

The Palestinian Strategic Report

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Chapter Five

The Palestinian Issue and the International Situation

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Introduction

Although the international community -especially its major powers- has promised the Palestinians with a viable state by the end of 2008; that promise has turned into an Israeli military attack on the GS by the last days of the year. The attack, which continued for 22 days, brought the Palestinian cause to the focus again, through the demonstrations that swept the world's capitals and cities. The brutal aggression that targeted children and civilians on the one hand, and the popular steadfastness of the resistance that repelled the Israeli ground attacks on the other hand; both had a direct impact on the denounce of the aggression and the support for the Palestinian people that the world witnessed.

The US administration was preoccupied by settling the issues of Iraq and Afghanistan, dealing with the Iran nuclear issue, and then it was concerned -along with the rest of the world- over the crucial financial crisis. Despite all that, the Palestinian issue received greater attention from the administration of President George W. Bush compared to previous years, in an attempt to follow up the outcome of the Annapolis conference, in order to reach an outstanding achievement before the end of Bush's non-extendable term in office.

On the other hand, the world has been preoccupied since the beginning of 2008 by the tension resulted from various media reports on the US-Israeli plan to launch a military attack on Iran. It was coincided with an unprecedented surge in oil prices to \$147 a barrel around the middle of the year. This put many countries under the pressure of difficult economic conditions. The international diplomatic efforts were engaged in attempts to contain the implications of such developments, both at the regional or international level.

At a later stage, the crisis of the Georgian-Russian relations formed a breakthrough in the Russian politics, in which Russia restored some of its military prestige, challenging the US Administration. This issue drew the attention of the major countries particularly that Russia succeeded in changing the map of the Caucasus region through separating both Abkhazia and South

Ossetia from Georgia, when they were announced to be two independent states. This brought about a series of international meetings, and apprehension of being on the verge of a structural changes phase in the international system, given the increasing international feeling of Russia's return to be more effective in determining the trends of international interactions, given the fears of a Russian-NATO confrontation, especially after the various movements of the American and Russian navy's warships in the Black Sea region.

Later, the world was concerned over the financial crisis that pushed the economies of many major countries in the international system to the brink of recession. Fears of economic recession similar to the 1929 international depression crisis were mounting. The USA was the centre of this international crisis, which raised once again the issue of the capitalist system capability to lead the financial system and the global economy. The world's attention was focused on the monitors of the international stock markets watching its ups and downs.

There were many factors that led the Palestinian cause into a state of "relative stagnation" at the international level, particularly from the USA side. The USA was preoccupied by the presidential election and the accompanied heated election campaigns. It was also engrossed in the major financial crisis and its repercussions on the American and global economy. It exhausted much of its efforts to resolve its situations in the Iraq and Afghanistan quagmires. On the other hand, the inter-Palestinian division, in addition to the inability of President Abu Mazen and the PA government in Ramallah to provide convincing answers concerning speaking on behalf of the Palestinians, and to move forward with settlement agreements that are enforceable and accepted by the Palestinians; both discouraged the major and influential countries from taking serious measures towards the settlement process.

Moreover, the government of Hamas in the GS has been under siege and was in six-month truce. This contributed to reducing the tension, moving the case away from top news in the media, and leaving the international powers preoccupied by other issues, waiting for better conditions for a settlement in which the rule of Hamas would be weakened or overthrown.

On the Israeli side, there were also factors discouraging to continue moving on the course of settlement; including the Israeli internal partisan and political problems, the prosecution of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert on charges of corruption that forced him to resign, the ruling party "Kadima" launching a process

of re-arrangement, the failure of Tzipi Livni to form a new government, and the subsequent call for new elections.

In general, the “three weak ones”; i.e. Bush, Olmert and ‘Abbas did not have the potential of moving towards successful settlement negotiations.

On the other hand, there were some circumstances and events that brought the issue again to the international attention such as the Palestinians’ breaking through the Rafah Crossing, the Israeli attacks on the GS from 27/2/2008 to 4/3/2008, the prisoner exchange between Hezbollah and Israel, the judaization and destroying houses which raised criticism from some European countries such as Switzerland.¹ The year concluded by the overall Israeli aggression on the GS, which the whole world was concerned with.

Despite the concerns of the American administration, it should be borne in mind that the Bush administration has been relatively active, in comparison to previous years, trying to make a breakthrough in the settlement process, as any success in this area will enhance the Republicans electoral chances, consequently the visits to the region by the US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other American officials increased. Rice visits amounted to eight visits during the year 2008.

Israel has taken advantage of this situation to do more projects of settlement and Judaization, ignoring international objections, which were nothing more than words in the air. The Israeli efforts also continued to broaden the base of natural ties with the countries of the region. The United Nations conference on dialogue between religions on 12/11/2008 was one of these efforts’ new tracks; especially that it was adopted by some major Arab countries such as, Saudi Arabia.

Accordingly, we will address the international dimension of the Palestinian issue through the diplomatic efforts of the international major powers and the role of the international community in the economic dimension.

First: The Diplomatic Focus

The year 2008 was supposed to be devoted to achieve what was agreed upon in late 2007, particularly in the Annapolis conference in November 2007, where the year 2008 was undertaken to be the year of the solution based on two states, Palestinian and Israeli, living in peace side by side.

Tracking the diplomatic activity of the central powers with the greatest influence in the movement, we can see the collective failure represented in the committees and international organizations, and the individual failure represented in the solo effort of each State, as indicated in the following:

1. The Quartet

The Quartet (the United Nations, the USA, Russia and the EU) represents the most influential international actors in the international dimension of the Palestinian cause. However, the efforts of this committee did not lead to meaningful results, as evidenced in the four meetings held during 2008 as follows:²

a. The first meeting in London on 2/5/2008: The statement of the meeting included some of points such as:

1. Emphasis on continuing negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides to realize a Palestinian state by the end of the year 2008.
2. The Quartet called on Israel to remove roadblocks and the outposts, expressed its deep concern at continuing settlement activity, called on Israel to freeze all settlement activity including natural growth, and urged Israel to facilitate the delivery of security assistance to the Palestinian. The Quartet also expressed its continuing concern over the closure of Gaza crossing points.
3. On the Palestinian side, the Quartet also expressed its strong backing for the Bethlehem Conference “Investing in Palestine: Partners for Change” for private sector development, called for all donors to follow through on pledges made at the December 2007 Paris International Donors’ Conference, encouraged the Arab states to fulfill both their political and financial commitments made in the Annapolis conference, and supported the improvement of security conditions in Jenin. It called on the PA to fulfill its commitment to fight terrorism, to accelerate steps of rebuilding its security apparatus. The Quartet also condemned the rocket attacks from Gaza on southern Israel.
4. The Committee called on Egypt, the PA and Israel to provide security to all Gazans, and to end all acts of terror.
5. Reference to the importance of the Arab initiative to settle the conflict in the Middle East.

b. The second meeting in Berlin on 24/6/2008 included the following:

1. Emphasizing on the PA to continue fighting terrorism, and emphasizing the importance of unobstructed delivery of security assistance to the PA.
2. Increasing aid for Gaza under the management of the PA, and welcoming the EU's offer to resume its monitoring of crossings in the GS.
3. Welcoming the calm in the GS between Israel and Hamas, supporting the Egyptian efforts in this regard.
4. Voicing support for the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law.
5. Welcoming the indirect negotiations between Syria and Israel in Turkey.

c. The third meeting was in New York on 26/9/2008. The statement of the Committee states:

1. The Quartet called on all Palestinians to commit themselves to non-violence, recognition of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements between the PA and Israel.
2. Restoring Palestinian unity based on the PLO commitments, and supporting the Egyptian endeavors to reunite the Palestinians in the WB and GS under the legitimate PA.
3. Supporting the PA in confronting militias and terrorist groups, stressing the need for dismantling the infrastructure of terror.
4. The Quartet expressed deep concern about increasing settlement activity, and noted the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative as a major element in moving the process forward.
5. Supporting the idea of convening an international conference in Moscow the Spring of 2009.

d. The Fourth Meeting on 9/11/2008, in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. The statement of the Commission states:

1. Hearing each of Mahmud 'Abbas and Livni in each's presentation of their negotiating efforts; noting that they will continue to negotiate and they formed ten committees.
2. Welcoming the deployment of Palestinian security forces in Hebron.

3. Emphasizing the importance of the Arab peace initiative.

What can be observed from all these statements?

- a. The Committee is seeking to liquidate and cordon the resistance through strengthening the Palestinian security services, and facilitate the arrival of what is needed in this aspect.
- b. The Committee insists on not recognizing or dealing with Hamas unless it recognized all the agreements, signed by the PA or the PLO.
- c. Supporting the Egyptian efforts to unite the Palestinians under the legitimate authority; that is defined by the Committee as the Government of President Mahmud ‘Abbas.
- d. The Committee expresses “concern over the settlement”, and calls for “freezing it”, but does not consider it as a wrongful act that must be ended in all its forms. It is even noted that successive statements urging to “freeze”, and not to remove all the settlements, while insisting on ending all forms of incitement and violence and “terrorism”.

It is noticed that the most significant paragraphs of the Quartet statements are repeated in the Security Council resolutions, as will be seen later when we review the Security Council Resolution no. 1850.

However, comparing the statements of individual parties of the Commission indicates a range of positions on various aspects of the issue. This can be seen in the statements of the EU when compared with the American positions as will be indicated later.

2. The United States of America

During the year 2008, the Middle East witnessed some meetings that brought together international leaders with the regional leaders. President Bush was the first to visit the Middle East in 2008. His first visit to Israel in his capacity as president of the USA was in January of the same year; to give the impression of the continuity of his effort to establish a Palestinian state that he promised. Dick Cheney, the Vice President visited the region in March 2008 (his first interest was investigating the rise in oil prices). In both visits, they emphasized the “necessity” for the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of the year, a position which has been repeated by the American President almost throughout the year. In his speech at the Davos conference in May 2008, President Bush emphasized this

view. He reconfirmed it again during a meeting with Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in September 2008,³ continuing turning a blind eye to the growing siege on the GS, which prompted some Gazans to sweep through the Rafah border crossing on the Egyptian border in late January 2008.

However, in return for his emphasis on the creation of a Palestinian state, Bush had initiated his visit to Israel stressing the Judaism of the Jewish state, while noting that the alliance between the USA and Israel contribute to ensure its security as a Jewish state.⁴ A position similar to what was expressed in the House of Representatives and the Senate, which released two separate statements on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the establishment of Israel, describing it as “a homeland for the Jewish people”.⁵

The American diplomatic efforts includes the visits of Condoleezza Rice, the American Secretary of State, in which she frequently criticized the continued Israeli settlement, considering it as an act that impedes the peace,⁶ but did not, at any time, call for the need to end the settlement activity and not just freezing it.

The policy of “carrot and stick” was dominating the efforts of the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice. The stick part was evident in the continued emphasis on refusal to deal with the GS ignoring the siege imposed on it, and in the hard work to weaken the Arab summit held in Damascus in March 2008, the same month, in which a US warship arrived to the Lebanese coast.

This American orientation can also be seen in the speech delivered by US Ambassador to the United Nations, Khalilzad on 25/3/2008, when he emphasized on the continuation of US Gen. William Fraser to lead the US efforts to pressure for the implementation of the road map, and the continued support of the PA by signing the American-Palestinian Agreement on 19/3/2008. Under this Agreement, the USA provides \$150 million for the PA.⁷ The American conduct became clear in objecting to the draft resolution, submitted by Libya to the Security Council to halt the fighting that erupted after the Israeli attack on the GS, at the end of December 2008.

Meanwhile, the carrot was represented in the Rice’s Declaration of releasing \$100 million of aid to Egypt, which the US Congress froze because of the Egyptian human rights record.⁸ However, that was accompanied by the continuation of Egypt’s blockade of Gaza, and work on destroying the tunnels by which the Gazans try to lift the blockade as much as possible. This Egyptian approach in the closure

of the Rafah crossing has continued even after the Israeli aggression on Gaza by the end of December 2008.

From the discussions of the Foreign Affairs Committee in the US House of Representatives on 21/5/2008, regarding the Israeli-Egyptian-American relations, it was clear that the USA is preoccupied with how to strengthen the Egyptian role in controlling the Egyptian border with the GS, as indicated by the following actions that have been proposed in the Committee:⁹

- a. Allocating \$23 million to procure advanced detection equipment and devices to help the Egyptian Government thwart the smuggling of weapons along the border to the GS. This issue was raised by the Israeli government later when the attack on the GS started on 27/12/2008.
- b. The need to think of activating the Multi-National Force stationed in the Sinai, working within the framework of Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty since 1979.
- c. Calling for encouraging the European role in the development of Sinai in a way that helps in weakening the role of Sinai Bedouin, nearly a 60 thousand population in the “smuggling” of weapons.

The “policy of the carrot” is also realized in the American-Palestinian relationship. During the Israeli attacks on the GS in March, President ‘Abbas suspended talks with Israel, they were resumed after a meeting with Rice, which made *The Economist* magazine commenting on this saying that ‘Abbas’ “main claim to legitimacy among his people is that America and Israel recognize him as a partner for peace. If they withdrew their support he would probably be finished as a leader.”¹⁰ Perhaps this explains the fact that President ‘Abbas was the only official in the international community, who, until the middle of the year, continued saying that he had hope for a Palestinian state this year.

The Democratic elected President, Barack Obama, has presented conflicting indications of the directions he’ll take. He visited Palestine for the first time in January 2006, and revisited the region in July 2008. In a conversation with students, he said that he “supported the idea of two states.” It also quoted him telling a group of people in Muscatine on 11/3/2007 after announcing his candidacy for the presidential election, that “nobody is suffering more than the Palestinian people.” He added that Hamas has to acknowledge that the road to peace is not going through terrorism and other violence; and that the Israeli settlement is also a problem.

Meanwhile he noted in an interview with the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 29/2/2008, “that Israel has to remain a Jewish state.”¹¹ He also expressed sympathy with Israel during a ceremony by the Jewish lobby, The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), in June, in which he said that he is in favor of keeping Jerusalem as the united capital of Israel.¹² Then raised concern of the appointing some personalities that have Israeli inclinations in important posts in the White House.

In spite of the continuous Palestinian meetings (the team of Ramallah Government) with various international parties, the problem of dealing with Hamas (Gaza government) is still a point of internal debate between the major international powers. At a time when the USA remained committed to the policy of boycotting the “Gaza government” in any sense, there were emerging views from outside the American and European official circles that see the necessity of dealing with this government, despite the differences in the degree and level of this engagement.

The advocates of engagement with Hamas justified their opinion on two grounds:¹³

- a. Any course of a peaceful settlement would not be feasible without the participation of Hamas, given Hamas’ power and popularity among Palestinians and its ability to undermine this course of settlement.
- b. The realistic thinking demands that the Palestinian forces are only to be dealt according to the balance of power that they hold in the Palestinian community, not only on the basis of the degree of satisfaction with the directions of these forces.

It seems that the meeting of Jimmy Carter, the former US President, with Hamas leaders in Damascus in April 2008 was part of that view. From the above, The American position can be summarized in some points:

- a. Failure to achieve the promise of a Palestinian state in 2008.
- b. Disruption of the calls for an immediate cease-fire that have accompanied the Israeli aggression on Gaza on 27 December.
- c. Continued financial, political and security support for the PA on the one hand, and the continued pressure on the Hamas movement in the same three fields.

3. European Union

The EU's position achieved more progress, though slightly, than the American position; as the European diplomacy tries to give a degree of balance to its positions. It is a reflection of the differences in the directions taken by the Member States of the Union, which can be felt in the position of Sanja Štiglic, the EU representative in his speech at the Security Council on 28/3/2008; in which he noted:¹⁴

- a. Condemning the attack on a Jewish religious centre in Jerusalem on 3/3/2008 on the one hand, and expressing concern over the Israel settlements expansion.
- b. Stressing the right of Israel in defending itself, on the other hand demanding the cessation of all acts of violence.
- c. Emphasis on the European position that the settlements in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem, are illegal under international law. This is the same position that considered the settlement as a major obstacle to peace, in his statement on 22/1/2008. It should be noted that this clear paragraph about settlement is being generally re-edited in the Quartet resolutions.

MPs of the EU also invited their counterparts of the Hamas members of the Palestinian Legislative Council for dialogue in early November 2003,¹⁵ which indicates a degree of disparity from the US position.

But the paradigm shift in the European-Israeli relationships emerged in two steps declared in the last month of the year 2008, namely:

- a. An agreement signed between Israel and the EU on 2/12/2008, that stated on enhancing cooperation in the fight against terrorism, the strengthening of military relations and the exchange of intelligence information,¹⁶ which reinforces the previous agreement reached between the two parties in October 2006.
- b. Decision of the EU Foreign Ministers on 8/12/2008, for strengthening the European-Israeli relations in accordance with the principle adopted by the EU in June 2008; the resolution noted:
 1. Holding meetings at the level of foreign ministers three times a year, and once yearly for ministers in the other sectors.

2. Opening the way for a summit between the two parties.
3. Probability of calling Israel to participate in civilian missions in European security and defense operations.
4. Emphasized that the relations between the two parties are based on respect for human rights, the rule of law, and the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of a two-state solution.
5. Giving each of the EU countries, during its presidency of the EU, the right to invite an Israeli diplomatic official to a meeting of EU ambassadors on security issues.

Although the European Parliament postponed voting on this resolution until Israel shows “serious signs of good intentions”, according to Francis Wurtz, the Chairman of the European United Left-Nordic Green Left Group, and because of the worsening situation in the GS, according to statements made by the Socialist Veronique De Keyser; the parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee had recommended the support of the proposal by the 27 member states. This resolution is supposed to be adopted in April 2009.

Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister, said referring to the EU’s decision that enhancing the relations with Palestine will come next, but it is somewhat difficult with the Palestinians, because it would be more complicated in the absence of a state.¹⁷

Regarding The European attitude of aggression on the GS at the end of December 2008, it is clear from the statement of the EU that there is no change in European attitudes; where it stated:¹⁸

- a. Immediate cessation of rocket launching and Israeli military operations. It is noticeable in the drafting of the European statements in this regard that the text on halting the Israeli military action is always preceded by the text on halting the Palestinian military action, to make the Israeli military action seems to be a response to the Palestinian reaction.
- b. Opening of all border crossings, as provided for in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access (AMA) signed between Israel, the PA, and the EU. This means depriving Hamas of any role in organizing the movement through the crossings. In other language, it means the continuation of the blockade as far as the Hamas government is the one that rules the GS.

- c. The EU is ready to re-dispatch the EU Border Assistance Mission (EUBAM) to Rafah to enable its re-opening, in cooperation with Egypt, the PA and Israel. Thus, deliberately disregard the fact that the concerned PA does not exist in Gaza.
- d. Providing immediate humanitarian aid.
- e. Stepping up the peace process based on the Annapolis conference resolutions.

However, the individual diplomatic efforts of European countries sometimes seem to be in tune with the general European orientations, and sometimes appear to have some disparities in the detailed issues.

a. Germany

Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor conducted her third visit to Israel during the 26 months of her term in office, and delivered a speech in the Israeli Knesset on 18/3/2008 in which she emphasized the depth of the German-Israeli relations.

It is worth mentioning that Germany is the least country in directing criticism to the Israeli policies toward the Palestinians. This is due to the heritage of relations between the two parties on the one hand, and the role played by Merkel in the European policies towards Israel on the other hand. Germany has played a key role in the 2000 Convention for the liberalization of trade between Israel and the EU, which raised the volume of trade exchange between Israel and Germany to \$6.6 billion, making Germany the second-biggest trading partner with Israel.¹⁹

It is noticeable that Merkel condemned the launching of rockets from Gaza on Israeli settlements, but did not mention the death of more than a hundred Palestinians in the Israeli attacks during March. She declined to condemn the continued Israeli settlement in her visit, in which she was accompanied by about half of the cabinet members. It is also noted that the French and the British positions were more active toward the cease-fire to halt the fighting -that broke out in Gaza after the Israeli attack at the end of December- than the German role which has shown little enthusiasm to rein in the Israeli military machine. Despite the fact that the French President Sarkozy held Hamas a great responsibility for the development of events at the end of the year.

However, it is necessary to take note of some German differences with Israel; such as the German-Israeli difference on using military action against Iran. Israel

tends to encourage this position, while Germany is showing some reluctance in this regard, note that Iran is first importer from Germany.

In June, Germany hosted a conference on justice and security in Palestine.²⁰ The main goals of the conference are to reinforce internal environment in favor of PA aspirations.

b. Britain

Regarding the British policy, it is necessary to be aware that the leadership of the British Labor Party was sympathetic with the Israeli project, regardless of the balanced stance that the party is trying to suggest. Tony Blair, Special Envoy of the Quartet on the Middle East, and James Gordon Brown, the current British Prime Minister are members of the Pro-Israel lobby group Labour Friends of Israel²¹ and Partons of The Jewish National Fund (JNF).²²

Gordon Brown, the British Prime Minister has made no secret of his feelings towards Israel. In his speech to the Knesset, the first speech by a British Prime Minister to the Knesset, on 21/7/2008, he referred to the role his father played in deepening his emotions towards Israel, the divine promise of the establishment of Israel, and the unbreakable partnership between Israel and Britain. He said that for the whole of his life he has counted himself a friend of Israel, adding that they are determined to prevent an Iranian nuclear weapons program. After meeting with ‘Abbas, the PA President, Brown said that there is an urgent need for a viable Palestinian state, and that he had brought to the Knesset his view of a two-state solution, according to the 1967 borders, with Jerusalem as the capital of both.²³

c. France

During the year 2008, France continued calling for the establishment of a Palestinian state as soon as possible, and asked Israel to halt the settlement process to prejudice the ability of the forthcoming Palestinian state to survive according to Pascale Andréani,²⁴ the French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman. While Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President repeatedly stressed France’s commitment to the security of Israel.

In the framework of the French diplomatic effort, Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister visited Ramallah in February 2008, in which he assured that the Israeli blockade actions have a direct impact on the Palestinian economy as a whole, and the living conditions of the Palestinians. He called for improving the conditions

of transportation in the WB and the lifting the siege on Gaza. He called on Israel to completely freeze settlement in the WB and East Jerusalem, to dismantle all settlements, which are described as being non-legitimate, and to reopen the Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem. He added that the settlements are an obstacle to peace and they deny the principle of exchanging land for peace. On the other hand, he added that, the PA should make a major effort to combat terrorist movements and to reform the security services to become more effective. He also expressed hope for the establishment of a Palestinian state before the end of 2008.²⁵

The spokesman for the French presidency quoted the President Sarkozy saying to his Israeli counterpart Shimon Peres, during an official visit to France by the latter that as a friend he says to them that Israel's security passes through the cessation of colonialism. He added that Israel's security is out of the question, and that France will always be by the Israeli side. He asserted that the best guarantee of Israel's security is the establishment of a modern, democratic, and viable Palestinian state before the end of the year 2008.²⁶ These are the same stances confirmed by Sarkozy during his visit to Israel in June 2008, along with his call to lift Gaza blockade, and to reaffirm France's position of refusing any dialogue with Hamas as long as it did not respond to the Quartet's conditions.²⁷

In this context, it is worth mentioning that Isma'il Haniyyah, the prime minister of the Palestinian dismissed government sent a letter to Sarkozy in January 2008, on which France replies by confirming that Hamas needs to comply with the requirements of the Quartet.²⁸ This was a firm stance from France, in spite of the French communications with the Hamas movement in May. Pascale Andréani, the French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman diminished the importance of the contact between a former French ambassador with Khalid Mish'al at the time, pointing out that such contacts do not amount to the level of political relations, and assured Israel that the French stance does not change and still committed to the conditions of the Quartet.²⁹ Moreover, Sarkozy told Tzipi Livni, the Israeli Foreign Minister, during a meeting in Paris on 25/5/2008, that the meeting between the French envoy, and representatives of Hamas, was a mistake, adding that "France will not hold any meeting with Hamas."³⁰

Furthermore, *Le Figaro* newspaper said that Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, put forward in December a new peace plan for the Middle East, in which Jerusalem becomes a unified and open capital for the Israelis and Palestinians, with troops from the EU to maintain order in the WB. The newspaper said that France

is willing to solve the problem of Palestinian refugees through the “financial settlement” and the compensation for the refugees through an international agency, at a cost ranging from \$80 billion to \$200 billion paid by the Arab Gulf States and the EU. The plan also includes resettlement of a limited number of the Palestinian population in the Negev Desert.³¹

d. Crisis with the Vatican

It is useful to stop at the Israeli relations with the Vatican during the year 2008, when a crisis erupted between the two sides after an Israeli rabbi raised, during a visit to the Vatican, the role of Pope Pius XII during the World War II, saying that he has not performed his duty properly in protecting the Jews, on the background of the intention of Pope Benedict XVI to upgrade Pope Pius XII to the ranking of a saint. The problem exacerbated after Shimon Peres, the Israeli President said in 19 October that “We have reason to believe that Pius XII didn’t do enough to save Jewish life.” The response was from Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican’s spokesman, referring to an invitation from Peres to Pope Benedict XVI to visit the Holy Land, saying that criticizing Pius XII would not be “the determining factor” deciding a papal visit to Israel.³²

This came in spite of Pope Benedict’s statements sympathizing with Israel, as he commented upon receiving the credentials of Mordechai Lewy, the new Israeli ambassador to the Vatican, in May 2008 saying that, “The Holy See joins you in giving thanks to the Lord that the aspirations of the Jewish people for a home in the land of their fathers have been fulfilled,” and he recognized Israel’s “legitimate need for security and self-defense.”³³

Regarding the position of the Vatican from the Israeli military aggressions against the Palestinians, the Pope condemned the spiral of destruction and death that which seems to have no end in the Holy Land, in the aftermath of Operation Hot Winter at the end of February and early March 2008.³⁴ The Pope also condemned what he described as “violence” in the GS, following the Israeli launching of operation “cast lead” against the GS, saying he was “distressed” for deaths and injuries.³⁵ However, Father Federico Lombardi, the Vatican’s spokesman said that an Israeli reaction to the launching of rockets from Gaza was “expected”, adding: “Certainly it has been a strong blow against Hamas. At the same time there will be numerous innocent victims,” in addition he said that Hamas is a prisoner of the logic of hatred and Israel of the logic of force.³⁶

4. The Russian Federation

When looking at the Russian position, we should pay attention to the impact of the Georgian crisis (the Georgian-Russian war in 2008) on the Russian-Israeli relations. These relations were influenced by some factors, including:³⁷

- a. The growing conviction in the Russian community that the Israeli presence in Georgia is a part of the US effort to encircle Russia from the Asian front, after encircle it from the Eastern Europe side, this was confirmed by revealing the Georgian-Israel military relations.
- b. The growth of the arms trade and selling the Israeli security expertise since 2001. This was clear in the role played by the Israeli military experts in the training and management of the battles between Russian army and Georgian troops.
- c. Israel owns a strong interest in Caspian oil and gas pipelines reach the Turkish terminal port of Ceyhan, rather than the Russian network... and thence to Israel's oil terminal at Ashkelon and on to its Red Sea port of Eilat. From there supertankers can carry the gas and oil to the Far East through the Indian Ocean. Israel offered Russia a stake in the project but was rejected.

The Israeli Government was concerned about the implications of the Georgian crisis on relations with Moscow, which led Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister to visit Moscow in October 2008. A joint statement by the two sides confirmed continuing their dialogue on defense issues, and forming a team to discuss arms sales. Olmert said that Dmitry Medvedev, the Russian President had told him that Russian policy will continue on the basis of not to harm Israel's security under any circumstances.³⁸

However, the Israeli concerns still exist about the possibility of Russia's providing Syria with sophisticated weapons, or establishing military bases or facilities for the Russian Navy in the Syrian ports.

Israeli officials have raised reports of Russian's spying on Israel. Colonel Ram Dor, chief of information security in the armed forces, said to the newspaper *Yedioth Ahronoth*, "Israel believes Russia passes intelligence it gathers about the Jewish state to Syria and indirectly to Hezbollah guerrillas."³⁹

However, this does not preclude that other aspects of relationships have developed; Israel and Russia has switched to visa-free regime in September

2008.⁴⁰ In addition to this, Russia attempts to continue dialogue with Israel to ensure the success of the international conference suggested to be held in Moscow in the Spring of 2009. During a meeting with the Egyptian Foreign Minister on 26/3/2008, Sergey Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister said that the Moscow meeting “will provide collective support for the Palestinian-Israeli talks.” This was emphasized during his meeting with President ‘Abbas in Ramallah in March 2008.

However, the Russian role seems to be limited in its ability to influence the course of events after the outbreak of fighting between Hamas and Israel in Gaza at the end of December. Despite the Russian call for a cessation of fighting, Israel totally disregarded this call.

5. China

Chinese Positions remained in their traditional framework.⁴¹ A delegation from the Chinese Communist Party visited the region, including the WB on an invitation from the PLO. In this visit, the Chinese stressed their support for the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people. In addition to this, during a visit of a Syrian delegation to Beijing in the July 2008, Yang Jiechi, Chinese Foreign Minister, said that his country emphasizes the solution of problems between Israel and its neighbors on the basis of the UN resolutions and the principle of “land for peace”.

Regarding the Chinese position on the crisis and the siege of Gaza, Jiang Yu, the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, said that her country is concerned about the situation in the GS, and hopes that everyone will work to improve the humanitarian condition, hoping that the negotiations between the two sides will reach positive outcomes soon on the basis of two states living side by side peacefully. In March 2008, the Chinese government demanded Israel to stop its military operations in Gaza, especially since it has an impact on the peace negotiations between the parties.

6. Japan

The diplomatic effort of Japan during the year 2008 focused on the project, called “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity”, which we will talk about in the Economic Focus. Tokyo also hosted the Fourth Conference for confidence-building between Palestinians and Israelis on 22-23/10/2008, where Sa’ib ‘Uraiqtat headed the Palestinian delegation, and Meir Shehrit, the Israeli Interior Minister headed the Israeli delegation.⁴²

Othaer than that, the Japanese diplomacy only made some statements that indicate its position on key issues that have occurred during this year. These issues include the Israeli settlement in the WB; in March the Japanese government expressed concern about the Individual Israeli practices in the construction of the controversial Israeli settlements “that might further undermine the momentum for peace, and could never make any constructive contribution to the confidence-building between the concerned parties,” Commenting on the resumption of construction of approximately 750 housing units at a settlement located in the vicinity of Jerusalem⁴³ and the announcement of the construction of 1,300 houses at settlement in the WB in June.⁴⁴

Tokyo had expressed concern about the situation in the GS, following the end of the operation “Hot Winter”.⁴⁵ It expressed concern again following the launching of the Israeli aggression on the GS in December, and called on Israel to maintain self-restraint, and the Palestinians to stop launching rockets. Hirofumi Nakasone, the Japanese Foreign Minister said in a statement that Japan is urging both sides to immediately halt the use of force and achieve a durable cessation of violence.⁴⁶

7. International Organizations

At the level of international organizations, an international meeting was held within the UN on the Palestinian issue on 4/6/2008, with emphasis on continuing negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, along with the emphasis on three points:⁴⁷

- a. Emphasizing the damage caused by the construction of the wall, and the continuation of settlement activity in and around East Jerusalem.
- b. Supporting the efforts of the PA in the area of enforcing security in the WB.
- c. Criticizing the Israeli government for not doing enough to ensure the protection of civilians under occupation.

Regarding the diplomatic effort in the scope of international organizations, specifically the UN. In its session no. 63 on 11/11/2008, the UN General Assembly stressed the Palestinian people’s right to “self-determination”.

The Security Council, made five resolutions on the Middle East during the year 2008;⁴⁸ three of which are primarily concerned with the Lebanese situation, and in one of them there is a reference to the Arab-Israeli conflict and the need to resolve on the basis of international resolutions 242, 338, etc. While the fourth

resolution is on the international crisis with Iran over its nuclear program. The Security Council held a public meeting on 26/9/2008 to discuss the continuation of Israeli settlement. However, the most significant among these resolutions is the resolution no. 1850, which deserves some attention, the resolution states that the Security Council:

Recalling all its previous relevant resolutions, in particular resolutions 242, 338, 1397, and 1515 and the Madrid principles. Reiterating its vision of a region where two democratic States, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace within secure and recognized borders. Welcoming the 9 November 2008 statement from the Quartet and the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Understanding announced at the November 2007 Annapolis Conference, including in relation to implementation of the Performance Based Roadmap to a Permanent Two-State Solution to the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. Noting also that lasting peace can only be based on an enduring commitment to mutual recognition, freedom from violence, incitement, and terror, and the two-State solution, building upon previous agreements and obligations. Noting the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, declares its commitment to the irreversibility of the bilateral negotiations, calls on all States and international organizations to contribute to an atmosphere conducive to negotiations and to support the Palestinian government that is committed to the Quartet principles and the Arab Peace Initiative and respects the commitments of the PLO. The Security Council also welcomes the Quartet's consideration, in consultation with the parties, of an international meeting in Moscow in 2009.

A careful reading of the resolution suggests some conclusions:

- a. The resolution is an implicit declaration of the failure of establishing the promised Palestinian state on the date set by President Bush.
- b. The focus is totally on the cordoning off the resistance, which is reflected in the emphasis on the renunciation of violence and terrorism, implementation of the road map, respect for the obligations of the PLO, and commitment to the Annapolis, which conforms to the statements of Condoleezza Rice that there is no way other than through Annapolis.⁴⁹
- c. Leaving room for the Israeli side to maneuver. The resolution does not state for the acceptance of the Arab initiative, but rather its "importance", which means that the Israeli side sees it as debatable and not acceptable as stated by Peres. The resolution also preconditions consultation between the two parties for the Moscow meeting, which is linked to Israel's hesitation to

participate in this meeting, which means that it is left to them to decide as it deems appropriate.

- d. The resolution clearly and repeatedly noted all elements of the strangulating the resistance, while not referring to the idea of withdrawal from the occupied territories, neither to deem the settlement as an illegal activity.
- e. The resolution suggests unequivocally that any future Palestinian government is obliged to follow a certain categorically defined foreign policy, which means that the Palestinian people's choice of political orientations is tightened to the extent. Any government that does not commit itself to these principles would be unacceptable even if it came through a democratic way.
- f. Such resolution, and the consent of the Arab parties to it shows how weak they are, their declining political performance, their low ceiling, even in comparison with the previous readings of the UN.

These orientations define the features of the international map, which explain the background of launching the Israeli attack at the end of December on the GS, along with some considerations that can be summarized as follows:⁵⁰

- a. Termination of armed resistance in the occupied territories.
- b. Strengthening the PA in a way that allows it to continue negotiation, to make more concessions, especially after losing the tools of pressure represented in the armed resistance.
- c. Restore the prestige of the Israeli army, after the deterrent power in Lebanon was shaken after the war of July 2006.
- d. Intensification of US and the Western efforts of political, economic and security pressure on the Arab (as well as Muslim and foreign) countries, which have supported the resistance in the GS during and in the aftermath of the aggression, on the one hand, and on the other rewarding the governments that have colluded with them.

Second: Economic Focus

Following the Paris Conference in late 2007, and after the meeting of the Ad-Hoc Liaison Committee in London, 2/5/2008, the international aid was supposed to begin flowing to the PA, but Salam Fayyad, the Authority Prime

Minister said in late October 2008, that he was concerned about the suspension of donor aid to the Palestinian people, although the US has provided more than \$700 million to the PA during 2008, which is \$200 million more than its commitments.⁵¹

Mohammad Shtayyeh, the president of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR) stated that the international aid for the year 2008 totaled \$1.2 billion, out of \$7.7 billion that was donated by donor countries from 2008-2010.⁵²

The State Department's Bureau of International Information Programs stated that the US government released hundreds of millions of dollars, and transferred them to the WB "to boost the economy" on the occasion of Palestine Investment Conference in Bethlehem in May 2008, focusing on the sectors of housing and information technology. The USA Agency for International Development (USAID) promised to build youth centres. Robert M. Kimmitt, the USA Deputy Secretary of the Treasury and the president of the American delegation to the Conference, emphasized the President Bush's support for promoting investments in the WB, saying that the USA will continue to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza through the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), at the same time avoiding direct contact with the Hamas government, which is considered by the US government as a movement that adopts terrorism.⁵³

A study of international aid for the Palestinians, particularly the US aid, indicates to the permanent presence of the security aid. This study shows that the main drives behind providing the US aid are the security factors in the first place, then the economic factors. This is confirmed by the fact that the international community pledged at the Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law in June 2008 to provide \$242 million to enhance the security forces and the judicial system.⁵⁴

At the European level, the European countries have committed themselves, at the end of 2007, to provide aid as follows:⁵⁵

Table 1/5: European Financial Pledges to the PA (\$ million)

Donor	Amount	Period
European Union	631	2008
France	300	2008-2010
Germany	287	2008-2010
Sweden	300	2008-2010
USA	550	2008
UK	489	2008-2010
Spain	360	2008-2010
Canada	300	2008-2012
Australia	45	2008

The Europeans have adopted a mechanism (known as Mécanisme Palestino-Européen de Gestion de l'Aide Socio-Economique) or PEGASE; to provide aid to the PA starting from February 2008. This plan is based on facilitating assistance to support the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP) during the period from 2008-2010. It was presented to the Paris donor conference; it includes a consistent and unwavering flow of aid. Accordingly, it was supposed that the Europeans would pay 440 million euros in 2008 (about \$631 million) out of 664 million euros (about \$952 million) that the EU has pledged.

It was expected that Tony Blair, Special Envoy of the Quartet, would visit Gaza in July, but he changed his mind at the last moment on the pretext that there is a risk to his life, according to the Israelis.⁵⁶

However, the volume and continuity of the European aid was influenced by the inter-Palestinian conflict. During 2008, the British aid reached about 50 million pounds sterling (approximately \$92.5 million). The British Prime Minister said during a meeting with 'Abbas in July 2008 that the UK will provide "an economic road map for peace", citing Northern Ireland as a place where prosperity had discouraged violence.⁵⁷

On the other hand, it is expected that the global financial crisis will be reflected on the volume of international aid to poor countries, which may affect the volume of international aid to the Palestinian community negatively. This means that the international community, which has not fulfilled its pledges during the previous conferences to help the Palestinians, may not be able to meet the new commitments because of the current financial crisis.

From another economic perspective, it is necessary to review the Japanese project entitled the “Corridor of Peace and Prosperity” in 2008, especially since this project is a major effort by the Japanese diplomacy on the Palestinian issue. Japan hosted The Third Ministerial-Level Meeting of the Four-Party Consultative Unit for the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” (Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Japan) in July 2008, where Masahiko Komura, the Japanese minister of Foreign Affairs said that his country sees that stability in the Middle East is vital to the world peace, and that corridor for peace and prosperity is vital for peace in the Middle East. He added that the parties shared common views on the followings:⁵⁸

1. Emphasis on the start of the Agro-Industrial Park in Area A in Jericho, with the possible extension to adjacent Area in the future.
2. The feasibility study will be completed in November 2008, and projects to develop the basic infrastructure will move into the implementation stage as early as possible in 2009.

During the regular meetings of the parties of the project in 2008, and at the third and fourth meetings, from 31/3/2008 to 1/4/2008, they agreed as follows:

1. Emphasis on the encouraging regional cooperation, and the participation of public and private sectors.
2. Discussing possible access routes from the project site to Jordan.
3. Supporting the Four-Party Agricultural Technical Cooperation.
4. Japan’s contributions:
 - a. The rehabilitation of agricultural wells and irrigation systems.
 - b. Provide technical assistance in the agricultural field.
 - c. The rehabilitation of Jericho-Taybeh road.

The joint Israeli-Japanese issued a statement on 27/2/2008 following the visit of Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, to Japan. The statement primarily emphasized the importance of the Japanese initiative of the Corridor project.

It is clear that the dominant idea for the Japanese side is to expand the common interests between the conflicting parties, which will result in the long run on weakening the conflict of interests between them, i.e. converting the relations between the parties, gradually, from a zero-sum to a non-zero-sum relationship, according to the descriptions of the international relations literature.

Furthermore, Russia has sent humanitarian aid to Gaza in September 2008, which was handed over to the United Nations Mission in the GS. Russia also delivered 25 armored cars to the PA though not equipped with guns.⁵⁹

On the Chinese side, the Chinese government announced, in October 2008, that it would fund the construction of The Palestinian Ministry of Foreign Affairs building, and to be implemented through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).⁶⁰ China also has received, during the year 2008, about 150 Palestinian trainees in some different sectors.

Regarding the International organizations, particularly the United Nations, The UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) in its August report expressed concern for the inadequate protection afforded Palestinian children, pointing out the Palestinian children who were shot to death, by the Israeli Border Police.⁶¹ This issue was emphasized again in the meeting of the UN Committee for the Protection of Civilian Persons, in the period from 12-18/11/2008.

In the field of humanitarian assistance, it is estimated that UN assistance during the year 2008 was about \$312.7 million.⁶² Statements issued from the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) and from the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, explicitly refers to Israeli refusal of allowing aid in, and that the relief agency facing a deep and imminent financial crisis.

These are the positions which have been expressed by Ban Ki-moon, the UN Secretary-General, during November, however, Ban Ki-moon has also condemned the launching missile attacks on Israeli civilian targets.⁶³ On the other hand, he stated that “the occupation of the 1967 territories must come to an end.”

The UN and relief agencies estimate that the Palestinians needed \$462 million of emergency aid in 2008, and they only received 70% of it. On the other hand, in a speech in Vienna in October 2008, the Commissioner-General of UNRWA called on the international community to allocate \$282 million for the reconstruction of Nahr al-Bared camp in Lebanon, pointing out that the amounts collected for this purpose is \$57.8 million, of which five million was received from The OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID), and 91% of the amount was collected through voluntary contributions from Western countries.⁶⁴

A report of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) called on the need to break the isolation of the Palestinian economy,

to lift restrictions on freedom of movement in the WB and GS, and to allow access to domestic and foreign markets.⁶⁵

When Richard A. Falk, the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, attempted to go to the occupied territories, the Israeli authorities barred him from entering, which is considered “regrettable”, by the UN as Ban Ki-Moon said.⁶⁶

Third: International Public Opinion

It is mentioned in previous reports that the image of Israel and the USA is clearly negative to the international public opinion. This issue is reflected during the year 2008 by some indicators, including:

1. International Popular Sympathy with the GS Encountering the Siege

During the period from 22/8/2008 till 29/10/2008, four ships carrying delegations of lawyers, politicians and human rights activists arrived to the GS, in order to exert political pressure to lift the siege. The delegations included 13 European MP and Clare Short; the former British Secretary of State for International Development.

The Scottish MP, Pauline McNeill, a member of the European campaign to break the siege said that the goal of the campaign is to form political pressure on Israel. The European campaign set up a week for Gaza, in one hundred European universities in February 2009.⁶⁷ The indicators showed popular sympathy manifested in large demonstrations in several European countries; to condemn the Israeli aggression on Gaza by the end of December.

2. Studies of International Public Opinion

A study was conducted by the World Public Opinion which is a project managed by Program on International Policy Attitudes at the University of Maryland on the Arab-Israeli conflict during the year 2008 on citizens of 18 countries constitute the total 59% of the world population (USA, China, India, Russia, UK, France, Spain, Mexico, Nigeria, Thailand, South Korea, Peru, Azerbaijan, Indonesia, Turkey, Ukraine, Iran, and Egypt). The study indicated the following results:⁶⁸

- 58% say that their country should not take either side of the conflict.
- 54% say that Israel it is not doing its part well.
- 35% of Indians regard Israel positively.
- 25% of Indians regard Israel negatively.
- 75% of Americans critical of Palestinian efforts.
- 74% of South Koreans said that the Palestinians are not doing their part well.
- 59% of all countries rate US efforts poorly.
- 67% favor the UN Security Council offering -if Israel and the Palestinians come to a peace agreement- to send a peacekeeping force to enforce the agreement.

The study indicates the disparity in the attitude towards the Palestinians and Israelis as follows:⁶⁹

Table 2/5: WorldPublicOpinion.org Poll of Favoring the Palestinian or the Israeli Side in Some of the World Countries

Country	Palestinians' Side %	Israel's Side %
India	23	24
China	10	2
South Korea	5	10
Russia	7	7
Spain	12	7
Ukraine	4	4
UK	8	2
France	6	4
USA	3	21
Peru	4	4
Mexico	4	3

Another study was conducted by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), during the period from 31/10/2007 till 25/1/2008, and included 17,457 people from 34 countries. The study points out that view towards Israel and the USA is generally characterized by decline, which can be seen from the following results:⁷⁰

Table 3/5: The BBC Poll for Mainly Positive Views of United States’ Influence

Year	Mainly Positive Views of the USA %
2005	38
2006	32
2007	28
2008	32

The survey also shows growing negative views of Israel’s in the USA, where the rate was 33% in 2007, and rose to 39% in 2008.

3. General Trends

It is clear that the major world powers are generally interested in some dimensions of its foreign policy towards the Palestinian issue:

- a. Priority of peace to the withdrawal from the occupied territories, that is, they are interested in the Israeli security more than the ending of occupation. Despite the huge number of various statements (from the Quartet or the major countries individually), the issue of “terror” and Israel’s security is a common denominator in all statements, however varied the methods of expression among countries. On the other hand, the issue of the Israeli withdrawal is not clearly mentioned nor it is being assured, despite the reference to the international resolutions no. 242, 338, etc.

The non-recurrence of the term “withdrawal” of Israel from the occupied territories, and vaguely rendering it with formulas that are subject to interpretation, is a matter of concern indicating the tacit acceptance by these major countries of changes in the political map of the border responding to Israeli conditions and the reality imposed by the Israelis.

Expressions such as “viable state”, or “geographically contiguous state”, or “supporting whatever agreed by the negotiators”, or “concern over the continuation of settlement activity”, etc, refer to an attempt to obscure the concept of withdrawal from the occupied territories turning it into a kind of contiguous arrangement between Israel and Palestine.

We believe that the next negotiation will focus on the priority Israeli security other than the withdrawal from the occupied territories. When security

according to the Israeli view is achieved, the Arab side would be abandoning its available means of pressure; making Israel free from the pressure to withdraw in such a way acceptable to the Palestinian side.

- b. All statements from the major countries cite the term “call for settlement freezing”, and not to “remove all the settlements”, which suggests orientation to tame the international and regional environment to deal with existing settlements as a matter of fact, and the need to look beyond this fact.
- c. Diplomacy of promises: It is clear that during the year 2008 (and the end of 2007), the Palestinians were promised a Palestinian state before the end of the year 2008, and were promised more than seven billion dollars aid. It is clear that none of these two promises were achieved, even minimally. The state has not been established there is even nothing to suggest its establishment in the near future. The promised funds were not received; the international financial crisis could push the Palestinian economic situation further to the point of suffocation.
- d. International consensus on the continued siege of the resistance by all diplomatic, economic, and military means. The efforts of the major powers, particularly the USA, the major European countries, and the UN to put pressure on the countries of the region for the realignment around this stance, which is reflected in the attitudes of international and Arab towards the Israeli attack at the end of the year 2008.

Fourth: The Prospects for the Year 2009

The battle of Gaza, at the end of the year 2008, imposed itself on the international diplomatic activity, and the attempts to resolve the crisis. It is clear that the international effort has begun on the basis of the following guidelines:

1. Working to end the fighting after giving adequate opportunity for the Israeli aggression to achieve the Israeli targets adequately, in particular the commitment to stop the rockets from Gaza towards Israeli settlements, and banning the entry of weapons into the GS.
2. Attempt to emphasize the diplomatic isolation of Hamas, and to highlight the diplomat role of the PA, and the attempt to gradually returning it to Gaza,

particularly through the exploitation of the 2005 Convention for the Rafah Crossing, which we above mentioned.

3. Attempt to introduce the idea of an international buffer force in the GS, whose task is to prevent the resistance from the exercising its activities, or creating international arrangements to control the borders of Gaza.
4. Organizing the efforts of reconstruction of the GS, especially in financial terms. The Western countries, in particular, seek to expand the role of the PA in this area at the expense of the Gaza Government.

Attention was attracted mainly by the new US administration led by Obama, an administration that need first six months of the year to explore the views of the parties in the Middle East and other international forces; while Israel would continue the settlement activity, and the Arab statements would increase calling for “giving Obama an adequate opportunity.”

In the light of these trends, 2008 passed in, the year 2009 came witnessing some international efforts to address the Israeli aggression on Gaza, which ended with the Israeli unilateral declaration of cessation of hostilities after nine days of the release of Security Council resolution calling for an immediate cease-fire (followed by another resolution of the UN General Assembly stressing the immediate cease-fire). Thus, we have to record the following preliminary observations on the first three weeks of the year 2009:⁷¹

1. The USA abstained from voting on the Security Council resolution that was released on 9/1/2009 with the consent of 14 countries. This implicitly suggests the possibility of the continuation of the Israeli military operation until the achievement of its targets under the tacit US approval. Abstaining rather than using veto was an attempt to absorb the Arab project presented to the Security Council regarding the cease-fire, which happened indeed when the Arab retracted their project.
2. The EU attempted to intervene in the diplomatic efforts to rein in the conflict. This was represented in three indicators:
 - a. The visits of Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, to the region, which began on January 5th, in order to create arrangements for the cease-fire.
 - b. Sending the Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg by the EU.
 - c. A consultation conference with Israeli Prime Minister attended by

leaders of the EU major States (the British Prime Minister, the German Chancellor, the French President, the Italian Prime Minister, together with Tony Blair; Special Envoy of the Quartet).

There are some observations on the European effort in this domain:

- a. The European statements in all of these efforts focused on emphasizing the right of Israel to defend itself, provided that it does not allow actions that largely affect civilians according to the Czech Minister, as the EU representative. The formulation of the statement indicates an attempt to understand the Israeli military operation, with reference to the fact that Israel should not excessively use force; a trend completely dominated the European statements from the beginning of the crisis.
- b. The above mentioned consultative conference that was attended by the most prominent European leaders, involved some kind of sympathy and moral support for Israel; in light of the growing popular demonstrations in the world and in Europe specifically, and in the light of severing relations by Latin American countries (Venezuela and Bolivia), the sharp Brazilian criticism, and the increasing number of legal organizations and bodies and intellectual figures (some of which are Nobel laureates) calling for the prosecution of Israeli leaders as war criminals.
- c. Europe announced that it would urgently send humanitarian assistance of about 4.2 million euro (approximately \$5.56 million), but linked this by the need to cooperate with the PA.

In observing the international interactions to the aggression on Gaza, the picture seems as follows:

1. It is noted that the cease-fire declaration by Israel was two days ahead of Obama's receiving of his official duties, which means an investment of position of Bush administration until the last moment, on the one hand, and an attempt to create a certain reality for Obama's administration in which it will be captive, on the other hand. This was reinforced by the security Memorandum of Understanding between the USA and Israel (and signed by the two Foreign Ministers Condoleezza Rice and Tzipi Livni, respectively), which is based on organizing international effort to control "arms smuggling" to Gaza through international cooperation which includes the North Atlantic

Treaty in the majority of sea lanes that lead to the GS. In his first statements, Obama noted this agreement, and the need to activate it, after he announced the appointment of George Mitchell as the US envoy for the Middle East.

2. It is noted that first Obama's statements were based on the same grounds of Bush's policy, regarding the need for Hamas' recognition of Israel, and stop the launching of rockets (which implies the cessation of armed resistance).
3. The weakness of international reactions towards the siege of the GS, and the military aggression against it, indicates that Israel will invest in the major countries' preoccupation, in particular, with their economic issues, and the lack of concern over possibility that the Middle East crisis would increase the oil prices in light of the collapse of such prices at least in the foreseeable future.

This Israeli investment will take the form of: continuous pressure on the resistance movements, expansion of settlements, and the expansion of the PA influence in the security domain. That will be affected by the final adoption of reinforcing the above mentioned European-Israeli relations in 2009, the possibility of initiating US-Iranian negotiations, a possible return in a later stage to the indirect negotiation between Syria and Israel, and more Arab states opening up to Israel through back roads, despite the flow of verbal statements that accompanied the recent Israeli military aggression on Gaza.

4. It is noted that the diplomatic efforts of both China and Russia during the crisis were weak (each sent an envoy, and the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov has called for an immediate cease-fire). They even voted in favor of the previously-mentioned Security Council resolution.

It seems that the lackluster performance of the PA, the Palestinian division, and the Arab sharp differences, added more difficulty to the two countries' ability of movement, as China continues the policy of not indulging in sharp conflicts, while Russia seems to be concerned over the gas crisis with Ukraine and Europe.

To Sum it up, it seems that the international pressure on the Palestinian resistance will continue according to three central determinants:

1. Constant pressure on the Palestinian resistance to recognize Israel by investing the aid to the GS, pressure to engage the PA actively in the Gazan

affairs, turning a blind eye to the continuation of some military Israeli pressures on Gaza, and the tampering with opening the crossings linking it to certain political conditions.

2. Attempting to pressure to activate the Arab initiative firstly, then working to modify some of its paragraphs to be commensurate with the Israeli orientation. It seems that the French role in this regard will increase.
3. Blocking all efforts in all international forums to prevent any attempt to bring Israeli officials to trial before the international criminal tribunals.

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This Report

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008 is the fourth in a series of annual resourceful scientific studies. This Report aims at monitoring the Palestinian issue through an informative and analytical approach. The Report covers the Palestinian internal political situation, the Israeli scene and the Israeli-Palestinian relations. It focuses on the Arab, Islamic, and International stances towards the Palestinian issue, in addition to the issues concerning the Land and holy sites. The Report also analyzes the Palestinian demographic and economic indicators. Hence, it provides a comprehensive meticulous reading of the current situation.

This Report is distinguished for its updated information till the end of 2008 and for its outstanding team of academics and experts.

Despite the heat and sensitivity of the issues discussed, the Report did its best endeavors to be professional, scientific and objective. Thus, this Report is an unequivocal addition to the area of the Palestinian studies.

The Palestinian Strategic Report 2008



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