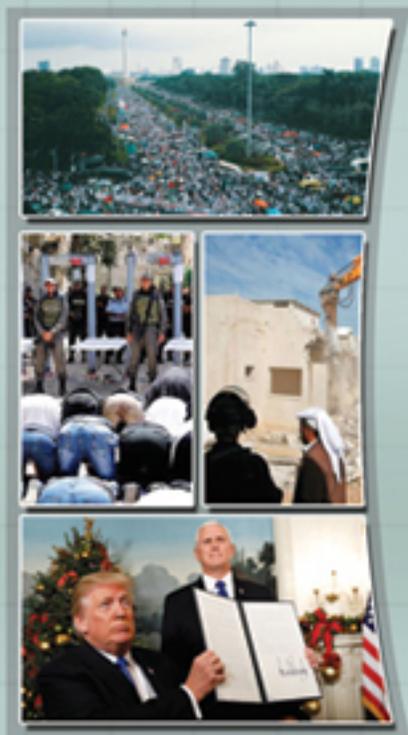


The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017



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Chapter Eight

*The Palestine Issue and the
International Situation*

The Palestine Issue and the International Situation

Introduction

While the international environment was busy with a number of hot regional and international issues in 2016–2017, including developments in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Ukraine, attention on the Palestine issue fell back from the forefront of the scene, except for brief periods of time linked to the Jerusalem *Intifadah* and the Lion’s Gate uprising. Generally, the Palestine issue was “marginalized,” as confirmed by a number of officials representing international powers; these will be mentioned later in this report. It is sufficient here to point out that the presidential and ministerial statements of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (which was established in 2001, and includes eight countries: Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, with their combined population being approximately 50% of the world’s population, with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of about 25% of the Gross World Product (GWP), and with an area of nearly 80% of Eurasia) were entirely devoid of the Palestine issue, while other Middle Eastern matters were prominent in these statements in 2016–2017.¹

International and regional dynamics have overwhelmed the Palestine issue, with their subjects overlapping in a manner which makes it difficult to separate them, on the one hand, and makes it hard to avoid their negative impact on the centrality of the Palestine issue in the Arab and Islamic environment, hence on the international environment, on the other hand.

First: The International Environment and the Palestine Issue

It is difficult, considering the increasing interdependence of international entities, to separate the mutual impacts between one aspect and another, regardless of proximity or geographic dimension. The international and regional arenas

witnessed mutual-impact dynamics in 2016–2017, and this had an impact on the Palestine issue, as evident in the following dynamics:

1. Regional Dynamics and Their International Implications

a. Continuation of the severe political instability in the Arab region, and international diplomacy's preoccupation with it. It suffices to point out that during 2016–2017, five Arab countries were among the top 10 most politically unstable countries in the world.²

This Arab political turmoil led to the backlash of Arab policies against their internal situation, which reduced the level of interest in the Palestine issue on the international stage, both in the diplomatic and economic activities of Arab countries (especially in support of the Palestinian people).

b. Building Arab international alliances (the US coalition and Russian coalition) to counter what is known as “terrorist organizations,” especially ISIS. This resulted in the emergence of Arab and international trends (especially among US-affiliated alliances) to include the Palestinian resistance organizations on the list of “terrorist organizations.” This had a profound negative impact on the political status and legal legitimacy of the Palestinian resistance movement, particularly considering the continued Palestinian resistance, especially what was dubbed the “Knives’ *Intifadah*,” i.e., the confrontations with Israel, as Israel attempted to control the gates of the *al-Aqsa* Mosque throughout 2017.

c. The pursuit of some Arab countries, with the support of the US, to divert Arab efforts from confronting Israel to confronting Iran, despite the victory of the reformist movement in the Iranian presidential elections in May 2017.

This Arab trend gave rise to Arab regional crises—such as the Gulf crisis—which diverted international efforts to resolving such crises, in a manner that had a negative impact on the Palestine issue, not to mention the increased emergence of diplomatic Arab-Israeli relations which moved toward normalization with Israel, and that further restricted the Palestinian political scope of work within the international framework.

d. Decline in oil prices in international markets starting February 2016 (with the price per barrel hitting a low); the price remained low until the end of 2017. This led to a decline in the Arab countries' income generated from this sector by about 50%, which would later affect Arab aid to the Palestinians, not to mention the probability

that this economic situation could further spread political instability across Arab regions which had previously survived it, and that deepened the negative effects on the Palestine issue. Perhaps the oil price decline had the biggest impact on international dynamics,³ leading to negative repercussions on the Palestine issue at the international level.

2. The International Dimension

The international scene witnessed a number of variables that diverted attention from the Palestine issue to a large extent. Some of these variables represented periodic changes, some of which were unexpected, as was the case with the following:

a. The “unexpected” transition from a Democratic presidency in the US (Barack Obama) to a Republican administration led by President Donald Trump, characterized by a lack of stability and his involvement in internal conflicts which revolve around numerous accusations made against him, coupled with his unclear policy toward the Palestine issue, as evidenced by the discrepancies between his campaign pledges and his actions after taking office.

b. Centrist candidate Emmanuel Macron winning the French presidency in May 2017; a victory which caused a profound change in the structure of the traditional French political elite (*Le Parti Socialiste* and *Les Républicains*). There is no doubt that this development requires Palestinian diplomacy to study and reflect on how to deal with a significant change in a major European state.

c. Britain’s announcement of its exit from the European Union (EU) in June 2016, not to mention the resignation of Prime Minister David Cameron and replacement with Home Secretary Theresa May. There is no doubt that the United Kingdom (UK) exiting the European Union will affect the European Union’s attitude toward the Palestine issue, especially as Britain was one of the “counter-tension” forces, more in tune with American and Israeli policies than other European countries. This could make the Palestinian diplomacy’s job of dealing with the EU less difficult.

d. Continued “terrorist operations” in 2016–2017 in a number of European and Asian countries, as well as the US, and holding “Islamic” movements responsible for these operations, which affected international public opinion’s attitude toward Arab and Islamic matters, including the Palestine issue.

e. Continued diplomatic tension over North Korea's missile and nuclear tests contributed to the abandonment, on the part of major powers in particular, of other issues, in an attempt to contain the risks of this crisis, which got so far as the US and North Korea exchanging nuclear threats.

This international environment, which we have briefly outlined the general features of, suggests a less favourable climate for Palestinian political action. To realize this negative impact, it is sufficient to consider—as we'll explain later in this report—the number of diplomatic activities related to the Palestine issue at the UN, EU, or the BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), as well as the joint statements of most internationally influential states, in addition to media coverage and international conferences. It is enough to point out—as we will explain—that the former UN Secretary-General had warned that the UN Security Council, throughout the tenure of Ban Ki-moon (10 years), only made two decisions regarding the conflict in the Middle East.

In general, there are two crucial factors to the discussion of the Palestine issue internationally:

- a. Activity aimed at achieving a peaceful settlement.
- b. Activity resulting from the Palestinian resistance and *Intifadah*.

Both factors have varying and overlapping effects, noting that international intervention does not necessarily mean support for the Palestinian question, because US and Western intervention often favours and supports Israel, providing a cover for it, and extricating it from its predicaments.

Second: Quartet on the Middle East (UN, EU, US, Russian Federation)

Perhaps the nonchalant attitude of the Quartet toward their role, evident from the extent of their diplomatic activity compared to the number of their meetings and statements issued, has been a noticeable feature since the beginning of this Quartet's work in 2002. Indeed, the contradictory statements found in its annual report have repeated a number of attitudes that are approved by the international community in general, opting out of any action-based approach. Its effectiveness seems to have been mainly linked to an attempt to calm and contain the Palestinian

situation and put it under control, as well as to free Israel from the responsibilities incurred by its occupation. Below is a summary of its statements in 2016–2017:⁴

1. Statement of the Munich meeting on 12/2/2016: The statement indicated that political trends were imperilling the viability of the two-state solution. The Quartet pledged to offer recommendations to advance the two-state solution, emphasizing the following:

- a. Condemning all acts of “terrorism” and condemning violence against civilians, calling on all parties to cease incitement and work to reduce tension.
- b. Emphasising that violence against civilians, the high rate of demolition of Palestinian homes, and the continuation of settlement construction constituted a serious impediment to reaching a two-state solution, and that unilateral actions by either party to the conflict seriously jeopardized the two-state solution. Emphasising the Quartet’s commitment to reaching a solution based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973).
- c. The Quartet affirmed the need to support the Palestinian economy and strengthen governance as essential tools for building a Palestinian state and achieving Palestinian unity between WB and GS under a single, democratic and legitimate PA based on the PLO platform and Quartet principles.
- d. The Quartet stressed the need to pay attention to the dire humanitarian situation in GS, and to look at the facilitation of passage to Gaza, in addition to urging the international community to honour its pledges to provide the funds approved at the Cairo Conference in October 2014.

2. The Quartet, in a statement on 1/7/2016, made a number of recommendations for the achievement of the two-state solution, which they had referred to in their February 2016 statement, as seen in the following:

- a. The two parties to the conflict should de-escalate tensions and refrain from provocative actions and rhetoric.
- b. The PA should do everything in its power to prevent incitement to violence and to strengthen “counter-terrorism” measures, including the condemnation of such acts.
- c. The Israeli government must cease: all settlement activity, whether construction or expansion; the allocation of Palestinian territory for Israeli purposes; and the obstruction of Palestinian development.

- d. Israel should begin positive and important transitional steps, including the transfer of powers and responsibilities in Area C, in a manner consistent with a broader level of Palestinian civil authority powers established in previous agreements. All of this should be accomplished alongside development in water, electricity, roads, communications, energy, agriculture, and natural resources. Also, restrictions on the movement of Palestinians should be eased, while the requirements of Israeli security continued to be respected.
- e. The PA should continue its efforts to strengthen governance and economic development, and Israel should take all measures to facilitate that, in line with the recommendations of the Quartet.
- f. All parties must respect the cease-fire in Gaza and the need to end armament and armed activity.

3. Statement of the New York meeting on 23/9/2016: The Ministers of Foreign Affairs of both France and Egypt participated in the meeting. The statement called for:

- a. The implementation of the Quartet's recommendations which were stated in its report issued on 1/7/2016.
- b. The resumption of negotiations to lead to the ending of the occupation in place since 1967, and the resolution of all final status issues.
- c. Reiteration of the committee's opposition to settlement activity and to measures eroding the viability of the two-state solution.
- d. Reiteration of the need to address the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, while noting the dangers of continued arms build-up by Palestinian militant groups in a manner which might lead to new rounds of conflict.
- e. Avoiding all actions that could lead to the escalation of violence.

4. The Jerusalem meeting on 13/7/2017, which was the Quartet's first meeting after the new US President, Donald Trump, took office. The Quartet's envoys reflected on the efforts aiming to advance the political settlement, while also examining the deterioration of the GS humanitarian situation. The Quartet called on all parties to exercise restraint with regard to the Jerusalem incidents, and to refrain from action which could further complicate matters.

The Quartet's statements and recommendations, when considering their general implications, indicate three aspects:

- a. Creating conditions that tighten the screws on the prospects of growing Palestinian resistance, and insisting on linking it with the “terrorism” phenomenon, in line with the world’s preoccupation with the listing of organizations that can be described as “terrorist.”
- b. Promoting everything necessary to strengthen the powers of the PA and enhance its authority to implement its WB policies in GS, as reflected in the text of Article 9 of the Quartet’s report (February 2016), which reads that the PA should “control... all armed personnel and weapons in accordance with existing agreements.”
- c. Being consistent with the international community’s attitude calling for Israel to end settlement expansion without identifying any specific actions or punitive measures in case of Israel’s non-compliance with this request.

Third: The United Nations and Intergovernmental Organizations

UN efforts are made through the activities of the Secretary-General, the Security Council, and the General Assembly, along with other specialised agencies within the UN. During 2016–2017, it witnessed a change in its Secretary-General position (in January 2017, when António Guterres replaced Ban Ki-moon, whose term expired in December 2016).

1. UN Secretariat

The report submitted by Ban Ki-Moon to the UN Security Council in December 2016, and the report submitted in September 2016, can be considered as a summary of his assessment of the Arab-Israeli conflict after his 10 years of service at the UN. These reports include the following points:⁵

- a. Ban Ki-moon stressed that his assessment of the situation brings no sense of optimism for the future of the Palestine issue.
- b. Ban Ki-moon believes that although the Palestine issue is not the cause of the wars in the Middle East, its resolution can create momentum for peace throughout the region.
- c. The Secretary-General pointed out that UN Resolution 181 of 1947 provided for the emergence of “independent Arab and Jewish States.” In 1948, the State

of Israel was born. Almost seven decades later, the world still awaits the birth of the Palestinian State.

- d. He stressed that the conviction among the parties to the conflict of the two-state solution was initially strong but then started to wane, pointing out that Israelis living in settlements in the WB, including East Jerusalem, increased by 30% over the past decade, emphasising the existence of Israeli forces that call for the full annexation of WB, not to mention the continued Palestinian division, and continuing Israeli apprehension about ongoing incitement to “terrorism.”
- e. Ban Ki-moon stated that rounds of conflict continued after the announcement of the Arab peace initiative, which weakened optimism for an early solution, referring to the wars in 2006 and 2008, focusing on the tragic consequences of the 2014 war on GS.
- f. Ban Ki-moon warned of an important point: that the Security Council adopted only two resolutions on the Middle East peace process throughout the period from 2007 to early 2017. The time difference between the two resolutions was approximately eight years.
- g. To get out of this impasse, Ban Ki-moon believes that the solution is to implement the recommendations of the Quartet (which we mentioned earlier). However, settlement and the “regularization” decisions made by Israel at the beginning of 2016 (regarding 50 outposts and thousands of housing units in WB) threaten—from the Secretary-General’s point of view—the capacity to implement the recommendations.
- h. Ban Ki-moon called on the PA to work harder to stop incitement and the various acts of “violence.”
- i. He called on all parties (Israel, PA, and Hamas) to respect human rights defenders and freedom of expression, and to refrain from administrative detention.
- j. He called on Palestinians to unite and establish a single, legitimate, inclusive Palestinian Government, based on the PLO principles.

The new Secretary-General, Guterres, reiterated the traditional UN position during his PA visit in August 2017. He emphasized the two-state solution, and that Israeli settlement activities are an obstacle to achieving this goal, as well as reiterating the need to help resolve the GS humanitarian crisis, which he described, during his visit to the city, as “one of the most dramatic humanitarian crises that I have seen in many years working as a humanitarian in the United Nations.”⁶

2. Security Council

Resolution 2334 issued on 23/12/2016, concerning Israeli settlement activities, confirmed the international trend toward opposing settlement expansion, especially with the US abstaining from using veto against the resolution, and with the other 14 States supporting the resolution. The Israeli government considered the resolution to be shocking and subsequently recalled their ambassadors from both New Zealand and Senegal. Israel also cancelled a visit planned by the Prime Minister of Ukraine to Israel, and David Keyes, spokesperson for the Israeli Prime Minister, accused the Obama administration and stated that “This was a deliberate push by the United States and in fact they helped create the resolution in the first place.” In addition to that, the Israeli government, in the first week of January 2017, cut their UN annual dues, which amounted to \$6 million.⁷

The resolution provided for the following:⁸

- a. “The establishment by Israel of settlements in the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, has no legal validity and constitutes a flagrant violation under international law and a major obstacle to the achievement of the two-State solution.”
- b. A demand that Israel cease all settlement activities, including in East Jerusalem.
- c. Non-recognition of any changes to the 1967 lines, including with regard to Jerusalem.
- d. Calling upon all States to “distinguish, in their relevant dealings, between the territory of the State of Israel and the territories occupied since 1967.”

3. General Assembly

The 71st session of the UN General Assembly, held on 13–23/12/2016, adopted a number of resolutions on the Palestine issue, set out below:⁹

- a. The Assembly reaffirmed that Palestinian refugees are entitled to their property and to the income derived therefrom, in conformity with the principles of equity and justice.
- b. The Assembly requested the Secretary-General take all suitable steps, in consultation with the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine (UNCCP), to protect Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel.

- c. The Assembly called once again upon Israel to render all facilities and assistance to the Secretary-General in the implementation of the present resolution.
- d. The Assembly called upon all the parties concerned to provide the Secretary-General with any pertinent information in their possession concerning Arab property, assets and property rights in Israel that would assist him in the implementation of the present resolution.

The Assembly's resolutions at this session also included:

- a. The Assembly affirmed the necessity for the continuation of the work of UNRWA, stressing that Israel must facilitate the Agency's work and the movement of its employees, underlining the financial difficulties experienced by the Agency.
- b. The Assembly noted with regret that the UNCCP had been unable to find a means of achieving progress in the implementation of Paragraph 11 of General Assembly Resolution 194. It reiterated its request to the UNCCP to continue exerting efforts toward the implementation of assistance to the Palestinian refugees and to report to the Assembly on the efforts being exerted in this regard as appropriate, but no later than 1/9/2017.
- c. The Assembly reaffirmed the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and of the population of the occupied Syrian Golan over their natural resources, including land, water and energy. It demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, cease the exploitation, damage, cause of loss or depletion and endangerment of the natural resources in the Occupied Palestinian Territory (territories occupied in 1967),¹⁰ including East Jerusalem, and in the occupied Syrian Golan.
- d. The Assembly recognized the right of the Palestinian people to claim restitution as a result of any exploitation, damage, loss or depletion or endangerment of their natural resources resulting from illegal measures taken by Israel, the occupying power, and Israeli settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. It expressed the hope that this issue would be dealt with within the framework of the final status negotiations between the Palestinian and Israeli sides.
- e. The Assembly considered the work of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices Affecting the Human Rights of the Palestinian People and Other Arabs of the Occupied Territories and demanded that Israel provide

the Committee with all necessary facilities. They also pointed out the Israeli violations of Palestinian rights in the occupied territories, including Jerusalem.

- f. The Assembly emphasized the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination; that Israeli practices harm Palestinian human rights in the occupied territories; and that the settlements are illegal, including those in East Jerusalem.

When calculating the level of support for the 16 paragraphs voted in favour of the Palestinian cause at the said session, the voting results were as follows:

- a. The rate of support was 140 votes out of 193, the total number of member States; the rate of support for Palestinian rights was 72.53%.
- b. It had the highest level of support in the General Assembly's vote for the resolution on Palestinians' right to self-determination, receiving 177 votes (91.7%). The least supported resolution was the one related to the formation of a committee to investigate Israeli violations affecting the human rights of the Palestinian people and other Arabs of the occupied territories, receiving 91 votes (47.15%).

4. United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC)

The HRC comprises 47 members elected by the UN General Assembly, representing the world's political regions. During the March 2016 meetings, the Council took the following positions:¹¹

- a. Affirmed the right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.
- b. Reviewed all Israeli violations of human rights in the territories occupied in 1967, including Jerusalem.
- c. The Council called upon all responsible bodies and UN agencies to continue to implement the recommendations contained in the reports of the Independent Commission of Inquiry on the 2014 Gaza Conflict and the United Nations Fact-Finding Mission to Investigate the Implications of the Israeli Settlements on the Civil, Political, Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights of the Palestinian People Throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 1967, Including East Jerusalem.
- d. The Assembly approved the proposal of establishing a database of all international and Israeli business enterprises whose activities are linked to

the illegal Jewish settlements in the territories occupied in 1967. A number of researchers linked this decision to the ICC's announcement that they would start focusing on crimes linked to the exploitation of natural resources and unlawful dispossession of land.

The 34th session of the Assembly, held between 27/2–24/3/2017, reiterated the call for accountability and determination of responsibility for the violations of Palestinian human rights in the occupied territories in 1967, including East Jerusalem, and reiterated the right of Palestinian people to self-determination and the illegality of settlement activities.

5. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

The UNESCO represents the UN scientific, intellectual, and literary dimensions, and Israel views this body with antipathy in the light of the majority of the UNESCO positions on the Palestine issue. In line with the prevailing approach in this organization, UNESCO took a number of positions throughout 2016–2017, outlined below:¹²

- a. In its October 2016 motion, UNESCO condemned Israeli measures taking place around the *al-Aqsa* Mosque such as excavations and restrictions on worshippers entering the mosque.
- b. At the meeting held between 4–18/10/2016, the UNESCO stressed:
 1. It deeply regrets Israel's refusal to implement previous resolutions.
 2. It deeply regrets the persistence of Israeli excavations in Jerusalem.
 3. They called on Israel to work to restore the pre-2000 status quo with regard to Jordan's mandate to supervise the holy places.
 4. They reject Israeli violations of the rights of Palestinian clerics and the restrictions imposed on *al-Aqsa* Mosque entry.
 5. They condemn the destruction which affected the walls of Jerusalem.

In 2017, UNESCO held a meeting during the period 19/4–5/5/2017, in which they criticized Israeli actions regarding the Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron and the Bilal bin Rabah Mosque/ Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, since they fall within the Palestinian territories occupied in 1967.

In July 2017, the UNESCO World Heritage Committee passed a resolution labelling Israel as “the occupying Power, which have altered or purport to alter the character and status of the Holy City of Jerusalem,” which was rejected by Israel and the United States.¹³

In a statement issued by the US State Department in October 2017, the United States described UNESCO’s position as “anti-Israel bias” and said that the organization needed “reform.” This led a decision to withdraw from UNESCO—which will take effect on 31/12/2018—at the same time, Netanyahu called on the relevant Israeli parties to work to withdraw from the organization. It is known that the US has not pay its dues to UNESCO since 2011, because of what it considers bias against Israel, after UNESCO granted membership to Palestine, and this was the second time the US had withdrawn from UNESCO, having previously withdrawn in 1984 under Ronald Reagan, for “what it considered an ideological tilt toward the Soviet Union against the West”; however, they rejoined in 2002 under George W. Bush.¹⁴

6. United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)

At two meetings held during 2016 (2 June and 25 July), ECOSOC condemned a number of Israeli policies, including:¹⁵

- a. Israeli settler violence toward Palestinian women.
- b. Excessive Israeli use of force and violent action against civilians in GS.
- c. The Commission affirmed the poor economic and humanitarian conditions in GS and considered the occupation to be the primary cause of all these conditions.
- d. The Commission called upon the international community to fulfil its commitments to the Palestinian people.
- e. The Commission demanded the opening of all GS borders and crossings in accordance with Security Council Resolution 1860 (2009).
- f. The Commission affirmed the contiguity and unity of the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories and demanded that Israel respect the agreement signed with the PA in 1994 regarding the economic relations between the two parties.

7. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)

In September 2016, the UNCTAD published a detailed report on the impact of Israeli policies on the Palestinian economy. After reviewing the various production

sectors in relation to the overall tendency of the Palestinian economy during the period 1975–2014, the report concluded:

- a. The contribution of the tradable goods sector (agriculture and industry) to GDP dropped by more than 50%, from 37% to 18%.
- b. The contribution to employment decreased from 47% to 23%.
- c. The Palestinian economy was deprived of the benefits derived from Area C, i.e., access to more than 60% of WB and approximately 66% of grazing land.
- d. In GS, 85% of fishery resources are inaccessible to Palestinian producers.
- e. Israeli military operations against GS (2008–2014) had incurred a cost at least three times the size of GS's GDP.
- f. More than 2.5 million productive trees have been uprooted since 1967, including 800 thousand olive trees, 5,600 of which were vandalized in 2015.
- g. 82% of the Palestinian groundwater resources have been confiscated in the 1967 occupied territories.
- h. Palestinians must import 50% of their water needs from Israel.
- i. 66% of Palestinians in the WB and GS suffer chronic food insecurity.
- j. 73% of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip need humanitarian assistance.
- k. Health status in Gaza:
 1. Up to 90 million litres of partially treated sewage is discharged daily into GS's Mediterranean Sea.
 2. Waiting time for some surgeries can be 18 months.
 3. More than 70% of households are supplied with piped water for only 6–8 hours every 2–4 days.
 4. The rate of neonatal mortality has also risen significantly, from 12 per thousand live births in 2008 to 20.3 in 2013.

The report concluded that without the occupation, the economy of the Occupied Palestinian Territory could produce twice the GDP it currently generates; chronic trade and budget deficits, as well as poverty and unemployment, could recede; and economic dependence on Israel could end, as confirmed by the report of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace, in which he referred to the harmful effects of the occupation authorities denying Palestinians access to their natural resources, especially in Area C of WB.¹⁶

UNCTAD's 2017 report reaffirmed the economic and social difficulties facing the Palestinian economy due to the Israeli policies, especially the high rates of unemployment, deterioration of humanitarian conditions, the 38% drop in donor support in 2014–2016, and by about 13% in 2017—according to estimates by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), accelerated settlement expansion in violation of Resolution 2334, as evidenced by the 40% increase in 2016 (compared to 2015) in housing construction in these settlements, and the restrictions imposed on the movement of Palestinians. The report also reviews some of UNCTAD's technical assistance to the Palestinians during 2017.¹⁷

8. International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL)

Palestine succeeded in joining INTERPOL, whose total number of members has reached 192 States. In the vote of the INTERPOL General Assembly in September 2017, 75 countries supported, 24 opposed, while 34 abstained from voting.¹⁸ In November 2016, Israel succeeded in deferring the consideration of Palestine's membership, as Palestine received only 56 votes for, while 62 voted against and 37 abstained from voting. The Palestinian application was agreed to be reconsidered in 2017,¹⁹ which has taken place and ended with Palestine being granted membership.

INTERPOL is concerned with the exchange of information on international criminals, particularly in international crimes involving counterfeiting, smuggling, and the illegal arms trade, as well as providing police consultations to some States.

Israel reacted strongly to this vote, and the reactions of Netanyahu and other ministers, as well as the Israeli media, indicate a deep sense of increasing “international understanding” of Palestinian rights, especially in the UN and its specialized agencies, in addition to other intergovernmental organizations.²⁰

Fourth: The United States (US)

US policy toward the Palestine issue in 2016–2017 can be divided into two parts: the first is the results of President Barack Obama's term (Democratic Party), which ended in 2016, and the second is the transition to a Republican administration headed by President Donald Trump in 2017. The results of the eight-year presence of the Democrats in the White House (from the beginning of 2009 until the end of

2016) can be identified by looking at the last lengthy speech on the Middle East by John Kerry on 28/12/2016 at the Dean Acheson Auditorium in Washington DC. The speech included the following key points:²¹

1. Kerry emphasized the two-state solution, despite the fact that the reality is that it is no longer a straight forward solution to implement; it is rather moving toward one state dominated by Israel, and perpetual occupation.
2. He defended the decision not to use the American veto against the Security Council's resolution passed on 23/12/2016, criticizing the remarks of the Israeli permanent representative to the UN, whom he described as somebody "who does not support a two-state solution."
3. Kerry stressed his strong opposition to the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement, referring to the increased US funding to support Israel, even in the midst of the US financial crisis and budget deficits. He stated that US financial support to Israel amounted to more than half of the total US global FMF, including an MOU concluded with Israel in the fall of 2016. The \$38 billion MOU is to be provided over the next 10 years; a number, Kerry maintained, that "exceeds any military assistance package the United States has provided to any country." He added, "No American administration has done more for Israel's security than Barack Obama's." He quoted the words of the Israeli Prime Minister saying that US military and intelligence cooperation during Obama's term in office has been "unprecedented."
4. Kerry criticized the PA President, Mahmud 'Abbas for "failing to condemn specific terrorist attacks and naming public squares, streets and schools after terrorists."
5. He affirmed the US role in thwarting Palestinian efforts "to delegitimize Israel in international fora," the most recent of which the "wholly unbalanced and inflammatory UNESCO resolution regarding Jerusalem." He criticised the PA's attempts to criminalize Israel in the International Criminal Court (ICC). He also criticised Hamas' policy and armament, citing the harsh conditions of the Palestinian people in GS.
6. Kerry criticized the settlement policy and pointed out that the number of settlers rose during the Obama administration (starting 2009) to approximately 100 thousand. He then added a statement which bore a serious connotation saying, "We understand that in a final status agreement, certain settlements

would become part of Israel to account for the changes that have taken place over the last 49 years—we understand that—including the new democratic demographic realities that exist on the ground.”

7. He affirmed that East Jerusalem forms part of the territories occupied in 1967, and that is part of the US policy which is based on the 1978 opinion of the State Department Legal Advisor.
8. Work should be done to compensate refugees and provide “permanent homes” for them and that “the solution must be consistent with two states for two peoples and cannot affect the fundamental character of Israel.”
9. Jerusalem should not be divided and the holy sites should remain accessible to adherents of all three monotheistic faiths.

Kerry’s speech confirmed that the Obama administration had implicitly accepted the annexation of some settlements in the occupied territories of 1967 to Israel while believing there should be “permanent homes” for the Palestinian refugees—a statement that suggested the US had abandoned any pretense of adherence to the right of return.

The US rejected any boycott targeting Israel (although in January 2016 the US Customs and Border Protection issued a reminder of its 1995 statement that “goods produced in the West Bank or Gaza Strip shall be marked as originating from ‘West Bank,’.. ‘Gaza Strip.’” And “It is not acceptable to mark the aforementioned goods with the words ‘Israel,’ ‘Made in Israel.’”). The 2016 US provision of generous assistance to Israel, amounted to \$3.8 billion a year (over the following 10 years) including \$3.1 billion in FMF, while the Palestinians would receive \$400 million annually, including for the security and economic sectors. This meant that the aid provided to the Palestinians is amounts to 10.5% of that given to Israel. The new MOU on Security Assistance concluded by the Obama administration on 14/9/2016 pledged to increase military aid for the next 10 years from \$30 billion (previously agreed on) to \$38 billion. This makes the total US assistance to Israel since its inception \$127.4 billion; knowing that this amount is much larger if calculated based on our contemporary purchasing value.²² As for the US aid to the Palestinians, no agreement was reached. Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah said that the PA had received no aid from Washington in 2016, while the US State Department said in a statement in December 2016 that it had provided Ramallah with over \$357 million in 2016, and an additional \$95 million

was given to UNRWA in WB and GS, totalling \$452 million. However, the USAID website indicates that the United States provided a total of \$317 million in 2016 and provided the same amount again in 2017.²³

The term of the Republican President Trump began with his visit to KSA and Israel in May 2017, participating in the Arab-American Islamic Summit held in Riyadh. Trump reiterated his support for Israel and urged the parties to return to negotiations. His policies, according to his and his staff's statements, can be seen as follows:

1. The confrontation with Iran and the armed Islamic organizations is considered more important than dealing with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.²⁴
2. Financial, diplomatic, and military support for Israel should continue, with the tendency to include Palestinian armed groups on the lists of "terrorist" organizations.
3. There was a failure to take a clear position on the issue of transferring the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem in the first months of his term, which is something he promised to do during the election campaign.

Monitoring Trump's statements after his assumption of office in early 2017 reveals extreme disarray in the structure of his administration (successive resignations, media campaigns against him, contradictory statements and decisions on his part, etc.).²⁵ Nevertheless, some statements by the Trump administration highlight positions that require extreme caution. For example:²⁶

1. A statement by a White House official ahead of a meeting between Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu that the Trump administration "would not push the two-state solution."
2. In a press conference with Netanyahu in February 2017, "Trump directly broke with diplomatic tradition on the issue by saying his concern was the 'deal,' not whether that included a state for Palestinians." He said, "I'm looking at two states and one state," adding, "I like the one that both parties like. I can live with either one."

On 6/12/2017, Trump signed the proclamation recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and directed "the State Department to begin preparations to move the American embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem." He called "on all parties to maintain the status quo at Jerusalem's holy sites," adding that his announcement "marks the

beginning of a new approach to conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.” It is noted that the US Congress, on 23/10/1995, adopted the Jerusalem Embassy Act, which stipulates that “Jerusalem should be recognized as the capital of the State of Israel” and that it “should remain an undivided city, while deciding that the United States Embassy in Israel should be established in Jerusalem no later than May 31, 1999.”²⁷ US presidents’ policy used to be signing a six-month waiver overriding a 1995 law requiring that the embassy be transferred to Jerusalem, and Trump’s comment on that was: “Some say they lacked courage.”²⁸ As for the factors helping in such a decision, they include the rise of the right wing in the US, the influence of the Israel lobby on US decision-making, in addition to the general state of weakness of Arab and Muslim countries.

Despite extensive international and Arab condemnation, the State Department’s Acting Assistant Secretary for the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, David Satterfield, affirmed that “the decision by the President was, is, will remain firm.” He explained that the US President “made clear that this step did not touch upon, did not deal with, did not resolve or prejudice any of the specific aspects or boundaries of Israeli sovereignty in Jerusalem”, and that Trump affirmed “that these measures in no way prejudice the outcome of final status negotiation between Israel and the Palestinians.” Satterfield assured that the “President is absolutely committed with his peace team to doing everything in his, in our power to move forward at a point in the new year, a peace process, a peace initiative, which can move the region forward,” however, he declined to give any details.²⁹ Some US media outlets had their own analyses concerning the Trump decision, where *The New York Times* newspaper saw that “Mr. Trump’s decision, a high-risk foray into the thicket of the Middle East, was driven not by diplomatic calculations but by a campaign promise.”³⁰

This decision was condemned internationally and caused a fury all around the world. Governments asked the US to reverse the decision, which was also refused. 521 protests were held in various non-Arab countries, of which 91 were in the US, a few days following the decision, more than 300 protests took place in some European cities.³¹ In India, rallies, protests and events were organized in more than 150 cities, condemning the US move.³²

During an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council, on 8/12/2017, many members rejected the US move. The UN ambassadors of Sweden, France, Italy and

the UK said that the decision “contradicted international law and Security Council resolutions.”³³ On 18/12/2017, the US vetoed a UN Security Council call for the declaration to be withdrawn. The text, tabled by Egypt, stressed that “Jerusalem is a final status issue to be resolved through negotiations” and that “any decisions and actions which purport to have altered, the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded.” It also demanded that “all States comply with Security Council resolutions regarding the Holy City of Jerusalem, and not to recognize any actions or measures contrary to those resolutions.” The resolution was rejected by a vote of 14 in favour to 1 against (US veto).³⁴

UN Secretary General António Guterres stated, “Jerusalem is a final status issue that must be resolved through direct negotiations between the two parties,” and reiterated his position that rejected “any unilateral measures that would jeopardize the prospect of peace for Israelis and Palestinians.”³⁵ The decision was also rejected by Turkey, the UK, France, Germany, Russia, China, Canada, Brazil, Italy and North Korea...,³⁶ in addition to Bolivia and the Inter-Parliamentary Union.³⁷ The President of the European Council Donald Tusk affirmed that the 28 “EU leaders reiterate firm commitment to the two-state solution and, in this context, the EU position on Jerusalem remains unchanged.” The statement by the EU’s heads of state and government adds fresh weight to the criticism of Trump’s move, which upended seven decades of US policy on the sensitive issue of Jerusalem.³⁸

UK Prime Minister Theresa May has added her voice to the dissent over President Trump’s move, “We disagree with the US decision to move its embassy to Jerusalem and recognise Jerusalem as the Israeli capital before a final status agreement.” German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s spokesperson, Steffen Seibert announced “The German government does not support this position because the status of Jerusalem can only be negotiated within the framework of a two-state solution.”³⁹

As for France, the French President Emmanuel Macron considered the decision “a regrettable” one, and said, “France and Europe are attached to a two-state solution.”⁴⁰ Pope Francis also rejected Trump’s decision, wishing that everyone remained “committed to respecting the status quo of the city, in accordance with the relevant resolutions of the United Nations.”⁴¹ China and Russia expressed their concern, considering it counterproductive and destabilizing.⁴²

On 21/12/2017, during a rare emergency meeting, the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly to call “upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem.” By a recorded vote of 128 in favour to 9 against, with 35 abstentions, and where 21 states were absent, the Assembly adopted the resolution.⁴³

Fifth: The European Union (EU)

Despite a number of European resolutions on the settlement of the Palestine issue, EU countries refrained from taking measures to make Israel comply with the resolutions of international bodies. Indeed, a study by the European Council on Foreign Relations in October 2016 refers to two important matters:⁴⁴

1. EU countries, while recognising the two-state solution, do not work to change the mechanisms of achieving this solution and remain committed to the same mechanisms that have not produced any results. The report indicates that the most prominent of these mechanisms is the “incentives” policy, which aims to “moderate its behaviour and move along the path of peace with its Palestinian neighbours,” which has proven to be unsuccessful.
2. “Differentiation refers to a variety of measures taken by the EU and its member states to exclude settlement-linked entities and activities from bilateral relations with Israel.” The EU considers Israeli settlements in the 1967 occupied territories including those in East Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan Heights, illegal. However, this policy is not practised by many EU countries. Suffice to state here that the importance of this policy is that the EU Council’s report “EU Differentiation and Israeli Settlements,” in 2015,⁴⁵ led to a direct decline in the Tel Aviv banking index by 2.46 points.

The report argues that EU consensus around differentiation has broadened, adding that, if the EU wants the two-state solution to “remain a viable option, then the process of differentiation must be accelerated and streamlined.” Perhaps the UK and France are the least committed to pressurising Israel, especially with regard to dealing with the products of the Israeli settlements. However, the Brexit could boost the more assertive European attitudes in adopting the aforementioned “differentiation” policy. Some European countries support settlement building by

investing in Israeli banks, which in turn provide loans to settlers. “To date, 17 EU member states have advisories warning their businesses of the legal, financial and reputational consequences they could expose themselves to in dealings with Israeli settlement entities.”

Perhaps the resolution of the European Parliament on the achievement of the two-state solution, which was based on the Foreign Affairs Council’s conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process issued on 18/1/2016, was the most important during the period the study was conducted (2016–2017). The resolution states,

The only lasting solution to the conflict in the Middle East remains that of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace within secure and recognised borders, on the basis of the 1967 ‘green line’ and with Jerusalem as the capital of both states.

The resolution urged “all Member States to unconditionally recognise the State of Palestine,” and stated that the “entrenchment of a one-state reality of unequal rights, unending occupation and creeping annexation of the West Bank, as well as the vanishing prospect of Palestinian statehood, require a rethink of EU policy towards the conflict.” In addition, the EU condemned “all acts of violence against civilians.” It also condemned the continued expansion of Israeli settlements and called for a series of measures against this policy, as well as establishing “a robust EU monitoring and compliance mechanism in relation to trade originating from the settlements.” It underscored “the resolve of the international community, as expressed again by the UN Security Council in December 2016, not to recognise any changes to the 1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem.” It expressed “its grave concern over the exploitation of Palestinian natural resources by Israel and the prevalence of forcible transfer, notably in Area C, which constitutes a grave breach of the Geneva Conventions.” It also urged “the Israeli Government to immediately, unconditionally and completely lift the illegal blockade of the Gaza Strip,” deplored the “continued Palestinian disunity,” and called “on all Palestinian forces to resume efforts towards reconciliation.”⁴⁶

As for the aspects related to Palestinian human rights under occupation, the report of Euro-Mediterranean Human Rights Monitor on Israel’s policy towards EU-funded projects in Palestine, indicates that, in the first months of 2016, there was an increase in the number of demolitions in the 1967 occupied Palestinian territories. This was the result of an Israeli reaction to the EU’s resolution

in 2015 to label the products of the Israeli settlements established in the 1967 occupied territories in a step to boycott them on a large scale. A report issued by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) “has documented 120 demolitions against EU-financed buildings in the first three months of 2016.” The European report criticized the fact that “this information is actively suppressed by European officials to avoid embarrassment” with Israel.⁴⁷ Not to mention that some European countries buy shares in Israeli banks, and these Israeli banks finance settlement projects in the occupied West Bank. In addition, some European States, especially Eastern European countries, do not abide by the resolution to label products imported from Israeli settlements.⁴⁸

As for the international conferences hosted by Europe in 2017 for the purpose of considering the Palestine issue and working to advance the peace process, the Paris Conference (Conférence de Paris Pour la Paix au Proche-Orient) was the most prominent. It was held in January 2017 with the participation of 70 countries, including permanent members of the UN Security Council and the EU, represented by EU Foreign Policy Chief Federica Mogherini. Delegates restated their commitment to the two-state solution, and that neither side should take unilateral steps.⁴⁹

In March 2016, the European Commission announced a \$274.1 million assistance package for the Palestinian people, \$184 million of which is set to be funnelled directly to the PA, and about \$89 million to UNRWA, with another amount to be announced later in the year.⁵⁰ About €20 million (Around \$18.2 million) in humanitarian funding was also provided by the European Commission in 2017.⁵¹

Sixth: BRICS States

The BRICS group (Russia, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa) account for 41% of the world’s population, with a GDP equivalent to 22% of the GWP. The five States also belong to the G20. This makes this group a political and economic force, capable of influencing international relations, including the Palestine issue, especially as Russia has insisted since 2013 that the group should give political and security issues more attention.

The Group have held nine summits, two of which were in 2016 and 2017, and the Group's statement issued in India in October 2016 provided for:⁵²

1. Reiterating the necessity to implement the two-state solution on the basis of UN Security Council resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative, and all agreements between the two parties to the conflict.
2. Negotiations between the two parties to the conflict to take place with a view to establishing an independent, viable, and territorially contiguous Palestinian State, living side by side with Israel, within secure borders on the basis of the 1967 lines.
3. East Jerusalem shall be the capital of the State of Palestine as envisaged in the relevant UN resolutions.

As for the summit held in China in September 2017, Paragraph 42 of the summit's statement reads:⁵³

We reiterate the urgent need for a just, lasting and comprehensive solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to achieve peace and stability in the Middle East on the basis of relevant United Nations resolutions, the Madrid Principles, the Arab Peace Initiative and previous agreements between the parties through negotiations with a view to creating an independent, viable, territorially contiguous Palestinian State...

The participants stressed their readiness to aid the achievement of this goal.

In general, the ceiling of these states' support for the Palestine issue has been declining in the past years, with their interests and economic considerations on the increase, and with the state of weakness and fragmentation witnessed in the Arab region. There is also a focus among some of the BRICS states on supporting the "two-state solution" and the establishment of a Palestinian state, as dictated by the peace process, while avoiding denouncing the Israeli occupation and condemning Israeli settlements and arbitrary practices.

As for the individual relationship between the BRICS and the Palestine issue, Russia are the most active:

1. Russia

The Russian Foreign Ministry published the general indicators of Russian foreign policy, which had been approved by Vladimir Putin in November 2016, and in which (Item 92) the following was stated:⁵⁴

- a. “Russia will continue making a meaningful contribution to stabilizing the situation in the Middle East and North Africa.”
- b. “Supporting collective efforts aimed at neutralizing the threats that emanate from international terrorist groups.”
- c. Continued promotion of political and diplomatic settlement of conflicts in the States of the region, respecting their sovereignty and territorial integrity, and the right to self-determination without external interference.
- d. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council and member of the Middle East Quartet, Russia will further strive to achieve a comprehensive, fair and lasting resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in all its aspects consistent with international law.

In June 2016, a meeting was held between Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Riyad al-Maliki, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Palestinian Authority, where the following points were emphasised:⁵⁵

- a. Calling for the activation of the efforts of the Quartet.
- b. Emphasising intra-Palestinian unity.
- c. Affirming the importance of the Arab initiative (2002). Lavrov said that “Prime Minister Netanyahu repeatedly referred to the Arab Peace Initiative as a generally acceptable basis for future efforts,” and that he did not hear “Benjamin Netanyahu say anything about the need to amend it.”
- d. The Paris International Conference in June 2016 was referred to as a basis upon which to resume “negotiations within existing international legal solutions.”

Moscow look keen on “restoring Palestine unity and overcoming the rift” within the Palestinian front, especially between the Hamas and Fatah movements. This was evident in Lavrov’s remarks to representatives of the Palestinian organizations during their meeting in Moscow in January 2017.⁵⁶

Moscow has shown willingness to provide assistance to the Palestinian people, as evidenced by the press conference which President Putin and Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas held in May 2017. Putin referred to the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) that would include Palestine among the users of the common preference system, exempting Palestinian goods from customs duties when entering the EAEU territory. He added that there were 500 Palestinian

students studying at Russian universities; and that “Russia took part in work to renovate Bethlehem’s historic and religious centre – Star Street,” in a way that would bring increased numbers of pilgrims and tourists from Russia (More than 300 thousand Russian tourists visited Palestine in 2016). Putin stressed the necessity “to maintain bilateral relations, refrain from unilateral steps, search together for mutually acceptable solutions.” He emphasised the need to reach a negotiated political solution based on international law. As for ‘Abbas, he agreed to hold a trilateral meeting in Moscow on the basis of a two-state solution,⁵⁷ following an invitation by Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev during his visit to the occupied Palestinian territories in November 2016. This invitation was an extension of the Russian Foreign Ministry’s September 2016 invitation to both Israel and the PA to hold negotiations in Moscow. However, that had not produced any results because the Israeli side refused to pledge to stop settlement expansion as requested by the PA.

2. China

It is not possible to separate the Chinese policy on the Middle East from China’s strategic project (One Belt, One Road Initiative) which seeks to link China and Asia with Europe by means of establishing land and sea corridors through the Middle East; especially with the growing Chinese trade with the region, and the increase in China’s investments in the Arab region and with Israel, which reached approximately \$55 billion with the Arab world and about \$16.5 billion with Israel in 2016.⁵⁸

Although China is the only major Power that is not part of the Quartet, it does have a special envoy to the Middle East, Gong Xiaosheng, who regularly meets with leaders of both parties to the conflict.

The statement by the Chinese Ambassador to UN, WU Haitao, delivered in December 2016 at the UN Security Council, sheds light upon Chinese trends regarding Palestine. The delegate, following the vote on the resolution on Israeli settlement in the 1967 Palestinian occupied territories, indicated:⁵⁹

- a. China’s full support for the UN Security Council to play its role in the Palestine issue.
- b. The Council’s adoption of Resolution 2334 (which we referred to earlier) was an important decision reflecting “the common aspiration and wish of the

international community and heeds the just demand of Palestine and the Arab countries.”

- c. Called upon Israel to implement the Resolution in a practical manner by immediately ending both its settlement activities and the demolition of Palestinian homes, in order to create conditions for the relaunch of the peace talks.
- d. Called upon both the Palestinian and Israeli sides to honor their obligations, maintain calm, exercise restraint, and to “establish mutual trust so as to return to the right path of peace negotiations as soon as possible.”
- e. Affirmed the continuation of China’s support for Palestinians to establish their independent, fully sovereign state on the 1967 lines, with East Jerusalem as its capital.
- f. China’s willingness to work with the international community “in scaling up the diplomatic efforts to promote an early, comprehensive and just solution to the conflict between Palestine and Israel.”

The Chinese position on the vote on Resolution 2334 caused a “sharp reaction” in Israel, despite the attempts by the new Israeli ambassador in Beijing (appointed in early 2017) to emphasize the solidity of Chinese-Israeli relations.

Although China’s pro-Israel lobby is centred in Shanghai (due to the city’s role in hosting German Jews in the 1930s and during World War II), most Israeli thinkers are less confident in China because they see it as a future force that will change the rules of the international system, which is controlled by the West, and which currently forms the main base of Israel’s defence.⁶⁰

Chinese President Xi Jinping had confirmed his country’s position on the establishment of a Palestinian state with Jerusalem as its capital at his meeting with the Arab League in early 2016; where he announced that the Israeli-Palestine issue “can’t be overlooked at any time and its resolution must be a top priority,” a position confirmed by Chinese Ambassador to Israel Zhan Yongxin.⁶¹ He also announced aid of \$7.6 million for a solar power station project in the Palestinian territories.⁶²

In the hope not to marginalize the Palestine issue, Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed a project during his meeting with the Palestinian president in Beijing in July 2017 (nearly four months after Netanyahu’s visit to Beijing). The Chinese

project is based on four elements, and this is the second time China put forward an initiative following their earlier initiative in 2013. The new Chinese initiative includes these elements:⁶³

- a. Advancing the two-state solution based on the 1967 lines and East Jerusalem as the capital of a new Palestinian state.
- b. Emphasising the concept of common, comprehensive, co-operative and sustainable security, and the need to immediately end the construction of Israeli settlements; take immediate measures to prevent violence against civilians; and call for an early resumption of the peace process.
- c. Coordinating international efforts to introduce peace-promoting measures that include a joint contribution at an early date.
- d. Promoting peace through development and cooperation between the Palestinians and Israel; the peace through development notion had been proposed by the Chinese president in 2016 in a speech delivered at the Arab League in January 2016, and “China is expected to play a bigger role in the Middle East in the future, especially as the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative advances in the region.”⁶⁴

During a meeting between the Palestinian and Chinese presidents in July 2017, China had proposed a “trilateral dialogue mechanism”: Palestinian-Israeli-Chinese.⁶⁵

3. India

In previous reports, we referred to the strategic shift in India’s policy after Narendra Modi, leader of the Hindu Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), known for their great sympathy with Israel, took office as Prime Minister of India in May 2014.

Modi’s tenure has witnessed diplomatic activity between Israel and India, with Indian Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj visiting Israel in January 2016. Modi also made the first visit of an Indian prime minister to Israel in July 2017. Israeli President Reuven Rivlin had preceded him with a visit to India in January 2017, followed by Indian President Pranab Mukherjee’s visit to Israel. These visits have strengthened the relationship between the two sides, as bilateral trade grew from \$200 million in 1992 (the start of diplomatic relations between them) to \$4.5 billion in 2016, primarily based on sales of military hardware, agriculture and water technology, bearing in mind that the Palestinian president visited India in

May 2017, during which time the Indian prime minister confirmed his support for the concept of establishing a Palestinian state.⁶⁶ Israel, with their growing relations with India, rank third after the United States and Russia in arms sales to India.

The issue of counter-terrorism is a convergence point between the Israeli and Indian sides, especially with the circumstances surrounding the Indian situation with Pakistan in Kashmir, and the desire of the two parties to limit the phenomenon of “political Islam.”⁶⁷

Concerning the Palestinian side, the Indian position supporting the concept of a Palestinian state remains, as was evident from the Palestinian President’s talks with the Indian Prime Minister in May of 2017.⁶⁸

4. South Africa

The general tendency in South Africa indicates refusal to deal with Israel because of its close relations with the racist apartheid system that ruled South Africa. However, the South African government are gradually moving toward deepening relations with Israel, while continuing to sympathize with Palestinian demands.

Studying at the trade between the two sides reveals that “the two countries have gone from a parity situation in 2009 to one where Israel exports to South Africa almost four times as much as it imports,” according to statements by the South African Ambassador to Israel, Sisa Ngombane.⁶⁹

Nevertheless, considering the policies of the South African parties reveals a number of important differences in their position towards the Palestine issue, as follows:⁷⁰

- a. African National Congress (ANC):** Supports the Palestinian people in “their struggle for self-determination” and the establishment of a Palestinian state on the 1967 lines. They believe that appropriate arrangements must be made for the safe passage of all Palestinians between GS and the WB, however, they do not call for boycotts and divestment or sanctions against Israel, despite encouraging its members, whether they are in the organization or aligned movements, to “desist from any trips to Israel.”
- b. Democratic Alliance (DA):** Supports the two-state solution with Jerusalem as the capital of the two states; does not support the boycott of Israel.

- c. **African Christian Democratic Party (ACDP):** Supports what the Palestinian and Israeli sides agree on, does not see Israel as a “settlement regime,” and does not support the boycott of Israel because they believe that “Israel’s innovative technological advances and expertise in many sectors would be of significant benefit to South Africa.”
- d. **United Democratic Movement (UDM):** Supports the two-state solution through peaceful negotiations and believes that as long as the solution to the Middle East conflict is viewed as a monopoly of the US, a real and lasting solution will remain far-fetched. The movement calls on South Africa to invite the Palestinian and Israeli sides to hold talks in South Africa and does not support the boycott of Israel.
- e. **Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF):** They support the UN resolutions on Palestine, and the boycott of Israel so that it would be brought to a negotiation table and agree to the national resolutions on the matter of the people of Palestine.
- f. **Congress of the People (COPE):** Calls for a two-state solution and supports the boycott of Israel.

5. Brazil

When the UN General Assembly approved the partition of Palestine in 1947, the President of the General Assembly was the Brazilian delegate to the United Nations, Osvaldo Aranha, who was one of the most prominent supporters of the establishment of Israel.⁷¹ Eventually, Brazil recognized Israel in 1949, one year after its establishment.

Israeli-Brazilian relations became strained in 2016 after Brazil refused to approve Israeli Ambassador Danny Dayan as Ambassador of Israel to Brazil because he was considered a “settler leader” in the West Bank. Later they approved Ambassador Yossi Shelly as an accredited ambassador of Israel, after leftist President Dilma Rousseff, whose party (Democratic Labor Party) is seen by Israel as having an anti-Israel, pro-Palestinian stance, was impeached. Michel Temer, of Lebanese origin, took over as President after Rousseff. The Israeli Foreign Ministry asserted that “There is no doubt that this appointment will promote friendship between

the two countries and further relations across many spheres, including economy and trade.” This speculation is backed up by the fact that Temer appointed Jose Serra, a Jew known for his tendency toward Israel, as Brazil’s Minister of Foreign Affairs; he also appointed another Israeli-born, Ilan Goldfajn, as President of the Central Bank of Brazil (Banco Central do Brasi).⁷² However, the current Brazilian President Temer is facing corruption charges, which could open the door to his replacement, with his term due to expire in 2019.⁷³

It is noted that the rate of Jewish emigration from Brazil to Israel was on the increase during the years 2016–2017 (the number of Jews in Brazil is approximately 120 thousand), for different reasons, mostly economic.⁷⁴

Seventh: Japan

Japan’s policy on the Palestine issue revolves around three points:⁷⁵

1. Financial and economic contribution to support Palestinian projects within the framework of a broad Japanese vision that includes both Jordan and Israel in what is known as the “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative in the Jordan Rift Valley, launched in 2006. In 2017, 39 tenants signed an agreement to operate in the industrial park there and six factories are in operation. With respect to Japan’s aid, Japanese assistance to the Palestinians reached \$1.77 billion between 1993 and 2017, an annual average of \$74 million.
2. Japanese policy, according to its official statements, opposes the Israeli settlement policy in WB and East Jerusalem. The Japanese Foreign Ministry confirmed that position in five statements in 2016 and two other statements in June and July 2017, calling upon Israel to freeze settlement activities because they are in “violation of international law,” and because it constitutes a request by the international community.
3. The constant call for peace and avoidance of violence, which was reiterated in the Japanese Foreign Ministry statements in July 2017 following the Jerusalem incidents and the clashes between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli security forces around the *al-Aqsa* Mosque.

Eighth: International Public Opinion

International public opinion can be divided into three segments: There are two non-governmental groups: people on the one hand and civil society, on the other, represented by international non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The third segment is governmental, represented by intergovernmental organizations (here, excluding the United Nations).

1. Public Opinion

Most of the polls conducted in 2016 and 2017 indicate that a negative view about Israel is widespread, whether in countries known to be hostile to Israel or in countries that are friendly to it (such as the US, UK, or others). This is confirmed by most relevant academic references.⁷⁶

A careful review of the previous polls' results indicates that:

- The negative view of Israel was double the positive view.
- Of the 19 countries (representing most of the world's population), Israel remains "the fourth most-negatively viewed country out of the 17 countries in the ranking. Of the 19 countries participating in the survey in 2017, 15 lean negatively in their opinion of Israel's influence, while four lean positively."
- When looking at the period from 2014 to 2017, perceptions of Israel remain largely negative in Europe.
- US opinion still ranks first globally in its positive view of Israel.
- European public opinion is still closer to the negative view, with the positive view being the weakest in Germany (7%), while France is the highest (28%).
- African countries rank second after the US in the positive view of Israel (Kenya and Nigeria).
- There is a noticeable increase in the positive view of Israel in China (34% in 2017 compared to 13% in 2014).
- The negative view remains the highest among Latin American countries.

The following table shows that there has been a change, albeit slight, in the negative attitude toward Israel in American public opinion:

Table 1/8: American Public Opinion of Israel 2016–2017⁷⁷

Year	Very favorable	Mostly favorable	Mostly unfavorable	Very unfavorable	No opinion
2017	29	42	21	6	2
2016	30	41	16	8	5

The following table shows the result of Country Ratings Poll among 18 thousand people in 19 countries between December 2016 and April 2017:

Table 2/8: Views of Israel’s Influence by Country 2017⁷⁸

Country	Mainly positive (%)	Mainly negative (%)
US	59	28
Canada	35	52
Peru	20	50
Mexico	16	63
Brazil	16	61
France	28	62
UK	25	66
Greece	19	35
Spain	11	60
Germany	7	36
Russia	34	20
Turkey	10	77
Kenya	46	26
Nigeria	45	37
China	34	57
Australia	31	56
India	21	40
Pakistan	10	49
Indonesia	9	64
Global average	25	50

2. NGOs Concerned with the Arab-Israeli Conflict

Some references indicate that there are 114 NGOs concerned with the Arab-Israeli conflict, covering various aspects of human rights (political, economic, and social), in addition to international NGOs.⁷⁹ Perhaps what was mentioned by Daniel Egel, one of the researchers of the RAND Corporation's report "The Costs of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict," on the impact of the Palestinian BDS movement reveals the Israeli concern. Egel stated that if BDS took hold in a serious way in 2014, "in 2024 the economy would be \$8.8 b [billion] smaller than if it remained on its current path."⁸⁰

Among the influential NGOs is Amnesty International, which devotes an annual special report on the situation in WB and GS. In its 2016–2017 report, the organization indicated:⁸¹

First: Israel: The organization recorded the following Israeli practices:

- Unlawful killing of Palestinian civilians, including children, in WB, GS and Israel.
- Continued detention of thousands of Palestinians who oppose the occupation, including hundreds of administrative detainees.
- Continued arrest of hundreds of Palestinian children, many of whom were subjected to abuse, and some were held under renewable administrative detention.
- Exercising torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including children, with impunity.
- Continued development of illegal settlements and land confiscation and the imposition of severe restrictions on the movement of Palestinians.
- Continued siege of GS.
- Unprecedentedly high number of demolitions of Palestinian homes in both WB and the Negev desert, forcibly evicting residents.
- Deportation of thousands of African asylum-seekers.

Second: PA: The report recorded the following criticism:

- Restrictions on freedom of expression.
- Arbitrary arrest of political opponents.
- Prevention of peaceful assembly and protests and forcible dispersion of them.
- Torture and ill-treatment of detainees.
- The death penalty remaining in force for murder and other crimes.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) is conducting a preliminary examination into the situation in Palestine to determine whether the situation there meets the criteria to pursue a formal investigation into crimes committed in Palestine, by both sides, the Israelis and the Palestinians. In October, an ICC delegation visited Israel and WB and held meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials.⁸²

Conclusion

A review of the political literature on the Middle East indicates that the term “Palestinian-Israeli” conflict is increasingly used at the expense of the term “Arab-Israeli” conflict. This signifies a shift in the geography of the conflict, making its borders bilateral rather than regional, which puts the Palestinian side in a less influential position. This is a situation that the Arab regimes are primarily responsible for, whether because of their failed policies, preoccupation with their repression of their peoples, or agendas which are linked to external forces.

The most important features of growing international sympathy with the Palestinian side, clearly visible in international public opinion or the involvement of international governmental and non-governmental organizations, are:

1. It is mostly theoretical and not supported by effective international measures, especially regarding Israeli settlements in WB, the Judaization of Jerusalem, and the continued GS siege.
2. The major Powers (US, Russia, EU, China, and Japan) are working to alter the peace process to serve their goals in the region, as evidenced by the following:
 - a. The US wants to expand NATO and encircle Russian and Chinese areas of influence in the region. It is pushing Arab countries toward Israel to achieve this strategy.
 - b. Russia hopes to break into American spheres of influence by attracting Arab countries toward its strategy, prioritising this above the Arab-Israeli conflict.
 - c. China supports the peace process to facilitate the success of its project in integrating the region into the “One Belt, One Road Initiative,” since continuation of the conflict further increases obstacles to this project.

- d. Japan supports the peace process through its “Corridor for Peace and Prosperity” initiative, aiming to strengthen Arab trade with the Japanese market, so as to buy Japanese goods which are capable of competing with European and American goods, while the continuation of the conflict depletes Arab budgets as they head to arms markets, where Japan is not competitive.
- e. The EU are still pursuing projects such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EUROMED) and the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) proposed by France and supported by Germany to make these projects a success. This is not possible without reaching a settlement to the Arab–Israeli conflict.

Future Implications

The current international scene suggests the following:

1. Other regional issues (other than the Arab-Israeli conflict) will remain a priority in the short term, especially the repercussions of the Arab political turmoil since 2011.
2. International pressure will increase on the Palestinian resistance bloc through financial or diplomatic pressure to make them abide by what the PLO agreed with Israel.
3. Israeli settlement building will continue, but the international position will not change to effectively confront it, for it will remain limited to diplomatic and legal criticism. International public opinion and NGOs may be more visible and effective in confronting it, with EU civil society groups being perhaps the most visible in this regard.
4. With regard to the Palestinian reconciliation agreed between Hamas and Fatah in October 2017, it was welcomed by the US in terms of the potential for easing humanitarian conditions in GS and the PA’s return to Gaza,⁸³ while it is assumed that the EU would participate in border control through the European Union Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah Crossing Point (EUBAM Rafah).⁸⁴ However, the prospect of the reconciliation’s ultimate success depends on the extent to which each of the parties is willing to give up their strategic choice (negotiations or armed resistance).

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This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present to its readers the Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2016–2017, the 10th PSR to be published.

With an academic methodology and comprehensive, objective approach, the report comprehensively details developments concerning the Palestine issue and provides the latest information and data available at the end of 2017, along with analysis and forecasts running into 2018.

This report is the result of collaborative work between 14 experts and researchers. In eight chapters, it addresses the internal Palestinian scene; Palestinian demographic and economic indicators; the situation in Jerusalem and the holy sites; the specifics of Israeli aggression, Palestinian resistance and the peace process; the complexities of Israeli-Palestinian dynamics, including the internal situation in Israel; and Palestine's Arab, Islamic, and international relations. This tenth PSR volume features an advanced research map and forecasts the most prominent scenarios of relevance to the Palestine issue in 2018 and 2019.

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

Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

The Palestine Strategic Report 2016 – 2017



Al-Zaytouna Centre for Studies & Consultations

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