

Chapter Three

The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World





The Palestinian Issue and the Arab World

Introduction:

Although the official Arab concern for the Palestinian issue has been lately declining, Palestine remains the central issue in the Arab world. It will be simple and simplistic to maintain that this enthusiasm is primarily motivated by emotional reasons or sympathy with the Palestinian people, who have been experiencing Zionist colonial aggression for more than a hundred years. Rather, the importance of the Palestinian issue arises from the fact that this aggression targets both the Arab and Muslim nations. Therefore, the conclusion of an agreement between an Arab country and the Zionist state would not bring the Arab-Israeli conflict to an end. Rather, this dispute will last as long as Israel exists in Palestine, particularly so because of its acts of terror and racism against Arabs and Muslims, and its threat to the stability and security in the region.

At the beginning of this section, it is necessary to emphasize that the Arab world should be viewed as one single unit, as the Arab regional system still exists, notwithstanding the crisis that it is experiencing. The recurrent Arab League meetings, including those held at summit level, support this argument.

A regional system can be defined as “a group of neighboring units which have stronger bonds of harmony, compatibility and mutual interdependence than those they have with other external units, which, in turn, leads to more intensive interactions.”² This definition is true of the Arab regional system, because of the geographical unity of its members, and their interactions during different historical epochs, which proves the unique characteristics of this system.

The Palestinian issue has been instrumental in promoting national awareness among all Arab peoples, and it contributed to their belief that most of their problems are brought about by the presence of Israel at the heart of their region. Imperial powers, which transplanted Israel in the region to break it up and continue its domination, are still plotting against the Arab and Muslim nations in order to guarantee the survival of Israel, and to protect their own interests. Being pivotal, the Palestinian issue has always been a major item in all Arab gatherings, especially in summit meetings, which helped to form the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), and gave it permanent support.

Due to the direct relationship between the Palestinian issue and the Arab states, this chapter addresses the subject of “The Palestinian Issue and the Arab



World” through the following dimensions:

- The Algeria Summit and King 'Abdullah's Initiative.
- The position of the major axis' states on the Palestinian issue.
- The position of the various Arab countries' on the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip (GS).
- Developments on the issue of Arab-Israeli normalization.
- Official and popular Arab attitudes and their orientation.

The Position of the Algerian Summit and King 'Abdullah's Initiative:

The 25th Arab Summit was held in Algeria during the period

22 and 23 March 2005, in response to Jordan's call to discuss a proposal to modify the Arab Peace Initiative. However, the Arab Monarchs and Presidents announced their commitment to the Saudi Initiative adopted by the Beirut Summit of 2002, known as Prince 'Abdullah's Initiative (King 'Abdullah later) or the Saudi Initiative. It called for a just and comprehensive peace, which is the declared strategic choice of Arab countries, and is in line with the resolutions of the international community. However, this necessitates Israel's full withdrawal from all Arab territories occupied since June 1967 in compliance with Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, reaffirmed by Madrid Conference in 1991, and the land-for-peace principle. Additionally, Israel should accept the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem. In return, normal relations will be established between the Arabs and Israel in the context of a comprehensive peace treaty.

Due to the conviction of the Arab countries that a military solution to the conflict could not achieve a lasting peace, or provide security for the concerned parties, the Arab Initiative includes:

1. Calling Israel to reconsider its policies and declare that a just peace is its strategic choice.
2. Calling upon Israel to affirm its acceptance of:
 - a. Complete Israeli withdrawal from all the territories that it occupied in 1967, including the Golan Heights, to the 4 June 1967 lines, and from the remaining occupied territories in Southern Lebanon.
 - b. A just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon



in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

- c. The establishment of a sovereign independent Palestinian state on the Palestinian territories occupied since 4 June 1967 in the West Bank (WB) and GS, with East Jerusalem as its capital.
3. Thereupon, the Arab countries shall:
 - a. Consider the Arab-Israeli conflict to have ended, and enter into a peace agreement with Israel that provides security for all the states of the region.
 - b. Establish normal relations with Israel in the context of this comprehensive peace.
4. Guarantee the rejection of all forms of the Palestinian re-settling, which is incompatible with the special conditions of the Arab host countries.
5. Call upon the government of Israel and all Israelis to accept this Initiative in order to safeguard the prospects for peace, stop further shedding of blood, enable the Arab countries and Israel to live in peace and good neighborliness, and provide the future generations with security, stability and prosperity.
6. Call upon the international community and all the countries and organizations concerned to support this Initiative.
7. The chairman of the Summit is required to form a special committee, composed of some of the concerned member states and the Secretary General of the Arab League, to pursue the necessary contacts to secure support for this Initiative at all levels, particularly from the United Nations, the Security Council, the United States of America, Russia, the Muslim states and the European Union.

The Arab Initiative rejected the content of the two letters exchanged between the US President George W. Bush and the then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, as well as those letters that contained decisions that preceded the outcomes of the final status negotiations. The Arab countries also declared their commitment to continue their support to “the Palestinian Authority (PA) till it is able to shoulder the burdens and requirements of the coming phase.”

With regard to the Israeli withdrawal from GS, the Arab Summit stressed upon the necessity that the withdrawal should be carried out “within the framework of the Road Map, and be a starting point for implementing this Map. The Summit also emphasized the unity and regional integration of the Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem.”³



Though several other issues, like the Arab League reforms, the situation in Iraq and the Syrian-Lebanese relations, were on the agenda of the Summit, the Palestinian issue, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Jordanian proposal to activate this Initiative had the lion's share of these discussions. During this gathering, Jordan presented a proposal that linked the Arab-Israeli normalization with the unilateral pull out from GS, which had actually been achieved later in September 2005. The Jordanian delegation defended their country's call for normalization with Israel. To discredit those who objected to this move, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, Dr. Hani al-Mulqi said: "Anybody who accuses the Jordanian proposal could not have read it. He should rather go back to school to learn how to read." He argued that the proposal does not deal with the issues of refugees and Jerusalem because its aim is to polish and activate the Arab Initiative, not to change any of the items that were already approved by the Beirut Summit.⁴ To clarify the Jordanian position, the address of the Jordanian Monarch 'Abdullah II- who did not attend the meeting- emphasized the adoption of the Road Map as a peace initiative, Jordan's commitment to support the PA in all fields, and the necessity of reaching a comprehensive settlement based on the international legitimacy and the Arab Initiative.⁵ The Jordanian resolution on the Arab Peace Initiative stated:

The Arab League Council reaffirms Arab commitment to the principles of the Arab Peace Initiative, endorsed by Beirut Summit in 2002, and reemphasizes the strategic Arab choice of achieving a just and comprehensive peace. This shall be achieved in accordance with the international legitimacy, and with similar commitment on the Israeli part. Moreover, it reaffirms the belief of the Arab countries' that the military solution could not bring about peace or security to either side. Having reviewed the different international endeavors to revive the peace process, the Council affirms the Arab commitment to realize peace, security and stability in the Middle East, as a strategic option, in accordance with the terms of the Arab Peace Initiative. The Council also announces that the Arab countries are willing to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, and to establish normal relations with Israel, if a just, comprehensive and durable peace is achieved in accordance with the resolutions of the international legitimacy, the principle of land-for-peace, and the Madrid terms of reference.

However, the Jordanian proposal seems to be leading to the neglect of mentioning the General Assembly's Resolution 194 on the right of the Palestinian refugees' to return to their homes, which was included in the Arab Initiative, while it called for normal relations with Israel. Thus, it was rejected.

On their part, the Palestinians, represented by the head of the PLO Political Bureau, Mr. Faruq Qaddumi, rejected the Jordanian proposal and modifying the



Arab Initiative. The same stance was adopted by Syria and Lebanon, who refused any proposals that do not address the issues of the refugees and Jerusalem. Qaddumi said: “Rather than placing pressures on us (the Palestinians) and calling upon us to be more flexible, the Arabs should abstain from establishing normal relations with Israel.”⁶

On the other hand, Egypt’s position, as explained by Mr. Ahmad Abu al-Gheit, the Egyptian Foreign Minister, was in the middle between the Jordanian and the Palestinian-Syrian stands. The Minister said: “The Jordanian proposal affirms the Arab Initiative, which outlines the conditions for peace with Israel.”⁷

Egypt considered the Palestinian Foreign Minister the only one who is directly concerned with the Jordanian proposal. However, it announced its solid commitment to the Arab Initiative concluded at the Beirut Summit, whose essence, irrespective of the phraseology, is the full withdrawal from the occupied Arab territories in return for normalization.

As for Syria, it turned down the Jordanian proposal, and affirmed its steadfast principles that reject any initiative that does not stipulate withdrawal from the Golan Heights and provide a solution for the refugee problem. It considered the Arab Initiative the minimum acceptable compromise on the basis of the international legitimacy resolutions and the Madrid terms. This concept was summed up by the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, Mr. Walid al-Mu’allim, who was quoted saying: “There is no Arab peace initiative except the one adopted by Beirut Summit in 2002.”⁸

When expressing the Arab League stance on the issue, Mr. ‘Amr Musa, Secretary General of the Arab League, said that there is no priceless peace, and there is no necessity to rush to establish normal relations with Israel. He warned that Israel was seeking to get unilateral Arab concessions, though its policy of expansion and building more settlements is ongoing. To reach to a balanced peace, Mr. Musa urged the Arab countries not to establish relations with Israel until it completely withdraws from the occupied Arab territories in accordance with Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338. Musa’s statement was severely slammed by Israel.⁹

On their part, the Algerian officials stressed that their country, which sacrificed a million martyrs, should not be the venue for normalizing relations with Israel. Saudi Arabia, represented by the then Crown Prince ‘Abdullah bin ‘Abd al-’Aziz, insisted that the Arab Initiative, that he had personally articulated at the Beirut Summit, should not be modified. However, Saudi Arabia contacted



different Arab countries in an attempt to make the Summit a success, and to avoid “controversial points, including the modification of the Arab Initiative.” Hence, the Arab Monarchs and Presidents reaffirmed their support to the Arab Initiative endorsed by the Beirut Summit, thus rejecting the Jordanian proposal to modify it.

The Attitude of the Major Surrounding States on the Palestinian Issue:

The Egyptian Attitude: Egypt has indeed the greatest influence on the Palestinian leadership and organizations. Though its role, which was most powerful during the era of President Nasser, has considerably retreated since its conclusion of Camp David Accords with Israel in 1979, the country has eventually regained its influence, and is now capable of giving more attention and support to the Palestinian issue. The Egyptian role on the Palestinian issue during the year 2005 will be discussed through four dimensions:

1. Playing a mediating role between different Palestinian movements in the Cairo-based meetings to reach a temporary truce with Israel.
2. Playing a mediating role between the PA and Israel to minimize the acuteness of their differences.
3. Negotiating with Israel the implementation of its plan for a pull out from GS, and on Rafah passage.
4. Bilateral relations between Egypt and Israel.

It is well known that Egypt played a key role in the intra-Palestinian dialogue, in which all Palestinian movements were involved, that resulted in a temporary truce with Israel which lasted until the end of 2005. The Egyptian capital witnessed intensive dialogue between the PA and all Palestinian resistance movements headed by Hamas. It was the Egyptian Intelligence Agency Chief, Major-General ‘Umar Sulayman, who exercised intense pressure to persuade the Palestinian movements to suspend their “self-immolation” operations against Israel in order to give the PA an opportunity to negotiate with the Israeli government in a violent-free atmosphere. Egypt managed to secure the agreement of 12 Palestinian movements to convene in Cairo on 15 March 2005. The congress was attended by President Mahmud ‘Abbas, the then Palestinian



Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei', secretaries general of these movements, Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Gheit and Mr. 'Umar Sulayman. During the three-day congress, an Egyptian proposal, calling for a cease-fire and the commitment of Palestinian movements' to a truce with Israel until the end of 2005, was discussed. Egypt seemed keen to support the position of the Palestinian President Mahmud 'Abbas' vis-a-vis Israel before proceeding to negotiate a final solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The congress resulted in the Cairo Declaration, to which all the convening Palestinian movements and parties agreed. It stressed commitment to the Palestinian fundamentals: the right of the Palestinian people to resist the occupation forces, establishing a sovereign Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital, and the refugees' right to return to their homes and properties.

The convening parties also agreed on a program of action for the year 2005, based on continuing commitment to the truce, in return for a mutual Israeli commitment to stop all forms of aggression against the Palestinians, and to release all the Palestinian prisoners. In addition, the Declaration viewed any steps taken by Israel to proceed with its policy of establishing more settlements, building the Wall or Judaizing East Jerusalem as time bombs. The convening parties also highlighted the necessity of pursuing comprehensive reforms in all fields, supporting different aspects of the democratic process, and holding municipal and legislative elections as scheduled, and in accordance with a generally accepted electoral law. The Declaration also stipulated the activation and updating of the PLO, the only legal representative of the Palestinian people, by expanding it to include all the Palestinian parties and movements. The Palestinian consensus in this Declaration has been considered an important achievement that would not have been materialized without Egypt's efforts. Furthermore, Egypt exerted tremendous efforts, as demonstrated by the shuttle visits of the Egyptian envoy, 'Umar Sulayman, to both the PA and the Israeli government, to pave way for holding rounds of meetings and negotiations between the two sides. But Israel did not implement what was agreed upon in these meetings.

Egypt's other role laid in conducting negotiations with Israel to facilitate the latter's unilateral pull out from GS. The two parties agreed to allow the presence of some Egyptian police patrols along the border between Egypt and GS, near Rafah passage, (though Camp David Accords disallowed Egypt to station troops near the Palestinian borders). Thereby, Israel agreed that Egypt sends



750 soldiers to guard its frontiers with GS. At the same time, Egypt stressed that the Israeli withdrawal from GS should not make it a big prison for the Palestinians, as Israel insisted on dismantling the Rafah passage that connects Egypt with the Palestinian territories.

On the request of the PA, Egypt hosted and trained 49 Palestinian police officers, to shoulder the responsibilities of providing security and maintaining discipline as soon as Israel withdraws from GS.

Previously, Egypt had offered to train the Palestinian police officers, but Israel had always objected; however, after the demise of President Yasir ‘Arafat, Israel changed its passive stance on the matter.

Moreover, Egypt assisted in holding a Quartet Summit meeting in Sharm el-Sheikh in February 2005, attended by the Jordanian King ‘Abdullah II, the elected Palestinian President, Mahmud ‘Abbas, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, and the Egyptian President Husni Mubarak. Egypt was always keen to host conferences on its land to revive the Middle East peace process. In this connection, it is noteworthy that Egypt has played the role of a mediator between the PA and Israel, rather than itself being a key party in the Arab-Israeli conflict. It even sent a new Ambassador, Mr. Muhammad ‘Asim, to Israel on 17 March 2005, to replace the former one who had been recalled more than four years ago. Egypt and Jordan, the first two Arab countries to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, had recalled their Ambassadors from Tel Aviv in November 2000 in protest against Israel’s “excessive use of force” to suppress *al-Aqsa Intifadah*, which broke out in September the same year.

The two countries (Egypt & Jordan) announced the return of their Ambassadors to Israel in Sharm el-Sheikh Conference. The Jordanian Ambassador returned on 20 February 2005. The Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper quoted the Egyptian Ambassador, Muhammad ‘Asim, on his arrival in Tel Aviv, as saying that he is so proud that President Mubarak entrusted him with the responsibility of representing Egypt in Israel, and he is looking forward to promote relations between the two countries. The Ambassador reportedly added that he is entrusted with a message of peace and cooperation, and expressed his hope that a just and comprehensive settlement for the Arab-Israeli conflict be reached.¹⁰ While presenting his credentials to the Israeli President Moshe Katsav, the Egyptian Ambassador said:

The Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon’s plan to pull out from GS is the first step towards implementing the Road Map, and the recent developments on the Palestinian arena show a glimmer of hope at the end of the tunnel,



which Egypt has detected and is trying to take advantage of. Therefore, Egypt decided to send an Ambassador to find out what is going on, and to improve relations whenever possible.... Of course, there are reasons that justify why Egypt is keen to have an Ambassador in Israel, and to establish normal relations with it. Yet, boosting or weakening this tendency depends on the status of the Palestinian-Israel relations, and the Arab-Israeli relations in general.... If we manage to achieve progress in the Palestinian-Israeli relations, Israel will immediately see more progress in its relations with the Arab and Muslim world.¹¹

With regard to the Egyptian-Israeli normalization activities, the two parties, along with the US Department of State, signed a cultural cooperation protocol to promote cooperation between Israeli educational institutions and four Egyptian universities: Cairo, Alexandria, 'Ain Shams and Asyut. Cooperation programs listed under this protocol included: visiting Israeli professors to deliver lectures at these universities, organize joint symposiums and conferences, and exchange of the curricula.¹²

With regard to economic normalization, Egypt, Israel, and the USA signed the Qualified Industrial Zone (QIZ) Agreement, which allows Egypt to export its textile products to American markets exempted from customs duties on condition that not less than 11.7% of its components are manufactured in Israel. Accordingly, Egypt imported 2500 tons of cotton from Israel for the first time. In addition, Egypt and Israel concluded a \$2,500 million deal to export Egyptian gas to Israel, through a pipeline starting from al-Sheikh Zuwaid area (Eastern al-'Arish) to 'Asqalan (Ashkelon), for 14 renewable years.¹³

But a number of Egyptian investors demanded that Israel's percentage in the QIZ Agreement be reduced from 11.7% to 7% only. Speaking to the press, Mr. 'Abd al-Wahhab al-Sharqawi, a member of the board of the Federation of Egyptian Industries' Chamber of Textile Industries, said that Israel raised the price of the materials used in the Egyptian textiles that will be exported to the US. Moreover, Israel has not committed itself to provide the percentage specified by the Agreement. Mr. al-Sharqawi stressed that a new mechanism should be developed to stop the Israeli manipulation and lack of commitment to the specified percentage, and to check its practice of raising the price of materials. He pointed out that the US does not accept any products with less than 11.7% Israeli component, adding that the only alternative is to follow the example of other countries that set up preferential trade areas with the US, as this would guarantee the Egyptian products a fair opportunity to compete in the American market. Mr. al-Sharqawi went on to say that if Israel is unable to



provide the percentage specified in the QIZ Agreement, it should reconsider the matter, and reduce the percentage to the level it could meet. He expected that the coming period would witness a recovery in the Egyptian textile exports through the QIZ Agreement. The Egyptian investors indicated that the materials and other industrial requirements (components of the textile) imported from Israel within the framework of the QIZ Agreement cost \$5 million & 600,000.¹⁴

Anti-normalization Egyptian groups have criticized the agreement between Cairo and Tel Aviv to export Egyptian gas to Israel. They expressed their rejection of the gas deal on the website www.boycott.com, and by means of a myriad of e-mails that dismissed it as a deal at the “expense of the Palestinian martyrs.”¹⁵

The Israelis frequently tried to activate normalization with Egypt, but the Egyptians, especially the educated public, resisted these attempts. Dr. Faruq Husni, the Egyptian Minister of Culture, admitted that the Israeli Ambassador to Cairo, Shalom Cohen, requested him to promote joint cultural programs between Egypt and Israel, and to encourage exchange of visits by the educated elites of the two countries. The Minister told the Ambassador that it was impossible to take any steps towards cultural normalization owing to the Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. Dr. Husni explained to Mr. Cohen he, being an Egyptian artist by profession and interest, very well understands the feeling and position of the Egyptian educated public that reject such normalization until a comprehensive and just solution of the Palestinian issue is concluded, and the Arab territories are liberated.¹⁶

The Egyptian policy towards the Palestinian issue was clearly stated by its Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu al-Gheit in an interview with the Israeli *Haaretz* newspaper. Mr. Abu al-Gheit slammed Knesset members who opposed plans to deploy Egyptian soldiers at Philadelphi route, describing them as irresponsible provocateurs. He mentioned that those members aim at complicating the peace process between Israel and Egypt and hindering the efforts to reach an agreement with the Palestinians. The Israeli daily noted that reports to the Israeli Embassy in Cairo indicated warm Egyptian-Israeli relations in all fields. Mr. Abu al-Gheit added that there were several factors that helped the promotion of better relations between Egypt and Israel. He stressed Egypt was using its influence to take the Palestinians to a point where they could settle their differences with Israel, and thereupon Egypt would try to convince Israel to accept a settlement. He said that they have to realize that Israel is already existing in the region, and



consequently we have to deal and work with it, we should try to convince it of the principle that in order to have full-fledged normalization with the Arabs, it should take the necessary steps to enable the emergence of a Palestinian state. He added that Egypt, Palestine and the whole Arab world are willing to normalize relations with Israel, but this depends on the Israeli actual performance on the peace track, that should be formulated in such a way that enables the Arabs and the Muslims to build confidence.¹⁷

Yet, Israel still regards Egypt a danger. The Israeli media endlessly attacks on the Egyptian policy towards Israel, maintained that Egypt, not Syria or Iran, is the real and fundamental danger that threatens their country. These fears emanate from Egypt's continuous armament of its military forces. The Hebrew newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* quoted an Israeli security source as saying:

The Egyptians are boosting their armament capacity, increasing their strength and building a bigger, more state-of-the-art army. However, some people in Israel tend to think that they (the Egyptians) do not have an enemy that justifies such an armament. Yes, the desert separates us from them, which, in today's war, will be a field for destroying any force that attempts to march towards Israel. Yes, the Egyptians purchase American planes just to be kept in store, while Israel improves its purchases and makes them completely different. And yes, during his 24 years in power, the Egyptian President Mubarak abstained from violating the agreement with Israel, even when we invaded Lebanon and assaulted the Palestinians. But, as they (the Arabs) always like to remind us, the policies of the Arab regimes could be changed by a single shot. Moreover, there are many friction points between Egypt and us, like Rafah borders, relations with the Palestinian rejection movements and the illegal smuggling between Netsanet and Eilat. Each of these points may trigger misunderstanding, which could be taken as a threat, contrary to the writings of those who listen to the Israeli finance officials. Then the Arab gun will be ready to shoot at any time. I am talking about fears arising at a time when we understand that we have built a mighty military force at an expensive price. Yet this force, which is exceedingly more powerful than the zero-potential threats, is not able to secure victory in real battles, because victory cannot be obtained as long as the goals are not identified. We are going to start asking many questions, including the simplest, the normal, and the most persistent ones. We are warning of the old battlefields. So, be prepared! In the near year, you will most probably hear much about Egypt.¹⁸

The Jordanian Attitude: Jordan is an Arab country that is closely associated with the Palestinian issue. The year 2005 witnessed some important Jordanian moves, including the abovementioned proposal presented at Algeria Summit, as well as Jordan's position on the issues



of Israeli withdrawal from GS and normalization of relations with Israel.

The Jordanian stance was made clear during an interview that King ‘Abdullah’s gave to the Israeli TV’s second channel before the convention of Algeria Summit, in which he announced a Jordanian Initiative to activate the “modified” Arab Initiative for peace with Israel. He said that Jordan, along with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, aims to get the Arab Peace Initiative moving “in such a way that it could receive better acceptance from Israel.” He added that the major problems in the Arab-Israeli conflict could be settled, especially the refugee and East Jerusalem issues, after Mahmud ‘Abbas’ assumption of the Palestinian Presidency and Ariel Sharon’s announcement of a plan for withdrawal from GS in 2005. But ‘Abdullah warned that the peace process would not succeed unless the Palestinians got a viable independent state. He stressed: “To ensure the Palestinians a (good) future, they should have a viable state, I mean in geographical terms.”¹⁹

As for the Jordanian-Israeli normalization, the year 2005 witnessed a significant development. At the beginning of this year, Dr. Hani al-Mulqi, the Jordanian Foreign Minister, visited Israel, and met Prime Minister Ariel Sharon after a four-year suspension of relations caused by *al-Aqsa Intifadah*.

Al-Mulqi’s visit, which came two weeks after the return of the Jordanian Ambassador to Israel, was part of a Jordanian-Egyptian-Israeli agreement hammered out at Sharm el-Sheikh Quadrilateral Summit, in which the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas and the Israeli Premier Ariel Sharon, jointly vowed to revive the settlement talks and return to the negotiation table. During this visit, Dr. al-Mulqi discussed with senior Israeli officials the Jordanian-Israeli agreement on the project of a canal that links the Red Sea with the Dead Sea. Jordan also presented an Initiative at the Algeria Summit to normalize the Arab-Israeli relations.

In addition, a symposium was held at the Jordanian territory of al-Baqura, which was attended by an Israeli delegation. The gathering, attended by the Israeli Minister of Environment, Shalom Simhon, and former Jordanian Minister of Water and Irrigation, Munthir Haddadin, discussed regional water investment in the Jordan River basin.

Previously, the former Jordanian Minister of Finance, Basim ‘Awadallah, had called for cooperation with Israel. In an interview with the Israeli newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, ‘Awadallah was quoted as saying: “We have to look for new channels of cooperation, build together, find investors, and export joint products.”



He added that business sectors in the two countries are not active enough, Mr. 'Awadallah indicated that Jordan could help Israel to establish economic relations not only with Iraq, but with all Arab countries as well, provided that a solution to the Palestinian issue is concluded. However, he slammed Sharon's advisor for fighting "terrorism" for warning Israeli tourists and businesspersons against visiting Jordan.²⁰

An international fund offered by a Zionist businessman sponsored a technical scientific congress, attended by scientists from Israel, America and Jordan, that was held on 10 September 2005 near the Dead Sea. The participants discussed the prospect of setting up a joint project for education and cultural literacy, that was planned to serve as a basis for a scientific and technical normalization in the fields of agriculture, tourism, pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries.

Concerning the commercial relations, which are essentially based on the QIZ Agreement, official Jordanian estimates indicate that in 2003 the total Israeli exports to Jordan amounted to \$134 million, while Israel imported \$108 million worth of Jordanian goods. In 2004, Jordan's imports from Israel increased to \$164 million, while the Jordanian exports to Israel increased slightly to reach \$116 million. During the first eight months of the year 2005, Israeli exports hit \$99 million, compared to \$79 million worth of Jordanian exports. More than 60,000 Jordanian people, mostly of Palestinian origin, illegally work in Israel, largely in restaurants and gardens, and a great number of them married and settled there.

Jordan held talks with the PA and Israel on the possibility of allowing the Jordan-based nearly 5,000 soldiers of Badr troops, who belong to the Palestinian Liberation Army, to enter the WB. Israel maintained that it would allow them to do so in the near future. 'Atallah Khayri, chargé d'affaires of the Palestinian Embassy in Amman, said that Jordan had recently started training those Palestinian forces (Badr troops) to qualify them to join the Palestinian security forces in the WB and GS. He said that: "Jordan is preparing Badr troops to join the Palestinian security force in the WB and GS to do their job in protecting citizens and maintaining discipline. "Khayri added": Badr soldiers will not be stripped of Jordanian nationality." On its part, Badr troops opened the doors to Jordanians of Palestinian origin to be enlisted and take part in this 3 month training that was provided by Jordan, before these forces would be sent to the Palestinian territories. It is worth mentioning that the Jordan-stationed Badr troops are divided into four battalions, not exceeding 5,000 persons. These



developments took place at a time when the Israeli forces were getting ready to withdraw from GS, while the PA was gearing to take up security responsibilities. Formerly, Jordan refused to get involved in any activities related to security in Palestine; although there were expectations that Egypt will play a role in GS.²¹

Badr troops, which include a small company responsible for guarding four Palestinian buildings in Amman, announced, through some ads published in Jordanian newspapers, that it needed to recruit Jordanian young people of Palestinian origin to be trained under the supervision of the Jordanian army. However, Jordan's declared intention to send Badr troops, in their capacity as Jordanian forces, to the WB did not trigger any Palestinian doubts or sensitivities, which reflected the strong relations between the Jordanian government and the PA.

In addition, a delegation from Fatah Movement in Amman, headed by a Fatah key member, Muhammad Ghunaim, discussed with the Jordanian government, represented by the Minister of the Interior, Samir Habashaneh, the request of re-opening the movement's offices in Jordan and reviving its activities there. Jordan agreed to Fatah's request on condition that only those offices situated in Amman would be opened, thus rejecting the re-opening of other offices located at Palestinian camps in Jordan. Jordan King 'Abdullah II also met Fatah delegation.

The deposition of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem, Irineos I, who was accused of selling Church property to some Jewish investors, was a concern for Jordan. On 10 May 2005, the Jordanian cabinet approved the dismissal decree. Jordan had also been concerned about the status of tens of Jordanian prisoners in Israeli jails, who were detained there for being involved in some attacks against Israel before the conclusion of the peace treaty between the two countries. While refusing to release these prisoners as a gesture of goodwill to Jordan, Israel had, however, released on 29 January 2004, other prisoners, belonging to its traditional enemy Hizbullah. This was through a political deal that caused much embarrassment to the Jordanian government.

The Syrian Attitude: The Syrian stance in 2005 on peace with Israel did not change from what it was throughout the previous years, particularly so because the Golan Heights are still under Israel occupation, and Israel continued to refuse negotiating their status. Therefore, Syria vetoed any amendments to the Arab Peace Initiative during the Algeria



Summit. Syria feared that such amendments could lead to normalizing Arab relations with Israel before the latter's withdrawal from all the Arab territories it occupied in the 1967 war. Walid al-Mu'allim, the Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister, stressed the necessity of sticking to the original Arab Peace Initiative approved by the Beirut Summit, and rejected any amendment to it. He indicated that the Jordanian proposal to modify the Initiative was motivated by the desire for normalization, and the denial of the Palestinian refugees' right to return to their homes. Hence, the Syrian President, Bashar al-Asad, affirmed his country's insistence to abide by the Arab Peace Initiative "to solve all problems in the region."

On the other hand, Syrian-Palestinian relations have improved after the death of the former Palestinian President Yasir 'Arafat. Syria invited the incumbent Palestinian President, Mahmud 'Abbas, to visit Damascus. During the visit, which took place in July 2005, Syria showed its support to the intra-Palestinian dialogue, and to all efforts that aimed at promoting national Palestinian unity. On his part, Mr. 'Abbas said: "Syria has a key and basic role in the Middle East peace process, especially the Palestinian-Israeli peace track." In a welcoming statement, the Syrian Foreign Minister, Faruq al-Shar', said: "We feel comfortable by Abu Mazin's visit. Today's talks between the two Presidents will be in the interest of the Palestinian issue and in the pursuit of a just and comprehensive peace." During this visit 'Abbas also met the leaders of Hamas and other Palestinian movements residing in Damascus.²²

The Syrian media gave noticeable attention to the visit, particularly to President al-Asad's meeting with the leaders of all Palestinian movements, including Khalid Mish'al, Ramadan Shallah, Ahmad Jibreel, 'Arabi 'Awwad, colonel Abu Musa and Khalid al-Fahum, in addition to the official leaders of the Palestinian delegation headed by Mahmud 'Abbas. It was the first time that all the Palestinian movements' gathered around one table in a meeting attended by the Syrian President, which indicated Syria's keenness in the Palestinian issue at all levels, and to support the national Palestinian unity, without intervening directly in the Palestinian internal differences. The meeting also highlighted the Syrian role in the Palestinian cause, despite its rejection of the Oslo Agreement. Moreover, in a gesture of goodwill towards the PA, Syria released the last two of Fatah Syrian prisoners in its jails, who were kept behind bars for two decades.



The Lebanese Attitude:

A myriad of intertwined issues had affected the Lebanese stance on the Palestinian issue in the year 2005. This is due to some internal developments in Lebanon, the Security Council Resolution 1559, and the assassination of the Lebanese former Prime Minister Rafiq al-Hariri. Some quarters argued that the Security Council Resolution included the demilitarization of the Palestinian resistance, while others, like the Lebanese Cedar Guardians, renewed old calls for deporting the Palestinians from Lebanon, and confiscating their properties. But the majority of the Lebanese people, especially Hizbullah, regarded the Palestinian issue a main concern for the Lebanese, and stressed the importance of allying with the Palestinian movements against their common enemy Israel.

In this atmosphere, and after Syria's withdrawal from Lebanon, the Lebanese Prime Minister, Fu'ad al-Sanyurah, held in October 2005 a dialogue with the Palestinian movements in Lebanon in order to have a fresh start of mutual understanding between Lebanon and the PLO, and to coordinate Lebanese-Palestinian relations. The dialogue sessions resulted in setting up a follow-up committee to deal with all relevant issues, including the humanitarian conditions in the Palestinian refugee camps. Al-Sanyurah stressed that the Palestinian weaponry should be orderly retained inside the camps, but controlled by a single Palestinian authority with which the Lebanese government and security agencies could coordinate. He added that the Palestinians are required to respect Lebanon's sovereignty and independence, while Lebanon should also respect the Palestinians' security and special circumstances until a solution to their cause is found, and the Palestinian refugees return to their homes. In another statement, Mr. al-Sanyurah stressed upon the necessity of:

easing the tense atmosphere and paving the way for a Palestinian-Lebanese dialogue to kick off. But our success, meaning the Lebanese and the Palestinians, to defuse the explosion and prove the falsity of those who bet that we will go backwards doesn't mean that the problem is over and that we consequently relax. No, because we think that what's more important is to go on with the dialogue by means of continuous communication with all the Palestinian movements.²³

However, the Lebanese-Palestinian relations became tense after clashes between some members of the Popular Front-General Command (*al-Jabha al-Sha'abiyyah al-Qiyadah al-'Ammah*) and the Lebanese army. The Lebanese authorities asked that the Palestinian elements behind these clashes be extradited. But the accident was swiftly contained. The Palestinian President Mahmud



‘Abbas flew to Lebanon, and met leaders of the Palestinian movements. Furthermore, he discussed the Palestinian-Lebanese relations, as well as the possibility of re-opening the PLO’s office in Beirut.

In June 2005, the Lebanese Labor Minister, Tarrad Hamadah, agreed to allow Palestinians residing in Lebanon to work to improve their deteriorated living conditions. He stated that he was working on new laws that would give the Palestinians the right to work without having to get a permit. Hamadah added that there were plans to provide the Palestinians with job opportunities and social security. In this connection, it is worth mentioning that the Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon are not allowed to take 73 types of jobs; they are permitted to work only in cheap handicraft activities. The Lebanese Labor Minister refused the notion that his decision was related to the prospect of settling the Palestinians in Lebanon. The Palestinians in Lebanon lauded the decision. Salih al-’Adawi, head of the Union of Palestinian Workers in Lebanon, said that: “The decision will help provide job opportunities for a work force of 325,000 Palestinians living in Lebanon.” Similarly, the PA welcomed the decision, which expressed:

spirit of responsibility and brotherly bonds between the Palestinian and Lebanese people. It will help easing part of the economic strain and difficult circumstances which our Palestinian people suffer in refugee camps in Lebanon, until a solution based on the resolutions of the international legitimacy is found.²⁴

The Attitudes of the Arab Countries on the Israeli Withdrawal from Gaza Strip:

Although the Israeli pull out from GS was unilateral, which means that it was carried out without coordination with the PA, Israel involved some Arab countries, like Egypt and Jordan, in the developments of the withdrawal process. For example, Israel held talks with Egypt on deploying Egyptian forces on borders near the Rafah passage. In implementation of the Road Map, the Arab countries called for full withdrawal from GS as a preliminary step for another withdrawal from the WB, and emphasized that the Palestinians should gain mastery over the borders and passageways, and that GS should not be made into a big prison. The Arab states also called on the Palestinians not to lose any chance to regain any area of land however small it may be, and regardless of the Israeli government’s ulterior intentions.



The Egyptian Attitude: Due to Egypt's geographical, historical and political links with GS, the Egyptian stance on the Israeli pull out from GS was most important and remarkable. In this connection, we should recall that GS was occupied in 1967 while it was run by the Egyptians. Since the very beginning, President Mubarak declared Egypt's stance on the issue by saying: "We hope that withdrawal from GS is carried out in coordination with the Palestinians. If Israel abruptly pulled out from GS without prior consultation with the PA, it would bring about a state of chaos and disorder." He called on both sides to implement the Road Map.²⁵

Egypt showed a tendency to support the PA as it offered to train the Palestinian forces and contribute to the success of the intra-Palestinian dialogue. Generally, the Egyptian position on the issue of withdrawal from GS may be summed up in the following points:²⁶

1. A complete and comprehensive Israeli pull out from GS as well as some northern parts of the WB.
2. GS should not be made into a big prison and the harbor and airport should operate.
3. This withdrawal should be part of the Road Map, not an alternative to it, so that a Palestinian independent state could be eventually established.

The then Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, realized that Egypt could not be ruled out from the withdrawal process, though he had previously, when floating his project in December 2003, objected to any Egyptian involvement in this respect on the pretext that Egypt would be biased towards the Palestinians.²⁷

Egypt's stance on the withdrawal plan was in harmony with its declared policy that it should have a role in the Palestinian issue, and in maintaining peace and stability within GS and on its eastern borders. An Israeli proposal to move the Rafah passage to "Kerem Shalom" was rejected by Egypt. On 25 November 2005, the passage, which connects Egypt with the Palestinian territories, was for the first time run without Israeli direct control. Israel only fixed monitor screens connected with a central computer at the passageway between Egypt and Israel. Israel has also reserved the right to object to the entry or departure of some persons, provided that the Europeans, the Egyptians, and, later on, the Palestinians are notified.

The PA appreciated Egypt's stance, and considered it close to its own position. It appreciated the Egyptian role in conveying its viewpoints to Israel, though there was no direct coordination between the two sides



The Jordanian Attitude: Jordan's role in the Israeli withdrawal from GS was not that substantial. For, contrary to Egypt, Jordan is geographically far from GS. In addition, Israel was not enthusiastic about a Jordanian role. However, Jordan declared its support to the withdrawal on condition that it should be accompanied by the implementation of the Road Map, and withdrawal from the WB, which is in harmony with the Jordanian policy that encourages all peaceful solutions in the Middle East, and the establishment of the Palestinian state. But Jordan is expected to play a greater role in future, in case Israel shows willingness to pull out from the WB. This is because of the historical connection between Jordan and the WB, which started at the Jericho Conference of 1950, in which the West Bank was annexed to the East Bank of Jordan. Subsequently, in 1988, the legal and administrative unity of the two Banks was dismantled by a Jordanian decree. Israeli newspapers and decision-making centers circulate from time to time reports that claim the Jordanian role in the WB would be revived to be as strong as that of the Egyptian in GS. Yet, the Jordanian King, 'Abdullah II, said in an interview that he is not willing "to play any role, or take any action, that would raise doubts or accusation of treason against Jordan, as happened in the past. Now, Jordan's role in the Palestinian issue is similar to that of any other Arab country."²⁸

The Syrian Attitude: Whenever the Syrian stance on the Palestinian issue is reviewed, it is found that Syria relates any progress towards a solution to the issue of the liberation of the Golan Heights from the Israeli occupation. Therefore, Syria seeks to reach a settlement with Israel to regain its land.

As leaders of some Palestinian movements, including Hamas and the Islamic Jihad, are based in Damascus, Syria has an effective role to play in the future of GS. Mahdi Dakhlallah, the Syrian Minister of Information, said that the Israeli withdrawal from GS is not a favor, but an outcome of the struggle of the Palestinian resistance. "Had Israel felt comfortable in GS, it would not have withdrawn from it," he said.²⁹ In addition, the Syrian press warned that GS could be made into a big prison, as its borders, water resources and passageways are all under Israeli control.



Developments of Arab-Israeli Normalization:

The 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty - which stipulated that relations be normalized and diplomatic representation be exchanged - marked the beginning of normalization between Israel and an Arab country. The third paragraph of Article (5) of the Camp David Treaty provided that “the two parties should work together to establish cultural ties, which helps to create a conducive climate for understanding and cooperation,” notwithstanding a previous boycott resolution taken by the Arab League at the time of the very emergence of Israel. The Arab League set up a Damascus-based bureau to follow up the implementation of its resolutions on boycotting Israel, including identifying and properly handling foreign companies that deal with Israel. In 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel (known as Wadi ‘Araba Accord), which stipulated that relations should be normalized and diplomatic representation be exchanged. The third Israeli infiltration into the Arab world was through Mauritania, which normalized its relations with Israel, and recognized it as an independent state. Other Arab countries, like Tunisia, Morocco, Qatar and Oman, opened representation offices, for exchanging commercial visits with Israel, under the pretext of promoting the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. It was *al-Aqsa Intifadah* that stopped the rush of the Arab countries’ to normalize relations with Israel. Some of the above-mentioned countries recalled their Ambassadors and representatives from Israel. Yet, due to some recent developments, including the abatement of the *Intifadah*, the election of Mahmud ‘Abbas as a new Palestinian President, and the convention of the Sharm el-Sheikh Conference, Egypt, Jordan and other Arab countries resumed their diplomatic relations with Israel. In the Arab Summit held in Algeria in March 2005, Jordan floated a proposal to modify the Arab Peace Initiative and normalize relations with Israel on the assumption that this would encourage the latter to pull out from the occupied Palestinian territories. On its part, Israel used its withdrawal from GS to persuade other Arab countries to establish relations with it. The international and Arab media quoted a statement by the Israeli Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom, to the effect that 10 Arab countries will normalize relations with Israel after its withdrawal from GS. Furthermore, there have been reports of an Israeli commercial representation office to be opened in Dubai. Other reports maintained that Libya is expected to start relations with Israel soon. The weekly newspaper *Afaq ‘Arabiyyah* indicated that Major-General Musa Kusa, head of the Libyan Intelligence Agency, had a



meeting with Sharon in which they agreed to open an Israeli Embassy in Libya, and establish commercial relations between the two countries. The weekly newspaper claimed that the calls for economic normalization with Israel, issued by four Arab countries: (Morocco, Libya, Qatar and Kuwait), came as a reaction to Egypt’s signature of the QIZ Agreement with Israel and the US.³⁰

The conclusion of the QIZ Agreement in 2005 was a key event towards the economic normalization between Israel, on one hand, and Egypt and Jordan on the other hand. Previously, in 1996, Jordan had signed a similar agreement, which was re-activated in the year 2005. The underlying danger of this agreement is that it could be used by the US as a tool to exert pressure on the Arab countries to normalize their relations with Israel. For, according to the agreement, the Arab products should contain components manufactured in Israel if they are to find an access to the American markets. Thus, the QIZ Agreement serves as an Israeli visa, to put it bluntly, for Egypt to enter the Free Trade Area, as had been the case with its access to it got involved in the European partnership Agreement. Dr. Isma’il Sabri described the QIZ Agreement as “an economic Camp David,” in the sense that it will have passive effects on the Egyptian economy, and will lead to malicious infiltration into the Arab world under the guise of normalization.³¹

Furthermore, Morocco and Bahrain signed Free Trade Agreements with the US, which allowed Israeli companies to freely deal with these two countries.

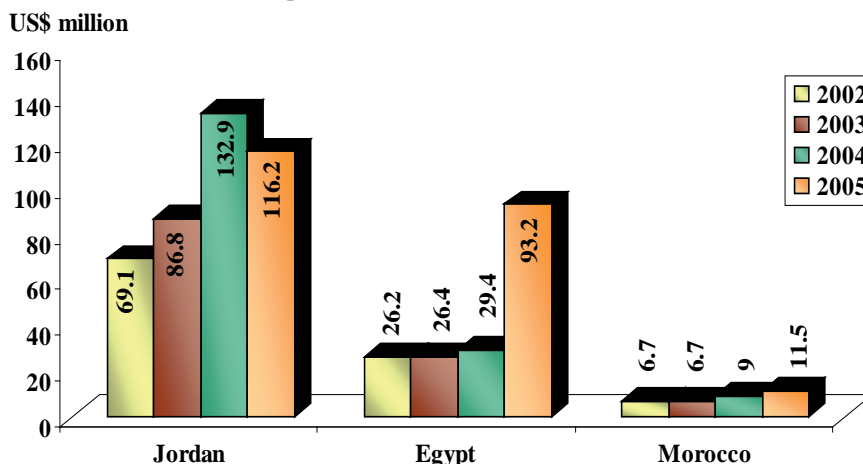
The following table, based on Israeli sources, displays the volume of trade between Israel on one hand and some Arab countries on the other hand.³²

Table 1/3: The Israeli Trade with the Arab Countries (US\$ million)

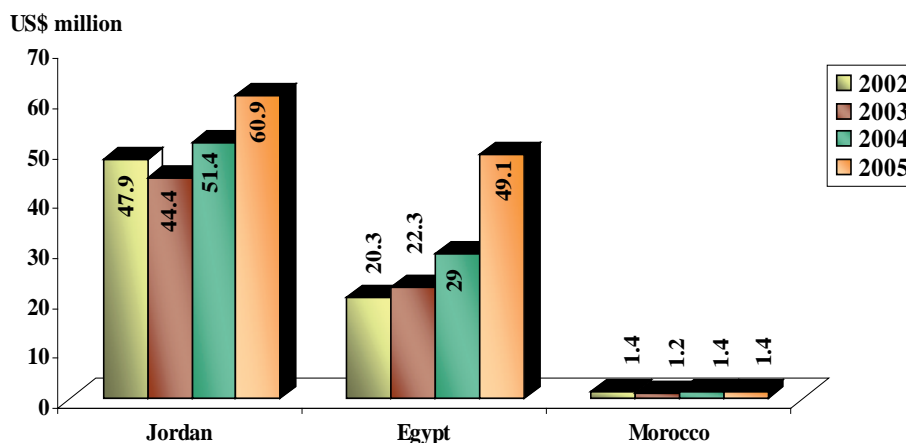
Year	The Israeli exports				The Israeli imports			
	2005	2004	2003	2002	2005	2004	2003	2002
Jordan	116.2	132.9	86.8	69.1	60.9	51.4	44.4	47.9
Egypt	93.2	29.4	26.4	26.2	49.1	29	22.3	20.3
Morocco	11.5	9	6.7	6.7	1.4	1.4	1.2	1.4



The Israeli Exports to Arab Countries 2002 - 2005



The Israeli Imports from Arab Countries 2002 - 2005



The Attitude of the Arab Masses:

The Arab masses still consider the Palestinian issue the primary and central issue in the Arab world, and they view Israel as their traditional arch enemy. They always react to developments in Palestine, and exert as much pressure as they can on their governments to support the Palestinian people and their just cause. Moreover, the position of the Arab masses towards foreign countries depends on their stance on the Palestinian issue. Hence, is their persistent anti-American attitude as the US is the permanent supporter of Israel. The support of the Arab peoples to the Palestinian struggle

is demonstrated by their rejection of the Arab-Israeli normalization, which is in contradiction with the official view of some Arab countries. This rejection emanates from the belief that normalization is detrimental to Arab interests and national security. It, moreover, serves the imperial Israeli project and creates an Arab social and economic base that has common interests with Israel. Although some Arab states attempted to normalize their relations with Israel at official levels, normalization at the peoples' level is a big failure, which means that Israel could not possibly achieve its goals. This failure had been clearly seen during the *Intifadah* when the Arab peoples boycotted Israeli and American products, which was a powerful means of resistance against Israel. Extensive campaigns were organized in various Arab countries to promote this boycott as a kind of public support to the Palestinian *Intifadah*. This widespread culture of boycott among the Arab masses aspires to achieve the following goals:

1. Expanding the Arab public base which supports the Palestinian people in their conflict with Israel, and enhancing the confidence of the masses that can resist and help in the struggle against Israel and its allies.
2. Adopting boycott plans that identify the products and the countries that should be boycotted.
3. Communicating with civil society organizations to encourage them to join the boycott activities, and contribute in the spread of the boycott culture among the people.³³
4. To aggravate the economic crisis in Israel, and enhance the cost of its occupation of the Arab territories.
5. To punish America economically for its pro-Israeli and anti-Arab stances, while rewarding friendly countries for their support to the Arab cause, and encouraging them to pursue this policy.

These campaigns managed to create an Arab public awareness of the importance of boycotting the products as a reaction against the US pro-Israel politics, and the Israeli aggressive practices against the Palestinians.

In Jordan, the public move against political and economic normalization with Israel has been a hotly debated issue since the government's signature of Wadi 'Araba Agreement in 1994. The Jordanian parties and unions called for establishing "the Jordanian People's Congress for Protecting Home and Defying Normalization", which publishes "*Defiance*" newsletter. There is also the "Jordanian Committee for Resisting Normalization", which publishes "*Resistance*" newsletter, in addition to some committees affiliated to the union



of engineers, and some student forums which publish “*Resist*” newsletter.³⁴

The public move to resist the Jordanian normalization with Israel continued vigorously in 2005. The people’s committees organized prior protest movements to oppose the return of the Jordanian Ambassador’s to Tel Aviv, and to express public rejection to all joint Israeli-Jordanian projects. Professional unions also released a statement that denounced Jordan’s absence from the meetings of the Arab Bureau for Boycotting Israel. Furthermore, anti-normalization committees, which include representatives of political parties and professional unions as well as patriotic figures, were set up. They called upon the Jordanian people to boycott Israeli and US goods. Some Jordanian university students distributed lists containing names of commodities produced by Israeli and American companies, attached with domestic alternatives. The declared volume of investments in Jordan amounted to about \$25 million, distributed among 28 companies. The boycott resulted in the shutdown of Kitan Company’s spinning and textile factories, as it had sustained huge losses. In addition, 1,350 workers from a clothing company, which used to cooperate with Israeli companies, were laid off because of considerable losses. Another company went bankrupt after the dismissal of 850 workers.³⁵

In Morocco, the year 2005 witnessed an escalation in public opposition to normalization with Israel. Mr. Khalid al-Sufyani, former chief of the “Moroccan Association for Supporting the Palestinian Struggle” stressed: “Morocco is one of the important countries for fighting normalization and boycotting US and Israeli goods.” On the first anniversary of the assassination of Hamas’ founder, Sheikh Ahmad Yasin, a speech festival was held in the Moroccan Western city of Meknas. During the festival, a student’s anti-normalization initiative was announced. The head of the Students’ Organization, Mustafa al-Khalafi, said: “The entire Moroccan people, with its student and youth powers, stand against this tendency towards normalization.”³⁶

In the Arab Gulf states, “the People’s Conference for Resisting Normalization with the Zionist Entity” was held in Bahrain under the slogan “Towards Practical Public Mechanisms for Fighting Normalization and Supporting the *Intifadah*.” The congress resulted in setting up two permanent Committees:³⁷

- Committee for Supporting the Palestinian *Intifidah* and Steadfastness.
- Committee for Fighting Normalization with the Zionist Entity.

In Bahrain, the campaign for fighting normalization and boycotting Israeli goods is led by the "Bahraini Association for Resisting Normalization with



the Zionist Enemy", which publishes newsletters and articles, and launches demonstration, pickets and social events. It also publishes a newsletter titled: Resistance-Boycott.³⁸

The 4th People's Conference for Resisting Normalization with Israel, held in Doha on 26 December 2004, called for developing new mechanisms to prevent normalization with Israel and keep it away from the Arab Gulf region.

The 14th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement, held in the city of Durban, South Africa, on 17 August 2004, issued a resolution that calls for boycotting all products coming from the Israeli settlements that are established on the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967, banning the entry of the Jewish settlers to the states of the Non-Alignment Movement and imposing sanctions on companies which take part in building the Israeli Apartheid Wall. In a Paris-based meeting, held on 23 February 2005, the World Council of Churches, the biggest international non-Catholic Christian organization, urged its members to withdraw their investments in companies that profit from the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.

Bernard Lewis, a well-known Jewish British historian living in America and a staunch supporter of Israel, admitted: "Arab academic circles and professionals are hostile to Israel and will likely continue to be so for a long time. This also applies to the Arab media as well." He added that the Arab countries which established relations and treaties with Israel are themselves facing strong opposition against normalization. "Those who express different opinions in these countries are severely slammed by their more stubborn fellows," he said.³⁹

Should the Arab people have the opportunity and the freedom, their stance on the Palestinian issue would be more powerful and influential in deterring the future course on the developments of the Arab-Israeli conflict. After all, official Arab pressure could not prevent the Arab people from showing and expressing their enthusiastic support to the *Intifadah* and the struggle of the Palestinian people, and their categorical denunciation of the Israeli aggressive practices.

Conclusion: The Arab attitude towards the Palestinian issue in 2005 remained basically the same as in previous years. The conditions of helplessness, disarray and inward looking prevailed. The Arab countries continued to patronize the traditional policies of a peaceful settlement with Israel based on the Saudi Initiative. Meanwhile, the Israelis managed



to develop their political and economic relations with Egypt and Jordan, and achieved a measure of success on normalization elsewhere. But the Arab masses still constitute a powerful support to the Palestinian steadfastness and resistance, though spectacular changes in the official Arab positions are highly unlikely, at least in the near future. Yet, the public vigorous zeal and rush to establish more transparent and democratic political systems may give a glimmer of hope that the Arab regimes will eventually be prompted to shoulder their responsibilities towards Palestine more effectively.



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