62% in 2020 and 17% over the last five years (2016–2020).¹⁴⁰ In contrast, the Director-General of the Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem (ARIJ), specialists in land and settlement affairs in WB, stated on 1/11/2021 that the WB (including East Jerusalem) had approximately 913 thousand settlers.¹⁴¹

The same difficulty applies to determining the number of Jewish settlements in WB. Peace Now data indicate the existence of 132 large settlements and 141 other outposts.¹⁴² However, the number of settlements in the WB reached 199 according to ARIJ, in addition to 220 outposts in late 2021.¹⁴³ A report published by *Israel Hayom* newspaper spoke of the presence of 150 settlements in the WB, excluding East Jerusalem.¹⁴⁴ In any case, in addition to the intentional Israeli official ambiguity, there is a problem associated with the Israeli definition of what is “official” and what is “unofficial,” as well as with the definition of outposts, whether they are temporary or have acquired a permanent nature and waiting to be officially “legitimized.” In general, Israeli Peace Now reports tend to be conservative and understate settlement figures.

Reports indicate that the Higher Planning Council of the Israeli Civil Administration has approved 12,159 settlement units from the beginning of 2020 until mid-October of the same year.¹⁴⁵ As for 2021, ARIJ reported that the Israeli authorities deposited 113 settlement plans in 62 settlements to build more than 17 thousand settler units on more than 13 thousand donums.¹⁴⁶ According to the Land Research Center (LRC), in WB, 55 settlements were expanded in 2021, 15 new outposts were established, and 25 new bypass roads were built.¹⁴⁷

In 2021, the shepherds' outposts increased, with support from the Israeli authorities, through the arrival of settlers with herds of sheep or cows and their control over large open areas belonging to Palestinians, under the pretext of grazing. This leads to the confiscation of large areas of land to expand settlements besides terrorism by settlers and the destruction of crops.¹⁴⁸

Aggression on land included targeting Palestinian archaeological sites in WB. At the end of February 2021, the Israeli army issued military orders targeting 601 archaeological and historical sites claiming that they were Israeli archaeological sites. The announcement included 219 locations in the Jericho governorate, 117 locations in Ramallah governorate, 117 locations in the Nablus governorate, and 32 locations in the Jerusalem governorate.¹⁴⁹

Eviatar Outpost on Jabal Sabih

This outpost was established during Netanyahu's term and just before the beginning of the Bennett government's path, and instead of evacuating it, the Bennett government "agreed to leave the buildings in the area and place soldiers to guard them, while promising to legalize the outpost if it turns out to be legally possible. Since then, the soldiers have been subjected to daily attacks by stones and fireworks, and in clashes with the demonstrators, at least seven Palestinians have been killed" by Israeli army fire.¹⁵⁰

Settlers took advantage of the recent uprising in Jerusalem and the GS war to return to the outpost with mobile homes under the protection of the Israeli army, as part of a plan to consolidate their presence and turn the place into a permanent settlement. Jabal Sabih is located between three Palestinian villages: Qabalan, Yatma, and Beita, south of Nablus. It is owned by Palestinians from the three villages, who have documents proving their ownership and have always expressed readiness to submit them through lawyers to the Israeli courts.¹⁵¹



Route 55

In continuation of the Israeli policies supporting settlement expansion in the WB, the occupation forces began on 16/8/2021 razing large areas of Palestinian lands belonging to the city of Qalqilya, the town of Azzun, and the village of al-Nabi Elias, to implement a settlement plan aimed at expanding settler Route 55 linking Qalqilya and Nablus. The Israeli authorities approved the expansion of a section of this route, which links the settlements in the Qalqilya governorate with the settlements within the Green Line, at the expense of Palestinians' agricultural lands south of Qalqilya. The authorities call this section the "nursery route" and prohibit Palestinians from entering it except if they have a special permit.¹⁵²

After revealing a plan to expand settlements adjacent to the aforementioned route to build 5,650 new settlement units in the next few years, objections were filed by 35 Palestinian plant nursery owners whose lands will be expropriated for the highway construction, which is located entirely in the WB, but before a military checkpoint, and therefore mainly Israeli cars travel on it. The objections submitted by the owners of land and nurseries were rejected by the Higher Planning Council of the Civil Administration, arguing that this was not under its purview. The Civil Administration claimed that the expansion of the road served Palestinians who use it, while barely 250 Palestinian cars travel on this route. The route is part of a larger plan to expand Route 55, which is being expanded in stretches.

The owners of these nurseries fear the expanded service roads, besides Route 55, which will lead to the confiscation of a very large area of their land and the complete elimination of their nurseries. On both sides of this route are 14 agricultural nurseries employing hundreds of workers and providing a livelihood for about 500 families, in addition to the presence of four artesian wells.

It can be said that the main objective of this settlement project is to separate Qalqilya and the town of Habla, by seizing agricultural lands between them, thus opening the way to link the city of Kfar Saba within the 1948 occupied territories with Alfei Menashe settlement, which will negatively affect the Palestinian presence between them.¹⁵³

Land Confiscation

The years 2020–2021 witnessed the confiscation of about 41,095 donums of Palestinian lands in WB, for security reasons, establishing new settlements or

expanding existing ones, expanding bypass roads for the benefit of settlers, or linking settlements through a network of settlers' bypass roads or to expand these roads.

In 2021, more than 24,750 donums¹⁵⁴ of Palestinian land were confiscated in WB and Jerusalem in favor of settlement activity, while in 2020, more than 16,345 donums were confiscated and 1,650 donums of agricultural land were bulldozed to expand settlements and outposts, according to 2020 figures.¹⁵⁵

For example, in January 2021, in Khallet Hassan of Bidhya town, Salbit, the Israeli forces bulldozed an area of agricultural lands threatened by confiscation and uprooted olive and grape trees. The Israeli authorities also issued a military order to confiscate an area of Palestinian lands in Bethlehem governorate, and another military order to confiscate 1,008 donums of Palestinian lands near the settlement of Alfei Menashe.¹⁵⁶ In the following month, a group of settlers did settlement work on the Palestinian citizens' lands to expand the boundaries of the settlement of Yitzhar. In addition, the occupation forces razed Palestinian lands on the southern side of Ematin village – Qalqilya, near Emmanuel settlement's industrial zone to expand the industrial site, in addition to expanding Maskiot settlement established in the northern Jordan Valley. The occupation forces issued another order to confiscate 193 donums of lands from Deir Dibwan and Ramon village located east of Ramallah and al-Bireh governorate, to establish a landfill for the benefit of settlers.¹⁵⁷

Demolition of Homes and Structures

The demolition of Palestinian homes and facilities by the Israeli authorities during the period covered by the report witnessed a significant increase compared to the previous years. In 2020, they demolished 854 Palestinian homes and structures, which resulted in the displacement of 1,001 citizens and leaving them without shelter, compared to the demolition of 905 Palestinian homes and structures in 2021, resulting in the displacement of 1,205 Palestinians.¹⁵⁸

Field documentation by OCHA-oPt showed a significant increase in demolitions carried out by Israel against Palestinian homes and facilities during the reporting period. The Israeli authorities claim that demolitions are due to a lack of permits or security reasons in addition to demolishing the homes of martyrs' families or those executing resistance operations, as a form of collective punishment.



Table 8/3: Demolitions of Homes and Structures in WB and People Displaced 2017–2021¹⁵⁹

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Demolished homes and structures	421	468	628	854	905
People displaced	664	472	907	1,001	1,205

The Separation Wall

No significant developments were witnessed in the reporting period regarding the construction of the Separation Wall in WB, as most of the main stages of work were completed several years ago, except for a few parts that were completed in the past three years. Also, there has been no increase in the length of the Wall's route reaching 708 kilometers. This does not mean that Israel will abandon work on the Wall, but indicates the absence of important developments due to the completion of the basic parts separating the WB and Jerusalem from Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 and 1967, in addition to the completion of isolation of WB settlements from their surroundings.

In December 2021, Israel announced the completion of the construction of a security barrier along the GS borders with the 1948 occupied territories. According to the Israeli PM's spokesman Ofir Gendelman, the Israeli army completed after three and a half years the construction of the smart security barrier, surrounding GS, and extended over 65 kilometers, to prevent infiltrations into Israel.¹⁶⁰

The Barriers

The year 2021 witnessed an unprecedented leap in the number of barriers including fixed and flying (temporary) Israeli military checkpoints that cut off roads deep in WB, preventing communication between the governorates of WB, on the one hand, and between the centers of Palestinian cities, villages and towns surrounding them, on the other hand. The number of barriers including fixed and flying Israeli military checkpoints reached 4,210 in 2021 compared to 705 in 2020. Most Israeli military checkpoints are concentrated in the cities of Hebron, Ramallah and Nablus in particular.¹⁶¹ The following table provides a summary of the most prominent violations of the Israeli occupation and its settlers:

**Table 9/3: Violations of the Israeli Occupation and its Settlers in the WB
2020–2021¹⁶²**

	2020	2021
Settlers' violence	698 attacks	1,032 attacks
Cutting, burning or destroying trees	10,105 trees	20,309 trees
Land confiscation	16,345 donums confiscated and 1,650 donums bulldozed	24,750 donums
Homes and Structures demolished by the occupation	854 Homes and structures inhabited by about 1,001 citizens	905 Homes and structures inhabited by about 1,205 citizens
Barriers	705	4,210

Conclusion

Al-Aqsa Mosque was the reason for seven popular confrontations over the past 25 years, including five successive uprisings in July 2014, October 2015, July 2017, February 2019, and May 2021, with an average of 17 months between each of them. At each milestone, these confrontations have increased their mobilization capabilities and were able to impose setbacks. The trigger of such uprisings is the continuous Israeli attempt to resolve the status of *al-Aqsa* and impose radical changes to its identity. Given the continuation of this central motive, the next uprising, according to this pattern, is expected approximately in September 2022. However, given the extrapolation of the field situation and the Hijri–Hebrew congruence, the month of Ramadan and its third week coinciding with the period 16–22/4/2022 may witness the eruption of the next uprising.

The struggle over Sheikh Jarrah, the prevention of the forced displacement of its residents and also those of Silwan, the confrontation over the demolition policies, and the struggle over the Damascus Gate Plaza were the reasons for confrontations, along with the central trigger represented in *al-Aqsa*. All these elements are still interacting, with the possibility of the Khan al-Ahmar evacuation issue joining in March 2022. This complex scene along with the confrontations over settlement building and the Wall in WB, the harsh conditions of prisons, the GS siege and the prevention of reconstruction there, the marginalization of the Arab and Muslim



identity in the 1948 occupied territories, and the continued attempts to displace the Palestinians in the Negev, form a network of intertwined elements heading towards a new peak whose events would be in Jerusalem, at least as a trigger for the uprising. Notably, over time, these uprisings could impose Israeli retreats similar to those done by an organized popular uprising, albeit over a longer period.

Endnotes

- ¹ The Temple Institute formed the institution that laid the foundations of knowledge for the extremist Temple groups. Since 1987, it has been working on a conception of the alleged temple, its shape, construction, the rituals to be performed in it, the tools of religious worship and the dress of priests. In 2008, it inaugurated a new headquarters at the northwestern edge of Western Wall plaza. It consists of four floors and includes a space to display all these models, collectibles and imaginary drawings under the name “Mount Temple Museum.” See Holy Temple Museum, site of Temple Institute, <https://templeinstitute.org/holy-temple-museum>
- ² For the balances of the Netanyahu-Gantz coalition, see Ofer Kenig, Israel’s 35th Government: A Portrait, site of The Israel Democracy Institute, 17/5/2020, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/31613>
- ³ Hisham Yaqoub et al., *‘Ain ‘ala al-Aqsa: Taqrir Tawthiqi Yarsud al-I’tida’at ‘ala al-Masjid al-Aqsa fi al-Fatrah ma bayna 1/8/2020 wa hatta 1/8/2021* (Eye on al-Aqsa: An Annual Documentary Report Monitoring Israeli Aggressions on al-Aqsa Mosque During the Period 1/8/2020 until 1/8/2021), Report no. 15 (Beirut: Al-Quds International Institution, 2021).
- ⁴ Ibid., p. 64.
- ⁵ Ibid., p. 63.
- ⁶ Ofir Kenig, Israel’s 36th Government – By the Numbers, The Israel Democracy Institute, 9/6/2021, <https://en.idi.org.il/articles/34687>
- ⁷ The table is a summary of the researcher’s documentation. Published in detail with names and parties in Hisham Yaqoub et al., *‘Ain ‘ala al-Aqsa*, Report no. 15, pp. 62–70.
- ⁸ Israeli Minister Calls for Allowing Jews to Pray at Temple Mount, site of Jewish Journal, 14/8/2019, <https://jewishjournal.com/israel/303001/israeli-minister-calls-for-allowing-jews-to-pray-at-temple-mount/>
- ⁹ Israeli Minister Calls to Allow Jewish Prayer in al-Aqsa, Anadolu Agency, 13/8/2019. (in Arabic)
- ¹⁰ Netanyahu Promises Jewish Prayer on Temple Mount “Before the Messiah Comes” But Security Minister Says Sooner than that, site of Israel365News, 30/8/2019, <https://www.israel365news.com/136305/netanyahus-promises-jewish-prayer-on-temple-mount-before-the-messiah-comes-but-security-minister-says-sooner-than-that>
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Documented by the researcher quoting eyewitnesses who said that the policeman Ibrahim Sa‘id, of Arab origin, was accompanying the group of intruders between 7–8 a.m., and when a number of *al-Aqsa* guards objected to the settlers performing rituals and prayers inside the Mosque, Sa‘id told them in a threatening tone that what the settlers had done was acceptable, and that the guards should accept it against their will, and that their objections to these rituals would not be heard.
- ¹³ See the right-wing news website “Srugim,” 21/7/2020 <https://www.srugim.co.il/471962-%D7%9C%D7%90-%D7%99%D7%A%D7%9B%D7%9F-%D7%A9%D7%A7%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%90%D7%A-%D7%A9%D7%9E%D7%A2-%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%AA%D7%94%D7%99%D7%94-%D7%A2%D7%91%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%94-%D7%A4%D7%9C%D7%99> (in Hebrew)
- ¹⁴ A supplication that opens the morning and evening prayers in Judaism and is derived from the Hebrew “shema” which means hearing, and its beginning is “Hear, O Israel, The Lord our God, the Lord is one.” (Deuteronomy 6:4). The complete supplication includes chapters from 4 to 9 of Deuteronomy. See Abd al-Wahhab al-Masiri, *Mawsu‘at al-Yahud wa al-Yahudiyyah wa al-Suhyuniyyah* (Encyclopedia of Jews, Judaism and Zionism), Volume Five: Judaism: Concepts and Differences (Cairo: Dar al-Shorouk, 1999), p. 229.



- ¹⁵ See for example: 1,100 Settlers Break into al-Aqsa on the Day of Arafah, Aljazeera.net, 30/7/2020. (in Arabic)
- ¹⁶ Circular no. 1/4/18/1210 issued on 28/7/2020 by Director General of Jerusalem Awqaf Department.
- ¹⁷ Extremist Rabbi Glick Blows the Trumpet at the Lions' Gate, Safa, 25/8/2020.
- ¹⁸ *Haaretz*, 17/9/2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/israel-s-3-week-lockdown-explained-the-dos-don-ts-and-the-open-questions-1.9154501>
- ¹⁹ Site of Al-Quds City, 6/12/2020, <https://www.alquds-city.com/index.php?s=news&id=35641>
- ²⁰ Temple Forum Demands Netanyahu to Allow Lighting Hannukah in al-Aqsa, site of al-Bosala, 14/12/2020, <https://albosala.com/>
- ²¹ The Times of Israel, 7/3/2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/israel-reopens-all-the-new-rules-from-march-7>
- ²² Site of Al-Quds City, 2/4/2021, <https://alquds-city.com/index.php?s=1&id=36514>
- ²³ Reuters, 18/4/2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-rescinds-outdoor-coronavirus-mask-requirement-2021-04-18>
- ²⁴ *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 4/4/2021, <https://www.addustour.com>
- ²⁵ *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 30/4/2021, <https://alghad.com>
- ²⁶ The pages of the temple organizations began circulating the countdown on 22/4/2021, that is 18 days before the expected date of the storming. See the official page of Temple Organizations Headquarters, site of Facebook, <https://web.facebook.com/mikdashx/photos/a.693969914031184/3987367318024744/?type=3&theater>
- ²⁷ Aljazeera.net, 2/5/2021. (in Arabic)
- ²⁸ The Times of Israel, 21/5/2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hateful-rioting-in-lod-gives-way-to-cautious-rebuilding-but-unease-persists>
- ²⁹ *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 15/5/2021, <https://www.alaraby.com/news/%D8%B3%D9%8A%D8%A7%D8%B3%D8%A9-23790>
- ³⁰ *Arabi21*, 3/5/2021.
- ³¹ *Al-‘Arabi al-Jadid*, 23/5/2021.
- ³² *Israel Hayom* newspaper, 18/7/2021, <https://www.israelhayom.co.il/judaism/judaism-news/article/3455397> (in Hebrew)
- ³³ Site of Channel 12, 18/7/2021, https://www.mako.co.il/news-israel/2021_q3/Article-95175b3f116ba71027.htm (in Hebrew). Report published on the page of Temple Organizations Headquarters, site of Youtube, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_EuftX6Zje4
- ³⁴ The Times of Israel, 18/7/2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bennett-speaks-of-freedom-of-worship-for-jews-on-temple-mount>
- ³⁵ Bennett backtracks on Jews' religious freedom on Temple Mount, *The Jerusalem Post* newspaper, 19/7/2021, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/prime-ministers-office-freedom-of-worship-statement-was-incorrect-674290>; and Lapid: We've reassured Jordan there's no change to Temple Mount status quo, The Times of Israel, 19/7/2021, https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/lapid-weve-reassured-jordan-theres-no-change-to-temple-mount-status-quo/
- ³⁶ During this season, the following historical attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque took place: *Al-Aqsa* massacre on 8/10/1990, the opening of the tunnel on 24/9/1996, which led to the Tunnel Uprising and Ariel Sharon's storming of *al-Aqsa* on 28/9/2000. Also, the attempt to impose complete temporal division on 14 and 15/9/2015, then on 28 and 29/9/2015, which led to the launch of the Knives Uprising with the resistance operation of Muhannad al-Halabi on 3/10/2015.
- ³⁷ A post on the page of "Return to the Temple Mount," Facebook, 9/9/2021.

- ³⁸ Posts by Arnon Segal and Tom Nissani on their pages, Facebook, 9/9/2021.
- ³⁹ The Israeli forces completed their withdrawal from *al-Aqsa* on Thursday 15/6/1967, in preparation for the return of the call to prayer (*Adhan*) and prayers there, and for the Friday prayer, as the Muslim leaders refused to perform prayer there, as long as the Israeli soldiers were in it. Faced with its need to give international legitimacy to its occupation, the Israeli forces acquiesced to this condition, and completed their withdrawal on Thursday eve, and next day, on 16/6/1967, Friday prayers were held in *al-Aqsa*, marking the first Friday after its occupation. See ‘Abd al-Hamid al-Sa’ih, *La Salat Tahta al-Hirab* (No Prayer under Spears) (Beirut: Institute for Palestine Studies, n.d.).
- ⁴⁰ English Translation of the live broadcast from Jerusalem on 7/6/1967 from “Voice of Israel Radio,” site of Jewish Virtual Library, <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-liberation-of-the-temple-mount-and-western-wall-june-1967>
- ⁴¹ With the end of the Jewish Holiday Season: What Price did al-Aqsa Pay and What are the Prospects?, Aljazeera.net, 27/9/2021. (in Arabic)
- ⁴² Ibid.
- ⁴³ Statement by Al-Quds International Institution, site of Al-Quds City, 23/9/2021.
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- ⁴⁶ Metonic cycle, site of Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/science/Metonic-cycle>
- ⁴⁷ The closure of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Global Figures, the European Catastrophe, and the Dath Toll and Infections from Corona in the Arab countries, Aljazeera.net, 23/3/2020. (in Arabic)
- ⁴⁸ Friday Prayers Canceled in Mosques across Israel, West Bank amid Coronavirus Fears, *Haaretz*, 22/3/2020, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/palestinians/.premium-friday-prayers-canceled-in-mosques-across-israel-west-bank-amid-coronavirus-fears-1.8693757>
- ⁴⁹ Temple Mount closed to both Jews, Muslims over coronavirus, Al-Monitor, 29/4/2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2020/04/israel-jordan-palestinians-benjamin-netanyahu-king-abdullah.html>
- ⁵⁰ A Jordanian government source to Arabi21: Al-Aqsa is closed in agreement with Israel, Arabi21, 11/5/2020.
- ⁵¹ *The Jerusalem Post*, 14/5/2020, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/state-wont-reveal-if-it-has-deal-with-jordan-banning-jews-on-temple-mount-627989>
- ⁵² Sources to Arabi 21: Israel Employs Corona to Impose Change in al-Aqsa, Arabi21, 9/5/2020, quoting well-informed sources in Jerusalem Endowments.
- ⁵³ According to a post published by the Jerusalem Mayor Moshe Leon, on 10/5/2020 on his Facebook page published on 10/5/2020 on his Facebook page, in which he announced, “This Sunday evening, all restrictions imposed on shops in towns and suburbs of the Arab community have been cancelled.”
- ⁵⁴ Site of Al-Quds City, 22/5/2020, <https://alquds-city.com/index.php?s=news&cat=33&id=34254>
- ⁵⁵ Site of Jerusalem Online, 2/6/2020, <https://www.jerusalemonline.com/temple-mount-reopens-to-public/>
- ⁵⁶ Anadolu Agency, 16/9/2020. (in Arabic)
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- ⁶⁰ Site of Al-Quds City, 26/1/2021, <https://alquds-city.com/news/36057>
- ⁶¹ Site of Nawres, 15/2/2021, <http://www.nawres.net/archives/74813>
- ⁶² Site of Al-Quds City, 17/8/2021, <https://alquds-city.com/index.php?s=1&id=37333>
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- ⁶⁵ Documented by the researcher based on eyewitnesses.
- ⁶⁶ Wafa, 13/4/2021, <http://www.wafa.ps/Pages/Details/21785> (in Arabic)
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- ⁷¹ Al Qastal, 25/11/2021, <https://alqastal.org/?p=10828>
- ⁷² Al Qastal, 28/8/2021, <https://alqastal.org/?p=7974>
- ⁷³ Al Qastal, 1/10/2021, <https://alqastal.org/?p=8662>
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Chapter Four

*The Courses of Aggression, Resistance
and the Peace Process*

The Courses of Aggression, Resistance and the Peace Process

Introduction

In 2020 and 2021, the Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people persisted, while resistance to the occupation escalated. In May 2021, the Sword of Jerusalem Battle marked the peak of Palestinian resistance during the period covered by the report, as resistance multiplied in WB. The PA's security coordination with Israel continued its obstructive role to the resistance in WB, and was halted only for a period of six months. As for the stalemate peace process, it was compounded by the practical failure of the two-state solution, while Israel continued to change facts on the ground, imposing its own vision of the final settlement.

First: The Israeli Aggression and Palestinian Resistance

Throughout 2020 and 2021, Israel continued its aggression against the Palestinian people, who persisted in their resistance. Despite the security coordination between the PA and the Israeli army in WB, individual resistance operations and other forms of popular resistance continued.

In GS, Palestinian resistance adopted an attack strategy to defend Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was manifested in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed *Operation Guardian of the Walls* by Israel), launched in May 2021 and led by the Hamas movement, along with the Palestinian resistance factions. In 2021, in the aftermath of this operation, GS witnessed a sharp increase in Palestinian rocket fire aimed at Israeli towns and cities; according to Shabak, 4,575 rockets were launched in 2021, most of them during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (4,500 rockets), compared to 197 rockets and mortars shells launched in 2020.¹ In 2020 and 2021, Israel also continued to close the GS's crossings and tighten the blockade.

While 2020 marked a decrease in resistance operations compared to 2019, 2021 saw a significant increase. The Shabak recorded 1,513 attacks in 2020, compared

to 4,386 in 2021 in WB, including East Jerusalem, GS, and inside the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948. Consequently, the monthly average of attacks during 2021 was three times that of 2020. The Shabak recorded 912 attacks in WB (excluding Jerusalem) in 2020, compared to 1,539 throughout 2021. It recorded 336 attacks in East Jerusalem and inside the 1948 occupied territories, in 2020, compared to 524 in 2021. It should be noted that most of the attacks in 2021 in WB consisted of throwing firebombs (1,516), 245 arson attacks, 142 pipe bombs, 93 small-arms fire, and 8 vehicular attacks, among others. However, this number should always be viewed as an indication of the rising resistance in a difficult and complex security environment, where the resistance has been systematically persecuted for many years, with full coordination between the PA and Israel. In GS, the Shabak recorded 265 attacks in 2020, compared to 2,323 in 2021. Most of the attacks recorded in 2021 were in GS: with 2,256 rocket launches (mostly in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle), 37 arson attacks and 11 small-arms fire incidents. It should be noted that the Shabak reports count operations that come from the Egyptian Sinai under its GS records, although these are few in number compared to those originating from the GS.²

Table 1/4: Geographical Distribution of Palestinian Resistance Operations 2020–2021, According to Shabak³

Year	WB (Jerusalem excluded)	The 1948 occupied territories and East Jerusalem*	GS**	Total
2020	912	336	265	1,513
2021	1,539	524	2,323	4,386
Total	2,451	860	2,588	5,899

* Reports by the Israeli Shabak included the operations of East Jerusalem with those in the 1948 occupied territories.

** Including the Sinai Peninsula.

It seems there are discrepancies in the Israeli reports themselves regarding the number of attacks and the way they are categorized; especially those associated with popular resistance. For example, the Israeli Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) and the *Jerusalem Post* published statistics that showed the Israeli army reported 5,532 stone-throwing incidents in 2021; while the Shabak mentioned only 10.

As for Hamas, it reported 10,850 resistance acts in 2021 in WB, including East Jerusalem, among them 441 effective (armed) operations. It stated that effective operations quadrupled compared to the previous year; while the total number of operations, including popular resistance, was double that of 2020.⁴

Table 2/4: Palestinian Resistance Operations in WB 2018–2021, According to Hamas⁵

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Acts of popular resistance*	5,930	5,236	5,433	10,409
Effective operations**	187	167	97	441
Total	6,117	5,402	5,530	10,850

*Including confrontations, throwing stones and firebombs, strikes, demonstrations...

**Including small-arms fire, stabbing, vehicular assault...

Table 3/4: Development of Effective Resistance Acts 2018–2021, According to Hamas⁶

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
Shooting	51	38	29	191
Stabbing or attempted stabbing	39	30	27	41
Vehicular assault or attempted vehicular assault	22	11	11	21
Deployed or dropped improvised explosive device (IED)	74	87	30	55
Arson targeting military facilities, vehicles and posts	1	–	–	112
Downing a drone	–	–	–	3
Other	–	1	–	18
Total	187	167	97	441

The security coordination in WB, despite its suspension for about six months (May–November 2020), detected many resistance cells and thwarted many resistance operations.

Several Israeli security and military sources indicated that security coordination, which has witnessed a significant expansion during PA presidency of Mahmud ‘Abbas, has significantly helped in eliminating the organizational structures of Hamas and prevented the development of resistance operations in WB.⁷ In a report, the *New York Times* stated that the task of the Palestinian police forces is difficult; they are called collaborators, doing the dirty work for Israel’s occupation, while the Israelis routinely treated them with highhandedness and disdain.⁸

In November 2020, the PA announced the return of security coordination after a six-month hiatus. The Palestinian factions labelled it more “subjugation to the Zionist-US hegemony and re-promotion of the illusion,” adding that it was a stab in the back of our people’s hopes for real unity, and a blow to national efforts to build national partnership to confront Israel and its decision regarding the annexation of WB, the Deal of the Century and normalization.⁹ It should be noted that the PA was keen to clarify that suspending security coordination did not mean holding back from “fighting terrorism.” The Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation (Kan) stated that the PA, in an official letter to the Israeli government, stressed that it “has nothing to do with the chaos and violence, and will not allow any breach to public order and the rule of law on its territory,” even during the period of suspended security coordination. This was confirmed by the Secretary of the PLO Executive Committee Saeb Erekat, and the PA Presidency Spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeineh.¹⁰

In June 2020, in his comment on the Palestinian security forces’ thwarting of an operation targeting Israeli soldiers in the outskirts of Jenin, the Palestinian General Political Commissioner and the Spokesperson for the security forces ‘Adnan al-Dumairi confirmed that “the Palestinian state is committed to international agreements against terrorism, and we are not afraid of that. We consider ourselves part of the international and Arab framework against terrorism.”¹¹ In the same vein, the Governor of Jenin, Major General Akram Rajoub, stressed that the security coordination with the Israel was continuing and developing, reiterating that the PA would not allow the presence of resistance factions and weapons because such weapons harm the PA’s relationship with Israel.¹²

In turn, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid noted, during an interview with Israeli Channel 12, that 90% of Israel’s relationship with the PA concerned security coordination.¹³ Israeli General Moshe Elad stated in an interview with

Makan—Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, that the “coordination has been going on since 1995, has never been interrupted, and has not stopped. And when it is announced by the PA that the coordination has been suspended, we must ask ourselves, ‘what does that mean?’” Elad added, “Coordination exists 24 hours a day between the officers on both sides; therefore, when we hear a declaration from the PA, it is a political move, and has no roots on the ground.”¹⁴

1. GS Between Aggression and Calm

In 2020–2021, many rounds of fighting and escalation took place, ranging between short bursts lasting for hours and longer bouts that persisted for 12 days in GS. During these incidents, 4,772 rockets and mortars were fired from GS, killing 17 Israelis and wounding dozens, according to Shabak.¹⁵ The most significant of these rounds was the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.

Contrary to the three major confrontations undertaken by the Palestinian resistance in GS in 2008, 2012, and 2014, this time the resistance took the initiative in military escalation in response to Israel’s violations of the *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the attempts to evict the Palestinian residents from Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in Jerusalem. This was the prelude to several new equations, most notably:¹⁶

- a. The mission of the resistance forces in GS, and the motives for using their weapons, are no longer confined to the Strip; what happened is that the Gaza weapons were used to intervene in support of Jerusalem, *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah, a new development.
- b. Re-establishing the Palestinian right to Jerusalem and refuting Israel’s narrative of its right to Judaize Jerusalem and its neighbourhoods.
- c. The resistance took the initiative this time, and its intervention was not restricted to responding to a direct aggression against it on defensive grounds. A development of this type has important repercussions on the conflict; it shows the boldness of the resistance, and its self-confidence and increased capabilities. It brings back to memory the foundations and essence of the cause: that Israel, even if it is not attacking GS, it is still an occupying, oppressive and racist power, and this makes resistance a duty, not just a right.
- d. Imposing the equation that targeting civilians in GS with hundreds of missiles will mean bombing Tel Aviv in return.



- e. The targeting of the Ramon Airport in southern Palestine, about 220 km from Gaza, with an Ayash 250 missile, covering a range greater than 250 km, indicated that the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948 are within the range of the Palestinian resistance's fire. This came as a surprise to the Israeli army and air force, who believed that the maximum range of the rockets in possession of Hamas did not exceed 160 km.
- f. Unifying all Palestinians across all historic Palestine, including the 1948 occupied territories, and the Diaspora. This was in addition to the major demonstrations of solidarity in Jordan, Lebanon, the Arab and Muslim world, and countries all over the world.
- g. The return of the Palestine issue to the fore of Arab, regional and international attention; particularly regarding promoting the Palestinian narrative and refuting Israeli propaganda.

Despite the achievements that Israel claimed, it incurred tangible losses in that confrontation. During and after the stand-off, the debate arose in its political, military and media circles about its failure, and the eventual upper hand of the Palestinians after the successes achieved by the resistance.¹⁷

On Monday, 10/5/2021, at six o'clock in the evening, Ezzedeem al-Qassam Brigades launched a missile strike on the occupied Palestinian territories in Jerusalem, in response to Israel's aggression against the Holy City. They first issued an ultimatum to Israel to withdraw its soldiers and those who had stormed the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah, and to release all detainees held in the aftermath of the last Jerusalem uprising by six o'clock that evening.¹⁸

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle continued until dawn on Friday, 21/5/2021, after Egypt had informed the Palestinian factions that a mutual and simultaneous ceasefire agreement had been reached in GS on 20/5/2021. The Israeli Ministerial Council for Political and Security Affairs (Cabinet) announced the unanimous endorsement of a ceasefire in GS, and said that it had agreed to an "unconditional, mutual cease-fire," which meant that both Tel Aviv and Hamas would be absolved of any mutual obligations. The Hamas leader's Media Advisor Taher al-Nono, stressed that the Palestinian resistance would abide by this agreement as long as the occupation did. This was confirmed by the al-Qassam Brigades Spokesperson Abu 'Ubeida, who said, "We fought the battle with honour, will and power on behalf of an entire nation, and the massacres have not been able to stem the tide

of our resistance, nor did it manage to silence our guns and launchers.” He added, “We have accepted the proposed Arab mediation and suspended the missile strike until two o’clock Friday morning,” adding, “The occupation’s leadership is facing a real test, and the decision to launch a missile strike is on the table until two in the morning.”¹⁹

Assessing the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, Amos Harel, a military expert, wrote in the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* that Hamas secured an important military achievement during the battle, showing that the balance of power had begun to somehow change between the two parties. Harel said that the marked improvement of the Palestinian resistance in its long-range shooting, and the significant number of rockets and mortar shells it fired at Israel, was remarkable.²⁰

According to an assessment by the Israeli intelligence services, following the announcement of the ceasefire agreement, Hamas maintained its ability to launch large numbers of rockets at Israel, and the frequency of rocket fire and the intensity of shells recorded during the escalation were the highest ever. According to Shabak, the resistance fired 4,500 rockets and mortar shells from GS, of which 3,400 reached inside Israel.²¹ Israeli estimates indicate that the resistance factions retain about 10 thousand missiles, including hundreds of long-range missiles.²² The editor-in-chief of the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz*, Aluf Benn, described the battle as “Israel’s most failed and pointless border war ever, even when measured against the tough competition from the Champions league of the Second Lebanon War” and previous Gaza wars, stressing that what happened was a serious military and diplomatic failure.²³ The official Israeli TV channel revealed that the Israeli army failed to achieve its goal during the first days of the GS battle, which was to kill Hamas’ leaders.²⁴

Thomas Friedman, in an article in *The New York Times*, stated that the war in GS revealed the weakness of Israel and exposed it to world public opinion. Friedman said that Israel’s use of advanced air power, regardless of what he saw as its justified use and accuracy, was the reason for the release of photos and videos on social media, igniting Israel’s critics around the world.²⁵

Al-Qassam Brigades published pictures and information about its new weapons used during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, including SH85 missile, named after the martyr Muhammad Abu Shammala. It has a range of 85 km and significant destructive power. Al-Qassam also introduced the locally manufactured

Shehab kamikaze unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV), and the locally manufactured Al-Zawari reconnaissance UAV.²⁶ The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Quds Force Commander, Esmail Qaani, said that most of the missiles fired by the Palestinian factions during the battle were made by the fighters themselves.²⁷

During the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, 258 Palestinians were killed,²⁸ including 66 children, 39 women (four pregnant) and 17 elderly people, while 1,948 were wounded, of which 90 were “serious injuries.”²⁹ The Palestinian Ministry of Health in GS revealed that Israel targeted 19 families, thus committing massacres. Israel’s 1,800 raids led to the killing of 91 Palestinians, including 41 children and 25 women.³⁰ Photos published by the al-Qassam Brigades showed that 61 of its members were killed in the battle, including 8 commanders,³¹ while 22 al-Quds Brigades members were killed. The Palestinian Prisoner Club declared that Israeli forces arrested more than 2,400 Palestinians during the battle in WB and the Arab towns of the 1948 occupied territories, pointing to the noticeably high cases of administrative detention.³²

The Ministry of Public Works and Housing in GS announced that the escalation destroyed 1,800 housing units, while 16,800 were partially damaged. It added that five large residential towers were destroyed, in addition to 74 government facilities and headquarters; 66 schools were damaged, three mosques were destroyed and about 40 others were slightly damaged.³³ The Under-Secretary of the Ministry of National Economy in the GS, Rushdi Wadi, announced that Israeli planes had targeted 16 factories in an industrial town, east of Gaza City; half of them were completely destroyed, and the others were partially damaged.³⁴

As for the Israelis, 13 were killed,³⁵ and the Shabak website stated that 168 Israelis were injured in May 2021, but it did not specify the casualties that resulted from the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.³⁶ The *Haaretz* newspaper reported that the number of settlers of the Gaza envelope, including Ashkelon, who requested psychological support during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle was 54% higher than that during the 2014 aggression. It added that psychological treatment was provided to 3,409 people, who had experienced anxiety, fear and trauma in the five centres in the Gaza envelope, while 666 settlers were treated in Ashkelon. Compared to the 2014 GS war, 2,200 settlers were provided with this treatment.³⁷

Following the announcement of the ceasefire, Israel’s economic losses amounted to about 7 billion shekels (roughly \$2.14 billion) according to preliminary

unofficial estimates of an official source at the Israeli Ministry of Finance.³⁸ The Manufacturers Association of Israel, which represents about 1,500 companies and 400 thousand workers, said that Israeli companies lost 1.2 billion shekels (about \$369 million).³⁹

GS Tunnels

The GS tunnels played a pivotal role in the resistance's steadfastness, despite the consecutive wars waged by Israel. Every time, the resistance has emerged with minimal losses in its ranks, while also managing to maintain its military capacity. In his book, *The Subterranean War and Critical Challenges for Our Forces*, former deputy head of the Israel National Security Council (NSC), and former head of the military history department of the Israeli army, Shaul Shay, talked about the "tunnel dilemma," which will turn into a fundamental problem to the Israeli army in any war with the resistance in GS, citing the historical experience in Vietnam for US forces who failed to overcome the tunnel challenge.⁴⁰

During the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, an internal investigation in the Israeli army revealed that the manoeuvre carried out by the Air Force, in which at least 160 combat aircraft were used within hours, failed to achieve its objectives. According to the *Maariv* newspaper, the plan succeeded in destroying a few tunnels, but it failed to debilitate the resistance, where only a few of its men were killed in the operation.⁴¹ Five Israeli officers of the southern command admitted to the failure of a plan developed to eliminate Hamas' tunnel network, where only a small part of the tunnel network was destroyed, killing only few al-Qassam Brigades fighters. In this context, the head of the Hamas movement in GS, Yahya al-Sinwar, confirmed after the battle that the Israeli army destroyed no more than 3% of tunnels in GS.⁴²

In 2020–2021, the Israeli forces sought to limit the efficiency of the tunnels, searching for them. In this regard, in early December 2021 the Israeli army announced that it had completed the construction of a massive iron barrier, a project that had taken about three and a half years to complete. The 65 km barrier lies along the Gaza border and extends out to sea, a 6 m steel fence and an unknown number of meters underground. Construction of the barrier was a massive industrial undertaking, requiring two million cubic meters of concrete and 140 tons of iron and steel plates. A network of radar arrays and other surveillance sensors were installed, and the project required 1,200 workers.⁴³



The cost of the wall was 3.5 billion shekels (about \$1.1 billion). The head of the Israeli army-Defense Ministry security-fence project, Eran Ophir, described the installation as a very complex process in operational, engineering and performance terms, but it had created another means of fencing in the Palestinians, as the wall will surround the entire GS. To the north of the GS, the wall will continue into the sea.⁴⁴ Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz said, “This barrier, a creative, technological project of the first order, denies Hamas one of the capabilities that it tried to develop and puts a wall of iron, sensors and concrete between it and the residents of the south.”⁴⁵

2. The Killed and Wounded

In 2020, a total of 48 Palestinians were killed by the Israelis (see table 4/4), including 9 children, a breastfeeding woman, 2 people with special needs, and 4 prisoners.⁴⁶ In 2021, a total of 365 Palestinians from various cities and towns of Palestine were killed (including 258 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle); 264 were killed in GS, most of them during the war on Gaza in May 2021, while Nablus witnessed the highest number of those killed among WB governorates: 22, followed by Jenin with 20, then Ramallah with 16, Hebron with 10, and Jerusalem with nine. Also, two were killed in the 1948 occupied territories. Among those killed were 18 children and 61 Palestinian women, who were shot by the Israeli forces and settlers in both the GS and WB, including Jerusalem.⁴⁷ 2,614 Palestinians were injured in 2020, compared to more than 17,042 in 2021.⁴⁸

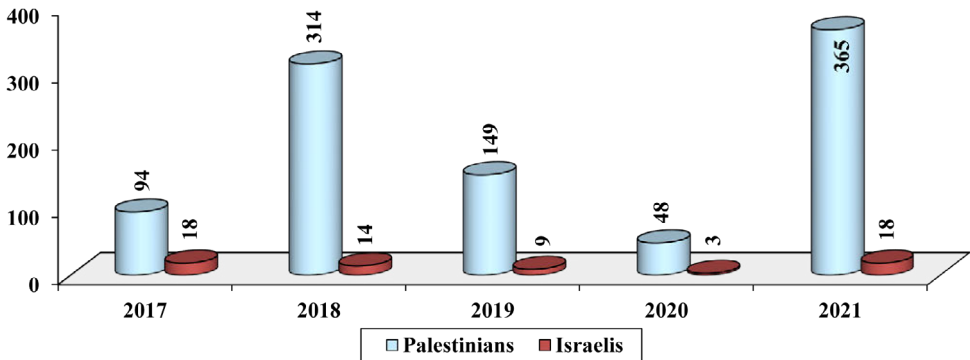
The Shabak recorded the killing of 3 Israelis in 2020, while in 2021, it recorded the killing of 18 Israelis (including 15 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle) because of Palestinian operations. In addition, 46 Israelis were wounded in 2020, compared to 190 (including 168 in May 2021 during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle) in 2021 (see table 4/4).⁴⁹

The policy of extrajudicial killings at the checkpoints continued using false pretexts. In 2016, Israel returned to the policy of withholding Palestinian bodies, and in 2020–2021 it continued with this, delaying handing them over to their families for burial. It is still withholding 90 bodies in morgues, and has long withheld the remains of 250 Palestinians in the so called “cemeteries of numbers.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, as part of the Israeli collective punishment policy, 6 Palestinian houses were blown up and demolished in 2020, and 3 in 2021, where these houses belong to the families of Palestinians killed or imprisoned by Israel and accused of carrying out attacks against the Israelis.⁵¹

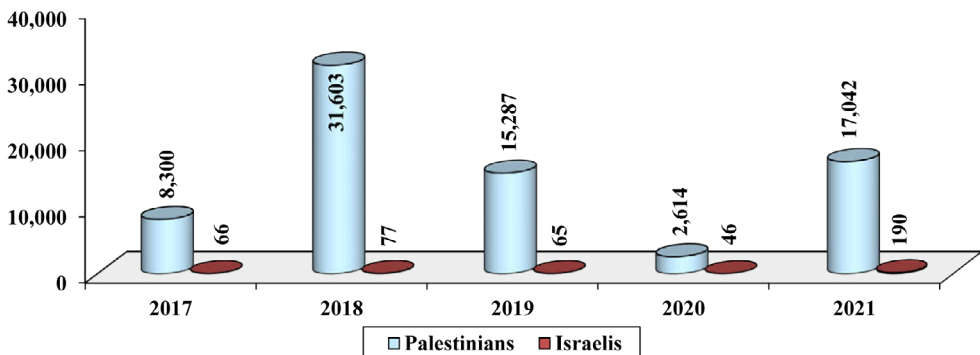
Table 4/4: The Killed and Wounded Among Palestinians and Israelis in WB and GS 2017–2021⁵²

Year	Killed		Wounded	
	Palestinian	Israeli	Palestinian	Israeli
2017	94	18	8,300	66
2018	314	14	31,603	77
2019	149	9	15,287	65
2020	48	3	2,614	46
2021	365	18	17,042	190

Palestinians and Israelis Killed in WB and GS 2017–2021



Palestinians and Israelis Wounded in WB and GS 2017–2021



3. Prisoners and Detainees

In 2020 and 2021 the suffering of Palestinian prisoners continued. By the end of December 2021, the number of prisoners in Israeli prisons reached approximately 4,550, of whom 32 were women, 170 children, and 8 PLC members. There were 4,250 prisoners from WB, of whom 350 were from East Jerusalem, 230 from GS and 70 from the 1948 territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 500 of the prisoners were classified as administrative detainees, or detainees pending trial, or what Israel calls “unlawful combatants” (see table 5/4).

In December 2020, there were 4,400 in Israeli prisons, including 41 women, 170 children, and 8 PLC members. There were 4,075 prisoners from WB, of whom 310 were from East Jerusalem, 255 from GS and 70 from the 1948 occupied territories, in addition to dozens of Arab detainees of different nationalities. 380 were classified as administrative detainees among the prisoners (see table 5/4).

The Palestine Center for Prisoners Studies monitored the increase in arrests in 2021 and indicated that it had been the highest for 18 years. The centre recorded 8 thousand arrests, including of 1,266 children and 118 women and girls.⁵³ This marked an increase of 60% over 2020, where 4,700 were arrested, including 550 children and 178 women and girls.⁵⁴

The arrests in 2020 and 2021, as in previous years, affected all segments and groups of Palestinian society, including children, women, academics, released prisoners, patients, the elderly, human rights activists, journalists, and parliamentarians. They were carried out in ways that included storming into homes or hospitals, abduction from the street and the workplace, the kidnapping of the sick and injured, via the “Arabized undercover security units,” or at the crossings and checkpoints; plus there were dozens of fishermen arrested at sea in GS.

However, the pattern of arrests was non-linear throughout 2020, with an average of 392 detentions per month, about 13 per day. In 2021, the average number of arrests increased significantly, reaching 667 detainees per month, and an average of about 22 cases daily.

The highest number of arrests during 2020 took place in Jerusalem, with 2,000 cases (42% of total arrests), while Hebron witnessed 700 cases and GS 88 cases. Of those detained, 1,200 were former prisoners and 145 suffering illness or injury.

Furthermore, 9 PLC members were detained. The same year witnessed 72 arrests, summonses, and detentions that would last for several hours, plus administrative orders were issued to Palestinian journalists.⁵⁵

Jerusalem had the largest share of arrests in 2021 as well, with 2,784 arrests.⁵⁶ The Palestine Center for Prisoners Studies indicated that the campaign of arrests that took place in the cities and villages of the Palestinian interior during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021 was the fiercest and largest in many years; thousands of Israeli police, border guards and reservists participated in it, and it lasted for several days. The arrests affected more than 1,700 Palestinians, which significantly increased the number of detainees that year. Of those arrested, 1,750 were released prisoners, 196 sick and 7 PLC members.⁵⁷

In 2020, Israel issued 1,100 administrative orders, the majority of which were extensions of detention, while in 2021, they reached 1,600 orders. Israeli courts issued 5 life sentences in 2020 and another 3 in 2021. The number of Palestinian prisoners who died rose to 227 with the deaths of four in 2020 and one in 2021.⁵⁸

The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed increased prison raids carried out by the special units against the prisoner sections at Israeli prisons and detention centers. Prisoner advocacy groups documented many prisoner testimonies about attacks and abuse by the special prison forces, with beatings and severe ill-treatment amounting to torture.

In 2020–2021, the Israeli Prison Service adopted harsh policies towards prisoners, including medical negligence, administrative detention, unfair trials and the prevention of visits, consequently the prisoners held a number of hunger strikes, collectively and individually. Prisoners' strikes and "empty stomach battles" were weapons to urge the alleviation of unfair and arbitrary policies, and to restore usurped rights.

In 2020 and 2021, Israeli authorities discussed and issued several discriminatory laws and decisions against Palestinian prisoners, most importantly the Defense Service Bill (Temporary Provision) (Placement of Soldiers in Israel Prison Service) (Amendment No. 9), which was approved by the Israeli Knesset in three readings in December 2021. It aims to heighten the repression of prisoners, legitimising their oppression, and stripping them of their most basic rights. After the six prisoners' escape from the Gilboa Prison in September 2021, this new legal amendment

provided for extending the option to assign soldiers from combat units and reserve units to certain units of the Israel Prison Service, provided this amendment would be extended until December 2022.⁵⁹

On 6/9/2021, six Palestinian prisoners escaped from Gilboa Prison, a high-security facility in northern Israel known as “The Safe.” They are believed to have dug a hole in the floor of their cell, then crawled through a cavity and tunneled beneath the outer wall. This constituted a blow to the Israeli security system and to the image of Israel. On 19/9/2021, the Israeli army announced the re-arrest of the six prisoners at different times.⁶⁰

Table 5/4: Prisoners and Detainees in Israeli Prisons 2017–2021⁶¹

Year	Total no. of detainees	WB*	GS	Serving life sentences	Women	Children
2017	6,119	5,729	320	525	59	330
2018	5,450	5,082	298	540	53	215
2019	5,000	4,634	296	541	41	180
2020	4,400	4,075	255	543	41	170
2021	4,550	4,250	230	544	32	170

* Approximate figures according to Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association—Addameer.

Administrative Detention

Although administrative detention is prohibited under international law and violates the most basic human rights, Israel continued to issue such orders in 2020 and 2021, to issue administrative detention orders against various segments of Palestinian society, including PLC members, human rights activists, workers, students, lawyers, merchants, etc. The number of administrative detainees held by Israel without specific charges or trial reached 500 in December 2021, including 6 PLC members, compared to 380 at the end of 2020, including 6 PLC members; 461 by the end of 2019, 495 by the end of 2018, and 450 by the end of 2017.⁶²

Table 6/4: Administrative Detainees 2017–2021⁶³

Year	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Administrative detainees	450	495	461	380	500

The Hunger Strike of Prisoners

Since the beginning of the occupation, many Palestinian prisoners have been going on hunger strikes as a result of the arbitrary rules of the Israel Prison Service. Strikes were either to grant the prisoners some demands or to protest against poor conditions or mistreatment, collectively and individually. During 2020–2021, the prisoners staged several such strikes.

Among the most significant strikes, in 2020–2021, those called the “empty stomach battle,” undertaken individually by the prisoners, specifically against administrative detention. Most prominent of which was prisoner Maher al-Akhras, whose strike lasted 103 days and ended on 6/11/2020, following an agreement stipulating his release on 26/11/2020; Sheikh Khader ‘Adnan, who went on his sixth strike, during May and June 2021, for 25 days to reject his arbitrary detention; Ghadanfar Abu ‘Atwan, 65 days, ended on 8/7/2021; Nahid al-Fakhouri’s, 113 days, ended on 11/11/2021; Kayed al-Fasfous, 131 days, ended on 22/11/2021; Lo’ai al-Ashqar, 49 days, ended on 28/11/2021; and Nidal Ballout, 32 days, ended on 29/11/2021.⁶⁴ Also Hisham Abu Hawash, whose hunger strike lasted 141 days, in rejection of administrative detention. It ended on 4/1/2022 after the Israel Prison Service announced that the current administrative order of prisoner Abu Hawash would expire on 26/2/2022 and would not be renewed.⁶⁵

Another major “empty-stomach battle” that the prisoners took part in en masse in 2020–2021 was the announcement of the Commission of Detainees and Ex-Detainees Affairs, on 12/9/2021, that started on 17/9/2021, under the slogan “The Battle of Defending Rights,” the prisoner movement is organizing an indefinite hunger strike divided among groups, to protest against the continuous attacks against the detainees, which came as a result of the escape of the six detainees from Gilboa Prison. On 13/10/2021, about 250 PIJ prisoners declared an indefinite hunger strike in protest at the “abusive measures” taken against them, after the Gilboa Prison break on 6/9/2021. On 26/12/2021, the Supreme Leadership Body of Hamas Prisoners announced that the first group of its prisoners, “led by leading figures,” went on a hunger strike, in protest against the continuous violations of the Israel Prison Service against the prisoners.⁶⁶

4. Israeli GS Siege

Israel continued to impose a siege on GS for the 15th year in a row, the longest in modern history. It imposed further siege measures on the population, as well as

persisting in imposing severe restrictions on commercial traffic passing through the crossings, in addition to its restrictions on the movement of individuals. Throughout 2020 and 2021, there were no structural changes to the siege measures, as the facilitations that Israel had claimed to be implementing did not affect the restrictions on the freedom of movement of individuals and goods. Consequently, there has been a serious deterioration in the humanitarian, economic and social conditions of more than two million Palestinians living in the Strip.

Regarding the movement of individuals, Israel continued to impose severe restrictions on the movement of Gazans through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, their only access to WB. Israel permitted the passage of some groups, albeit very specific cases, such as patients with serious medical conditions and their companions, Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, foreign journalists, workers in international humanitarian organizations, merchants and businessmen, families of detainees in Israeli prisons, and persons travelling via al-Karamah border crossing.⁶⁷

Israel even imposed restrictions on those wishing to travel under the limited exception policy during lockdowns, and most GS residents did not fall under these exceptions. According to Gisha–Legal Center for Freedom of Movement, the average monthly number of exits by Palestinians through the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing in the first half of 2021 was about 6% of what it was in the months prior to the “COVID-19 closure” (January and February 2021), which reached 14,960 per month in 2019. In August 2021, following a year and a half ban, Israel began to allow traders to exit GS via Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing.⁶⁸ Israel also prevented young Christian Palestinians from GS from entering Jerusalem, Bethlehem and Nazareth during the Christmas and Easter holidays to practice their religious rites. They imposed restrictions on the freedom of movement and entry to the holy sites for hundreds of Christians in the Strip.

In addition to the significant restrictions imposed by Israel on the movement of Palestinians on normal days, the closure of crossings is often used as a punitive measure. For example, during the aggression on GS in May 2021, Israel completely closed the Beit Hanoun (Erez) Crossing, and even though a ceasefire was reached, it continued to impose additional restrictions on the movement of people.⁶⁹

In 2020 and 2021, the Rafah Crossing continued to open for the evacuation of humanitarian cases and the return of the stranded, however, the crossing’s operation was limited and very slow in 2020, with 21,961 travellers leaving the

GS and 24,256 returning to it, during the same period. On 9/2/2021, the Egyptian authorities announced the daily opening of the Rafah Crossing for the travel of humanitarian cases, including students, patients, and residency holders (except for weekly and annual vacations) for an indefinite period; a precedent in years. 85,642 passengers managed to leave GS from the beginning of 2021 until the end of November 2021, while 78,784 returned during the same period. Travellers returning to the Strip usually endure inspection procedures carried out by the Egyptian authorities, which are long, repetitive, and arbitrary.⁷⁰

Regarding the movement of commercial goods, in 2020 and 2021, Israel continued to impose tightened restrictions on the list of items classified as “dual-use”; which Israel claims that despite being used for civilian purposes, can be used to develop the combat capabilities of the Palestinian resistance. The dual-use items include 62 categories and hundreds of goods and commodities that are essential to the life of the population, and whose restriction contributes to the deterioration of infrastructure conditions, and the deterioration of economic, health, and educational conditions. The list includes, communications equipment, pumps, big generators, iron bars, iron pipes in all diameters, welding equipment and welding rods, various types of wood, X-ray machines, cranes and heavy vehicles, types of batteries, and many types of fertilizers.⁷¹

For the fifteenth consecutive year, Israeli authorities continued to ban the export of all GS products to WB, the 1948 occupied territories, and the world. There was only a limited exception, where they allowed the export of very limited quantities of Gazan products, mostly agricultural commodities. In 2020–2021, the exports constituted only 7% of the Strip’s total monthly exports before closure was imposed in June 2007 (4,500 truckloads/month). The ban on the exportation of the Strip’s products led to the deterioration of economic conditions and the closure of thousands of factories, therefore contributing to the increase of unemployment and poverty rates.⁷²

Israel continued tightening its closure of the Gaza Sea and denying fishermen access to fishing areas, despite the proclaimed authorization for fishermen to fish at a distance between 3–15 nautical miles. It decreased the fishing area or closed the sea completely dozens of times claiming the decisions to be in response to the launch of incendiary balloons and projectiles into Israeli areas adjacent to GS.⁷³



Second: The Peace Process

2020–2021 was a period of stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, which has been largely moribund. It reached a deadlock a long time ago, starting with the Camp David Summit in 2000, or, at the latest, in 2014, when US Secretary of State John Kerry made a failed attempt at progress during the Obama presidency. However, the Israeli side saw concrete developments as the Netanyahu-led Israeli government made speedy progress towards its goals, with the full support of the Trump administration. It acted as if it had a historic opportunity to unilaterally resolve the conflict and achieve the Israeli solution, over the corpse of the Palestine issue, by eliminating its different aspects; the right of return and compensation for refugees, self-determination, ending the occupation, attaining national independence, and individual and national equality.

An example of the above was the announcement of the Trump Deal in January 2020, which was a joint US-Israeli plan to phase out the Palestine issue through dismantling and invalidating the various final status issues; Jerusalem, the settlements, borders, security, and water.⁷⁴ It adopted the approach of having Arab normalization with Israel first, before withdrawing from the occupied Palestinian and Arab lands as per the Arab Peace Initiative. The proposed deal went so far that it dealt with the West Bank as a “liberated” land with which Israel can do what it wishes, including the confiscation of Palestinian land, the expulsion of its residents, and the establishment of settlements on it, on the grounds that it is part of the “Promised Land” of Israel, not even a disputed land as stated in the Oslo Accords.

Trump endorsed his predecessors’ policy of recognizing Israel as a “homeland for the Jewish people,” and this encouraged the Israeli government to push for the passing of the racist Jewish Nation-State Law in 2018, that made racism constitutional. He also did what the previous US presidents dared not to do, when he moved the US embassy to Jerusalem and recognized the city as the capital of Israel, closed the 144-year-old US Consulate in Jerusalem, recognized the annexation of the Golan Heights, and ceased US funding for the PA and the UNRWA, which he demanded to be dissolved. He had a plan to redefine the Palestinian refugee so that it would only include the thousands of Palestinians who had been living in Palestine until the *Nakbah*, thus disregarding their children and grandchildren.

The deal also included a clause allowing the annexation of 30% of the WB to Israel, and a clause stating “the possibility, subject to agreement of the parties that the borders of Israel will be redrawn such that the Triangle Communities become part of the State of Palestine,” which the plan included a provision for its establishment,⁷⁵ but only after a years-long test, and after meeting conditions that are impossible to meet.

Despite the plan’s full adoption of the Israeli vision, it was not submitted to the government and the Knesset for approval. Large numbers of the ruling right would not endorse it, rather they would oppose some of its clauses, especially the reference to the Palestinian state, even if it lacks any of the characteristics of a state, particularly its lack of sovereignty; the essential element that gives the existence of states a meaning.

The 2020–2021 period (as with many years prior to it) did not witness any negotiations or political or summit-level meetings, despite the constant calls of President Mahmud ‘Abbas for their resumption. He expressed his approval of French and Russian initiatives to hold meetings with Netanyahu,⁷⁶ but the latter constantly thwarted them.

President ‘Abbas repeated his calls for the resumption of bilateral negotiations, on the basis of reconsidering the signed agreements, and by requesting the activation of the Quartet on the Middle East⁷⁷ at times and by calling for its expansion at other times. ‘Abbas also called for an international conference⁷⁸ with a new proposal rejecting unilateral US sponsorship, in response to Trump’s plan, which ‘Abbas and most states rejected. The US administration faced international isolation and great difficulty in passing the deal, especially regarding the annexation clause, which included deadlines that were not met. The deal was exchanged for a strategy of normalization that has succeeded in securing an unquestioning following of Israel by some Arab states.

The legal annexation was postponed mainly due to the unanimous Palestinian rejection that could not be overlooked.⁷⁹ In other words, undertaking the annexation would lead to a large-scale *Intifadah* preceded by continuous uprisings and popular waves of protests, in addition to the various forms of resistance and boycott campaigns. It would also have major repercussions on security and stability in the region.



From the outset, the peace process bore the seeds of its own failure. The Israeli government was never ready or willing to reach a settlement, and has been primarily concerned with ending the Palestine issue. The settlement that was proposed in the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991 was not based on a clear and binding reference, and was neither fair nor balanced. The balance of power was always tipped in favour of US-backed Israel. The Oslo Accords were also a major failure due to the substantial concessions made by the Palestinian negotiators, most significantly the recognition of Israel over most of Palestine's land, and the cessation of resistance, without any guarantees of fulfilling any basic Palestinian rights.

Instead of renouncing the peace process at the end of the transitional period in May 1999, and following the failure of the Camp David negotiations in 2000, the Palestinian ceiling was lowered, and the “road map” was accepted. Its main framework was built on Israel's security. Under President ‘Abbas, a much worse approach has been adopted; it entails fulfilling Palestinian obligations regardless of the failures of the Israeli side, which continued to “manage” the peace process and establish new realities on the ground. Israel has continued its attempts to annex the largest areas of land, with the smallest possible population.

The trend in Israel, particularly since Netanyahu assumed the presidency of the Israeli government in 2009, has been the refusal to continue or revive the “peace process,” and to thwart any attempts to boost the PA's legitimacy. The search for a settlement has ended, as Netanyahu refused to revive it, and instead he proposed an “economic peace” with the Palestinians that did not recognize their rights, but rather legitimized the occupation and aimed to make it permanent. The other solution is a regional one, which skips the Palestinians and goes straight to the other Arabs, with the aim of using the Arabs to subjugate the Palestinians, whereas previously the Palestinians were used to break the ice with the Arabs. This is because Israel has been relieved of the conditions that would make it accept a settlement, especially after the Arab Spring, and in the context of Israeli society moving increasingly towards extremism, religiosity and racism. A new Zionism has developed, which enjoys a stable large right-wing Israeli majority, while the left and centre remain a diminishing minority; to the extent that the Palestine issue is no longer at the forefront of the Israeli governments' concerns, and has become a security and internal issue. This has manifested in Israel's dealings with the Palestinian side; from being at the highest, most official level down to ministerial, then administrative, economic and now primarily at the security level.

The evidence for the above is that, like Netanyahu, the current Prime Minister Naftali Bennett refuses to meet President ‘Abbas. When meetings are held at lower levels, whether between ‘Abbas and Israeli ministers or with security leaders; or between security leaders from both sides; or between the Area Coordinator and the minister of civil affairs, meetings focus on economic and security matters, as well as on reducing tension and preventing potential deterioration of the security situation. This means that they want to prevent any escalation of resistance, whether into a popular movement that might develop into an *Intifadah*, or into armed action. They also want to contain the situation in GS, based on a formula in which calm is good for the Israeli economy. The ultimate yet unattainable goal is to reach a total long-term quiet in exchange for easing or lifting the blockade.

If we take, for example, the meeting between ‘Abbas and Benny Gantz on 29/12/2021, we note that the latter demanded an increase in the PA’s efforts to thwart the resistance, suspend paying the monthly stipends to prisoners and families of killed Palestinians, and “end the proceedings launched by the Palestinian Authority against Israel in the International Criminal Court.” He also refused to discuss any political issues. ‘Abbas demanded a return to the political process, resumption of stalled negotiations and the implementation of the signed agreements.⁸⁰ He had forgotten that the more intractable obstacles cannot be overcome by the same methods that failed in the past and have no prospect in the present.

Given the unlikelihood of a political process with Bennett’s government, the PA has adopted a new approach. This meant it crossing into the previously prohibited zone of dealing with economic “peace.” For this would make it more difficult to resume the political path, if not eliminate it. The economic “peace” does not achieve actual peace or real economic growth, and its true goal is to keep the PA weak but alive, in order to fulfil its security function for Israel.

In 2020–2021, it can be noted that the PA was initially very optimistic about Trump’s loss in the elections and the failure of his deal. The PA revived its bets on the US administration, anticipating changes in Israel, to the extent that it retracted the May 2020 decision to terminate all agreements with Israel in response to the hostile US policy during Trump’s tenure. In November 2020, it hastened to withdraw its decision (before the official results of the US presidential elections were announced, which indicated Joe Biden’s victory) and unilaterally re-established the agreements, knowing that there was no truth to the Israeli government’s claim that



it was still committed to the Oslo Accords. This shift by the PA can be clearly seen in its seeking to convince the Israeli side to implement what the PA has claimed it had achieved, namely a return to the political process, fulfilment of previous commitments, and going back to pre-second *Intifadah* conditions, in addition to implementing 33 terms presented by the PA to the Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Israel and Palestinian Affairs Hady ‘Amr in his repeated tours. The fulfilment of these means returning to the Oslo Accords.⁸¹

History and the current context of events indicate that there is no chance of returning to the Oslo Accords; for, despite its misery, it is behind us, and the current ceiling is significantly lower than that established in Oslo. The Bennett government has continued the policy of creeping annexation of land, rights and holy sites, i.e., quiet implementation of the Trump deal, without legal annexation at the present time. This process combines conflict management, currently called “conflict reduction,” and gradual conflict resolution; piece by piece, whenever and wherever possible. The current Israeli government has realized that the legal annexation of the occupied lands or parts of it is impossible at the moment and would have major repercussions. The Netanyahu government and Trump administration reached a similar conclusion, as evidenced by the fact they postponed the annexation in return for normalization, a policy carried out by the current government, which is also encouraged by continued Palestinian weakness, division and confusion.

Biden’s victory had major repercussions. These started before his victory, with the Palestinian leadership returning to the agreements and restoring relations with Israel for nothing in return.⁸² Such a move is a continuation of PA policy despite the fact that each time it is disappointed with the lack of reciprocal goodwill gestures from Israel and her allies. This time Biden did not fulfil his promises; the US consulate in Jerusalem was not opened, the PLO office in Washington was not reopened, the majority of US aid had not resumed, at the time of writing this report, due to legal complications, while the aid provided to UNRWA had resumed between the two sides within an agreement that changes the mandate granted to the international agency. In addition, the peace process did not resume, with the US adopting the two-state solution without doing anything to make it a reality. Actually, it froze any movement in this regard until further notice, for fear the Bennett government might fall, allowing the return of Netanyahu, hence the PA was advised and pressured to deal with the matters in hand and postpone any negotiations until further notice.

Therefore, a US-Israeli agreement has been reached in which discussions about political negotiations and reviving the political process are set aside, and the focus is on “confidence-building,” avoiding the PA’s collapse and preventing the escalation of all forms of resistance to uncontrollable levels. This applies to the situation in WB and GS.

The PA was disappointed with the US-Israeli accord. However, due to its sense of helplessness, defeat, despair, and lack of other alternatives, and its unwillingness to pay the price of national unity in the form of true partnership, it hastily held meetings between ‘Abbas and Israeli ministers, most importantly, the two meetings with Defense Minister Benny Gantz. The PA has been trying to combine two contradictory policies, the first is its call for adherence to the negotiations and political process, activating the Quartet, holding an international conference, and continuing efforts to activate international institutions, especially the ICC. The second is its practical dealing with the “peace” plan, which would hinder any potential resumption of the political process. Currently, there are no active forces pushing to resume the political process, and there will be no one “more royal than the king,” i.e., the Palestinians. There exist deep divisions despite the popular uprisings in Jerusalem and their spread to all Palestinian communities, and despite the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls), which offered an inspiring model of steadfastness and resistance, but was not invested politically, even in terms of seriously lifting or easing the GS siege. In addition, Israeli, regional and US efforts to strengthen the PA and weaken its opponents have continued.⁸³

What put the PA in a more critical situation was that its hopes in alternate prime minister Yair Lapid, who is set to assume power in 2023, have faded early, as he does not carry hope for the resumption of political negotiations. Contrary to his previous announcements, he stated in October 2021 that he does not plan to resume political talks; so much so that he refused a request from the Palestinian president to meet him.⁸⁴

Even if we assumed for the sake of argument that he changed his mind and wished to hold negotiations, his partners in the government from the right and extreme right would prevent it. Interior Minister Ayelet Shaked announced that political negotiations will not resume during Bennett’s term nor during Lapid’s term, nor after them. The coalition agreement stipulates taking no unilateral steps without prior agreement.



Even if negotiations somehow resume, they are likely to be as futile as previous iterations, possibly even worse, because Israel has become more extremist, and the US administration is weak, retreating and repositioning its forces, reshaping its role in the region, and is preoccupied with other internal and external issues. Many developments in the region and the world favor Israeli interests, and according to the Arij Institute, the number of settlers in WB, including East Jerusalem, has reached 913 thousand.⁸⁵ The Israeli government has announced settlements and is planning more, which would make any negotiations, if they ever took place, another major deception. Negotiations in these conditions would amount to covering up the completion of a fait accompli occupation, before it is legitimized in Israel, then the US, and then at the international and Arab levels.

The likely scenarios and courses of action in the coming two years can be summarized as follows:

First Scenario: Maintaining the Status Quo

The negotiations, though aimless, remain stalled, while the plans of building trust and developing the economy in exchange for security in WB and GS would continue. Also, attempts will be made to prevent the PA's collapse and the associated progression of Hamas and PIJ, in addition to other resistance factions in GS. The potential outbreak of an *Intifadah* will be prevented in WB, as well as any major military confrontations between the occupation and the resistance in GS, which means the PA will play a new role that is further restricted by Israel. It will lose more and more Palestinian national legitimacy.

Second Scenario: Deterioration of the Situation in WB and GS

This scenario involves the deterioration of the situation in WB and GS, as the correlation between the two seemed greater after May 2021, when rockets were launched in support of Jerusalem. Israel is trying to link any lull agreement in GS to another one in WB, due to the fact that we may witness an escalation and recurrence of popular uprisings and armed resistance in WB, and military confrontation in GS.

There is another sub-scenario here involving the possibility of chaos and more security, instability due to the conflict between the centres of power within Fatah, the PA, and the community, especially given the competition and struggle over the succession to the presidency that combines all the powers, authorities and potentials.

Third Scenario: Continued Steadfastness and Attempts to Achieve Unity

This scenario revolves around the continuation of steadfastness and the escalation of resistance, with renewed attempts to end the internal schism and achieve unity. This can be considered possible on the battlefield where field unity is ripe, especially considering the failed hope in reviving political negotiations and achieving something for the Palestinians that might renew the legitimacy of the PA. Also, if negotiations were to resume, they would not lead to a solution or satisfactory settlement without a fundamental change in the balance of power. This cannot take place without constructing a comprehensive picture of what has happened, drawing lessons from history, developing strategies for struggle, forming a unified leadership stemming from true partnership, all underpinned by having the necessary willpower.

Conclusion

In 2020 and 2021, Israel continued its occupation and aggression against the Palestinian people, who continued their resistance. In WB—despite the security coordination—individual operations multiplied, as did daily confrontations and the various forms of popular resistance. This coordination was suspended for only about six months (May–November 2020), and then continued leading to the detection of many resistance cells and thwarted many resistance operations and popular confrontations.

As for the GS, resistance action marked new developments, namely the adoption of assault strategy in defence of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. This was manifested in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, which showed the increasing power of resistance, despite the severity of the siege. It forced millions of Israelis to go to bomb shelters to escape the resistance missiles, which were able to cover all parts of the 1948 occupied territories and penetrate the Iron Dome and the Israeli defence systems, by the hundreds. The resistance received more popular support, clearly manifested in the wider Palestinian positive response of WB, GS, the 1948 occupied territories and Palestinians abroad. This was in addition to the Arab, Islamic and international solidarity.



2020 and 2021 were a continuation of preceding years in terms of the continued suffering of prisoners. The escape of six prisoners from the Gilboa Prison drew attention to the prisoners issue and their defiance. The long hunger strikes carried out by several administrative detainees, and the fact they were freed, also showed the magnitude of the prisoners' persistence in gaining their rights, while also effectively challenging the Israelis' power.

In general, the outlook suggests the possibility of an escalation of resistance acts in the next two years, with a greater Israeli ferocity pushing back against the resistance.

It is clear that the reconciliation or peace process has reached a deadlock, given the failure of negotiations over three decades; the de facto failure and Israeli negligence of the two-state solution; Israel's attempts to impose its vision of a settlement on the ground, by annexing the largest swaths of land that contain the smallest number of Palestinian residents possible; and the resolution of the final issues in Israel's favour, namely Jerusalem, the refugees, settlement building, the area of the promised Palestinian state and the extent of its sovereignty, effectively turning it into "Bantustans" or self-governing authorities in the midst of a sea of occupation.

The implementation of the Deal of the Century or "Trump's Plan" made significant progress; the US provided a cover to decide the future of Jerusalem by transferring the US embassy there, recognized the annexation of the Golan, legalized settlements in WB, and pushed a number of Arab states to normalize relations with Israel, which represents a real danger. However, the Palestinian people and their leaders have stood against the "deal," making it lose a considerable part of its value. For they are the concerned party in the first place. Also, the fact that President Trump focused on his second presidential election caused the deal to lose its momentum.

Therefore, the reconciliation process will most likely remain frozen due to the existence of an occupation state that insists on imposing its own vision on the ground; a powerless Palestinian leadership; a weak and divided Arab and Muslim environment that is infiltrated with normalization; and an international system that supports Israel or fails to prevent it from continuing its aggression against Palestinian land and people.

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Chapter Five

The Israeli Scene

The Israeli Scene

Introduction

In 2020–2021, Israel experienced political instability followed by political polarization between two camps: Benjamin Netanyahu’s supporters, on one hand, and his detractors on the other. This situation produced alliances and partisan divisions of unprecedented intensity in the history of the Israeli political system, indicating the centrality of Netanyahu to the Israeli political scene, for even after the formation of a new government in Israel headed by Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid, Netanyahu’s presence remained the key to its cohesion despite political, ideological, and economic differences (in terms of trends and policies) between its various constituent parts.

The political scene was marked by the historic accession of an Arab list, the United Arab List (UAL—*Ra’am*), to the government coalition, the first time in the history of the Israeli political system that an Israeli government has relied on an Arab list for its survival. Ostensibly, the UAL will remain a central player in the formation of a future government, as long as Netanyahu remains on the political scene. Therefore, it can be said that Netanyahu’s survival on the political scene, despite his continued and his failure to form a government, as well as his knowledge that Likud will remain in opposition, this time because of him, will be a central factor in shaping the internal political scene in the years to come.

First: The Internal Israeli Political Scene

The Israeli scene in 2020–2021 was marked by the continuing political instability of two electoral cycles during the March 2020–March 2021 period, and the formation of a new Israeli government in June 2020, headed by Naftali Bennett in rotation with Yair Lapid.

1. March 2020 Elections

The 23rd Knesset elections were held on 2/3/2020, following the failure of Likud and the Blue and White Party (*Kachol Laven*) to form a government after



the September 2019 elections, which had followed the failure of Likud to form a government in the April 2019 elections.

In the 2020 elections, Likud succeeded in increasing its representation in the Knesset from 32 to 36 seats, despite the indictment filed by the government's legal adviser against party leader Benjamin Netanyahu during the run-up to the elections, and the trial hearings that began on 17/3/2020. These developments did not affect Netanyahu's political performance. Likud strengthened its parliamentary representation and increased the representation of the right-wing bloc (the parties supporting Likud) from 55 seats in the September 2019 elections to 58 in these elections (March 2020). In the September 2019 elections, Likud received 1,113,617 votes compared to 1,352,449 votes in the March 2020 elections, meaning that Likud increased its voter turnout by more than 200 thousand.¹ It should be noted that the rest of the lists in the right-wing bloc maintained their strength, which indicates that the electoral bases of Likud are static, and that the electoral mobility of the right-wing bases essentially remains within the control of the right-wing camp.

The most important reason for the strengthening of Likud's power was the intensive outreach work of Likud to stimulate right-wing electoral bases, which had not voted in the previous elections. This was in addition to promoting the idea that the government that Gantz might form would be established through the Joint List support, whose representatives were dubbed "supporters of terrorism"² by Netanyahu. Moreover, he succeeded in persuading right-wing voters that he was being prosecuted with the aim of a political ouster, emphasizing his self-assigned "victim" status. He benefited from the wish of many right-wing voting bases to settle the elections in order to prevent a fourth election, and it was thus only by voting for Likud that the right-wing reached a stable Jewish government.

In contrast, the Blue and White Party maintained its parliamentary representation in the March 2020 elections with 33 seats, but unlike the September 2019 elections, it was no longer the largest party in the Knesset, after Likud gained 36 seats. It grew by about 70 thousand votes, whereas the bloc opposing Netanyahu (Blue and White, Yisrael Beiteinu, and the Labor-Gesher-Meretz Alliance (Emet)) declined from 52 to 47 seats.

The March 2020 elections indicated the collapse of the Labor Party, as Party members in the alliance gained only two seats (two for Labor, one for Gesher

and four for Meretz). The second loss came after Geshet split from this alliance, after it failed to bring votes from Eastern right-wing bases. Moreover, Labor Party representation declined from the September 2019 elections. Geshet thus gained a seat from the Labor Party and Meretz bases, after which it split, with the party's president announcing that she would join Netanyahu's right-wing bloc, raising the bloc's representation from 58 to 59.

2. The Netanyahu-Gantz Government

After the 23rd Knesset elections in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis worsened in Israel, and the transitional government under Netanyahu began to take more action, announcing from mid-March a near-total closure of all institutions and facilities, except those identified as vital facilities. This, in turn, was reflected in the economic situation where unemployment gradually rose, reaching almost 25%, and government spending increased in an unprecedented manner to cope with the crisis and its economic repercussions.

During the crisis, Netanyahu was at the forefront of the media and political scene. Since he is known for his demagoguery, his almost daily-televised speeches contributed to increasing people's fear of the consequences of the crisis and the pandemic's spread, and he proposed an emergency government under his presidency as the best option to overcome the crisis, which he dubbed the "invisible enemy."³ Netanyahu grabbed this opportunity to market himself, especially after the head of the State Reuven Rivlin tasked Benny Gantz to form the government, having received a recommendation from 61 Knesset members, including the 15 members of the Joint List, in exchange for Netanyahu's recommendation by the right-wing bloc (58 seats).

After Gantz failed to form a government owing to the refusal of the Knesset members of the Blue and White Alliance to form an administration based on the votes of the Joint List, Gantz split from the Blue and White Alliance and joined a government in rotation with Netanyahu. Gantz justified the formation of the government by his defense of democratic institutions, preventing the annexation project that was at the center of Likud's election campaign after the announcement of the "Deal of the Century" in early 2020, and confronting the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The prospect of a Joint List-backed government fell short after three Knesset Blue and White members declared their rejection of this option, leaving



Benny Gantz with a blocked fourth election on the horizon along with a COVID-19 pandemic crisis. The possibility of forming a national unity government between the Blue and White party and Likud also fell away, following Lapid and Moshe Ya'alon's opposition. Moreover, Netanyahu considered the COVID-19 crisis a "national crisis" of the first degree requiring a "national unity" government as was the case on the eve of the June 1967 war, as well as the fact that the health crisis had strengthened Netanyahu's political power. This complicated scene led Gantz to split from the Blue and White alliance and debate a rotation government with Netanyahu, with a large representation of a shrunk Blue and White party headed by Gantz, and where the ministries would be distributed between them. This was in addition to his willingness to support a law that would allow Netanyahu to be in the government (acting in rotation) despite the indictment.⁴

The Netanyahu-Gantz government was unable to last for more than a year, because Netanyahu refused to rotate with Gantz to head the government, believing that if the Knesset disbanded and headed to new elections, this would ensure the formation of a new government. Indeed, in voting on the bill to dissolve the Knesset on 2/12/2020, it passed with 61 votes in favor and 54 against. The Joint List voted in favor of the resolution with the exception of the UAL headed by Mansour 'Abbas, which abstained from voting.⁵ Gantz saw this vote as a signal to Netanyahu to reach a budget settlement, as Likud refused to approve the 2021 budget that Gantz wanted.

The date for the dissolution of the Knesset was well known and awaited by all. The disagreement over the government budget was the apparent predicament, but it concealed other crises as we mentioned earlier. The grave crisis between Likud and the Blue and White party emerged on the issue of the approval of the State's general budget, which was one of the key reasons why each party could justify joining an alliance with the other. Likud demanded the approval of a one-year budget, while the Blue and White Party demanded a two-year budget. This disagreement stemmed from a lack of Blue and White confidence in Benjamin Netanyahu, as it was felt that the goal of adopting a one-year budget reflected Netanyahu's intention to elude his agreement with Gantz to rotate as head of government.

Although the budget approval crisis represented the ultimate point of tension within the government, other issues helped fuel that tension. For example, the

judiciary and law enforcement authorities were constantly attacked by Netanyahu, ministers and members of the Likud Knesset, while the Blue and White Party defended these bodies, especially as the then Minister of Justice, Avi Nissenkorn, was a member of the Blue and White Party. Netanyahu and Likud attacked these authorities repeatedly during his alliance with Gantz, increasing tension between the parties. The Minister of Justice himself was attacked and offensive statements between the parties suggested that the issue was not about blocs within the government, but rather about a government and opposition with strong political and ideological antagonism. Tension also emerged between the parties because Netanyahu did not involve Benny Gantz, Minister of Defense and alternate head of government, and Gabi Ashkenazi, Minister for Foreign Affairs, in an agreement with the UAE. Indeed, the two men were dumbfounded by former US President Donald Trump's announcement of diplomatic relations and normalization. As a justification, Netanyahu said he feared that the agreement would fail if he shared the secret talks with the two men because "They could have spoken uncarefully to people close to them, and the information could have come out."⁶ More likely, Netanyahu did not share the agreement because he wanted to register it as a personal achievement, which he might well employ in upcoming elections in Israel. In the same vein, there was tension between Likud and the Blue and White party following the statements of Ashkenazi, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in which he declared that the issue of annexation was no longer on the table and that the normalization phase had begun with the Arab States instead of the annexation phase. This statement provoked members of the Likud Party, among them Netanyahu, who had repeatedly assured that annexation was not the price paid for the "peace agreement" with UAE and that it was merely delayed. This issue was considered important for Likud because its political legitimacy among parts of its electoral base resided in its promise to annex areas in WB.

The Netanyahu-Gantz government ended for these reasons, but the most important reason was Netanyahu's decision not to relinquish the position of head of government to Gantz under the rotation agreement. Netanyahu believed that he could dismantle the government, prevent Gantz from becoming prime minister, and head to a new election armed with the signing of normalization agreements with Arab States, which he thought would ensure that he had a government without a rotating agreement with another party.



3. March 2021 Elections

The Israeli elections on 23/3/2021 were marked by a decline in the overall voting turnout from 71.5% to 67.4%. In the Palestinian population, however, the decline was significant, from 65% in the March 2020 elections to 45% in the March 2021 elections⁷ (see table 1/5). This decline was due to the following reasons:

- a. The dismantling of the Joint List contributed to a significant decline in the voting rate of the Palestinian society, which was reflected in the overall voting rate.
- b. The indifference of Israeli society as a result of repeated electoral cycles, with four cycles held in two years, and Israel becoming the most politically unstable parliamentary “Western” state due to the number of electoral cycles.
- c. Distrust in the ability to change the political map, in terms of what can be expected from elections, has led many to abstain from voting.
- d. The fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis that accompanied it contributed to people’s reluctance to vote.

This election was also marked by the number of lists that won the election, which succeeded in surpassing the electoral threshold, with 13 lists winning against 8 in the 2020 election. This was indicative of the disintegration of the Israeli political landscape, as the Joint List split into two, the Yemina coalition split into two (Yemina and Religious Zionism). Moreover, Gideon Sa‘ar defected from Likud, forming a new party; the Blue and White alliance split into two parties (Blue and White and Yesh Atid (There is a Future)); and the Labor Party Alliance disintegrated into two lists again (Labor and Meretz). This showed that the coalitions from the March 2020 elections and the breakup from the March 2021 elections could not save Israel from the political quandary created by the April 2019 elections.

Table 1/5: Results of the 21st, 22nd, 23rd and the 24th Knesset Elections⁸

List name *	24th Knesset (23/3/2021)		23rd Knesset (2/3/2020)		22nd Knesset (17/9/2019)		21st Knesset (9/4/2019)	
	No. of valid votes	No. of seats	No. of valid votes	No. of seats	No. of valid votes	No. of seats	No. of valid votes	No. of seats
Likud	1,066,892	30	1,352,449	36	1,113,617	32	1,140,370	35
Yesh Atid	614,112	17	–	–	–	–	–	–
Shas	316,008	9	352,853	9	330,199	9	258,275	8
Blue and White**	292,257	8	1,220,381	33	1,151,214	33	1,125,881	35
Yemina (United Right: April 2019)	273,836	7	240,689	6	260,655	7	159,468	5
Labor	268,767	7	–	–	–	–	190,870	6
United Torah Judaism	248,391	7	274,437	7	268,775	7	249,049	8
Yisrael Beiteinu	248,370	7	263,365	7	310,154	8	173,004	5
Religious Zionism	225,641	6	–	–	–	–	–	–
Joint List (Hadash, Balad, Ta'al)	212,583	6	–	–	–	–	–	–
New Hope	209,161	6	–	–	–	–	–	–
Meretz	202,218	6	–	–	–	–	156,473	4
UAL	167,064	4	–	–	–	–	–	–
Joint List (UAL, Hadash, Balad, Ta'al)	–	–	581,507	15	470,211	13	–	–
Hadash – Ta'al	–	–	–	–	–	–	193,442	6
UAL – Balad	–	–	–	–	–	–	143,666	4
Labor – Gesher – Meretz	–	–	267,480	7	–	–	–	–
Labor – Gesher	–	–	–	–	212,782	6	–	–
The Democratic Camp (Meretz, Israel Democratic Party and Green Movement)	–	–	–	–	192,495	5	–	–
Kulanu***	–	–	–	–	–	–	152,756	4
Number of eligible voters	6,578,084		6,453,255		6,394,030		6,339,729	
Total valid votes	4,410,052		4,553,161		4,310,102		4,309,270	

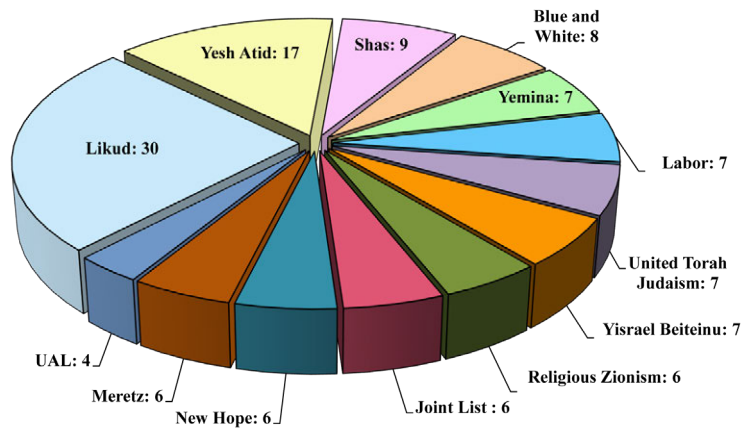
* Some names have been shortened in an attempt to simplify the table, where Hadash: Democratic Front for Peace and Equality; Balad: National Democratic Assembly; and Ta'al: Arab Movement for Renewal.

** Yesh Atid officially dissolved itself before the April 2019 elections and joined the Blue and White Party.

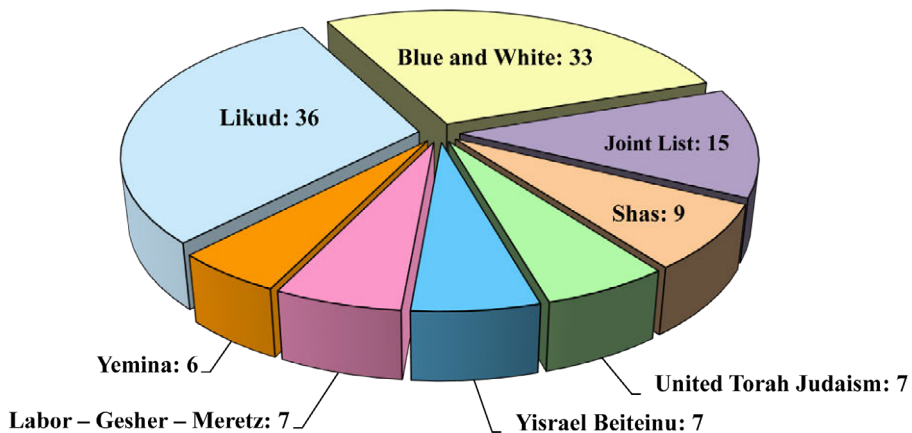
*** Kulanu officially dissolved itself before the September 2019 elections and joined the Likud Party.



Results of the 24th Knesset Elections on 23/3/2021



Results of the 23rd Knesset Elections on 2/3/2020



In the September 2019 elections, Likud received 1,113,617 votes compared to 1,352,449 votes in the March 2020 elections, meaning it gained more than 200 thousand votes. In the March 2021 elections, the number of Likud voters fell to 1,066,892, i.e., Likud lost about 300 thousand voters from the previous elections. In these elections, Likud obtained 24.2% of votes, representing 30 seats, which is 6 seats fewer than the March 2020 elections.⁹ The reason for the decline of Likud can be attributed to the following factors:

First: Gideon Sa'ar defected from Likud at the end of 2020 and formed a new party called New Hope. Many Likud leaders at the national level, such as Minister Ze'ev Elkin, and local leaders, defected with Sa'ar. This split contributed to the loss of many votes for Likud, as Sa'ar and his party competed on the same electoral rules as Likud.

Second: People were reluctant to vote, with overall turnout falling by about 4%, which must have contributed to Likud losing a significant number of votes.

Third: The economic crisis in Israel caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the accusations against Netanyahu of mismanaging the crisis shifted the votes of the weak social sectors to the Shas movement, which increased its representation by one seat.

This brings us to New Hope, the new party founded by Gideon Sa'ar the Likud dissident, whose popularity has gradually eroded since its founding. After it was formed, opinion polls predicted it would gain about 20 seats,¹⁰ with Sa'ar announcing that he was a candidate for prime minister. As the election approached, his popularity eroded, and the party obtained 6 seats, with 4.7% of votes (209 thousand votes). Apparently, these votes were mostly taken from the Likud Party, which as previously mentioned, declined by some 300 thousand votes.

After the dissolution of the Blue and White alliance, and following Gantz's entry to the Netanyahu government, two parties remained for the elections: the Blue and White headed by Gantz, and Yesh Atid headed by Yair Lapid. The latter obtained 17 seats, with the party being second in terms of parliamentary representation, i.e., 13.9% of votes (around 614 thousand votes). The Blue and White Party obtained about 292 thousand votes with 6.6% of the valid votes, represented in 8 seats in the Knesset. This means that together they received less than the alliance in the 2020 elections, with about 1.2 million votes. This underlined the transition of many of the former Coalition's voters to other parties, mainly the Labor Party and the Meretz Party, as well as the decline in overall voting, which negatively affected everyone.

The Shas movement headed by Aryeh Deri obtained 316 thousand votes (7.2% of votes) compared to 353 thousand votes and 9 seats (7.7%) in the previous elections. The movement maintained its representation despite a decline in the number of voters due to a decline in the voting rate in Israeli society, but overall, it maintained most of its electoral base. This is what distinguishes Haredi religious parties, as their bases are fairly steady.



In the elections, United Torah Judaism won 248 thousand votes (5.6% of votes) compared to 274 thousand votes and 7 seats in the previous elections. In other words, it maintained its number of seats despite a decline in the number of votes. This also applied to the Shas movement, which did not lose many voters, even though the party claimed that it could have had more votes had it not been for the support of Netanyahu to the Religious Zionism Party, resulting in part of the two movements' voters (Shas and United Torah Judaism) voting for the Religious Zionism Party.

The Religious Zionism party—one of whose components was the Kahanist (after Meir Kahane) party, the Jewish Power (*Otzma Yehudit*)—managed to obtain some 226 thousand votes (5.1% of votes), and Netanyahu worked hard to build this party for fear of losing tens of thousands of right-wing votes, as in previous election cycles. The party was able to achieve a major electoral breakthrough by gaining 6 seats in the Knesset, re-representing the old/new Kahane Party in the Knesset for the first time since the 1980s, when Meir Kahane was a member of the Knesset and his party Kach was prevented from running in 1984.

The Yemina party headed by Naftali Bennett obtained 7 seats, having received some 274 thousand votes (6.2% of votes), meaning that it was weaker than that of the Religious Zionism party. Naftali Bennett had refused to build an alliance with the head of the Religious Zionism Party, Bezalel Smotrich, and the head of the Jewish Power party, Itamar Ben-Gvir, hoping to attract voters from the Israeli political center. However, his strategy failed because of Netanyahu's propaganda campaign against him claiming that he would be a compound of a "leftist" government headed by Yair Lapid.

On the other side of the political map, Labor Party leader Merav Michaeli managed to save the party from a fall in the elections, with the Labor Party receiving some 269 thousand votes (6.1% of votes) and 7 seats in the Knesset. In the previous elections, the party also gained 7 seats, but in alliance with Meretz and Gesher. These results demonstrate Michaeli's success in increasing the party's number of voters, as well as its representation on its own of the number of seats previously held.

Following the failure of its previous alliance with Labor and Gesher, the Meretz Party was able to strengthen its power, running in the elections on its own and trying to win votes from the Arab community by including two Arab candidates

in the fourth and fifth places. The party obtained 202 thousand votes (4.6% of the votes) with 6 seats in the Knesset. It was an outcome that the party did not expect, as it was struggling to exceed the electoral threshold.

The Yisrael Beiteinu party, headed by Avigdor Lieberman, has maintained its representative power in the Knesset with 7 seats, as was the case before, thanks to 248 thousand votes (5.6% of votes) compared to 263 thousand votes (5.8%) in the previous elections. This demonstrates that the party has a stable electoral base that cares about religion and the State, and that religious parties have a position of strength in the Israeli political landscape.

4. May 2021 Popular Uprising

The Palestinian popular uprising in Israel was an important moment in the history of Palestinians since 2000, particularly as it emerged in the midst of political fragmentation and frustration stemming from the spread of crime and violence in Palestinian society, and the critical state of society due to the COVID-19 pandemic, with all its economic, political and psychological repercussions. Perhaps the most important factor was the “Israelization” that has been strengthened in recent years, which is represented by individual integration and the wagering on individual movement, independently from the collective political project.

There were several direct and indirect reasons that contributed to the outbreak of the popular uprising. The immediate reasons were the repression by the armed police of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood protests against the expulsion of Palestinian families from their homes, in addition to the series of violent incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its courtyards and the attacks on worshippers inside it. In both cases, the presence and participation of the Palestinians was remarkable. The importance of the issue of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood lay in the fact that it brought to mind the conditions of the Palestinians in Israel, particularly in the coastal towns of Lod and Ramla. Indeed, the inhabitants of these towns endure the same attempts to evict them and take over their homes by bringing Jewish families to an obvious settlement project aiming to restrict Arabs, Judaize their neighborhoods, and thus Judaize the coastal cities. Since Lod was the most afflicted place by this settlement policy, perhaps this explains to some extent the violence of the events in this town, where the Judaism project was initiated by planting settlement hotbeds under the cover of Torah schools in the town.¹¹



The poll conducted by the Arab Center for Applied Social Research (Mada al-Carmel) in Jaffa after the popular uprising indicated that 60% of Palestinians in the 1948 occupied territories believed that the uprising was chiefly ignited by events in Jerusalem (the attacks on the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah). 21% of Palestinians believed that it was due to discrimination towards Arabs, while 15% indicated that it was due to anger at the failure of the police and the State to tackle violence and crime in the Arab community.¹²

Table 2/5: Stances of Palestinians of the 1948 Occupied Territories on the Causes of the Popular Uprising 2021¹³

What do you think is the main factor behind the outbreak of the popular uprising in the Arab community in Israel?	Percentage (%)
Events at the <i>al-Aqsa</i> Mosque and Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood	60.5
Anger at the failure of the police and the State against crime and violence	15.2
Discrimination of the State against Arab citizens in civil life	21.1
The growing role of youth movements in popular protests	0
The Judaization of the coastal towns of Lod and Ramla	1
The attacks against the Gaza Strip	0
Other	2.1

Successive incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its courtyards fueled the anger of Palestinians, who prayed at the mosque during the month of Ramadan in 2021, particularly in the last days of the month. On 8/5/2021, the Israeli police broke into the *al-Aqsa* Mosque and its courtyards on Laylat al-Qadr (the Night of Power), and suppressed worshippers. These incursions continued during the days leading up to Eid al-Fitr and on the day thereof. The events were preceded by the erection of barricades at the Damascus Gate to prevent the presence of Palestinians, bringing back to memory the electronic gates Israel had placed at the entrances of the *al-Aqsa* Mosque in 2017, and the essential role played by the popular uprising to thwart this action. This happened again after the police erected the barricades at the Damascus Gate entrance, where the uprising and protests of Palestinians, including those from in the 1948 occupied territories, played an important role in the police retreat.¹⁴

Israel stepped up its crackdown on the popular uprising that spread from Jerusalem to the Arab towns within the Green Line. The Israeli government approved the expansion of police powers in dealing with the uprising in Arab towns, including imposing checkpoints, searching cars, closing the entrances to Arab towns, placing concrete blocks on the entrances to other towns, and shutting down areas in coastal cities, as the police did in the old town of Acre during the Eid al-Fitr days. This was in addition to imposing a curfew in Lod.¹⁵

During the first week of the uprising, the police launched an arrest campaign against the young people involved. The campaign resulted in hundreds of arrests within days, including minors. A small number of the youths were arrested for only a few days, while the majority remained in detention. In addition, in less than a week, the police filed about 200 indictments against young Arabs in an unprecedented campaign in a short period of time. The arrests were not limited to young men, they included also political leaders such as the deputy head of the banned Islamic movement Sheikh Kamal al-Khatib, whose detention was extended twice. Others were released after a few days.¹⁶

This uprising saw the entry of organized Jewish militias, some of them armed, from West Bank outposts, Torah religious schools settled in the coastal towns of Lod and Jaffa, and fascist organizations such as La Familia, the Beitar Jerusalem Supporters Association, and Lehava. These two organizations believe in the purity of the Jewish race, the superiority of Judaism and the inferiority of other ethnic groups.¹⁷

5. The Formation of the Bennett-Lapid Government

After Netanyahu failed to form a government in the aftermath of the 2021 elections, owing to the refusal of the Religious Zionism party to enter the coalition's consolidated list, the mandate was transferred to Yair Lapid, who was able to form a government headed by Naftali Bennett (until August 2023), followed by Lapid. The latter succeeded in forming the government because of two factors: the agreement among all its constituents to prevent Netanyahu from forming a government, and their agreement that the UAL would participate in the coalition government.

The government was formed from eight lists of 62 members, an unprecedented low number that carried a major challenge: each of its constituents was capable of toppling it on their own.



The government included parties from very diverse political and ideological backgrounds, with right-wing parties (Yemina, New Hope, Yisrael Beiteinu), left-wing parties (Meretz, Labor), centrist parties (Yesh Atid, Blue and White), and an Arab party.

The main reason for the formation of the Change Government was because its central constituents sought to topple Benjamin Netanyahu. The right, left and centrist parties that had refused to sit with each other in the past came together to that end. Apart from wanting to topple Netanyahu, this government was a way out for the opposition stance of the Zionist left that lasted for many years. For example, the left-wing Meretz Party had not participated in an Israeli government since 2001, the Labor Party had been outside the government since 2009, and Yesh Atid had not participated in the government since 2015. The permanent opposition situation and the right-wing dominance of government ministries prompted some Israeli movements to participate in the government and try to influence and build themselves as powerful parties, which could improve their electoral popularity. These parties, namely Meretz and Labor, gained access to social ministries, which could improve their ability to influence social and educational policies according to their party perspectives.

These constituents, especially the right-wing ones and the Blue and White Party headed by Gantz, decided to prevent Netanyahu from forming the government. Sa'ar and Bennett ignored the right-wing's pressure to abstain from joining the Change Government,¹⁸ and joined it in order to send a message to the right-wing electoral bases in general, and the Likud electoral bases in particular: Likud will not return to power as long as Netanyahu is its leader, and only his removal can give way to forming a purely right-wing government led by Likud.

The new government was formed based on a rotation between Naftali Bennett and Yair Lapid. However, Lapid stepped down from this deal even though his was the largest party after Likud, in order to persuade Bennett to join the government. This constituted a precedent in the Israeli political system. For the first time, the government was headed by a person belonging to a party that had only six seats in the Knesset. Nonetheless, Bennett's condition to join the government was the non-compliance with the agreements Lapid had signed with the other partners, and compliance only with the agreement he had signed with Lapid. Moreover, each of the heads of government would alternately have the veto power over each

government decision,¹⁹ which would impede the government's work. However, Lapid made these concessions for the formation of the government.

6. Palestinians in Israel and the Participation in Knesset Elections

a. The March 2020 Elections

The voter turnout in the Arab community (not including mixed cities) in the March 2020 elections reached 65%, compared to 60% in the September 2019 elections and 49% in the April 2019 elections. The Joint List obtained 581,507 votes (12.67% of votes), of which 487,911 were from Arab voters (87% of the total), while the rest went to Zionist parties. The Joint List attained the largest electoral achievement in Arab history in Israel with 15 seats. For comparison, in the April 2019 elections, the two Arab lists (Hadash-Ta'al and UAL-Balad) obtained 337,108 votes, equivalent to 70% of all votes in the Arab community, while 30% of all votes went to Zionist parties. Compared to the voting results of the 2015 Joint List, the list obtained 446,583 votes, (10.61% of the total vote), which is 82% of the votes of the Arab community.²⁰

Several reasons may be cited for the increased representation of the Joint List in the elections. Since its establishment in 2015, these elections have been the first without conflict and struggles between its four constituents over the division and ranking of seats on the list. Each of the last three sessions (2015, April 2019, and September 2019) was preceded by months of debates that reached the level of accusations, which left a negative impact on social groups. It was thought the Joint List had become a mere "lifeboat" through which everyone was trying to reach the Knesset rather than a political project aimed at promoting Arab representation in the Knesset and improving its performance. In the March 2020 elections, the Joint List entered the elections in the absence of such conflicts between its constituents and their bases. Rather, there was collective action on the ground that left a positive impact on its objective to promote Arab representation.

The US Deal of the Century plan made the vote for the Joint List increase. The Arab public was convinced that the strengthening of the Joint List would be at the expense of a stronger representation of the right-wing bloc led by Likud and Benjamin Netanyahu, which would prevent the right-wing government from carrying out its promises to annex parts of WB and impose Israeli sovereignty over these areas. This conviction increased following the results of the Knesset elections in September 2019. With the rise of the Joint List representation to



13 seats, the representation of the right-wing bloc declined from 60 seats in the April 2019 elections (at which time two Arab lists had been elected and obtained 10 seats together) to 56 in the September 2019 elections. The Joint List was able to market this equation through its electoral slogan that the “Deal of the Century” would be dropped by voting for the Joint List, especially since the US plan included a land-population exchange clause where the “Triangle Communities become part of the State of Palestine.”²¹ The results showed that the increased representation of the Joint List prevented the right-wing bloc from reaching 61 seats.

In addition, the two major parties and contenders for the formation of the government, Likud and the Blue and White party, joined forces with a view to de-legitimizing the Joint List.²² Netanyahu continued to incite against the Joint List, while the Blue and White Party announced that it was refusing to cooperate with the Joint List in forming the government, even if the option was to receive external support, announcing its preference to form a government dependent on a “Jewish majority.” The Blue and White Party’s perseverance in de-legitimizing the Joint List came under Likud propaganda that Gantz wanted to form a government with the Joint List. The party responded by intensifying its rejection of all cooperation with the Joint List, on the one hand, while a bloc in the party refused to cooperate with the Joint List based on racist ideologies, on the other hand. This was in addition to the party’s support for the removal of Member of Knesset (MK) Heba Yazbak. The Blue and White Party’s stance emerged despite the fact that the three Joint List constituents (except for Balad) recommended Gantz to form a government in September 2019. The de-legitimization rhetoric against the Joint List played an important role in rallying people around it, hoping to increase its representation.

b. The March 2021 Elections

On the eve of the March 2021 elections, the Joint List was split into two lists, the UAL and the Joint List, which maintained the alliance of its three constituents (Hadash, Ta‘al, and Balad). Dissent in the Joint List began after a series of statements by MK Mansour ‘Abbas. The relationship between the UAL and the other Joint List constituents reached the point of estrangement prior to the split of the Joint List. There have been attempts by the High Follow-up Committee for Arab Citizens of Israel to maintain the Joint List with its four constituents, but to no avail. Indeed, the break-up culminated at the level of electoral bases and party activists who preferred such division, with each side blaming the other.

The two parties considered that each party made the decision to split the Joint List. The UAL accused the Joint List of having taken a decision to exclude it, even though it had reached understandings on political issues with the other constituents. As for the other constituents, namely Hadash and Balad, they accused the UAL of having rejected the principle of political decision-making within the Joint List through democratic determination of the four constituents, and of refusing to adhere to a common political agenda,²³ claiming that this was an intentional position to dissociate itself from the Joint List. The Hadash likened the UAL to Likud, saying it refused to have a Likud branch in the Joint List.²⁴

During the election campaign, the UAL focused on putting the issue of the preservation of religion and the religious identity of the community at the center of the conflict with the three Joint List constituents, in order to form a supportive social bloc away from the political debate on the speech and behavior of MK Mansour ‘Abbas during the previous year (2020). Meanwhile, the Joint List placed the political debate and national discourse at the center of its discussion with the UAL, which works on social segregation in the context of a religious-secular conflict, while the Joint List works on social segregation on the basis of national and Israelized political positions.

The voter turnout in Palestinian society was only 45%. It is the lowest percentage since the beginning of Palestinian participation in Israeli parliamentary elections since 1948, while in March 2020, it was 65%. There has been a serious decline in the voting rate and a rise in the abstention rate. Non-voting is the most important given in Palestinian electoral behavior since the formation of the Joint List in 2015. According to the results of the last four elections in 2019–2021, the voting rate fell to less than 50%, and then jumped to 60% before declining to 45% in 2021. These sharp changes in voting patterns bear many connotations about the relationship between the Palestinian public and parliamentary work in general, and between it and Arab parties in particular (see table 3/5).

The Joint List obtained 212,583 votes in the March 2021 electoral cycle, equivalent to 4.82% of the total public vote, while the UAL obtained 167,064 votes, equivalent to 3.79% of the total public vote.²⁵ By comparison, the Joint List obtained 581,507 votes equivalent to 12.67% of the total public vote in the 23rd Knesset elections (March 2020).²⁶ Despite the decline in voting in Palestinian society, the majority of Arab voters elected the two Arab lists, accounting for about



80% of the Arab vote, while the rest went to Zionist parties. In the 2020 elections, 87% of Arab voters voted for the Joint List, while the remaining 13% voted for Zionist parties.

Table 3/5: Voting Patterns of the Arab Community Since the Formation of the Joint List in 2015²⁷

	2015	April 2019*	September 2019	March 2020	March 2021**
No. of votes for the Joint List	446,583	337,108	470,611	487,911	317,384
No. of seats	13	10	13	15	10
Voters for the Joint List (%)	82	70	80	87	79.5
Voters for Zionist parties (%)	18	30	20	13	19.4
Abstention from voting (%)	36	51	40	35	55

Note: These results do not include mixed cities.

* Numbers of votes for Hadash–Ta’al and UAL–Balad.

** Numbers of votes for the Joint List (Three components) and the UAL.

In this election, the Zionist parties obtained approximately 20% of the Arab vote, i.e., around 80 thousand votes. Of these votes, Likud obtained 26%, Meretz 19%, Yisrael Beiteinu 17%, and Yesh Atid 11%.²⁸

The voting rate in the Arab community for the 24th Knesset is indicative of first-rate protest and punitive behavior against the Joint List, and does not carry a negative political stance against parliamentary action.

We cannot infer from the marked rise and decline in voting rates from one session to another, with such speed and high proportions for one side or the other, that it has de-legitimized parliamentary action in domestic Arab politics altogether. In the current election cycle, the two Arab lists obtained almost 380 thousand votes, about 200 thousand fewer than the March 2020 elections, when they were on the Joint List. The current number of votes and the split into two lists, as well as the stable number of votes obtained by the Zionist parties in the last two sessions, indicate that the primary options for the Palestinian public were either to vote for the two Arab lists or to abstain.

c. UAL Participation in the Government

The UAL decided to join the Bennett-Lapid government. This decision came a year after it had moved to participate in or support any governmental coalition. It also came under the umbrella of domestic influence, in the words of its leaders.

The UAL, headed by Mansour ‘Abbas, followed political rhetoric and behavior that bet on involvement in any Israeli government, notably after the March 2020 elections, the failure of wagering on the Gantz project, and the toppling of Netanyahu by the Joint List, of which the UAL was a constituent.

After Netanyahu failed to form a government due to the refusal of the Religious Zionism party²⁹ of the UAL’s support of the coalition government, the latter signed the government coalition participation agreement with Yesh Atid. On 2/6/2021, the Yesh Atid head Yair Lapid, and the UAL head Mansour ‘Abbas, signed an agreement to form a unity government. This agreement covered understandings agreed between the two lists and an annex regulating the work of the government. The most important items, as set out in the agreement, were:³⁰

- “The UAL supports the formation of the government, is part of the governmental coalition, is committed to the decisions of the government and the management of the coalition, and supports its actions in the Knesset.”
- “The UAL supports all legislative amendments submitted to the Knesset after the signing of this agreement.”
- “The UAL is committed to supporting coalition actions in the Knesset and voting for coalition candidates for various positions in the Knesset and various committees.”
- “The UAL works to ensure that the government remains until the end of its term, including supporting the State budget and opposing proposals of no confidence or proposals for the dissolution of the Knesset.”
- “The Committee of the Interior and Environmental Protection will be split into two committees: the Committee of the Interior and Environmental Protection and the Committee of Internal Security.”
- “The UAL will have the following positions: Deputy Minister in the Office of the Head of Government; Chairman of the Committee of the Interior; Deputy Speaker of the Knesset; and Chair of the Special Committee on Arab Society Affairs.”



- “The parties agree to work on the formulation of a five-year plan to reduce gaps in Arab, Druze, Circassian and Bedouin communities with a budget of 30 billion shekels [around \$9.2 billion]³¹ by the end of 2026, without prejudice to previous government decisions (at least 50% of which is budget increase). The five-year plan is developed in coordination between the Authority for Economic Development of Arab Society and the Budget Section of the Ministry of Finance, and in consultation with the Special Committee on Arab Society Affairs.”
- “The government will approve a five-year plan to combat violence and crime in Arab society, according to the report of the Directors and the government’s resolution No. 852 for a budget of 2.5 billion shekels [around \$771 million] for five years, including one billion shekels [around \$308 million] of a civilian nature to combat crime and violence unrelated to the Department of Internal Security.”
- “Establishment of a ministerial committee for Arab society affairs under the chairmanship of the head of government.”
- “To overcome the planning and bureaucratic obstacles to building permits in Arab society and to approach the government’s legal adviser in order to examine the cancellation of fines imposed on Arabs in connection with unauthorized construction.”
- “The government is under the obligation to ratify within 45 days of its formation the decision of the government on the recognition of three Bedouin villages in the Negev. In parallel, within nine months of its formation, the government will present for ratification a plan to settle/ regulate the settlement of Bedouins in the Negev according to the general interest of the Negev.”

Second: Demographic Indicators

The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) estimated the population of Israel at the end of 2021 at 9.451 million, including 6.983 million Jews, i.e., 73.9% of the population, compared to 9.29 million people, including 6.874 million Jews, i.e., 74% of the population at the end of 2020. The Arab population, including those in East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, was estimated at 1.996 million in 2021, compared to 1.957 million in 2020, i.e., 21.1% of the population (see table 4/5). If we exclude the population of East Jerusalem (370 thousand)³² and the Golan Heights

(25 thousand), the number of 1948 Palestinians (i.e., the Palestinian territories occupied in 1948) was about 1.6 million in 2021, i.e., 16.9% of the population.

In 2021, the CBS classified 472 thousand people as “others” (5%), compared to 458.6 thousand in 2020. These “others” are mostly immigrants from Russia, the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, who are not recognized as Jews, or who tend to deal with Judaism as a nationality rather than a religious affiliation, or who are non-Jews or non-Arab Christians.

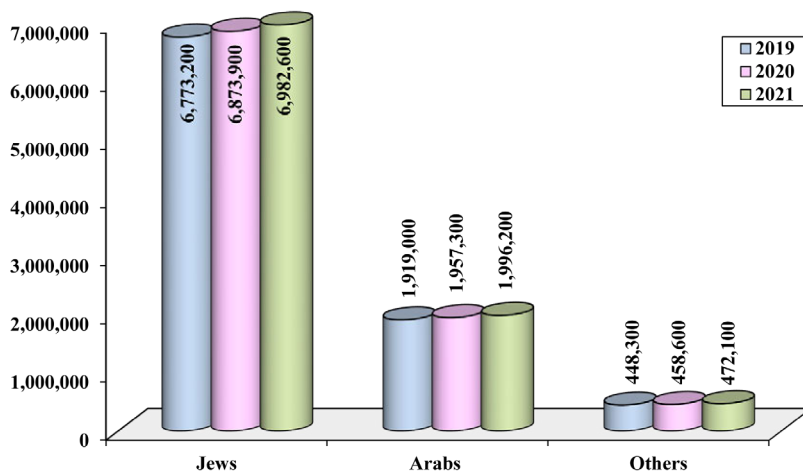
A CBS statement issued on the commemoration of the occupation of the eastern part of Jerusalem in 1967, affirmed Jerusalem as the largest city in Palestine with a population accounting for 10% of the total population of Israel. At the end of 2020, the population of Jerusalem reached 951 thousand, including 585 thousand settlers and 367 thousand Palestinians, approximately 38.6%.³³ Israeli estimates indicated that in 2021, the number of settlers in East Jerusalem was 800 thousand, while ARIJ estimates for the same year indicated that the number was 913 thousand.

Table 4/5: Population of Israel 2013–2021³⁴

Year	Total	Jews	Arabs (including the population of East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights)	Others
2013	8,134,500	6,104,500	1,683,200	346,800
2014	8,296,900	6,219,200	1,720,300	357,400
2015	8,463,400	6,334,500	1,757,800	371,100
2016	8,628,600	6,446,100	1,797,300	386,200
2017	8,797,900	6,554,500	1,838,200	405,200
2018	8,967,600	6,664,300	1,878,400	424,900
2019	9,140,500	6,773,200	1,919,000	448,300
2020	9,289,800	6,873,900	1,957,300	458,600
2021	9,450,900	6,982,600	1,996,200	472,100



Population of Israel 2019–2021



In 2020, Israel’s population growth rate was 1.63%, compared to about 1.7% in 2021. In 2021, there was an increase of 1.58% for Jews and 1.99% for Arabs, including eastern Jerusalem and the Golan Heights.

According to the CBS, life expectancy in Israel was 80.7 years for men and 84.8 years for women. Moreover, 44.8% of Jews identified themselves as secular, 20.5% identified themselves as conservative but not particularly religious; 12.5% saw themselves as traditionally religious; 11.7% said they were religious; and 10% identified as ultra-Orthodox.³⁵

The 1948 Palestinians suffered greatly from the spread of organized crime and weapons, with some 500 weapons found in Arab towns without a permit, according to Israeli police estimates. They also suffered from the inaction of the responsible authorities and the complicity of the Israeli police with crime gangs. There seems to be an unstated Israeli policy to create an undesirable environment for Palestinians. A total of 113 Palestinians were killed by organized crime in 2020,³⁶ and some 110 more had been killed by November 2021.³⁷

Simultaneously, there has been increased incitement in Israeli Zionist circles against the 1948 Palestinians and against the Palestinians in general. According to the Racism and Incitement Index in Israeli social networks, published by 7amleh–The Arab Center for the Advancement of Social Media, hate speech towards Arabs increased by 8% in 2021 compared to 2020, with 620 thousand monitored conversations involving violence and inciting hate speech against Arabs. This violent discourse saw a 16% increase in 2020 compared to 2019.³⁸

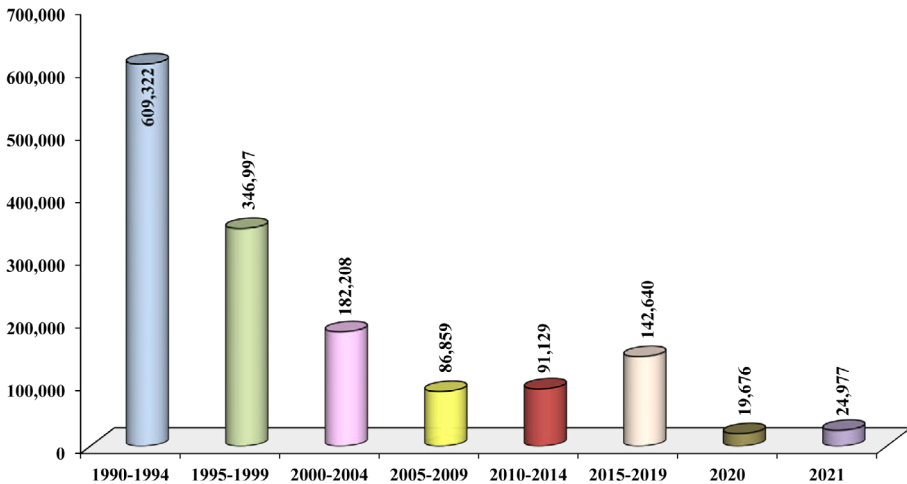
In 2021, according to the CBS, 24,977 immigrants went to Israel, compared to 19,676 and 33,247 in 2020 and 2019 respectively (see table 5/5). According to statistics pls. expand between words, the number of immigrants to Israel since its establishment in 1948 has reached 3.3 million, 45.6% of whom arrived following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.³⁹ These figures show relative stability in the immigration rate in 2015–2021. However, they remain minimal compared to the 1990s. This comes after the diminution of the numbers of Jews willing to migrate, and after most Jews abroad went to countries in North America and Europe, so Jews do not have an incentive to migrate on a large scale.

Table 5/5: Numbers of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2021⁴⁰

Year	1990–1994	1995–1999	2000–2004	2005–2009	2010–2014	2015–2019	2020	2021	Grand Total
No. of immigrants	609,322	346,997	182,208	86,859	91,129	142,640	19,676	24,977	1,503,808

The following chart shows the evolution of the number of Jewish immigrants to Israel every five years in 1990–2019, except for 2020–2021.

Numbers of Jewish Immigrants to Israel 1990–2021



It should be noted that immigration to Israel has been accompanied by continued counter-migration. According to the CBS, 15,500 Israeli passport holders exited, in 2019, while 8,000 returned in the same year. In other words, the rate of counter-migration was about 7,500 persons.⁴¹

According to CBS estimates, 560–596 thousand Israelis lived abroad as of the end of 2016, not including the number of children born to them while they were outside the country.⁴² According to an annual report released by the National Union of Israeli Students in 2018, 59% of university students in Israel think of immigration for various reasons, mostly personal and economic.⁴³

With reference to the religious distribution of the 1948 Palestinians, it should be noted first that Israeli statistics incorporate the eastern Jerusalem Palestinians and Syrians of the Golan Heights with the 1948 Palestinians. Thus, according to data at the end of 2020, there are approximately 1.671 million Muslims (Sunni) at 85.4%, 147 thousand Druze at 7.5%, and 137.6 thousand Christians at 7%.⁴⁴

As for the world Jewish population, it was estimated at 15.166 million in 2021, the vast majority of whom lived in the US and Israel. This figure was a jump in estimates compared to previous years. The reason for the sudden increase in the figures that used to be published by the same sources, is that they started to include those Jews who do not believe in Judaism as a religion, and children whose parents are Jewish, mostly in the US. It is an increase of about 500 thousand compared to 2019, up from an annual increase of about 100 thousand per year.

Demographer and activist at the Jewish Agency for Israel, Sergio DellaPergola, noted that the number of Jews in the US was about 6 million, an increase of only 300 thousand from 2013. However, according to a Pew Research Center poll, the number of Jews in the US is 7.5 million, an increase of 800 thousand from 2013. Another estimate in the American Jewish Youth Book by Ira Sheskin and Arnold Dashefsky showed that the number of Jews in the US was 7.3 million, an increase of 600 thousand from 2013, a figure close to the Pew Research Center poll. According to Ira Sheskin, the majority of American sociologists accepted this difference in numbers as reasonable estimates, and DellaPergola did not count 1.5 million people identified as “Jews without religion.”⁴⁵ They belong to Judaism as a nation, rather than a religion. However, the adoption of this figure would bring the total number of Jews in the US and Israel to 14.298 million (according to the Jewish Virtual Library), i.e., 94.3% of the world’s Jews, which does not make sense if the rest of the world’s Jews were added. In this case, one has to either remove or decrease the Jewish presence in a number of countries, or has to increase the total number of Jews by 15.166 million to accommodate the rest of the world’s Jews.⁴⁶ In this report, we therefore prefer to maintain an estimate of 6 million Jews in the

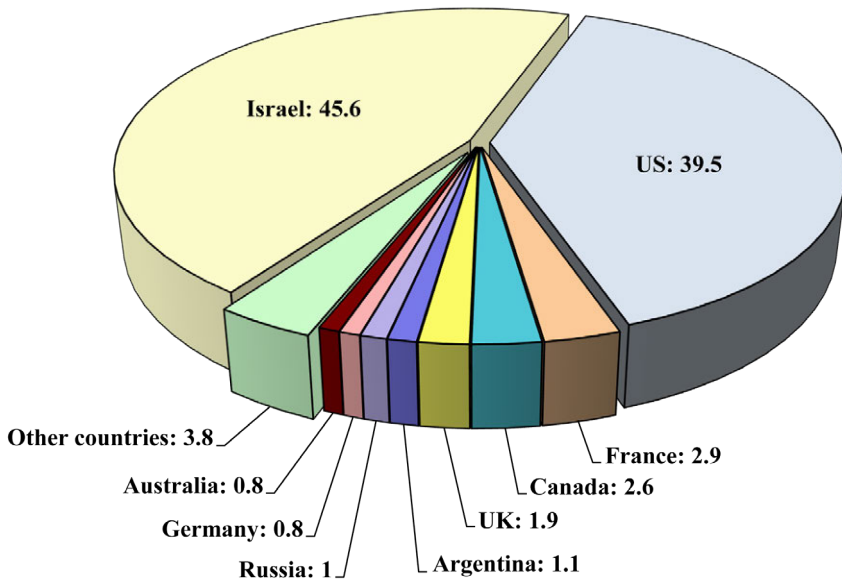
US, which is closer to the logical distribution of Jews and their global spread, the same figure as the Jewish Agency.

Undoubtedly, this great disparity in the assessment of the numbers of Jews, mainly due to the definition of who is Jewish, is confusing. However, it does not negate the small number of Jews worldwide, their concentration of more than 85% in two countries, and the overall slow growth of their numbers. It also underlines a state of declining numbers in other societies and reflects the problems and challenges of globalization on Jewish people around the world.

Table 6/5: World Jewish Population by Country 2021⁴⁷

Country	Israel	US	France	Canada	UK	Argentina	Russia	Germany	Australia	Other countries	Total
Estimates (thousands)	6,930	6,000	446	393.5	292	175	150	118	118	577.5	15,200
Percentage (%)	45.6	39.5	2.9	2.6	1.9	1.1	1	0.8	0.8	3.8	100

World Jewish Population by Country 2021 (%)



Third: Economic Indicators

Israel enjoys an advanced economic situation comparable to the standard of living and economies in western Europe and a higher standard of living and stronger economy than the countries of the Middle East. This prosperity is at the expense of the Palestinian people, their land and their natural wealth, and it is boosted by US support and the influence of the Western world. Israel also benefits from the absence of Arab states willing to challenge them and from normalization with numerous Arab countries.

During the years 2020–2021, the Israeli economy suffered greatly from the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic. Israeli experts spoke of Israel's worst economic downturn since its establishment and of an economic crisis that wiped out several years of economic progress. At the end of 2021, the number of cases reached 1.38 million.⁴⁸

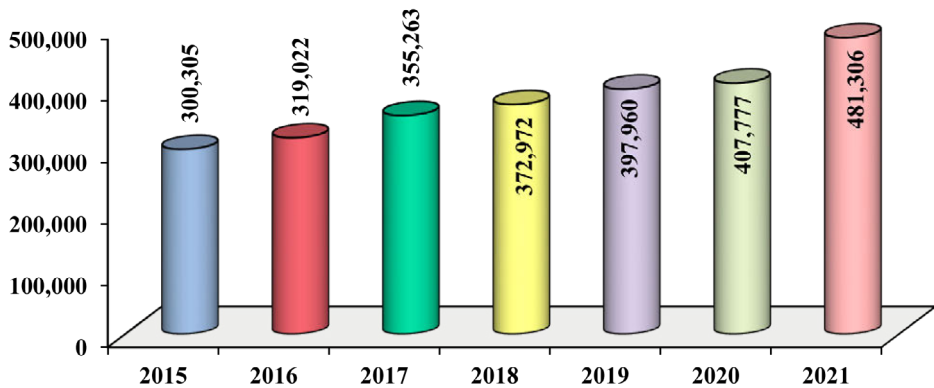
Israel spent some \$9.3 billion up to the end of 2021 to deal with the pandemic. The government deficit rose to 11.6% in 2020, and the public debt rose from 60% to 72.6% of national income. Each week cost the Israeli economy 6–9 billion shekels (about \$1.9–2.8 billion). Hotel occupancy rates by foreign tourists fell by 95% in 2020. The economic improvement of 2021 remained partial, although losses were lower than expected.⁴⁹

The Israeli economy was also affected by the consequences of the war on Gaza during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, in May 2021, with economic losses totaling some \$2.14 billion.⁵⁰

According to CBS estimates, GDP totaled 1,554.3 billion shekels (\$481 billion) in 2021, compared to 1,401.4 billion shekels (about \$408 billion) in 2020 and 1,418.4 billion shekels (\$398 billion) in 2019. Based on these estimates, GDP grew in local currency by 10.9% in 2021 and regressed by 1.2% in 2020. When dollar growth is calculated, and because of the fluctuation in the value of the shekel against the dollar, growth rose by 18% in 2021, while it fell by 2.5% in 2020 compared to the previous year (see table 7/5). Note, however, that the statistics we present are derived from official sources, which update data and make adjustments from time to time.

Table 7/5: Israeli GDP 2015–2021 at Current Prices⁵¹

Year	GDP (million shekels)	GDP (\$ million)	Shekel exchange rate (according to Bank of Israel)
2015	1,166,354	300,305	3.8839
2016	1,225,235	319,022	3.8406
2017	1,278,841	355,263	3.5997
2018	1,341,581	372,972	3.597
2019	1,418,449	397,960	3.5643
2020	1,401,406	407,777	3.4367
2021	1,554,281	481,306	3.2293

Israeli GDP in 2015–2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)

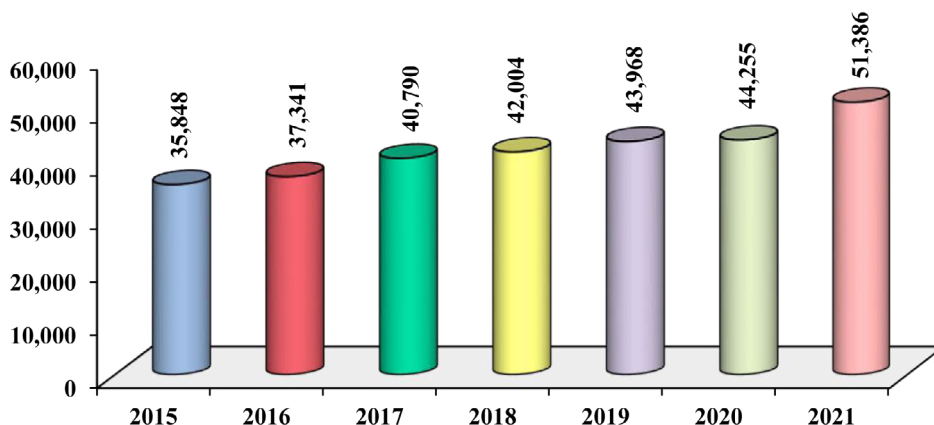
According to Israeli statistics, Israeli GDP per capita income in 2021 was 165,942 shekels (\$51,386), compared to 152,090 shekels (\$44,255) in 2020 and 156,716 shekels (\$43,968) in 2019. According to these statistics, GDP per capita income grew in the local currency by 9.1% in 2021 and declined by 3% in 2020. When dollar growth is calculated, and because of the fluctuation in the value of the shekel against the dollar, growth increased by 16.1% in 2021 and by 0.7% in 2020 compared to the previous year. Therefore, one should not rush to conclusions if the difference in the local currency against the dollar is not considered (see table 8/5).



Table 8/5: Israeli GDP per Capita 2015–2021 at Current Prices⁵²

Year	GDP per capita (shekels)	GDP per capita (\$)
2015	139,231	35,848
2016	143,413	37,341
2017	146,830	40,790
2018	151,087	42,004
2019	156,716	43,968
2020	152,090	44,255
2021	165,942	51,386

Israeli GDP per Capita 2015–2021 at Current Prices (\$)



According to the annual poverty report of the Israeli organization Latet published on 21/12/2021, 27% of the population of Israel live below the poverty line. This statistic is often calculated before they receive social benefits that reduce their poverty by about 29%. What is striking, however, is that these allocations raise about 45% of poor Jews above the poverty line, as opposed to 11% of poor 1948 Palestinians. 27% means that 2.5 million people live below the poverty line, including 1.1 million children under 18.⁵³

The NII’s Annual Poverty Report of 29/12/2021 stated that the poverty rate was 21% in 2020 and 22.7% in 2021.⁵⁴

The Adva Center in Tel Aviv noted in its March 2021 report that almost one million people had become unemployed or closed their small businesses in 2020,

mostly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, while high earners in Israel were not affected. The number of millionaires declined by only a small percentage, and there were 157 thousand millionaires in Israel.⁵⁵

With regard to the budget of the Israeli government, CBS data indicated that total expenditures in the approved amended budget for 2019 amounted to 572.345 billion shekels (about \$160.58 billion). However, the grand total of budget performance of government receipts was 624.526 billion shekels (\$181.7 billion) in 2020 compared to 554.726 billion shekels (about \$155.6 billion) in 2019.⁵⁶

The budget is spread across three areas: first, the ordinary budget covering the expenses of the presidency, the prime minister and the ministries; second, the development budget and debt repayment; and third, the budget of business enterprises. We note that the ordinary budget performance of 2020 was 455.957 billion shekels (\$132.7 billion), including that of the Ministry of Defense at 71.928 billion shekels (\$20.9 billion), and the Ministry of Public Security at 19.797 billion shekels (\$5.76 billion). This was in addition to 79.909 billion shekels (\$23.3 billion) spent by the Ministry of Education, and 77.434 billion shekels (\$22.5 billion) spent by the Ministry of Social Affairs. It should also be noted that debt repayment carved out a significant portion of total expenditure, reaching 97.392 billion shekels (about \$28.3 billion) in 2020 compared to 104.85 billion shekels (\$29.4 billion) in 2019.⁵⁷

The big jump in expenditure in 2020 appears to be mainly related to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic and the provision of social welfare and financial support to workers, who had been temporarily or completely disrupted by the pandemic.

The grand total of budget performance of government receipts in 2020 was 610.8 billion shekels (\$177.7 billion) compared to 512.13 billion shekels (\$143.7 billion) in 2019. A large proportion of the current receipts came from income tax (139.3 billion shekels or about \$40.5 billion) and value added tax (VAT) (100.2 billion shekels or about \$29.2 billion) as was apparent in the 2020 budget.⁵⁸

Statistics obtained from the Ministry of Finance of Israel showed that expenditures reached 519.9 billion shekels (\$161 billion) in 2021, without referring to debt repayment and business enterprises. Statistics showed expenditure of 478.5 billion shekels (about \$139.2 billion) in 2020, compared to 420.3 billion shekels (about \$117.9 billion) in 2019.⁵⁹

It must be noted that, according to statistics and figures issued by official Israeli authorities, there may be some confusion among researchers due to the lack of precise distinction between the grand total or ordinary budget, and whether it was the budget approved by the government or by the Knesset or the actual budget updated for receipts and payments after the completion of the fiscal year.

The following table shows the actual public receipts and payments of the Israeli government during 2018–2020:

Table 9/5: Budget Performance of Israeli Government Receipts and Payments 2018–2020⁶⁰

		2018		2019		2020	
		Million shekels	Million \$	Million shekels	Million \$	Million shekels	Million \$
Receipts	Current receipts	314,753	87,504.3	323,245	90,689.6	316,192	92,004.5
	Capital receipts	128,694	35,778.1	162,575	45,612	269,135	78,312
	Business receipts	25,072	6,970.3	26,312	7,382.1	25,473	7,412.1
Receipts grand total		468,519	130,252.7	512,133	143,684	610,800	177,728.6
Payments	Ordinary budget	368,549	102,460.1	384,165	107,781.3	455,957	132,672.9
	Development budget and debt repayment	113,338	31,509	144,229	40,464.9	143,101	41,639.1
	Business enterprises	24,983	6,945.5	26,332	7,387.7	25,468	7,410.6
Payments grand total		506,870	140,914.7	554,726	155,633.9	624,526	181,722.6
Deficit (%)		-8.2		-8.3		-2.2	

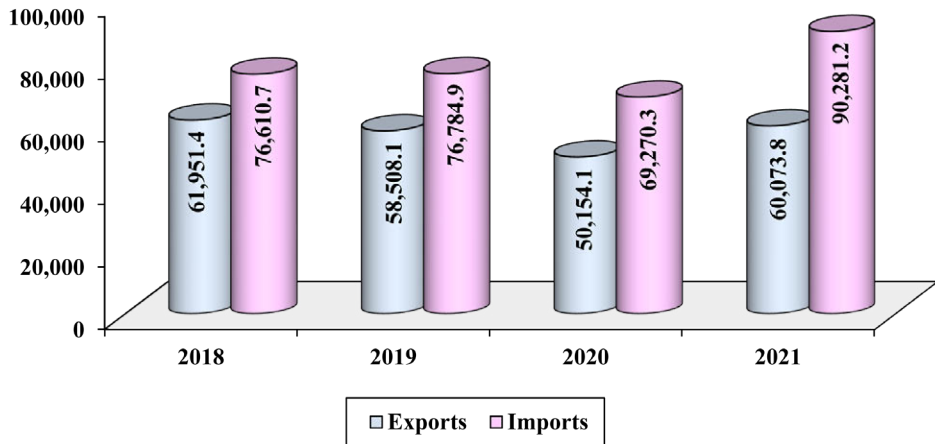
Israeli exports for 2021 amounted to \$60.07 billion, compared to \$50.154 billion in 2020 and \$58.508 billion in 2019. Exports thus increased by 19.8% in 2021, after a 14.3% decrease in 2020. Imports for 2021 totaled \$90.28 billion, compared

to \$69.27 billion in 2020 and \$76.79 billion in 2019. Imports thus increased by 30.3% in 2021, after a 9.8% decrease in 2020 (see table 10/5). These statistics do not include foreign trade services (import and export activities) and the ratios were based on the dollar, not the shekel.

Table 10/5: Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2018–2021 at Current Prices⁶¹

		Exports	Imports	Deficit (%)
2018	Million shekels	222,432.6	275,436.4	-23.8
	\$ million	61,951.4	76,610.7	
2019	Million shekels	208,769.1	273,743.8	-31.1
	\$ million	58,508.1	76,784.9	
2020	Million shekels	172,326.2	237,861.8	-38
	\$ million	50,154.1	69,270.3	
2021	Million shekels	193,828.8	291,387.8	-50.3
	\$ million	60,073.8	90,281.2	

Total Israeli Exports and Imports 2018–2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)



The US still maintains its status as a primary trading partner of Israel. In 2021, Israeli exports to the US amounted to \$16.195 billion, representing 27% of all Israeli exports, compared with \$13.132 billion in 2020 (26.2% of all Israeli exports). Israeli imports from the US declined significantly in 2021, reaching \$8.293 billion, representing 9.2% of all Israeli imports, compared with \$8.05 billion in 2018 (11.6% of all Israeli imports). Israel offset its trade deficit to a large extent with most of its trading partners through the trade surplus of \$7.9 billion in 2021 and \$5.08 billion in 2020, with the US, which represented significant support to the Israeli economy (see table 11/5).

China was the second largest trading partner of Israel, with exports to Israel amounting to \$4.356 billion in 2021 and \$4.241 billion in 2020, and Israeli imports from China amounted to \$10.724 billion in 2021 and \$7.67 billion in 2020. Germany ranked third, with a trade volume of \$8.35 billion, up from \$6.91 billion in 2020.

Switzerland advanced from fifth to fourth place in 2021, with a trade volume of \$7.341 billion compared to \$5.672 billion in 2020. It was notable that Turkey advanced from seventh to fifth place to a trade volume of \$6.67 billion in 2021, up from \$4.93 billion in 2020. Belgium and the Netherlands each occupied the sixth and seventh positions with \$5.99 billion and \$5.94 billion respectively. Britain slipped from third place in 2019 to fourth place in 2020 with a trade volume of \$6.68 billion, then to eighth place in 2021 with a trade volume of \$5.38 billion (see table 11/5).

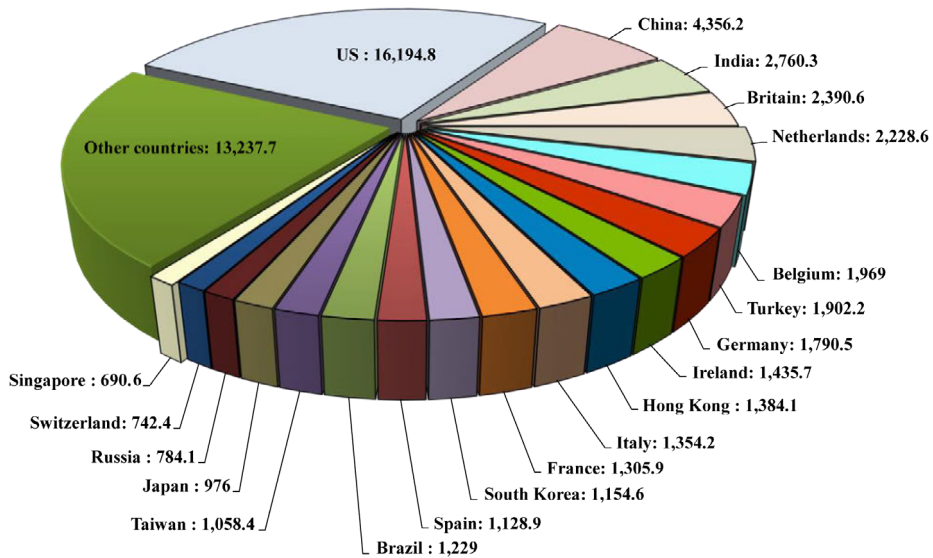
Along with the aforementioned, the most notable countries to which Israel exported goods in 2021 were India (\$2.76 billion), Ireland (\$1.44 billion), Hong Kong (\$1.38 billion), Italy (\$1.35 billion), France, and Brazil. It is noteworthy that Israeli exports to Ireland rose by 625%, and overall trade between Ireland and Israel rose by 141% in 2021 compared to 2020. The main countries from which Israel imported goods in 2021 are Italy (\$3.36 billion), Hong Kong (\$2.67 billion), France (\$2.37 billion), South Korea (\$2.25 billion), India (\$2.24 billion) and Spain (\$2.03 billion) (see table 11/5).

Table 11/5: Volume of Israeli Trade, Exports and Imports to/ from Selected Countries 2020–2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)⁶²

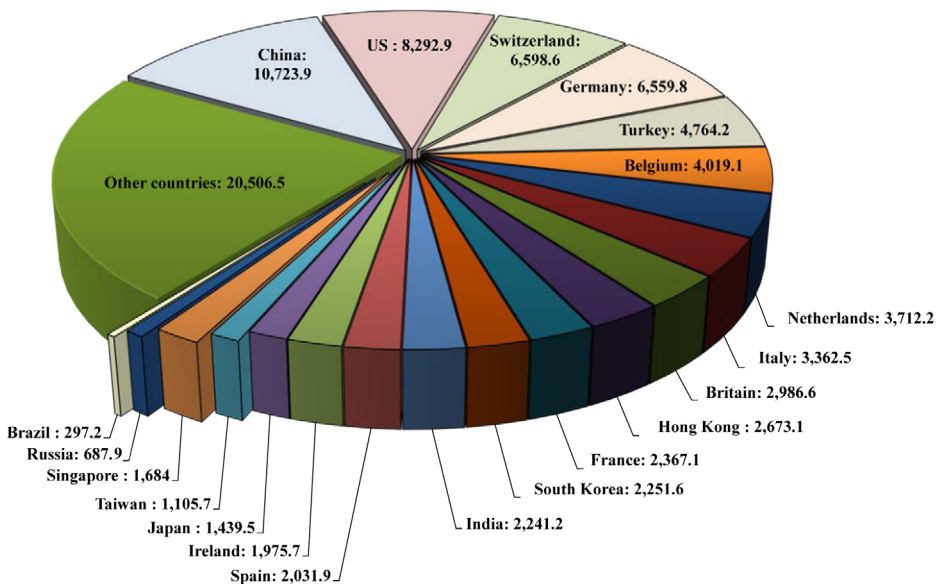
	Country	Trade volume		Israeli exports to:		Israeli imports from:	
		2021	2020	2021	2020	2021	2020
1	US	24,487.7	21,181.8	16,194.8	13,132.3	8,292.9	8,049.5
2	China	15,080.1	11,910.2	4,356.2	4,240.5	10,723.9	7,669.7
3	Germany	8,350.3	6,911.5	1,790.5	1,681.1	6,559.8	5,230.4
4	Switzerland	7,341	5,671.9	742.4	445.2	6,598.6	5,226.7
5	Turkey	6,666.4	4,928.8	1,902.2	1,430.8	4,764.2	3,498
6	Belgium	5,988.1	4,524.4	1,969	1,458.3	4,019.1	3,066.1
7	Netherlands	5,940.8	5,364.9	2,228.6	2,462.8	3,712.2	2,902.1
8	Britain	5,377.2	6,681.4	2,390.6	3,712.7	2,986.6	2,968.7
9	India	5,001.5	3,112.6	2,760.3	1,598.9	2,241.2	1,513.7
10	Italy	4,716.7	3,470.2	1,354.2	786.7	3,362.5	2,683.5
11	Hong Kong	4,057.2	3,249.4	1,384.1	1,239.6	2,673.1	2,009.8
12	France	3,673	3,290	1,305.9	1,153.7	2,367.1	2,136.3
13	Ireland	3,411.4	1,414.1	1,435.7	198	1,975.7	1,216.1
14	South Korea	3,406.2	2,480.4	1,154.6	787.7	2,251.6	1,692.7
15	Spain	3,160.8	2,401.2	1,128.9	874.8	2,031.9	1,526.4
16	Japan	2,415.5	2,187.7	976	948.3	1,439.5	1,239.4
17	Singapore	2,374.6	1,587.1	690.6	513.9	1,684	1,073.2
18	Taiwan	2,164.1	1,671.2	1,058.4	733.2	1,105.7	938
19	Brazil	1,526.2	1,226.3	1,229	1,006.7	297.2	219.6
20	Russia	1,472	1,090.3	784.1	672	687.9	418.3
21	Other countries	33,744.2	25,069	13,237.7	11,076.9	20,506.5	13,992.1
Total		150,355	119,424.4	60,073.8	50,154.1	90,281.2	69,270.3



Israeli Exports to Selected Countries 2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Israeli Imports from Selected Countries 2021 at Current Prices (\$ million)



Manufacturing, mining, and quarrying topped the list of Israeli exports for the years 2020 and 2021 with 91.9% and 89.1%, respectively. The proportion of net Israeli diamond exports was 6.5% in 2020 and 9.4% in 2021. Agricultural

exports and those relating to forestry and fishing totaled to 2% in 2020 and 2021 (see table 12/5). The breakdown of industrial exports by technological intensity, high-tech industries accounted for 38% of all such exports in 2020, with medium-tech industries accounting for 55% and low-tech industries for 7%.⁶³

Table 12/5: Israeli Exports by Commodity Group 2019–2021 (\$ million)⁶⁴

Year	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Manufacturing, mining & quarrying excl. working diamonds	Working of diamonds & Wholesale of diamond	Other	Discarded exports	Total
2019	1,124.6	46,069.5	4,843.8	7.3	−394.2	51,651.1
2020	1,039.4	43,640.9	3,099.4	52.3	−341.8	47,490.1
2021	1,129.1	50,165.6	5,314.5	14.2	−340.5	56,283

For Israeli imports, raw materials topped the list of imports in 2020 and 2021, with 45.7% and 44.1% respectively, fuel imports amounted to 8% and 10.1%, consumer goods 26%, investment goods 16%, and diamond imports 4% in 2020 and 2021 respectively (see table 13/5).

Table 13/5: Israeli Imports by Commodity Group 2019–2021 (\$ million)⁶⁵

Year	Consumer goods	Raw materials	Investment materials	Fuel	Polished and rough diamonds	Others	Total
2019	17,307.5	31,229.9	11,263.6	9,155.2	3,879.7	2,975.8	75,811.7
2020	17,962.4	31,384.2	10,842.6	5,528.4	2,432.1	597.8	68,747.5
2021	23,337.7	39,259.2	13,884	9,002.9	3,413.9	199.7	89,097.4

Although Israel is a rich and developed country, it still receives US annual aid, which has seen an increase of about \$700 million annually since 2018. Support increased to \$3.8 billion annually, including \$3.3 billion in military grants. Therefore, Israel received a total of \$3.8 billion in 2020 and the same in 2021. The total support received by Israel in 1949–2021 is approximately \$145.89 billion, according to the report by the Congressional Research Service (CRS).⁶⁶

Table 14/5: US Foreign Aid to Israel 1949–2021 (\$ million)⁶⁷

Period	1949–1958	1959–1968	1969–1978	1979–1988	1989–1998
Total	599.6	727.8	11,426.5	29,933.9	31,551.9

Period	1999–2008	2009–2018	2019	2020	2021	Grand total
Total	29,374.7	30,878.2	3,800	3,800	3,800	145,892.6

Fourth: Military Indicators

Despite Israel's huge military superiority compared to the Palestinian resistance or even to Arab States, and despite the availability of all forms of weapons, training, mobilization, advanced techniques and huge budgets, the Palestinian resistance, particularly in GS, imposed itself and managed to confuse the Israeli army and thwart its plans in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. It even managed to confuse the Israeli community in historic Palestine. This led the political and military apparatuses to conduct reviews of their plans. The military indicators for 2020–2021 are as follows:

1. Appointments and Structural Changes

In 2020 and 2021, there were regular appointments to important positions in the Israeli army. In August 2020, Brigadier General Nimrod Aloni took over as Commander of the Gaza Division.⁶⁸ In October 2020, General Yaron Finkleman became the leader of the Operations Section of the Israeli Army Operations Directorate, a central role in planning military activities and often a starting point for a position in the Israeli Army General Staff.⁶⁹

In September 2021, following Major General Amikam Norkin, a new Israeli Air Force Commander was appointed Tomer Bar, who was the head of the Force Design Directorate (a rejiggered version of what was once the Planning Directorate), while he was replaced by General Yaakov Banjo.⁷⁰ On 12/10/2021, Major General Tamir Yadai was appointed Commanding Officer of the Ground Forces, succeeding Major General Yoel Strick.⁷¹

2. Manpower

The Israeli army's forces numbered around 635 thousand, including 170 thousand active personnel, and 465 thousand reserve personnel.⁷² It is an effective reserve that can enter service and be ready to fight in just four days. In recent years, the influence of the right-wing religious movement has increased, including in the upper ranks of the army.

In January 2022, the Israeli Army's Manpower Directorate issued its annual data showing the number of soldiers killed in different circumstances during 2021: 31 Israeli soldiers were killed in 2021, compared to 28 in 2020 and 27 in 2019. In 2021, 19 soldiers were killed in training, road or work accidents compared to 13 in 2020. A soldier was killed by an anti-tank missile in GS during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021, while in 2020, a soldier in the Golani unit was killed as a result of a stone being thrown at his head during an arrest campaign in WB. There were 11 suicides in 2021, 3 of them Falasha Jews, compared to 9 in 2020 and 12 in 2019.⁷³ It should be noted that Israeli sniper Barel Shmueli, who was killed by a Palestinian gunman during a protest at the GS border in August 2021, was not included in the death statistics because he was serving with the border guard police.⁷⁴

Regarding military motivation, on 1/8/2020 the Walla! website indicated that the Israeli army was suffering from the low motivation of young soldiers about serving in combat units. The desire of young Israelis to serve in the military is constantly declining, as 11.5% of new soldiers evaded service in 2019 compared to 7.9% in 2018.⁷⁵ On 6/1/2022, the Israel Democracy Institute revealed in its annual report that public trust in the army has reached its lowest level in 10 years. Indeed, it has declined from 90% in 2019 to 81% in 2020 and 78% in 2021.⁷⁶

3. Military Plans and Directions

According to security and military estimates and research center analysts, the challenges for Israel are increasing in 2022, following the long series of global, regional and local events affecting the Israeli landscape in 2020–2021.

According to Israeli consensus, Iran's nuclear program has been defined as the most serious threat to Israel and its national security, under the pretext that Iran is gaining the necessary knowledge and expertise in nuclear weapons and advancing uranium enrichment to high levels.⁷⁷ However, in its report summarizing its

operations and security conditions on various fronts during 2021, the Israeli army acknowledged its inability to launch an attack on Iran without preparing for a preliminary battles on the Lebanese front, in Syria and GS. Israel's internal front remains "fragile" and ill-equipped for simultaneous warfare on several fronts and is not immune from rocket attacks that could affect Israeli targets that would be logical targets of an attack.⁷⁸

The Herzliya Conference in 2020 and 2021 concluded that the challenges and threats facing Israel were traditional (armies), non-traditional (resistance), nuclear and cyber-related. Ranking first, the Iranian threat is represented by its nuclear program and conventional military expansion in the geographical vicinity of Israel, especially in Lebanon and Syria. Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett threatened at the 2021 Herzliya Conference that Israel would respond directly to what he called attacks by Iran's proxies by targeting the Iranian regime.⁷⁹

While addressing the Israeli military option against Iran, the commander of the Israeli Air Force, General Amikam Norkin, also stressed during the same conference that according to the instructions of the Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, Aviv Kochavi, Iran is top of the army's priorities. This determines the allocation of resources and training, and prompts the army to improve its capabilities. He said that the army had to accelerate part of the procurement, production and long-distance refueling capabilities, and the strategic plan would no doubt be adapted to this.⁸⁰

In the document reviewing the main challenges facing Israel submitted by INSS to President Isaac Herzog in 2021, the Iranian nuclear program was defined as "the most serious threat to Israel". The document called for the military option to be ready if negotiations in Vienna failed to reach a new nuclear agreement. Moreover, it stressed that "Israel must continue to try to obstruct Iranian entrenchment in the northern arena and disrupt its subversive regional activity as part of the ongoing campaign between wars (CBW), while improving capabilities and avoiding signs of weakening in its struggle against Iranian influence." With regard to the Northern front, the potential threat there is growing with the disintegration of Lebanon, the growing division in Syria, and the consolidation of Hizbullah's power in Lebanon.⁸¹

As for the Palestinians, the document concluded that "the Palestinian arena is marginal to the international and regional agenda," but stressed the need to

strengthen the PA to “to achieve stability in the West Bank and to retain it as a partner in a future settlement, while maintaining high level dialogue and extending security coordination.” It added that “Preparations must be made for the post-Abu Mazen era, particularly since Hamas continues to gain strength,” and “Israel must improve its preparedness for a military operation in the Strip, including ground maneuvers designed to cause serious damage to the Hamas military wing.”⁸²

With the approval of the general budget for 2022 by the Israeli Knesset, the Multi-Year Tnufa Plan, which was developed by Aviv Kochavi, received a strong boost for implementation in regard to the training, structure and armament of the army, in particular the improvement of the standard of living, the operational level and the health situation within the army. This had been a key demand of Kochavi since he took office in 2018.⁸³ The credibility of the Israeli army, which was shaken on the eve of the May 2021 Sword of Jerusalem Battle, is being re-examined through the Tnufa Plan, which is based on a “sudden war” approach.

The Israeli army’s annual assessment found the security situation to be “improving,” and it believed the approval of the Ministry of Defense’s budget would help through further procurement, acquisition of equipment, and training of military and reserve personnel in the next two years. Despite the state of “improvement” in the security situation, according to the assessment, this cannot prevent the possibility of a sudden unexpected escalation on any of the fronts. This is especially true for the GS front, where the assessment finds that the factors that might lead to escalation have not diminished, for Hamas and the PIJ movements are resistance groups, and because Israel continues to refuse to improve the economic situation of Gaza, and negotiations on prisoner exchanges remain stalled. According to the report, the Israeli army recommended that Hamas and the PIJ must not be allowed to increase their military power.⁸⁴

4. Military Maneuvers

During the years 2020–2021, the Israeli army intensified its maneuvers simulating a confrontation on several fronts with a series of varied military exercises, in an effort to raise its readiness against the “security risks” of neighboring countries.

The maneuvers arose against the backdrop of repeated statements by senior Israeli officials predicting an escalation in the region, in a scenario where the Israeli army could fight a war on several fronts with Lebanon, Syria and GS, apart



from cyber warfare and cyberattacks. In a remarkable turn of events, the army conducted maneuvers in Arab towns in the 1948 occupied territories, simulating the outbreak of unrest inside Palestine and WB in the event of a war on one of the fronts, as had occurred during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.⁸⁵

One of the most visible exercises of recent years was the exercise by the Israeli army in December 2021, dedicated to preparing for the next war. According to the army statement, the maneuver simulated combat scenarios for improving the Israeli army's readiness for the next war, indicating that these "exercises were led by the Technology and Logistics Division in cooperation with the Ground Forces, the Operations Division and the Southern Command."⁸⁶ The Israeli army also conducted an exercise simulating a possible invasion of GS, the first after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021.⁸⁷

In March 2021, the Israeli army's Multidimensional Unit (Ghost Unit) completed a three-week exercise involving live ammunition maneuvers that included all its formations in the Golan Heights and at the Lebanese border. In the same vein, the Commander of the Ground Forces, Major General Yoel Strick, said, "We want the next war to be more precise and more lethal, with great intelligence, as live ammunition is activated next to Ground Forces."⁸⁸

As for the joint exercises between the Israeli army and other armies of the region and the world, they have become frequent and entrenched year after year, taking advantage of the often-tense relations between a number of States in the region. In March 2021, the Navy participated in international military exercises with Greece, Cyprus and France, in the eastern Mediterranean.⁸⁹ On 12/4/2021, Israel and the UAE conducted a 10-day joint air exercise.⁹⁰ In April 2021, Israel also participated in a maneuver called Iniohos held in Greece with the participation of seven countries, which simulated several scenarios, notably dealing with advanced surface-to-air missile threats and other scenarios.⁹¹

5. Arms and Arms Trade

State Comptroller Judge Matanyahu Engelman published his annual report in which he criticized the decision-making process of the security system and military armament. He wrote that there were flaws in the way security information about the purchase of new artillery is presented to the Chief of Staff, Minister of Defense and Cabinet. The Albert company, which won the tender, was the only company

considered, and the German competing company was not given a chance. The State Comptroller confirmed that the reports submitted to the Chief of Staff and to the Cabinet about the artillery were false and unclear.⁹²

In August 2020, four new F-35 stealth fighter jets were delivered to the Israeli Air Force⁹³ followed by three others in September 2021, bringing the total number to 30 delivered aircraft out of the 50 expected to be received by 2024.⁹⁴ On 30/12/2021, Israel also signed an agreement with the US to acquire 12 Lockheed Martin CH-53K helicopters and two Boeing KC-46 refueling aircraft. The Ministry of Defense estimated the total deal to be worth \$3.1 billion, with aircraft expected to arrive in 2026.⁹⁵

Israeli arms exports reached \$8.55 billion in 2020, mostly to the Asia and the Pacific region. It was an indicator of the growth in arms exports compared to 2019, when it reached \$7.3 billion.⁹⁶ Whereas in 2021, they reached \$11.3 billion, the highest since the establishment of Israel.

According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (Sipri) arms trade control report, Israeli arms exports represented 3% of the global total in 2016–2020, and were 59% higher than in 2011–2015, whereas Israeli arms exports represented 2.4% of the global total in 2017–2021, and were 5.6% less than in 2012–2016.⁹⁷

6. Military Budget

Due to the long political crisis that led to four legislative elections in less than two years, no budget was voted on in Israel after 2018. In December 2020, the Knesset was also dissolved because the MKs were unable to agree on a budget.

With the approval by the Knesset of the general budget for the year 2022 on Friday 5/11/2021 at dawn, the military received an important boost, particularly since the defense balance for the year 2022 was in accordance with the aspirations of the military. This gave impetus to the military's plans and programs in the face of what it saw as existential challenges.

The Israeli military budget amounted to \$20.929 billion (71.928 billion shekels) for 2020 based on the budget actual expenditure (see table 15/5), while the military budget for 2021 was estimated at more than \$23.9 billion (77.3 billion shekels).⁹⁸

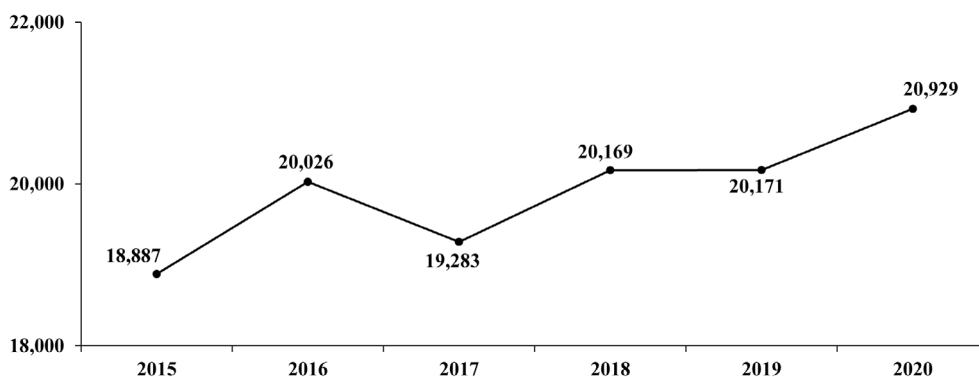


The following table shows actual Israeli military expenditure according to the CBS figures in the 2015–2020 period:

**Table 15/5: Actual Israeli Military Expenditures 2015–2020
at Current Prices⁹⁹**

Year	Expenditures (million shekels)	Expenditures (\$ million)
2015	73,356	18,887
2016	76,912	20,026
2017	69,414	19,283
2018	72,547	20,169
2019	71,897	20,171
2020	71,928	20,929

Actual Israeli Military Expenditures 2015–2020 at Current Prices (in \$ million)



Fifth: The Israeli Position on the Internal Palestinian Situation

Although two Israeli governments governed in the years 2020 and 2021, the first with a right-wing majority headed by Benjamin Netanyahu, and the second with right-wing, “centrist” and “left-wing” movements headed by Naftali Bennett, the policy of the two governments towards the internal Palestinian situation did not differ. Israel continued to exert pressure in order to consolidate the Palestinian

division, pursuing the GS siege, implementing closer security coordination, creating political and administrative tracks in WB as a substitute for the sovereignty of the PA, and preparing for the post-‘Abbas period by finding a successor in accordance with Israeli security and political criteria. 2021 witnessed a new war on GS, just before the end of the Netanyahu government and his replacement by Bennett.

With the progress of the Palestinian reconciliation during 2020, and the announcement of an agreement on PLC, presidential and PNC elections starting with the PLC ones in May 2021, it was clear how much Israel feared that Hamas could win these elections. Multiple Palestinian polls supported this notion, intersecting with Israeli estimates confirming such a possibility. Consequently, there were a series of Israeli statements warning against such a scenario, in conjunction with arrests, repression and threats against many Palestinian faction candidates in WB, the largest share of them being Hamas candidates and officials, which was a clear intervention to enshrine division and undermine the Palestinian democratic track.

Gabi Ashkenazi, the Israeli Foreign Minister in Netanyahu’s government, stressed that the Palestinian elections seemed more serious than previous attempts, but expressed concern about the growing strength of Hamas in GS.¹⁰⁰ On 9/4/2021, the Walla! website quoted Ashkenazi, who claimed during a phone conversation with his US counterpart Antony Blinken that Israel was not putting obstacles to legislative elections, however, Israel was concerned that the internal split in Fatah would weaken ‘Abbas’s party and pave the way for Hamas’s victory.¹⁰¹ This claim was also repeated by Tal Kalman, head of the Israeli Army’s Strategic Division.¹⁰² The coordinator of government activities in the territories, Kamil Abu Rukun, threatened to cease relations and security coordination should Hamas win the legislative elections.¹⁰³ On 19/3/2021, Channel 12 revealed the content of a meeting between Israeli Shabak Chief Nadav Argaman and Mahmud ‘Abbas, where the former warned the latter not to involve Hamas in the PLC elections for fear of them dominating.¹⁰⁴

As part of its effective interference in impeding the holding of elections, Israel has arrested and summoned candidates from Palestinian factions, particularly Hamas candidates in Jerusalem¹⁰⁵ and the rest of WB.¹⁰⁶ Press conferences for candidates were banned in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁷



Not only has the Israeli side disrupted the Palestinian democratic track through actions and arrests, but it also escalated, including increasing the frequency of incursions by settlers into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, in addition to increasing Israeli attacks and repressive measures. This led to the outbreak of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021, which entailed Israeli aggression against GS and the continuation of the suffocating siege, as exchanges of prisoners and the dismantling or easing of the siege faltered.

Israeli concerns continued to center on controlling and calming the situation in WB, particularly as armed resistance is growing and popular uprisings are escalating, hence consolidating security coordination with the PA and the enshrinement of schism. Israel is also concerned with finding a Palestinian successor to Mahmud ‘Abbas who is in line with Israeli and US conditions, and who is “reasonably cooperative” in the PA’s “functional” administration of WB.

On 17/11/2020, Palestinian Authority Civil Affairs Commissioner Hussein al-Sheikh announced the return of the PA’s relationship with Israel after it had been suspended for six months.¹⁰⁸ This entailed a series of meetings between Palestinian and Israeli leaders, the first of which being between Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz and Mahmud ‘Abbas in Ramallah in August 2021, followed by another in Tel Aviv on 8/12/2021.¹⁰⁹ Gantz confirmed that the meetings were to address “issues related to security, diplomacy, economics and civil affairs,” and “Gantz told [‘Abbas] that Israel is ready for a series of measures that would strengthen the PA economy,”¹¹⁰ stressing that the stronger the PA was, the weaker Hamas would be.¹¹¹ There were also numerous meetings by Palestinian figures with high-level Israeli political and security figures, most notably Hussein al-Sheikh and the GIS head Majid Faraj.

Within the framework of security coordination, the Chief of General Staff of the Israeli Army Aviv Kochavi revealed that, at the request of Tel Aviv, PA security forces, rather than Israeli forces, had launched a series of crackdowns in November 2021 against armed resisters in the Jenin Refugee Camp and had “acted against terrorists there.” The request was conveyed by the new Shabak Chief Ronen Bar, who met ‘Abbas at his headquarters in Ramallah and warned him that his Fatah opponents and Hamas activists were cooperating together to rebel against his authority.¹¹²

The Israeli fear of a possible PA collapse, the weakening of PA security grip and the chaos that could follow, which would certainly strengthens those forces that reject the peace process, primarily Hamas, have led the Israeli side to lend the PA some \$155 million.¹¹³ Gantz also asked Washington to exert pressure on Arab and European countries to increase financial aid to the PA.¹¹⁴ Israel then authorized a bundle of facilities for Palestinians in WB and GS, including the approval of thousands of reunion requests for unregistered Palestinians, where the process was administered by Hussein al-Sheikh.¹¹⁵

The succession of ‘Abbas was an Israeli concern in recent years, in particular because of the lack of clarity of who the successor will be. Perhaps partly because he marginalized or alienated his rivals, thereby enhancing his standing among international actors, making them unwilling to exert pressure on him because of concerns that he would leave without a successor.

The frequency of meetings increased in the months prior to the writing of this report, namely between Hussein al-Sheikh and Majid Faraj with Israeli officials, in addition al-Sheikh—who was ‘Abbas’s Fatah candidate—was elected a member of the PLO Executive Committee to succeed the late Saeb Erekat during the PCC session, on 6–8/2/2022.¹¹⁶ Moreover, al-Sheikh is likely to also serve as the secretary of the PLO Executive Committee (a position also formerly held by Erekat). Hence, he has practically entered ‘Abbas’s succession race.¹¹⁷ There is no doubt that the extent of the Palestinian political and security cooperation with Israel and the US is a key determinant for them in supporting the individual or “current” that will succeed ‘Abbas in the future. Hussein al-Sheikh may be closer to gaining Israeli-US support, but he still has much to prove at both the Fatah and the national Palestinian levels.

Conclusion

Israeli society continues to develop to become more radical, religious and nationalist, and right-wing and religious movements have become dominant in the Israeli system of governance and politics, with the decline and near-demise of the Israeli left. Along with the government system, Israeli society is moving towards enactment of laws that entrench the Jewish-Zionist identity of Israel, Judaization of Jerusalem and the rest of WB, and intensification of settlement building.



The Israeli political system has experienced confusion, instability and difficulty in resolving important decisions, due to multiple general elections (four in 2019–2021) and the inability of large parties to form stable governments. Many parties have wished to end Netanyahu's reign as prime minister, after he served the longest term since the establishment of Israel, in addition to his facing charges of corruption.

This has led to a state of political polarization between two camps; Anti- and pro-Netanyahu supporters, spawning major coalitions and party divisions. Even after the formation of a new government headed by Naftali Bennett, Netanyahu's presence remained the key to its cohesion, despite the political, ideological and economic differences (in terms of trends and policies) among its various constituents. Although the nature of this configuration may cause it to fall at any moment, it seems to be in the interest of the parties involved to continue, especially when Netanyahu remains a possible alternative in the event of its collapse.

The political scene was marked by the historic accession of the UAL to the government coalition, which like all its constituent parts, is considered essential to the survival of the government. This is the first time in the history of the Israeli political system that an Israeli government has relied on an Arab list for its survival. It seems that the UAL will remain a central player in the formation of the government to come, as long as Netanyahu remains in the political landscape.

Israeli population statistics show general stability in population growth. Despite its limited decline, the Palestinian Arab population growth rate remained higher than that of the Jewish community. Jewish immigration rates to Israel also remained stable compared to the previous 10 years. Experts consider the increase in the number of Jews in the world is mainly because of their expansion of the definition of a Jew, including those who do not believe in Judaism as a religion, and those who have one Jewish parent.

Israel enjoys an advanced economic situation at the expense of the Palestinian people, their land and natural resources. It benefits from the US support and influence in the Western world, the absence of official Arab threat and the normalization with several Arab countries. However, the Israeli economy suffered greatly in 2020–2021, due to the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which caused one of the worst economic regressions since Israel's establishment. Nevertheless, its ability

to recover from the crisis has been faster than many countries that have suffered from the pandemic. Its GDP per capita has remained close to that of Europe, and has surpassed most of those of the Middle East.

Israel continues to enjoy qualitative military superiority compared to the countries of the region, in addition to its large supply of non-conventional weapons. Its military budget compared to its population size is among the highest in the world, and it continues to be one of the world's largest arms exporters. However, the resistance's performance in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle confused Israeli military and security forces, who failed to stop the escalation of resistant action, particularly in GS, thus forcing them to review their plans and actions.

Israel continues to face the risk of escalation of resistance in the Palestinian interior and of having a wide global public opinion against it that supports the resistance. The surrounding strategic environment is unstable, which may open the way for further hostility and for resistant action in the future. The Israeli leadership has declined in quality and the Israeli soldiers' will to fight has declined, not to mention the internal contradictions of Israeli society. This keeps Israel in a precarious position.



Endnotes

- ¹ See the election results on the site of the Central Election Commission, <https://www.bechirot.gov.il/> (in Hebrew); and Elections for the Knesset, The Knesset, <https://main.knesset.gov.il/EN/mk/Pages/Elections.aspx>
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- ⁶ Netanyahu Told Likud MK About UAE Deal But Left Gantz, Ashkenazi in Dark, *The Jerusalem Post*, 17/8/2020, <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/netanyahu-admits-he-kept-gantz-in-dark-on-uae-deal-due-to-fear-of-leaks-638926>
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Chapter Six

The Palestine Issue and the Arab World

The Palestine Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

This chapter aims to explore the popular and official Arab positions vis-à-vis the Palestine Issue, in light of the proposals of former US President Donald Trump’s “peace” plan, known as the Deal of the Century, the normalization agreements signed between some Arab countries and Israel, and the subsequent eruption of military hostilities between the Palestinian resistance and Israel in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel *Operation Guardian of the Walls*), triggered by the occupation’s practices in Jerusalem’s Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

The chapter contains four main sections: The first focuses on the position of the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Arab Summit. The second focuses on the positions and roles of the Arab states, including those neighbouring Palestine—Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon—and countries like the KSA and other Gulf states. It also addresses the position of Sudan, Morocco and other Arab states. This section develops from multiple angles, including the evolution of these countries’ international relations, diplomatic activities, positions on the internal Palestinian conflict, and their positions on the peace process, culminating with their relations with Israel.

The third section addresses developments related to Arab-Israeli normalization, overviewing its multiple forms, including aviation, medical normalization, telecoms, academic normalization, tourism, arts, media and sports. The fourth section addresses the popular Arab position’s trends, overviewing the leading popular events in support of the Palestinian people and their rights, and in rejection of normalization and the liquidation of the Palestine Issue.

First: LAS Positions and the Arab Summit

1. The Position on Trump’s Peace Plan and the Peace Process

The LAS Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait declared that Trump’s plan represented a “major undermining of Palestinian rights.”¹ The LAS Council for its part rejected the US-Israeli Deal of the Century, for not meeting even the basic



minimum of Palestinian rights and aspirations, and for contradicting the reference frameworks agreed for the peace process. The LAS Council stressed that the Arab Peace Initiative, as agreed in 2002, is the basic minimum acceptable for peace with Israel, through ending the occupation of the Palestinian and Arab territories occupied in 1967; the establishment of a sovereign Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital; finding a mutually acceptable just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue, in accordance with UN Resolution 194 of 1948; and affirming that Israel, as an occupation force and power, will not be engaged by the Arab states for normalization of relations unless it accepts the Arab Peace Initiative.² The Arab foreign ministers affirmed this position again during a meeting in February 2021, in which they affirmed their commitment to the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative.³

However, instead of working to strengthen Palestinian resistance to the Deal of the Century plan, the Arab states have abandoned their support of the Palestinian position. This is evident in a report on the Palestinian general budget, which showed that Arab financial grants to the Palestinian budget declined by 85% in 2020, with the KSA alone cutting 81.4% of its support. Shukri Bishara, Palestinian finance minister at the time, said that “sisterly states have suspended grants and aid allocated to support the budget” without explaining why.⁴

The role of the LAS was limited to denouncing Israeli occupation practices, including seizure of land or international law violations. It also denounced the confiscation of lands belonging to the Islamic endowments in the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron.⁵ The Arab foreign ministers, at their emergency meeting in Cairo, said that the Israeli occupation government’s implementation of plans to annex Palestinian lands occupied in 1967 constituted “a war crime to be added to the Israeli record full of brutal crimes against the Palestinian people, and flagrant violations of the charter and resolutions of the United Nations and international law.”⁶ In the same context, the LAS called on the international community to assume its responsibilities in providing protection to the Palestinian people.⁷ It announced its intention to take practical steps to counter the annexation, but these intentions were not translated into actions on the ground. The LAS Secretary-General stated, “It is necessary to work at this stage to form the broadest possible international coalition to isolate Israel and its supporters, in this reckless and dangerous policy that threatens to ignite the region.” Hossam Zaki, assistant LAS Secretary-General, also

confirmed that the Secretary-General was making international contacts to build an alliance against the Israeli move, and show its grave danger to international peace and security, saying that he recently sent a number of messages bearing this meaning to Japan and India, Australia and Russia.⁸

2. Stance Towards Normalization

The LAS ignored its own previous decisions and statements rejecting any normalization with Israel before the implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative, with the Secretary-General refusing the Palestinians' request to hold an emergency meeting, against the background of the Emirati-Israeli deal.⁹ The Secretary-General's position shifted from wilful blindness to complicity, by dropping the Palestinian draft resolution rejecting the Emirati normalization agreement from the agenda of the Arab foreign ministers meeting.¹⁰ Abu al-Ghait justified his position by saying that "there is an Arab dispute over some concepts related to establishing peace with Israel, but everyone is committed to supporting the ceiling of Palestinian demands and rights as set and formulated by the Palestinian side."¹¹ He also claimed that the UAE-Israel agreement stopped the annexation of territories in WB.¹²

3. Internal Conflict and Reconciliation

The LAS reiterated its position in support of Palestinian reconciliation, by welcoming the outcomes of the meeting of the secretaries-general of the Palestinian factions, which was held in Ramallah and Beirut on 3/9/2020. Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait affirmed that "the meeting is a positive step towards unifying the Palestinian ranks and agreeing on the priorities of Palestinian political action in the coming stage, under the umbrella of (the Palestine Liberation Organization), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people."¹³ The LAS reaffirmed this position in decisions issued at the conclusion of the 156th ordinary meeting of foreign ministers, on 9/9/2021.¹⁴

4. Stance Towards Jerusalem

The LAS reiterated its position rejecting the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but it was just to condemnation and denunciation, without taking any practical measures against the countries that recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. The League, as well as the Arab Parliament, condemned



Kosovo's recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, and its decision to open an embassy there.¹⁵ It also condemned the opening of a diplomatic office by the Czech Republic in Jerusalem.¹⁶

The League continued denouncing the systematic Israeli plans for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and the repeated incursions into its compound.¹⁷ Although it decided to form a ministerial committee to address the Security Council countries to stop Israeli attacks against the Palestinians,¹⁸ nothing changed on the ground, and the Arab action remained limited to condemnation and denunciation. In the same context, and in an indication of the LAS's support of Jordan, the LAS stressed the importance of the Hashemite guardianship in Jerusalem and its role in protecting the holy sites.¹⁹

Second: The Positions and Roles of Some Key Arab States

1. Egypt

a. The Development of Egypt's Political Relations and Diplomatic Activities

Egypt's efforts to restore its regional role have increased. It held diplomatic meetings and summits that include leaders of pivotal countries in the region, in addition to the efforts to achieve de-escalation between the Palestinian resistance and Israel, as well as Palestinian reconciliation. Egypt convened a meeting in Cairo in January 2021 that included Jordan, France and Germany. On the sidelines of the meeting, a call was made for the immediate resumption of Palestinian-Israeli talks and the settlement of the conflict on the basis of the two-state solution.²⁰ In September 2021, Egypt also convened a tripartite presidential summit, which included Egyptian President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, Jordan's King 'Abdullah II and Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas, to emphasize the importance of reviving a peaceful settlement and the option of a two-state solution.²¹

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry tried to play an active role in de-escalating the situation after the outbreak of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, launched by the Palestinian resistance in response to occupation practices in Jerusalem and the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. However, Egyptian efforts to reach a truce was initially snibbed by Israel.²²

The steadfastness of Gazans, the escalation of popular resistance in most areas of historical Palestine, which includes WB, Jerusalem and the 1948 occupied territories, and the resistance continuation of launching missile strikes at the heart of Israel, all contributed to forcing Israel to deal with the Egyptian diplomatic openings, which received US support. The Egypt–US convergence aimed to establish a truce and rebuild GS, after it was devastated because of the Israeli aggression.²³

After the truce was agreed on, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry sought to build on it, by putting forward an initiative to hold negotiations between Israel, the PA and Hamas, fearing renewed confrontation and to maintain calm.²⁴ As for Israel, it sought to link the GS reconstruction issue to the resistance’s release of its captured soldiers, which encouraged Egypt to move towards brokering a prisoner exchange deal. Thus, Major General ‘Abbas Kamel, head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), conducted intensive discussions in Tel Aviv about this issue.²⁵ However, the resistance refused to link the two issues of reconstruction and prisoner exchange, which prompted Egypt to propose a “road map” that does not include linking the two files.²⁶ Previously, a phone call was made between Egyptian President ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett, in which the former stressed the importance of supporting Egypt’s efforts to rebuild GS.²⁷ In light of this, Kamel visited Tel Aviv a second time to broker a lasting truce between the resistance and Israel, and in his meeting with Bennett in August 2021, he carried an invitation from al-Sisi to visit Cairo.²⁸

At the level of regional alliances, al-Sisi ratified the charter of the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF):²⁹ Seven countries, namely: Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Palestine, had signed on 22/9/2020, the statute of EMGF, establishing it as a regional intergovernmental organization, which set several goals, including coordinating the exploitation of gas resources in the Mediterranean. The signing ceremony was held virtually, bringing together the ambassadors of member states in Cairo, including Italy, Greece, Jordan, Israel and Cyprus. Other countries and blocs may join soon, including France, the EU and the US. Then Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz revealed that he had worked with his Egyptian counterpart for three years to establish the regional gas forum, which it is currently being developed to be a regional organization that also includes the PA.³⁰

b. The Position on the Internal Palestinian Conflict

Egypt has maintained its previous stance towards the Palestinian factions, in terms of considering the PLO and its head as the representatives of the Palestinians, while the relationship with the resistance factions fluctuated up and down according to political events. On the one hand, Egypt sells gas to GS at prices higher than the international price.³¹ On the other hand, in an attempt to absorb Palestinian anger after the killing of two fishermen by the Egyptian navy, Egypt released 32 Gazan detainees.³² By contrast, following the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, and in order to strengthen the position of the Egyptian regime, the Egyptian presidency announced the allocation of \$500 million to rebuild GS,³³ in addition to sending an aid convoy to the Gazans.³⁴ In addition, ‘Abbas Kamel laid the foundation stone for a residential neighborhood in GS,³⁵ as Egypt promised to rebuild the demolished towers there, with the reconstruction carried out through Palestinian companies and workers to benefit Palestinian labour.³⁶ The first phase of reconstruction began under the supervision of an Egyptian engineering delegation in September 2021.³⁷ However, the resistance leadership in GS later expressed its dismay at the slowdown in Egyptian reconstruction works.³⁸

Egypt was keen to control the reconciliation file and not to allow any other party to interfere with it, using the Rafah Crossing as leverage. This was embodied in the pressure it exerted on the Gazans on account of agreements related to Palestinian reconciliation, on the side-lines of the Istanbul meetings and the meeting of the secretaries-general of the factions in Beirut and Ramallah related to reconciliation. Egypt arrested 14 people close to Hamas while they were traveling through Egypt.³⁹ In February 2021, when Egypt sponsored the Palestinian national dialogue to broker Palestinian reconciliation and dialogue, it opened the Rafah Crossing for an “indefinite period,” which resulted in the factions’ agreement on the mechanisms for holding Palestinian elections, which were postponed later by Mahmud ‘Abbas.⁴⁰ In June 2021, after the end of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, al-Sisi invited the Palestinian factions to a meeting in Cairo to discuss ending the division.⁴¹ However, the gap between the two sides, Hamas and Fatah, with regard to reconciliation and the reconstruction of GS, prevented the completion of this meeting. It was then postponed for an unknown period.⁴²

We can say that the media campaigns of Egypt against Hamas are indicators of the fluctuation of the relationship with the resistance and GS. After Al Jazeera

Arabic program titled *Ma Khufia A'tham* (The Hidden is More Immense) aired an episode focusing on the Egyptian siege of the resistance in GS, Egyptian state-linked media launched a counter media campaign against Hamas.⁴³ However, the relationship between Hamas and Egypt saw some recovery, after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. This was demonstrated by Cairo hosting in October 2021 the first meeting of the newly elected Hamas political bureau, and the meeting of the movement's leadership with EGIS Head Major General 'Abbas Kamel, to discuss the truce, the exchange of prisoners. reconstruction and reconciliation.⁴⁴

c. The Position on the Peace Process

Contradicting the LAS's position on the Deal of the Century plan, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry welcomed efforts made by the US administration to reach a comprehensive and just peace for the Palestine issue, which would support stability and security in the Middle East and end the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It added that Egypt sees the importance of the US administration's initiative in terms of reaching a settlement for the Palestine issue, in a way that restores the Palestinian people's full legitimate rights, through the establishment of their independent and sovereign state on the occupied Palestinian territories, in accordance with international legitimacy and its decisions. It called on "the two concerned parties to carefully study the US vision of achieving peace, and examine all its dimensions."⁴⁵ In the same context, al-Sisi praised the Emirati-Israeli agreement that allegedly would stop Israel's annexation of WB.⁴⁶ He also said that the "peace" agreement between Bahrain and Israel is a historic step to achieve a just settlement of the Palestine Issue,⁴⁷ and praised the announcement of the normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel.⁴⁸

d. Relations with Israel

Several Israeli parties praised the improvement of the relations between Egypt and Israel, which extended to strengthening political, security and economic relations. According to a report by Mitvim—The Israeli Institute for Regional Foreign Policies, prepared by former Israeli ambassador in Cairo Haim Koren, the strategic cooperation between the two parties has been strengthened, based on a set of common strategic interests, on top of which confronting Islamic movements, Turkey and Iran, and adopting the same approach in managing the Palestine issue.⁴⁹ In this context, the Israeli orientalist Liad Porat declared that the legacy of Egyptian



President Hosni Mubarak regarding the relations between the two parties was renewed during the al-Sisi era.⁵⁰ The Israeli orientalist Jackie Khogy wrote that the Egyptian school curricula under al-Sisi, present a conciliatory discourse towards Israel.⁵¹ Meanwhile, the Israeli ambassador to Egypt, Amira Oren, confirmed that the bilateral coordination between the two parties on security and economic issues reached a new peak since al-Sisi took over the reins of power.⁵²

There were numerous indications of coordination in the “positions” between the two sides. The *Israel Hayom* newspaper claimed that there was coordination on the annexation plan, and that they even reached understandings that allow, on the one hand, to bring the plan to impose Israeli sovereignty into effect, and on the other hand allow the opposition of Arab states as soon as the plans are actually implemented, without this leading to a major impact on political relations between countries.⁵³ In this context, Eli Cohen, Israeli Minister of Intelligence, affirmed the strengthening of the alliance between the two countries, saying that Israel, under US umbrella, is building a Sudanese, Emirati, Egyptian and Jordanian alliance, and that other countries in the region are expected to join.⁵⁴ As an indication of improving relations, in September 2021, al-Sisi met with Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett in Sharm el-Sheikh, in the first public visit of an Israeli prime minister to Egypt in 10 years. During the meeting, efforts to revive the peace process, maintain calm and rebuild GS were discussed.⁵⁵ Bennett announced after that it was a very important meeting, in which a number of files were discussed, including strengthening joint cooperation in all fields, especially trade, and regional and international issues.⁵⁶ Bennett’s visit was followed by Foreign Minister Yair Lapid’s arrival in Cairo in December 2021, and his meeting with al-Sisi and EGIS Head Major General ‘Abbas Kamel, to discuss the “economy for security” plan for GS.⁵⁷

As an indication of the improvement in economic relations between the two countries, Israel began supplying gas to Egypt in July 2020. According to Makan—Israeli Broadcasting Corporation, there is an agreement between the two sides to provide Egyptian facilities with one billion cubic meters of natural gas annually.⁵⁸ In this context, Israeli Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz announced an agreement with his Egyptian counterpart Tarek el-Molla to build a pipeline to connect Israel’s offshore Leviathan natural gas field with liquefaction stations in northern Egypt, to increase gas exports to Europe via Egypt’s liquefaction

facilities.⁵⁹ In the same context, in March 2021, an Egyptian-Israeli meeting was held in Sharm el-Sheikh to enhance cooperation between the two parties, which included a high-level Israeli delegation and Israeli businessmen. The meeting, which Ofir Gendelman, the prime minister's spokesperson, described as the largest in 20 years, discussed expanding trade between the two countries in agriculture, water, electricity and tourism.⁶⁰ This economic cooperation was demonstrated by an EGYPTAIR announcement that it is considering starting flights to Tel Aviv.⁶¹

Security relations between the two sides have also been strengthened. Former Israeli ambassador to Egypt, Itzhak Levanon stated, "In all the rounds against Hamas, it was Egypt that brought calm. This time there has been a change that I believe Israel should strengthen, and that is al-Sisi's greater understanding of Jerusalem's security needs."⁶² In this context, Al Jazeera revealed, in an investigation, the presence of an Egyptian naval base, the Berenice Naval Base, that takes part in enforcing the siege of the Palestinian resistance in the GS.⁶³ In addition, on the sidelines of a meeting with the EGIS Head Major General 'Abbas Kamel, Israel asked Egypt to prevent Hamas from regaining its combat capabilities.⁶⁴ It seems that al-Sisi took advantage of this atmosphere to ask Bennett to allow the introduction of Egyptian reinforcements into North Sinai, in the demilitarized zones, in order to enable the Egyptian army to eliminate "extremist Islamic organizations," which was approved.⁶⁵

The bilateral security understandings reflected negatively on GS in terms of tightening the siege. For example, the Egyptian army killed two fishermen brothers and wounded a third, under the pretext that they had entered Egyptian territorial waters.⁶⁶ The tightening of the siege was also manifested in the acceleration of the construction of a wall between Sinai and GS, the construction of a sea barrier between the GS and Sinai,⁶⁷ and the demolition of tunnels, as the Egyptian army did in April 2021 when it destroyed five tunnels on the border with GS.⁶⁸ In addition, poisonous gas was sprayed into the tunnels, which led to the death of three people in a commercial tunnel on the border between GS and Egypt.⁶⁹

Egypt's al-Sisi regime used the Rafah Crossing, considered a lifeline for the people of GS, as leverage to put pressure on the resistance there, linking its opening and closing to the extent to which the resistance complies with Egyptian demands. The repeated closure of the crossing was justified as something that fell within the framework of Egyptian national security.⁷⁰ Egypt had closed the Rafah Crossing



in August 2021 (until further notice), as an expression of its dissatisfaction with the demonstrations on the border with Israel, against the continuation of the siege. Egypt had previously asked Hamas to impose calm, in exchange for restoring the situation to what it was at the crossing, especially regarding the movement of goods at the Karm Abu Salem Crossing.⁷¹

Egypt later resumed operating the crossing as part of a new security mechanism in agreement with Israel, which included tightening security measures to prevent materials that would help Hamas build its military and security capabilities. In this context, Egypt informed Hamas leadership in GS that all materials designated for reconstruction, which enter through the Rafah Crossing, will remain under the exclusive supervision and management of the Egyptian engineering teams.⁷²

2. Jordan

a. The Development of Jordan's Political Relations and Diplomatic Activity

Jordan participated in some Egyptian diplomatic endeavours, such as the Cairo meeting in January 2021 that included France and Germany. The meeting called for the immediate resumption of Palestinian-Israeli talks and the settlement of the conflict on the basis of the two-state solution.⁷³ Jordan also participated in the tripartite summit held by Egypt in September 2021, at the level of presidents, which included the King of Jordan, the Palestinian President and the Egyptian President, to discuss reviving the peace process.⁷⁴

As for relations with the US, the US bilateral aid to Jordan was \$1.525 billion in 2020, and \$1.65 billion in 2021, including economic aid reaching \$1.082 billion in 2020 and \$1.122 billion in 2021, while military aid was the same amount each year; \$425 million in 2020 and 2021.⁷⁵

b. The Position on the Palestinian Internal Conflict

The Jordanian political system does not hide its bias towards the PA at the expense of Hamas. However, it deals with the internal conflict rationally, in terms of maintaining minimum relations with all parties. Despite internal calls (The Islamic Action Front Party) to restore relations with Hamas,⁷⁶ the Jordanian government maintained its previous position not to reopen a Hamas office. Yet Jordan has kept the door open by allowing the Hamas leadership to move under umbrella of “humanitarian cases” as happened when some leaders of the Hamas political bureau were allowed to set up a funeral service for the deceased Hamas leader

Ibrahim Ghushah.⁷⁷ However, the official Jordanian position exhibits a preference for dealing with the PLO and the PA, which is in line with media reports that claimed there is an Egyptian, Jordanian and Emirati plan to prevent Hamas from winning any elections (which were not held anyway).⁷⁸ As an additional indication of this bias, Jordan agreed with the PA to establish a joint free zone, and promote trade between the two sides.⁷⁹ In return, and as a kind of attempt to have balance in the relationship, the Jordanian government is working to establish a Jordanian hospital in GS at a cost of \$72 million.⁸⁰

c. The Position on the Peace Process

In response to the Deal of the Century plan, Jordan affirmed its support of the two-state solution.⁸¹ Jordanian lawmakers rejected the plan, echoing the official position rejecting it.⁸² In the same context, the Jordanian Foreign Minister considered that the annexation of areas in the occupied Palestinian territories would kill the two-state solution and would undermine the chances of a just “peace.”⁸³ The Jordanian monarch escalated the tone rejecting the annexation plan, declaring that Israel’s annexation of parts of WB would lead to a “massive conflict” with Jordan,⁸⁴ and affirmed that Jordan’s position was strongly against annexation.⁸⁵

As for the normalization agreements between the UAE and Israel, the Jordanian Foreign Minister announced that the agreement will be judged based on what Israel will do later, in terms of ending the occupation, which would lead to de-escalation, while continuing with occupation would keep the causes of tension present.⁸⁶ Jordan repeated the same position after the normalization agreement between Bahrain and Israel, as the Foreign Minister said that the condition for a just and comprehensive “peace” remains by ending Israeli occupation.⁸⁷ The Jordanian king reiterated that “Achieving just and comprehensive peace on the basis of the two-state solution is our strategic choice,” and stressed that “denying the Palestinian people their just and legitimate rights is the very reason our region continues to suffer conflict and instability.”⁸⁸

d. Relations with Israel

There was a fluctuation in relations between Jordan and Israel in the economic, security and diplomatic aspects, due to occupation practices, whether in Jerusalem or throughout the occupied territories. On the economic side, the Jordanian parliament approved by a majority a draft resolution banning the import of gas from Israel.⁸⁹ An agreement was signed between Israel and Jordan to shorten



flights, using the airspace of both sides to shorten flights to the Gulf, Asia, the Far East, Europe and North America, as well as flights from China that pass through Iran, by allowing them to pass through Israeli airspace.⁹⁰ In this context, KAN—Israeli Public Broadcasting Corporation reported that Jordan and Israel were intensifying their contacts to establish joint projects to improve bilateral relations.⁹¹ These contacts resulted in an Israeli agreement to raise Jordanian exports to the Palestinians from \$160 million annually to \$700 million.⁹² Moreover, a “special” agreement was signed between Jordan and Israel to import Jordanian agricultural products, in order to cover Israeli needs in the year of the “Shmita,” the Sabbath of the Land where under Judaism it should be left fallow.⁹³ Jordan and Israel also signed in Dubai, with Emirati funding and US sponsorship, a declaration of intent to cooperate in the production of electricity from solar energy and water desalination. The agreement stipulates that Jordan will work to generate electricity from solar energy for Israel, and in return Israel will work on the desalination of water for the benefit of Jordan, which suffers from drought.⁹⁴

The security relations between the two parties have remained relatively stable, where they were not affected much by the political tension resulting from the Israeli transgressions in Jerusalem, and the attempt to implement the annexation project. In June 2020, the State Security Court began trying five Jordanians on charges of planning operations against targets inside Israel.⁹⁵ In addition, the State Security Court sentenced a Jordanian prisoner held by Israel to five years in prison, and considered him a fugitive from justice, on charges of “threatening to use violence,” after he attacked several settlers in 2018, which led to the injury of a number of them, after he managed to enter the occupied city of Eilat, for the purpose of work.⁹⁶ In a related context, Jordan decided to deport the Palestinian prisoner Nizar al-Tamimi, released in the prisoner exchange operation known as the “Devotion of the Free” deal, on the grounds that his residency had expired.⁹⁷ In July 2021, Jordanian intelligence also announced that it had thwarted a plot aimed at killing Israeli soldiers on the border,⁹⁸ while the Israeli army announced in September 2021 that it had thwarted an arms smuggling operation in the Jordan Valley.⁹⁹

Diplomatic relations between the two sides witnessed a state of ebb and flow. The relationship was strained during the time of Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, but it witnessed an improvement with Netanyahu’s stepping down and the formation of the Bennett government. Although meetings were held between the two sides, some secret and others public, relations with the Netanyahu government

remained lukewarm. *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper revealed that in December 2020, a secret meeting was held between the Jordanian king and Defense Minister Benny Gantz,¹⁰⁰ followed by a public meeting between the Jordanian foreign minister and his Israeli counterpart, in which they discussed re-launching negotiations between Israel and the PA.¹⁰¹ As an indication of the tense relationship between the two sides, the Jordanian crown prince cancelled his visit to *al-Aqsa* Mosque, despite Netanyahu's claim to have settled the dispute,¹⁰² and tensions remained. Gantz stated that Netanyahu had seriously damaged relations with Jordan.¹⁰³

The practices of the Israeli forces also contributed to the tension, especially the attempt to forcibly remove the residents of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry had announced Jordan's ratification of 14 property ownership documents with the residents of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, and that it handed the Palestinian Foreign Ministry, the original proprietors and their lawyers a certificate stating that the Ministry of Construction and Reconstruction signed an agreement with UNRWA "to construct 28 housing units in Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood."¹⁰⁴ In this context, the Jordanian Foreign Minister declared that Jerusalem is a red line and that Israel is playing with fire, saying its continued aggression and arrogance will have repercussions on all issues, including Jordanian-Israeli relations.¹⁰⁵ 95 lawmakers had signed a bill on the relations with Israel urging the expulsion of its ambassador from Jordan, due to the Israeli encroachments in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁶

In the same context, during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, a massive march was organized towards the Jordanian border in support of Jerusalem and GS.¹⁰⁷ On the official level, Jordan rejected an Israeli "Property Rights Settlement and Land Registration" bill in occupied Jerusalem, and the official spokesperson for the Jordanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stressed that "the international law recognises East Jerusalem as an occupied city by Israel in 1967; it confirms the invalidity of all Israeli administrative and legislative measures that seek to change the status quo in the occupied city."¹⁰⁸ In a speech, the Jordanian king stressed that Jordan will continue to work to preserve the historical and legal status quo in the city of Jerusalem.¹⁰⁹

Despite the tension in relations, Israel expressed concern after the announced coup attempt targeting the Jordanian regime. Former Mossad chief Danny Yatom stated that the incident in Jordan is worrying for Israel and that it is a disturbing



event. Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz commented on the coup attempt by saying, “A strong and flourishing Jordan is a security and economic interest for us, and we need to do what we can to help them,” adding, “But as I said, regarding the internal developments there — that’s an internal issue.”¹¹⁰

Relations between the two parties improved with Bennett’s arrival as prime minister. Bennett approved the sale of water to Jordan (after Netanyahu refused to do so), so that the annual quantity does not exceed 50 million cubic meters, until the end of 2022.¹¹¹ According to the Israeli press, Bennett agreed with the Jordanian monarch when he met him to open a new page in relations.¹¹² This agreement was reflected when the new Israeli ambassador, Eitan Surkis, presented his credentials to the King of Jordan,¹¹³ as well as by increasing the frequency of meetings between the two countries, which were hitherto mostly secret, as happened with the meeting of Israeli President Isaac Herzog with the Jordanian monarch, at a Jordanian invitation.¹¹⁴ In addition, a secret meeting took place between the King and Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, in the capital, Amman.¹¹⁵

3. Syria

Israel continued its attacks on Syrian territory in the absence of a deterrent. The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that the Israeli attacks, which lasted three months (from May to the end of July 2020), killed 60 pro-Iranian militants in Syria.¹¹⁶ The Israeli army claimed that it destroyed a third of the Syrian air defense during the attacks it carried out in the last three years 2017–2020, using 4,239 weapons against 955 targets. The Israeli army justified its attacks as aimed at slowing down Iran’s entrenchment in Syria and the development of Hizbullah’s missiles. Consequently, the Israeli army launches frequent raids targeting Syrian regime, Iranian and Hizbullah sites in Syria, as well as convoys of weapons or equipment destined for Lebanon. At the same time, the Israeli army claimed that Syrian air defenses fired 844 anti-aircraft missiles, to respond to the Israeli violations of the Syrian airspace, which it described as a “sharp spike compared to previous years.” The Israeli army stated that some anti-aircraft missiles launched through the air defense system of the Syrian army were able to intercept missiles launched by the air force.¹¹⁷

At the political level, Syria stuck to its position rejecting any agreements or treaties with Israel. The Syrian Foreign Ministry expressed this by affirming its “steadfast position based on adhering to land and rights, and rejecting concessions

and unilateral agreements, regardless of their form or content.”¹¹⁸ Syrian President Bashar al-Assad emphasized this position by saying, “We can establish normal relations with Israel only when we regain our land.”¹¹⁹ Despite the initial Syrian refusal to conduct political negotiations with Israel, the two sides announced a prisoner exchange deal brokered by Russia, after two Syrian shepherds arrested for crossing the border were returned,¹²⁰ in exchange for an Israeli girl who entered the Syrian border, and arrested by the Syrian security services. *Haaretz* newspaper revealed that the exchange deal included a secret clause stipulating that Israel finances the purchase of the Russian Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine for an amount of \$1.2 million.¹²¹

At the level of Syrian-Palestinian relations, a Fatah delegation met the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, Faisal al-Mikdad, in October 2020 at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the Syrian capital, Damascus, where the Fatah delegation included Palestinian ambassador to Syria Anwar ‘Abdul Hadi and the Fatah Central Committee members Jibril Rajoub, Samir al-Rifa‘i and Rouhi Fattouh. They discussed ways to build a Palestinian partnership between the factions of the Palestinian political spectrum.¹²² Also, the Director-General of the Political Department of the PLO, Ambassador Anwar ‘Abdul Hadi, discussed with the Syrian Minister of Social Affairs and Labour Salwa ‘Abdullah the situation of refugees in the Palestinian RCs, and ways of returning the people to the al-Yarmouk RC, especially in light of the decision issued to facilitate their return. ‘Abdullah said that the Palestinians in Syria are our children, and in all our laws and legislations they have talked about the Syrian Arab citizen or their equivalent, where only the children of Palestine are their equivalent. She indicated that any work that the Syrian state does, for any citizen on Syrian soil, will be replicated in the al-Yarmouk RC, calling for solidarity to return to normal life in Syria.¹²³

Bashar al-Assad also received in Damascus a delegation that included several leaders and representatives of Palestinian forces and factions, but Hamas representatives were absent from the meeting. Al-Assad said that the Oslo Accords were a “big blunder,” stressing that Syria will always be against these agreements and against the “Quartet,” because negotiations through the Quartet mean negotiations under the US ceiling. On the sidelines of the meeting, al-Assad saluted “all the resistance fighters without exception.” When the name of Hamas was mentioned, he repeated “all the resistance fighters,” adding that “Syria is



ready for whatever you need. We are part of the axis of resistance, militarily and politically.” He said that Syria’s decision to “rebuild the al-Yarmouk camp is firm, and together we are following the implementation mechanisms,” stressing at the same time the importance of the right of return.¹²⁴

4. Lebanon:

a. Diplomatically

There is a near consensus in Lebanon to reject the Deal of the Century and adhere to the Arab Peace Initiative. During a call between Lebanese President Michel Aoun and his Palestinian counterpart Mahmud ‘Abbas, the former affirmed Lebanon’s solidarity, as president and people, with the Palestinian people against the latest developments due to the Deal of the Century. The Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, said that “the Deal of the Century aborts the last remaining Palestinian dream of establishing its independent state with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.” He stressed:

Lebanon and the Lebanese will not be false witnesses in the new ceremony of the execution of the Palestinian people and their legitimate rights, foremost of which is the right of return, and will not accept under any circumstances to be a partner in selling or bartering any of these rights for thirty pieces of silver.

Then-Foreign Minister Nassif Hitti said that “the Lebanese position on the Deal of the Century is based on the 2002 Arab Summit and calls for achieving a just peace by establishing an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.”

For his part, the Grand Mufti of the Lebanese Republic, Sheikh ‘Abdul Latif Darian, affirmed that “the so-called Deal of the Century is a liquidation of the Palestine issue, and it will be doomed to failure.”¹²⁵

In a related context, the Lebanese President renewed Lebanon’s refusal to resettle Palestinian refugees. In his speech before the 76th session of the UN General Assembly, Aoun said that Lebanon “reiterates its position rejecting any form of settlement of Palestinian refugees, based on the necessity to find a solution to the Palestinian issue in accordance with relevant international resolutions, specifically those guaranteeing the right of return.”¹²⁶

b. Lebanese-Palestinian Relations

Some Lebanese still deal with Palestinian refugees in Lebanon in a negative way. For example, the head of the Lebanese Forces Party, Samir Geagea, called for a siege on the Palestinian RCs to prevent Palestinian refugees from entering and leaving them, provided that the state secures the supplies they need, under the pretext of curtailing the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²⁷ In the same context, human rights organizations appealed to the concerned authorities in Lebanon to allow Palestinian refugees stranded in the UAE to return to Beirut, after the closure of air and land ports due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic.¹²⁸ These appeals clashed with the decision of the General Directorate of Lebanese General Security to not allow the return of Palestinian refugees to Lebanon on board evacuation planes, which the Lebanese authorities organized for their citizens stranded in various countries of the world. The evacuation excluded Palestinian refugees in Lebanon carrying Palestinian travel document or PA passports.¹²⁹

In a related context, Nazih Najm, a member of the Lebanese Parliament from the Future Movement bloc, angered many Palestinians, after urging the UN to expel Palestinian refugees from Lebanon, declaring that “a million and a half Syrian and 400 thousand Palestinian refugees live in Lebanon. Lebanese government incurred the 400 thousand Palestinians for prolonged years as well as the Syrians. We call the international community, who is responsible for their existence in Lebanon, to return them to their countries,” forgetting that the presence of these refugees is a result of their forced displacement, not their will.¹³⁰

On the other hand, the Minister of Labor in the new Lebanese government, Mustafa Bayram, affirmed his support of the rights of refugees in the Lebanese RCs, and his quest for “the Palestinian people not to be subjected to injustice again, or to be subjected to prejudice in their place of residence.” He pledged that he will contribute to “amending the laws that prevent the Palestinians from being redressed in terms of justice and labour rights, in a manner that does not conflict with Lebanese laws and the interest of the Lebanese worker.”¹³¹ Indeed, the minister issued instructions allowing Palestinians born in Lebanon to work in more than 70 professions that were exclusive to Lebanese only, which angered some Lebanese parties, which accused the minister of seeking to settle refugees in Lebanon. Meanwhile, the Palestinian factions in Lebanon praised the minister’s decision, but expressed concerns that the decision may be aborted, as it depends on



the instructions of the minister and not on a law, which means that this order can be cancelled in the event of a change of minister.¹³²

The head of the Lebanese Progressive Socialist Party, Walid Jumblatt, met with the head of the political bureau of Hamas, Isma‘il Haniyyah, where Jumblatt stated, “My advice to Haniyyah is [fostering] the unity of the Palestinian position, and it is the most important and the foundation of everything, regardless of the pressures. I am ready to help with this issue with my capabilities,” and he promised Haniyyah to facilitate the basic right of living of Palestinian refugees, as “racial discrimination is unfair to them.”¹³³ Haniyyah visited Lebanon in September 2020, and the visit was met with mixed reactions. While Hizbullah encouraged the visit, the Lebanese political group opposed to Hizbullah was concerned by the visit, and the prospect of turning Lebanon into a launching pad and arena for conflict with Israel.¹³⁴

Hizbullah maintained its strong relationship and support for Hamas throughout the period covered by this report. However, this relationship was marred by some sensitivity and tension following the visit of Khalid Mish‘al, the head of the Hamas movement abroad, to Lebanon in December 2021 to participate in the activities of the 34th anniversary of the founding of Hamas and address the repercussions of the death of four Hamas cadres in Burj al-Shamali RC. It seems that Hizbullah did not see the timing of the visit as appropriate, given reports that the party, Iran and the Syrian regime held a negative view of Mish‘al, because of his position on the events in Syria. Hizbullah reportedly sought to thwart or cancel a number of official meetings that were on Mish‘al’s schedule, including his meeting with the President of the Republic and the Speaker of Parliament. However, Mish‘al engaged in many other activities, especially in the Palestinian context. It seems the two sides were keen not to escalate tensions in the media, and to return the water to its course after that.¹³⁵

c. Relations with Israel

Security tensions have an impact on the relationship between Israel and Lebanon. While the Israelis continued to make threats to launch a war against the Lebanese resistance represented by Hizbullah, negotiations were being held between the two parties over maritime borders. Hassan Diab, the former Lebanese Prime Minister, confirmed that Lebanon would not stand silent vis-à-vis repeated Israeli violations of Lebanon’s borders, and pointed out that Israel should be aware that “we will no longer submit to these violations as if they are a normal matter.”¹³⁶

As for the Israelis, following a limited clash with the resistance in the Shebaa Farms, Netanyahu said, “Everything that is happening right now is the result of an Iranian attempt to establish itself in our region.” He added, “Nasrallah is serving the Iranian interests at the expense of the Lebanese people,” and warned that he wouldn’t “advise anyone to test us.”¹³⁷

The tension in the relationship did not prevent reaching an agreement regarding the borders. The Speaker of the Lebanese Parliament, Nabih Berri, announced reaching a “framework agreement” to demarcate the maritime borders with Israel, noting that his mission had now ended after a decade of leading the negotiations, to be resumed by the army and the Presidency of the Republic with the aim of reaching a final agreement, stressing the link between demarcation of both land and sea borders.¹³⁸

The internal Lebanese political division was reflected in the reactions to Berri’s announcement. Opponents of the Amal Movement and Hizbullah saw that the function of the party’s arms ended with its endorsement of these negotiations with Israel, while the team loyal to Hizbullah and Amal argued that Berri’s efforts resulted in reaching an agreement that would be in the interest of Lebanon and would revive its economic situation.¹³⁹ In response to the accusations that the agreement embodies normalization, Hizbullah’s parliamentary bloc said that the negotiations to demarcate the maritime and land borders in the south of the country do not fall within the context of reconciliation with the Israeli occupation, and are not related to “the normalization policies pursued by Arab countries that have never believed in, or practiced, the option of resistance against the enemy of the nation.”¹⁴⁰ Despite squabbles between the Lebanese parties, the first round of negotiations on demarcating the borders between Israel and Lebanon was held in mid-October 2020, at the headquarters of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) in the Naqoura area in southern Lebanon, to be resumed after two weeks.¹⁴¹

During negotiations, Israel refused to discuss Lebanon’s request to expand the scope of the disputed area in the maritime borders, as the Lebanese side demands full control of two gas fields in the Mediterranean Sea, which Israel claims. According to the Israeli sources, the Lebanese negotiators in Ras al-Naqoura surprised the Israeli delegation by presenting a new map showing that they are not only demanding the disputed area of 860 km², but also an additional 1,430 km²



within the Israeli economic zone.¹⁴² Negotiations between the two sides stopped after four sessions as the Lebanese demanded an additional 1,430 km² of sea, based on the amendment of the decree deposited by the Lebanese government at the United Nations, so that the disputed area with Israel became 2,290 km² instead of 860 km².¹⁴³ However, after a US intervention, negotiations resumed between the two parties again in May 2021, while Lebanon affirmed its position to resume the negotiations as they ended, meaning on the basis of the disputed 2,290 km².¹⁴⁴

The relationship between Israel and Lebanon on the security level was marred by ebb and flow. Despite negotiations over the demarcation of the border, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah Hassan Nasrallah continued to wage a psychological war against Israel by declaring on December 2020 that his party possesses twice the number of precision missiles that it had a year earlier.¹⁴⁵

Matters between Israel and Lebanon escalated in conjunction with the events of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. A young Lebanese man was killed following demonstrations at the border, denouncing the Israeli aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the Palestinian people.¹⁴⁶ A few days later, six grad rockets were fired from Lebanon at the Upper Galilee, and Israel responded with artillery shelling.¹⁴⁷ In order not to allow matters to deteriorate further, the Lebanese army intervened by setting up checkpoints to prevent the protesting Palestinian convoys from reaching the border with Israel.¹⁴⁸

Nasrallah warned Israel against tampering with Jerusalem and the holy sites. He said that any harm that would befall them would lead to a regional war.¹⁴⁹ The security tension remained despite the end of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. The borders did not calm down before and after the battle, as the Israeli escalation did not stop.

In July 2020, the Israeli army announced the downing of one of its drones in southern Lebanon, after which the Israeli artillery fired several shells at Lebanese border areas. On 1/2/2021, Hizbullah shot down an Israeli drone over the town of Blida in the south, while in May 2021 missiles were launched from Lebanon towards northern Israel three times. Israeli forces responded by bombing Lebanese border areas.¹⁵⁰ In August 2021, rockets were launched from Lebanon at northern Israel, and the Israeli artillery responded by firing 100 shells.¹⁵¹ In the wake of the Lebanese Hizbullah's response to the Israeli bombing of Lebanese lands, the Israeli Defense Minister, Benny Gantz, warned that "while the situation in their

country is already dire, Israel was prepared to make it even worse.” Gantz stated, “We recommend that Hezbollah, the Lebanese army and the Lebanese government don’t test the State of Israel,” adding “ ‘We have no interests in Lebanon, except [in maintaining] security and quiet,’ he said, adding that quiet will be met with quiet.”¹⁵² However, despite Gantz’s threats, Hizbullah is still preparing itself for an upcoming confrontation. An Israeli report stated that there is a network of Hizbullah tunnels, “inter-regional” tunnels, extending tens of kilometers from the southern borders to Beirut and the Bekaa. The report indicated that these tunnels are prepared for offensive and defensive purposes, and are designed to allow the transfer of personnel, weapons, and equipment, and that work on building this network had begun in the aftermath of the 2006 Second Lebanon War with the assistance of experts from North Korea and Iran.¹⁵³

5. KSA and the Gulf States

a. The Development of Their Political Relations and Diplomatic Activities

Bahrain and the UAE rejected a Palestinian draft resolution stating that the Emirati-Israeli-US tripartite declaration known as the “Abraham Accords” does not prejudice the Arab vision based on the principle of the two-state solution, the principle of land for “peace,” and the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002. Bahrain also rejected a Palestinian request to hold an emergency meeting of the LAS at the ministerial level, to discuss the repercussions of the Emirati-Israeli normalization announcement on the Palestine issue.¹⁵⁴

In a related context, Bahrain and Israel inaugurated full diplomatic relations, after an Israeli delegation visited Manama, accompanied by US Secretary of the Treasury Steven Mnuchin, and Special Assistant for International Negotiations Avi Berkowitz. An agreement was signed to launch diplomatic relations, which allows the exchange of embassies and ambassadors and the launch of direct flights, in addition to seven memoranda of understanding in various fields.¹⁵⁵ Bahrain decided to open an embassy in Tel Aviv in March 2021, and appointed Khaled al-Jalahma as the first ambassador of Bahrain to Israel. He was the Director of Operations Department at the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and held the position of Deputy Head of the Kingdom’s Mission to the United States.¹⁵⁶ Al-Jalahma assumed his duties at the end of August 2021.¹⁵⁷



As for the UAE-Israel relations, Israel appointed temporary ambassador to Abu Dhabi, Eitan Na'eh, who was expelled from Turkey when relations between the two countries deteriorated in 2018. Since then, he has not held any position.¹⁵⁸ In parallel, the Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi appointed former ambassador, Zvi Heifetz, as a special envoy to the Gulf states that signed “peace” agreements with Israel. Heifetz worked in a number of countries, the last of which was China. He was appointed as a special envoy to the UAE and Bahrain. He is entrusted with developing relations with the Gulf states and establishing three diplomatic missions.¹⁵⁹ Indeed, the Israeli Embassy in Abu Dhabi, as well as the Israeli Consulate General in Dubai, were officially opened on 26/1/2021.¹⁶⁰

As for the UAE, Mohamed Al Khaja was sworn in as the first UAE ambassador to Israel,¹⁶¹ and the UAE opened its embassy in Tel Aviv in July 2021, in a festive atmosphere, with a pledge from its ambassador to strengthen the partnership with Israel.¹⁶² Whereas, the Israeli Foreign Ministry appointed Amir Hayek, who previously served as the head of the Israel Hotel Association and the head of the Manufacturers Association of Israel, to replace Eitan Na'eh, the acting ambassador to the UAE.¹⁶³ The appointment of an Israeli economist as ambassador highlights the Israeli aspirations for the relationship with the UAE, and its ambition to reap economic benefits.

The establishment of official diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel was accompanied by the announcement of the Abraham Fund. “Through this fund, the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), the UAE, and Israel will mobilize more than \$3 billion in private sector-led investment and development initiatives to promote regional economic cooperation and prosperity in the Middle East and beyond.”¹⁶⁴

After announcing the establishment of official diplomatic relations, Israeli diplomats revealed to the Israeli press how they had worked secretly in the UAE and Bahrain during the past 20 years. In the past two decades, about 20 Israeli diplomats served in these Gulf countries, even before the establishment of official relations within the framework of the “Abraham Accords.” They lived there with civilian identities, forged identity cards, and participated primarily in creating business opportunities for Israeli companies seeking to strengthen economic relations with the UAE and Bahrain, as well as strengthening political relations.¹⁶⁵

Some Gulf countries tried to play a diplomatic role after the outbreak of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan affirmed his country's condemnation of the illegal practices carried out by the Israeli occupation authorities, during a phone call with his Palestinian counterpart, Riyad al-Maliki. Bin Farhan said it was necessary to immediately stop Israeli escalatory actions that violate all international norms and covenants.¹⁶⁶ In a telephone conversation with President 'Abbas, Saudi King Salman bin 'Abdul 'Aziz affirmed the KSA's condemnation of the Israeli attacks and measures in the city of Jerusalem, and the Israeli aggression on GS, which resulted in the loss of innocent victims and wounded. He said that the KSA will continue its efforts at all levels to stop the Israeli measures and attacks on Jerusalem, by communicating with the relevant parties to put pressure on the Israeli government. The kingdom later welcomed the declaration of a ceasefire in the GS.¹⁶⁷

In a related context, Mohamed bin Zayed, Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, expressed the UAE's support of Egyptian efforts to achieve security and stability in the region. He stressed the need to make more efforts, especially by Israeli and Palestinian leaders, stressing the UAE's readiness to work with all parties to preserve a ceasefire, and to explore new paths to reduce escalation and achieve "peace."¹⁶⁸

As for Qatar, Qatari Ambassador Muhammed al-'Emadi, chairman of Qatar's Gaza Reconstruction Committee, announced a new truce agreement in GS between the Palestinian factions and Israel. The agreement provides for the full reopening of the crossings to meet the GS's main needs, with the provision of various facilities, which would help all parties to get out of the tense situation and reduce tension in the region.¹⁶⁹

b. Position on the Internal Palestinian Conflict

The relationship between the KSA and Hamas witnessed more tension, as reflected in the KSA's trial of 68 detained Jordanian and Palestinian activists, on the grounds of sympathy with the Palestinian resistance. The court charged the detainees with "transferring funds illegally and establishing unlicensed organizations."¹⁷⁰

For its part, Human Rights Watch questioned the detainees' access to fair trials, and indicated that after two years of detainees being held without charge, mass trial



behind closed doors began on 8/3/2020, based on vague allegations related to their links with a “terrorist organization” that was not named.¹⁷¹ The Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor documented shocking testimonies of serious violations against the detainees, including their arbitrary detention since the beginning of 2019, physical torture, isolation and deliberate medical neglect.¹⁷²

In a related context, the KSA rejected the initiative of the Secretary-General of the Yemeni “Ansar Allah” (Houthi) movement, ‘Abdul Malik al-Houthi, to release Hamas detainees, in exchange for the release of Saudi soldiers. The KSA had previously refused Jordanian and Moroccan mediation to close this file on the pretext that it was a “a private issue related to Saudi internal security.”¹⁷³ The Prisoners of Conscience account on Twitter (@m3takl) had revealed that the number of Palestinians detained in Saudi prisons on charges of belonging to Hamas is 160, and that all of them are in Abha prison (southwest of KSA).¹⁷⁴ According to the Arabic Post website, the KSA used the Mossad to interrogate the detainees, in addition to the participation of another team of foreign nationals in the interrogations.¹⁷⁵

In August 2021, the Saudi Criminal Court sentenced one of its most prominent detainees, Muhammad al-Khodari, the former representative of Hamas in the kingdom, to 15 years in prison, on charges of supporting the resistance, among sentences of 69 Jordanians and Palestinians, ranging between acquittal and 22 years in prison.¹⁷⁶

A week after these rulings, new ones were issued against Jordanians and Palestinians in the same file, according to the Prisoners of Conscience, which said that it had received information that a number of Palestinian and Jordanian detainees were tortured, to force them to give information about the resistance in Palestine. They were tortured, beaten on sensitive areas of the body, and some of them lost a significant amount of weight. During the interrogation of some Palestinian and Jordanian detainees, the intelligence services offered them the option to work with the KSA authorities and provide them with information in return for reduced sentences, and then to be released and deported to Jordan.¹⁷⁷

Tensions were not confined to the relationship between Hamas and the KSA. There were also problems in the relationship between the UAE and the rest of the factions, in addition to the PA. After the factions denounced in a meeting the UAE’s normalization of relations with Israel, with ‘Abbas describing it as a stab in

the back of the Palestinian people with a “poisoned dagger,” the Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) demanded ‘Abbas and Palestinian leaders to apologize for what he considered transgressions and provocative and false statements, which in his opinion, contradict the reality and history of relations between the GCC states and the Palestinian people.¹⁷⁸ The PA, and in an attempt to cool the tensions, and according to the Presidential Spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudeineh, declared that ‘Abbas was against attacking the sovereign symbols of other Arab countries.¹⁷⁹

However, the Palestinian leadership’s refusal to apologize, prompted Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the former Saudi ambassador to the US, to attack the Palestinians. He said that the remarks of the Palestinian leaders after the UAE and Bahrain’s agreement with Israel were “painful” and “low,” noting that “the PA leadership attack on the Gulf states is unacceptable.”¹⁸⁰ However, in another place, he said that the ingratitude of the Palestinian leaders and the lack of loyalty “will not affect our attachment to the Palestine issue.”¹⁸¹

The billionaire Emirati businessman Khalaf Al Habtoor declared that the idea of the return of the Palestinian refugees was illogical, publishing an article in the *Haaretz* newspaper in which he wrote, “There is a valid argument that says the Israelis have been intransigent. But the same can also be said for the Palestinians who still insist on the right of return for refugees in Syria, Jordan, Lebanon and elsewhere. Never going to happen, and they know that full well.”¹⁸² The UAE Foreign Minister, ‘Abdullah bin Zayed, in an interview with the American Jewish Committee (AJC) website, said, “It’s been funny when countries designate the same entity its military wing as a terrorist group and its political wing as a non-terrorist group, and then that same entity says there is no difference between our military and political wing.”¹⁸³

In a related context, the UAE Chairman of the Defense, Interior and Foreign Affairs Committee, Ali al-Nuaimi, said that the Palestinians are still living in the past, and demanded that they return to negotiations, stressing that if a war broke out in GS, the relations between the UAE and Israel would not be affected.¹⁸⁴ Indeed, after the outbreak of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, al-Nuaimi attacked Hamas, in an interview with the *Israel Hayom* newspaper, pointing out that it controls GS and “the Palestinian people in Gaza are suffering because of Hamas, not the Israelis,” accusing Hamas of serving Iranian goals.¹⁸⁵

In contrast to the Saudi-Emirati position against the resistance in Palestine, we find the positive position of Qatar and Kuwait. The new Emir of Kuwait, Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah, stressed, in a telephone conversation with the head of the Hamas political bureau, that Kuwait will remain loyal to the nation's issues, especially the cause of the Palestinian people. He said that Kuwaitis will remain faithful to the legacy of the late Emir and follow him in support of the Palestine issue.¹⁸⁶

Qatar tried to balance its relationship with both sides of the Palestinian equation. In 2020, it provided the PA with medical equipment worth \$10 million for its COVID-19 response.¹⁸⁷ In parallel, it provided the GS with \$150 million in financial support for its COVID-19 response.¹⁸⁸ In 2021, Qatar allocated a financial grant of \$360 million to GS, used to pay the salaries of civil servants, provide financial aid to needy families, and operate power stations.¹⁸⁹ Thus, the total Qatari grants directed to GS through the "Gaza Reconstruction Committee" since its inception in 2012, amounted to about \$1,422.4 million.¹⁹⁰

At the beginning of 2021, an agreement was signed with the Israeli company Delek, to transport gas to the power station in GS with funding from the EU and Qatar. Doha pledged to provide \$60 million, while the EU pledged to provide \$24 million, in order to finance the project.¹⁹¹ Following the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, Qatar distributed urgent relief aid to the families of those killed and those affected by the war in GS.¹⁹² A few days later, Doha pledged \$500 million in support for the reconstruction of GS,¹⁹³ as Qatar and Kuwait pledged to rebuild residential buildings, while Egypt pledged to provide \$500 million for separate reconstruction operations in GS.¹⁹⁴

For their part, KSA and the UAE pledged their support through UNRWA. The KSA pledged \$1 million to support UNRWA's efforts to combat COVID-19 in GS,¹⁹⁵ in addition to \$25 million to UNRWA through the Saudi Embassy in Jordan. According to UNRWA, the KSA donated \$50 million in 2018 to help fill the shortfall resulting from the US administration's decision to withhold funding for the agency.¹⁹⁶

An Israeli report issued by the Center for Near East Policy stated that the UAE and Bahrain, since they signed "peace" agreements with Israel, reduced their financial support to UNRWA. According to the report, the UAE in 2018 alone contributed \$53 million to UNRWA, but in 2019 contributed \$51 million, and 2020, only \$1 million.¹⁹⁷

c. Position on the Peace Process

Kuwait implicitly rejected the Deal of the Century plan, when the Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry stated that a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine issue could only be achieved by adhering to the relevant resolutions of international legitimacy, and the references established by the international community, led by the establishment of an independent, sovereign [Palestinian] state on the borders of June 4, 1967, with East Jerusalem as its capital.¹⁹⁸ For its part, the GCC condemned Israel's plans to annex any part of the occupied Palestinian territories, stressing the firm position of the Gulf states on the Palestine issue, considering it the prime Arab and Muslim issue. The GCC, also affirmed its support for the permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people over all their occupied lands since June 1967, and the establishment of their independent state with its capital, East Jerusalem.¹⁹⁹

US President Trump announced an agreement to normalize all relations between Israel and the UAE. Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed wrote on Twitter, "During a call with President Trump and Prime Minister Netanyahu, an agreement was reached to stop further Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories. The UAE and Israel also agreed to cooperation and setting a roadmap towards establishing a bilateral relationship." However, in a TV address, Netanyahu said, "he had 'delayed' West Bank annexation plans, but those plans remain 'on the table.'" White House Adviser Jared Kushner had revealed that the talks that lasted for a year and a half culminated in an agreement to normalize relations between Israel and the UAE. The UAE Embassy in Washington also wrote on Twitter, "The UAE and Israel will join with the US to launch a 'Strategic Agenda for the Middle East.' This will deepen diplomatic, commercial and security cooperation together and with other countries committed to peace and non-interference." and added, "The UAE will remain a strong supporter of the Palestinian people – for their dignity, their rights and their own sovereign state. They must benefit from normalization. We will forcefully advocate for these ends."²⁰⁰

UAE Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Anwar Gargash said, "an agreement with Israel to normalise relations was done to deal with the threat that further annexation of Palestinian territories posed to the two-state solution, as this would eliminate any hopes for peace in the region." He further called on the Palestinians and Israelis to return to negotiations.²⁰¹ Despite this, Netanyahu declared, during



his announcement of the “peace agreement” with the UAE, that there is no change in the annexation scheme, saying “he would continue to seek to extend Israeli sovereignty to parts of the West Bank land, in coordination with the US,” noting that the real “peace” as he sees, is a peace that maintains security (Israel’s security) and “the important things for our people.” Netanyahu added, a peace that distances war and does not bring it closer. A peace based on solid economic cooperation, and mutual respect. Real peace, not a slogan ... a peace for peace.²⁰²

Concerning the KSA, there are apparent differences between the wings of the Saudi state towards concluding a “peace” agreement with Israel and normalization. Prince Turki al-Faisal, the former Saudi intelligence chief, described “all Israeli government, are the last of the Western colonizing parts of the Middle East” that “they have forcibly evicted the inhabitants of Palestine after the 1948 war. They burned villages of Palestinian to the ground.” He accused Israel of depicting itself as a “small, existentially threatened country, surrounded by bloodthirsty killers who want to eradicate her from existence,” “And yet they profess that they want to be friends with Saudi Arabia.” Al-Faisal stressed that he was speaking in a private capacity, and expressed his doubts about the peace agreements signed by Gulf states with Israel, saying “you cannot treat an open wound with palliatives and painkillers,” adding that only “through the Arab Peace Initiative will we be able to confront Iran, and the Abraham Accords cannot be called as such without the Saudi Arabia’s participation.”²⁰³

However, Jared Kushner statements indicated that there are parties in the Saudi state in favor of a “peace” agreement with Israel, saying, “Israel and Saudi Arabia coming together and having full normalization at this point is an inevitability, but the timeframe... is something that has to be worked out.”²⁰⁴

In the same context, *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper revealed that the Saudi Crown Prince, Muhammed bin Salman, was a full partner in secret from the beginning of the Abraham Accords between the UAE and Israel, pointing out that his good relationship with Jared Kushner, and with the ruler of the Emirates, Mohamed bin Zayed, led in recent days to applying double pressure, but he insisted that the UAE be first in line.²⁰⁵

On a related note, King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz, before the 75th session of the UN General Assembly, affirmed KSA’s traditional position of accepting “peace” based on the Arab Peace Initiative, declaring:

Peace in the Middle East is our strategic option. Our duty is to spare no effort to work together towards achieving a bright future where peace, stability, prosperity, and coexistence among all the region's peoples prevail. The Kingdom supports all efforts to advance the peace process. The Kingdom introduced peace initiatives since 1981. The 2002 Arab Peace Initiative provides the basis for a comprehensive and just solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict that ensures that the fraternal Palestinian people obtain their legitimate rights, at the forefront of which is establishing their independent state with East Jerusalem as its capital. We support the efforts of the current U.S. administration to achieve peace in the Middle East by bringing the Palestinians and the Israelis to the negotiation table to reach a fair and comprehensive agreement.²⁰⁶

Meanwhile, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan affirmed that peace between the Kingdom and Israel depends on the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital East Jerusalem.²⁰⁷

The UAE and Bahrain had signed a “peace” agreement with Israel at the White House, in a ceremony attended by several ambassadors to the US, including the ambassador of the Sultanate of Oman and the deputy ambassador of Sudan. In his speech, Trump said, “We’re here this afternoon to change the course of history. After decades of division and conflict, we mark the dawn of a new Middle East... In Israel’s entire history, there have previously been only two such agreements. Now we have achieved two in a single month, and there are more to follow.” He added, “Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain will establish embassies, exchange ambassadors, and begin to cooperate — and work together so strongly to cooperate as partners across the broad range of sectors, from tourism to trade, and healthcare to security.” He also said, “The Abraham Accords also open the door for Muslims around the world to visit the historic sites in Israel and to peacefully pray at *Al-Aqsa* Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam.”²⁰⁸ UAE Foreign Minister ‘Abdullah bin Zayed commented on the signing of the agreement by saying that normalization with Israel shows that peoples are fed up with conflicts and desire stability.²⁰⁹

The 41st GCC summit reaffirmed its commitment to the Arab Peace Initiative and stressed the centrality of the Palestine issue.²¹⁰ Qatar and Kuwait differed from the rest of the Gulf states in their refusal to normalize with Israel before resolving the conflict with the Palestinians. Qatar confirmed this in a statement by Lolwah



Alkhatir, Assistant Foreign Minister of Qatar, noting that normalization with Israel cannot be the solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the solution lies in implementing Security Council resolutions, granting the Palestinians their rights, and finding a just solution to their cause.²¹¹

The Kuwaiti government stressed the centrality of the Palestine issue as it is the first Arab and Muslim issue, and the State of Kuwait's commitment to stand by the Palestinian people and support their options. It reaffirmed its support of all efforts aimed at reaching a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine issue, which would guarantee ending the occupation, the return of refugees, and the establishment of an independent state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, on the borders of June 4, 1967, in accordance with international legitimacy resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the two-state solution.²¹²

The White House published excerpts from the Emirati and Bahraini normalization agreement with Israel. The agreement includes general terms stressing the importance of strengthening and preserving “peace” in the Middle East, based on mutual understanding and existence, and respect for human dignity, freedom and religious freedom. It contains 12 points that revolve around the establishment of diplomatic “peace” relations, and the full normalization of relations between the two countries, in accordance with the UN laws and international law. They would take steps to prevent any “terrorist” or violent activities against each of the two countries and deny any support for such activities abroad. In addition, it stipulates enhancing cooperation by concluding agreements covering: Finance and Investment, Civil Aviation, Visas and Consular Services, Innovation, Trade and Economic Relations, Healthcare, Science, Technology and Peaceful Uses of Outer-Space, Tourism, Culture and Sport, Energy, Environment, Education, Maritime Arrangements, Telecommunications and Post, Agriculture and Food Security, Water; and Legal Cooperation.²¹³

d. Relations with Israel:

Political and Diplomatic Aspect

The position of the Gulf states regarding Israel varied. While the UAE and Bahrain went a long way in normalizing with Israel, there were conflicting signals from the KSA between rejection and acceptance, and the same can be said of Oman. Kuwait was characterized by its rejection of normalization, and to a lesser extent the Qatari position.

The pace of normalization between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel accelerated after the signing of the Abraham Accords. Bahraini Foreign Minister ‘Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani met with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Netanyahu in west Jerusalem, where he announced, on this first-ever visit of a Gulf foreign minister to Israel, the exchange of embassies, and the expansion of normalization agreements between the two countries.²¹⁴ In the same context, Israeli President Reuven Rivlin sent an official invitation to Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed to visit Jerusalem, days after the official announcement of the relationship between Israel and the UAE.²¹⁵ In mid-December 2021, at the invitation of the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Bennett arrived to the UAE, which was the first official visit by an Israeli head of government to the UAE.²¹⁶

The state of normalization was then “legalized” in the Emirates, with a decree issued to abolish Federal Law No. 15 of 1972 regarding the boycott of Israel and the penalties resulting from it. The abolition of the law allows individuals and companies in the Emirates to conclude agreements with bodies or individuals residing in Israel or holding its nationality.²¹⁷ Meanwhile, The Times of Israel reported that Bahrain, after signing a normalization agreement with Israel, does not have to abolish its law mandating the boycotting of Israel, having already formally withdrew its boycott of the Israeli state some 15 years ago, a short while after signing a free-trade agreement with the US in 2004. Then Bahraini Finance Minister Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Khalifa said that “Bahrain recognizes the need to withdraw the primary boycott against Israel and is developing the means to achieve this.”²¹⁸

The UAE and Bahrain worked to strengthen diplomatic relations with Israel, exchanging congratulations with Israel on the Hebrew New Year (*Rosh Hashanah*).²¹⁹ As an attempt to gain the approval of the Zionist parties, and in an unprecedented Arab move, the UAE Foreign Minister visited the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, where he met his Israeli counterpart.²²⁰ As a means of strengthening relations at the personal level between the leaders of countries, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, Mohamed bin Zayed, received a phone call from Netanyahu, in which bin Zayed stressed that the UAE is keen to make all efforts to achieve “peace,” stability and development that would be in the interest of everyone without exception.²²¹

The UAE used the normalization agreement with Israel to enhance its security capabilities and deepen its relations with the US, with the UAE Foreign Ministry



expecting closer security cooperation between the UAE, on the one hand, and Israel and the US, on the other.²²² The UAE Foreign Minister Gargash stated that his country's agreement with Israel to normalize relations should remove any obstacle for the US to sell F-35 fighters to his country.²²³ However, Israeli Minister of Settlements Affairs Tzachi Hanegbi ruled out the UAE's obtaining the F-35 stealth aircraft regardless of the normalization agreement with the UAE, stating, "We oppose the sale of even one screw of one plane of the stealth fighters to any country in the Middle East, if we have peace with them or not. That's our position, and it has been presented in the past and has been clarified in recent weeks."²²⁴

But the Mossad's position was the opposite, as the *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper revealed that the Mossad was pushing Israeli leaders, to sell advanced weapon systems and highly classified information to the UAE. The newspaper reported that the shift to sell Israeli weapons to the UAE took place after the assassination of the Hamas leader, Mahmud al-Mabhouh in Dubai in 2010. A deep schism formed between the two countries, forcing Israel to try to contain the damage, sending the head of the Mossad at the time, Tamir Pardo, to the UAE, with "the intention of mending the relationship, which was conditioned on an Israeli agreement to sell a number of weapons to the UAE."²²⁵

Relations between the Emirates and Israel became briefly tense, following Tzachi Hanegbi's statement about the sale of US planes to the Emirates, forcing Israel to clarify its position with remarks from Netanyahu and Defense Minister Benny Gantz, in a joint statement that Israel would not oppose the sale of F-35 planes to the Emirates.²²⁶

Israel was keen to deny its opposition to the sale of the F-35 planes, stemming from its desire not to sabotage the emerging alliance with the normalizing countries. Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen stated, "We are currently under the US umbrella building a Sudanese, Emirati, Egyptian and Jordanian alliance, and we expect other countries in the region to join this alliance."²²⁷ It is clear that one of the primary goals of this alliance is to counter Iranian influence in the region, and as an indication of this we can cite the GCC condemnation of the attack on the Israeli oil tanker off Oman, which Israel accused Iran of being behind.²²⁸

Normalization between the two sides took a religious turn, when a new Jewish organization was established in the six Gulf states run by the Israeli Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, comprising the UAE, Bahrain, Oman, KSA, Qatar and Kuwait, with the aim of providing religious services to Jews living in these Gulf countries, whether for residence or tourism.²²⁹ In this context, AJC opened an office in Abu Dhabi.²³⁰ Bahrain also announced the return of prayer and hymns to the Jewish synagogue in the heart of the capital, Manama, for the first time since 1947.²³¹

There were conflicting reports regarding the possibility of announcing normalization between the KSA and Israel. In this regard, the Israeli press revealed secret contacts between the KSA and Israel in the context of the Deal of the Century, with the aim of giving the KSA a role in managing the Islamic endowments in occupied Jerusalem, foremost of which is the *al-Aqsa* Mosque compound, and integrating Saudi delegates in the “board of directors” of the endowments in occupied Jerusalem.²³²

During an interview with Cable News Network (CNN), Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said, “I think normalizing Israel’s status within the region would bring tremendous benefit to the region as a whole,” adding, “It would be extremely helpful both economically but also socially and from a security perspective.” However, he clarified earlier, “the focus now needs to be on getting the Palestinians and the Israelis back to the negotiating table. In the end, the only thing that can deliver lasting peace and lasting stability is an agreement between the Palestinians and the Israelis.”²³³

The presence of a “common enemy” represented by Iran is pushing for the normalization of relations between the two countries, even if not officially announced. The Israeli Regional Cooperation Minister Issawi Frej revealed that there are contacts with Gulf countries, including KSA, regarding the Iranian file.²³⁴ But this does not mean that the KSA has surrendered all its cards. In an indication of the Saudi regime’s reluctance to fully engage in a relationship with Israel, KSA amended import rules from other member GCC states, to exclude goods produced in free zones, or that use Israeli components, from preferential customs privileges.²³⁵ This poses a challenge to the UAE, which has concluded trade agreements with Israel, and indicates a differentiation between the Saudi and Emirati position on normalization, as it is a veiled sign that no Saudi final decision existed regarding official normalization with Israel.

As for Kuwait, it announced that its position on normalization with Israel was firm, and will not change, and that it will be the last country to do so.²³⁶ The



government's strong rejection of normalization is based on the public's position, reflected in the National Assembly. Several Assembly members, led by Assembly Speaker Marzouq al-Ghanem, submitted a request to expedite proposed laws submitted to the Assembly committees on the "boycott of Israel and the prohibition of dealing or normalization with the Zionist entity."²³⁷ Indeed, the Kuwaiti National Assembly approved further penalties for normalization with Israel.²³⁸ After some press reports said there is pressure on Kuwait to normalize, the Emir of Kuwait, Sheikh Nawaf al-Ahmad al-Sabah affirmed Kuwait's firm and supportive position for the Palestine issue in all international forums, saying that Kuwait will continue to follow in the footsteps of the late Emir concerning Palestine and its people.²³⁹ In conjunction, the Kuwaiti Ministry of Commerce and Industry announced the closure of a store that was selling Israeli products, in violation of the law and regulations on dealing with Israeli products.²⁴⁰ Then Minister of Public Works, Rana al-Fares, also issued a decision banning the entry of commercial ships carrying goods to and from Israel into Kuwait's territorial waters.²⁴¹

The Qatari position intersects with the Kuwaiti position. Qatari Foreign Minister Muhammad bin 'Abdulrahman said in a television interview, "We are waiting for our turn in normalization if Israel commits to the Arab Peace Initiative, ends the occupation, establishes a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and returns the refugees... and the State of Qatar will follow this path, but now we don't see any reason [to normalize]."²⁴²

As for Oman, we find that the regime has not settled its position towards normalization. On the one hand, the Sultanate of Oman welcomed Bahrain's initiative to normalize with Israel, and said in a statement that it hoped that this new strategic direction, chosen by some Arab countries, would be a practical contribution to achieve "peace," based on ending the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and establishing an independent state of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital.²⁴³ On the other hand, the Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, attacked what he described as courtship with the enemy and the issuance of fatwas that would subjugate the nation, in light of the Arab countries' scramble for normalization with the Israeli occupation.²⁴⁴ After that, Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi declared that his country would not be the third Gulf country to normalize with Israel.²⁴⁵

The Security Aspect

Security relations between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel strengthened, by signing public security agreements, concluding deals to purchase arms and conducting joint military exercises. The US declared that the goal of strengthening security cooperation between the parties was to counter Iran's influence in the region. Then-US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo revealed that the UAE and Israel had reached an agreement to form an alliance against Iran, saying that "the UAE and Israel both recognize Iran as this great threat."²⁴⁶ The Bahraini Minister of Interior stated that the agreement to establish diplomatic relations with Israel comes within the framework of protecting the supreme interests of the Kingdom of Bahrain, which means protecting the entity of the state...This does not mean abandoning the Palestine issue and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, but is meant to enhance the security and economy of the Bahrainis...If Palestine is our Arab cause, then Bahrain is our fateful cause.²⁴⁷

Bahrain's Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa stated during talks with Netanyahu that supporting "peace" with Israel enhances security, stability and prosperity in the region.²⁴⁸ The UAE confirmed the same stance, on the sidelines of a meeting in Cyprus that brought together Israeli Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi with Anwar Gargash, the diplomatic advisor to the President of the UAE. Gargash stated that "ties with Israel amounted to an 'alternative strategic view' aimed at bolstering regional security."²⁴⁹

Israel benefited economically from the security agreements by concluding several deals to sell Israeli arms. The UAE resorted to Israel to strengthen the air defense of its ally in Libya, Khalifa Haftar, in order to confront the drone system of the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA), supported by Turkey.²⁵⁰ The UAE IDEX International Defense Exhibition and Conference signed a strategic agreement, with the Defense, National Security and Cyber Security Exhibition in Israel ISDEF, to participate in the exhibition held in the capital Abu Dhabi in mid-February 2021, and promote Israeli defense, security and technology companies.²⁵¹ Furthermore, the *Calcalist* newspaper reported that "Israeli cybersecurity companies were active in the UAE through their international branches even before the countries agreed to establish full diplomatic relations this past summer." However, Mohammad al-Kuwaiti, the Executive Director of the UAE's National Electronic Security Authority (NESA) said that this



“activity has intensified significantly since the Abraham Accords were signed.”²⁵² In this context, the Israeli newspaper *Globes* reported that the Israeli company, Percepto, had installed drones in the UAE to monitor oil fields, solar farms and other infrastructure. The drones are used for security purposes and to identify malfunctions in real time.²⁵³

The meetings and security contacts between the two sides then became public. After the visit of Mossad Chief Yossi Cohen to the UAE in August 2020, he left for Bahrain to meet with officials there.²⁵⁴ Meanwhile, Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz had a phone conversation with his Emirati counterpart, Mohammed bin Ahmed Al Bowardi, during which they discussed strengthening security cooperation and channels of communication and establishing solid bilateral relations.²⁵⁵ In October 2020, the Mossad chief also held security talks in Bahrain.²⁵⁶

Abu Dhabi hosted a virtual meeting of the interior ministers of the countries of the International Security Alliance, in the presence of the representative of Israel. The alliance includes the UAE, France, Italy, Spain, Slovakia, Senegal, Singapore, the Kingdom of Bahrain and the Kingdom of Morocco, in addition to Israel, which has officially joined it.²⁵⁷

The two sides “legalized” their security relations by signing joint agreements, as a Bahraini-Israeli agreement on joint security cooperation was announced,²⁵⁸ in addition the UAE’s advanced technology group for defence and beyond EDGE agreed on a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) to develop an advanced C-UAS Counter-Unmanned Aircraft System (C-UAS).²⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the Hebrew Walla! website revealed that Israel and the UAE had agreed to appoint a permanent representative of the Israeli police to the UAE, and vice versa.²⁶⁰ This was followed by the signing of an MOU in the field of “fighting money laundering and terrorist financing” between the UAE and Israel.²⁶¹

In terms of joint training, Emirati and Israeli fighter jets participated in joint exercises in Greece, as part of the joint exercise dubbed *Iniochos*.²⁶² The UAE, represented by the Commander of the Air Force, also participated in the international “Blue Flag” exercise, which was held by Israel in the Negev desert in October 2021, with the participation of many countries.²⁶³ In addition, a joint naval exercise was held between the UAE, Bahrain, Israel and the United States in November 2021, in the Red Sea, with the focus of training on “on visit, board,

search and seizure tactics.” It is believed that the move can “create the potential for a regional coalition with Arab countries that have normalized ties with Israel against shared threats posed by Iran.”²⁶⁴

The Commercial and Economic Aspect

Trade and economic normalization between some Gulf states and Israel deepened in several areas. In addition to signing joint trade agreements and drawing up plans for future projects, trade between ports, banking transactions, and oil and gas supplies have been institutionalized, with the import of Israeli products. In addition, economic relations were strengthened by allowing Israel to participate in various trade fairs, and in various fields, most notably high-tech, which resulted in an increase in the trade volume between the two parties. The customs ports in the UAE allowed the entry of Israeli products or any goods imported from Israel, as well as the export of Emirati products or any goods exported from the Emirates to the Israeli ports.²⁶⁵

Several agreements were also signed between the two parties. The Tel Aviv Chamber of Commerce (TACC) has signed an agreement with the Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ADCCI), where both sides will jointly work to extend cooperation in a number of investment sectors including tourism, technologies, agriculture, medicine and digital professions.²⁶⁶ Meanwhile, the Jebel Ali Free Zone (Jafza) and the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce (FICC) signed an MOU to build new partnerships and strengthen commercial relations, as well as sharing information that serve economic relations, including regulations and plans, and possibilities in terms of economic planning.²⁶⁷ The UAE and Israel signed four MOUs in Israel concerning irrigation solutions and advanced agriculture, which would further strengthen cooperation and strategic partnership between the two countries.²⁶⁸

It also signed several agreements with Israel to support cooperation in the fields of investment, tourism, banking and technology between the two countries. The signed agreements included an investment protection and promotion agreement, aviation services agreement, a visa exemption agreement, and an MOU on cooperation in the areas of improving and developing science and technology.²⁶⁹ Meanwhile, the two export credit agencies of UAE and Israel signed a cooperation agreement to develop economic relations between the two countries, broadening the export financing possibilities for their exporters.²⁷⁰ The UAE also signed a

tax agreement with Israel aimed at bolstering economic ties between the two sides. The agreement provides “certainty and favorable conditions for extensive business activity,” according to Israel Katz, the Israeli Finance Minister.²⁷¹ The UAE and Israel signed an economic cooperation agreement, in which the two governments commit to open up economic relations, a free flow of goods and services, cooperation on trade fairs, exchange of experts and know how, exchange of delegations, cooperation on standards and regulation, encouragement of cooperation by the private sector, encouragement of Research and Development, agritech and more. The agreement provides for the formation of a joint economic committee, led by the Ministries of Economy of both countries, to examine ways of increasing trade and removing trade barriers.²⁷²

The UAE announced the establishment of a \$10 billion fund to invest in Israel, aimed at investing in strategic sectors in Israel, including energy, manufacturing, water, space, health care, agricultural technology and others.²⁷³ Meanwhile, a Jerusalem municipality official revealed Emirati “willingness and enthusiasm” to invest in the settlement scheme, which is intended to Judaize large parts of the Jerusalem neighborhoods, Wadi al-Joz, Sheikh Jarrah and Musrara, by converting large areas of them into an investment center in a project known as “Silicon Wadi.” The scheme is based on the ruins of about 200 commercial and industrial facilities in the industrial area in the Jerusalem neighborhood of Wadi al-Joz. The first phase of the plan targets more than 250 donums of the Jerusalem neighborhoods adjacent to the Old City.²⁷⁴

The Emirati and Israeli sides worked to overcome the obstacles to trade through their ports. The DP World group signed three memoranda of understanding with the Israeli company DoverTower, which cover areas of cooperation, where “DP World will assess the development of Israeli ports and free zones, and the potential establishment of a direct shipping route between Eilat and Jebel Ali.” In addition, “Dubai Customs will promote and facilitate trade between private entities in the two countries through customs best practice and seamless, innovative processes,” and “Drydocks World will explore business opportunities with Israel Shipyards Ltd (ISL) on a joint venture for developing, manufacturing and marketing ISL products.”²⁷⁵ DP World signed an MOU with the Israeli Bank Leumi, “to work together to enhance trade and logistics in Israel and promote the flow of trade between Israel and the wider region.” The MOU includes a framework for cooperation which would:

enable the parties to explore potential opportunities including the development of ports and logistics assets in Israel to drive trade and greater job creation; trade finance solutions to simplify working capital requirements for customers improve flow of cargo; and digital solutions in end-to-end logistics to remove inefficiencies in the supply chain.²⁷⁶

A maritime line between Israel and the UAE was inaugurated on 12/10/2020, with the first container ship coming directly from the Emirates arriving at the Haifa port in Israel, which would then sail on a line linking India and the UAE with the Haifa port, and then to the ports of the US east.²⁷⁷ After the container ship arrived, then Prime Minister Netanyahu toured the pier at Haifa port where the container ship from the UAE is anchored and said:

It is important to understand, once Israel was a cul-de-sac, meaning that you could come here from the west and leave; you could not fly or sail. In effect, you were constrained. Now, Israel is becoming a main hub, both maritime and in the air. It is possible to fly in all directions, over Saudi Arabia and Jordan. This is a land, sea, air, technological, commercial and human hub. This is a very big thing. This is a historic day, genuinely historic. This is the second visit to Israel of a ship from Dubai that has anchored in Haifa port.²⁷⁸

In the same context, Israel announced joining the World Logistics Passport (WLP), an international initiative established and led by Dubai, which aims to increase the volume of trade in the world's markets, by reducing shipping costs and reducing transit time, through the first global freight loyalty program.²⁷⁹

As trade between the two sides needs banking transactions, they also engaged in banking normalization. The Governor of the UAE Central Bank and the Director General of the Israeli Prime Minister's Office signed an MOU for future cooperation in the financial and banking sector.²⁸⁰ The Israeli Bank Leumi signed an MOU with the First Abu Dhabi Bank and Emirates NBD, a day after Emirates NBD signed an MOU with Bank Hapoalim.²⁸¹ The Dubai International Finance Center (DIFC) and Israel's Bank Hapoalim signed an agreement under which Bank Hapoalim would become "part of DIFC's global network of banks, financial centres, regulators and companies that are disrupting the financial and technology sectors."²⁸² The DIFC FinTech Hive technology hub signed an agreement with the Israeli Fintech Aviv, which will enable DIFC to further support the UAE in facilitating economic growth from the technology and innovation sectors.²⁸³ The



two largest banks in Israel, Bank Leumi and Bank Hapoalim, signed two MOUs with the National Bank of Bahrain, under which the two parties agreed to work together to provide customers with the required banking information between the two countries, as well as trade, clearing, investment, foreign currency and security trading.²⁸⁴

Regarding oil and gas, in October 2020, the Israeli Europe Asia Pipeline Company (EAPC) signed a preliminary deal with MED-RED Land Bridge, a company with Israeli and Emirati owners, to help transport oil from the UAE to Europe via a pipeline that connects Eilat and the Mediterranean port of Ashkelon. It could provide quicker access for consumers in Asia to oil produced in the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions.²⁸⁵ In April 2021, the first vessel offloaded its crude in Ashkelon port to be pumped through the EAPC pipeline network on a 242-kilometer journey to the port of Eilat where it was loaded onto a Very large crude carrier (VLCC) heading to the Far East via the Red Sea.²⁸⁶ In a related context, Israel's Delek Drilling, which owns 22% of the Tamar natural gas field in the Mediterranean, sold its stake to the Emirati company Mubadala Petroleum for a value of \$1.025 billion.²⁸⁷

High-tech deals became public. A huge Israeli delegation participated in the GITEX event for information technology in the UAE. The Israeli delegation also participated in the Future Digital Economy Summit on the sidelines of GITEX.²⁸⁸ In addition, the Israeli company Beacon Red, owned by a former head of Mossad, announced signing a strategic agreement with the UAE company XM Cyber, to further enhance its vulnerability assessment and penetration testing (VAPT) services provided to government and critical infrastructure clients in the UAE and across the GCC region.²⁸⁹ It was also announced that Group 42 (G42), a leading technology company based in Abu Dhabi, and Rafael Advanced Defense Systems of Israel signed “an agreement to form a new Joint Venture (JV) that will commercialize Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Big Data technologies and solutions for multiple sectors,” such as, banking, healthcare, public safety and others, to be sold in Israel, the UAE and worldwide.²⁹⁰

The normalizing Arab countries did not care about the origin of the goods they imported from Israel, even if they were produced in settlements established in Palestinian Territories Occupied in 1967. In this regard, an Anadolu Agency investigation revealed that Emirati companies contracted with Israeli companies

blacklisted by the UN, for supporting illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank. The “blacklist” includes 112 Israeli and international companies.²⁹¹ The UAE also signed an agreement with an Israeli company to market wine made in the occupied Syrian Golan Heights.²⁹²

A delegation of businessmen from Israeli settlements visited Dubai to establish economic partnerships. The settlement delegation, consisting of directors of factories, companies and businessmen from the industrial zones of the settlement council, met with about 20 Emirati businessmen, owners of companies specializing in the fields of agriculture, pesticides and plastics, and managers of big investment companies. The two sides discussed bilateral cooperation, especially in the fields of agricultural crops and water desalination.²⁹³

As an affirmation of this Emirati trend, the head of the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) announced that his country will deal with goods produced in the settlements established on Palestinian lands in the occupied WB as imports from Israel, saying that the UAE does not distinguish between Israeli imports manufactured in different regions, including “Judea and Samaria,” using the Israeli designation for the occupied WB.²⁹⁴ On 7/12/2020, an agreement was also signed to export settlement products in the northern WB to the UAE, the Israeli products included honey-producers, wineries, olive oil and tahini.²⁹⁵ After that, it did not take long for the UAE to receive the first official shipment of products from Israeli settlements built on the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.²⁹⁶

In the same vein, the Bahraini Minister of Trade, Industry and Tourism Zayed bin Rashid al-Zayani stated that his country will treat Israeli products as Israeli regardless of their origin,²⁹⁷ meaning it will not distinguish between the products of the settlements and Israel proper. This statement caused an uproar, prompting Bahraini Foreign Minister ‘Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani to contact his Palestinian counterpart and deny what had been attributed to the Bahraini Minister of Commerce.²⁹⁸

The volume of trade between the UAE and Israel has increased because of the normalization of relations. After the announcement of the normalization of relations between the UAE and Israel, Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen expected that the annual trade between them would reach \$4 billion within 3–5 years.²⁹⁹ Netanyahu stated that the “peace” agreements with the UAE and Bahrain would generate billions of dollars for the Israeli economy, strengthen Israel



in general, and help it face the economic damage caused by the repercussions of the coronavirus.³⁰⁰

Economic normalization led to the revival of the Israeli diamond industry. According to a report published by the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry for the first quarter of 2021, the net import of rough diamonds to Israel amounted to about \$476 million, an increase of 75% compared to the same period in 2020.³⁰¹

6. Sudan, Morocco and other Arab Countries

a. Sudan

Sudanese-Israeli relations began to publicly emerge in February 2020, when the head of the Transitional Sovereign Council, ‘Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, met with Netanyahu in Uganda. The Israeli media reported that the meeting was arranged by the UAE and with the aim of “accelerating” the process of removing Sudan from the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list.”³⁰² According to the Israeli sources, Netanyahu asked al-Burhan to open Sudanese airspace to Israeli flights coming from Latin America, while al-Burhan requested Israel’s mediation to ease US sanctions on his country and remove it from the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list.”³⁰³ It seems that the meeting took place without consulting the Sudanese government. The Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism, and the spokesperson for the transitional government, Faisal Muhammad Saleh, stated that “we were not notified or consulted in the Council of Ministers about the meeting, and we will wait for clarifications after the return of the President of the Sovereign Council.”³⁰⁴ But normalization then began immediately. After the Uganda meeting, Netanyahu announced that he had obtained permission for Israeli civilian planes to fly over Sudan.³⁰⁵

Al-Burhan tried to justify his meeting with Netanyahu by saying that this would contribute to Sudan’s integration into the international community, declaring that “contacts with Netanyahu and Pompeo began three months ago, and we discussed what can benefit Sudan.” He explained that he had informed Prime Minister ‘Abdallah Hamdok of the Entebbe meeting two days before it was scheduled, stressing that the Forces for Freedom and Change had no objection to the step, but that their objection came because of the lack of consultation prior to the meeting. As for aviation collaboration, al-Burhan indicated that some airlines had for months been crossing Sudan’s airspace on the way to Israel, claiming that

Sudan's rapprochement with Israel may be useful in "helping the Palestinians solve their problems." Following these statements, the Sudanese army announced its support for al-Burhan, stressing that his meeting with Netanyahu comes within the framework of Sudan's supreme interest.³⁰⁶

Sudanese steps towards normalization were manifested by allowing commercial flights to fly to Israel through its airspace, where in March 2020, LATAM, Latin America's largest airline group, was allowed to fly over Sudan in its direct flights between South America and Israel.³⁰⁷ Several months later, in June 2020, an El Al plane flying from Argentina crossed through Sudan's airspace, the first Israeli airliner to do so.³⁰⁸ In June 2020, press reports revealed that an Israeli plane crossed Sudanese airspace on its way to the Chadian capital, N'Djamena, on the first direct flight from Israel to Chad.³⁰⁹

Disagreements on the issue of normalization within the Transitional Sovereign Council became public. This was exemplified by the Foreign Ministry's dismissal of its spokesperson, Haider Badawi Sadiq, after he stated that contacts were taking place between Sudan and Israel to normalize relations, praising the agreement announced between the UAE and Israel, describing it as a "brave and bold step." Sadiq added that it in the event of signing a "peace" agreement, Sudan "will be the most important country with which Israel normalizes, even more important than Egypt," stressing that "peace between Israel and the Arab countries helps the world achieve international peace."³¹⁰

Hamdok tried to manoeuvre with regard to seeking an agreement with Israel, by informing his guest, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, that his government did not have a mandate beyond the tasks of the transitional phase, and that normalization with Israel should be discussed after the completion of the transitional governance structures.³¹¹ Similarly, the Sudanese Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism Faisal Mohamed Salih stated that the delegation that visited the UAE and met the US administration team there "does not have a mandate to discuss normalization with Israel." He stressed that his country's position "is consistent regarding normalization with Israel, and we do not have a mandate to take a decision in such matters, as they are among the tasks of an elected government, and we still hold the same position."³¹²

The government's refusal to sign a normalization agreement prompted some parties to warn of the disintegration of the ruling coalition, comprised of the



military and civilians represented by the “Declaration of Freedom and Change” forces.³¹³ While civilians believed they had no popular mandate that would qualify them to take such a step, al-Burhan and the military were promoting the idea that normalization would contribute to easing the siege on Sudan, and that it was an opportunity that must be seized to remove Sudan from the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list.”³¹⁴ In the same context, the *New York Times* revealed that the Trump administration offered “cash aid and promises to entice Sudan to recognize Israel before the American election.”³¹⁵

Sudanese parties and forces were divided in their stance on normalization. Several parties (National Umma Party, Sudan Liberation Movement-Second Revolution and the Eastern Front) called for seizing the opportunity and agreeing to the US offer of normalization. Other parties that are part of the government’s political camp, including the National Umma, the Communist, the Arab Socialist Ba‘ath, and the Nasserist Democratic Unionist parties rejected this.³¹⁶ Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, head of the National Umma Party, launched a campaign lobbying against relations with Israel, he considered that “linking the removal of Sudan from the list of countries sponsoring terrorism to normalization is a blackmail that insults the dignity of the Sudanese people.”³¹⁷ In the same context, the Islamic Jurisprudence Academy in Sudan issued a fatwa prohibiting normalization with Israel in all fields, “as it supports injustice and aids sin and aggression.”³¹⁸

The military ignored the voices opposing a normalization agreement, and at the same time, the civilians who rejected normalization within the Governing Council acquiesced to the military, in order not to break up the ruling coalition. At the end of October 2020, the US announced that Sudan and Israel had agreed to start relations, and a joint statement stated that Trump, al-Burhan, Hamdok and Netanyahu have talked, where Israel and Sudan agreed to begin normalizing their economic relations with an initial focus on agriculture.³¹⁹

Israel sought to showcase the benefits of normalization, with Sudan (after signing) receiving a wheat grant from the UAE and Israel.³²⁰ The Sudanese cabinet had revealed that the US stipulated normalization of relations between Sudan and Israel as a condition to write off Sudan from the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list.”³²¹ Moreover, an Israeli intelligence report showed the benefits of normalization with Sudan, saying that despite the country’s poverty, there is an Israeli interest in normalizing in agriculture and tourism, and working for the reduction of arms smuggling into GS and migration into Israel.³²²

Al-Burhan claimed that the agreement was a peace treaty with Israel and denied there was any US blackmail or pressure from the Gulf States to sign the normalization agreement. He claimed that most Sudanese political forces do not oppose normalization.³²³ Deputy chief of the Transitional Sovereign Council Lieutenant-General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) echoed al-Burhan, claiming that the historical position of Sudan on the Palestine issue does not prevent normal relations with Israel, that 90% of Sudanese support normalization, and denied there was any pressure on Sudan to sign the deal.³²⁴

We can say that both claims are disputable (that there was no pressure, and that most Sudanese support normalization). Indeed, then-Sudanese Foreign Minister Omar Qamar al-Din said Sudan had come under pressure for normalization in the last hours of negotiations to get Sudan removed from the US the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list.” Al-Burhan later admitted that Sudan’s removal from the list was linked to normalization with Israel.³²⁵ Regarding alleged majority support for normalization in Sudan, the Sudanese Professionals Association (which backs the ruling coalition) accused the transitional government of deceiving the Sudanese people and said that normalization serves mainly the interests of the US and Israeli administrations’ electoral propaganda, and did not bring the Sudanese people anything but more division among their revolutionary forces.³²⁶ The National Umma Party and the Arab Socialist Ba‘ath Party denied al-Burhan’s statements about their acceptance of normalization.³²⁷

In the same context, demonstrations broke out against the agreement. Sudanese figures, parties and political forces declared categorical opposition to normalization of relations with Israel and called for the formation of a resistance front including the National Umma Party and the Nasserist Democratic Unionist Party. Later, the National Consensus Forces, the second most prominent component of the “Declaration of Freedom and Change” (Civilian component participating in the ruling coalition) rejected normalization with Israel.³²⁸ Indeed, a popular anti-normalization assembly was launched with the participation of 28 Sudanese parties and blocs, under the name of the Coalition of Sudanese Popular Forces Against Normalization with Israel, which includes the Popular Congress Party, the Reform Now Movement, the Just Peace Forum Party, Independent Youth Gathering and Sudan Scholars Association. The signatories to its charter included: the Sudanese Federation of Scholars, Imams and Preachers, the Muslim Brothers Movement, Academics Against Normalization and the Journalists Against Normalization.³²⁹



Al-Burhan ignored the opposition of these political forces to the normalization agreement, saying there is no point in being against a UN member state that has become accepted by the international community, regardless of the circumstances that accompanied its establishment. He stressed that the Transitional Sovereign Council and the ministers were partners in the step of ending hostility with Israel. He further added that whenever the Legislative Council is established, it will be the body authorized to ratify international agreements.³³⁰

The Sudanese Transitional Sovereign Council backed al-Burhan's position, when its spokesperson stated, "Sudan's interest is the supreme criterion in its foreign relations, and if there is an interest in normalization with Israel, we will go through with it to the end."³³¹ However, Sudanese Minister of Culture, Information and Tourism criticized the army for working to develop relations with Israel, without notifying other officials, noting that an Israeli delegation's visit to a Sudanese military factory was done without the knowledge of the Council of Ministers.³³²

The normalization of relations between the two parties began by signing an agreement to promote strategic cooperation, including security, intelligence and stabilization, during a visit by Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen to Khartoum.³³³ The Sudanese cabinet abolished the "Israel Boycott Law" issued in 1958.³³⁴ Security relations between the two sides were launched, and an Axios website scoop revealed that a "secret" meeting was held between Mossad officials and Deputy Head of the Transitional Sovereign Council General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (aka Hemedti) in Khartoum, Sudan.³³⁵

Security cooperation between the two sides led to measures on the ground to crackdown on activities of the Palestinian resistance, which was previously moving freely in Sudan. A controversy erupted following a Reuters report that said the Sudanese authorities confiscated assets and properties belonging to Hamas, while Hamas denied having properties in Sudan. Reuters claimed Hamas's assets in Sudan include "real estate, company shares, a hotel in a prime Khartoum location, an exchange bureau, a TV station, and more than a million acres of farmland."³³⁶ In scientific normalization, an Israeli scientific mission from the city of Eilat sailed to Port Sudan and launched a joint venture with Sudanese researchers, claiming to work to preserve unique coral reefs in the Red Sea.³³⁷

Israel's infiltration of the ruling elite in Sudan, especially the military side, appeared with its intervention after al-Burhan's coup against Hamdok. According to *Haaretz*, the United States asked Israel to use its relations with the military in Sudan to "convince" them to restore civilian-led government. However, *Al-Sudani* newspaper, as well as the Israeli Walla! News website, reported that an Israeli delegation, including Mossad officials, flew to Khartoum immediately after the coup. Analysts indicated that the visit aimed to support the coup and preserve the normalization agreements.³³⁸ Regardless of whether the purpose of the meeting was to support the coup or vice versa, the important thing here is the confirmation received from a Sudanese source and an Israeli source of a visit by a Mossad delegation to Khartoum after the coup. This indicates the extent of the influence that Israel has across the region, and the extent of its penetration into the ruling elite in Sudan.

b. Morocco and Other Arab Countries

Trump announced on Twitter that Morocco and Israel had agreed to normalize relations, including launching flights between Rabat and Tel Aviv, opening two embassies, and establishing economic relations between the two parties. Trump indicated, in another tweet, that he signed a decree of the US recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara, in what appears to be a "down payment" for Morocco's normalization of its relationship with Israel.³³⁹ Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita claimed that restoring contact with Israel is not considered normalization, and that Morocco adheres to the basic principles of the two-state solution and negotiation as a basis for resolving the crisis. He denied that the US recognition of sovereignty over the Sahara was in exchange for restoring relations with Israel, especially since there has been a relationship between Morocco and Israel since the 1990s.³⁴⁰ But later, the minister admitted that the agreement with Israel was a package deal that included the Western Sahara.³⁴¹

Israel has relations with Morocco that extend back to before the signing of the "Abraham Accords." For example, in February 2020, the Moroccan army received three Israeli-made reconnaissance drones, sold through France.³⁴² This was confirmed by Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita, in an interview with *Yedioth Ahronoth*, in which he indicated that relations between Morocco and Israel were "already normal" before the normalization agreement announced by



Trump.³⁴³ *Haaretz* revealed that Morocco and Israel “have had close economic, diplomatic and military ties for many year,” as well as several previous secret meetings and visits by senior Moroccan and Israeli officials. *Haaretz* reported that the military cooperation between the two sides dates to 1970, when Israel sold tanks to Morocco. The newspaper added that “from 2000 until 2020, a number of secret and not-so-secret visits were made by officials from both countries.”³⁴⁴

Moroccan Prime Minister Saad dine El Otmani, who is affiliated with the Islamic movement, tried to justify the signing of the agreement by noting that normalization is a difficult decision, claiming that Morocco will not give up its support for the Palestine issue. He said that “Morocco will never fall below the level of the Arab Initiative, rather our fundamentals are higher than the initiative.”³⁴⁵ In a telephone conversation with Netanyahu, the Moroccan monarch confirmed the reactivation of cooperation mechanisms between his country and Israel, and the resumption of contacts on a regular basis, within the framework of peaceful and friendly diplomatic relations.³⁴⁶ After the formation of the new Israeli government, in June 2021, the King congratulated Naftali Bennett, for his election as prime minister.³⁴⁷

Israel opened a diplomatic representative office in Morocco following the announcement of the agreement, while Israeli President Isaac Herzog invited the Moroccan monarch to visit Tel Aviv.³⁴⁸ The Israeli Liaison Office in Rabat was unofficially opened at the end of January 2021, coinciding with the arrival of the Israeli Ambassador David Govrin to Morocco.³⁴⁹

After mid-December 2020, Morocco started procedures for resuming contacts and flights with Israel.³⁵⁰ This was followed by signing four agreements between the two parties in various fields, including visa waivers for holders of diplomatic and service passports, an MOU on civil aviation, and an MOU on innovation and the development of water resources. In addition, an MOU was signed for cooperation in finance and investment, as well as negotiating other agreements framing these relations, including an agreement to avoid double taxation, an investment promotion and protection agreement, and a customs assistance agreement.³⁵¹ The two parties also discussed industrial cooperation and partnership in five industrial sectors, covering textiles, food industries, applied research in industry, green technologies and renewable energy.³⁵² An Israel-Morocco Friendship Forum was

also formed under the chairmanship of Sam Ben Chitrit, president of the World Federation of Moroccan Jews. The forum includes public figures, retired police and judicial officers, businessmen and women, former mayors and others. Among its objectives is to promote cooperation between Israel and Morocco in various fields, especially tourism.³⁵³

Morocco signed a strategic partnership agreement with Israeli businessmen working in the private sector, where the two sides agreed to establish a bilateral business council to enhance cooperation between the private sectors of the two countries.³⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Head of the Israeli Mission to Morocco David Govrin announced the signing of two cooperation agreements, the first between the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM), the largest corporate group in Morocco, and one of the Israel's top technology companies IBEO. The second agreement was signed between the "National School of Business and Management in Casablanca and Tel Aviv University's School of Management."³⁵⁵ In this context, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita stated, "We... are sincere in our commitments, because we took the decision (for normalization with Israel) with conviction, and we will go to the maximum extent possible in developing bilateral cooperation."³⁵⁶

Morocco went public with its security relations with Israel, as the Moroccan army participated, for the first time, in a joint international exercise in Israel.³⁵⁷ Morocco also signed with Israel an agreement in cyber security, which provides for establishing cooperation in research and development and operational areas in cyber.³⁵⁸ Meanwhile, Moroccan Foreign Minister Nasser Bourita stated that Rabat is awaiting important visits by Israeli officials, including the Ministers of Economy and Defense, and stated that many ministers in the two countries have communicated, paving the way for the signing of nearly 20 (bilateral) agreements in various fields.³⁵⁹

Morocco also started cooperating with Israel to build kamikaze drone sector.³⁶⁰ Israeli Defense Minister Gantz visited Morocco in November 2021, where he signed an agreement on security cooperation between the two countries, which the head of the Political-Military Bureau at Israel's Ministry of Defense, Zohar Palti, described as a "strategic alliance for information," and said that "Morocco has for years been battling terror on several fronts, and is a country that is struggling against al Qaeda and global jihadi groups."³⁶¹ Morocco's Foreign Minister, Nasser



Bourita, called for a “new regional order in which Israel would be an active player,” and expressed his regret that normalization had led to “enmity,” in direct reference to Algeria.³⁶²

As for the reactions to Morocco’s normalization with Israel from the countries surrounding Morocco, Algerian Prime Minister ‘Abdelaziz Djerad said that Algeria is targeted by the agreement, where there is a foreign plan for Israel to reach Algeria’s borders.³⁶³ A spokesperson for the Algerian government stated that Algeria will not rush towards normalization.³⁶⁴ In an interview regarding the position on the Palestine issue and normalization, Algerian President ‘Abdelmadjid Tebboune said that his country’s position on the Palestine issue is not subject to the statute of limitations or inaction. He added that there is an Arab agreement on the principle of “land for peace,” and that Algeria is committed to this position, then added, “But today there is no peace or land, so why normalization?”³⁶⁵

Algeria held the view that the normalization agreement between Morocco and Israel targeted it in the first place. The Algerian presidency accused Morocco and Israel of hatching plots against it, and accordingly decided to “reconsider” its relations with Morocco, which it accused of involvement with Israel in the huge wildfires that swept northern Algeria,³⁶⁶ due to their conflict over the Sahara. Algeria decided to sever diplomatic relations with Morocco, less than a week after declaring that it will “reconsider” its relations with Morocco.³⁶⁷ Algeria agreed with 13 countries to reject the decision to admit Israel into the African Union (AU) to preserve the principles of the union and support the Palestinian Arab statehood, in response to Israel’s acceptance as an observer member.³⁶⁸

In the same context, seven Arab African countries officially objected to the decision of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission (AUC) to grant Israel an “observer” status in the union: Mauritania, Egypt, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Comoros and Djibouti.³⁶⁹

As for Tunisia, the Tunisian Prime Minister Hichem Mechichi, stated that normalizing relations with Israel was not on the table, saying, “We respect Morocco’s choice, Morocco is a sister country that we love very much,” adding, “For Tunisia, the question is not on the agenda.” He also said, “Every country has its own reality, its own truth and its own diplomacy, which it considers best for its people.” In his comments, Mechichi said he had not been approached by the US administration about the issue.³⁷⁰

There were conflicting reports about Mauritania's stance. Following reports Mauritania could sign a normalization agreement with Israel, at the invitation of the ruling party, Mauritaniens of all sects and ethnicities went out in mass rallies in the center of the Mauritanian capital, Nouakchott, to support the Palestinian people and denounce the crimes of the Israeli occupation in GS, Jerusalem and the rest of the Palestinian territories.³⁷¹

Meanwhile, Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani received Isma'il Haniyyah, the head of the Hamas political bureau, in the Mauritanian capital, at an official invitation.³⁷² Mauritania denied the existence of any contacts with Israel, following press reports on this issue. The Minister of Culture, Youth, Sports and Relations with Parliament, and the government spokesperson stated, "I categorically deny the existence of any contacts between Mauritania and Israel in any field."³⁷³

Attitudes on normalization in Iraq varied. About 300 local Iraqi leaders called on their government to normalize relations with Israel in a gathering in the city of Erbil in the Kurdistan region.³⁷⁴ By contrast, Iraqi President Barham Salih affirmed his country's position calling for finding a comprehensive and just solution to the Palestine issue. In his speech before the 76th session of the United Nations General Assembly, on 23/9/2021, President Salih said, "Iraq stresses the importance of solving the Palestinian issue and fulfilling the rights of the Palestinian people in an independent state and finding a comprehensive, just and lasting solution. This will also help to stabilize the region and the world."³⁷⁵

The calls for normalization in Erbil sparked official condemnations, and condemnations by political parties and religious movements. The Iraqi government issued a statement expressing its categorical rejection of this meeting and its decisions, and the Supreme Judicial Council of Iraq issued arrest warrants for three people, including a former deputy, who participated in the meeting calling for normalization with Israel.³⁷⁶ But the controversy erupted again over exports of Iraqi Kurdistan's oil to Israel, as experts confirmed that these exports cover 70% of Israel's needs at very low prices, in exchange for the support of the Israel lobby in the US to the Kurdish cause.³⁷⁷



Third: The Developments in Normalization

1. Aviation

Normalization through aviation cooperation proceeded with the signing of agreements between the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Israel, opening airline offices and operating direct flights. UAE-based airline Etihad Airways signed an MOU with the Israeli airline El Al, which includes introduction of joint codeshare services, and “cooperation in the fields of cargo, engineering, loyalty, destination management and the optimal use of pilot and cabin crew training facilities.”³⁷⁸

The UAE used aid to Palestinians as a cover to begin aviation normalization. The first direct flight of Etihad Airways arrived from Abu Dhabi to Israel on 19/5/2020, under the pretext of delivering humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in WB and GS.³⁷⁹ Less than a month later, a second Emirati flight landed at the Israeli Lod Airport, with the same pretext used for the first flight.³⁸⁰ To facilitate travel, the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation announced that UAE citizens will be able to travel to Israel “without the need for a visa and for a maximum period of 90 days per visit.”³⁸¹ Meanwhile, the Bahraini Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced an agreement with Israel on mutual exemption from visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and special passports.³⁸²

Flights with Israel were then institutionalized and legalized. Etihad Airways opened an official representative office in Tel Aviv.³⁸³ In September 2020, El Al operated the first Israeli airline cargo flight to Dubai.³⁸⁴ In September 2020, first direct commercial flight from Israel to Bahrain took place, the Israir-operated flight carried Israeli officials on its way to Manama, for talks to set up an office for the company in the Bahraini capital.³⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the Israeli Minister of Transportation and Road Safety, Miri Regev, announced on 14/10/2020 that the first flight operated by Etihad Airways to fly over Israel came from Milan.³⁸⁶ After that, Etihad Airways launched a website in Hebrew.³⁸⁷ Official efforts to normalize flights culminated with Israel and the UAE reaching an agreement to enable 28 weekly flights between Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi and Dubai, while charter flights between the UAE and Israel’s Ramon Airport, near Eilat, will be unlimited.³⁸⁸

In the same context, Israel and Bahrain signed an aviation agreement that allows the operation of dozens of regular flights between the two countries.³⁸⁹ Bahrain’s Gulf Air signed an MOU with the Israeli El Al Airlines, according to which it

would operate direct flights to Tel Aviv.³⁹⁰ In this regard, the Bahraini national carrier Gulf Air announced that it had signed five aviation agreements with Israeli entities during a Bahraini trade visit to Israel.³⁹¹

Direct flights continued between the two sides, after an Emirati plane brought the first Israeli tourist group to Dubai, in November 2020.³⁹² Dubai Airports announced that three Israeli airlines will begin operating direct flights from Tel Aviv to Dubai.³⁹³ El Al Airlines announced that it will operate 14 direct flights to Dubai per week.³⁹⁴ Meanwhile, budget airline flydubai, launched its direct commercial flights to Tel Aviv at the end of November 2020.³⁹⁵

Normalization in aviation went beyond direct flights towards joint ventures. The Etihad Aviation Training (EAT) signed a contract with Israir Airlines to offer Full-Flight Simulator pilot training for Israir Airlines' Airbus A320 pilots.³⁹⁶ In April 2021, Etihad Cargo, the cargo and logistics arm of the Etihad Aviation Group, has selected Rom Top Aviation Ltd, as its general sales agent (GSA) for the state of Israel.³⁹⁷ The UAE then became a partner in the Israeli Beresheet 2 space mission.³⁹⁸ In addition, Etihad Engineering "signed a strategic partnership with Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI), to provide Passenger to Freighter (P2F) conversions on Boeing 777-300ER's."³⁹⁹

The Saudi position differed from the UAE-Bahraini position on aviation normalization, despite the Israeli Minister of Interior's approval of an unprecedented decision allowing Israelis to travel to the KSA for "commercial purposes," such as holding business meetings or searching for investments, provided that the traveller receives an official invitation from a host in the KSA,⁴⁰⁰ which was not met with Saudi reciprocation. Despite this, Israeli efforts to normalize aviation relations with KSA continued, where Netanyahu stated, "We are currently working on enabling direct flights, over Saudi Arabia, between Tel Aviv and Dubai and Abu Dhabi." He estimated flight time at "about three hours, just like to Rome."⁴⁰¹ Indeed, after this statement, KSA officially announced that it had agreed to allow all flights to and from the UAE from all countries to cross its airspace, two days after the first public Israeli flight crossed the Kingdom's airspace towards Abu Dhabi.⁴⁰² *Yedioth Ahronoth* newspaper reported that an Israeli plane flew over the holy city of Mecca, KSA, during its flight to India.⁴⁰³ In this regard, a senior Trump administration official said that the KSA agreed to let Israeli airliners cross its airspace enroute to the UAE, after talks between Saudi officials and White House

senior adviser Jared Kushner.⁴⁰⁴ Indeed, the first Israeli commercial flight to Dubai took off in December 2020 via Saudi airspace, after the KSA had agreed.⁴⁰⁵

For its part, Morocco signed an agreement with Israel to operate direct flights between the two sides.⁴⁰⁶ Hundreds of Israeli tourists flocked to Morocco on direct flights, seven months after the normalization of diplomatic relations between Morocco and the Hebrew state with US support.⁴⁰⁷ Meanwhile, the Israeli foreign minister signed with his Moroccan counterpart three agreements for joint cooperation between the two sides, in aviation, political dialogue and culture, youth and sports.⁴⁰⁸

2. Health

The fight against the coronavirus pandemic was used as a tool to promote normalization. Israeli officials announced (before signing the normalization agreement) that the Israeli intelligence service (Mossad) obtained 100 thousand COVID-19 testing kits, procured from the Gulf Arab states.⁴⁰⁹ In parallel, Gargash stated that the UAE would work with Israel in some areas, including combating COVID-19 and technology, even as political differences continue between the two countries.⁴¹⁰ Later, it was revealed that the UAE was the Gulf country from which the devices were purchased. In the first official cooperation between the two countries, two Emirati private sector companies and two Israeli companies announced several joint projects in medicine and COVID-19 response.⁴¹¹

The UAE Group 42 (G42), which specializes in artificial intelligence and cloud computing, has signed with Israel's Rafael Advanced Defense Systems and Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) two MOUs to explore collaborations in the research and development of effective solutions to combat SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19 disease.⁴¹² Meanwhile, the G42 Healthcare group announced the signing of an MOU with the Israeli company NanoScent, which specializes in scent reading technologies, "to explore collaborations in the development, validation, distribution and manufacturing of Scent Check, a revolutionary solution capable of detecting suspected cases of COVID-19 from a sample of exhaled nasal air."⁴¹³

The UAE Minister of Health and Prevention, 'Abdul Rahman Al Owais, discussed, in a phone call with Israeli Minister of Health Yuli Edelstein, bilateral cooperation in the fields of health and scientific research, and ways to enhance cooperation in the medical field, as well as pharmaceutical industries, medical

research, and frameworks for joint cooperation in combating the COVID-19 pandemic, in addition to establishing future projects for scientific and medical partnership and experiments, and exchanging visits between delegations.⁴¹⁴ An Israeli-Bahraini agreement was also signed for cooperation in the medical field. The agreement includes the cooperation in the medical fields, research, innovation and training.⁴¹⁵ A cooperation agreement was also signed between Israel and the UAE in the field of health, which includes the establishment of various projects, including cooperation in combating global epidemics, utilizing advanced technologies for the benefit of the health field, in addition to exchanging experience in the field of electronic and cyber warfare. The agreement also includes the exchange of visits by medical delegations from the two countries.⁴¹⁶

The governments of Bahrain and Israel reached an agreement on mutual recognition of vaccination and green passports. According to the agreement, people vaccinated in both countries, who have received a recognized vaccination in the other country, will be exempted from quarantine, and will also be able to enter places that require a “green passport.”⁴¹⁷ The Department of Health–Abu Dhabi (DoH) signed an MOU with the Israeli Clalit Health Services, to strengthen the exchange of healthcare information and “the implementation of various plans including, but not limited to, digital health initiatives related to artificial intelligence, visiting doctors’ program, professional education, international patient care referrals, research, and clinical trials.”⁴¹⁸ In addition, DoH and the Israeli Sheba Medical Center signed an MOU aimed at exchanging medical expertise and experiences.⁴¹⁹

3. Communications Normalization

The UAE and Israel launched direct telecom links between the two countries, days after a “peace” agreement was signed.⁴²⁰ The Kingdom of Bahrain then opened direct telecom links with Israel.⁴²¹ The Emirates Post Group (EPG) announced that it has added Israel to its global operations network.⁴²²

4. Academic Normalization

Academic normalization between the two parties included the signing of joint academic and research agreements and partnerships. Israel and the UAE agreed to launch student exchange.⁴²³ In September 2020, Mohamed bin Zayed University of Artificial Intelligence (MBZUAI) signed an MOU with the Israeli Weizmann Institute of Science, to cooperate in a number of fields, including “student and

postdoctoral fellow exchange programs, conferences and seminars, various forms of exchange between researchers, sharing of computing resources and the establishment of a joint virtual institute for artificial intelligence.”⁴²⁴ Three research institutes in UAE, US and Israel announced the establishment of a trilateral strategic partnership in research and studies. The three institutes are: the Atlantic Council in Washington, DC, the Emirates Policy Center in Abu Dhabi and the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv.⁴²⁵ In turn, Morocco signed an agreement with Israel to exchange student delegations and organize study visits between the two sides.⁴²⁶

5. Tourism Normalization

The Israeli and Bahraini Ministers of Tourism agreed on cooperation between the two sides in the field of tourism. They also discussed establishing a trilateral partnership with the UAE in tourism, including reciprocal packages and trips between the three countries, including flights that pass over the KSA.⁴²⁷ This agreement culminated in the signing of Bahraini-Israel MOUs, including the establishment of a forum for tourism exchange.⁴²⁸

6. Media and Art Normalization

As a prelude to the normalization agreement, the UAE ambassador to US, Yousef Al-Otaiba, published an article in the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, in which he overviewed the Abu Dhabi government’s vision for close relations with Israel. Otaiba wrote, “we would like to believe Israel is an opportunity, not an enemy.” However, he said, “Israeli plans for annexation and talk of normalization are a contradiction.”⁴²⁹ In a related context, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid and Emirati Foreign Minister ‘Abdullah bin Zayed published a joint article in also *Yedioth Ahronoth*, in which they share “their aspirations for a strong relationship and bilateral cooperation.”⁴³⁰

In television broadcasting, Dubai TV, Israeli Channel 12 and Bahrain TV aired a joint broadcast on the occasion of signing the two normalization agreements between Israel and UAE and Bahrain.⁴³¹ The Abu Dhabi Media and the Israeli i24NEWS channel signed an MOU in which “both media companies collaborate on multiple fronts including shared reporting and library content, as well as production exchange.”⁴³² The Emirates News Agency (WAM) also signed an agreement with Israel’s Tazpit Press Service (TPS), “to strengthen professional cooperation and

news exchange experiences.⁴³³ A day before the agreement, WAM launched news service in Hebrew.⁴³⁴ In addition, Israeli channel i24NEWS opened a new office in the UAE, where it also started broadcasting.⁴³⁵

In the same context, Gantz, the Israeli Defense Minister, was interviewed by journalists from the KSA, UAE and Bahrain, through the Zoom application. The virtual meeting was organized by the Arab Council for Regional Integration. Answering a question about security cooperation, Gantz said, “the normalization agreements strengthen the fight against Iran... We have shared interests. We all share the battle against the Iranian aggression and its nuclear development which jeopardizes the region and the world, and we’ll establish a united front against it.”⁴³⁶

On the artistic and cultural level, the Abu Dhabi Film Commission, the Israeli Film Fund and the Sam Spiegel Film and Television Lab in Jerusalem signed a cooperation agreement for training and production. The agreement includes plans to hold an annual regional film festival rotating between Abu Dhabi and Israel.⁴³⁷ The UAE Minister of Culture and Youth, Noura bint Mohammed Al Kaabi, discussed with the Israeli Minister of Culture and Sport Hili Topper cultural cooperation considering the “peace” treaty between the UAE and Israel. The two sides agreed to form joint task forces “to draft a framework for future cultural cooperation.”⁴³⁸ The artistic normalization includes showing films from six Arab countries at an Israeli film festival organized by the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute and Cinematheque.⁴³⁹

In the same context, and as a form of artistic normalization, the Saudi MBC channel showed the series *Makhray 7* (Exit 7), which encourages normalization with Israel and attacks the Palestinians and their issue. The channel had sparked widespread controversy at the beginning of Ramadan, by broadcasting a series called *Um Harun* (The Mother of Harun) that talked about the history of the Jews in Kuwait.⁴⁴⁰

The purpose of the media and cultural “agreements” between the two parties can be inferred according to several indicators,: On the sidelines of his meeting with the leader of the extremist Shas movement, the UAE ambassador to Israel, Mohamed Al Khaja, attacked Al Jazeera for its coverage of the war on GS.⁴⁴¹ This shows that the goal behind the media agreements between the two parties is to soften the image and practices of the Israel, normalize its existence, and try to silence any party that exposes these practices. Meanwhile, Bahraini Deputy



Foreign Minister Sheikh ‘Abdullah bin Ahmed Al Khalifa signed an agreement with Israel to wage a “war of ideas” against Iran.⁴⁴² This reveals another goal of the technical and cultural cooperation between the two parties, which is to confront the ideology of resistance that Iran adopts in its media discourse along with the resistance forces in the Arab and Muslim world.

7. Sports Normalization

Sports normalization took a new turn after the normalization agreement. The UAE Pro League signed an MOU with the Israel Professional Football League.⁴⁴³ The UAE Football Association signed an MOU with Israel Football Association (IFA), which includes holding friendly matches for all national teams and clubs. Indeed, a match was then held between the Israeli youth team and its Emirati counterpart in mid-December 2021 at Netanya Stadium, built on the ruins of Umm Khaled village. The agreement also covers the establishment of joint workshops “for technical and administrative members of the associations and launching development initiatives that contribute to supporting the game in the two countries.”⁴⁴⁴ In a related context, a member of the ruling family in Abu Dhabi “bought a 50% stake in the Israeli football club Beitar Jerusalem, long tainted by accusations of anti-Arab racism.”⁴⁴⁵

In Morocco, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Israeli Volleyball Association and its Moroccan counterpart.⁴⁴⁶ This was followed by signing a cooperation agreement between IFA and Morocco’s Royal Football Federation (FRMF), and the agreement included establishing “working teams headed by the directors of the two associations,” and allowing the Israeli team to use the Moroccan team’s home. The agreement also provides for cooperation in refereeing and the formation of joint teams in the areas of innovations, training of football executives, and the development of football clubs for women, youth and players with special needs and more.⁴⁴⁷

8. Economically

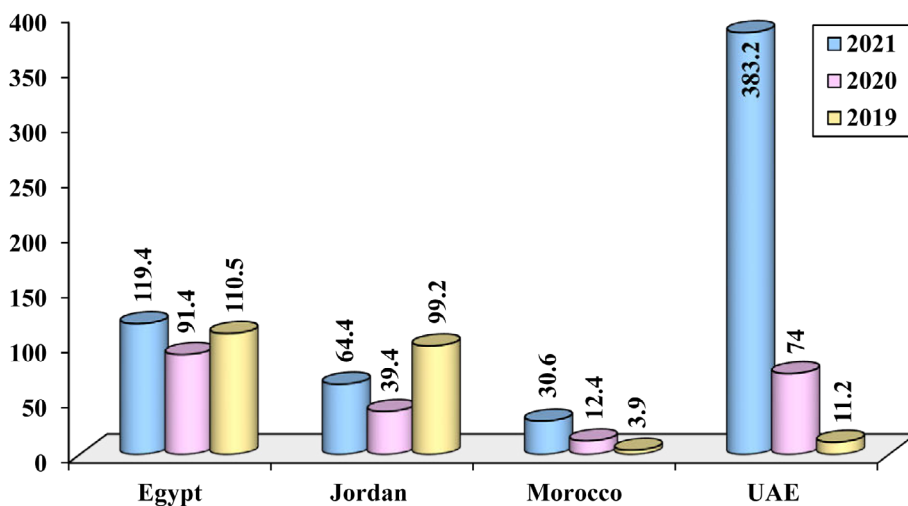
According to a CBS report, trade between Israel and the Arab countries grew by 234%, compared to the same period in 2020, because of the normalization of relations following the “Abraham Accords.” Trade with the UAE surged between January and July 2020, from \$50.8 million to \$613.9 million in the same period in 2021; with Jordan, from \$136.2 million to \$224.2 million; with

Egypt, from \$92 million to \$122.4 million; with Morocco, from \$14.9 million to \$20.8 million. As for Bahrain, direct trade was non-existent in the first seven months of 2020, but during the same period in 2021, it was worth \$300 thousand. The report pointed out that this data does not include trade in jewellery, services and tourism. According to the Israeli economist and businessman, Yitzhak Gal, tourism alone amounts to several million, as more than 230 thousand Israelis entered the UAE in the first seven months of 2021.⁴⁴⁸

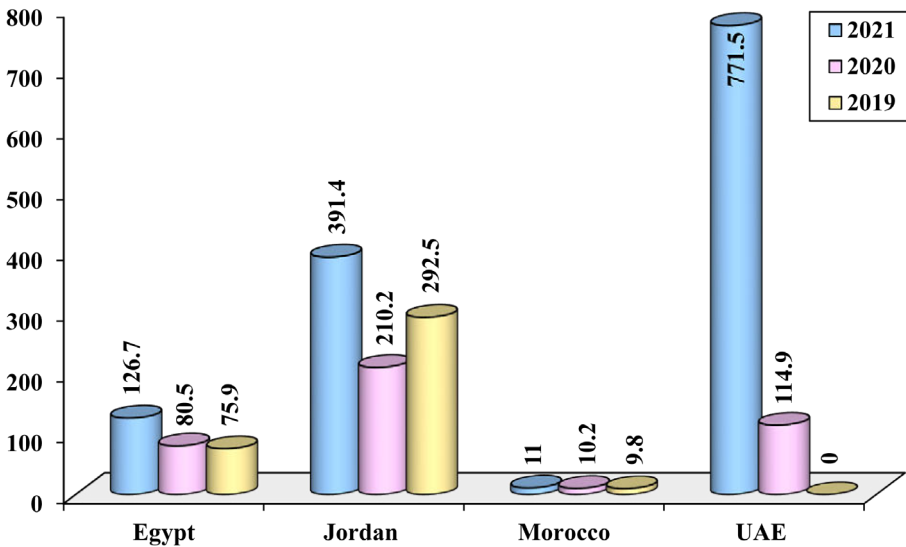
Table 1/6: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries 2019–2021 (\$ million)⁴⁴⁹

Country	Israeli exports			Israeli imports		
	2021	2020	2019	2021	2020	2019
Egypt	119.4	91.4	110.5	126.7	80.5	75.9
Jordan	64.4	39.4	99.2	391.4	210.2	292.5
Morocco	30.6	12.4	3.9	11	10.2	9.8
UAE	383.2	74	11.2	771.5	114.9	0

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2019–2021 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports From Some Arab Countries 2019–2021 (\$ million)



9. The Arab Public Position and its Directions

The Palestine issue is still the focus of the attention of a high percentage of Arabs. The rejection of normalization with Israel remains the prevailing norm, despite the preoccupation of many people in Arab countries with their own problems, and the unfavorable political circumstance represented by the security grip of authoritarian regimes. According to the Arab Opinion Index survey, 89% of Arabs believe that Israel poses the greatest threat, and 88% of Arabs would disapprove of recognition of Israel by their home countries.⁴⁵⁰ A study by the Israeli Ministry of Strategic Affairs revealed that 90% of the Arab discourse on social media about normalization with Israel is negative. The report indicated that 95% of the critical discourse about the normalization agreement was directed towards the UAE, which led the initiative, not Bahrain.⁴⁵¹

Most Arab populations rejected the liquidation of the Palestine issue, through rejecting the Deal of the Century plan, and rejected normalization agreements between some Arab countries and Israel. The Arab public stood in solidarity with the Palestinian people in confronting the Israeli aggression on Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem and GS, and staged celebrations after the end of the war, considering the results of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle a victory.

In terms of rejecting liquidation projects, and after the announcement of the “Deal of the Century,” which aims to liquidate the Palestine issue, the slogans of the Palestine issue dominated the demonstrations of the popular movement (*hirak*) in Algeria. On the 50th week of the movement, thousands of Algerians went out in huge rallies denouncing the Deal of the Century, raising Palestinian flags, and chanting the slogan “Algeria with Palestine whether oppressing or oppressed.”⁴⁵² In Mauritania, political and popular protests rejecting the Deal of the Century were sustained for a period. The Mauritanian Nasserist Youth and the Arab Nationalist Youth movement organized a sit-in in front of the US embassy in the capital, Nouakchott, rejecting the deal.⁴⁵³

In Yemen, thousands in various Yemeni cities came out in massive demonstrations, in rejection of the Trump and in support of the Palestine issue.⁴⁵⁴ An extensive meeting was also held in Sanaa, attended by a wide range of leaders of Yemeni parties and political forces with the participation of Palestinian factions, in support of the Palestine issue and rejection of normalization.⁴⁵⁵ Hundreds of Yemenis demonstrated in the governorate of Aden, which is controlled by Emirati-backed forces, in protest against the Emirati normalization agreement with Israel.⁴⁵⁶ The Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, said in a post on Twitter that the liberation of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the liberation of all the land around it from any occupation, is a sacred duty of all the Muslim *Ummah* (nation), and a debt that they all have to fulfil. Al-Khalili added in his tweet that if circumstances do not help now to liberate the mosque, the *Ummah* has no right of bargaining over it.⁴⁵⁷

Political dissidents in the UAE announced the establishment of a league against normalization, after their country announced the establishment of official relations with Israel.⁴⁵⁸ Several Arab writers and intellectuals, under the name “Arab Writers and Intellectuals Against Normalization,” called for signing a petition declaring their rejection of the Emirati normalization agreement.⁴⁵⁹

In Bahrain, political associations and civil society institutions reaffirmed their adherence to the fundamentals of the Bahraini people concerning the Palestine issue, the provisions of the Bahraini constitution that criminalizes normalization with Israel, and the official and popular Arab and Muslim consensus rejecting the US sponsored normalization agreement.⁴⁶⁰ In parallel, the Gulf Coalition Against Normalization announced that the “Palestine Charter campaign” that it launched



at the time of signing the two normalization agreements between Israel, and the UAE and Bahrain at the White House, exceeded one million memberships in less than 24 hours since its launch.⁴⁶¹ Meanwhile, 17 Bahraini political societies and civil society institutions confirmed, in a joint statement, that normalization with Israel does not represent the will of the people of the Kingdom, and will not bring peace.⁴⁶² Bahraini institutions and associations also issued a charter in which they announced rejection of normalization with Israel, and their support of the Palestine issue and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.⁴⁶³ Demonstrations took place in Bahrain, rejecting normalization and denouncing the visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid, who inaugurated the Israeli embassy in Manama.⁴⁶⁴

Sixteen Arab trade unions, societies, student groups, and political associations and organizations opposed to normalization announced the launch of a broad popular campaign to boycott “Zionist [Sympathizers] institutions” that support Israel.⁴⁶⁵ Meanwhile, 41 Kuwaiti organizations called in a joint statement for parliament to pass a law that “criminalizes” normalization with Israel.⁴⁶⁶ Popular demonstrations took place in the Jordanian capital, Amman, bearing the slogan “The people want to overthrow normalization,” in which the participants denounced the cooperation agreement between Jordan and Israel, funded by the UAE, in the field of water desalination and solar energy generation, demanding its immediate cancellation and the cancellation of all normalization projects with Israel, including the Wadi Arabah Peace Treaty, and the projects of gas, electricity and water.⁴⁶⁷

In Morocco, 28 associations called for a protest in solidarity with Palestine, and in rejection of the normalization agreements between the UAE and Bahrain and Israel.⁴⁶⁸ After Morocco signed a normalization agreement with Israel, a statement of the League of Arab Maghreb Scholars called on the Moroccan authorities to reconsider normalization with Israel, stressing that “this matter will remain a disgrace on the forehead of a country that has done its duty to defend the nation’s cause for decades.”⁴⁶⁹ The principal Islamic parties and groups in Morocco also rejected Rabat’s announcement of normalization with Israel: The Unity and Reform Movement, the religious preaching wing of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which leads the government coalition, said in a statement that it “rejects and condemns all attempts of normalization and Zionist penetration.” The banned but popular Moroccan Justice and Charity Group said normalization agreements are “a stab to the Palestine issue, and a betrayal of the Palestinian people.”⁴⁷⁰ The

National Syndicate of Moroccan Press issued a statement declaring its rejection of any normalization or media communication with the Israel at the expense of the legitimate and inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.⁴⁷¹ Meanwhile, 15 political, union and human rights bodies announced the establishment of a new Moroccan entity to support the Palestine issue and oppose normalization. The body, which was established under the name of the “Moroccan Front in Support of Palestine and Against Normalization,” said in a press statement, “This step came in response to the Moroccan state’s official signing of the normalization agreement with the Zionist entity.”⁴⁷² In the same context, 200 Mauritanian scholars issued a fatwa prohibiting normalization with the Israeli occupation.⁴⁷³

In the same vein, Algerians welcomed judoka Fathi Norine with the chants about Palestine after he refused to face an Israeli player in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics, despite knowing that he would be punished with a ban.⁴⁷⁴ The Sudanese judoka, Mohamed ‘Abdul Latif, also announced at the same Olympics that he would not play the match against an Israeli judoka.⁴⁷⁵

About 50 Moroccan cities witnessed massive demonstrations, during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, in support of the Palestinians and to denounce the Israeli attacks. The demonstrations were characterized by the massive participation of a diverse set of political, legal and trade union groups and many citizens of different ages, men, women and children. The Moroccan Front in Support of Palestine and Against Normalization called for these protests, which affirmed that various components of the Moroccan people support the Palestine issue.⁴⁷⁶

In the same context, and under the slogan Palestine Rises, thousands of Qataris and Arab and Muslim communities in the capital, Doha, participated in a massive solidarity festival, to express their support for the Palestinian people who are subjected to continuous Israeli aggression.⁴⁷⁷

Despite the bitterness of a decade displacement of hundreds of thousands of Syrians, it did not prevent them from showing solidarity with the Palestinian people and the people of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood, where they held demonstrations in their scattered camps in the north of Syria in support of Palestine.⁴⁷⁸

Lebanon also witnessed protests, sit-ins, and stances, under the title “You Are Not Alone,” in support of the Palestinian people in their confrontation with the occupation in Jerusalem and GS.⁴⁷⁹

Arab peoples celebrated the victory of the resistance after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. The Grand Mufti of the Sultanate of Oman, Sheikh Ahmad bin Hamad al-Khalili, praised the Palestinian resistance, saying that it has “washed the nation’s forehead from shame.”⁴⁸⁰ Celebrations were also held in Libya, Iraq, Jordan and the Palestinian RCs in Lebanon, for the victory of the resistance in GS, and sweets were distributed there.⁴⁸¹

Conclusion

The reactions of the Arab regimes to the Deal of the Century and normalization varied. Their positions were divided into three axes: the first is the axis of rejection of this deal; the second is the axis of participation and involvement; and the third axis whose position was ambiguous and hesitant between rejection and acceptance. In general, none of the Arab countries showed effectiveness in influencing events and policymaking in the region. Their role was limited at best to playing the role of mediator, as Egypt did by mediating a truce agreement between Israel and the Palestinian resistance after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.

In 2020 and 2021, several Arab countries signed normalization agreements with Israel. This began with the UAE and Bahrain, who were followed by Sudan and Morocco. These countries ignored what was previously agreed upon in the Arab summits in terms of rejecting political settlement and normalization before reaching a solution to the Palestine issue based on the Arab Peace Initiative.

The normalizing regimes claimed that they were seeking to advance national interests by signing normalization agreements, without abandoning support for the rights of the Palestinian people. The UAE and Bahrain invoked confronting Iranian influence, and their need for an alliance with a force parallel to the Iranian force to help them confront it. The Sudanese regime invoked its attempt to remove Sudan from the “State Sponsors of Terrorism list,” for its economy to be freed from the Western embargo it. Morocco justified its signature by invoking US recognition of its sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara, where Algeria is involved.

The Arab popular positions in support of the Palestine issue and rejecting normalization of relations with Israel were divided between rejecting the liquidation of the Palestine issue and demonstrating against the Deal of the Century and rejecting the normalization agreements signed between some Arab

countries and Israel. Committees were formed and statements were issued, with calls for demonstrations to express this opposition. The Arab peoples showed their solidarity with the Palestine issue, as evident in the broad popular solidarity with the Palestinian people in their response to the Israeli aggression on Sheikh Jarrah in Jerusalem and GS during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, and in celebrations and expressions of joy on social media after the confrontation ended, celebrating the victory of the resistance.

The positions of the countries surrounding Israel (Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon) regarding the Palestine issue also varied. The years 2020–2021 witnessed unremitting efforts by Egypt to restore its regional role, which had declined significantly in the previous decade, evident by holding diplomatic meetings and summits that included leaders of pivotal countries in the region dealing with the Palestine issue. This was accompanied by Egypt's continuation of previous policies regarding dealing with Palestinian factions, in terms of considering the PLO and the PA the official representatives of the Palestinians, while the relationship with the resistance factions in GS fluctuated up and down according to events, and the need to play a role in the truce and prevent escalation with Israel.

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry deviated from the LAS position on the Deal of the Century, by welcoming the efforts led by the US administration to achieve "peace." Furthermore, its relations with Israel witnessed remarkable development that included strengthening political, security and economic relations.

Jordan tried to play a diplomatic role in the Palestine issue by participating in several Egyptian diplomatic initiatives. The Jordanian official position on the Palestinian factions intersected with Egypt's, in terms of preferring to deal with the PA, while keeping back channels with Hamas. However, the Jordanian position on the Deal of the Century differed from the Egyptian, in terms of refusing to deal with it, especially because of the categorical refusal to settle Palestinian refugees, and the sensitivity of the issue of Hashemite jurisdiction over the holy sites in Jerusalem. This was reflected in the fluctuating relationship with Israel, despite some warmth in terms of economic normalization, whether through the import of gas or through solar energy projects.

The positions of Syria and Lebanon regarding the rejection of the Deal of the Century were similar. Despite the sharp political division in Lebanon, there was unanimity among the Lebanese parties to reject the deal. On the security front,

Israeli attacks on Syrian territory continued, while the Lebanese-Israeli security atmosphere witnessed more tension, in light of the repeated threats from Israel to launch a destructive war on Lebanon, in order to limit Hizbullah's combat capabilities. However, the security tension and mutual threats between Hizbullah and Israel did not prevent indirect negotiations between the Lebanese government and Israel to demarcate maritime borders.

As for the relations between Syria and Lebanon and the Palestinian factions, they witnessed some discrepancies, where the Syrian official position was open to Fatah and had reservations on the relations with Hamas. Nonetheless, the relationship between Hizbullah, the strong ally of the Syrian regime in Lebanon, and Hamas witnessed more rapprochement and coordination. Part of the Lebanese state's relationship with the Palestinian refugees has also seen a breakthrough through a decision issued by the Lebanese Minister of Labor, to allow the refugees to practice many professions that were prohibited to them, despite some calls for the continuation of the repulsive environment in dealing with the Palestinians, advocated by a group of Lebanese, under the pretext of refusing the resettlement of refugees.

In terms of forecasting the next two years, in light of the widespread popular rejection of normalization, instability of the region, the end of President Trump's term, the decline in pressure on the Arab regimes, the Palestinian consensus rejecting the Deal of the Century and the path of normalization, and the victory of the resistance in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, we expect that there will be competing trends governing the actions of some Arab regimes, either proceeding with normalization or delaying or freezing it. However, the push towards normalization is likely to decline, not only for the previous reasons, but because the normalizing states will find that the costs and burdens of normalization are much greater than what they have hoped to achieve. Indeed, the relationship with the Israeli side will continue to suffer from a crisis of trust and credibility, given that the Israeli side often deals with opportunism and condescension, and does not have the slightest chance of becoming a friend or ally.

The Arab states will continue to support the peace process and the current official PLO and PA leadership. The main regimes concerned with the Palestinian file will remain opposed or reserved towards the resistance and the Islamic movements, which will hinder any real rearrangement of the Palestinian political house in a way that reflects the weight of the real forces and their popularity on the ground.

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Chapter Seven

*The Palestine Issue and the
Muslim World*

The Palestine Issue and the Muslim World

Introduction

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) includes 57 countries, which makes it difficult to cover each of these countries in confines of one chapter. Therefore, we will cover the positions and activities of the organization as a whole and explore two models, Turkey and Iran, while addressing the most prominent positions of some other important countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan, as well as examining popular interaction and normalization with Israel.

First: OIC

Since its inception in 1969, shortly after Zionists burned *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the OIC has been part of the ruling system in the Arab and Muslim region, which means that its policies can be viewed as a reflection of the policies of the individual countries sponsoring it. Thus, the OIC did not change its approach to the Palestine issue throughout 2020–2021, remaining within the political limits of the Arab countries. The OIC continued to adopt the “Arab Peace Initiative,” the two-state solution and recognized that Jerusalem is a part of the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories.¹

The OIC General Secretariat has consistently reiterated that “the establishment of normal relations between the member states of the Organization and Israel would not be achieved until after ending the Israeli occupation of the Arab and Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem.”² Yet, this did not prevent some Muslim countries from normalizing relations with Israel, their cooperation seemingly moving quickly to incorporate all fields, including security and intelligence. The signing of the Abraham Accords in September 2020 between the UAE and Bahrain on the one side, and Israel on the other, clearly displayed the difference between OIC stances and OIC realities.

Apparently, Israel is aware of the OIC’s stark contradictions; thus, it proceeded with its aggression against Islamic and Christian holy sites in Jerusalem, and

continued imposing new realities on the ground, part of its strategic project to annex the largest area of the WB despite the OIC's continuous rejection and denunciation of this. Israeli forces even attempted to storm the house of the Director of the OIC's Representation Office in Palestine, Ahmad al-Ruwaidi, located in Silwan in occupied Jerusalem, which al-Ruwaidi considered "a political message through which the Israeli occupation and its government sought to undermine work in Jerusalem and prevent coverage of the developments in the holy city."³

The years 2020 and 2021 were bad ones for the Palestine issue. Despite the change of the US administration with the defeat of President Donald Trump, the sponsor of normalization, in the electoral race, this did not prevent Kosovo from opening its embassy in Jerusalem (most are in Tel Aviv) in March 2021, which prompted the Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to send a letter to the OIC General Secretariat requesting member states boycott Kosovo.⁴ The OIC also condemned Honduras's opening of its embassy in Jerusalem in June 2021.⁵

On 16/5/2021, the OIC held an emergency meeting to discuss ways to stop Israel's aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque and GS, when dozens of Palestinians were killed and thousands wounded, in addition to the destruction and damage of infrastructure and thousands of housing units in the Strip. OIC Secretary General Yousef al-Othaimen said that in light of the dire Palestinian circumstances, and since the Palestine issue was at the top of the OIC's concerns, the meeting was to exchange opinions, advice and debate the measures to be taken to confront the Israeli attacks on the Palestinian territories, especially Jerusalem, and Israel's hostile actions in the vicinity of *al-Aqsa* Mosque against the holy sites, in addition to the forced displacement of Palestinians, which remains a provocation to the feelings of all Muslims around the world and a flagrant violation of international law. He added that the OIC affirms its support and solidarity for the Palestinian people.⁶

As part of the OIC's endeavor to support the Palestinian people, the Islamic World Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (ICESCO) launched a package of projects, while giving priority to Jerusalem.⁷

The OIC continued to interact with the Palestine issue, including the matter of Israeli abuse of prisoners in Israeli prisons. Nonetheless, this interaction worked within the constraints set by member states, noting the discrepancy between these limits from one country to another, and taking into account the rush by some of these countries to establish strong relations with Israel, while simultaneously

showing hostility to the Palestinian resistance. This might be reflected in the future performance of the OIC, especially if the countries that either normalize relations or support normalization are effective in determining the Organization's policies.

Second: Turkey

The priorities of Turkish foreign policy in 2020 and 2021 focused on the Eastern Mediterranean, Libya, and the US, then on the path of dialogue and rapprochement with the KSA-UAE-Egypt axis in 2021. The internal agenda was also significantly preoccupied with the economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic and the Turkish lira plunging to a record low value, after a series of interest rate cuts.

The aforementioned priorities, along with other factors, led to a relative decline in Turkish concern with the Palestine issue. However, this did not prevent Turkish interaction, on official and popular levels, with some important events, such as the issue of the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle (dubbed by Israel Operation Guardian of the Walls), demonstrating full support for the Palestinians and serious criticisms of Israel.

In parallel, there were repeated official Turkish statements expressing Ankara's desire to redevelop its relations with Israel, where even the name of a Turkish ambassador to Israel was proposed, although procedures were not completed. Meanwhile, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan concluded 2021 by re-emphasizing his country's aspiration for strong steps forward with Egypt and Israel like the progress made in relations with the UAE.

Foreign Policy: Priorities and Transformations

The priorities of Turkish foreign policy changed according to regional and internal developments. In 2020 and 2021, the conflict in Libya and the issue of the Eastern Mediterranean topped these priorities, along with Joe Biden's victory in the US presidential elections and its impact on Turkish-US relations, along with several other issues of importance to Ankara.

In November 2019, Turkey signed two agreements with the Libyan Government of National Accord (GNA); the first on maritime boundaries and the designation of an exclusive economic zone, and the second concerning security and military cooperation between the two countries.⁸



With the GNA submitting an official request to Turkey to send its forces to Libya, on 2/1/2021 the Grand National Assembly of Turkey (GNAT) approved the dispatching of Turkish forces to Libya,⁹ which took place quickly. Ankara provided the GNA with training and logistical support, and helped coordination between military groups affiliated with this government. As a result, the siege of Tripoli was lifted,¹⁰ the forces of retired General Khalifa Haftar were defeated and expelled from western Libya,¹¹ then these GNA forces reached the Sirte region, where they were halted by a direct Russian military intervention.¹² Remarkably, Turkish drones played a pivotal role in all these stages.

Thus, the Turkish involvement in the Libyan crisis played a direct role in reducing the chances of a military solution, and accelerated the political process which proceeded with the Libyan Political Dialogue Forum (LPDF) and then the elections of the Presidential Council, with several international and regional parties opening to the GNA at the time.¹³

Ankara remained almost the only regional power supporting the GNA and the Government of National Unity (GNU) which succeeded it. Ankara sought to perpetuate its role and cooperation with the Libyan government, which was its only partner in the Eastern Mediterranean gas issue, as well as one of its partners in the geopolitical competition between the axes of the region.

The eastern Mediterranean was a priority for Turkey in terms of wealth, geopolitics, and competition with Greece with which it has a traditional rivalry. Therefore, Ankara continued its gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in the disputed areas with Greece and Greek Cyprus,¹⁴ despite frictions with these two which almost led to a military clash.¹⁵ Turkey's activities also created tensions with the US and subjected it to EU sanctions,¹⁶ which are still in place.¹⁷ However, tension in the eastern Mediterranean receded with the Turkish-Greek dialogue rounds in early 2021.¹⁸

Biden's election to the US presidency was an additional challenge for Turkey due to the importance of Turkish-US relations, the many contentious files between the two sides and the negative positions Biden adopted towards Turkey and Erdoğan, specifically during his election campaign,¹⁹ as well as after his election, including the imposition of sanctions on Ankara and its official removal from the F-35 joint strike fighter program.²⁰

This prompted Turkey to assume several internal measures, including the postponement of the activation of the Russian S-400 missile system, presenting alternatives regarding the system, and in-depth dialogue with Washington regarding controversial files.²¹

The second half of 2021 witnessed a turning point in Turkish foreign policy, represented by new openness to the KSA-UAE-Egypt axis which had opposed Turkey in all regional issues. Ankara and Cairo held several rounds of dialogue, and relations between them saw relative progress.²² Turkey also received Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, and the two countries signed several memoranda of understanding that included UAE's investment of \$10 billion in Turkey.²³ Simultaneously, Bahrain's Foreign Minister visited Turkey and met with his Turkish counterpart Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu,²⁴ while Turkish Vice President Fuat Oktay met with the Saudi Trade Minister in Istanbul.²⁵ Erdoğan summarized his country's course by saying: "Whatever kind of step was taken with the UAE, we will also take similar ones with the others [Egypt and Israel]."²⁶

This remarkable transformation, which included several countries in the region in addition to Turkey, came about due to several contributing factors, including:

1. Local reasons, mainly related to the negative repercussions of the emerging COVID-19 pandemic and other factors on the economies of the region, the approaching Turkish presidential and parliamentary elections, and the desire of all countries for a state of calm conducive to investment and revival of economies.
2. Regional reasons, mainly related to the exhaustion of options for all parties regarding different regional issues and conflicts, where no party was able to satisfactorily conclude them in their favor. Other reasons included the penetrations Turkey achieved in 2020 into Libya and the Caucasus, the stability of the situation in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean as tensions with the EU in this context declined. Moreover, Ankara considered the Eastern Mediterranean issue a priority, seeking to break its isolation in this file, and attempting to disrupt the axis supporting Greece, by concluding understandings and demarcating maritime borders with Egypt and/or Israel.
3. International reasons, mainly related to the new US administration's orientations causing concern for its regional allies, specifically the continuation of its policy of declining interest in the Middle East region, and its eagerness to conclude



a new agreement with Iran, which may represent a concern for the Arab Gulf states in particular.

Palestinian Milestones

In general, Turkey continued rejecting the Deal of the Century and the attempts to end the Palestine issue; a policy initiated in 2018 in which Turkey has been leading the diplomatic efforts of Muslim countries to confront these policies.²⁷ Turkey also maintained its official discourse rejecting Israeli violations of Palestinian rights.

In the last weeks of Donald Trump’s presidency and before Biden entered the Oval Office, the Turkish Foreign Ministry renewed its rejection of the Deal of the Century.²⁸ The GNAT Speaker Mustafa Şentop also reiterated his country’s slogan “Jerusalem is a red line,”²⁹ while the Turkish president stated that his country rejected the US plan aiming to “legitimize the Israeli occupation,” stressing that it did not serve peace and would not bring a solution.³⁰

Turkish positions repeatedly condemned Israeli policies against the Palestinians, especially the decisions to annex WB land, calling on the international community to stand against illegal and unilateral Israeli initiatives, which undermined international law.³¹ The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs welcomed the ICC ruling that it has jurisdiction over the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, adding that the decision “is a meaningful step towards holding Israel accountable for its crimes in the Palestinian territories and identifying those who are responsible for these crimes.”³²

It is also possible to monitor Turkish positions on the Palestine issue in 2020 and 2021 regarding three significant developments, namely the Palestinian elections, the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood issue and the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.

Concerning Palestinian reconciliation, Ankara welcomed President ‘Abbas’s issue of a decree for parliamentary and presidential elections. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that it was ready to provide all necessary support for the success of the elections.³³ The Ministry also issued a statement calling “upon the Israeli Government to end its obstructive policies...so that the Palestinian elections will be conducted,” including in Jerusalem.³⁴ Remarkably, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs held Israel responsible for the Palestinian president’s 29/4/2021 decision on to postpone the elections, stating “Turkey urges Israel not to impede Palestinian elections.”³⁵ Turkey repeatedly reiterated its support for

internal Palestinian reconciliation, as asserted by Erdoğan during a meeting with his Palestinian counterpart in Istanbul in July 2021.³⁶

Regarding the Israeli attempt to confiscate Palestinian homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem, Ankara condemned the “illegal measures” of the occupation authorities in the neighborhood and throughout Jerusalem, calling on the international community to stand in solidarity with the Palestinians against Israel’s expansionist policies, which represented the latest example of Israeli violations of international law.³⁷

With the Israeli occupation forces storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque, then the outbreak of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021, the Turkish position developed both at the official government level and in the population, including demonstrations in several governorates, despite the COVID-19 ban on crowds, dedicating the Friday and Eid sermons to Palestine. Also, different parties, state institutions and civil society organizations condemned the Israeli aggression and expressed solidarity with the Palestinians.³⁸

On the official level, Erdoğan described Israel as a “cruel terrorist state,” and he called the occupation forces’ attack on worshipers in Jerusalem “an attack on all Muslims,” stressing that “protecting the honor of Jerusalem is a duty for every Muslim.”³⁹ During the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, the Turkish president criticized countries that expressed their support for Israel, such as the US and Austria, saying that they “would go down in history as being complicit in child murder and crimes against humanity.”⁴⁰ Against the backdrop of Israeli attacks on Jerusalem and Gaza, Turkey withdrew its invitation to the Israeli Energy Minister to participate in the “Antalya Diplomacy Forum.”⁴¹

As part of Turkish diplomatic efforts, Erdoğan contacted Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas, and the head of Hamas political bureau Isma‘il Haniyyah, in addition to the heads and leaders of a number of countries regarding the Israeli attacks on the Palestinians.⁴² He demanded international and regional organizations such as the UN, UN Security Council and OIC, to act against the oppression of Palestinians as well as to take a firm stance on the issue of Jerusalem,⁴³ saying that the international community should teach Israel a strong lesson, because of its aggressions, and he pledged his country’s support for these efforts.⁴⁴ Among the initiatives Erdoğan presented during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle was sending international forces to the Palestinian territories to protect the Palestinians,⁴⁵ and

a commission with Jewish, Muslim and Christian representatives to administer Jerusalem.⁴⁶

Such proposals and his call to “give Israel a strong and deterrent lesson” over its conduct towards the Palestinians,⁴⁷ earned him a US accusation of “anti-Semitism,” an accusation dismissed by the ruling Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP) as “a lie.”⁴⁸

GNAT Speaker Mustafa Şentop accused Israel of practicing “state terrorism,”⁴⁹ and he organized a special session of the Parliament “to show solidarity with the Palestinians and condemn the crimes of the occupation.”⁵⁰ A statement was issued at the end of the session condemning the Israeli attacks which was signed, in rare consensus, by all parties of the Parliament.⁵¹

The political parties also issued statements of solidarity with the Palestinians and condemnation of Israeli policies. Ömer Çelik, the AKP spokesperson, described the Israeli practices as “brutal” and a blatant violation of international law and norms, and he called for stopping the aggression.⁵² The opposition leader and head of the Republican People’s Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*—CHP) Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu confirmed his party’s continued support for the Palestinians and described the Israeli attacks as a “massacre.”⁵³

For his part, Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*—MHP) leader Devlet Bahçeli asserted that “Israeli terror is impossible to be digested,” and urged the ICC to prosecute Netanyahu.⁵⁴ Similar positions were also issued by İYİ Party leader Meral Akşener, Vice President Fuat Oktay, Presidential Spokesman Ibrahim Kalin, Presidency’s Director of Communications Fahrettin Altun, a number of ministers and the Head of Diyanet, Turkey’s Directorate of Religious Affairs Ali Erbaş.⁵⁵ Former Prime Minister and the Head of the Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*—GP) Ahmet Davutoğlu called on the Turkish parties to unite for Jerusalem, and the government to take practical steps to support the Palestinians.⁵⁶

On the popular level, the Israeli aggression on Jerusalem and Gaza topped the headlines of Turkish news bulletins, as well as social media, while various media outlets devoted hours to extensive coverage of events.⁵⁷ Various Turkish cities also witnessed mass demonstrations to denounce Israeli aggression, and the demonstrations were organized despite the complete COVID-19 lockdown, which implied an official facilitation. The demonstrations mainly took place in Ankara and Istanbul in front of Israel’s embassy and consulate.⁵⁸

Along with the stances of many civil society institutions, the presidency of religious affairs dedicated the Eid and Friday sermons to Palestine, including supplications for the Palestinians and the collection of donations for them.⁵⁹

On the Palestinian side, the Sword of Jerusalem Battle was considered different from previous battles in terms of motives, processes and results in addition to the belief that the stage following this battle would be markedly different to the preceding phase. It appears that the role played by Turkey during the battle was believed to be “good but not sufficient.” When Isma‘il Haniyyah, the head of Hamas political bureau, thanked several countries and parties for their role and support in a post-battle speech, Turkey was not among them.⁶⁰ It was also demonstrated in remarks to Anadolu Agency by Hamas chief in the GS Yahya al-Sinwar.⁶¹

In June 2021, Ankara announced the dispatching of humanitarian aid to GS in coordination with Cairo,⁶² and in an interview with a Turkish TV channel, Haniyyah thanked Turkey and showed interest in the Turkish president’s proposals regarding Jerusalem and the protection of the Palestinians.⁶³ Furthermore, a high-ranking Hamas delegation participated in the Republic Day celebrations in the Turkish Embassy in Doha.⁶⁴ However, the aforementioned activities did not completely dispel the impression that things were not rosy between the two sides, especially since, after the end of the battle, and until the time of writing this report, no other contact or official and public meeting of the Turkish president with Hamas leadership has been announced.

Turkish communication and meetings with the PA continued, as Erdoğan received Mahmud ‘Abbas in July 2021,⁶⁵ and Ankara ratified a security agreement signed with the PA in 2018, including security cooperation, training and details related to maritime and coastal security.⁶⁶

Finally, Turkey condemned the normalization of some Arab countries’ relations with Israel, as well as the move of some countries’ embassies to Jerusalem, after the US relocated its embassy in May 2018. Ankara said the UAE when it normalized ties with Israel, had “betrayed the Palestinian cause for its interests,” adding that history would never forgive this “hypocritical behavior.” Turkey announced that it was considering closing its embassy in Abu Dhabi and suspending diplomatic ties with UAE.⁶⁷ It also condemned the Bahrain’s normalization with Israel, viewing it as “a blow to the efforts to defend the Palestinian people,”⁶⁸ and demanded Morocco not pursue normalization with Israel “at the expense of the Palestine



issue.”⁶⁹ Turkey condemned Kosovo’s pledge to open an embassy in Jerusalem,⁷⁰ the Czech Republic’s opening of an embassy office in the city⁷¹ and Honduras’s relocation of its embassy.⁷²

Turkey and Israel

No new developments were witnessed in relations between Turkey and Israel in 2020–2021. Their relationship cooled when Turkey withdrew its ambassador from Tel Aviv in 2018, against the background of Trump’s decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem, and Israel’s assault on the Marches of Return in Gaza.⁷³

However, fluctuations can be observed throughout the last two years. In 2020, Turkey announced its desire to restore relations with Tel Aviv and appoint an ambassador to Israel, and it concluded 2021 by repeating the same desire, which had not materialized at the time of writing this report. The two years also witnessed contention between the two countries.

The year 2020 began with news of imminent developments in relations between Turkey and Israel,⁷⁴ and Israel resumed air cargo flights to Turkey after a 10-year hiatus.⁷⁵ Some news reports circulated the name of the supposed Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv,⁷⁶ but the process was not completed for several reasons, including a lack of Israeli enthusiasm and continued Turkish criticism of occupation policies against the Palestinians,⁷⁷ in addition to the technical requirements of both sides to develop relations.

Israel informed Turkey that it would not normalize relations until “it shuts the activities of Hamas’ military wing in Istanbul—which includes directing terrorist activities in the West Bank, recruiting Palestinians for terrorist activities, financing terrorist activities” in WB and “transferring funds to Hamas’ military infrastructure.”⁷⁸ Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu stated five conditions for his country to have good relations with Israel, including stopping Israeli attacks on Palestinians, undoing steps that corrode the two-state solution, returning to peace talks, stopping illegal settlement construction and halting measures aimed at changing the status quo in Jerusalem.⁷⁹

The years 2020 and 2021 witnessed some tension between the two sides, foremost of which, as previously mentioned, was Ankara’s sharp opposition to Arab normalization with Israel, which can be partially explained by Turkish disputes with the UAE.⁸⁰ Also, the Eastern Mediterranean issue and the gas agreements

between Israel and Greece caused additional tension between Tel Aviv and Ankara, as the latter considered the underwater power cable agreement between Israel, Greece and Cyprus a violation of its continental shelf,⁸¹ knowing that the Israeli government had announced that it had contacted Turkey regarding the gas in the Eastern Mediterranean.⁸²

In October 2021, Turkey announced that its authorities had arrested five Israeli spy networks including 15 Arabs, on charges of spying on Turkey, Arab students and Palestinian institutions operating on its territory.⁸³ In November 2021, the Turkish authorities arrested two Israeli tourists on charges of photographing the Turkish president's home in Istanbul,⁸⁴ before releasing them days later.⁸⁵ Israeli President Isaac Herzog called the Turkish president to thank him for releasing the two, and Erdoğan said during the call that his country's relations with Israel were important for the stability of the Middle East.⁸⁶ Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett also called Erdoğan thanking him and his government for their cooperation.⁸⁷

Following Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed's visit to Turkey and his signing of memoranda of cooperation with the Turkish side, President Erdoğan said that "similar steps" would be taken with Egypt and Israel.⁸⁸ When asked about the possibility of exchanging ambassadors with Israel in an interview with journalists, Erdoğan said, "Israel needs to be more sensitive concerning its Palestinian policy. It needs to be sensitive about Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque," adding, "As soon as we detect the sensitivities, we will do our best and take steps [for better ties]."⁸⁹ A Turkish journalist suggested that the formalization of improved Turkey-Israel relations would happen in the first half of 2022 or shortly after.⁹⁰

It is noteworthy that news stories exposing Israeli spy networks were circulated with great pride,⁹¹ while the official talk regarding the desire to develop relations with Israel was not discussed widely and did not trigger great controversy or tangible opposition in Turkey, perhaps because practical steps had not been crystallized. However, in early 2022, it was announced that Israel's President Herzog would visit Turkey.⁹²

On the economic level, the crisis of 2018, including the withdrawal of the two ambassadors and the decline in diplomatic relations, did not have a significant impact on trade between Turkey and Israel. Rather, it grew steadily, both in terms of exports and imports, except for Turkey's imports from Israel in 2020, which



saw temporary decline that can be attributed to the repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trade volume rose from about \$6 billion in 2018 to about \$6.1 billion in 2019 and to about \$6.2 billion in 2020 and kept rising to about \$8.4 billion in 2021 (see table 1/7).

Table 1/7: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2018–2021 (\$ million)⁹³

Year	Turkish exports to Israel		Turkish imports from Israel		Trade volume	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2021	6,357.6	4,764.2	2,047.1	1,902.2	8,404.7	6,666.4
2020	4,704.1	3,498	1,496.3	1,430.8	6,200.4	4,928.8
2019	4,463.8	3,208	1,600.8	1,757.6	6,064.6	4,965.6
2018	4,022.9	2,885.5	2,001.2	1,912.4	6,024.1	4,797.9

Turkish exports to the PA decreased by 14.4% in 2019, then rose by 28.8% in 2020, and by 14.4% in 2021 to reach about \$99.6 million, compared to about \$79 million in 2018. Turkish imports from the PA significantly increased by 298% in 2020, to reach about \$36 million compared to about \$9 million in 2019, and then declined by 68% in 2021 (see table 2/7).

Table 2/7: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and the PA According to Turkish Statistics 2018–2021 (\$ thousand)⁹⁴

Year	Turkish exports to the PA	Turkish imports from the PA	Trade volume
2021	99,596	11,536	111,132
2020	87,070	35,993	123,063
2019	67,595	9,034	76,629
2018	78,987	7,057	86,044

Summary and Outlook

Based on the above factors, the following general trends can be observed regarding Turkey's possible approach to the Palestine issue and relations with Israel throughout 2020–2021:

1. The Turkish desire to develop relations with Israel is real and evidenced, and it is consistent with improving Ankara's relations with several Arab countries. It is also a quest to improve relations with Israel specifically because Ankara believes such relations would have a positive impact on its tense relations with the new US administration on the one hand, and the priority of the eastern Mediterranean file on the other hand. Noteworthy in this latter file are official Israeli statements about the possibility for Ankara joining the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF),⁹⁵ and Israel's absence from statements condemning Turkey's activities in the Eastern Mediterranean,⁹⁶ considering the Turkish strategic goal of disrupting the alliance led by Greece.

2. Economic relations and trade were only slightly affected by the decline in the political and diplomatic relations between the two sides, and they even assumed an upward and continuous growth. This trend is likely to continue considering global recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as because of the new challenges faced by the Turkish economy, particularly the lira's weakness.

3. There are many impediments to the restoration of bilateral relations, including Israel's suspicion of Turkey's intentions and the requirements of the two parties, but none of them is an obstacle capable of preventing complete rapprochement.

4. Of the developments that may help convergence are the recent advancement of relations with the UAE, which has warm relations with Israel after the normalization between them, and the fall of the Netanyahu government which Ankara had long blamed for the deterioration of relations.

5. Relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv are not expected to return to the state of strategic alliance of the 1990s, nor will the improvement of relations between them lead to a change in the Turkish discourse regarding the Palestine issue, in general, and Jerusalem, in particular. Rather, matters, especially in the first stage, will be closer to pacification and reducing their differences. It is important to note that the assessments in Israel regarding Turkey at the present time are not positive, and that several Israeli reports have classified Turkey as a "challenge and threat" to Israel.⁹⁷



6. The issue of eastern Mediterranean gas plays a pivotal role in Turkey's perception of its relations with Israel, but it is a role that has two sides, and its outcome is not predetermined. Ankara wants to disrupt the alliance opposing it and is looking for partners to demarcate the maritime borders according to its vision rather than that of Greece. In this sense, Israel is a potential partner for Turkey and a competitor/adversary at the same time. Therefore, Israel's position towards Turkey regarding the gas issue on the one hand, and the development of Turkish-Egyptian relations including reaching an agreement, on the other hand, will be main determinants of Turkey-Israel relations. If Turkey reaches an agreement with Egypt, it could see less need to conclude an agreement with Israel.

7. The rapprochement between Turkey and Israel is expected to have a negative impact on Ankara's relations with the Palestinians, especially the resistance movements, whose relations with Turkey fall within Israeli-set conditions. One of the initial indications in this respect was that no official and public meeting took place between the Turkish presidency and Hamas leadership during or after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle.

8. Turkey's rapprochement with the aforementioned Arab countries, and a fortiori with Israel, is not inevitable or definitive, nor is it defined in its stages or results. Rather, it is a path driven by the above reasons and motives. Therefore, there are many possibilities, including retraction by one or both sides, or maintaining the rapprochement at some level in the event of important changes or if radical internal developments in Turkey or Israel occur, especially regarding the Palestine issue.

In conclusion, 2021 ended with the prospects for the return of diplomatic relations between Turkey and Israel greater than ever, as the path of calm and rapprochement was broad and included various parties in the region. Therefore, we could soon witness the exchange of ambassadors between the two sides.

In contrast, it is not expected that there will be a retreat or a radical change in Ankara's approach to the Palestine issue, especially regarding the legal status of Jerusalem, the Israeli attacks on the Palestinians, and any aggression on GS.

But the general strategic repositioning in the region in general, including Turkey's rapprochement with a number of its traditional opponents, could bring change, even if relatively, partially, or gradually—in some relations and positions, especially as other parties will be required to change. Some regional strategic changes have already been observed.

Third: Iran

In 2020, the Palestine issue faced the strategic threat of the “Deal of the Century,” which US President Donald Trump announced in January 2020, along with the threat carried by direct normalization agreements, the Abraham Accords, which were signed between some Arab countries (UAE, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco) and Israel. However, these threats were soon met in May 2021 with the Palestinians’ own strategic imperative with the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, dubbed by Israel as “Operation Guardian of the Walls,” 10–21/5/2021, which established an equation stipulating that the resistance in GS will act to defend Jerusalem and protect all Palestinian territories.

Iran had direct stances on these threats and transformations, whether in rejecting the Deal of the Century, condemning direct normalization with Israel, or praising the resistance in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. Iran also reiterated its position on the Palestine issue, the resistance and Israel, while developments on the ground revealed the evolution of relations between Iran and the resistance movements in Palestine.

As for Iran, in 2020 and 2021 it faced severe challenges. First, the assassination of the IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani in January 2020, to which Iran responded by bombing the US forces at the ‘Ain al-Asad airbase in Iraq. Second, the assassination of one of Iran’s most important nuclear scientists, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, in November 2020, which led to tensions and threats of military confrontation after Iran accused Israeli agents of carrying out this assassination. The Jerusalem Institute for Strategy and Security (JISS) 2020 forecast asserted that if Iran intensified its uranium enrichment in the latter half of 2020, there would be high probability of confrontation with Israel.⁹⁸ Jacob Nagel, a former national security adviser to Benjamin Netanyahu, said that Israel and its allies must work with the US and maintain a military threat against the Iranian nuclear program.⁹⁹

The US-Western economic and financial blockade of Iran also continued, while negotiations in 2020 and 2021 did not produce a result regarding restoring the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the US, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), from which President Trump had withdrawn in 2018.



From the Deal of the Century to Direct Normalization

With the beginning of 2020, US President Donald Trump announced the Deal of the Century in which he pledged that Jerusalem would remain the “undivided” capital of Israel. In a press conference at the White House, with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu standing at his side, Trump said that his plan “could be the last opportunity” the Palestinians will ever have.¹⁰⁰

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Abbas Mousavi described the Deal of the Century as a “satanic deal” and a plan put by a group of “criminals and fraudsters.”¹⁰¹ Iran’s Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei emphasized that the Deal of the Century would not be achieved, tweeting that: “Against the will of US officials, with Allah’s help, the US satanic and malicious plan the Deal of the Century will never be realized,” and “the Americans are committing reckless foolishness with their efforts to Judaize Jerusalem.”¹⁰² Khamenei also tweeted, “The American plot of the ‘Deal of the Century’ will die before Trump dies.”¹⁰³

The Islamic Parliament of Iran unanimously approved an “urgent” bill against the Israeli occupation. The bill affirmed the right of the original Palestinians to the land of historic Palestine and obliged Iran to treat Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Palestine. Also, a vote was taken to open a virtual embassy for Iran in Jerusalem.¹⁰⁴

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif described the Deal of the Century as “a nightmare for the region and the world.” He tweeted, “The so-called ‘Vision for Peace’ is simply the dream project of a bankruptcy-ridden real estate developer” hoping for it to be “a wake-up call for all the Muslims who have been barking up the wrong tree,” and calling for unity for Palestine.¹⁰⁵

IRGC Deputy Commander for Political Affairs Brigadier General Yadollah Javani said that the Deal of the Century marked a new chapter for the resistance of Palestinian factions, and that the plan was one-sided and did not include another party to enable it to be productive. Javani added that, through this plan, Trump revealed the defeat of the deal of the biggest betrayal of the century describing the Deal of the Century as a strategic mistake.¹⁰⁶

Yet, the Deal of the Century did not achieve what its architects hoped it would, as it was rejected by all Palestinian leaders, including the PA leadership, and many Arab and foreign countries were not enthusiastic about it. The Deal did not even realize what had been stipulated under previous international initiatives for “peace”

such as the two-state solution. Despite the huge financial incentives offered by Trump in return for accepting the deal, the Palestinian side refused; as a result, the deal could not be implemented and consequently, regional and international interest in it declined. Yet, with the looming presidential elections, amidst expectations of a close race with Democratic candidate Joseph Biden, Trump wanted to make a breakthrough in the Middle East which he could invest in the elections. As the Deal of the Century failed to meet its aims and faced many difficulties and complications, Trump opted for direct normalization between Israel and some Gulf states (UAE and Bahrain), in addition to Sudan and Morocco.

This public normalization by Arab states was met by the Palestinian resistance factions and the Palestinian people with sharp criticism, and those involved in it were accused of treason. Iran, for its part, deemed this step, besides its Palestinian ramifications, a threat to security in the region. President Hassan Rouhani warned both the UAE and Bahrain of the “consequences” of normalization with Israel. Rouhani said in a cabinet meeting that Israel is committing more crimes in Palestine every day, and he asked, “How can you reach out to Israel, and then grant it bases in the region?” He warned the normalizing countries that they will be responsible for all the dire consequences, and that were committing an illegal act against the security of the region.¹⁰⁷ Khamenei was quoted saying that the alliance between the UAE and Israel would not last long, because it constitutes an alliance of persons not of peoples. He stressed that what happened was a “disgrace” that will haunt the rulers of the UAE.¹⁰⁸

On 14/8/2020, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement strongly condemning the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, describing the step as “strategic stupidity.” The statement stressed that the Palestinian people and all free nations of the world “will never forgive the normalization of ties with the usurping and criminal regime.” The Ministry expressed its confidence that “history will show how the strategic mistake made by the Zionist regime and the move by the UAE to unfairly stab the Palestinian people and the whole Muslims in the back would backfire, strengthen the axis of resistance, and maximize unity and solidarity against the Zionist regime and the regional reactionaries.”¹⁰⁹

In another statement issued on 12/9/2020, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said, “From now on, the Bahraini rulers will be an accomplice in the crimes committed



by the Zionist regime as the constant source of threat to security in the region and the Muslim world.” The Ministry considered the agreement “a shameful and ignominious measure by Bahrain that would sacrifice the cause of Palestine, decades of struggles, and the Palestinian people’s fortitude against miseries and suffering for the sake of the US election.”¹¹⁰ As for normalization between Morocco and Israel, Ali Akbar Velayati, the foreign relations adviser to Iran’s Supreme Leader, said that in this deal, the US officially recognized Morocco’s sovereignty over the Western Sahara in exchange for Morocco’s betrayal of Islam and the principles of Palestine.¹¹¹

IRGC Deputy Commander Ali Fadavi said that his country would not allow the gates of the region to be opened for Israel, stressing that the countries that cooperate with Israel would not be safe from the repercussions of normalization, that the glass palaces of its rulers would not protect them in the face of the revolution’s power, and will not withstand the stones of the children of Palestine.¹¹² Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that the decision of normalization imposed by the US administration on some Arab countries would lead to destabilization of security in the region.¹¹³ Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the then assistant speaker of the parliament, said, “The more severe the ban on us, the more we support the resistance in the region.”¹¹⁴

Hamid Shahriari, the Secretary-General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, described the normalization of relations with Israel as “a betrayal of the Holy Qur’an and a turning away from the Messenger of Allah (PBUH)” asserting that this normalization “will bring nothing but humiliation and disgrace to the rulers of the Emirates among the Arabs.”¹¹⁵

The Iranian rejection of normalization with Israel was clear and consistent with Iran’s fundamental stances regarding Israel’s illegitimacy. This rejection was reiterated at various political, leadership and military levels. Iran also linked this normalization to sacrificing the Palestine issue and conspiring against the Palestinian people on the one hand, and threatening security in the region on the other, especially since the most important justifications and pretexts for normalization from the Israeli and Gulf sides concerned confronting Iran, the “common enemy,” and establishing joint security, military and intelligence systems to spy on Iran, its activities and relations. This is what Iranian statements warned against, indicating that normalization would lead to “destabilization of security in the region,” and

that the countries cooperating with Israel would not be safe from the repercussions of normalization, in addition to perceiving the step as an attempt to besiege Iran through the Gulf states.

According to the Arabic Post website, with the Trump administration intensifying its campaign of pressure on Tehran, Netanyahu seized the opportunity in recent years to encircle the Iranian presence in the Middle East. “While in recent years Tehran has had a strong presence of friendly forces in the vicinity of Israel, now it is Tel Aviv that is encircling Iran more than ever,” according to a report by Responsible Statecraft website.¹¹⁶

When some Gulf countries rushed to normalize, they were in a hurry to do Trump a favor before the US presidential elections, but Trump failed to reward their support, and these countries lost their gamble on his reelection. At the same time, normalization helped Netanyahu in facing his internal crisis and political difficulties. However, Netanyahu failed to reassume his premiership, and these countries also lost their bets on his return. Nonetheless, normalization did not stop, and the gamble on it continued. The objective was to please Israel which did not want the US administration to return to the nuclear agreement with Iran, as announced by President Biden.

The Israelis believed that normalization would allow the formation of an Israeli-Gulf front or axis against Iran, the “common enemy.” Israeli Army Minister Benny Gantz said that “normalization agreements [between Israel and Arab countries] strengthen the fight against Iran.” He added, “We have shared interests. We all share the battle against the Iranian aggression and its nuclear development which jeopardizes the region and the world, and we will establish a united front against it.”¹¹⁷

Therefore, from the Israeli perspective, the US had to reach a new agreement that included Iran’s ballistic missile program, all other missiles and Tehran’s strategic options in the Middle East; and it was the duty of the White House to preserve the pro-Western, anti-Iranian camp that was taking shape in the Middle East after the signing of the Abraham Accords. The west had established a potential infrastructure for broad cooperation against Iran.¹¹⁸

The US ambassador to the UN, Kelly Craft, confirmed that direct military cooperation between the UAE and Israel was intended to counter Iran’s “threats,” and that “more Arab and Muslim countries will follow the United Arab Emirates’ lead and normalize relations with Israel.” At the UN Security Council’s regular

session on the Middle East, Craft said, “Direct military cooperation will benefit the entire region by countering the threat posed by Iran’s destabilizing activities in the Middle East and beyond.”¹¹⁹

Jared Kushner, US President Donald Trump’s senior adviser, said, “If you think about the people who don’t want Saudi Arabia and Israel to make a peace agreement, the number one proponent of that is going to be Iran. And [...] that just shows that it’s probably the right thing to do.”¹²⁰

The normalization that made Iran the “common enemy” of Israel and the Arabs aimed to promote new awareness and a culture different from that which had prevailed over preceding decades; deeming Israel as the main enemy and Palestine as the central issue for Arabs and Muslims. Israel wanted to shift this hostility towards Iran, presenting itself as a “peace” seeking country that, unlike Iran, did not pose a threat to any Arab country, the Gulf countries specifically. It was remarkable and strange in this context that several Gulf commentators in the media and social media in some Gulf countries justified the Israeli occupation of Palestine, claiming that the Jews were the historically rightful owners of Palestine. Some media, political and academic figures blamed the Palestinian people for the *Nakbah*, and for the displacement of the Palestinians from their land, while the silence of their governments regarding these claims can be viewed as implicit encouragement to establish a pro-normalization environment with negative stances towards the Palestinians. Yet, all these efforts suffered a major setback with the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, fought by the resistance forces in GS in defense of Palestine.

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle

A few months after the election of US President Biden, in early May 2021, Israeli forces attacked *al-Aqsa* Mosque and attempted to displace the residents of Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood in Jerusalem. The Israeli leadership did not expect the resistance forces in GS to retaliate with a confrontation or to execute their threats and attack deep in the occupied Palestinian territories, in what the resistance called the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. The confrontation caused a major shakeup in Israel’s security theory, which had been based on deterrence, preemptive war, decisive speed, and the prevention of threats to the home front. Israeli leaders and most military and political analysts admitted their failure in this confrontation and their underestimation of the capabilities of the resistance, including the

Palestinians' missile capabilities. The most important thing in this confrontation, in which the resistance's missile bombardment continued for 11 days, was not only that the resistance took the initiatives of starting the confrontation and deciding to implement the ceasefire, but also that there was popular Palestinian action across historic Palestine, in support of the resistance. Hence, it could be said that the Sword of Jerusalem Battle ended the notion that the Palestinian people had been divided between regions, and that the objectives of those in GS, WB and the 1948 occupied territories, were different.

The noticeable accomplishment of the resistance in this confrontation did not receive any commendation from any Arab or Muslim official except for Khamenei, who addressed the Palestinian people and the “resistance and political factions” in a letter, congratulating them on the victory of the Palestinian resistance in its 11-day war against Israel. Khamenei stressed that the cooperation between the Palestinians in Jerusalem, WB, GS, the 1948 territories and the refugee camps, “has shown the future solution to the Palestinians.” In his letter, Khamenei stressed that “The time to begin and to end the clashes depend on the discernment of the great Jihadi and political leaders of Palestine. But being prepared and maintaining a powerful presence in the field cannot be stopped.” Addressing the Islamic world, Khamenei said, “The entire world of Islam has responsibilities and religious obligations with respect to the Palestinian cause.” He added, “Muslim governments should earnestly enter the field to support the Palestinian nation in both military and financial areas—which is needed more than the past—and to help in the rebuilding of infrastructures and the ruins in Gaza.”¹²¹

The Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs had condemned the continuous Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in GS and Jerusalem, calling on the international community as well as on Arab and Muslim countries to carry out their duties and responsibilities to stop the Israeli massacres. The Ministry said in a statement that the Palestinian people, who are struggling to regain all their rights, have the natural right to defend themselves, and legitimate resistance is the only way to confront the aggression and the occupation.¹²²

In July 2021, the elected Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi confirmed, in a phone call with the head of Hamas political bureau Isma‘il Haniyyah and the PIJ Secretary-General Ziad Nakhleh, that Iran would continue to defend Palestine and to support its people until the liberation of Jerusalem.¹²³ When receiving

Haniyyah on 6/8/2021, Raisi stressed that the theory of resistance in Palestine has always borne fruit, and what determines the future of Palestine and the region is the struggle of resistance fighters and the resistance of the jihadists.¹²⁴

For his part, IRGC Quds Force Commander, Esmail Qaani, sent a message to Muhammad Deif, Commander of Ezzedeem al-Qassam Brigades (Hamas), and Akram al-‘Ajouri, Commander of al-Quds Brigades (PIJ) in which he said: “This war has caused a new stage in the battle,” stressing that “Your resistance is written with blood and fire; an equation that says the enemy cannot isolate al-Quds without receiving a tough response, and Imam Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, has emphasized that the countdown to the destruction of the enemy has begun and will never stop.” He added, “The enemy knows that Palestine is not alone and the axis of resistance stands by it and its circle is constantly expanding and its power is increasing, and al-Quds is the compass of the axis of resistance and the Qiblah of jihad,” and “Until the destruction of the usurper regime and the liberation of the whole land, we will not be at ease and we will not be at peace.”¹²⁵

After this battle, and perhaps for the first time, Israeli media circles and political and security institutions began discussing the future of Israel, for the confrontation revealed the extent of the settlers’ fears of losing security and stability and possibly their stay in Israel. This was because resistance missiles had reached all towns and cities, and it was revealed that there was coordination between the GS resistance and the resistance in Lebanon. The head of Hamas in GS, Yahya al-Sinwar, confirmed that “What happened was just a maneuver for what would happen in a regional war and an open confrontation,” pointing out that “the missiles launched from Lebanon were in full coordination with the Lebanese resistance.”¹²⁶

It is known that Israel fears the outbreak of a confrontation on more than one front, which would render it unable to protect its settlers or implement its combative doctrine regarding decisive speed, superior weapons and the guarantee of a short war. Therefore, following this confrontation and after the emergence of this regional resistance threat, the Israelis fear for the future of Israel has become more apparent.

Evolution of the Relationship with the Resistance

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle was preceded by several meetings, stances and statements that revealed the extent to which Iran’s relations with Hamas and other

resistance factions had developed. Iran received the head of the Hamas political bureau, Isma‘il Haniyyah, at the funeral ceremony of Qassem Soleimani, who was assassinated by the US using drones in Baghdad. At the ceremony, Haniyyah said:

We came from Palestine to offer our condolences to His Eminence the Leader Ali Khamenei, and to the Islamic Republic of Iran, its leadership, government and people, on the martyrdom of Commander Qassem Soleimani, [...] We express our sincere feelings toward a dear brother and martyr leader who has immensely supported Palestine and its resistance.

He also called Soleimani the martyr of Jerusalem.¹²⁷ Haniyyah was accompanied by a high-level Hamas delegation, they met Iranian leaders and the IRGC Quds Force Commander Esmail Qaani.¹²⁸

Palestinian factions in GS set up a mourning site for Soleimani at the Unknown Soldier square, in the center of Gaza City, according to the German Press Agency. In a statement, Hamas held the US “responsible for the bloodshed in the Arab region,” noting that Soleimani “had a prominent role in supporting the Palestinian resistance in various fields.”¹²⁹ Israeli media reported that Israel conveyed warning messages to Hamas and the PIJ through Egypt against participating in any retaliation for Soleimani’s assassination from GS.¹³⁰

The deputy head of Hamas in GS, Khalil al-Hayya, said, “Our relationship with Iran has not changed for more than twenty years, and we will not sever it at any cost.”¹³¹ In the same context, al-Qassam Brigades commented that Soleimani “had dedicated a lot of his efforts towards working on the demise of Israel and sweeping it from the land of Palestine, and he worked to provide all forms of support for the resistance to confront the Zionist enemy.”¹³² Al-Quds Brigades spokesperson Abu Hamzah said that they bid farewell to a resistance leader who was feared by the “US and the Zionist entity.” He also asserted that Soleimani had overseen, for two decades, direct support to Palestine and the transfer of military and security expertise to its resistance fighters.¹³³

Hamas was criticized by some Arab political and media forces over Haniyyah’s visit to Tehran and participation in Soleimani’s funeral, while such voices did not criticize or object to the normalization (Abraham Accords) that took place between some Arab countries and Israel. Yet, Haniyyah’s visit was not surprising and was not outside the context of the development of relations between Hamas and Iran. It also made sense in the context of the siege imposed on Hamas by Arab countries



that had put it on their “terror” lists and were normalizing their relations with Israel.

In response to the critics of Hamas’s condolences for Soleimani’s assassination or Haniyyah’s participation in his funeral, Isma‘il Radwan, a Hamas leader, said that “Hamas is loyal to its allies, and Hamas, with its political and military wings, enjoyed the support of Soleimani, who was keen to provide the Movement with necessary support, and stood with it.” Thus, he added, “our solidarity with Iran is part of our loyalty to it and to reject the American crime, as well as to coordinate the positions of the resistance axis for the next phase, and to confirm the continuation of support to the resistance despite Soleimani’s assassination.”¹³⁴

Iran and Hamas After the Sword of Jerusalem Battle

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle had an impact different from those of previous confrontations between Hamas and Israel. For the first time, the public positions and statements of Hamas confirmed the direct relationship between Iran’s support and the achievements of the resistance. After reviewing the results of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle with the IRGC Commander Major General Hossein Salami, Haniyyah expressed his deep appreciation of Iran’s stance in standing by the Palestinian people and their resistance, and its steadfastness concerning the rights of the Palestinian people in various political, economic and social issues.

Major General Salami praised the “achievement made by the Palestinian resistance” and said that this battle had repercussions at various levels. He reiterated Iran’s readiness to provide all forms of assistance to the Palestinian people and their resistance in various fields, vowing that “Iran will not lag behind in this context.”¹³⁵

This was preceded by Haniyyah thanking Iran in his first appearance after declaring a ceasefire on 21/5/2021. He thanked Iran for supporting Hamas with “money, weapons and techniques,” and he stressed the readiness of Hamas for the aftermath of the recent military confrontation with Israel.¹³⁶ In a phone conversation with Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi, to congratulate him on his victory in the presidential elections, Haniyyah confirmed the strength of the relationship between Hamas and Iran, describing it as “strong, well-established and stable.” According to a statement by the Movement, Haniyyah praised Tehran’s support for Palestine.¹³⁷ In a phone conversation with Haniyyah, and the PIJ Secretary-General Ziad Nakhleh, the new Iranian president said that the battle had opened a new page for the resistance in facing the occupation, and proved the resistance

remained the primary strategic choice for resolving the Palestine issue. Raisi also condemned the ongoing siege on GS, stressing that it contradicts international law, and that it must end.¹³⁸

In an interview on al-Alam TV, Haniyyah confirmed that:

The resistance in Palestine is part of the broad resistance movement in the region, and we are in a strategic relationship with our brothers in the Islamic Republic of Iran, with our brothers in Hizbullah and with many parties in the region. It's not a secret when I say that the Islamic Republic has had a very important role in building this force that appeared during the Sword of Jerusalem Battle. Also, this intelligence exchange with the "Axis" had a role in this battle [...] We battle with the enemy on the basis of a united front towards a central issue and towards Jerusalem.

Haniyyah said that the presence of leaders and representatives of the Palestinian resistance in the front row of the inauguration ceremony of the new Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi was a tribute to the resistance, and a message from the Islamic Republic that the resistance is supported, enjoys political legitimacy, and is under the dome of the Islamic Parliament of Iran participating in one of the most important events of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Haniyyah asserted that Soleimani's role was pivotal in supporting the resistance in Palestine and in building its capacities. He added that this role began clearly to take shape on the eve of the first GS war in 2008–2009, then Soleimani proceeded with the strategy of accumulating power and developing plans, in addition to providing financial and logistical support for the resistance.¹³⁹

Abu Hamzah, al-Quds Brigades military spokesperson, also praised the role of the Iran and all the forces of the axis of resistance which "provided our resistance with weapons and expertise, and proved to be a real supporter in strengthening the resistance's material and technical capabilities," and added, "We tell them that you are the partners of our victory, and we shall enter *al-Aqsa* together."¹⁴⁰

Most of those who participated in the preparation of the Deal of the Century or the normalization process in 2020 and 2021 would not have expected that a confrontation on the scale of the Sword of Jerusalem Battle would erupt, or that the battle would bring the issue of Palestine and Jerusalem back to the forefront of Arab and Islamic popular consciousness. It can be said that all the plans to eliminate the resistance in Palestine and marginalize the Palestine issue or replace



it with other priorities, whether through the cooperation and normalization with Israel or by being hostile to Iran, have failed. The promotion of these plans has diminished in the media of the normalizing countries, for they were embarrassed upon witnessing the confrontations between Israel and the resistance, on one hand, and the popular action throughout Palestine, on the other hand, which even the Western media could not ignore.

New equations were formed on the ground following the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, after the resistance in Gaza dealt a strong blow to the Deal of the Century and to normalization projects, and after the extent of cooperation and coordination between the Palestinian resistance, on one hand, and Iran and the resistance axis, on the other hand, became clear.

It is now expected, with these new equations, and with the emphasis on regional interdependence among the axis of resistance parties in any future battle with Israel, that Hamas and the resistance factions whose achievements in the Sword of Jerusalem Battle extended to all of Palestine, will face more attempts at containment, siege and restriction, and more schemes to make the reconstruction of GS conditional upon joining the western political process and recognizing Israel. Meanwhile, the Biden administration will continue the quest for more Arab normalization with Israel, and to further promote the option of settlement and the priority of reconstruction over the priority of resistance. Nevertheless, all previous experiences confirm that Israel will always prepare for future military escalation and other attempts to eliminate the resistance. This means that the resistance factions will continue to accumulate qualitative capabilities, arming and training, along with developing the relationship with the resistance forces.

Fourth: Other Muslim States

Malaysia

The strategic shifts in the region throughout 2020–2021 did not change Malaysia's policies towards the Palestine issue. Despite US pressure to dedicate Israel as a normal "state," which coincided with the desire of some regional countries to establish a new public partnership with Israel and marketing this trend among Arab and Muslim countries, Malaysia continued to defend Palestinian rights and to reject the US plan for "peace" or the so-called the Deal of the Century.

This position was expressed by Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad in his speech before the Third Conference of the League of Parliamentarians for Al Quds, which was held in February 2020 in the Malaysian capital Kuala Lumpur, as he said, “The Deal of the Century hands over the holy city of Jerusalem on a silver platter to the Israeli side; in absolute disregard for the feelings of millions of Muslims and Christians worldwide.” He added that “This deal will only bring more conflicts to the region, and will antagonize billions of people around the world.”¹⁴¹

In the context of continued support for the Palestinian people, King of Malaysia Al-Sultan Abdullah Ri‘ayatuddin Al-Mustafa Billah Shah called on all Malaysians to pray “for the wellbeing of Palestinians who are oppressed by Israel,” and he reiterated his support for Malaysian efforts to continue working with the OIC “member countries and the international community who are against Israel’s plan to annex Palestinian land.”¹⁴²

It was noted that amidst the wave of Arab normalization with Israel, Malaysia received a delegation of Hamas figures led by the head of the Movement’s political bureau Isma‘il Haniyyah in January 2020. During the visit, Haniyyah held meetings with various Malaysian sides, at various official levels, including the parliament, political parties, and civil society institutions as well as Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. According to a statement issued by Hamas, “the Movement’s head focused during his meetings on the danger and rejection of the Deal of the Century and the need to unify Arab and Islamic efforts to abort this plan since it aims at corroding the Palestine issue and undermining the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, and he called to reject it and foil it.”¹⁴³

Haniyyah also reviewed the “difficult humanitarian conditions suffered by the Palestinians in various places where they live, in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, especially in light of the suffocating siege and restrictions imposed by Israel, as well as the conditions of refugees in refugee camps, and the need to meet their humanitarian needs and implement their right of return.” Haniyyah praised “the relation with Malaysia and all its components, which reflects the depth of belonging and brotherhood he sensed during the numerous meetings he held, as part of his efforts to support the Palestine issue and the steadfastness of the Palestinian people, and to abort attempts to circumvent the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people.”¹⁴⁴

In a political position that reflects the reality of the official and popular positions on the Palestine issue, the Malaysian Parliament unanimously demanded Israel's expulsion from the UN in response to its plans to annex more Palestinian lands. A parliamentary delegation representing the Malaysian political spectrum delivered a memorandum in this regard to the US and Palestinian embassies, as well as to the UN and the Association of Southeast Asia (ASEAN) offices in Kuala Lumpur. The Parliament also condemned the UAE's normalization with Israel on the grounds that it harms the Palestine issue.¹⁴⁵

In the same sense, the annual general conference of the Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS) unanimously adopted a resolution condemning the UAE and Bahrain's normalization with Israel and denouncing the LAS's position on normalization. The party also announced that its Ulama Council had submitted a recommendation to the party's general assembly forbidding the establishment of relations with Israel and criminalizing normalization with it.¹⁴⁶

During the ASEAN Summit in November 2020, Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin emphasized his solidarity with the Palestinian people and said that “the only viable solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict is through the two-state solution—based on the pre-1967 borders— with East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine.”¹⁴⁷

Despite Israel's attempts to proclaim its ability to make a new breakthrough in normalization with the Southeast Asia countries, referring to Malaysia and Indonesia, Malaysian Minister of Foreign Affairs Saifuddin Abdullah denied these allegations.¹⁴⁸

Regarding the Israeli aggression on the GS in May 2021, Malaysian Prime Minister Muhyiddin Yassin said that the Israeli attack on the Palestinian people was “an act that violated international law, human rights law, international humanitarian law and the Charter of the United Nations.” He demanded the UN and the US take decisive action against Israel and said he was “disappointed by the inability of the international community, especially the UN Security Council, to immediately halt Israel's escalation of violence against the Palestinians,” only because of US opposition after 139 Palestinians were killed and hundreds were wounded.¹⁴⁹

Indonesia

The importance of Indonesia's support of the Palestine issue is in its status as the largest Muslim country in the world. This might be the reason for the Israel's strong attempts to normalize relations with Indonesia, with Israel stating that there was a possibility of signing normalization agreements with Southeast Asian countries in recent years.¹⁵⁰

Despite the temptations and pressures of the Trump administration, Indonesia did not sign a normalization agreement with Israel. Adam Boehler, the Chief Executive Officer of the US International Development Finance Corporation (DFC), said that his organization "could more than double its current \$1 billion portfolio if Indonesia develops ties with Israel," and he added, "We're talking to them about it. If they're ready, they're ready and if they are then we'll be happy to even support more financially than what we do."¹⁵¹

President Mahmud 'Abbas thanked Indonesian President Joko Widodo for the Indonesian stance decrying normalization. Widodo stated that "Despite the rapid changes in the Middle East, Indonesia will not take any steps to normalize with Israel until a permanent and comprehensive peace is achieved between the Palestinians and the Israelis."¹⁵²

In the same context, the Chairperson of the Inter-Parliamentary Cooperation Committee in the Indonesian Parliament, Fadli Zon, asserted that establishing diplomatic relations with Israel was impossible. This came days after talking about US pressure on Indonesia to normalize relations with Israel, with Zon saying that Israel was a colonial state, and normalization with it would be against the Indonesian constitution. He explained that normalization agreements encouraged Israel to continue its violations against the Palestinian people, and increased the pace of settlement construction in WB and occupied Jerusalem.¹⁵³

In the context of the Israeli aggression against the GS in May 2021, Indonesian Minister of Foreign Affairs Retno Marsudi called on the EU to play a greater role in efforts to resolve the Palestine issue. Marsudi said in a joint press conference with the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, "We exchanged ideas over Palestinian issues. Our stance is that Indonesia welcomes the cease-fire and we hope all parties are committed to maintain the conducive situation." The Indonesian minister emphasized the importance of



efforts to prevent the recurrence of Israeli violations against the Palestinians adding that “We must increase our efforts to resolve the core problem, which is Israeli occupation, through credible negotiations based on a two-state solution.”¹⁵⁴

It seems that the Israeli efforts to expand the range of normalizing countries within the Abraham Accords did not stop. In October 2021, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid said that the Abraham Accords were “a great process in the region and outside the region, and we are hopeful that we can expand this to other countries as well,” adding, “As it was before, I wouldn’t name names because this will harm the process.” Lapid said the US, as well as Bahrain, Morocco and the UAE were helping Israel in those efforts.¹⁵⁵

The then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stated at the end of 2020, that “many, many more countries” would be signing normalization agreements with Israel “a lot sooner than people expect,”¹⁵⁶ amidst speculation that Indonesia or Oman might normalize relations with Israel.

The *Jerusalem Post* claimed that the then former Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen “pointed to several countries that could be close to establishing ties with Israel, in Africa, Southeast Asia and the Gulf.” He also hoped that “seeing how well ties with Israel are going for other countries will create the momentum for Indonesia, Chad, Niger, Mauritania and others to normalize relations.”¹⁵⁷

Pakistan

Pakistan is connected to the Palestine issue in many ways. Primarily, the relationship is based on the religious status of Palestine, and the value of Jerusalem to all Muslims. Politically, the Palestinian–Pakistani relationship is of a particular nature, as the Pakistani political leadership considers the Kashmiri issue as similar to the Palestine issue. This was expressed by Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan in an interview, where he said that there were two reasons why Pakistan could not recognize Israel; First, “The situation in Kashmir is exactly the same situation in Palestine. If we recognize Israel’s takeover of Palestine territories, then we also have to recognize what India has done in Kashmir, so we completely lose moral standing.” As for the second reason, Khan recalled Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of Pakistan’s policy regarding the issue, who said that unless injustice done to the people of Palestine is removed and unless the people of Palestine were given their homeland, Pakistan could not recognize Israel.¹⁵⁸

Despite the pressures exerted on Pakistan in 2020 to push it towards normalizing relations with Israel, Pakistan remained steadfast. A report in the Israeli media said that the US and another country, which could have been KSA, were pressuring Islamabad to recognize Israel. The report said that the KSA “holds a strong card: a \$2 billion loan which keeps Pakistan afloat, but whose extension is in doubt.” It also referred to the role of the Pakistani army “that really manages diplomacy in Pakistan,” and “is actually encouraging its favorite journalists to appear on Israeli news channels to present the case.” This implies that there is a possibility of relations being established between Pakistan and Israel.¹⁵⁹

Support for the Palestine issue can be quite easily observed in official Pakistani political statements. In March 2020, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs modified the category to which members of the Palestinian community in Pakistan are subject to in terms of entry and residence visas to an easier and more flexible category. The Pakistani foreign minister affirmed the Pakistani government’s firm position supporting the Palestinian people’s rights to freedom, independence, self-determination, and the establishment of their independent state with Jerusalem as its capital. He also stressed his country’s rejection of the Deal of the Century.¹⁶⁰

Despite its firm stance in not recognizing Israel, Pakistan has opted to support the political solution endorsed by the Palestinians. In other words, the lack of normalization is linked to the Palestinians’ acceptance of a political solution to be achieved through the peace process. Prime Minister Imran Khan stressed, “I have no second thought to recognize Israel unless there is a just settlement, which satisfies Palestinians.”¹⁶¹

In the same direction, the Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had made it clear to the UAE that “Islamabad cannot recognize Israel until a ‘concrete and permanent settlement’ ” of the Palestine issue is reached. Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs Shah Mahmood Qureshi said, “I categorically presented Pakistan’s stance on Israel to the UAE’s foreign minister that we will not and cannot establish a relationship with Israel until a concrete and permanent solution to the Palestine issue is found.” Islamabad also denied reports that it secretly sent a messenger to Tel Aviv.¹⁶²

As for the position on the Israeli aggression on the GS in May 2021, Pakistan called on the UN Security Council to take the necessary steps to hold Israel responsible for committing war crimes and crimes against humanity.¹⁶³



Fifth: Responsiveness of the Muslim Public to the Palestine issue

Throughout 2020–2021, the Muslim peoples showed support for the Palestine issue and the Palestinian rights, while rejecting any form of normalization with Israel. In 2020, many demonstrations were held condemning Emirati and Bahraini normalization with Israel. In Indonesia, non-governmental organizations condemned the Israeli-Emirati normalization agreement, and the Indonesian Coalition Defending Baitul Maqdis perceived the normalization of relations with Israel as “a crime in terms of diplomacy, culture and economy, among others.” It stressed that any countries that normalize with Israel “agree with its crimes against Palestine.”¹⁶⁴

In the same context, the Secretary-General of the International Union of Muslim Scholars Ali al-Qaradaghi stressed that “normalization with the occupiers of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem is forbidden and is considered a treason.” An Islamic conference in Canada canceled the participation of the Chairman of the Emirates Fatwa Council Sheikh ‘Abdullah bin Bayyah in its activities because of his position in support of Emirati normalization with Israel.¹⁶⁵

In the context of Islamic popular support for the Palestine issue and in defense of its holy sites, different cities across the Muslim world witnessed dozens of demonstrations condemning the Israeli aggression on the GS in May 2021. In Istanbul, demonstrators hoisted Palestinian flags and demanded the world hold Israel accountable, and they condemned its aggressions against holy sites in Jerusalem amidst international silence. In the Pakistani capital Islamabad, protests demanded an end to the Israeli war on GS, and the demonstrators denounced what they described as the inaction by international organizations and the OIC.¹⁶⁶

In Bangladesh, thousands demonstrated in the capital Dhaka, to condemn and protest the Israeli war on GS. Activists of various political parties marched in the streets, after Eid al-Fitr prayers, to condemn the attacks. Raising the Palestinian flags, the demonstrators called on the international community to boycott Israel “for launching terrorist attacks against Muslims.”¹⁶⁷

In the same sense, the Indonesian Coalition Defending Baitul Maqdis put forward a program to support *al-Aqsa* Mosque and GS, in which about a thousand mosques and dozens of organizations and associations participated. Due to COVID-19 and

the difficulty of organizing large crowds in the capital Jakarta, alternative mass events were held in hundreds of mosques from the far east of Indonesia to its far west. The participants issued the “Indonesia Declaration to Save *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Liberate Palestine,” warning Israel against harming *al-Aqsa* and demanding a halt to settlement expansion in addition to the release of Palestinian prisoners, especially children. The participants also called for the boycott of Israel.¹⁶⁸

Apparently, the normalizations that swept the Arab world have not affected the levels of Muslim public support of the Palestine issue yet. This is because of its profound status in the conscience of Muslim peoples who perceive Jerusalem as the first Qiblah (the direction that should be faced during prayers) in Islam.

Sixth: Normalization and Israeli Relations with Muslim Countries

In 2020–2021, Israeli attempts to expand the circle of normalization with Arab and Muslim countries did not stop. Despite Donald Trump, who pressed for normalization with Israel, losing his attempted reelection, it seems that the Biden administration does not mind and may even want to expand the Abraham Accords, although in a manner different from Trump’s.

Israeli Intelligence Minister Eli Cohen revealed, in late 2020, that secret talks had taken place between Israel and Niger regarding the normalization of bilateral relations. “Niger is the largest Muslim country in West Africa, with a population of more than 25 million,” Cohen said, adding that “agreements expected between Israel and other Muslim states in Africa will help regional stability.”¹⁶⁹ Israeli interest in normalizing relations with Niger comes as the latter is one of the largest exporters of uranium in the world.

The years 2020–2021 witnessed several Emirati-Bahraini attempts to push Arab and Muslim countries to join the normalization agreements, whether directly and publicly or through secret channels. In this context came the meeting of the Indonesian Defense Minister Prabowo Subianto with the Israeli Ambassador to Bahrain, Itay Tagner, during the Manama security conference,¹⁷⁰ which also witnessed the participation of the head of the Israeli NSC Eyal Hulta.



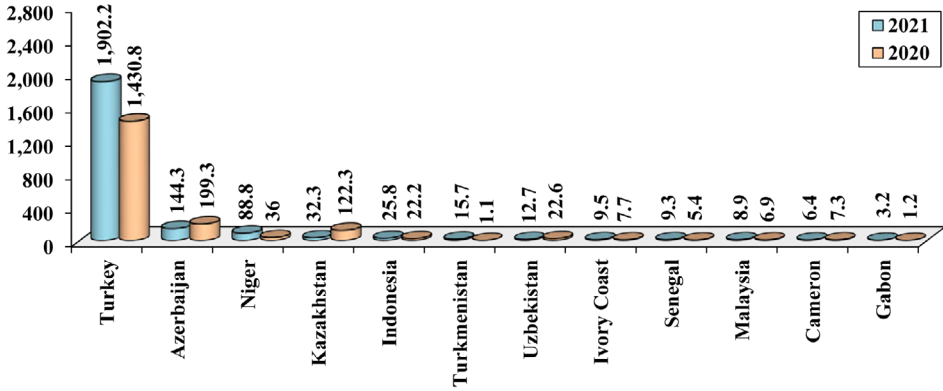
Muhyiddin Junaidi, deputy chairman of the Indonesian Ulema Council and foreign relations official, rejected Emirati normalization with Israel and said UAE's move was a betrayal of the Palestine issue. Junaidi stressed that the Emirati move served Israel's interest, while harming the struggle of Muslim and Palestinian peoples, making it difficult for Palestinians to gain their freedom and establish an independent state.¹⁷¹

Noticeably, Pakistan and Turkey, in addition to four Arab countries, namely Tunisia, the UAE, Morocco and Egypt, participated, along with Israel, in the huge military maneuvers led by the US and Ukraine in the Black Sea, which started on 28/6/2021 and ended on 10/7/2021.¹⁷²

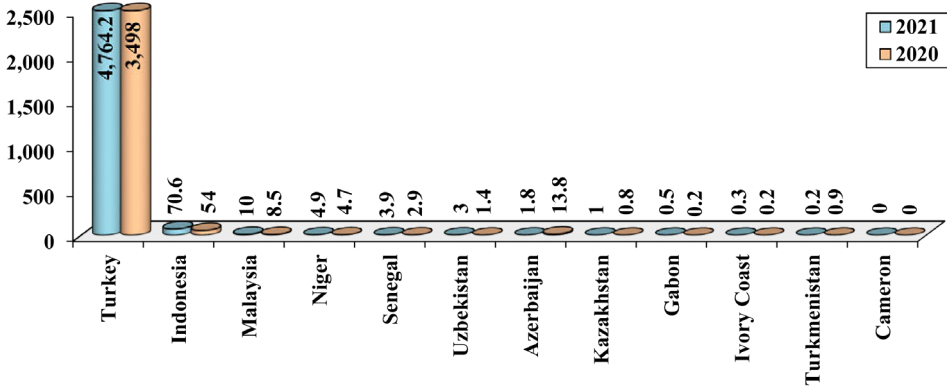
Table 3/7: Israeli Trade Volume with a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2019–2021 (\$ million)¹⁷³

Country	Israeli exports to:			Israeli imports from:		
	2021	2020	2019	2021	2020	2019
Turkey	1,902.2	1,430.8	1,757.6	4,764.2	3,498	3,208
Azerbaijan	144.3	199.3	113.9	1.8	13.8	0.8
Indonesia	25.8	22.2	30.5	70.6	54	43.7
Niger	88.8	36	165.5	4.9	4.7	6.3
Kazakhstan	32.3	122.3	34	1	0.8	15.5
Malaysia	8.9	6.9	3.4	10	8.5	16.9
Turkmenistan	15.7	1.1	0	0.2	0.9	0.9
Uzbekistan	12.7	22.6	18.5	3	1.4	1.7
Senegal	9.3	5.4	14.7	3.9	2.9	4.4
Ivory Coast	9.5	7.7	6.8	0.3	0.2	0.5
Cameron	6.4	7.3	5.1	0	0	0
Gabon	3.2	1.2	0.2	0.5	0.2	0.2

**Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2020–2021 (\$ million)**



**Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries
2020–2021 (\$ million)**



Conclusion

The OIC maintained its traditional policy towards the Palestine issue in the years considered in this report, although its interaction seemed less than the past. Several of its member states embraced normalization and established official relations with Israel, while other central countries opened or activated channels of relations under the table, awaiting the maturation of more suitable conditions to reveal them.

Turkey maintained its general policy towards the Palestine issue, while strongly confirming that Jerusalem remained a red line, criticizing Israeli practices and attacks against the Palestinian people and calling for the lift of GS siege. The government made room for many activities in support of the Palestinian people, and its relations with the PA and the PLO leadership improved further. It also maintained its good relations with Hamas, but it became more reticent about hosting the movement's leaders or about their stay in Turkey.

Given the challenges that Turkey faced in the past two years, especially the economic difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, the depreciation of the Turkish lira, and the desire of the ruling party, led by Erdoğan, to win the 2023 elections, the government sought to ease tension in many sensitive regional files, including with countries that opposed it because of the “Arab Spring.” Consequently, it improved its relations with Israel, where their trade increased, and Turkey became Israel's fifth biggest trading partner in the world and the first in the Muslim world. Turkey also took several steps to enhance political relations with Israel. Accordingly, the coming stage may witness further development and improvement of Turkish-Israeli and regional relations, while providing less space for Hamas and the resistance forces to operate in the Turkish arena.

As for Iran, it upheld its consistent stances and policies towards the Palestine issue, refusing to recognize Israel and supporting the Palestinian resistance. Its support of Palestine was not limited to political and media positions but also included military and financial aspects. The past two years have witnessed an improvement in the Hamas–Iran relationship. Iran is expected to be more able to manage its regional files and the file of its Palestinian relations in light of restoring the nuclear deal with the US and European powers, which will also provide it with better funding sources and better economic relations.

Israel is still trying to achieve normalization breakthroughs in the Muslim world, and there are indications of some non-public contacts and relationships. However, the popular mood, in general, has demonstrated widespread rejection of normalization with Israel and continued sympathy and support for the Palestine issue.

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Chapter Eight

*The Palestine Issue and the
International Situation*

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,¹ 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;² 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,³ 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.⁴

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:⁵

- 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.⁶
- 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.⁷

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.⁸

a. The General Assembly Resolutions on Palestine⁹

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:¹⁰

- 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).¹¹

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

- 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.¹³

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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵

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.¹⁶



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 Resolutions¹⁷

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:¹⁸

- 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:¹⁹

- 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.²⁰ The activities of the Quartet in 2021 were represented in the following:²¹

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:²²

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:²³

- 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).²⁴ 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.”²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷

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.²⁸ 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.²⁹

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

- 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 EUCCOM 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.³¹
- 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.³²
- 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:³³

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.³⁴

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,³⁵ 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.³⁶ 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.”³⁷

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.³⁸

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.³⁹

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.⁴⁰

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:⁴¹

- 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."⁴² 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.⁴³

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.⁴⁴

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."⁴⁵



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:⁴⁶

- 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.⁴⁷

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).⁴⁸

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

- 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."⁵⁰

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."⁵¹

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.⁵² 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."⁵³ 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:⁵⁴

- 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.⁵⁵ This move has been widely supported by pro-Israel groups, including the Zionist Federation, and the Jewish Leadership Council,⁵⁶ 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:⁵⁷

- 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:⁵⁸

- 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.⁵⁹

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.”⁶⁰

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."⁶¹

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.⁶² 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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴

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:⁶⁵

- 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.⁶⁶

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.⁶⁷



8. International Public Opinion⁶⁸

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.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰ 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.”⁷¹ 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.⁷² 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.⁷³

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

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

Organization	Stance	Date
Human Rights Watch	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
Amnesty International	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
A campaign by 452 civil society organizations from all over the world	Demanded the UN General Assembly investigate Israeli apartheid and impose sanctions, similar to those placed on South Africa.	22/9/2020
120 gender studies departments in American universities	Signed a statement labelling Israel an apartheid state.	24/5/2021
ICC	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:⁷⁵

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

Index	2020	2021	Remarks
Democracy	7.84	7.6	On a scale of 10.
Gini Index (Income distribution)	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)
Political Stability	75.1	76.5	On a scale of 100. (The higher rating indicates a worse situation)
Militarization Index	888.6	NA	Israel ranks first in the world in this indicator, which reflects the extent of influence of the military establishment.
Corruption	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,⁷⁶ 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.⁷⁷

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:⁷⁸

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

	2020	2021	Remarks
Favorable ratings: Israelis Palestinians	74 23	75 30	Increase in support for the Palestinians is higher, although the difference in support remains large in favor of Israel.
More sympathies with: The Israelis The Palestinians	60 23	58 25	A slight decrease for the Israelis and a slight increase for the Palestinians.
Establishing the Palestinian state: Favor Oppose	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
US pressure: More on Palestinians More on Israelis	65 17	29 53
Palestinian statehood: Favor Oppose	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.⁷⁹

As for the EU, an Israeli study issued by INSS⁸⁰ 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.⁸¹

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

- 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.⁸³

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:⁸⁴

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
General trend	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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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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