

The Palestinian Strategic Report
2014 – 2015
Ch.4



The Palestinian Issue and the Muslim World

2014 – 2015



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Introduction

The Arab revolutions and counter-revolutions in the region, and the subsequent state of flux and instability, had a profound impact on the levels of interest and support in the Muslim world for the Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015. Muslim countries, particularly Turkey, were deeply preoccupied with the reconfiguration of the regional landscape.

Internal Turkish issues were also a burden, where elections forced the ruling party to give priority to domestic issues, particularly mounting security tensions. For its part, Iran, despite its repeated affirmations in 2014 and 2015 regarding its support of the Palestinian resistance, was occupied with the Syrian issue, which took a significant amount of its potential and resources. Added to this was negotiations over Iran's nuclear program with Western powers, and its fluctuating relations with Hamas.

In this chapter we will analyse the most prominent roles played by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) during the years 2014–2015. We will also review the stances and roles of Turkey and Iran vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, public and official action in Malaysia and Pakistan, and the economic relations maintained by some Muslim countries with Israel.

First: Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)

Despite the state of weakness and disunity in the Muslim world, and the preoccupation of most its countries with their local issues, the Palestinian issue in 2014–2015 remained a focus of attention in the Muslim world. This was most notable during the Israeli assault on GS in the summer of 2014 and repeated attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque with attempts to divide it between Muslims and Jews. Despite the intensity of the war launched by Israel over more than 50 days, the efforts made by the OIC were not commensurate with the extent of the catastrophe visited upon GS. Furthermore, it was not the efforts of the OIC that put a halt to the

¹ This study is the approved English translation of chapter four of *The Palestinian Strategic Report 2014–2015*, edited by Dr. Mohsen Moh'd Saleh. It is an analytical study of the impact of changes in the Muslim on the Palestinian issue in 2014–2015. The Arabic version of this Report was released in 2016, and the draft of this chapter was written by Dr. Said al-Haj, Dr. Talal 'Atrisi and Wael Sa'ad.

division scheme for *al-Aqsa* Mosque, but the efforts of the Palestinian youths and their so-called *Intifadah of Knives* in late 2015, which is still ongoing at the time of writing.

The OIC's condemnations, denunciations, and praise continued, but such a policy did not have a tangible effect on the Palestinian issue. Nor did it appear that the OIC, as a representative of its member states, could bypass the latter's respective foreign policies or their political ceilings vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue. They support negotiations with Israel for the establishment of a Palestinian state along the borders prior to the 1967 war. This was reflected in the speeches of the OIC Secretary General Iyad Madani. In his speech welcoming al-Shati' Agreement signed on 23/4/2014, in which Hamas and Fatah agreed to form a National Consensus Government, he said that all the efforts for restoring legitimate Palestinian rights and establishing an independent state along the borders of 1967 with its capital in Jerusalem must be based on having a unified Palestinian polity with unified visions, policies, and goals. Here, we must observe that we have not seen serious efforts by the OIC to push forward Palestinian reconciliation, which continues to stall at the time of writing.

In May 2014 the OIC called on Muslims to go to Jerusalem and pray at *al-Aqsa* Mosque,² contradicting an edict issued by the International Union of Muslim Scholars. It explained the pros and cons based on Shariah law, and then stated that visiting Jerusalem under the brutal Israeli occupation, which seeks to eliminate all Islamic and Christian features and render Jerusalem its eternal capital, and its desperate attempts for full political, economic, cultural, and social normalization, entail massive harm and dire consequences. It stated that Muslims must not take part in this crime, but must prepare to liberate *al-Aqsa* Mosque by all possible means.³

The OIC went further than calling for visiting Jerusalem, and chose Jerusalem as the capital of Islamic tourism in 2016, in the context of what it considered support for the city of Jerusalem.⁴ However, the OIC did not specify the standards that would help prevent turning visits to Jerusalem into acts of normalization. The OIC call was consistent with calls made by the PA and PLO leaderships to commit to the Oslo Accords with Israel.

² *Al Bayan* newspaper, Dubai, 27/5/2014.

³ *Al-Watan* newspaper, Doha, 27/7/2014.

⁴ Palestine News and Information Agency (WAFA), 5/6/2014, <http://www.wafa.ps/arabic/index.php?action=detail&id=175867>



The OIC Secretary General Iyad Madani visited Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque in January 2015. In a statement he made upon entering the mosque, he said: “This is a right that no occupation authority must deny us, no matter what obstacles, violations, pitfalls, or difficulties it may place before us. This is a right we must reassert by exercising it, namely, by coming here to visit and pray in *al-Aqsa* Mosque.”⁵

As for the repeated Israeli assaults on the Palestinian people and their Muslim and Christian holy sites, the OIC continued issuing condemnations in 2014 and 2015. Iyad Madani reaffirmed support for the Palestinian people, in his address delivered at the extraordinary session of the OIC ministerial-level Executive Committee, held on 10/7/2014, to discuss the developments of the Israeli aggression on GS. Madani also called for exposing the Israeli government as a “racist government” pursuant to the international definition of the term, which would entail international sanctions against this government. Madani also called on the Palestinian government to sign up to join the ICC, to make it possible to prosecute Israeli politicians involved in war crimes, collective punishment, and human rights violations in the Palestinian territories.⁶

In summary, in 2014–2015, the OIC did not break the previous decades-long patterns of its activity concerning the Palestinian issue, which has not deviated from the policies of its member states. This meant that the OIC’s actions vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue was below the level needed to support the rights of the Palestinian people, and the weight of the organization itself as a representative of Muslim countries. It does not seem that the OIC’s work on the Palestinian issue in the near future can be elevated to the desired level, unless fundamental changes in the strategic policies of its influential member states take place.

Second: Turkey

The period 2014–2015 saw a decline in the Turkish presence in the Palestinian issue for a number of reasons: Most notably, regional transformations following the demise of the first wave of the Arab Spring revolutions and the victory of the counter-revolution, and the implications this had on various countries.

⁵ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Ramallah, 6/1/2015.

⁶ Site of Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), http://www.oic-oci.org/oicv2/m/ar/topic/?t_id=9214&t_ref=3686&lan=

Furthermore, Turkey's foreign policy failed to induce significant gains in regional issues, notably in Syria, which prompted calls for a reassessment of Turkish policy. Turkey then became preoccupied with its internal issues including elections, and the military escalation with the Kurdistan Workers' Party (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê*—PKK), all as the Palestinian issue dropped in importance regionally and internationally behind other issues. Turkey also lost the ability to influence other players amid estrangement with Cairo and Tel Aviv, not to mention the crisis with Russia after Turkey shot down a Russian jet, which curtailed Turkey's role in Syria.

Therefore, despite Turkey maintaining the general features of its policy towards the Palestinian issue and Palestinian factions, the changes mentioned above prevented Ankara from being able to have much influence in 2014–2015 with regard to the Palestinian issue. This also altered, in various ways, Turkish behaviour, which was clear during the GS assault in 2014 and then during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in late 2015, with Turkish support and influence being markedly reduced when compared to the GS assault in 2012.

Relations with the Palestinian Side

Turkish relations with the PLO and PA leadership on one hand, and Hamas on the other, continued as before. Turkey dealt officially with the PLO, PA, President Mahmud 'Abbas and the Palestinian embassy in Ankara, and it also dealt with Hamas as an elected political entity and one of the most important actors in Palestine.

Official Turkish-Palestinian relations in 2014–2015 saw continued growth and cooperation at the international level, based on the significant Turkish role regarding the accession of Palestine to the UN as an observer, non-member state. In June 2014, the then Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan congratulated President Mahmud 'Abbas on the consensus government, stressing the importance of unity in the Palestinian ranks.⁷ In July 2014, 'Abbas visited Turkey during the Israeli assault on GS, meeting with then-President Abdullah Gül, who called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and urgent aid to the Strip.⁸ 'Abbas also met with Erdoğan and Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu. 'Abbas

⁷ Site of Turkish Radio and Television Corporation (TRT), 5/6/2014, <http://www.trt.net.tr/arabic> (in Arabic)

⁸ Site of Sky News Arabia, 14/7/2014, <http://www.skynewsarabia.com/web/home>



visited Ankara in January 2015, and was the first visitor Erdoğan received as president-elect. The reception ceremony was grandiose. During the press conference Erdoğan criticized Netanyahu's participation in a march in Paris against terrorism, urging the Israeli prime minister to "give an account for the children, women you massacred," adding, "How can you see this individual, who carries out state terrorism by massacring 2,500 people in Gaza, waving his hand?"⁹

Turkey also had an interest in the ceremony of raising the Palestinian flag at the UN in September 2015. Erdoğan telephoned his Palestinian counterpart to congratulate him on the achievement, after sending then-Prime Minister Davutoğlu himself to participate in the flag-raising ceremony. He said that the raising of the Palestinian flag represented served as upholding of the flag of human dignity, pride, freedom and honour, adding that he prays to God that one day the Palestinian flag would be flying over the city of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* mosque.¹⁰

For his part, Khalid Mish'al, head of Hamas's political bureau, visited Turkey several times, albeit with less fanfare than his visits in previous years. Some of these visits took place away from the media or were not announced in advance. The decreased attention may be attributed to the regional shifts explained earlier, as well as Western pressures prompted by Israeli accusations against Ankara of aiding and abetting terrorists.¹¹ One indication of this, for example, was the delay in the visit of Mish'al to Ankara to congratulate Erdoğan on winning the presidential elections.

Mish'al visited Turkey in February 2014 and again in December 2014, to participate in the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP) Conference in the city of Konya. Mish'al delivered a speech, saying that a strong Konya and a strong Turkey mean a strong Palestine and a strong Jerusalem. A democratic, stable, and developed Turkey is a source of strength for all Muslims, he said.¹² Mish'al met with both Erdoğan and Davutoğlu in August 2015 in a private visit. In September, he attended the fifth AKP regular congress in Ankara, meeting with Erdoğan on its side-lines, without making statements.¹³

⁹ *Hürriyet* newspaper, Turkey, 13/1/2015, <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkish-president-erdogan-blasts-netanyahu-for-daring-to-attend-paris-rally-.aspx?pageID=238&nID=76860&NewsCatID=359>

¹⁰ Site of Akhbar Turkiya, 1/10/2015, <http://akhbarturkiya.com/>

¹¹ Sama News Agency, 31/12/2014.

¹² Site of Turk Press, 27/12/2014, <http://www.turkpress.co/>

¹³ Turk Press, 14/9/2015.

Mish'al visited Turkey in December 2015 in a visit that was not arranged in advance, following Israeli press reports that claimed an agreement was imminent between Israel and Turkey for normalizing relations. Nothing was leaked about the visit, but Turkish officials were keen afterwards to say that any détente with Tel Aviv would not be at the expense of the Palestinians, and even said the latter would have to first agree to the terms of the agreement.¹⁴

Phone contacts continued between the Turkish and Palestinian sides, particularly those that have a protocol aspect such as for congratulating Erdoğan for his electoral victory, AKP's success in the general election in June and in the second round, in addition to contacts over certain events such as the ones between Erdoğan and Davutoğlu on one hand, and 'Abbas and Mish'al on the other, to condemn Israeli attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the immolation of the Dawabsheh family.

The 2014 Assault

Events in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories deteriorated rapidly after settlers burned alive the Palestinian child Muhammad Abu Khudair, as part of several escalations leading up to direct confrontations, which began on 8/7/2014, lasting for more than 50 days. Israel dubbed the ensuing war Operation Protective Edge, while Hamas dubbed it Operation the Eaten Straw (*al- 'Asf al-Ma'kul*).

Despite the short length of time that elapsed between the 2012 and 2014 wars, Turkish action and influence underwent significant changes, albeit not in the levels of its interest and interaction, because of the regional shifts mentioned earlier. Of particular importance, however, was the military coup in Egypt that impacted two key aspects: the hostility towards GS and the Palestinian resistance compared to the period under President Muhammad Morsi; and the deterioration of relations with Turkey, meaning that the latter soon lost its ability to engage and influence events, coupled with Ankara's deteriorating relations with Tel Aviv. Thus, Turkey could not exert pressure towards achieving a rapid ceasefire, as it had done during the 2012 war, and was unable to put forward a Turkish initiative (or Turkish-Qatari) one for a ceasefire against the Egyptian one, which was strongly weighted in favor of Israel.

¹⁴ Site of Aljazeera.net, 21/12/2015.



Turkey, at the official and popular levels, followed the war on a daily basis. Official reactions were marked by a high political ceiling. Erdoğan said he would not remain silent about what was happening in GS, criticizing the West's defense of Israel, the world's silence, and accusing Israel of being a "terrorist state."¹⁵ While statements were issued condemning the Israeli assault by Turkish opposition parties,¹⁶ then-Foreign Minister Davutoğlu led an active political campaign in cooperation and coordination with Qatar, covering the United Nations and the United States, to try to find a formula for a ceasefire.¹⁷

In tune with this political position, the Turkish government declared a three-day mourning period for those killed in the Israeli assault.¹⁸ The Turkish government called for a donation campaign for the benefit of the Palestinians, supervised by the Presidency of Religious Affairs.¹⁹ A memo circulated by the government in the Turkish official gazette said the Republic of Turkey would provide all forms of support and assistance to the brotherly and friendly people of Palestine, in light of the demands of the population. The campaign raised nearly \$21 million²⁰, according to a statement by the Deputy Prime Minister Emrullah Isler.

At the grassroots level, dozens of protests were held in Turkish cities, condemning the aggression, especially in front of the Israeli diplomatic missions in Ankara and Istanbul. Up to 40 Turkish television channels worked together to broadcast live programs in solidarity with GS.²¹

Turkey delivered batches of aid to Gaza, beginning on 13/8/2014, sending 68.5 tons (68,500 kg) of humanitarian aid. A Turkish medical delegation visited GS to treat patients, and Turkey hosted hundreds of wounded Palestinians for treatment through an aerial corridor established with GS.²² Ankara also sought to send a floating plant to generate electricity to GS, but this was met with Israeli rejection. Turkey then pledged \$200 million to contribute to the GS reconstruction during

¹⁵ *Al-Quds al-Arabi* newspaper, London, 25/7/2014.

¹⁶ Site of Turkey Post, 17/7/2014, <http://www.turkey-post.net>

¹⁷ *Raialyoum* newspaper, London, 25/7/2014.

¹⁸ Turkey Post, 22/7/2014.

¹⁹ Site of The Palestinian Information Center (PIC), 18/8/2015.

²⁰ US Dollar.

²¹ Site of Middle East Monitor, 7/8/2014, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/>

²² Aljazeera.net, 20/9/2014.

the Cairo Conference,²³ in addition to donations pledged by the Turkish Red Crescent to all war orphans.

The Jerusalem *Intifadah*

Following Israeli attempts to expedite its plans for the temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and subsequent assaults on female worshippers camped in the mosque, its crackdown on Palestinian protesters, events in Jerusalem and WB steadily escalated as part of what was later called the Jerusalem *Intifadah*. The Turkish interaction with the *Intifadah* differed radically from the interaction with the assault on GS in the previous year, despite the fact that *al-Aqsa* Mosque and Jerusalem have represented, along with the humanitarian situation in GS, two main foundations of Turkish policy on Palestine over the past few years.

One of the key reasons for this was the large difference between the sight of the Israeli bombardment killing hundreds in GS, and the near-daily peaceful confrontations between Palestinian youths and occupation forces. The Turkish public were extremely moved by the scenes of carnage and destruction in GS, and had a less emotional reaction to what was happening in WB and Jerusalem. Another reason was the preoccupation of the Turkish street and Turkish decision-makers with the country's internal situation. The *Intifadah* began during the transitional period in Turkey, following the elections in June, in which the AKP lost its parliamentary majority. As a result, no stable government was formed, and economic uncertainty followed, and then a wave of unrest and military confrontations with the PKK.

At the official level, Turkish President Erdoğan condemned Israel's storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque in phone calls with both 'Abbas and Mish'al.²⁴ He said in a subsequent press conference that Israel's assaults was barbaric and that necessary steps should be taken at the international level, otherwise reactions to the assault would not be confined to Palestine.²⁵ Prime Minister Davutoğlu also condemned the "illegal practices" of the Israeli security forces against Palestinian civilians,²⁶ and the Turkish Foreign Ministry issued a strongly worded statement that condemned Israel's use of excessive force in WB and Jerusalem.²⁷

²³ Site of British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), 12/10/2014.

²⁴ Site of Daily Sabah, 14/9/2014, <http://www.dailysabah.com/arabic> (in Arabic)

²⁵ Site of Sahafaty, 6/11/2014, <http://sahafaty.net>, citing site of Felesteen Online.

²⁶ Turk Press, 27/9/2014.

²⁷ TRT, 13/10/2015.



President Erdoğan met with Palestinian leaders during the Jerusalem *Intifadah* and the previous attacks carried out by the occupation forces on worshipers at *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The most important of these visits were by former Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and Palestine ‘Ikrima Sabri, and Ra’id Salah, the head of the Islamic movement in the 1948 occupied territories.²⁸ As for trade unions, grassroots, and civil society, there were few mass demonstrations in Turkish cities, and actions were limited to symbolic activities that were not commensurate with the seriousness of the event.

Turkish-Palestinian communication through Turkish civil society groups continued as usual. The President of Turkish Religious Affairs, Mehmet Görmez, visited WB in May 2015, and delivered the Friday sermon at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, where he was welcomed warmly by Palestinians. Religious Affairs also announced the re-introduction of the Ottoman system with regard to *Umrah* (minor pilgrimage) trips, whereby the convoys of pilgrims would stop first in Jerusalem before heading to Mecca.²⁹ In addition, Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*—TİKA) provided grants to premier league football clubs in GS, worth \$180 thousand.³⁰

Turkish humanitarian aid and relief continued at roughly the same pace as during previous years, with some decline attributed to the higher priority occupied by the Syrian crisis for various aid groups. The Turkish charity The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (*İnsani Yardım Vakfı*—IHH) distributed Eid clothes to a thousand orphans in GS. The Turkish Red Crescent (*Türk Kızılayı*) organized a mass *Iftar* (breaking the fast after sunset) for 200 orphans in the Strip. The Turkish Religious Endowment (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı) distributed Ramadan care packages to the poor, and also provided scholarships to forty students from GS. Late in the year, IHH and the Qatari Sheikh Thani Ibn Abdullah for Humanitarian Services (Raf) distributed food parcels to thousands of families in the Strip.³¹

Relations with Israel

There were few notable developments in the official bilateral relationship between Ankara and Tel Aviv in 2014–2015. The official diplomatic estrangement

²⁸ Site of Horria Post, 18/9/2015, <http://horriapost.net/>

²⁹ Paltoday News Agency, 28/7/2015.

³⁰ Felesteen Online, 3/7/2015.

³¹ Turkey Post, 25/8/2015.

continued, despite several meetings held between the two sides in an attempt to bridge the gap between them, but trade relations continued nonetheless to grow and expand. However, the political and media rhetoric between the two sides went through two contradictory phases: one of tension, bickering, and incitement, lasting until mid-2015; followed by a phase of calm and talk of a possible agreement and détente between the two sides.

During the Israeli assault on GS in 2014, Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Beşir Atalay announced his country's support for prosecuting Israel before the ICC.³² The Turkish Foreign Ministry also supported Palestine's accession to the tribunal.³³ Then during his participation in an event on the anniversary of the Holocaust, the Turkish parliament speaker reminded the audience that Israel killed two thousand women and children in GS.³⁴ The Turkish foreign minister cancelled his attendance at a security conference in Germany in February 2015 because of Israel's attendance.³⁵ Turkey condemned the construction of hundreds of settlement units in Jerusalem, saying the move flouted international law.

For its part, the Israelis stepped up their campaign against Ankara, filing an official complaint with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) because of the presence of Hamas leaders on Turkish soil.³⁶ The Israelis accused Turkey of hosting Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades activities,³⁷ and even held Ankara responsible for some military operations in the WB on this account. During the anniversary of the "Armenian crisis of 1915," several calls were made in Israel to recognize the "Armenian Genocide" to pressure Turkey. Tel Aviv has so far refused to recognize the call.

Israeli leaders, led by Shimon Peres, did not conceal their joy at the setback suffered by the AKP in the elections of 7/6/2015, considering it an opportunity to decrease regional support for Hamas.³⁸ By contrast, there was Palestinian concern with the results; the Palestinian issue (and Jerusalem specifically) had in fact been a topic in the election campaigns of Turkish parties.³⁹

³² Turkey Post, 7/8/2014.

³³ Site of Moheet, 9/4/2015, <http://moheet.com/>

³⁴ Sama, 29/1/2015.

³⁵ BBC, 6/2/2015.

³⁶ Aljazeera.net, 27/11/2014.

³⁷ Site of al-Qalah News, 25/2/2015, <http://alqalahnews.com>

³⁸ Site of The New Arab, 14/6/2015.

³⁹ Turk Press, 1/5/2015.



The sharpness in the political discourse between the two sides quietened down gradually and noticeably after June 2015, amid reports of meetings aimed at normalizing relations. Turkey was keen to emphasize that there had been no change to its position, which is based on three conditions for normalizing relations with Israel: That Israel must apologize for the killings on the Mavi Marmara in 2010 (the apology was made in 2013); compensate the families of the killed; and lift the GS siege.⁴⁰ In August, a Turkish newspaper close to the government, interviewed the Chargé D'affaires of the Israeli Embassy in Ankara, Amira Oron, who reaffirmed Tel Aviv's keenness on improving relations with Ankara, saying there was a real opportunity to open a new chapter in relations. This was in fact the first time a Turkish media outlet close to the government had hosted an Israeli official since the Israeli assault on the Mavi Marmara Ship.⁴¹

In December 2015, the Israeli press ran a report claiming an agreement “had been reached” between Ankara and Tel Aviv to normalize relations once and for all, including an agreement on some clauses such as reducing the level of the Turkish relationship with Hamas and “expelling” some of its leaders from Turkey.⁴² The Turkish position appeared somewhat confused. Statements from Turkey were contradictory, ranging from admitting the presence of talks and denying an agreement had been reached,⁴³ to affirming the constancy of Turkish positions on Israeli policies while considering the Israeli people “friends of the Turkish people.”⁴⁴ Turkish statements also said reconciliation between the two countries was in the interest of “both of them and the region,”⁴⁵ all while boasting that Turkey was the only country to have “forced Israel to apologize”⁴⁶ and affirming the three conditions—sometimes with the wording “reducing the blockade” rather than “lifting the blockade.”⁴⁷

This shift was not arbitrary or surprising. Several contexts and causes paved the way for it, including:

⁴⁰ Daily Sabah, 24/6/2015. (in Arabic)

⁴¹ Daily Sabah, 9/8/2015, <http://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2015/08/10/normalization-with-israel-to-continue-after-formation-of-strong-govt>

⁴² Sky News Arabia, 17/12/2015.

⁴³ *Zaman* newspaper, Turkey, 11/1/2016.

⁴⁴ Site of Njoom News Network, 21/12/2015.

⁴⁵ Sky News Arabia, 2/1/2016.

⁴⁶ Turk Press, 22/12/2015.

⁴⁷ Turkey Post, 28/12/2014.

First: The June elections and the transitional period in which two messages were made clear to the Turkish decision-makers, one internal from the voters and the second external from Turkey's "allies," namely, that change was imperative. Several statements were made by officials in the ruling party and government in Ankara, calling for the restoration of pragmatism and realism to Turkish foreign policy.

Second: The crisis with Russia, which prompted Ankara to look for new allies, and de-escalate with some regional countries (Israel, Egypt, the UAE) at political and economic levels.

Third: The ongoing wave of escalation since July 2015 with the PKK, which Turkey believes is supported by some regional countries including Israel. This is a top priority issue for Turkey, for which reason Ankara believes normalization with Israel could help rein in the armed PKK.

Fourth: The multitude of dossiers of common interest and common threats between the two sides, beginning with the developments of the Syrian crisis, the ISIS group, the international coalition against ISIS, and Iranian expansionism and Russian military presence in the region.

Fifth: The Israeli decision to reactivate normalized relations with Ankara. In principle, Turkey did not change its three declared conditions and there have been no developments since the last round of negotiations. However, Netanyahu was betting on another setback for the AKP in the elections of November 2015. When the party won a parliamentary majority, allowing it to establish a stable government until 2019, it seems Tel Aviv understood there was no point postponing the issue any further.

Economic Relations

As in previous years, economic relations between Turkey and Israel grew steadily, despite deteriorating political and diplomatic relations since the Israeli assault on the Mavi Marmara in international waters, in 2010.

The apparent contradiction is due to a number of reasons, most notably: The quest by Turkish foreign policy under AKP rule to subject politics to economic



factors in normal times, and detach them in times of crisis.⁴⁸ The role of the Turkish private sector, which is independent from government decisions, was key in strengthening economic ties with Israel. Israel was keen to maintain and upgrade these ties in the hope this would help in the restoration of diplomatic ties.

Thus, trade volume between the two sides increased from approximately \$4.04 billion in 2012 to \$5.068 billion in 2013, and then rose to \$5.832 billion in 2014, then decreased to \$4.371 billion in 2015 (see table 1/4). In addition to the large trade volume, the trade balance between the two is almost even, which gives both sides a sense of security and encourages them to develop their trade relations.

Chemicals and derivatives used in manufacturing, generators and electrical transformers top the list of Turkish exports to Israel, and cars, racing cars, iron and steel top the list of Turkish imports from Israel.⁴⁹

Following reports of possible reconciliation between Turkey and Israel, there were renewed discussions regarding Israeli gas and the possibility its export to Turkey at discounted prices. This would both allow Israel to engage a promising new market like Turkey, a transit hub for Israeli gas to Europe, and would allow Turkey to reduce its reliance on Russian natural gas amid the crisis with Russia in Fall 2015, for Turkey imports 55% of its gas from Russia.

Table 1/4: Volume of Trade Between Turkey and Israel According to Turkish and Israeli Statistics 2012–2015 (\$ million)⁵⁰

Year	Turkish exports to Israel		Turkish imports from Israel		Trade volume	
	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics	Turkish statistics	Israeli statistics
2015	2,698.3	2,446	1,672.5	1,713.6	4,370.8	4,159.6
2014	2,950.9	2,683.6	2,881.3	2,755.6	5,832.2	5,439.2
2013	2,649.7	2,354.1	2,418	2,515.6	5,067.7	4,869.7
2012	2,329.5	2,082.7	1,710.4	1,421.4	4,039.9	3,504.1

⁴⁸ Aqil Mahfouz, *Al-Siyasah al-Kharijiyyah al-Turkiyyah: al-Istimirariyyah – al-Taghyeer* (Turkish Foreign Policy: Sustainability- Change) (Doha: Arab Center for Research and Policy Studies, 2012), p. 103.

⁴⁹ Site of Turkish Ministry of Economy, <https://goo.gl/3V3N1f>

⁵⁰ See Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), http://www.cbs.gov.il/www/fr_trade/td1.pdf; and Foreign Trade By Countries, Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046

Trade relations between Turkey and the PA continued to grow, but not to the level of Turkish-Israeli relations. The trade volume between them did not exceed \$100 million in 2014, with exports from Palestinian territories occupied in 1967 to Turkey reaching \$2.502 million, compared to \$90.945 million in Turkish exports to Palestinian territories occupied in 1967. In 2015, Palestinian imports were \$2.343 million, while Turkish exports to the occupied Palestinian territories in 1967 amounted to \$82.224 million.⁵¹ The trade balance between the two countries is significantly tipped in favour of Turkey, despite the exemption of Palestinian industrial products from customs fees in Turkey. Food items, sweets, tobacco and derivatives top the list of Turkish exports, while dates, figs, and other fruits top the list of Palestinian exports to Turkey.⁵²

As part of efforts to strengthen Palestinian-Turkish relations, and as part of the Turkish contribution to supporting the Palestinian economy and opening up international markets to it, two conferences were held in Turkey in 2014 and 2015 under the title Turkey is the Gate for Palestine to the World, attended by the two countries' ministers of economy and hundreds of businesspeople, including Palestinians from the interior and the Diaspora. Several bilateral agreements were concluded between the two sides in the areas of tourism, food processing, and textiles.⁵³

As for Turkish official and grassroots donations to Palestinians, they did not stop, including those mentioned above, such as the contributions from Turkey's civil society, and governmental or private-public contributions. These include Turkey's donation of \$0.5 million to buy fuel for GS's power plant;⁵⁴ the visit by a Turkish economic delegation to GS, who met deputy Hamas leader Isma'il Haniyyah and a number of Palestinian officials and businesspeople to discuss Turkish support for Palestine;⁵⁵ and a grant to the tune of \$1.5 million from Turkey to cover the costs of hospital fuel in GS.⁵⁶ The total amount of Turkish aid to GS in 2015 could well have exceeded \$100 million, according to official Turkish estimates,⁵⁷ but no final numbers had been issued at the time of writing this Report.

⁵¹ Foreign Trade By Countries, TurkStat, http://www.turkstat.gov.tr/PreTablo.do?alt_id=1046

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 6/2/2015.

⁵⁴ Site of Filastin Alaan, 2/3/2015.

⁵⁵ Site of Anadolu Agency, 30/8/2015.

⁵⁶ Paltoday, 9/11/2015.

⁵⁷ Turk Press, 27/5/2015.



Conclusion

In 2014 and 2015, the main foundations of Turkish foreign policy on the Palestinian issue did not change. These included acting within the international system, committing to the political settlement of the Palestinian issue in accordance with the two-state solution and the Arab Peace Initiative, and dealing with the Palestinian issue through the PA and President ‘Abbas, while not exceeding the ceilings of political, media, and financial support in the relationship with Hamas to avoid damaging Turkish interests and relations with the West.⁵⁸

However, these two years saw a number of important developments concerning Turkey, both internally and externally. These included the general elections and the repeat elections; the crisis with Russia; and the deepening regional crises led by Syria. This led to a temporary lessening of Turkish interest in the Palestinian issue, while estrangement with Tel Aviv and Cairo led to weakened Turkish role there.

These multiple changes, and the growing common threats, in addition to Turkey’s desire to pacify a number of its foes, pumped new blood into Turkish-Israeli reconciliation negotiations. Although these are yet to reach their conclusions at the time of writing, it is likely a compromise agreement will materialize involving some “re-interpretation” of Turkey’s condition regarding lifting the blockade on GS in a way Turkey can market as having eased the blockade, while not breaking Israel’s red line of actually lifting the blockade. On the other hand, failure to reach an agreement would only postpone something that will happen inevitably, given that its objective conditions are largely satisfied, not to mention the two sides’ desire to conclude an agreement, each for its own calculations.

Thus, despite large Turkish support and sympathy for the Palestinian issue officially and popularly, the years ahead will carry a rapprochement between Ankara and Tel Aviv. While this is unlikely to restore relations to the level of strategic cooperation seen in the 1990s, it will no doubt have an impact, albeit indirectly, on Turkish-Palestinian relations, especially as regards the Palestinian resistance factions led by Hamas. On the other hand, the Palestinian issue is not

⁵⁸ Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies and Consultations, Turkey and the Palestinian Issue Following the Turkish Legislative Elections, Strategic Assessment (84), November 2015, <http://eng.alzaytouna.net/2015/12/04/strategic-assessmnet-84-turkey-and-the-palestinian-issue-following-the-turkish-legislative-elections/>

expected to jump to the top of the list of Turkish foreign policy priorities in light of the developments of the Syrian crisis and its regional repercussions, and in light of the counter-revolutionary wave the region is witnessing against Islamic movements.

Third: Iran

The Western-Iranian nuclear deal led to further regional and international focus on this issue, following negotiations, which lasted nearly 12 years. For this reason, the deal received unprecedented political and media attention in 2014 and 2015. There was keen interest in learning its implications for regional balances of power, and its effects on Iran's foreign policies and positions on regional dynamics, including Israel and the Palestinian issue. Furthermore, the eruption of the Jerusalem *Intifadah* in 2015 refocused the limelight on occupied Palestine and the resistance of the Palestinian people. During 2014 and 2015, Iran continued to stress its consistent policy of supporting the Palestinian resistance and refusing to recognize Israel.

Relations with the Palestinian Forces

Iran supported Palestine's accession to the UN and Deputy Foreign Minister for Legal and International Affairs Abbas Araghchi criticized the obstacles placed by some members of the UN Security Council to the full accession of Palestine to the UN. He also criticized the unilateral policies of the US administration towards the issue of Palestine. During the meeting of the Ministerial Committee for the State of Palestine, which was held on the side lines of the 17th Ministerial Conference of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Algeria, Iran's Al-Alam News Network quoted Araghchi saying that the acceptance of Palestine as a non-member observer state in the UN was the first step to full integration with this organization, and to the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over the entire historical land.⁵⁹ Iran also announced its support for the Jerusalem *Intifadah*, and the Iranian Ambassador to Lebanon Mohammed Fathali announced that Iran would grant financial assistance to the families of Palestinian who were killed during the Jerusalem *Intifadah*. The

⁵⁹ *Al-Sharq* newspaper, Doha, 30/5/2014.



ambassador announced that every family would receive \$7,000, while families whose houses were demolished would receive of \$30 thousand.⁶⁰

Fatah sought to open up to Iran and build new diplomatic channels. On 28/1/2014, PA President Mahmud ‘Abbas sent the Fatah Central Committee Deputy Secretary Jibril Rajoub to Tehran, carrying a message to President Rouhani, which explained the Palestinian situation at the internal level and developments concerning US-brokered negotiations with Israel. Sources in Tehran said that the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, confirmed his country's readiness to support the Authority and Fatah in particular, referring to the historical relations between the founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, and late Palestinian leader Yasir ‘Arafat.⁶¹ Rajoub’s visit was the first by an official from the Fatah movement at this level. No Palestinian official from the leadership of the PLO and Fatah had visited Iran since the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993 between the Palestinian and Israeli sides, except for the presence of Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas in the NAM Summit in 2012 in Tehran.⁶² Although some consider this visit to be a sign of new openness on the part of the Iranian leadership vis-a-vis the PLO leadership and Fatah, no invitation was made to the Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas to visit Iran.⁶³

Rajoub said that Iranian officials had confirmed their great appreciation for the historic role played by the Fatah movement in the leadership of the Palestinian national work and the Palestinian people’s aspirations for freedom and independence, and their support for the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people. Rajoub said that a new page in bilateral relations had begun, based on mutual respect and absolute support for the rights of the Palestinian people. He added that the parties had discussed the role of the Fatah movement in ending the Palestinian division, and mechanisms for supporting the steadfastness of the Palestinian.

On 3/2/2014, the Fatah Central Committee released a statement stressing the importance of establishing equal relations with Iran based on the highest interests of Palestinian people and service to their just cause, following a meeting in

⁶⁰ Quds Press International News Agency, London, 24/2/2016.

⁶¹ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 30/1/2014.

⁶² Wattan News Agency, 28/1/2014.

⁶³ The New Arab, 19/8/2015.

Ramallah headed by Mahmud ‘Abbas.⁶⁴ On 15/8/2015, ‘Abbas Zaki, member of the Fatah Central Committee, declared that the development of the relationship with Iran was a mandatory step towards confronting the Israeli occupation. For his part, Fatah leader Mohammed Shtayyeh confirmed a plan to arrange a visit by ‘Abbas to Iran,⁶⁵ after the visit of a delegation headed by PLO Executive Committee member Ahmad Majdalani to Tehran at the beginning of August 2015. Majdalani stressed that relations with Iran were continuous and evolving.⁶⁶ He said he discussed with Foreign Minister Javad Zarif the strengthening the relationship between the PA and Iran, which he considered an important step given Iran’s increasingly important political and diplomatic weight.⁶⁷

Two delegations from Hamas visited the Iranian capital in the context of the restoration of warmer relations between the two parties, following the lukewarm phase that has prevailed between 2012 and 2015 on the back of the different positions taken over the crisis in Syria. Tehran also received Ramadan ‘Abdullah, secretary general of the PIJ. Remarkably, the latter’s Deputy, Ziad Nakhleh, who was designated on the US terror list a few days before visiting Iran, attended the meeting with President Rouhani.⁶⁸

The visit by the Fatah official to Tehran did not indicate any strategic change in relations, because their rapprochement would remain limited. Iran had nothing to offer to the PA, and vice versa. The PA cannot extend its relationship with Iran without the blessings of Israel and the US, while the fact that the Authority operates under occupation makes a strong relationship with Iran a source of embarrassment for the Iranian regime.⁶⁹

Iranian officials stressed that the relationship with Hamas remained a strategic one, the latter being a resistance movement first and foremost, as Shura Council Speaker Ali Larijani has said. He stressed that Iran’s relationship with Hamas was good, noting that the relationship was back to its previous level, and there are no problem with Hamas. He explained that Iran considered Hamas a resistance movement and support it from this standpoint. Larijani did not mention Iran’s reservations over Hamas’s position on the Syrian crisis. He acknowledged that

⁶⁴ *Al-Ayyam* newspaper, Bahrain, 3/2/2014.

⁶⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 16/8/2015.

⁶⁶ Aljazeera.net, 26/8/2015; and *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 16/8/2015.

⁶⁷ *Al-Ayyam*, Ramallah, 16/8/2015.

⁶⁸ *Raialyoum*, 6/2/2014.

⁶⁹ Aljazeera.net, 26/8/2015.



there are some problems with regard to their stances, but said that it was still considered Iran's Islamic duty to support the resistance. Regarding the relationship with Fatah, Larijani said that Iran had relations with Fatah at the time of the late Yasir 'Arafat. And of course, because of the positions of the PLO after the Oslo Accords, the level of those relations declined because Iran believed the Oslo Accords were a strategic mistake. He confirmed that Iran had no animosity with Fatah but considered some actions futile, such as peace negotiations.⁷⁰

In the same context, Head of Hamas's Political Bureau Khalid Mish'al received a phone call from the Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in which he expressed Tehran's support for the Palestinian resistance facing Israeli aggression in GS. IRNA news agency also said that Javad Zarif contacted PIJ Secretary General Ramadan 'Abdullah for the same purpose.⁷¹

The Shura Council Speaker also sent a cable congratulating Mish'al on the victory of the Palestinian people and resistance fighters against the "Zionist entity" during the Israeli aggression on GS. Larijani stressed Iran's comprehensive support for the Palestinian people and the liberation of all occupied Palestinian territory from the sea to the river.⁷² The Iranian Foreign Ministry also issued a statement on the occasion of the killing of three leaders of the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas.⁷³

Reflecting the gradual turning of the page on the controversy with Hamas, the Iranian FARS news agency quoted Hussein Sheikh al-Islam, adviser on International Affairs to the Iranian Shura Council speaker, as saying that Iran's relations with Hamas were strategic relationships. He stressed that Iran and Hamas had set aside their differences concerning the position over the Syrian crisis and that Iran continued to support the resistance axis. In response to linking this relationship to the return of financial support to its former level with the movement, Sheikh al-Islam confirmed the reduction of Iranian financial support to some resistance factions, referring to PIJ. He explained that the budget reduction was true, but said this was due to the financial hardship experienced by his country,

⁷⁰ Palestinian Press Agency (Safa), 10/3/2014, see <http://safa.ps>

⁷¹ *Assafir* newspaper, Beirut, 24/7/2014.

⁷² *Raialyoum*, 28/8/2014.

⁷³ PIC, 23/8/2014.

saying that the issue was not political, and that Iran would continue its support in the future.⁷⁴

In the wake of the Israeli aggression on GS, which lasted 51 days, General Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), Major General Mohammad Ali Jafari, issued a statement concerning the people of GS and the leadership of the resistance, confirming that Iran would stay with them until the end, in defence of their principles, faith, pride and independence, and until the liberation of their land. He stated that the Palestinians' sovereignty should cover the entire territory of occupied Palestine. He stressed that the organizational capacity of the factions, their infrastructure and defensive capabilities must be strengthened, and also expanded to WB in accordance with the recommendations of "our imam," and the strength, range and accuracy of missiles must also be increased.⁷⁵

Reflecting the quest to restore relations, a high-level delegation from Hamas visited Tehran. It was led by Muhammad Nasr, member of the Hamas political bureau, and comprised of 'Maher Obaid, Jamal 'Isa, Usama Hamdan and Khalid al-Qaddumi, Hamas's representative in Tehran. Head of Hamas's International Relations Usama Hamdan told Safa news agency that the movement's official visit to Tehran on 8/12/2014 achieved its goals, pointing out that the relationship between the two sides was, "much better than many people imagine."⁷⁶

A second visit to Iran took place within less than a month. The Hamas delegation, headed by Jamal 'Isa, member of the political bureau, met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian, who affirmed the "strategic" and "excellent" relationship with Tehran and stressed that the Palestinian issue and Jerusalem were top priorities for Iran. For his part, Jamal 'Isa confirmed the "excellent" relationship between Hamas and Tehran, describing Iran's role in developments in the region and its support for the aspirations of the Palestinian people as "unmatched," adding that the Palestinian factions were proud of their strategic relations with it. 'Isa pointed out that "Iran's support for the Palestinian resistance is an incentive for the Palestinian people," explaining that "Hamas was able to stand its ground despite the pressures and conspiracies." He added that Hamas hoped for continued Iranian support, as well

⁷⁴ The New Arab, 19/8/2015.

⁷⁵ Quds Press, 29/8/2014.

⁷⁶ Site of Alresalah Press, 9/12/2014; and *Alghad* newspaper, Amman, 27/12/2014.



as support from other countries until the Palestinian people achieve their full rights. He stressed that all components of the Muslim nation must set aside their differences and unite against the common enemy through a truly Islamic stance in support of Palestine and its holy sites.⁷⁷

It was inevitable that Tehran would criticize the Egyptian decision to designate Hamas a “terrorist movement.” The Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Arab and African Affairs Hossein Amir Abdollahian denounced the Egyptian court’s decision, saying that “the Zionist entity is a terrorist and not Hamas.” Abdollahian said in a statement made to the official news agency of Iran that the MB movement is part of the reality in Egypt, and political opposition groups and terrorist groups should be separated based on a realistic view of the situation.⁷⁸

Confirming the positive stance vis-à-vis Hamas, there were several statements made in support of the movement and its role in the resistance against Israel. Deputy Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Brigadier General Massoud Jazayeri said that the relationship with Hamas was “solid, and we are partners in the resistance, and we are working on one project, and we must all march together along the road of resisting the Zionist entity and America... the rest are secondary issues, things we can overcome, and we will soon.”⁷⁹

The experience of the past years in the relationship between Hamas and Iran has shown that it is difficult to have a full estrangement between the two sides because of their shared strategic objectives in facing Israel. Hamas and Iran intersect in many ways. Hamas is a liberation movement seeking to rescue historic Palestine from the Zionist project using an Islamic ideology and strategy that are compatible with the vision of the Iranian regime, which considers the liberation of Palestine a matter of religious creed. According to Mahmud al-Zahhar, a senior Hamas leader, in his remarks to the Palestinian Information Center, Iran believes that the Israeli enemy is its enemy, and that it has the right to defend itself. In this it has intersecting interests with Hamas, in addition to the fact that both see Israel as an alien entity that does not belong to the Muslim nation. Al-Zahhar believes that the Iranian position goes beyond mere policy issues with regard Palestine; since its revolution Iran has been part of the axis confronting the US and Israel, and it is

⁷⁷ *Raialyoum*, 8/1/2015.

⁷⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 2/3/2015.

⁷⁹ PIC, 16/2/2015.

unlikely that it would abandon the resistance in the region and leave it to face the political and cultural invasion alone.⁸⁰

In this context, Hamas openly declared that its visit to Iran was part of its vision for the need to mobilize the energy and potential of the Muslim nation to support the Palestinian resistance. It added that it was keen to build upon historical relations with Iran, this desire stemming from a realization among the parties regarding the importance of communicating and working hard to overcome the delicate circumstances facing the region, which could serve the Palestinian issue.⁸¹

But perhaps the most important thing to be said about Hamas's role and the role of other Palestinian resistance factions during the visit of the Palestinian delegation to Tehran and its participation in the 28th International Islamic Unity Conference was the statement made by the Secretary General of the World Forum for Proximity of Islamic Schools of Thought, Ayatollah Mohsen Araki: "The Palestinian resistance, Hamas, and Hizbullah can unite the Islamic Nation on the basis of supporting occupied Jerusalem and the *al-Aqsa* Mosque." Araki "called on all Muslims; Sunnis or Shias, scholars or parties to ramp up efforts to support the Palestinian people and its resistance."⁸²

It appears that the neutral PIJ stance regarding events in Syria and Yemen had an adverse impact on Iran's financial support to the movement. The features of this financial crisis began to appear after the closure of the office of Palestine Today TV in occupied Jerusalem, which the PIJ runs from outside Palestine, due to its "financial crisis."⁸³ PIJ then adopted an austerity policy, cutting jobs in its TV channel in Ramallah, closing the offices of its affiliate associations, and reducing budgets and expenses.⁸⁴ Perhaps the absence of PIJ Secretary General Ramadan 'Abdullah and his Deputy Ziad Nakhleh from the IRGC iftar in Beirut on 30/6/2015⁸⁵ indicated some kind of resentment by the movement over the reduction of Iranian support. This was despite the fact that Khodr Habib, leader of the movement, had denied any financial crisis in his movement's institutions and offices, saying instead that what was happening was "a difficulty of transferring

⁸⁰ PIC, 5/12/2014.

⁸¹ Site of AL Jazeera Centre for Studies, Doha, 17/12/2014, <http://studies.aljazeera.net/ar/>

⁸² Site of The Iran Project, 9/1/2015, <http://theiranproject.com/blog/2015/01/10/araki-hamas-can-unite-people-on-supporting-occupied-jerusalem/>

⁸³ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 18/5/2015.

⁸⁴ *Asharq Alawsat*, 26/5/2015.

⁸⁵ *Al-Hayat* newspaper, London, 6/7/2015.



funds amid recent Arab developments and what is happening in the countries of the region, but the talk of a crisis is baseless.”⁸⁶ The PIJ Secretary General later downplayed the impact of the financial issue on the relationship between the two sides, saying PIJ’s ties with Tehran were good, and adding, “The Palestinian issue for Iran is not linked to circumstantial matters, and it has been a fundamental since the days of Imam Khomeini, affirmed by Sayed Ali Khamenei on every occasion.”⁸⁷

Iran’s support for the al-Sabireen Movement for Supporting Palestine (Hesn) in 2014, formed by PIJ splinter leader Hisham Salem, caused tensions between PIJ and Iran and the latter’s aid was diverted in part to the new movement. PIJ expressed its resentment at this publicly.⁸⁸ Al-Sabireen Movement receives support from Iran as confirmed by the movement’s leaders, who consider themselves part of the national fabric. The movement is inspired by Hizbullah in Lebanon, and has similar flags and insignia.⁸⁹

Iran’s Position Towards Israel After the Nuclear Deal

Israel considered the nuclear deal a historic mistake by the US. For this reason, Netanyahu attacked the deal, making direct threats to Iran to bomb its facilities. Some analyses and forecasts predicted that Iran, after the nuclear deal with the West, would change its policy on the Palestinian issue and resistance movements, to be more reconciled with Western policies. In response to this, Iranian officials at all levels, military and political, responded to Israeli threats while the Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei stressed several times that Iran would continue to support the Palestinian issue and resistance movements. In an interview with CNN, President Hassan Rouhani, answering a question about Iran’s response in the event of an Israeli assault on Iranian nuclear facilities, said, “Israel knows very well what the response would be. Israel knows well our regional capability,” and added, “When it comes to practice, the Israelis cannot do that. If they do such a crazy thing, our response will make them rue the day.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ *Raialyoum*, 18/5/2015.

⁸⁷ Quds Net News Agency, 29/8/2015, <http://www.qudsnet.com>

⁸⁸ Site of Arabi21, 6/7/2015.

⁸⁹ *Asharq Alawsat*, 16/1/2016; and *Alquds* newspaper, 6/7/2015.

⁹⁰ President in an interview with CNN: Iran not to accept restrictions on peaceful nuclear technology, Official website of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 25/1/2014, <http://www.president.ir/en/74321>

Adviser to the Iranian Supreme Leader's Representative at the IRGC, Mojtaba Zolnour, in response to threats by Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman of targeting Iran's nuclear reactors, threatened to destroy Tel Aviv in less than ten minutes, if Israel made a mistake. He added, "The Zionists are cowards, and they could not even fight Hamas," explaining that the strength of Hamas and Hizbullah, is equal to a small part of Iran's military power and "the Zionists" could tackle the Islamic resistance. He said that the Israelis made such statements in order to raise the morale of the settlers, because the reverse migration of settlers threatens the "Zionist presence."⁹¹

Many experts and analysts raised questions about the future of Iran's relations with resistance movements in Palestine, especially Hamas, in addition to making predictions about Iran's future position on Israel after the nuclear deal with the West. No doubt, Iran faces two main challenges in this regard in the next phase: The Palestinian issue and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Iran's role in the region, on the geopolitical level. Domestically, the challenge could be the emergence of new liberal economic classes that shape the Iranian economy as it rejoins the international market. This could reflect into a change in its regional and foreign policies, especially in the direction of normalization with the West.

Iran, which resorted to "political pragmatism" in some of its positions and taking into account its interests, both in the relationship with the Russians and with other countries in the region and the world, continued to hold on to the maxims of its ideology regarding Israel. Its positions appearing radical and not subject to change with regard to recognition or making any contact with Israel.⁹²

It is noted that the positions of Iranian leaders and their statements, as well as the positions of Hamas leaders and their statements during 2015, reflect the keenness of both sides to maintain and develop this relationship. The focus of both sides was on strategic convergences, namely resisting Israel without binding any side by the positions of the other.

The importance of restoring warmth to these ties in the current stage lies in the seriousness of what is happening in the Arab region, in terms of expanding contacts with Israel to include Gulf countries, sometimes publicly. Iran has continued to

⁹¹ *Assabeel* newspaper, Amman, 22/2/2015.

⁹² Elias Farhat, Iran after the Nuclear Agreement: Two Major Challenges, *Annahar* newspaper, Beirut, 2/2/2016. (In Arabic)



stress, even after the nuclear deal with the West, its enmity with Israel and its support for resistance against it. In the context of affirming this support after the nuclear deal, Khamenei said that Iranian policy vis-à-vis the US and “global arrogance and the forces of evil” would not change. Iran would not stop supporting oppressed peoples in the region, regardless of the fate of the nuclear deal with the major powers.⁹³ Khamenei also said “After nuclear negotiations, the Zionist regime said that they will not be worried about Iran in the next 25 years,” adding, “I am telling you, first, you will not be around in 25 years’ time, and God willing, there will be no Zionist regime in 25 years. Second, during this period, the spirit of fighting, heroism and jihad will keep you worried every moment.”⁹⁴

Even President Rouhani himself waged a strong campaign on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying that Israel is the most murderous “terrorist entity,” which is talking about peace and future dangers, when it itself constitutes the greatest threat to the region.⁹⁵ Rouhani also said that the current state of Israel is not legitimate.⁹⁶

When the Jerusalem *Intifadah* erupted in WB, Iran expressed its support. Khamenei said Iran would support the Palestinian *Intifadah* against Israel in any way it can, and rejected US accusations that the new wave of stabbings and ramming attacks by Palestinians were “terrorism.”⁹⁷

Khamenei had addressed a letter to young people in the West, the second of its kind in 2015, in which he referred to Israeli brutal conduct, saying:

If the people of Europe have now taken refuge in their homes for a few days and refrain from being present in busy places- it is decades that a Palestinian family is not secure even in its own home from the Zionist regime’s death and destruction machinery. What kind of atrocious violence today is comparable to that of the settlement constructions of the Zionists regime?

⁹³ *Al-Akhbar* newspaper, Beirut, 20/7/2015.

⁹⁴ *The New York Times* newspaper, 9/9/2015,

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/10/world/middleeast/iran-ayatollah-khamenei-israel-will-not-exist.html?ref=middleeast&_r=0

⁹⁵ *Al-Hayat*, 26/8/2014.

⁹⁶ Aljazeera.net, 12/11/2015.

⁹⁷ Reuters News Agency, 25/11/2015.

He continued:

This regime—without ever being seriously and significantly censured by its influential allies or even by the so-called independent international organizations—everyday demolishes the homes of Palestinians and destroys their orchards and farms. This is done without even giving them time to gather their belongings or agricultural products and usually it is done in front of the terrified and tear-filled eyes of women and children who witness the brutal beatings of their family members who in some cases are being dragged away to gruesome torture chambers.⁹⁸

The above positions of Iranian leaders, even after the nuclear agreement, towards Israel, accusing it of “terrorism,” and affirming resistance as a strategic choice to confront it, means that the likelihood of a change in Iranian policy on Palestine remains very distant. Furthermore, the *Intifadah* in WB, and the discovery and collapse of tunnels in GS, means that the possibility of the resistance escalating against Israel is possible, despite various statements suggesting there remains no desire for escalation. It is therefore inevitable that the resistance is seeking to get all manner of support from any forces that can contribute to the promotion of this confrontation, or in preparation for war, which may come at any time. This requires resistance movements in Palestine to seek to heal the rift in the Arab countries, to contribute to the promotion of political solutions to the current crises, and to ensure a solid and strong relationship with Iran, which has previously provided all kinds of support for resistance movements, as expressed explicitly by the leadership of Al-Qassam Brigades.

Fourth: Malaysia

Despite Malaysia’s internal crises and political and economic instability, triggering protests that demanded political reform, the policy of supporting the Palestinian issue continued in 2014 and 2015. Both Malaysian officials and the public interacted with the Palestinian people in the two-year period, confirming the importance of the Islamic dimension of the Palestinian issue. UNRWA received an urgent assistance from the Islamic Relief Malaysia Organization to the tune of \$900 thousand for Palestinian refugees in the Yarmouk RC in Syria. The

⁹⁸ Mehr News Agency, 29/11/2015, <http://en.mehrnews.com/news/112409/Today-terrorism-is-our-common-worry>



organization made the donation two days after an appeal by the Commissioner General of UNRWA Filippo Grandi, regarding the deprivation and acute malnutrition among men, women and children in Yarmouk.⁹⁹

Politically, the Malaysian Prime Minister Mohammad Najib repeatedly confirmed his support for the Palestinian cause. Najib, in a phone call with Khalid Mish'al following the 2014 Israeli assault on GS, expressed his sympathy with the Palestinian people and those confronting it. This was while former Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad pointed out that the atrocities by Israel against the Palestinians could be stopped if the United States stopped its support for Israel. Mahathir was also quoted as saying that "For as long as Britain and the US continue to support Israel, it (the war) will not end."¹⁰⁰

Malaysians expressed their solidarity with the Palestinian people and GS by launching a campaign under the title "The Month of Ummah's (Nation's) Wrath." The campaign included a number of events in support of the Palestinian people against the Israeli aggression on Gaza.¹⁰¹ In January 2015, a campaign was launched out of the city of Cyberjaya in Malaysia for the GS reconstruction after the Israeli aggression, under the auspices of Mahathir Mohamad, with the slogan "One Billion Dollar Donation Campaign To Rebuild Gaza." In his speech, Mahathir said that the reconstruction of GS would not be easy, but it was a challenge that must be tackled and overcome. He also noted previous experiences when Israel had prevented the entry of assistance and intercepted ships and convoys trying to break the siege, despite their humanitarian nature. He said such Israeli actions were illegal and went contrary to international norms and human values.¹⁰²

In December 2015, Khalid Mish'al accepted an invitation from the ruling party United Malays National Organisation (UMNO) to visit Malaysia, leading a delegation from Hamas, to take part in the annual general congress of the party as an observer. The delegation met with a number of politicians and officials, and

⁹⁹ *Addustour* newspaper, Amman, 4/3/2014.

¹⁰⁰ Site of Astro Awani, 12/8/2014, <http://english.astroawani.com/malaysia-news/israeli-atrocities-palestine-can-be-resolved-without-interference-u-s-mahathir-41778>

¹⁰¹ Site of Malaymail Online, 10/8/2014, <http://www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/mcdonalds-starbucks-hsbc-in-crosshairs-of-muslim-ngos-month-long-boycott>

¹⁰² *Addustour*, 14/8/2014; and see site of The Rakyat Post, 24/1/2016, <http://www.therakyatpost.com/news/2015/01/24/vision-2020-still-attainable-government-cuts-spending-tun-m-says/>

took part in youth events organized to welcome the delegation in Malaysia,¹⁰³ reflecting the extent of popular and official solidarity in Malaysia with the Palestinian people.

Fifth: Pakistan

Pakistan's supportive policy for the Palestinian issue continued in 2014 and 2015, as expressed by the positions of the Pakistani government during the 2014 Israeli assault on GS. The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Muhammad Nawaz Sharif, condemned the aggression as unacceptable and a violation of all human rights. Sharif pointed out that the Israeli government had always used brutal force against unarmed Palestinian citizens to a degree amounting to a war crime. He also stressed that the people of Pakistan would stand by the people of GS, and support the right of the Palestinian people to a free and independent state.¹⁰⁴

In a statement in July 2014 the Pakistani government announced days of mourning in solidarity with the Palestinian people, and called for lifting the GS blockade and allowing humanitarian access to the population. Pakistan donated \$1 million to help meet the urgent appeal by the UN to alleviate the suffering of Gazans.¹⁰⁵

The Pakistani parliament issued a unanimous resolution describing the Israeli assault on Gaza as a "war crime and act of genocide." The resolution condemned the lack of an appropriate response by the international community to the "barbaric" Israeli attack, calling on the UN to act urgently to rescue the innocent children of GS.¹⁰⁶

The Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, meanwhile, granted the Children of the World prize she won for defending children's rights to the schools of Gaza. She said in a press conference when receiving the prize that the full amount (\$50 thousand) would be allocated to rebuild an UNRWA school.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Quds Press, 9/12/2015, <http://www.qudspress.com/index.php?page=show&id=13377>

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Sharq*, 10/7/2014.

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Khaleej* newspaper, al-Shariqa, 26/7/2014.

¹⁰⁶ *Raialyoum*, 5/8/2014.

¹⁰⁷ Site of United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), 29/10/2014, <http://www.unrwa.org/newsroom/press-releases/malala-yousafzai-donates-prize-money-unrwa-help-rebuild-damaged-school-gaza>



In July 2015, Pakistan and KSA submitted a draft resolution that was adopted at the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC), they called:

upon all states to promote compliance with human rights obligations and all High Contracting Parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention to respect, and to ensure respect for international humanitarian law in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, in accordance with article 1 common to the Geneva Conventions.

The resolution called “upon all duty bearers and United Nations bodies to pursue the implementation of all recommendations contained in the report of the commission of inquiry.”¹⁰⁸ The Pakistani delegate to the UN Maliha Lodhi urged, “Security Council to fulfill its responsibility and summon political courage to adopt a resolution with timelines for ending occupation,” and added that “that humanitarian assistance was necessary but not sufficient to address the ongoing tragedy of the Palestinian people.”¹⁰⁹

Sixth: Trade Exchange

The year 2014 saw a rise in the trade volume between Turkey and Israel. The value of Israeli exports to Turkey in 2014 rose to \$2,755.6 million, an increase of 9.5% compared to 2013. Israeli imports rose by about 14%. In 2015, the trade volume between Israel and Turkey decreased by 23.5%. Israeli exports to Turkey in 2015 decreased by 38% compared to 2014, while Israeli imports decreased by 9% compared to 2014. Perhaps the 2014 Israeli assault on GS had a toll on economic relations in 2015.

Concerning Malaysia, 2014 saw a slight decrease in trade volume with Israel, by 6.7% percent, while it remained steady in 2015 with an increase of nearly 0.5% compared to the previous year. It should be noted that no diplomatic ties exist between the two countries, and it is likely trade takes place through intermediary states. Trade between Israel and other Muslim countries remains limited.

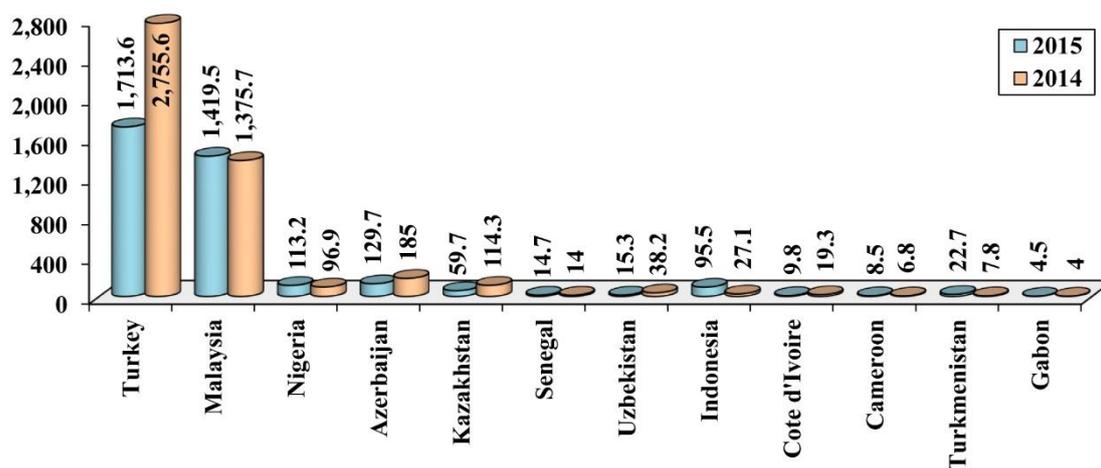
¹⁰⁸ UN, Human Rights Council, Twenty-Ninth Session, 1/7/2015, A/HRC/29/L.35, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/LTD/G15/141/03/PDF/G1514103.pdf?OpenElement>

¹⁰⁹ *The Express Tribune* newspaper, 5/6/2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/898182/pakistan-urges-uns-c-to-resolve-palestine-issue/>

Table 2/4: Israeli Exports and Imports to/from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)¹¹⁰

Countries	Israeli exports to				Israeli imports from			
	2015	2014	2013	2012	2015	2014	2013	2012
Turkey	1,713.6	2,755.6	2,515.6	1,421.4	2,446	2,683.6	2,354.1	2,082.7
Malaysia	1,419.5	1,375.7	1,457.1	763.3	15.3	52	72.9	74
Nigeria	113.2	96.9	155.1	367	2.9	1.4	2.1	2.8
Azerbaijan	129.7	185	106.2	129	2.4	1.1	0.4	1.1
Kazakhstan	59.7	114.3	87.3	77.2	1.6	3.9	1.5	1.7
Senegal	14.7	14	61.7	25.3	4.7	2.9	5	4.8
Uzbekistan	15.3	38.2	27.8	13	1.2	1.2	1	2.2
Indonesia	95.5	27.1	24.8	19.8	52.2	68.7	91.5	110.9
Cote d'Ivoire	9.8	19.3	20.8	8.9	0.4	1.1	0.3	1.6
Cameron	8.5	6.8	8.7	8.2	0	0.1	0.4	0.2
Turkmenistan	22.7	7.8	3.9	6	0	0	0	0
Gabon	4.5	4	1.9	11.7	0	0	0	0

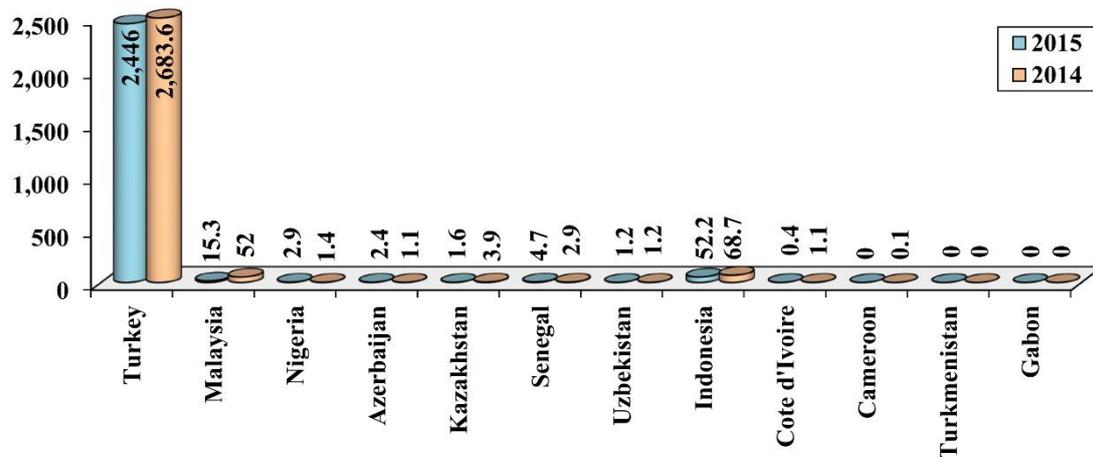
Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)



¹¹⁰ See CBS, <http://www1.cbs.gov.il/publications14/yarhon0214/pdf/h8.pdf>



Israeli Imports from a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2012–2015 (\$ million)



Conclusion

The Palestinian issue in 2014 and 2015 suffered from a decline in interest from the Muslim world, especially at the official level. The state of flux in the region in this period as a result of revolutions and counter-revolutions, and the preoccupation with the issue of “extremism” and sectarian-ethnic conflicts, in addition to internal concerns for both Turkey and Iran, gave priority to these dossiers at the expense of the Palestinian issue. For this reason, there was a lack of any development in support of the Palestinian issue, whether in terms of internal Palestinian relations to end the division, or in terms of confronting the Israeli assaults (2014 summer war, the Judaization of Jerusalem, and attempts to temporal and spatial division of *al-Aqsa* Mosque). This revealed OIC’s weakness in going beyond traditional approaches to address major Islamic issues, keeping the largest Islamic framework confined to a ceremonial bureaucratic role, instead of investing its economic and political weight (not to mention the military weight that it refuses to use) to achieve the goals for which it was established, led by the defence of Islamic holy sites including *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Despite Turkey’s preoccupation with internal and regional issues, especially the internal security issue that took up a significant part of its resources and energy amid escalating hostilities inside, its public and official approach toward the Palestinian issue did not change. Turkish policy has continued, under the leadership of the Justice and Development Party, to balance its Palestinian-Turkey

relations through communication with PLO leaders and the PA on one hand, and with the leaders of the Hamas movement on the other.

Concerning Israeli attempts to restore relations with Turkey, these efforts did not lead to any significant progress. Turkey stressed on more than one occasion that rapprochement with Israel would not come at the expense of the Palestinians, insisting that normalizing ties with Tel Aviv would only take place after the lifting of the blockade on Gaza. While there is a possibility Turkey might show leniency with regard to the interpretation of the conditions and meaning of lifting the blockade, and in light of the many issues preoccupying Turkey, and with the possibility of a relative breakthrough in Turkish-Israeli ties, it does not appear likely in the coming period that Turkey will be able or willing to change its traditional policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian issue, whether in terms of supporting the peace process and two-state solution, or supporting Palestinian resistance.

Iran continued affirming its support for the Palestinian resistance. In 2014–2015, it sought to play a balanced role in its relations with Palestinian factions. There were also efforts to restore warmth to the relationship with Hamas, focusing on joint enmity with Israel and support for resistance. However, differences over the position on the Syrian revolution and crisis, and the way Iran is handling some regional issues, continue to cast a shadow over the relationship between the two parties.



التقرير الاستراتيجي الفلسطيني

2015-2014

الفصل الرابع

القضية الفلسطينية والعالم الإسلامي

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