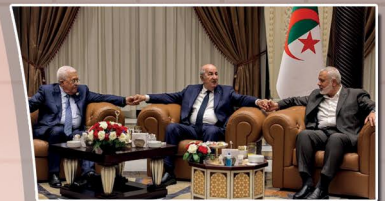


The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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Chapter Six

The Palestine Issue and the Arab World

The Palestine Issue and the Arab World

Introduction

The Arab world saw a significant movement towards normalization with Israel during 2022–2023. The UAE, Bahrain and Morocco made substantial progress in this regard, with efforts actively encouraging Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) to do the same. However, Operation al-Aqsa Flood disrupted this normalization process, even though state regimes still wish to maintain their relations with Israel.

In the weak, fragmented and inward-looking Arab environment, a typical pattern of behavior persisted. Despite the profound shock caused by Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Arab policies towards the Palestine issue remained unchanged. Nevertheless, pro-resistance public in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq supported Gaza in confronting Israeli aggression, while a broader regional war was avoided. Meanwhile, the Arab people's engagement with the Palestine issue was significant, although they could not genuinely express their positions and support due to the repressive behaviour of several Arab regimes or outright bans on Palestine solidarity. Countries like Qatar, Kuwait, Algeria, Syria, Mauritania and Oman maintained more positive stances towards resistance.

This chapter explores Arab positions on the Palestine issue, examines the stances of the League of Arab States (LAS), and highlights the roles of the frontline states: Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. It also analyzes the positions of other Arab countries and public opinion across the Arab world.

First: LAS Positions and the Arab Summit

1. Position on the Peace Process for the Palestine Issue and the Resistance Project

During the three summits held over the two years covered by the report, including the 31st ordinary session of the LAS council at the summit level in Algiers on 1–2/11/2022, the 32nd ordinary session of the LAS council at the summit level in Jeddah on 19/5/2023, and the Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit with

the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to discuss the aggression on GS in Riyadh on 11/11/2023, the LAS reaffirmed the centrality of the Palestine issue and its unwavering support for the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. The summits emphasized adherence to the Arab Peace Initiative of 2002 in all its elements and priorities, stressing the commitment to peace as a strategic option to end the Israeli occupation and resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict in accordance with international law and relevant international resolutions, including UN Security Council resolutions. The LAS also supported the State of Palestine's efforts to gain full membership in the UN and called on countries that have not yet recognized the State of Palestine to do so.¹

This position was reiterated by LAS Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, who stated that the LAS could not “override the Palestinian stance and vision,” which supports the “two-state solution.” He emphasized that Israel's insistence on its positions and rejection of the two-state vision could result in a Palestinian majority between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea in the coming years.² Abu al-Ghait announced an “initiative to reactivate the peace process” through Arab-European efforts.³

In May 2023, the Arab Ministerial Committee in Support of the State of Palestine issued a statement urging LAS member states to continue engaging with countries around the world. The committee specifically called on these countries, especially the permanent members of the UN Security Council, to recognize the State of Palestine and support its bid for full membership in the UN.⁴

Regarding the issue of Palestinian refugees, the LAS General Secretariat and the Arab Parliament have expressed their firm rejection of any proposals or attempts to diminish the responsibility of UNRWA and its comprehensive political and humanitarian mandate towards the Palestinian refugee community. This stance is based on the original mandate assigned to the agency, which remains in effect until a just solution to the Palestinian refugee issue is achieved in accordance with international resolutions.⁵

Nevertheless, the LAS's role was ultimately limited to denouncing Israeli occupation practices, including violations, land confiscations, assaults on holy sites, escalating aggression, open-ended warfare policies, and ongoing massacres against the Palestinian people. However, this denunciation was not followed by any practical measures to stop these actions, aside from holding Israel responsible

for the escalation and urging the international community and all influential parties to intervene.⁶ At the end of its 157th ordinary session at the foreign ministers' level on 9/3/2022, the LAS council called on the ICC to proceed with its criminal investigation into war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Israel against the defenseless Palestinian people.⁷ Additionally, on 27/7/2023, the LAS General Secretariat submitted a written pleading to the ICJ's headquarters in The Hague. This submission was part of the case concerning the ICJ's Advisory Opinion on the "Legal Consequences Arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem."⁸

More than a month after the Israeli war on GS following Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 7/10/2023, Arab and Muslim countries convened an emergency summit to address the situation. An Arab-Islamic summit was held in Riyadh on 11/11/2023 after the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced on 10/11/2023, that the "extraordinary Arab summit" and the "extraordinary Islamic summit" would be merged into a joint summit. According to sources cited by *al-'Arabi al-Jadid*, the merger was driven by a lack of consensus on significant decisions against Israel. Influential states within the LAS reportedly blocked serious proposals involving urgent measures to halt the aggression, opting instead for less impactful language.⁹

The summit failed to produce any practical decision, commitments or effective plans to pressure for an end to the aggression. Instead, its statement issued demands to the world, as if the combined Arab and Muslim countries lacked the means to pressure the occupation to stop its massacres against civilians in GS. Saudi Investment Minister Khalid al-Falih even emphasized at the Bloomberg New Economy Forum in Singapore on 7/11/2023 that using oil prices to pressure for an end to the war on GS was not an option, and that KSA was pursuing "peace" through negotiations.¹⁰ Meanwhile, several Arab countries seemed to implicitly support the elimination of Hamas, by participating in the GS siege, while maintaining diplomatic and trade relations with Israel and providing it with various needs.

The closing statement of the Arab-Islamic summit called for lifting the siege on GS and implementing measures to ensure the delivery of humanitarian aid. It condemned the "Israeli aggression on Gaza and the brutal, savage and inhumane war crimes and massacres committed by the colonial occupation government." The statement urged all countries to halt the export of weapons and ammunition to

Israel and rejected any justification of the war as self-defense or under any other pretext.¹¹

LAS Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait has called for an “immediate halt to military operations in Gaza.”¹² At the conclusion of their meeting in Cairo, Arab foreign ministers demanded “urgent international action to end the war on Gaza,” condemned the targeting of civilians by both sides and warned against “attempts to forcibly displace the Palestinian people.”¹³

2. The Position on Normalization

The LAS has consistently affirmed, in all its decisions and statements, its opposition to normalizing relations with Israel prior to the implementation of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. This initiative, with all its elements and priorities, represents the unified Arab consensus and serves as the basis for any efforts to revive peace in the Middle East. The LAS stressed that the prerequisite for achieving peace with Israel and normalizing relations with it, as outlined in the texts of the two ordinary summits, or “establishing normal relations with it” as stated in the Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit text to which Algeria and Iraq objected, is the end of Israel’s occupation of all Palestinian and Arab territories. This includes recognizing the independence of a fully sovereign State of Palestine along the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and restoring the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. These rights encompass the right to self-determination, the right of return and compensation for Palestinian refugees, with a just resolution of their issue according to UN General Assembly Resolution 194 of 1948.¹⁴

However, Ambassador Maged ‘Abdelfatah ‘Abdelaziz, head of the LAS mission to the UN, mentioned in an interview with Al Jazeera Mubasher’s *al-Masa’iyyah* program that normalizing relations between some Arab countries and Israel could potentially benefit the Palestinians. He stated that he does not view normalization with Israel as detrimental to the Palestine issue; on the contrary, it could be leveraged to pressure Israel through direct contacts to achieve progress and reach agreements regarding the Palestine issue.¹⁵

3. Internal Conflict and Reconciliation

The LAS reaffirmed its support for Palestinian reconciliation, commended the Arab efforts to unify the Palestinian ranks, and welcomed the signing of the

“Algiers Declaration” by Palestinian factions on 13/10/2022, at the conclusion of the “Reunification Conference for Achieving Palestinian National Unity,” mediated by Algeria. The LAS Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait described the agreement between Palestinian factions as a “significant development on the path to achieving Palestinian reconciliation, which all Arabs aspire to,” praising Algeria’s role in achieving this commendable accomplishment.¹⁶

The LAS reaffirmed this position in the resolutions issued at the conclusion of the 31st ordinary session of the LAS council at the summit level in Algiers on 1–2/11/2022, and the 32nd ordinary session of the LAS council at the summit level in Jeddah on 19/5/2023, emphasizing that the PLO is the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people. LAS called on Palestinian factions and forces to unite under its umbrella and urged everyone to assume their responsibilities within the framework of a national partnership led by the PLO.¹⁷

4. The Position on Jerusalem

The LAS maintained its stance of rejecting the declaration of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, but took no practical measures beyond verbal condemnation and denunciation against countries that recognize Jerusalem as the capital or move their embassies there. During a speech addressed to the British Conservative Party conference via video link on 4/10/2022, the LAS Secretary-General expressed strong disapproval of British Prime Minister Liz Truss’s statements about her intention to move the British embassy to Jerusalem, affirming the League’s rejection of any unilateral actions that violate international law and the historical and legal status of Jerusalem.¹⁸

The League persistently condemned the settlement activities, occupation plans and Israeli measures in Jerusalem, as well as the repeated incursions by settlers into *al-Aqsa* Mosque, viewing these actions as significant violations and provocations of Arab and Islamic sentiments, as well as clear breaches of international law. Through its resolutions and statements, LAS rejected all occupation practices within the holy city that aim to alter the existing legal and historical status of Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa*, emphasizing the necessity of ongoing efforts to protect Jerusalem and its holy sites. In this context, as an expression of the LAS’s support for Jordan, the League affirmed the importance of the Hashemite custodianship in Jerusalem and its role in safeguarding the holy sites.¹⁹

However, there was no change on the ground, with Arab actions limited to condemnation and denunciation. The Arab ministerial committee, which convened in Jordan on 21/4/2022, condemned the “illegal Israeli measures” in Jerusalem and called on the international community, particularly the Security Council, to “take immediate and effective action” to stop these measures and prevent the escalation of violence.²⁰ LAS Secretary-General Ahmad Abu al-Ghait, commenting on the Israeli flag march on 29/5/2022, which coincided with settlers storming *al-Aqsa* Mosque, stated that “this move constitutes a new violation of the status quo, a significant provocation of Arab and Islamic sentiments, and could ignite the situation in Jerusalem and other areas,” warning that it could “push everyone into a religious confrontation with unforeseeable consequences.”²¹ The Arab Parliament strongly condemned the storming of large numbers of settlers and extremist Jews into the courtyards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the raising of the Israeli flags in its sacred courtyards.²²

In the context of enhancing the resilience of Jerusalemites, participants in the “2023 Jerusalem Conference on Resilience and Development” support conference held at the LAS on 12/2/2023, agreed on measures to strengthen this resilience. These measures include the establishment of a joint financing mechanism to support projects aimed at reinforcing the resilience of Jerusalem’s residents and countering Israeli policies that seek to undermine their existence.²³ Furthermore, during the 26th session of the Council of Arab Ministers of Communications and Information, held in Cairo on 23/1/2023, the Council designated Jerusalem as the “Digital Capital for the Year 2023.”²⁴

Second: The Positions and Roles of Some Key Countries

1. Egypt

a. The Development of Egypt’s Political Relations and Diplomatic Activities

The significance of Egypt’s role in the Palestine issue remains undeniable. However, it is also crucial to acknowledge the shifts in its role due to the growing influence of other regional players, including the UAE, KSA and Qatar, as well as the evolving relationships between the Gulf states and Israel. This evolution has led to the normalization of political, security and economic relations between

some Gulf states, such as the UAE and Bahrain, and Israel, with ongoing efforts to achieve normalization between KSA and Israel.

In recent years, Egypt has faced a series of economic crises. Just as the global economy was beginning to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian-Ukrainian crisis emerged, leading to increased energy and grain prices. Economic reports indicate that this significantly affected the Egyptian economy, which is now suffering from a decline in foreign currency reserves. As a result, the Egyptian regime needs to engage in active political diplomacy more than ever to maintain stability in a country that remains one of the most influential in the Arab world regarding the Palestine issue, both negatively or positively. Given these factors, some argue that the effectiveness of the Egypt in shaping political developments in the region is declining, especially as some of its supporting states gain more influence. Naturally, this shift affects Egypt's role in the Palestine issue in various ways.

In March 2022, Hebrew media revealed a supposedly secret summit involving Egyptian President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi, UAE Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed, and Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. This rare and unusual trilateral meeting discussed key issues such as security and the potential formation of a regional defense alliance against drones, missiles and other threats, specifically targeting Iranian capabilities. Bennett proposed using Israeli laser-guided defense systems under development. The Palestine issue was also addressed, focusing on economic measures taken by Israel in WB and GS, as well as security concerns during Ramadan, with an emphasis on the need for calm during this period.²⁵

Israel's concerns about worsening security in Jerusalem during Ramadan (April–May 2022) were justified, particularly given the increasing settler attacks and repeated incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In response, Arab diplomacy aimed to restore calm to the region to prevent a repeat of the escalation seen in 2021, which led to the Sword of Jerusalem Battle between Palestinian resistance in GS and Israel. Another trilateral summit involving Egypt, the UAE and Jordan emphasized the need to halt all Israeli actions undermining "peace" and stressed the importance of sustained efforts to restore calm in Jerusalem.²⁶

Egypt remained closely involved with the Palestine issue. In March 2022, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry condemned an attack in Tel Aviv, with spokesperson Ahmad Hafez calling the act as "terrorism" and cautioning against further

deterioration between Palestinians and Israelis.²⁷ Simultaneously, Hafez denounced Israeli forces' incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and the resulting violence against Palestinians, which led to numerous injuries and the arrests of worshippers.²⁸

During Ramadan 2022, in the context of the events in Jerusalem and Egypt's efforts to restore calm to the city, President 'Abdul Fattah al-Sisi told Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in a call that Egypt had made strenuous and focused efforts to contain the situation on the ground, prevent the escalation of confrontations and military actions. He stressed the importance of building on the current calm, preventing any attempts to escalate tensions in WB or GS, accelerating the improvement of economic relations with the PA, and supporting President Mahmud 'Abbas.²⁹

It seems that Egypt's efforts to maintain regional calm were not solely driven by security concerns. An October 2022 report highlighted that Egypt had successfully persuaded Israel to begin extracting gas off the coast of Gaza after its development.³⁰ This raises numerous questions about the plans being formulated for the region before the events of 7/10/2023, especially given the increased demand for gas exports to Europe amid the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian war and the halt in gas exports to Europe.

Egypt's efforts concerning Gaza's gas resources appear to be serious. Egyptian Minister of Petroleum and Mineral Resources Tarek El Molla officially announced that a framework agreement had been reached to develop the Gaza gas field, stating that these efforts had begun two years earlier with Israel. However, the PA denied such an agreement had been finalized. An unnamed official confirmed an agreement on "basic terms," but noted that further discussions on technical aspects and final approvals from the PA would be needed.³¹

Egyptian authorities have been working on constructing an international highway along the GS border. Egyptian engineering equipment began repairing the separation wall with GS, following previous operations to demolish tunnels between Sinai and GS and to evacuate residents from Egyptian border areas near GS. This highway, which is 40 meters wide, extends from the beach at Palestinian Rafah along the border strip to the Karm Abu Salem crossing, located east of the city, at the junction of the borders of Egypt, GS and the 1948 occupied territories, where the Israeli army and settlers are present. This project coincides with the completion of a railway line connecting East and West Suez, stretching from Ismailia Governorate to Rafah at the Gaza border.³²

Egyptian diplomacy continued to monitor the Palestinian situation throughout 2023. Egypt actively sought to de-escalate tensions in WB, where settlers, emboldened by the hardline Israeli government—especially National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir—intensified their incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In response, head of the Egyptian General Intelligence Service (EGIS), Major General ‘Abbas Kamel delivered a proposal from President al-Sisi to halt the escalation. The proposal involved deploying Palestinian security forces in WB to regain control over certain areas and RCs, in exchange for a cessation of Israeli incursions into these RCs.³³

Despite Egypt’s efforts to prevent escalation, these attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, largely due to the extreme measures take by the Israeli government. These measures included efforts to divide *al-Aqsa* Mosque, disregard for Jordanian custodianship of Islamic holy sites in Jerusalem, and escalating security situations in WB and GS. Israeli violations in WB and GS persisted, involving assassinations and arrests of Palestinian resistance members in RCs, cities, and villages throughout WB. Between the start of 2023 until October 7 of the same year, PCBS reported that 263 Palestinian were killed.³⁴

b. Relations with Israel

Egyptian-Israeli relations have remained stable, characterized by bilateral cooperation in various fields, particularly in the economic sector, where collaboration increased during 2022–2023. This period also saw enhanced diplomatic engagement, with Israel acknowledging Egypt’s significant regional role. Notably, in January 2022, Egypt hosted its first Israeli event commemorating the Holocaust, titled “International Holocaust Remembrance Day.”³⁵

Given Egypt’s ongoing need for energy sources, particularly Israeli gas—which is more accurately Palestinian gas stolen by Israel—Egypt has significantly deepened its cooperation with Israel since the Camp David Accords. In February 2022, Israel agreed to establish a new gas supply line to Egypt from the Leviathan field via Jordan.³⁶ This agreement was accompanied by bilateral negotiations aimed at expanding economic and tourism relations. During an Egyptian visit to Israel, a delegation led by the deputy head of EGIS and senior Egyptian businessmen met with Israeli officials, including Yair Pence, head of the Israeli Prime Minister’s Office, as well as senior military officials and business leaders. They agreed to a comprehensive development of the Nitzana border crossing to facilitate

large-scale goods transportation, including imports of cement, ammonia and Egyptian agricultural products. According to Israeli media, Egypt is also keen on attracting Israeli tourists to Sharm el-Sheikh, although previous security threats have been a hindrance. The two sides agreed to form a joint economic committee in partnership with the private sector to address these challenges.³⁷

Indeed, Egypt aimed to address these challenges by reaching an agreement between the Egyptian president and his Israeli counterpart to establish a direct flight route between Ben Gurion Airport in Lod and the Sharm el-Sheikh resort. Bennett viewed this as “another step in the warming of the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt,” adding that “Cooperation between the two countries is expanding in many areas, and it contributes to both peoples and the stability of the region.”³⁸

In March 2022, Egypt signed an agreement with Israel to facilitate the trade of goods under the joint protocol of the Qualifying Industrial Zones (QIZ). This agreement aims to enhance export capacities, especially in response to global challenges.³⁹

Later, the Israeli government approved a plan to strengthen economic ties with Egypt. According to a statement from the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry, the plan “will expose more Israeli industries to the Egyptian market and make development and infrastructure projects accessible to Israeli tech companies.”⁴⁰

The strategic relationship between the two countries is underscored by agreements that extend beyond regional borders. Egypt signed a tripartite memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Israel and the European Union for the export of gas from Israel to EU countries. The plan involves exporting the gas to liquefaction facilities in Egypt before shipping it to Europe. Israeli Energy Minister Karine Elharrar said, “This is a tremendous moment in which little Israel is becoming a significant player in the global energy market.” European Commission President Ursula Von der Leyen described the agreement as “historic,” viewing it as the start of a long and successful energy story in the region. Additionally, Von der Leyen announced that the EU would provide €100 million (about \$104 million) to Egypt to help address the food crisis and allocate €3 billion (about \$3.1 billion) to invest in local agricultural production.⁴¹

Economic cooperation continued to rise in 2023 as well. The Japanese company Ocean Network Express, headquartered in Singapore, announced “a new weekly shuttle service connecting Israel to the hub of Damietta, Egypt.” This service,

which operates through the ports of Haifa and Ashdod, is named Israel Express (ILX). According to the company, it “was created in response to the growing demand for both import and export cargo from Israel.”⁴²

Despite official cooperation, incidents continued to reflect the underlying sentiments of the Egyptian public. In one instance, an Egyptian border guard stationed along the Egypt-Israel frontier carried out an attack that resulted in the deaths of three Israeli soldiers and the injury of two others before being killed. While Egyptian authorities claimed the incident occurred during a pursuit of drug smugglers, Israeli authorities reported that investigations revealed the Egyptian soldier had walked about 5 km to reach a hidden gate in the separation wall between Egypt and Israel. This gate was restricted to a select few, unknown to most Israeli soldiers and officers, and likely unknown to the Egyptians.⁴³

During a phone call with Netanyahu, al-Sisi offered his condolences. Netanyahu’s office reported that “the two leaders expressed their commitment to continue strengthening the peace and security cooperation that is vital to both countries.” President al-Sisi also “stressed the importance of coordination in the investigation, as well as the need to continue bilateral relations.”⁴⁴

c. Egypt and Operation Al-Aqsa Flood

The Hamas operation on 7/10/2023, which targeted Israeli military sites and settlements around GS, had significant strategic implications. These cannot be viewed in isolation from regional developments, such as plans to divide *al-Aqsa* Mosque temporally and spatially, the normalization of relations between Arab states and Israel, and the mistreatment of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood exposed Israel’s vulnerability and underscored the weakness of official Arab positions, which remain submissive to Israeli-US dominance. This battle ignited a spirit of resistance against Israeli occupation across the region, sparking a strong reaction among the Arab public, especially in light of Israel’s retaliatory attack on civilians in GS. In Alexandria, an Egyptian policeman opened fire on a tourist group, killing two Israeli tourists.⁴⁵

The Egyptian stance on Operation al-Aqsa Flood was shaped by various determinants and influencing factors, foremost among them:⁴⁶

- The desire to uphold Egypt’s pivotal role in the Palestine issue was driven by its significance in bolstering Egypt’s regional standing and fostering ties with the US.

- The Camp David Accords have yielded significant benefits, fostering advanced political, economic and security relations with Israel. These ties have notably strengthened during the tenure of Egyptian President ‘Abdel Fattah al-Sisi.
- The security concern revolves around the potential escalation of sympathetic popular movements for Palestinian resistance, in Egypt and the wider Arab region. There’s apprehension about reigniting the Arab Spring and revitalizing the Arab street, fueled by the profound inspiration from Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the growing discontent with Arab regimes, due the neglect of their duty towards Palestine.
- Concerns about the significant political and security impact of a potential large-scale displacement of Palestinians from GS to Egyptian territory, which could drag Egypt into conflict with Israel, jeopardize the Camp David Accords, and disrupt the stability of Egyptian-Israeli relations.
- Ideological reservations within the Egyptian government regarding the Islamic orientation of the Palestinian resistance, particularly amid strained relations with the Egyptian Muslim Brothers (MB) movement and broader scepticism towards Islamic movements in the region. There’s a perception that Egyptian and many Arab officials are hesitant about the victory of the Palestinian resistance in Operation al-Aqsa Flood, fearing potential destabilizing effects on Egypt’s internal dynamics and the broader Islamic movement presence in the region.
- The Egyptian official stance in the Palestinian landscape is characterized by strong alignment with the PA and its political objectives. Egypt maintains cautious and unfavorable relations with Hamas, showing reservations towards its resistance efforts and its inclination to maintain an independent stance and political autonomy in managing relations with Egypt and other Arab and regional entities.
- The Egyptian economy has been grappling with a deteriorating economic crisis, marked by the sharp depreciation of the Egyptian pound against the US dollar.
- The geopolitical determinant lies in Egypt’s control over the Rafah crossing, the sole land access point for GS to the outside world. This control has served as a potent pressure tool on both Gaza’s resistance factions and its populace, contributing to the tightening of the GS siege since 2007. During Operation al-Aqsa Flood, this control fueled accusations against Egypt, alleging complicity

in the siege, exacerbating suffering and scarcity, while Israeli aggression targets the GS population and resistance.

Amid ongoing Israeli calls to displace Gaza residents to Sinai, Egyptian President ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi cautioned against the escalating situation in GS. He stressed that Egypt “will not allow the liquidation of the Palestine issue at the expense of other parties” and declared that there would be “no leniency or compromise on Egypt’s national security under any circumstances.”⁴⁷

Egypt’s concerns were well-founded, as all indications pointed to plans for the ethnic cleansing of Gaza and the displacement of its residents to Sinai. The EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs, Josep Borrell, mentioned that the EU stressed the need “to open humanitarian corridors; to facilitate people who have to escape the bombing from Gaza. They could leave the country through Egypt—because the Israeli border is closed.”⁴⁸ Former Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon stated, “There is a huge expanse, almost endless space in the Sinai Desert just on the other side of Gaza,” adding, “The idea is for them [Palestinians] to leave over to the open areas where we [Israelis] and the international community will prepare infrastructure... tent cities, with food and with water.”⁴⁹

In a statement regarding the events of 7/10/2023, President ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi stated, “What happened was significant and difficult, and we condemn it, but we must understand that it resulted from accumulated anger and hatred spanning over more than 40 years, with no solution to the Palestine issue offering hope to the Palestinians.”⁵⁰ Meanwhile, Israeli National Security Adviser Tzachi Hanegbi “categorically rejected reports that Egypt had given Israel prior warning that Hamas was planning a major attack,”⁵¹ suggesting that they should have been alerted by Egypt.

Egyptian leadership has consistently reiterated the country’s rejection of any attempt to resolve the Palestine issue at the expense of other countries. President ‘Abdul Fattah al-Sisi affirmed Egypt’s refusal to allow the “liquidation” of the Palestine issue and the “displacement” of Palestinians from GS to Sinai. He warned that such displacement could set a precedent for moving Palestinians from WB to Jordan. During a meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz in Cairo, al-Sisi clarified that the ongoing events in Gaza are not solely an attack on Hamas, but an attempt to force civilians to seek refuge in Egypt. He further

questioned why, if displacement is the goal, Palestinians should not be relocated to the Negev instead, reaffirming Egypt's firm stance against turning Sinai into a staging ground for "terrorist operations against Israel."⁵²

Shaina Low, Communication Adviser with the Norwegian Refugee Council, echoed Egypt's concerns, stating that Israel's actions in GS indicate a deliberate effort to displace the population towards Egypt's Sinai Peninsula. She emphasized that this issue has largely been overlooked by the international community. Low highlighted the ongoing humanitarian catastrophe in GS, where 80% of the population has relocated to the south following Israeli orders to evacuate northern GS. She added that they are being urged to move towards Rafah, leaving them with no option but to enter Sinai to escape the escalating military pressure.⁵³

Despite being the official passage between Egypt and Gaza, the Rafah crossing remains outside full Egyptian control. Although it is meant to be governed jointly by Egypt and the Palestinians, Egypt has largely yielded to Israeli pressure, allowing Israel to exert significant influence over what passes through the crossing. Aid entering Gaza via Rafah is subjected to Israeli inspection, with Israel ultimately determining what can and cannot enter. Meanwhile, Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry dismissed global calls and protests demanding the opening of the Rafah border, arguing that such demands are politically motivated and not genuinely focused on the humanitarian crisis in GS.⁵⁴ In a related development, Egyptian authorities deported four foreign activists from the Committee for Justice after they protested in front of the Egyptian Foreign Ministry in Cairo, calling for the opening of the Rafah crossing and official clearance for an international aid convoy to GS.⁵⁵

In November 2023, Egypt, in collaboration with Qatar, mediated a prisoner exchange agreement between the Palestinian resistance in GS and Israel. The mediation successfully resulted in a humanitarian pause, during which the Palestinian resistance released about fifty Israeli civilian prisoners. In return, Israel freed Palestinian women and child prisoners from its jails, and humanitarian aid was allowed to enter GS through the Rafah crossing. Additionally, Egypt admitted dozens of injured Palestinians into its hospitals and facilitated the exit of 400 foreign passport holders from GS via the Rafah crossing.⁵⁶

In a development that sparked widespread questions, Israeli media reported that Tel Aviv and Cairo have held talks on the post-war scenario, including the

potential construction of a barrier along the Egyptian-Gaza border to prevent tunnel activity. The discussions also addressed arrangements concerning the Philadelphi Corridor.⁵⁷ In this context, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant confirmed holding talks with Cairo to discuss the possibility of establishing an “advanced border obstacle that includes technological means” separating GS from Egyptian territory, in an attempt to thwart alleged arms smuggling operations.⁵⁸

Clearly, the situation in Egypt prior to 7/10/2023, was entirely different from what it has become since that date. The war has directly impacted the movement of ships through the Suez Canal, particularly following the Houthis’ (Ansar Allah) attempt in Yemen to break the GS blockade by closing the Bab al-Mandab Strait and preventing the passage of Israeli ships or those bound for Israel.

It is evident that the Egyptian authorities have shown little effort in stopping the war or applying pressure to ease the suffering of Gaza’s residents. In fact, Israel, during its testimony before the ICC, claimed that Egypt was responsible for closing the Rafah crossing—an assertion echoed by the US president. Reports also surfaced about the imposition of substantial fees, amounting to thousands of dollars, for those seeking medical treatment outside Gaza through the Rafah crossing. Moreover, there were accusations that certain Egyptian entities had misappropriated a significant portion of the aid intended for GS.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood’s political and field developments have cast a negative impact on Egypt’s role in the Palestine issue and its regional standing. Accusations have surfaced regarding Egypt’s cooperation with Israel in tightening the GS siege. There’s little indication of a significant shift in Egypt’s stance or political strategies regarding the ongoing war.

Politically, Egypt is likely to maintain its adherence to the established official stance of Arab and Muslim countries, a position over which it holds significant influence. It’s anticipated that Egypt will persist with its current policies regarding the closure of the Rafah crossing and tying aid entry to Israeli approval. Regarding its engagement with Palestinian resistance groups, particularly with Hamas and PIJ, Egyptian authorities are expected to maintain a cautious and conservative stance. There’s little anticipation for a positive shift in Egypt’s position regarding permitting pro-resistance public events or condemning Israeli war on GS.⁵⁹

2. Jordan

a. Development of Political Relations and Diplomatic Activities

In the period 2022–2023, Jordan maintained its political and diplomatic path that primarily focuses on Jordanian internal and external interests, which require maintaining calm in the region. This was expressed by King Abdullah II, who noted that “the region stands to gain much from cooperation and economic integration, stressing that for the process to be inclusive it ‘should and must include the Palestinians’ and that requires maintaining calm and ceasing all unilateral measures that undermine the prospects of peace.”⁶⁰ He also emphasized, “No matter what relations Arab countries have with Israel, if we don’t solve the Palestinian issue, it’s really two steps forward and two steps back.” Later, King Abdullah said he would “support the formation of a Middle East military alliance similar to NATO, and that it can be done with countries that are like-minded.” The king viewed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as having “the potential to derail plans and cooperation in the Middle East.”⁶¹

Regarding Jordanian-Palestinian relations, Jordan maintained its ties with the PA and expanded economic cooperation between the two sides. Despite former Hamas political bureau chief Khalid Mish‘al’s visit to Jordan and significant speculation about the potential reopening of the Hamas office in the Jordanian capital, this did not materialize during the period 2022–2023, despite internal pressure in Jordan advocating for it. Former Jordanian Minister of Culture and Youth Muhammad Abu Rumman commented at the time that it is important for Jordan to have strategic relations with Hamas and ongoing coordination. He added that Hamas is a strong and active party, and it should not be excluded from the framework of strategic dialogue and continuous coordination for Jordan.⁶²

Moreover, prominent Jordanian tribal leader Sheikh Trad al-Fayez has urged his government to reopen Hamas offices in Jordan, stating that Arab rulers should have honored Hamas after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, as it is the primary defender of the dignity of the Arab and Muslim nation (*Ummah*).⁶³

In 2023, Jordanian authorities arrested four individuals linked to Hamas, according to leaked reports, accusing them of smuggling weapons to WB.⁶⁴ However, the Jordanian authorities released them in December 2023.⁶⁵

Regarding Jordan’s custodianship of *al-Aqsa* Mosque, the country faced significant pressure to relinquish this custodianship during 2022–2023, a period

marked by increased settler incursions led by Israeli Minister of Internal Security Itamar Ben-Gvir. In this context, Jordan reaffirmed its custodianship of the holy sites in Jerusalem. The Jordanian government allocated about 14 million Jordanian dinars (approximately \$20 million) in 2023 for the Jerusalem Waqf Program, which is part of the Ministry of Awqaf, Islamic Affairs and Holy Places' budget for the year. Additionally, in 2023, Jordan decided to appoint 100 employees to oversee the care of *al-Aqsa* Mosque and other holy sites in Jerusalem, bringing the total number of employees in this role to 900.⁶⁶

b. Relations with Israel

Despite Jordan signing a peace agreement with Israel in 1994, the normalization of relations was not as extensive as that achieved by some Gulf states, which quickly signed cooperation agreements across various political, security, economic and other fields. However, the period 2022–2023, up to 7/10/2023, saw notable developments in Jordanian-Israeli relations. Economically, Jordanian Member of Parliament Ahmad Qatawneh revealed an agreement between the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture and its Israeli counterpart, under which hundreds of tons of vegetables are supplied to Israeli settlements.⁶⁷

In the same context, Qatawneh said that Jordan supplies Israel with 4.8 million cubic meters of water annually from Al-Ghamr area in southern Jordan. He mentioned during a parliamentary session that the government disclosed these figures in response to a parliamentary inquiry on the matter.⁶⁸

Jordan supplying water to Israel is unusual, considering that the kingdom had signed a trilateral MoU with the UAE and Israel. This agreement stipulates that Israel will desalinate seawater and provide Jordan with about 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water annually. In return, the UAE will construct a solar power plant in Jordan with a production capacity of 600 megawatts along with a system for storing electricity to produce clean energy and export it to Israel.⁶⁹

Additionally, the Israeli government approved the proposal of Prime Minister Yair Lapid and Regional Cooperation Minister Esawi Frej to accelerate the implementation of the Jordan Gateway project, a joint industrial zone between Israel and Jordan. Lapid stated, “Twenty-eight years since the peace agreement with Jordan, we are taking the good neighborly relations between our two countries another step forward. This is a breakthrough that will contribute greatly to developing and strengthening the region.” He added, “The final details regarding

this initiative were addressed last week during my visit with King Abdullah II in Amman.” He also noted, “This is an initiative that will increase employment in both countries, advance our economic and diplomatic relations, and enhance the peace and friendship between our two countries.” He further remarked, “This is a joint industrial zone on the border. It will allow Israeli and Jordanian entrepreneurs and businesspeople to communicate directly. It will produce joint initiatives in trade, technology and local industry.”⁷⁰

Jordanian-Israeli cooperation extended beyond economic fields. In recent years, tensions have arisen in Jerusalem during Ramadan due to settler incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. In this context, Yair Lapid met with the Jordanian king before Ramadan 2022 to help ease tensions. According to a statement from Lapid’s office, which said, “We agreed that we must work together to calm tensions and promote understanding, particularly in the lead-up to the month of Ramadan and Passover.”⁷¹ According to Israel Hayom website, Israeli-Jordanian relations have a strategic dimension for both parties. Eyal Zisser, a lecturer in the Middle East History Department at Tel Aviv University, stated that “Israel doesn’t have a more reliable security partner than Jordan. To be more precise, it doesn’t have a more reliable partner than Jordan’s security agencies and army.” He added, “Relations with Jordan are based on security and even economic interests. The advantages from Israel’s perspective are considerable, chief among them the ability to lean on Jordan to safeguard our eastern flank against the threat of radical Islam, and of course, against Iran as well. At the same time, this cooperation is also a security interest of the highest order for the Jordanians.”⁷²

c. Jordan and Operation al-Aqsa Flood

The official Jordanian stance on Operation Al-Aqsa Flood was shaped by a range of factors that defined its boundaries and directions, including:⁷³

- National security concerns intensified due to the hostile attitudes of extreme right-wing Zionist groups towards Jordan, along with fears of forced displacement in WB amidst the arming of tens of thousands of settlers and their persistent efforts to compel Palestinians to relocate to Jordan. Furthermore, concerns emerged regarding security threats to the kingdom’s northern and eastern borders amidst increased attempts to breach them due to escalation in GS. On 28/1/2024, a drone attack targeted US forces stationed near the Syrian border in Jordan, killing three soldiers and wounding about 35 others.

- Geographic and demographic factors, coupled with strong public engagement with Operation al-Aqsa Flood, persistently fuelled Jordanian protests against Israeli aggression and in support of resistance since October 7th. The protests have spanned the entire geographical and societal spectrum in Jordan.
- The provisions of the Wadi Araba Treaty between Jordan and Israel, including political, economic restrictions, and normalization commitments between the parties.
- The strategic relationship between Jordan and the US, which fully sided with Israel and provided it with political, military and financial cover to continue its war on GS.
- Jordan's tepid ties with Hamas suffered a setback after Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which coincided with a noticeable decline in relations, prompted by the arrest of several Hamas members for attempting to smuggle weapons into WB.
- Jordan's political stance within the Arab and international sphere, which opposes Hamas and "political Islam" movements.
- Jordan's political choices in the Palestinian arena, which support the political settlement, negotiations and the two-state solution, the efforts to de-escalate and impose calm in WB, enhancing the PA status within the Palestinian society, and preventing its collapse or decline in favor of other parties.
- The official side voiced concerns about the impact of Operation al-Aqsa Flood on Jordanian public sentiment and electoral trends, fearing its exploitation by the Islamic movement during the critical upcoming parliamentary elections later this year (2024).

Despite Jordan's vocal condemnation of Israel's war on GS and King Abdullah's firm rejection of any attempts to displace Palestinians, especially toward Jordan and neighbouring countries, Jordanian security forces prevented demonstrators from reaching the Jordanian border, using tear gas against protesters on 13/10/2023.⁷⁴

Jordan's efforts have focused on advocating for opening humanitarian corridors for medical and relief aid. King Abdullah underscored this during his meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who was in Jordan to prepare for a planned quadripartite summit in Amman on 18/10/2023, with Presidents 'Abbas, al-Sisi and Biden. However, the summit was cancelled following the Israeli bombing of Al-Ahli Baptist hospital, which killed around 500 civilians.⁷⁵

In November 2023, Jordanian Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi decided to recall the Jordanian ambassador from Israel in protest against Israel's war on GS. Safadi stated that the ambassador's return would depend on Israel halting its war on GS and ending actions that contribute to a humanitarian crisis, depriving Palestinians of essential needs such as food, water, medicine and the right to live securely on their land.⁷⁶

One of the clear contradictions during the Israeli war on GS was revealed by the Israeli media, which reported about an agreement between the UAE and Israel to establish a land bridge between the ports of Haifa and Dubai. In fact, the concept of this land bridge was proposed approximately three months before Operation al-Aqsa flood. However, it was implemented during the battle, primarily to bypass the threats posed by Yemeni military forces to ships passing through the Red Sea towards Israel. Naturally, this bridge would pass through Jordanian and Saudi territories to reach Israel.⁷⁷

3. Syria

a. Syrian-Palestinian Relations and the Israeli Aggression

During the period from 2022 to 2023, Israel continued its military operations against Syrian territories, targeting sites associated with Hizbullah or Iranian leadership. This pattern of strikes, aimed at curbing the spread of Iranian influence, has been going on for years. Israel asserts that these actions are intended to disrupt the smuggling of offensive weapons to Hizbullah. In March 2022, the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post* revealed that over the past five years the Israeli Air Force has struck 1,200 targets in Syria with over 5,500 munitions during 408 missions, to prevent Iran from expanding its influence and supplying advanced weapons to Hizbullah.⁷⁸

Reports indicate that in 2023, Israel conducted 40 raids on 95 targets in Syrian territories, significantly increasing the frequency of these operations following the outbreak of war in GS. The number of raids rose from 6 to 11 when compared to the same period between 2022 and 2023.⁷⁹ In October 2022, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights reported that Israel conducted 28 strikes on Syrian territories during the first ten months of 2022, resulting in the destruction of 81 targets and the deaths of 62 military personnel, including Iranian Quds Force officers and Hizbullah commanders.⁸⁰ In September 2022, the Syrian Air Force and Military Intelligence initiated a widespread arrest campaign targeting officers in Damascus

and Aleppo, accusing them of collaborating with hostile entities, specifically referring to Israel.⁸¹

In 2022, the Syrian regime maintained its steady relations with the PA and most Palestinian factions. A significant development occurred in the previously strained relationship between the Syrian regime and Hamas. In September 2022, Hamas announced the restoration of its ties with the Syrian regime. This was a bold move by Hamas, despite the discomfort it caused among some of its popular base and many supporters across the Arab and Muslim world who oppose any association with the Syrian regime.⁸² Hamas's leadership made a significant move by sending a delegation to Damascus, led by Khalil al-Hayya, head of the Arab and Islamic Relations Office. During this visit, al-Hayya met with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Al-Hayya described this meeting as historic, marking a new beginning for Palestinian-Syrian collaboration.⁸³

Despite initial efforts, the relationship between Damascus and Hamas remained tepid, with neither side showing much urgency to strengthen ties. The Syrian regime sought to distinguish between Hamas's military wing, Al-Qassam, operating within Palestine, and its political leadership, particularly those based abroad, towards whom the regime maintained a negative stance. This was underscored by a statement from the Syrian president in an August 2023 interview, about two months before Operation al-Aqsa Flood, in which he accused Hamas of "betrayal and hypocrisy." Hamas's leadership chose to remain silent, opting not to respond to the accusation.⁸⁴

b. Syria and Operation al-Aqsa Flood

Syria was one of the few Arab countries to commend the events of 7/10/2023, carried out by the Palestinian resistance in GS. The Syrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates issued a statement expressing its support for the Palestinian people and their struggle against "Zionist terrorism." The statement lauded the "honorable achievement" of the Palestinian resistance in Operation al-Aqsa Flood against the Israeli occupation, asserting that resistance in all its forms is the only means for the Palestinian people to secure their legitimate rights. Additionally, Syria condemned the brutal practices of Israel against the Palestinian people. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that Syria stands proudly "with the martyrs of the Palestinian revolution and the heroes who planned and executed Operation al-Aqsa Flood."⁸⁵

It is noteworthy that there was a significant increase in the frequency of attacks on US forces in the region. An official from the Pentagon reported that, in October 2023, US and coalition forces in Iraq and Syria experienced 23 drone and missile attacks—14 in Iraq and 9 in Syria.⁸⁶

4. Lebanon

a. Relations with the Palestinians

The Lebanese landscape has long been marked by division among its parties regarding the Palestinian presence and how it should be managed. In this context, on 3/2/2022, the Lebanese State Council issued Decision No. 93, which suspended the implementation of a decision by Lebanese Labor Minister Mustafa Bayram, dated on 25/11/2021. This decision had permitted Palestinians born in Lebanon to engage in professions restricted to Lebanese citizens.⁸⁷

Conversely, the National Federation of Workers' and Employees' Unions in Lebanon (FENASOL), comprising around 40 unions, opposed the State Council's ruling, affirming their "solidarity with the Minister of Labor and the Palestinian brothers in the [refugee] camps."⁸⁸ Minister Bayram reiterated his commitment to his decision, stressing that this issue requires legislative follow-up with parliamentary blocs, driven by humanitarian, legal and ethical considerations.⁸⁹

In response to the ongoing Israeli attacks in WB and Jerusalem, which intensified in early 2022 under the extremist Israeli government, Lebanon's stance was articulated by President Michel Aoun. He asserted that the systematic assaults by Israeli forces on *al-Aqsa* Mosque and worshippers, as well as the violations of holy sites in Jerusalem, would not alter the identity of the holy city. He emphasized the need for pressure to halt these actions. Aoun tweeted, "We express our full solidarity with the steadfast Palestinians in resistance against attempts to Judaize *al-Aqsa*."⁹⁰

During 2022–2023, there was a significant revival in the relationship between Hizbullah and Hamas. Although their ties had never been entirely severed, they had cooled considerably since the onset of the Syrian crisis. However, recent years have witnessed increased efforts to restore these relations within the broader resistance axis, with Hizbullah playing a key role in mediating between Hamas and the Syrian regime. All parties shared a vested interest in strengthening their cooperation, particularly in light of the resistance's performance in the

Sword of Jerusalem Battle. This sentiment was echoed by Hizbullah's Deputy Secretary-General Naim Qassem, who remarked that after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle, there was no turning back for the Palestinian people. He further emphasized, "We reached an understanding with Hamas that the priority is Palestine, and the Palestinians are not obligated to support anyone, but rather the opposite."⁹¹

In 2022 and 2023, the head of Hamas's political bureau visited Lebanon twice. During his first visit in June 2022, he met with Lebanese President Michel Aoun, who stated during the meeting, "Standing with you is our duty... We cannot imagine Jerusalem without the Church of the Holy Sepulchre or *al-Aqsa*." He also held meetings with the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Parliament, and Hizbullah's Secretary-General.⁹²

Conversely, some Lebanese factions still view the Palestinian presence as a burden on Lebanon. Remarkably, they have even proposed relocating them to other countries. Maronite Patriarch Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros al-Ra'i expressed this sentiment, stating, "We call on the international community to alleviate Lebanon's economic and social burden by finding a permanent solution to the presence of Palestinian refugees and Syrian displaced persons on Lebanese soil," adding, "We cannot accept that many parties, particularly on the international level, consider refugees and displaced persons a *fait accompli* that must be adapted to the point of integration, naturalization and granting of citizenship." He emphasized that the Lebanese state must make exceptional efforts through negotiations with the PA, LAS, UN and major countries to pursue the project of redistributing refugees to countries capable of absorbing them demographically and providing them with a humane and dignified life.⁹³

b. Relations with Israel

The most prominent issue during 2022–2023 was the maritime border demarcation, a point of contention among all Lebanese parties. With Israel initiating gas exploration and the ongoing dispute over maritime borders, Israel asserted in June 2022 that the Karish gas field is in "Israeli territory" and called "on the Republic of Lebanon to accelerate negotiations on the maritime border."⁹⁴

Although Hizbullah was not directly involved in the US-mediated negotiations, it wielded significant influence over the talks. The Hizbullah's Secretary-General

warned that if the maritime border negotiations between Lebanon and Israel resulted in unfavorable outcomes, the party would not confine its response to the Karish field, but would implement what he termed the “post-Karish equation.”⁹⁵

After several rounds of negotiations, US mediation efforts culminated in an agreement between the parties, which was signed in October 2022. Lebanese chief negotiator Elias Bou Saab described the signing as marking “a new era.” Amos Hochstein, the US energy envoy who mediated the indirect negotiations said, “This agreement was written with the idea in mind that it was between two countries that don’t have diplomatic relations,” adding, “I think the good will and good faith efforts by all parties is what’s going to make this move forward.”⁹⁶

The Israeli side viewed this agreement as a Lebanese recognition of Israel. Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid said, “It is not every day that an enemy state recognizes the State of Israel in a written agreement, in view of the entire international community.” He added, “It is not every day that the United States and France stand behind us and provide security and economic guarantees for the agreement.” He also said, “This agreement strengthens and fortifies Israel’s security and our freedom of action against Hizbullah and threats from the north.”⁹⁷

Israel took advantage of Lebanon’s dire economic situation to recruit agents. In 2022, Lebanese security forces dismantled 15 Israeli spy networks operating across various regions of the country. Investigations revealed that these networks were not only gathering information on the Lebanese resistance and its centers but were also conducting extensive surveys of Palestinian resistance forces in Lebanon, particularly Hamas.⁹⁸

On the other hand, the Lebanese resistance continued to bolster its capabilities in anticipation of a potential Israeli war on Lebanon. Hizbullah’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah announced in February 2022 that the resistance had successfully converted thousands of its rockets into precision missiles. He also revealed that the Lebanese resistance began manufacturing drones years ago and highlighted that Israel has resorted to recruiting agents after the failure of its drone operations due to the activation of the resistance’s air defense weapons. He asserted that Israel is on the path to disappearance; it’s only a matter of time. The future of the region will differ from the expectations of others.⁹⁹

Although both the Israel and Hizbullah were careful throughout 2022 and until October 2023 to maintain rules of engagement that avoided war, neither side ruled

out the possibility of breaching these rules if necessary. In May 2023, Hizbullah conducted military exercises on the southern border. The head of Hizbullah's Executive Council, Hashem Safieddine, stated, "Our readiness is always complete to confront any aggression and to reinforce the deterrence equations that have protected Lebanon." He warned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government, "If you think of expanding your aggression to undermine the equations we have established with our blood and capabilities, we will be ready to shower you with our precision missiles and all our weapons. You will witness dark days like never before... The Israelis should know well that we mean what we say."¹⁰⁰

In response, Israeli forces conducted military exercises near the border shortly after, sending a clear message to Hizbullah. Israeli threats to devastate Lebanon in the event of a war with Hizbullah were repeatedly emphasized.

c. Lebanon and Operation al-Aqsa Flood

The events following the operation on 7/10/2023 highlighted the strong interconnectedness of the resistance against the Israeli occupation, both in Palestine and Lebanon. The resistance in Lebanon did not hesitate to respond to the Israeli massacres. As Safieddine stated, "The resistance in Lebanon is not neutral in the ongoing battle between the Palestinian resistance and the occupation forces."¹⁰¹

Regarding Hizbullah's stance on this war, the party's Deputy Secretary-General, Naim Qassem, stated during a speech at a rally in Beirut's southern suburbs, "We, as Hizbullah, contribute to the confrontation and will do so according to our vision and plan. We are monitoring the enemy's actions and are fully prepared. When the time comes for any action, we will carry it out."¹⁰² Hizbullah reported 126 members killed from 7/10/2023, until the end of 2023. Additionally, 221 members, including 12 medics from the party, were killed from 1/1/2024, to 12/6/2024.¹⁰³ There were also 18 members of the Amal Movement, one Lebanese Army soldier, one member of the Syrian Social Nationalist Party, and 61 civilians killed during the period from 7/10/2023, to 22/5/2024.¹⁰⁴

From the outset of the war, Hizbullah declared its role as establishing and maintaining a support front, participating in the conflict under limited engagement rules, typically advancing no more than 3–5 km into Israeli territory, while remaining ready to go further if necessary. In his first speech after Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Hizbullah Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah warned that Israel

should be concerned about the potential expansion and escalation of the war. He highlighted that Hizbullah had successfully eased the pressure on the GS front by forcing the Israeli army to divert a significant portion of its land, air and naval forces to the northern front.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, Israel also adhered to specific engagement rules, avoiding the opening of a full-scale front from Lebanon to prevent overextending its forces and diverting attention from GS.

As expected, perspectives and positions among Lebanese parties varied on the issue. The Lebanese Forces Party leader, Samir Geagea, stated, “We must work to prevent the eruption of the southern front, and I note the significant absence of the Lebanese government.”¹⁰⁶ In another statement, he argued that the operations in the south did not benefit Gaza in any way, while Lebanon suffered economic losses amounting to billions of dollars.¹⁰⁷

The Kataeb Party issued a statement warning that the events in the south risk dragging Lebanon into an unnecessary war, one that would serve to entrench power dynamics in the region and prioritize external interests over Lebanese sovereignty. The party firmly stated that “the use of Lebanese territory and its linkage to the Palestinian arena is categorically rejected. Neither Hizbullah nor any Palestinian factions have the right to speak on behalf of Lebanon, whether in matters of war or peace; this authority belongs exclusively to the Lebanese state and its institutions.”¹⁰⁸

The Maronite Bishops’ Council in Lebanon, under the leadership of Cardinal Mar Bechara Boutros al-Ra’i condemned the opening of new fronts in southern Lebanon by Palestinian factions, stating that such actions infringe upon Lebanon’s sovereignty as an independent state. The Council emphasized that the decision regarding war and peace “must rest solely with the Lebanese state, given their profound impact on the entire Lebanese population.”¹⁰⁹

In a television interview on 19/2/2024, former Lebanese President Michel Aoun criticized Hizbullah for opening the southern front against Israel in solidarity with GS. He stated, “We are not bound by a defense treaty with Gaza.”¹¹⁰

Furthermore, Operation al-Aqsa Flood has brought the military wing of *al-Jama’ah al-Islamiyyah*, known as the Fajr Forces, back into the forefront of resistance activities against Israel in Lebanon. In a statement on 18/10/2023, the group announced that it had targeted the Israeli army with rocket strikes, achieving direct hits.¹¹¹ The group’s Secretary-General Muhammad Takkoush, explained that the rocket attacks were partly a response to the Israeli attacks on southern villages,

residents, towns and mosques, and partly to show solidarity with the people of Gaza, affirming that they are not alone in this battle.¹¹² He emphasized that “*al-Jama‘ah al-Islamiyyah* is not aligned with any specific axis, though this does not preclude cooperation with those who share our views on any issue.”¹¹³ He stressed that al-Aqsa Flood battle represents a crucial struggle for the future of the world, with Palestine at its core. He called for “a parallel flood to al-Aqsa Flood and not merely symbolic gestures, as these do not determine the outcome of the battle.” He asserted that the group is not neutral in this war.¹¹⁴ In a speech delivered a year prior to Operation al-Aqsa Flood, on 25/12/2022, Takkoush stated that as long as the occupying entity controls part of our land, we in *al-Jama‘ah al-Islamiyyah* will continue our growing resistance activities, with the Fajr Forces ready to act.¹¹⁵

Al-Jama‘ah al-Islamiyyah lost five members across Lebanon during Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which took place from 7/10/2023, to April 2024, as a result of attacks by Israeli drones.¹¹⁶

On 6/4/2023, thirty rockets were fired from southern Lebanon towards northern Israel. No group initially claimed responsibility for the rocket fire. However, Reuters, citing three security sources, reported that Palestinian factions were behind the attacks from Lebanon on Israel.¹¹⁷ It was later revealed that Hamas’s Al-Qassam Brigades were responsible for launching the rockets. Following the incident, Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati met with Foreign Minister Abdullah Bou Habib. After local and international political consultations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Emigrants issued a statement affirming Lebanon’s full respect for and adherence to UN Security Council Resolution 1701. The statement emphasized Lebanon’s commitment to maintaining calm and stability in the south. Lebanon called on the international community to pressure Israel to cease its escalation and expressed its readiness to cooperate with the UN Peacekeeping Forces in the south to restore peace. It warned of Israel’s escalatory actions, which threaten regional and international peace and security.¹¹⁸ On 12/4/2023, Free Patriotic Movement leader Gebran Bassil stated, “As Lebanese, we reject anyone using our land to send messages, and we only accept Lebanese weapons on our land. We also reject the launching of rockets from our land if their source is not Lebanese.”¹¹⁹

From 7/10/2023, to the end of 2023, Hamas’s Al-Qassam Brigades in Lebanon claimed responsibility for ten rocket launches towards Israeli settlements in the

north, the first of which occurred on 10/10/2023, targeting settlements in western Galilee.¹²⁰ On 3/5/2024, Al-Qassam Brigades in Lebanon released footage for the first time showing rockets targeting command centers and Israeli soldiers' barracks in northern Israel.¹²¹ Additionally, Al-Quds Brigades, the PIJ military wing, conducted several operations from southern Lebanon, including rocket attacks, clashes with Israeli forces, and infiltration operations into Israel.¹²²

On 2/1/2024, Israel assassinated Saleh al-'Aruri, the deputy head of Hamas's political bureau, along with six of his comrades, in the southern suburbs of Beirut. This act was widely condemned by several Lebanese officials and party leaders. Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati denounced the attack, stating, "This explosion is a new Israeli crime aimed at dragging Lebanon into a new phase of confrontations." The Lebanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it had submitted two "strongly worded" protests to the UN regarding the Israeli airstrike on Beirut's southern suburbs that targeted Hamas leaders, including al-'Aruri.¹²³ In retaliation, Hamas's Al-Qassam Brigades in Lebanon shelled Israeli military sites in northern Palestine.¹²⁴ *Al-Jama'ah al-Islamiyyah*, which lost two members, Mahmud Shahin and Muhammad Bashasha, in this assassination, condemned the attack, describing it as "a failed Israeli attempt to compensate for the defeat of the occupation forces before the heroic Palestinian resistance in Gaza." The group affirmed that this "heinous crime will not go unpunished."¹²⁵ Hamas in Lebanon lost 18 members (including Saleh al-'Aruri, deputy head of Hamas's political bureau), with 7 killed from the start of Operation al-Aqsa Flood until the end of 2023 and 11 killed from 1/1/2024, to 12/6/2024. The PIJ in Lebanon also lost 18 members, with 9 killed from the start of the operation until the end of 2023 and 9 killed from January 1/1/2024, to 12/6/2024.¹²⁶

5. KSA and the Gulf States

a. The Development of Their Political Relations, Diplomatic Activities and Position on Peace Process

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member states have reiterated their unwavering positions on the centrality of the Palestine issue and their support for the sovereignty of the Palestinian people over all territories occupied since 1967, advocating for the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital. They also reaffirmed the rights of refugees in accordance with the Arab Peace Initiative and relevant international resolutions. The GCC

underscored the importance of intensifying international efforts to resolve the conflict in a manner that upholds the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people based on these principles. Furthermore, the GCC states commended efforts to revive the Arab Peace Initiative, and expressed their firm rejection of any attempts to annex settlements in WB to Israel.¹²⁷

The GCC member states condemned the ongoing Israeli construction of settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories. They called on the international community to intervene to stop the targeting of Palestinians in Jerusalem, the eviction of Palestinian residents from their homes in East Jerusalem, and efforts to alter the city's legal status and demographic composition, including arrangements concerning Islamic holy sites. The council underscored that these actions violate international law, international resolutions and existing agreements, stressing the need to avoid unilateral measures.¹²⁸ GCC Secretary-General Nayef al-Hajraf emphasized the importance of the Israeli authorities respecting the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites, and called for an end to all illegal actions.¹²⁹

Conversely, the "Abraham Accords," signed by the UAE and Bahrain with Israel, largely sidelined the Palestine issue. These agreements primarily focused on security, military and economic interests, making it clear that the path to normalization did not contribute to resolving the Palestine issue but rather exacerbated its marginalization. Israel, meanwhile, intensified its aggression against the Palestinian people, increased its assaults on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and continued Judaizing Jerusalem and expanding settlements. In contrast, KSA differed from its neighbors, the UAE and Bahrain, by refraining from signing any normalization agreement with Israel, despite US and Israeli efforts. However, KSA did facilitate certain forms of normalization, such as opening its airspace to Israeli flights and holding unofficial meetings. Kuwait, on the other hand, stood alone in rejecting all forms of normalization and continued to support the Palestine issue.

While Israel's relations with the UAE and Bahrain have developed in an unprecedented manner, including the signing of agreements for political, military, economic and security cooperation, a comprehensive study of public opinion across 14 Arab and Muslim countries, as reported by the British Jewish News site, revealed that the vast majority oppose recognizing Israel. Regarding normalization with Israel, in countries like the UAE, Morocco, Bahrain and Sudan, 84% of respondents opposed their home countries' recognition of Israel.¹³⁰ *Haaretz* quoted

Ebtesam al-Ketbi, head of the Emirates Policy Center, saying that the Israeli government “embarrassed” Arab leaders who signed agreements with Tel Aviv, and that no additional states are likely to sign normalization agreements with Israel in the near term.¹³¹

Saudi King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz underscored that the security and stability of the Middle East hinge on “accelerating a just and comprehensive solution to the Palestine issue in line with international legitimacy resolutions and the Arab Peace Initiative, including the establishment of an independent Palestinian state along the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital.” He also condemned all unilateral actions that undermine the two-state solution and called for their immediate cessation.¹³² Riyadh strongly denounced the escalating Israeli measures in Jerusalem, including repeated incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The Saudi government emphasized that this systematic escalation represents a blatant assault on holy sites, the sanctity of *al-Aqsa* and its significance to the Muslim *Ummah* (Muslim nation), as well as a serious violation of international law and the historical and legal status quo in Jerusalem and its holy sites.¹³³

Amid heightened discussions about a potential normalization agreement between KSA and Israel, on 12/8/2023, Saudi Ambassador to Jordan Nayef bin Bandar al-Sudairi presented his credentials as Non-Resident Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary to the State of Palestine to the PA and Consul General in Jerusalem city to Majdi al-Khaldi, Advisor to the Palestinian President on Diplomatic Affairs. Al-Sudairi stressed “the Kingdom’s unwavering stance with regard to supporting the Palestinian cause and the rights of the brotherly people of Palestine.”¹³⁴ The Palestinian government and the PLO hailed al-Sudairi’s visit to WB to present his credentials to Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas as a “historic moment” in the development of fraternal relations between the two countries.¹³⁵

Kuwait, Qatar and Oman reaffirmed their unwavering stance on the Palestine issue and the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people, particularly their right to establish an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital, within the framework of a two-state solution. These countries condemned the escalating Israeli actions in Jerusalem and the repeated incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque under the protection of Israeli forces, deeming these acts a blatant violation of international law and a provocation to the sentiments of Muslims worldwide. They warned that such ongoing violations clearly demonstrate the Israeli intent to transform the conflict into a religious war.¹³⁶

Kuwait and Oman have declared their rejection of normalization with Israel, while Qatar emphasized that it's difficult to envision joining the Abraham Accords "in the absence of a real commitment to a two-state solution." Qatar clarified that its engagements with Israel are focused on supporting the Palestinian people. Foreign Minister Mohammed bin 'Abdulrahman Al Thani mentioned that Qatar had previously maintained ties with Israel when "there was prospects for peace" with the Palestinians, but noted that his country "lost hope" after the 2008–2009 Gaza War.¹³⁷

Qatar continued to host Hamas leadership and provided official support by mediating between Israel and Palestinian resistance, which resulted in a temporary truce during the GS war following Operation al-Aqsa Flood. This truce lasted seven days, with Qatar managing these efforts in collaboration with Egypt, and supporting the active media role of Al Jazeera, which aligns with the resistance and reflects the sentiments of the Arab street. Simultaneously, Qatar maintained strong relations with the US, positioning itself as a reliable mediator and investing in an active role in regional politics.

Qatar submitted a written memorandum to the ICJ requesting an advisory opinion on the Legal Consequences arising from the Policies and Practices of Israel in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem. The memorandum urged the court to determine that Israel's obligations under international law necessitate the immediate cessation of its illegal occupation and the provision of full compensation for the damage and suffering caused by the occupation.¹³⁸

During the period covered by this report, the Qatar's Gaza Re-Construction Committee sustained an annual grant of \$360 million to support the GS residents. This grant was allocated for supplying fuel to operate Gaza's power plant, in cooperation with the UN Office for Project Services (UNOPS), and for providing a monthly aid of \$100 to 100 thousand needy families, alongside other projects implemented by Qatar in GS.¹³⁹

While the UAE protested and condemned Israeli actions in Jerusalem and within *al-Aqsa* Mosque, emphasizing the importance of respecting Jordan's role in overseeing the holy sites and endowments in accordance with international law and the historical status quo, and not infringing on the authority of the Jerusalem Endowments and Al-Aqsa Mosque Affairs,¹⁴⁰ Emirati Foreign Minister

Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, during a phone call with his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid, on 21/4/2022, “welcomed the Israeli government’s decision to halt the ‘Israeli Flags March’ from reaching the Bab al-Amud [Damascus Gate] area, as well as to prevent non-Muslim visitors from entering the Al-Aqsa courtyards from Friday until the end of the Holy Month of Ramadan.”¹⁴¹

b. Position on the Reconciliation Process and Palestinian Unity

The GCC Supreme Council emphasized the importance of reconciliation and Palestinian unity, urging all Palestinian factions to resolve their differences through dialogue and to engage in negotiations to strengthen national unity. The Council commended the efforts of Arab countries in promoting national reconciliation, restoring Palestinian unity, and unifying Palestinian ranks to serve the interests of the Palestinian people.¹⁴²

Relations between KSA and Hamas have shown signs of improvement. Musa Abu Marzuq, Hamas’s head of International Relations, indicated that the movement’s relations with KSA were gradually warming, particularly following Hamas’s visits to KSA under the pretext of *Hajj* and *Umrah*.¹⁴³ On 17/4/2023, a Hamas delegation led by the movement’s political bureau head, Isma‘il Haniyyah, performed *Umrah* during a visit to KSA for the first time in years. The delegation included Khalid Mish‘al, the head of Hamas abroad, along with several political bureau members, including Musa Abu Marzuq and Khalil al-Hayya.¹⁴⁴

Haniyyah sent a congratulatory message to King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman on the occasion of Saudi Arabia’s 92nd National Day. In the message, he urged them to commemorate the day by issuing a royal pardon for all detained Palestinians in the kingdom.¹⁴⁵ Mish‘al also called on KSA to release Hamas members, rejecting any significant reason for the change in the Saudi stance towards Hamas. He emphasized that the movement has neither harmed any party nor interfered in other countries’ affairs, and thus “it is not right for a state to hold Hamas accountable for practicing resistance.”¹⁴⁶

The recent escalation of Israeli war on GS following Operation al-Aqsa Flood has brought renewed attention to the issue of Palestinian and Jordanian detainees in KSA. These detainees are reported to have links with an unspecified “terrorist entity,” leading to increasing demands for transparency regarding their situation and calls for their release.

In August 2021, a Saudi criminal court sentenced Muhammad al-Khudari, a prominent detainee and former representative of Hamas in KSA, to 15 years in prison on charges of supporting resistance. This sentence was part of a broader series of verdicts targeting 69 Jordanians and Palestinians, with sentences ranging from acquittal to 22 years in prison. However, in December 2021, a Saudi appellate court reduced al-Khudari's sentence to 3 years. By 4/1/2022, the court had reviewed the sentences, with Khadir Al-Mshayikh, head of the Jordanian detainees committee in KSA, noting that "the Riyadh Court of Appeal reconsidered many of the sentences, reducing some by half and others by a third."¹⁴⁷ Muhammad al-Khudari was released on 19/10/2022,¹⁴⁸ and his son Hani was released on 26/4/2023.¹⁴⁹

c. Position on Operation al-Aqsa Flood

Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the subsequent Israeli war on GS have placed the Gulf states into a complex position. While some of these countries maintain diplomatic relations with Israel, KSA had been preparing for normalization talks with Israel. However, Riyadh announced the suspension of these talks in response to the war.¹⁵⁰ The Gulf countries' responses have varied: some have expressed concern over the escalation and spread of conflict, calling for a cease-fire, while others believed that "Hamas must be destroyed in Gaza."¹⁵¹

Operation al-Aqsa Flood took place approximately three years after the signing of the Abraham Accords. During this period, some Arab states began to perceive resistance not as a burden but as an opponent,¹⁵² an adversary to be fought and eliminated. This view arose from concerns that resistance was obstructing the normalization process, despite its expansion, and preventing it from becoming an accepted stance within the Arab and Muslim worlds.¹⁵³

The GCC Supreme Council condemned the Israeli war on GS and reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian people. The council called for "an immediate cessation of hostilities and Israeli military operations, ensuring the provision of all humanitarian and relief aid." It demanded "an end to the illegal Israeli blockade" on GS, "called for providing international protection to the Palestinian people and held Israel legally responsible for its ongoing attacks that have targeted innocent civilians." Additionally, the council urged "all parties to the conflict to protect civilians, refrain from targeting them, and adhere to international law and international humanitarian law." It also called for the "release of civilian hostages and detainees, especially women, children, the sick, and the elderly."¹⁵⁴

Riyadh's reaction to Operation al-Aqsa Flood was muted, as the entertainment season events in Riyadh commenced on 28/10/2023, amidst the ongoing war and genocide in GS. Turki Al al-Sheikh, the Chairman of the Saudi General Entertainment Authority (GEA), confirmed that these events would continue as planned.¹⁵⁵

The Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the Kingdom was “closely following the developments of the unprecedented situation between a number of Palestinian factions and the Israeli occupation forces, which has resulted in a high level of violence on several fronts there.” It called for an “immediate halt to the escalation between the two sides, the protection of civilians, and restraint,” renewing “the call of the international community to assume its responsibilities and activate a credible peace process that leads to the two-state solution.”¹⁵⁶ Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud condemned any attacks on civilians, regardless of their location.¹⁵⁷ King Salman bin ‘Abdul ‘Aziz and Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman initiated a popular donation campaign via the “Sahim” platform, associated with the King Salman Humanitarian Aid and Relief Center, to support the Palestinian people in GS. They launched the campaign with a donation of 50 million riyals (about \$13.3 million).¹⁵⁸

Qatar has attributed the current escalation solely to Israel, citing its ongoing violations of Palestinian rights, including repeated incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque under Israeli police protection. Qatar has expressed deep concern about the developments in GS and has urged all parties to de-escalate and exercise maximum restraint.¹⁵⁹ Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani called “for an end to this war that has transcended all limits, to stem the bloodshed, spare the civilians the consequences of military confrontations.” He added “It is untenable for Israel to be given an unconditional green light and free license to kill,” emphasizing, “It should not be allowed in our time to use cutting off water and preventing medicine and food as weapons against an entire population.”¹⁶⁰ Sheikh Tamim wondered, “how long will the international community continue to treat Israel as if it is above international law” and demanded that the UN “send international teams to immediately investigate the Israeli allegations and claims used to justify the bombing of hospitals, although there is no justification for such a crime.”¹⁶¹

Kuwait has also expressed “concern on the escalation in the Gaza Strip and the occupied Palestinian territories, which resulted from the continuous violations

and attacks by the Israeli occupation forces on the Palestinian people.”¹⁶² The Kuwaiti government ordered “halting all celebrations and concerts in solidarity with the brotherly Palestinian people and the blessed martyrs.”¹⁶³ Crown Prince Sheikh Mishal Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah denounced “the attacks of the brutal Israeli aggression” on GS, and called for “a ceasefire and allowing the entry of humanitarian and relief aid.”¹⁶⁴

Kuwaiti Interior Minister Talal Khaled Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah said, “We are proud of the Amir Decree of 1967 proclaiming that Kuwait is in a state of war against the Zionist gangs in the occupied Palestine,” noting that “the proclamation is still in effect, which signals Kuwait’s steadfast support to right and justice.”¹⁶⁵ In a joint statement signed by 45 members, Kuwaiti MPs expressed their full support for the Palestinian people’s right to resist occupation and respond to attacks and violations. They emphasized that the recent events are a natural reaction to the escalating crimes against holy sites in Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, and in WB.¹⁶⁶

The Omani Foreign Ministry stated that the escalation is “a result of the continued illegal Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories and constant Israeli aggressions in Palestinian cities and villages.” The ministry called “on both parties to exercise the utmost levels of restraint, stressing the importance of protecting civilians.” The statement adds that these events portend serious repercussions and an escalation in the intensity of violence.¹⁶⁷

In contrast, the UAE and Bahrain sought to maintain their relations with Israel while criticizing Hamas’s actions on 7/10/2023. UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al Hashimy, speaking at a UN Security Council Open Debate on the Situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian Question, stated that “the attacks launched by Hamas on October 7 are barbaric and heinous” and demanded “that Hamas release hostages immediately and unconditionally to stop the bloodshed and spare all civilians from further suffering.” However, she emphasized that “Hamas’ crimes against civilians can never justify Israel’s policy of collective punishment towards the Gaza Strip.”¹⁶⁸

The UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs expressed that it was “appalled by reports that Israeli civilians have been abducted as hostages from their homes.” It emphasized that civilians on both sides must always have full protection under international humanitarian law and must never be a target of conflict.” It added, “the Ministry deeply mourns the loss of Israeli and Palestinian lives as a result

of the outbreak of violence, and calls on both parties to de-escalate and avoid an expansion of the heinous violence with tragic consequences affecting civilian lives and facilities.” The UAE extended “condolences to the families of the victims” and called for “all diplomatic efforts to prevent a wider regional confrontation.”¹⁶⁹ Israeli opposition leader Yair Lapid mentioned that UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed expressed solidarity with Israel during a phone call.¹⁷⁰

Amid the escalation of war in GS and Israel’s intensified targeting of civilians and infrastructure, Anwar Gargash, the diplomatic adviser to the UAE president, described the Israeli response to the Hamas attack as “disproportionate,” while noting that “the two decade policy of containment of the Palestinian issue by Israel had failed.”¹⁷¹ UAE’s permanent representative to the UN, Lana Nusseibeh, stated that the UAE “will condition financial and political support for the reconstruction of Gaza’s infrastructure on a viable US-backed path toward a two-state solution.”¹⁷²

Bahrain criticized Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, with its Ministry of Foreign Affairs calling “for an immediate stop to the ongoing fighting between the Palestinian Hamas troops and the Israeli forces.” It “called on the international community to fulfil its responsibilities by intervening to stop the armed conflict” and “affirmed that the Kingdom of Bahrain supports the peace process and advocates for reaching a diplomatic solution through negotiations to bring forth a two-state solution in alignment with other international legitimacy resolutions.” The ministry “affirmed the Kingdom of Bahrain’s denunciation of the reported kidnappings of civilians from their homes to be taken as hostages,” expressing “its regret for the loss of life and destruction of property, offering its condolences to the families of the victims and wishing the injured a swift recovery.” Bahrain called for “the de-escalation of the violence that threatens regional security and stability,” noting the dire consequences this conflict will have on the region.¹⁷³

At the “IISS Manama Dialogue 2023,” organized by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), Bahrain’s Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa adopted the Israeli narrative, describing the attacks on 7/10/2023 as “barbaric” and “horrific.” He stated, “they were indiscriminate, they killed women, children, elderly; did not matter. They hit civilian institutions, and they hit military targets. And on top of that, it seems it’s okay now to grab hostages and take them away and speak about it as if it’s an act of war.” Prince Salman concluded, “There must be no terrorism directed from Gaza against the Israeli public.”¹⁷⁴

On the other hand, these countries that have normalized relations and exchanged ambassadors with Israel did not move to sever ties even after a month of aggression.¹⁷⁵ On 2/11/2023, Bahrain's Council of Representatives stated that "the Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain [Khalid al-Jalahma] to Tel Aviv returned to the Kingdom some time ago, and that the Ambassador of Israel to the Kingdom of Bahrain Eitan [Na'eh] had also departed the Kingdom previously, also confirming that direct flights between Bahrain International Airport and Tel Aviv Airport had stopped as of several weeks ago."¹⁷⁶ However, "Six sources familiar with the matter told Reuters Bahrain would not abandon its ties with Israel," and "is trying to preserve the relationship with Israel while also managing public opinion."¹⁷⁷

Conversely, Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, Chairman of the Defense, Interior, and Foreign Affairs Committee in the UAE's Federal National Council, stressed at a special online briefing organized by the European Jewish Association in collaboration together with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) that normalization agreements with Israel would not be cancelled despite the war on GS. He stated, "The Abraham Accords are there to stay," adding that "Israel is there to exist and that the roots of Jews, Christian are not in New York or Paris but here in our region."¹⁷⁸

The UAE played a key role in facilitating the launch of two overland routes for commercial shipments to Israel. The first was established through an agreement between Israel's Trucknet and the UAE's PureTrans logistics companies to transport goods from Dubai port through Saudi and Jordanian territories to Haifa port,¹⁷⁹ despite denial from the Jordanian Ministries of Transport and Industry and Trade.¹⁸⁰ However, evidence confirmed the route's existence. The second route involved Egypt's WWCS company joining the land bridge project, creating a new path from Jebel Ali port through Saudi territory and Jordan to the Haifa and Eilat ports, and then to the Egypt's Port Said and Ain Sokhna ports.¹⁸¹

d. Relations with Israel and Developments in Normalization

Political and Diplomatic Aspects

All signs indicate that the US is working to extend the normalization process it initiated with the UAE and Bahrain by facilitating similar ties between KSA and Israel. While the benefits for KSA appear limited compared to the substantial gains for Israel, KSA has stressed that normalizing relations with Israel would

benefit the region but hinges on resolving the Palestine issue. In an interview with *The Atlantic* magazine, Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman, when asked about the growing Gulf relations with Israel, said, “we hope that the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is solved. We don’t look at Israel as an enemy, we look to them as a potential ally, with many interests that we can pursue together. But we have to solve some issues before we get to that.”¹⁸²

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud stated that KSA believes that full normalization with Israel in the region is not only important or beneficial for Israel but also for all of us, as it can benefit all our countries economically, socially, and in terms of security.¹⁸³ During a session at the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Saudi minister emphasized that “a full normalisation between us and Israel, between the region and Israel, will bring immense benefits—we won’t be able to reap those benefits unless we address the issue of Palestine.”¹⁸⁴ Prince Faisal told Bloomberg that “an agreement to create a Palestinian state would be a precondition for the biggest Arab economy to establish formal diplomatic ties with Israel.”¹⁸⁵

In this context, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu aimed to secure a diplomatic success for his government by achieving a normalization agreement with Saudi Arabia. He repeatedly praised Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman for his role in negotiating normalization agreements between Israel and Arab states,¹⁸⁶ as well as for his communication with the US to facilitate this success.¹⁸⁷ Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid stated, “We will not wake up one morning to a surprise, rather it will be a long and cautious process on both sides. There are security interests for both countries.”¹⁸⁸

In a related development, the Israeli news site Walla! reported on 30/8/2023, that the PA had presented KSA with a list of demands they hope Riyadh will raise during talks aimed at reaching a normalization agreement between KSA and Israel.¹⁸⁹ *The Wall Street Journal* reported that senior Saudi officials said, “If Abbas can get security under control, the crown prince offered assurances that the kingdom would eventually resume its funding for the Palestinian Authority and that Saudi Arabia wouldn’t accept any deal with Israel that undermines efforts to create an independent Palestinian state.”¹⁹⁰

The *Israel Hayom* newspaper reported that Israeli security officials have intensified their visits to KSA in recent years.¹⁹¹ On 22/5/2023, Israel’s Channel 12

reported that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Foreign Minister Eli Cohen had phone conversations with Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman regarding the normalization of relations between Tel Aviv and Riyadh. These discussions were mediated by Bahrain and occurred under US pressure.¹⁹² On 10/9/2023, an official Israeli delegation arrived in Riyadh to participate in the 45th session of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. According to Israeli reports, the delegation included representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, although Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Education Minister Yoav Kisch were absent due to Saudi delays in issuing their entry visas.¹⁹³ This occurred despite Saudi Arabia's agreement with UNESCO, which included a commitment to allow Israeli representatives to participate in the meeting.¹⁹⁴

On 26/9/2023, in a first-of-its-kind public visit, Israeli Minister of Tourism Haim Katz and his delegation arrived in Riyadh, to attend a UN World Tourism Organization conference, thus "becoming the first Israeli minister to lead a delegation to the kingdom, according to his office."¹⁹⁵ Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, who visited Riyadh during the Feast of Tabernacles (*Sukkot*) holiday, on 3/10/2023, was filmed attending the morning prayers and taking part in the festive *Hoshanot* prayer.¹⁹⁶ Karhi praised the "blossoming ties" between Israel and KSA.¹⁹⁷

Additionally, in July 2023, Israeli media figures and athletes visited KSA to participate in sports tournaments. Videos circulated on social media showing the general rehearsal for the opening ceremony of the FIFAe World Cup finals, where three gamers from Israel were filmed singing the national anthem and holding the Israeli flag.¹⁹⁸

In a move to permit flights to and from Israel, the Saudi General Authority of Civil Aviation (GACA) announced on 15/7/2022, that it had opened "the kingdom's airspace for all air carriers the meet the requirements of the Authority for overflying." The authority stated that the decision was "to complement the efforts aimed at consolidating the kingdom's position as a global hub connecting three continents and to enhance international air connectivity."¹⁹⁹ This decision was welcomed by Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid.²⁰⁰ Many airlines operated flights through KSA for the first time after the ban on flights to and from Israel was lifted.²⁰¹

In a related context, leaders of UK Abraham Accords Group in Britain and Sharaka in Dubai signed a cooperation agreement on 11/1/2022, “to identify influencers from the Abraham Accords countries in the media, society, academia, business, and other fields and bring them on mutual visits—Israelis to the Arab world, people from the Arab world to Israel, and joint delegations to the UK. They will follow up by seeking areas for regional cooperation in a variety of fields.”²⁰²

Many analysts believe that the UAE’s commitment to a strong and long-term strategic relationship with Israel will remain resilient despite potential disruptions. Indeed, even as the UAE condemns the right-wing policies of Benjamin Netanyahu’s government, including settlement expansion and land confiscation, economic and trade cooperation between the two countries has continued to strengthen. Demonstrating this closeness, three members of the UAE Federal National Council visited the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum and the Israeli Knesset, marking the first visit of an Emirati delegation to the Knesset since the normalization of relations between the two countries.²⁰³ This visit coincided with the expanding normalization in various fields.

Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Abu Dhabi on 30/1/2022, marking the first official visit by an Israeli president to the UAE. The visit was made at the invitation of Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed, to open “Israel Day” at Expo 2020 Dubai.²⁰⁴ Israeli media sources published a video documenting Herzog’s delight as his plane passed through Saudi airspace en route to the UAE.²⁰⁵ Herzog said, “I hope and I believe that more and more nations will soon follow the UAE lead and join the Abraham Accords,” and added, “Already our trade has exceeded over \$1 billion, more than 120 agreements were signed and a \$100 million (research and development) fund was established recently.”²⁰⁶

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett made his second visit to the UAE on 9/6/2022, following his first visit on 12/12/2021, during which he discussed bilateral cooperation and development opportunities with UAE President Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.²⁰⁷

On 16/9/2022, during his visit to Israel, UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan visited the Yad Vashem Memorial Museum, paying tribute to the “Holocaust victims.” The UAE minister noted that about half a million Israelis had visited the UAE in the past two years, with 7 to 8 daily flights between the two countries.²⁰⁸ The UAE and Israel also exchanged congratulations on political

and religious occasions. However, these flights were reduced to one per day after Operation al-Aqsa Flood in October 2023 and were then temporarily suspended the following month.²⁰⁹

In a controversial move, a normalization delegation from the UAE, consisting of 41 individuals, stormed *al-Aqsa* Mosque on 11/1/2022, accompanied by 70 settlers from Jewish institutions and were heavily protected by Israeli police.²¹⁰ Similarly, on 9/12/2022, Israeli Ambassador to the UN Gilad Erdan, in collaboration with UAE Ambassador to the UN Lana Nusseibeh, organized visits for UN ambassadors to both UAE and Israel. These visits included the Western Wall, where the ambassadors met with Western Wall Rabbi Shmuel Rabinovitch. Erdan acknowledged that the tour was part of Israel's campaign to change the history of Jerusalem and the Western Wall, stating "The visit of the ambassadors that I am leading to Israel is part of my war in the UN to expose the lies of the Palestinians and their attempt to erase our thousand-year-old connection to Jerusalem."²¹¹

On 16/2/2023, UAE opened the Abrahamic Family House, which includes the first public synagogue alongside a mosque and a church. Mohamed Khalifa Al Mubarak, President of the Abrahamic Family House, said, "The Abrahamic Family House is symbolic of the UAE's long-standing values of mutual respect and peaceful coexistence—values embodied by our Founding Father, the late Sheikh Zayed. The centre will be a platform for learning and dialogue."²¹² Elie Abadie, the senior rabbi of the Jewish Council of the Emirates in the UAE, said "there are some 2,000 Jewish residents in the UAE, with about 500 'active Jewish' people practicing their religion."²¹³

In his first official visit to Bahrain since the signing of the normalization agreement in September 2020, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett arrived in Bahrain in mid-February 2022, marking a new chapter in relations between Manama and Tel Aviv.²¹⁴ Bennett met with several Bahraini officials, including King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa and Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. "The leaders agreed to expedite the negotiations on agreements for the protection of investments and the joint work on a tax treaty, which will provide the infrastructure for promoting secure commercial cooperation. The strengthening and encouragement of joint trade and investments and mutual visits of ministers and government officials was also agreed upon by the leaders." They also "welcomed the building of a bilateral 10-year plan called 'The Joint Warm Peace Strategy'

that will serve as a roadmap for the development of relations.” Bennett said, “We want a very warm peace with Bahrain,” and added, “Our goal in this visit is to turn our peace from peace between governments to peace between peoples... We want to bring content, energy and vigor to our relations.” He emphasized, “Israel and Bahrain are dealing with major security challenges that stem from the same source, which is the Islamic Republic of Iran.”²¹⁵

On 28/3/2022, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid al-Zayani and his Israeli counterpart Yair Lapid signed what was termed the “Joint Warm Peace Strategy” between the two countries, on the sidelines of the Negev Summit.²¹⁶

Security and Military Relations

Security and military relations between the UAE, Bahrain and Israel have been bolstered, with agreements being actively implemented, including arms deals and joint military exercises. Israel has expressed its readiness to offer intelligence, security and military assistance to protect the UAE, Bahrain and their citizens from any attacks.

According to *The Wall Street Journal* newspaper, “US convened a secret meeting of top military officials from Israel and Arab countries in March to explore how they could coordinate against Iran’s growing missile and drone capabilities.” The meeting, was held in Egypt, “brought together the top military officers from Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and Jordan,” as well as Bahrain and the UAE. The attendees included Israeli Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi, Saudi Chief of Staff Fayyadh bin Hamed al-Ruwaili, and Qatari Chief of Staff Salem bin Hamad al-Nabit.²¹⁷ Israeli i24 News reported on 14/12/2022, that Israel, UAE, Bahrain and Morocco held “meetings to discuss setting up a common cyber defense platform” due to “heightened threats from Iranian hackers.”²¹⁸ Israel’s Channel 12 revealed on 9/6/2022, that the Israeli military had deployed radar systems in several Middle Eastern countries, including the UAE and Bahrain. This move was part of a broader vision for joint cooperation aimed at countering “Iranian missile threats and establishing an early warning system.”²¹⁹

Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid affirmed Israel’s support for the UAE following the Houthi group’s drone attack on Abu Dhabi on 17/1/2022, which resulted in three fatalities.²²⁰ In a letter to Mohammed bin Zayed, Prime Minister Bennett offered “security and intelligence support in order to help you protect your citizens from similar attacks,” and “ordered the Israeli security establishment

to provide their counterparts in the UAE with any assistance.”²²¹ Following the UAE’s request, Israeli defense officials visited Abu Dhabi “to discuss possible defense and intelligence assistance.” The Axios website reported that “Israel and the UAE had a back-channel defense and intelligence relationship for more than two decades.”²²² The UAE and Israel agreed to deploy Israeli radars in the UAE to “to detect Iranian missiles and drones.”²²³ Israel National Cyber Directorate Head Gabi Portnoy, announced plans to establish a “cyber iron dome” in partnership with UAE and other countries, “We must meet the challenges with our partners, using the knowledge we have acquired and new technologies for better and faster protection,” Portnoy stated.²²⁴

On 3/1/2022, Israeli defense firm Elbit Systems was awarded an approximately \$53 million contract to supply Direct Infrared Countermeasures (DIRCM) and airborne Electronic Warfare (EW) systems for the UAE Air Force. The contract is set to be fulfilled over a five-year period.²²⁵ However, Israel has reportedly been reluctant to sell the UAE the Iron Dome and David’s Sling missile defense systems, according to Israeli sources.²²⁶ Reuters reported on 23/9/2022, that Israel had agreed to sell Rafael-made SPYDER mobile interceptors to the UAE. The Israeli Defense Ministry and Rafael declined to comment, and the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs also did not comment.²²⁷

On 20/2/2023, the UAE and Israel unveiled the first unmanned military vessel, a product of collaboration between Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and the Emirati defense consortium EDGE. The vessel, equipped with advanced sensors and imaging systems, is designed for surveillance, reconnaissance and mine detection. It was displayed off the coast of Abu Dhabi during the Naval Defence and Maritime Security Exhibition (NAVDEX).²²⁸

The Israeli Navy participated in a large maritime exercise in the Arabian Gulf, Arabian Sea, Gulf of Oman, Red Sea and North Indian Ocean on 31/1–17/2/2022. The exercise, dubbed International Maritime Exercise (IMX) 2022, was organized by US Naval Forces Central Command and involved 60 countries and international organizations, including Arab and Muslim countries such as Egypt, Jordan, UAE, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kenya, Oman, Pakistan and Yemen, etc.²²⁹ On 26/10/2022, the Israeli military reported that Israeli paratroopers participated in a multinational parachute drop in Bahrain with Bahraini, Emirati and US forces.²³⁰ Additionally, a UAE Air Force colonel began studying at Israel’s National Defense College

(INDC), marking the first time an Arab officer has attended this institution, according to KAN Public Broadcaster.²³¹

The relationship between Bahrain and Israel has gone beyond regular normalization, reaching overt security and military partnership. Bahrain's undersecretary for political affairs Abdullah bin Ahmad Al Khalifa revealed that Israel's Mossad has an official presence in Bahrain. Speaking alongside Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz at the Munich Security Conference, Al Khalifa stated that "There is intelligence cooperation between Bahrain and Israel. The Mossad is in Bahrain and they're present in the region." He added, "If this security cooperation between Bahrain and Israel would mean providing more stability and security, so be it, if it would mean saving the lives of innocent civilians, so be it."²³² In an unprecedented and unannounced visit, Gantz arrived in Bahrain on 2/2/2022, aboard an Israeli Air Force plane, marking the first time an Israeli military aircraft landed there.²³³ Gantz and his Bahraini counterpart Abdullah Al Nuaimi signed a security MoU between Israel and Bahrain. Gantz said, "We have reached new heights today in Israel-Bahrain relations with the important meetings that took place and with the signing of the historic MOU. We are building on the groundbreaking Abraham Accords and deepening ties between our nations." He added, "Only one year following the signing of the Accords, we have achieved an important defense agreement, which will contribute to the security of both countries and the stability of the region."²³⁴

The Israeli website Israel Defense revealed that the Bahrain Defence Forces purchased an Integrated Coastal Surveillance System under the BATS' GR12 brand to protect the shores of a military base located 200 kilometers from Iran. The system includes multiple installations of state-of-the-art radars and electro-optics, integrated in a Command and Control center. The contract was signed in the second half of 2021, with delivery expected in 2022.²³⁵

Trade and Economic Relations

In the three years since the normalization of relations, Israel and the UAE have developed close economic ties. According to Israeli government data, trade volume with the UAE has exceeded \$6 billion since 2020.²³⁶ Israel views these relations as a gateway to new business opportunities in the Gulf countries. The UAE is focused on enhancing cooperation with Israel in sectors such as finance, energy, security, technology and water security.²³⁷ On 10–11/7/2023, the N7

Initiative hosted the N7 Conference on Trade, in Manama, Bahrain, to “broaden and deepen integration between Israel and Arab and Muslim countries,” with high-level trade representatives from Bahrain, UAE, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan, US, and Israel participating.²³⁸

UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan stated that the UAE and Israel “continue to advance their partnership and bilateral cooperation in various fields.” He noted, “Through bilateral agreements the UAE and Israel are working to create new growth opportunities for the youth of the region, contributing to global efforts in supporting peace and prosperity.”²³⁹ Bilateral non-oil trade between the two countries reached over \$2.5 billion in 2022 and approximately \$3 billion in 2023.²⁴⁰ The UAE hopes to increase this figure to \$10 billion by 2030. Dubai International Chamber, which opened a Tel Aviv office in December 2022, reported that there are already about one thousand Israeli businesses operating in the UAE.²⁴¹

On 6/6/2022, Dubai International Chamber announced plans to open a representative office in Tel Aviv. Hamad Buamim, President and CEO of Dubai Chambers, stated, “By expanding our presence into Israel, we will be well positioned to achieve the objectives of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement signed by the UAE and Israel, build new bridges between the two business communities and boost non-oil trade to reach US\$10 billion annually within the next five years.”²⁴²

The UAE-Israel Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, signed on 31/5/2022, took effect on 1/4/2023. The agreement aims to strengthen trade and investment relations and boost non-oil bilateral trade. It provides economic benefits by eliminating tariffs on 96% of product lines, covering 99% of traded goods between the UAE and Israel, improving market access for services suppliers, and opening opportunities in government procurement. Buamim stressed the important role of promoting Dubai as a global gateway for Israeli companies and attracting foreign investment in key sectors of mutual interest such as digital economy, information technology, artificial intelligence, smart services, agricultural and food technologies and space sciences.²⁴³

On 23/1/2022, the Israeli government approved the establishment of a joint investment fund with the UAE, focusing on collaborative projects involving high-tech companies from both sides.²⁴⁴

At the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP27) in 2022, the UAE, Jordan and Israel signed an MoU to advance clean energy production and sustainable water desalination projects, initially announced in 2021.²⁴⁵ Jordanian Water and Irrigation Minister Mohammad Najjar stated that the water-for-energy agreement with Israel is still under feasibility studies, with an implementation expected by 2030. He added that the agreement could last up to 35 years, depending on satisfactory negotiations among all parties, including Jordan, UAE and Israel regarding the price of water per cubic meter.²⁴⁶

On 3/4/2022, UAE and Israel signed an MoU on transport cooperation. It aims “to set a future road map based on mutual benefit, in addition to exchanging experience and knowledge to serve the future directives for the next fifty years.”²⁴⁷

The diamond trade is one of the key areas of commercial exchange between the UAE and Israel. According to a statement from the Israeli Ministry of Economy and Industry’s Diamonds, Special Stones and Jewelry Administration, the UAE was a key trading partner for Israel, especially in uncut diamonds, with a significant increase in trade during 2022 compared to 2021. Israel’s rough diamond exports to the UAE amounted to approximately \$234 million in 2022, representing about 15.5% of Israel’s total rough diamond exports.²⁴⁸

In line with Bahrain’s efforts to strengthen cooperation with Israel across various fields, the Israeli Ministry of Economy announced the initiation of free trade agreement talks between the two countries. On 19/9/2022, Israeli Minister of Economy and Industry Orna Barbivai met with her Bahraini counterpart in Manama to officially launch these negotiations.²⁴⁹ Israel announced on 19/10/2022 the signing of a “historic” agreement aimed at enhancing and expanding agricultural cooperation with Bahrain.²⁵⁰

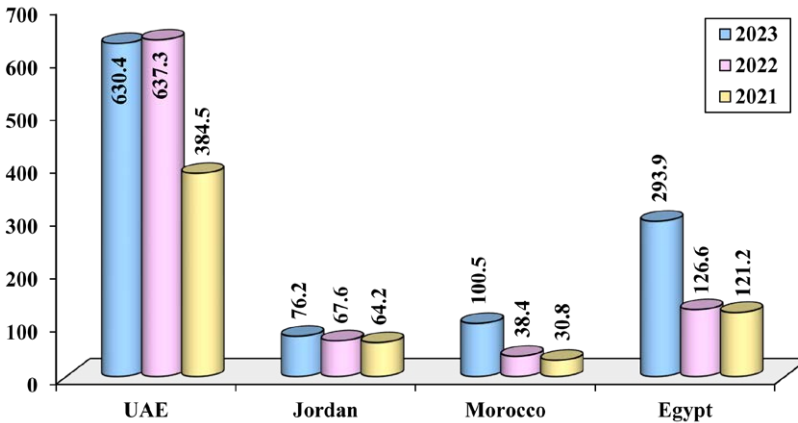
According to CBS, Israeli trade with the UAE saw a substantial increase, with exports to the UAE reaching \$630 million in 2023, up from \$74 million in 2020. Imports from the UAE rose to \$2.316 billion in 2023, compared to \$116 million in 2020.

The following table illustrates Israeli trade relations with some Arab countries:

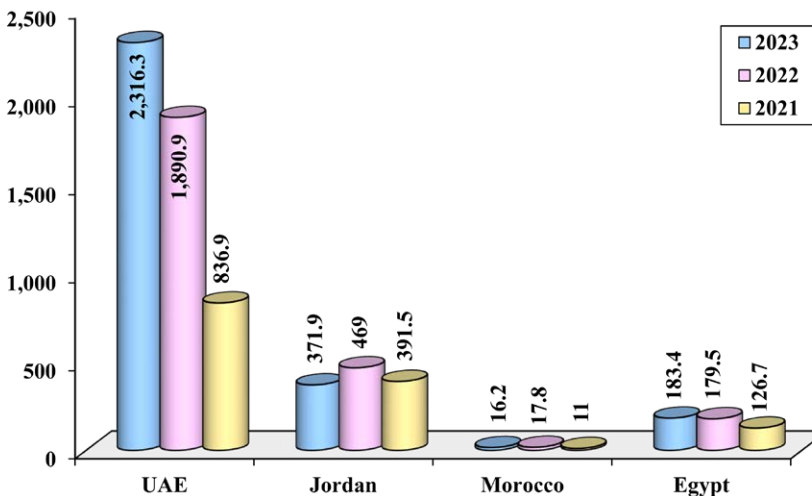
**Table 1/6: Israeli Exports and Imports with Some Arab Countries
2021–2023 (\$ million)²⁵¹**

Country	Israeli exports			Israeli imports		
	2023	2022	2021	2023	2022	2021
Egypt	293.9	126.6	121.2	183.4	179.5	126.7
Jordan	76.2	67.6	64.2	371.9	469	391.5
Morocco	100.5	38.4	30.8	16.2	17.8	11
UAE	630.4	637.3	384.5	2,316.3	1,890.9	836.9

Israeli Exports to Some Arab Countries 2021–2023 (\$ million)



Israeli Imports From Some Arab Countries 2021–2023 (\$ million)



6. Iraq and Yemen

In late 2021, the issue of normalizing relations between Iraq and Israel gained prominence when around 300 local Iraqi leaders convened in Erbil, in the Kurdistan region, to advocate for normalization with Israel. These calls were met with strong condemnations and denouncements from political parties and religious groups. The Iraqi government issued a statement expressing its firm rejection of the meeting and its outcomes.

In line with this, the Iraqi Parliament approved a bill criminalizing normalization with Israel on 26/5/2022, with unanimous support from those present.²⁵² Then-Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, prior to attending the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, stated that the conference would not discuss the issue of normalizing relations with Israel, describing such talk as an attempt to distract from Iraq's role in the region. Al-Kadhimi emphasized that Iraq's position on the Palestine issue is firm and non-negotiable, reiterating that Iraq has not and will not be part of any military alliance or bloc, with national interest being the primary focus of such meetings.²⁵³ This law is the first of its kind among Arab and Muslim countries, including those opposed to Israel.²⁵⁴ The law imposes severe penalties, such as the death penalty or life imprisonment, on individuals who engage with Israel.²⁵⁵ On 29/3/2022, Iraq announced that it had begun exploring mechanisms to seek compensation for the Israeli bombing of the Osirak plutonium nuclear reactor, located southeast of Baghdad, in 1981.²⁵⁶

Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) President Nechirvan Barzani affirmed on 4/5/2023 that the region remains committed to the decision not to establish relations between Iraq and Israel. He emphasized that Kurdistan does not support any state, including Israel, against Iran, noting that the security of Iran and Türkiye is important to the region. Barzani reiterated that his government is aligned with the Iraqi government's decisions in this regard.²⁵⁷ Regarding Iraq's relationship with Palestinian factions, Musa Abu Marzuq, head of Hamas's International Relations Office, revealed that his movement is in contact with Iraqi officials to arrange a delegation visit to Baghdad.²⁵⁸

Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Iraq condemned the war on GS. Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani described the scenes of killings and massacres in GS as acts of ethnic cleansing.²⁵⁹ The Iraqi resistance supported the Palestinian resistance in its operation by targeting US sites in the region and some Israeli sites.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein stated that Iraq, both the government and the people, rejects the principle of displacing Gaza's residents to Sinai. Regarding the potential for Iraq to become a battleground if the conflict expands, Hussein noted that all countries in the region are concerned, as the continuation of aggression and the invasion of Gaza could potentially widen the war.²⁶⁰ On 21/12/2023, the Prime Minister's Advisor for Human Rights, Zaidan Khalaf, announced that an Iraqi tanker loaded with 10 million liters of fuel had sailed to the Suez Canal as aid for Palestinians in GS. The Iraqi government intends to send more aid shipments in the future.²⁶¹

Yemen is among the foremost countries opposed to normalization with Israel, with a near-unanimous position among both the public and political parties against establishing relations with Israel. The Yemeni Islah Party and other Yemeni political parties have denounced efforts towards normalization, reaffirming their steadfast support for the Palestine issue and the Palestinian people.²⁶²

However, the position of 'Aidarous al-Zubaidi, head of the UAE-backed Southern Transitional Council (STC), marked a significant breach in the anti-normalization consensus. On 2/2/2021, al-Zubaidi endorsed the UAE's normalization with Israel and expressed a willingness to pursue normalization if South Yemen gains independence and is recognized as an independent sovereign state.²⁶³ His statement was met with widespread rejection by influential southern factions, including those aligned with him on secession, such as the Southern Revolutionary Movement Council led by Hasan Ba'um, as well as non-secessionist groups like the Southern National Salvation Council. Protests against these statements and their rejection occurred across most southern governorates.²⁶⁴

The Israelis indirectly contributed to the formation and organization of the security forces of the STC when it was established in 2016. This involvement was facilitated through the UAE, which hired retired Israeli officers from foreign security companies to train leaders of the STC's security forces in Abu Dhabi. Additionally, numerous assassinations targeting opponents of the UAE and the STC in Aden province were reportedly carried out by Israeli operatives working for foreign companies, including the American security company Spear Operations Group. Among these operatives was Abraham Golan, who "ran the assassination program in Yemen."²⁶⁵

With the launch of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, ‘Abdul Malik al-Houthi, Secretary-General of the Yemeni Ansar Allah (Houthi) movement praised the operation as a legitimate right for the Palestinian people, asserting that they have no choice but to engage in *jihad* to resist oppression and expel the occupier. He emphasized that there are red lines regarding the situation in GS, and stated that the movement is in coordination with our brothers in the “*jihad* axis,” ready to intervene with all available means.²⁶⁶

On 19/11/2023, Ansar Allah, who control the capital Sanaa and other parts of Yemen, launched their first military operations against ships linked to Israel passing through the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea. They reported the capture of a cargo ship owned by an Israeli businessman that was sailing in the Red Sea, and brought it to the Yemeni shore. Ansar Allah’s military spokesperson, Yahya Sare‘e, urged all countries whose citizens working in the Red Sea to avoid any interaction or activities involving Israeli ships or those owned by Israelis. He emphasized that this action was motivated by religious, humanitarian and moral obligations to the oppressed Palestinian people, who are under blockade and suffering ongoing horrific massacres by the Israeli enemy.²⁶⁷

The Houthis have tied the cessation of their attacks on ships bound for Israel to the lifting of the GS blockade, the entry of food and medicine, and the cessation of aggression against it. Mohammed Abdul Salam, the official spokesperson for Ansar Allah, emphasized that Yemen’s support for GS is non-negotiable.²⁶⁸

The attacks by Ansar Allah on ships linked to Israel disrupted trade dynamics in the Red Sea, a critical passageway for approximately 12% of global maritime trade.²⁶⁹ As a result, shipping companies began favoring routes via the Cape of Good Hope over the Bab al-Mandab Strait, primarily due to the heightened risk of Houthi attacks and the rising insurance costs, particularly for containers destined for Israeli ports.

This development led to increased shipping costs and doubled the time it took for ships to reach their destinations, impacting Israel significantly. Khitam Salama from the Strategic Planning Department at Haifa Bay Port noted, “A ship that normally takes a week now takes three weeks.” The Israeli Tax Authority “is providing full compensation to ships damaged in the conflict.”²⁷⁰

According to MarineTraffic, a company specializing in tracking ship movements, between 19/11/2023 and 30/4/2024, “Vessel traffic in the Bab al-Mandab Strait

also declined by 60.7%.” Additionally, the number of “vessels passing through the Suez Canal has fallen by 85%,” while the “Maritime trade in the Cape of Good Hope increased by 125%.”²⁷¹ As a result, revenues from the Suez Canal decreased by 50%, as stated by the Egyptian Minister of Planning and Economic Development Hala el-Said on 28/4/2024.²⁷²

In March 2024, ‘Abdul Malik al-Houthi detailed the attacks carried out by Ansar Allah on ships bound for Israeli ports, announcing that “at least 96 operations have been conducted in the region since November, using 403 ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones, hitting around 61 ships. Furthermore, the militias also reportedly launched at least 32 missile and drone operations against Israeli targets in the Palestinian Territories,” and 64 in the Red Sea and Arabian Sea.²⁷³ As of 29/5/2024, Ansar Allah had downed six advanced US MQ-9 drones.²⁷⁴

Following the onset of Ansar Allah’s attacks, the US and its allies swiftly established an international coalition to alleviate pressure on Israel and deter the Houthis. In this context, the US initiated Operation Prosperity Guardian on 18/12/2023, with a coalition comprising the UK, Bahrain, Canada, France, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Seychelles and Spain. The operation focused on the southern Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.²⁷⁵ Under Prosperity Guardian the US deployed several naval military assets to the region. On 16/4/2024, US Navy Secretary Carlos del Toro said, “The US Navy has spent nearly \$1 billion on munitions to thwart ‘over 130 direct attacks’ on US military and merchant ships in the Middle East over the past six months.”²⁷⁶ During Operation Prosperity Guardian, the US conducted numerous strikes on Houthi military bases and sites in Yemen. On 17/1/2024, to increase pressure, the US designated Ansar Allah as a “Specially Designated Global Terrorist group,” citing its “attacks against international maritime vessels in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden.”²⁷⁷ On 10/1/2024, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 2722, condemning Houthi attacks in the Red Sea and calling for an immediate cessation of all such attacks.²⁷⁸

According to Ansar Allah, as of 4/4/2024, some 424 US and British airstrikes on targets in Yemen have killed 37 people and wounded 30.²⁷⁹

Despite numerous strikes by the US and its allies on Houthi targets, these attacks failed to halt Houthi operations, which instead intensified. This resilience is attributed to the nature of the military targets, many of which had already been bombed by the Saudi-Emirati coalition during Operation Decisive Storm, launched

on 26/3/2015.²⁸⁰ The Houthis gained substantial experience in countering such assaults through effective camouflage tactics and strategic positioning, allowing them to maintain their operations.

In December 2023, Israel’s public broadcaster (Kan) reported that the STC and its leader ‘Aidarous al-Zubaidi showed a surprising willingness to “play a central role in securing the Red Sea navigation route with regional and international partners,” adding “if Israel recognizes our right to self-determination in southern Yemen, you will find an ally in the field against the Houthi threat.”²⁸¹

On 17/10/2023, the National Alliance of Political Parties and Forces in Yemen condemned the ongoing egregious crimes of state terrorism and genocide committed by the brutal Zionist occupation against the Palestinian people in Gaza, as witnessed by the world. The Alliance also denounced the brutal airstrike on Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in Gaza City.²⁸² On 11/11/2023, the House of Representatives in Houthi-controlled Sanaa passed a law declaring “normalization with the Israeli enemy constitutes treason against the Arab-Islamic *Ummah* [nation], Islam and the peoples.”²⁸³

7. Sudan, Algeria, Morocco and Other Arab Countries

a. Sudan

Sudan-Israel relations did not progress as anticipated during 2022 and 2023, despite an increase in meetings. Several factors contributed to this stagnation: First, the internal political strife following the military’s dismissal of the transitional government on 25/10/2021, led to a halt in efforts to formalize a peace agreement between Sudan and Israel.²⁸⁴ Second, the Sudanese public and the majority of political parties opposed deepening ties with Israel. Third, the outbreak of military clashes on 15/4/2023, between the Sudanese army and the Rapid Support Forces shifted national priorities to internal issues. Fourth, the impact of Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the subsequent Israeli war on GS further hindered the normalization process with Israel.

Since Sudan-Israel relations became public in February 2020, the Sudanese military has sought to strengthen its ties with Israel. Its goal is to leverage normalization efforts to bolster the military’s position, reinforce their rule, and retain control over the political transition process. Additionally, they aim to reduce political friction with the US. Sudanese military leaders also hope to use their relationship with Israel to influence the policies of Western countries.

On 15/12/2022, a framework agreement was signed to prepare for a civilian-led government in Sudan, with elections planned. This agreement granted the military an official role in overseeing the formation of a transitional government and parliament, as well as ratifying treaties with foreign countries.²⁸⁵ Consequently, the military gained the legal authority to influence the agreement, and to form alliances with local actors either supporting or opposing normalization with Israel.

On 11/2/2022, Sudanese Transitional Sovereign Council Head ‘Abdel Fattah al-Burhan stated that intelligence and security cooperation between Sudan and Israel had continued uninterrupted since his meeting with former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Entebbe, Uganda.²⁸⁶ However, these meetings and visits were kept confidential,²⁸⁷ suggesting the presence of obstacles and other unknown factors impeding progress on this issue.

Al-Burhan expressed dissatisfaction with the current normalization process and a desire to enhance relations. In September 2022, he expressed openness to visiting Israel if invited, acknowledging that relationship remained unofficial and low-level.²⁸⁸ Additionally, he sent a congratulatory message to Netanyahu following his victory in the Israeli Knesset elections in November 2022.²⁸⁹

The visit of Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, accompanied by Einat Schlein, head of MASHAV (Israel’s Agency for International Development Cooperation) at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to Khartoum on 2/2/2023, marked a significant milestone in establishing full official relations between Sudan and Israel. This was the first public visit, during which Cohen met with ‘Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Sudanese Foreign Minister Ali al-Sadiq. The Sudanese Foreign Ministry stated that the visit lasted a few hours and resulted in an agreement to move forward with normalizing relations. The Sudanese Transitional Sovereign Council highlighted discussions aimed at fostering productive relations with Israel and enhancing cooperation in areas such as agriculture, energy, health, water, education, and particularly in security and military fields.²⁹⁰

Despite Israel’s aim to enhance relations with Khartoum, Cohen adhered to US conditions regarding Sudan’s transition to civilian rule before proceeding with normalization. Upon returning to Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Cohen said that “the plan was for a full agreement to be signed by the end of the year—though only once Sudan’s current military leadership has transferred power to a civilian government.” He also noted that his visit to Khartoum was conducted with US approval.²⁹¹

The visit of the Israeli Foreign Minister ignited considerable debate and divergent opinions in Sudan. Islamic and nationalist factions were opposed to the visit. The National Congress Party, led by ousted President Omar al-Bashir, condemned it as a “humiliation, disgrace and shame” and rejected any notion of normalization. Analysts and activists on social media viewed the visit as an attempt by al-Burhan to rally support against civilian forces. The Sudanese Journalists Syndicate viewed it as an attempt to exploit Sudan’s crises for international leverage and to exert pressure on the political actors to reach a political agreement, thus allowing the coup leaders more time to remain in power. Meanwhile, Deputy Chief of the Transitional Sovereign Council Lieutenant-General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti) denied any prior knowledge of or involvement in the visit and its consequences.²⁹²

The National Umma Party reiterated the anti-normalization stance of its late leader, Sadiq al-Mahdi. The Nasserist Social Justice Movement opposed normalization and criticized Israel for trying to exploit the “historical plight of al-Burhan’s regime,” accusing it being a “sellout” in exchange for the safety and personal interests of the coup leaders. The movement urged national forces to unite in expressing Sudan’s rejection of Israel. The Popular Congress Party (Hasan al-Turabi’s party) asserted that the current transitional government had no right to make decisions on behalf of Sudan and its people.²⁹³

Following the outbreak of clashes in Sudan on 15/4/2023, and the escalating rift between Army Commander ‘Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and Rapid Support Forces Commander Lieutenant-General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), Israel observed the situation in Sudan with caution. There was concern that the expanding conflicts and chaos could jeopardize the normalization process. According to the Israeli Walla! News website, Israel concluded that a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and Sudan could not be finalized until the Sudanese conflict was resolved.²⁹⁴ The Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lior Haiat wrote on Twitter, “We are following with concern the events in Sudan. Israel wants stability and security for Sudan. Israel calls on all parties to refrain from violence and to return to the path of internal reconciliation, in order to conclude the process of governmental transition with a large consensus.”²⁹⁵

Israel sought to mediate a ceasefire and narrow differences, utilizing its strong relationships with both sides and guided by US encouragement. Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen and Ronen Levy, director general of the Israeli Foreign Ministry,

have been sending messages and directly speaking to al-Burhan and Hemedti since the fighting started, as reported by the Axios website.²⁹⁶

Israeli concerns went beyond the effects of ongoing fighting on normalization, encompassing fears of renewed arms transfers to Hamas and other resistance factions in GS, as well as growing Iranian and Hamas activities in Sudan.²⁹⁷

In an effort to bridge the gap between the warring parties and end the conflict, Israel proposed hosting a “reconciliation” meeting between al-Burhan and Hemedti on 22/4/2023, to discuss a cease fire. Eli Cohen stated that Israel had been working through various channels since the onset of the fighting in Sudan to achieve a ceasefire.²⁹⁸

Israeli mediation efforts were unsuccessful, further complicating Israel’s position. Despite its close partnerships and relations with both sides, Israel recognized the limits of its influence on Sudanese affairs, as international and regional powers involved in the conflict held greater sway. Moreover, some regional actors backing the warring parties showed little enthusiasm for ending the conflict.

Although both al-Burhan and Hemedti were involved in the normalization process, Israel favored Hemedti due to his eagerness to finalize agreements. Hemedti notably opened Khartoum’s doors to Mossad representatives without informing the Sudanese Sovereignty Council, sparking criticism from both military and civilian factions. He assigned his brother, Major General ‘Abdul Rahim Dagalo, to oversee relations with Israel, who openly visited Tel Aviv and met with Israeli military and security leaders.²⁹⁹

Hemedti notably made significant efforts to court Israel and persuade it to support him, aligning himself in a provocative manner with the Israeli narrative on the Palestinian conflict. His political advisor, Yusuf Ezzat, gave interviews to several Israeli TV channels, presenting Hemedti as a partner in Israel’s fight against “Islamic terrorism.” In one interview with the Israel Broadcasting Corporation (Kan), Ezzat likened al-Burhan’s forces to Palestinian “terrorist groups” fighting Israel. He went so far as to state, “What we are being exposed to, Israel has been exposed to it thousands of times from terrorist groups such as Hamas and other organizations that the Israeli people know very well.”³⁰⁰ By late 2023 and early 2024, Sudan distanced itself from the path of normalization with Israel, largely due to internal challenges, the regional impact of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, rising

public opposition to normalization, and increasing official discomfort with any such moves.

b. Morocco and other Arab Countries

Since signing the normalization agreement in late 2020, relations between Morocco and Israel have developed rapidly, extending into areas such as defense, economy, modern technology, tourism, trade and agriculture. Among the countries that signed the Abraham Accords, Morocco has become Israel's most cooperative partner after the UAE.

This relationship saw further growth during 2022–2023, culminating in Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's official recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over the disputed Western Sahara in a letter to King Mohammed VI on 17/7/2023.³⁰¹

Despite the rapid progress of the normalization process, the Israeli diplomatic corps in Morocco did not achieve the results the Israeli leadership had anticipated, largely due to popular opposition to re-establishing relations with Israel. The Israeli Foreign Ministry encountered difficulties in securing a suitable location for its embassy, with political sources in Tel Aviv stating that Moroccans were unwilling to rent buildings to Israel.³⁰² On 2/8/2022, Ambassador David Govrin signed a contract for the construction of a permanent Israeli embassy in the Moroccan capital, Rabat.³⁰³

To strengthen cooperation across various sectors, officials from both countries exchanged visits during 2022–2023. In July 2022, Aviv Kochavi, Chief of Staff of the Israeli Army, paid an official three-day visit to Morocco, where he met with senior leaders of the Royal Armed Forces, as well as security and intelligence officials. Kochavi also visited members of the Moroccan Jewish community in Marrakech, led by Jacky Kadouch. During this visit, he stated, "I am proud and delighted to meet you, the Moroccan Jewish community... your part in your fight for the State of Israel, and today you are working here for the Jewish community and to deepen ties with Israel."³⁰⁴ On 1/8/2022, Israeli Police Commissioner Yaakov Shabtai visited Rabat, heading a prominent security delegation to exchange knowledge and expertise in various security domains, with a particular focus on counter-terrorism.³⁰⁵

On 13/9/2022, Rabat initiated on a new phase in strengthening military cooperation with Israel through a historic first visit by Belkhir el-Farouk, Inspector

General of Morocco's Royal Armed Forces, to Israel. During his visit, he attended an international military conference and was received by Kochavi.³⁰⁶ Other notable visits to Morocco included Israeli Transportation Minister Miri Regev (of Moroccan descent) in May 2023,³⁰⁷ Israeli Knesset Speaker Amir Ohana (of Moroccan descent) on 7/6/2023,³⁰⁸ Israeli National Security Advisor Tzachi Hanegbi on 8/6/2023,³⁰⁹ and Israeli Interior and Health Minister Moshe Arbel on 15/6/2023.³¹⁰ In June 2023, Israeli Environment Minister Idit Silman (of Moroccan descent) visited Morocco to discuss ways to enhance normalization in sustainable development, natural resources and environmental protection with Moroccan Energy Transition and Sustainable Development Minister Leila Benali. During her visit, Silman also toured a Jewish synagogue in Rabat.³¹¹

Military cooperation was the most dynamic aspect of relations between Morocco and Israel during 2022–2023. It was a key area of focus, as evidenced by the high-level of visits, the scope and nature of military agreements, and the hosting of the inaugural meeting of the Follow-up Committee of the Moroccan-Israeli Defense Cooperation in Rabat, on 16–17/1/2023. This meeting addressed “various areas of bilateral military cooperation, including logistics and training as well as the acquisition and modernization of equipment.”³¹²

Military cooperation with Israel supports its objective of strengthening its military capabilities and modernize its armed forces, as reflected by the substantial unprecedented rise in defense budgets from around \$10 billion in 2019 to \$11.5 billion in 2022 and \$12 billion in 2023.³¹³ This development coincided with Morocco's opening to the Israeli arms market and the signing of multiple arms deals with Israel.

The agreements represented a major advancement in security and military cooperation between Tel Aviv and Rabat, establishing a foundation for future collaboration. In February 2022, Morocco signed a \$500 million deal with Israel Aerospace Industries to procure the BARAK MX Integrated Air and Missile Defense System.³¹⁴ In May 2022, Morocco was in talks with Israel to purchase the Delilah short-range cruise missile for its fleet of F–5, a supersonic light fighter jet.³¹⁵ In September 2022, Morocco purchased 150 military drones of the WanderB and ThunderB types, manufactured by Israel's BlueBird Aero Systems, a company specialized in designing and developing Tactical Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS) equipment.³¹⁶ Morocco also acquired Elbit System's Precise and Universal

Launching Systems (PULS) artillery rocket systems, capable of launching multiple ammunition types to distances up to 300 km.³¹⁷

Moroccan news outlet Hespresse reported that “the Moroccan government has contracted with Israeli company Elbit Systems to provide ‘Alinet’ Electronic Warfare (EW) and Signal Intelligence (SIGINT) systems for about \$70 million over the course of 2.5 years.”³¹⁸ In March 2023, it was revealed that Rabat will acquire the Rafael Spyder air defence system, which is “a low-level, quick-reaction surface-to-air missile system capable of engaging aircraft, helicopters, unmanned air vehicles, drones, and precision-guided munitions.”³¹⁹ In June 2023, Morocco received a shipment of SpyX, which is an expendable electric mini-UAV, designed for loitering and strike missions.³²⁰

Military relations continued to strengthen through joint military exercises. In June 2023, during the 19th African Lion exercises, held partly in Morocco, a 12-member team from the Israeli Golani Brigade participated alongside troops from 18 other countries, including the US. Ophir Gendelman, former spokesperson for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, told Asharq News that Morocco’s substantial military capabilities are vital for Israel in advancing regional stability. He emphasized that both countries share common security threats, primarily from Iran, its affiliates and global jihadist organizations.³²¹

Beyond military cooperation, Morocco and Israel signed agreements covering civil aviation, water resource research, finance, and a waiver of visa requirements for holders of diplomatic and official passports.³²² They also launched agricultural technology projects in the field of aquaponics,³²³ and agreed to bring Moroccan workers to the construction and nursing sectors in Israel.³²⁴

The normalization agreements and travel facilitation pacts have had a significant positive effect on tourism and trade. As reported in the Abraham Accords Peace Institute’s 2022 Annual Report, 200 thousand Israeli tourists visited Morocco in 2022. The same report noted that 5,200 tourists from Morocco, UAE, Bahrain, Kosovo and Sudan visited Israel in 2022, compared to 3,500 in 2019. The report assessed Israel-Morocco relations as “adequate,” noting a notable rise in total trade between the two countries, from \$13.7 million in 2019 to \$55.7 million in 2022. In 2022, Israel’s imports from Morocco amounted to \$17.8 million, while its exports to Morocco totalled \$37.9 million in goods and services.³²⁵

North Africa felt the impact of the Israeli war on GS, with Morocco likely being the most affected due to its relatively strong ties with Israel and the US. Meanwhile, anti-normalization sentiments intensified in other countries across the region.

On the official level, Moroccan diplomacy intensified from October 7th, expressing “deep concern” and condemning the targeting of civilians by any side³²⁶ on 7/10/2023. On 11/11/2023, during the Extraordinary Arab-Islamic summit in Riyadh, Moroccan Prime Minister Aziz Akhannouch read the Royal Speech that condemned Israel’s “blatant and continuing aggression against helpless civilians” without condemning Hamas’s attack.³²⁷ Morocco was among 120 countries that voted for a Jordanian-led Arab resolution in October 2023, calling for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and the lifting of the blockade, which Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen criticized as a “despicable call for a ceasefire.”³²⁸ Morocco also condemned the Israeli bombing of Al-Ahli Baptist hospital, which claimed the lives of hundreds of Palestinians.³²⁹

However, Morocco did not sever its relations or withdraw its ambassador from Tel Aviv, nor did Israel directly criticize Morocco’s stance. This suggests a mutual interest in preserving their relationship within “reasonable” limits for both parties, while also addressing “public opinion pressure.”³³⁰ Experts on Moroccan-Israeli relations believe that the military, security and economic ties developed since 2020 are too robust to be broken, even if public support wanes.³³¹ A 2022 survey by the Arab Barometer revealed that 31% of Moroccans and 39% of Sudanese are in favor of normalization with Israel.³³²

Regarding the stance of the Justice and Development Party (JDP), which is affiliated with the Islamic movement, its Secretary-General, ‘Abdelilah Benkirane, admitted that the party erred in normalizing relations with Israel. This referred to the normalization agreement signed by the Moroccan government, led by Saad dine El Otmani, in 2020, who was the JDP’s secretary-general at the time.³³³

Benkirane’s opposition to normalization went beyond merely rejecting its implications. In his annual political report to his party’s general conference on 14/1/2023, he reiterated his rejection of normalization and his support for Palestinian national resistance, cautioning against Israeli infiltration. Prior to the visit, Benkirane also opposed his country “hosting any meeting involving the Israeli enemy.” This stance followed Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen’s announcement

on 2/1/2023, that Morocco would host the Negev Summit 2 in March 2023, with participants including Israel, UAE, Bahrain, Egypt, the host country and the US. However, on 20/6/2023, and after being delayed several times amid escalating tensions between Israelis and Palestinians, Morocco decided to cancel the summit.³³⁴

On 25/7/2023, Morocco's Unity and Reform Movement, JDP's preaching wing, reaffirmed its opposition to normalization with Israel in a statement following its annual meeting. The movement characterized normalization as a path leading to Morocco becoming "a battleground for regional and international conflicts and Zionist infiltration, jeopardizing the region's security and stability."³³⁵

Commenting on the Israeli war against GS, 'Abdelilah Benkirane stated on 28/10/2023, that the Arab and Muslim *Ummah* (nation) risk "losing Gaza" forever. He criticized countries allied with Israel, whose leaders visit Netanyahu, claiming they are giving Tel Aviv a green light to escalate the war on GS.³³⁶ The Moroccan opposition party, the Progress and Socialism Party, called for an end to normalization with Israel and for taking legal action against it in the ICC.³³⁷

As for Algeria, its anti-normalization stance with Israel intensified. Along with other African countries like South Africa and Arab countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, Algeria succeeded in pushing the issue of "expelling Israel" from its observer membership in the African Union to the top of the agenda at the African heads of state summit held on 5/2/2022, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.³³⁸

On 14/2/2022, Algerian President 'Abdelmadjid Tebboune confirmed that relations with Morocco had worsened, accusing the kingdom of receiving increased Israeli support.³³⁹ Algerian Islamic groups' MPs submitted a draft law to parliament seeking to criminalize normalization with Israel, including articles prohibiting travel or any direct or indirect contact with Tel Aviv. Youcef Adjissa, an MP from the Movement of Society for Peace, stated on 16/5/2022, that he "lodged on behalf of his party's group of deputies (65 out of 462) the bill to the parliament," but it did not gain support from other MPs.³⁴⁰

The Algerian National People's Assembly (the lower house of parliament) announced on 30/4/2023, the resignation of its Deputy Speaker, Monder Bouden, from his position as President of the High-Level Advisory Group on Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism at the Inter-Parliamentary Union due to the inclusion of Israel in its membership.³⁴¹

Algeria played a significant role in the Palestinian reconciliation effort. Through direct mediation by President ‘Abdelmadjid Tebboune in 2022, Algeria succeeded in securing a new agreement known as the Algiers Declaration, signed by Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Fatah, on 13/10/2022 during their meeting in Algeria.³⁴² Tebboune’s initiative for Palestinian dialogue gained momentum due to several factors, including Algeria’s considerable political and economic influence; its firm stance on the Palestine issue and rejection of normalization with Israel; its openness to various Palestinian factions; and its framing of reconciliation as a political, rather than a security, issue. In addition, Algeria sought to garner Arab support for the Algiers Declaration during the Arab summit held in Algeria in November 2022. Other contributing factors included Egypt’s previous unsuccessful mediation efforts,³⁴³ and the pressing need for reconciliation after the Sword of Jerusalem Battle in May 2021, with its associated challenges and human and material losses. The formation of the Bennett government in June 2021; the absence of prospects for a political settlement; and the global focus on other issues in 2022, particularly the war in Ukraine and its regional and international impacts, also played a role. However, the outcomes of the Algiers Declaration did not materialize due to various obstacles, primarily the lack of commitment from the PLO and PA leadership to reach binding agreements, largely because of the obligations these agreements entailed.

Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Algeria’s leadership and people swiftly condemned the Israeli war on GS and expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people. President Tebboune emphasized that Palestinians are not terrorists but defenders of their land and legitimate rights, drawing a parallel to Algeria’s own struggle against colonialism, when Algerians were similarly labelled as “terrorists.”³⁴⁴ Tebboune called on free peoples around the world to bring Israel to the ICC.³⁴⁵ The Algerian Council of the Nation voiced deep concern over “the renewed brutal aggression of the Zionist occupation against Palestinians” in GS, condemning “the ongoing international hypocrisy and double standards regarding their just cause.”³⁴⁶ Algerian Foreign Minister Ahmad ‘Attaf informed Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh during their meeting that his country rejects the PA entering GS aboard an Israeli tank.³⁴⁷

In addition to the support from official institutions for the people of GS, Algerian political parties have taken significant stances in favor of the Palestine issue and

GS. They urged the authorities to open public spaces for Algerians to express their solidarity with Palestinian resistance. Various Algerian parties, including the Movement of Society for Peace, El Fadjr El Djadid, Ennahda, People’s Voice, Front for Justice and Development, Jil Jadid and Talaie el-Hourriyet, have called for the establishment of a coordinating body to consult and support Palestine. A statement issued after a meeting at the headquarters of the Movement of Society for Peace emphasized that the meeting was in response to the Palestinian resistance’s Operation al-Aqsa Flood and aimed to discuss the roles and responsibilities of Algeria’s political class in supporting the Palestinian people.³⁴⁸

The Speaker of the Algerian Parliament opposed a proposed law to criminalize normalization, asserting that Algeria “does not need it.”³⁴⁹ Additionally, the Algerian parliamentary delegation, along with other delegations, withdrew from an Inter-Parliamentary Union meeting during the opening speech of its president, Duarte Pacheco, who supported Israel in its war on GS.³⁵⁰

In direct support of residents in GS, the Algerian authorities facilitated the treatment of 300 injured children from GS in Algerian hospitals.³⁵¹ As part of the air bridge initiative launched to assist GS, the Algerian Red Crescent dispatched two aid shipments, totalling 310 tons, on 24 and 29/3/2024.³⁵² Additionally, Algeria made an exceptional contribution of \$15 million to support UNRWA.³⁵³

The August 2023 meeting in Rome between Libyan Foreign Minister Najla Mangoush and Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, mediated by Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani, marked a notable step toward the normalization of relations between Libya and Israel. On 27/8/2023, *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported that over the past decade, Israel and Libya have engaged in covert contacts facilitated by Israel’s Foreign Ministry and Mossad. Cohen stated, “I spoke with the minister about the immense potential for both countries, which also includes renovating synagogues and Jewish cemeteries in the country.” He added, “Libya’s size and location give the relationship enormous significance and huge potential for the State of Israel.”³⁵⁴ However, two senior Libyan government officials told The Associated Press that Prime Minister ‘Abdul Hamid Dbeibah “knew about the talks between his foreign minister and the Israeli chief diplomat...Dbeibah gave the green light for the meeting... and his office arranged the encounter in coordination with Mangoush.”³⁵⁵ Raphael Luzon, president of the Union of Libyan Jews, said meetings between Israeli and Libyan officials had occurred before and after the

Libyan revolution.³⁵⁶ A Libyan official stated that “normalization of relations between Libya and Israel was first discussed in a meeting between Dbeibah and [Central Intelligence Agency] CIA Director William Burns, who visited the Libyan capital in January” 2023.³⁵⁷

The announcement sparked outrage across Libya, leading to protests denouncing the meeting. Demonstrators in Tripoli set fires outside the Government of National Unity headquarters, chanting slogans in support of Palestine and opposing any Libyan engagement with the Israeli government. Protesters also stormed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Tripoli, demanding the dismissal and accountability of the Foreign Minister.³⁵⁸

Libyan Presidential Council spokesperson Najwa Wheba urged the Libyan government to take deterrent measures in accordance with the applicable laws and regulations. Libya’s High State Council (HSC) expressed surprise at the meeting and called for accountability from those responsible. The HSC’s National Consensus Bloc demanded Mangoush’s dismissal and a collective resignation from the government and the Presidential Council, should there have been prior coordination regarding the meeting. The Justice and Construction Party (JCP) also condemned the meeting, calling on the Prime Minister to remove the Foreign Minister from her position.³⁵⁹

In an effort to quell public outrage in Libya over normalization with Israel, Dbeibah, during a visit to the Palestinian embassy in Libya, announced the dismissal of Mangoush, claiming that her actions were taken independently.³⁶⁰ The Libyan Internal Security Agency in Tripoli also declared that Mangoush had been placed on a no-fly list until she complies with ongoing investigations.³⁶¹

Following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Dbeibah’s government swiftly condemned the “aggression” on GS, particularly after the attack on Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital in the Strip, with Dbeibah describing the incident as a brutal crime committed by Israeli occupation forces.³⁶²

As for Tunisia, although it has not joined the normalization process with Israel and there is widespread opposition to normalization among Tunisians, the proposed law to criminalize normalization with Israel, recognition of it and dealing with it, submitted by the Sovereign National Line bloc, which consists of 15 deputies in parliament, has not reached the discussion or voting stage. The vote was postponed twice, first on 2/11/2023 and again on 23/2/2024,³⁶³ due to sharp divisions over the

law. Parliament Speaker Ibrahim Bouderbala informed the deputies pressing for further discussion of the bill, stating that “the president [Kais Saied] had warned the bill could harm Tunisia’s foreign affairs and security.”³⁶⁴

The majority of parliamentarians insisted on continuing the discussion of the law, rejecting a motion to postpone the session with 68 votes. Deputies from the Sovereign National Line, Independent National, al-Ahrar, and Let the People Triumph blocs, along with several unaffiliated deputies, held a press conference, asserting that a plot to obstruct the passage of the criminalization law and delay its approval is being orchestrated behind the scenes. They warned of a conspiracy against the will of the people.³⁶⁵ In the capital, Tunis, a popular sit-in took place in front of parliament, calling for a vote in favor of the proposed law.³⁶⁶ Several other Tunisian cities also witnessed demonstrations condemning the Israeli war on GS since 7/10/2023.³⁶⁷ Despite these demands, the law’s discussion was postponed.

Following the launch of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, Tunisia’s official and political circles expressed their steadfast support for the people of Gaza and its resistance factions. They affirmed the Palestinian people’s right to resist the occupation by any means necessary. In response, the Tunisian authorities undertook practical measures to bolster Gaza’s resilience, including admitting dozens of injured individuals to their hospitals and supporting Palestinian students in Tunisian universities through scholarships and accommodation.

In this context, President Kais Saied pledged to dispatch medical teams to the occupied Palestinian territories and to admit several injured Palestinians into Tunisian hospitals. During a working session on 9/10/2023, focused on supporting the Palestinians, Saied stressed “the need for real support for the Palestinian people, not just through statements and positions.” In a statement issued by the Presidency on 7/10/2023, “Tunisia expressed its full and unconditional support for the Palestinian people, stressing that it is the right of the Palestinian people to regain their land and establish their independent state.” Additionally, Saied criticized the infiltration of the Zionist movement into the media, including at the terminology level.³⁶⁸

Saied also called for the inclusion of the “crime of betraying the Palestinian people” in Tunisian law, categorizing it as “high treason.” He emphasized that while Tunisia “does not possess intercontinental missiles, it holds intercontinental positions.” Tunisian Foreign Minister Nabil Ammar sent letters to some of his

counterparts in member countries of International organizations, including the International Organization of the Francophonie, in which he “pointed out the need for concerted action to put an end to the aggression on the occupied Palestinian territories and to ensure that humanitarian aid continues to be delivered.”³⁶⁹ The Tunisian Parliament, on 9/10/2023, expressed its unequivocal support for the Palestinian people, affirming their full right to defend their legitimate rights, determine their own future, reclaim their lands and establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.³⁷⁰

The Tunisian Foreign Ministry’s announcement on 10/1/2024 that “Tunis does not endorse any legal action taken against Israel before the International Court of Justice (ICJ), considering it as implicit recognition of the occupying entity” sparked controversy within the country. Ghassan Ben Khelifa, a member of the Coordination of Joint Action for Palestine and coordinator of the Tunisian Campaign for Boycott and Anti-Normalization, described the position as illogical, strange and unacceptable. He argued if the Tunisian state had passed a law criminalizing all forms of normalization with Israel, its stance might be understandable. However, he pointed out that ministers from the current government are attending official meetings with ministers from Israel at NATO and Euro-Mediterranean meetings. Additionally, former Prime Minister Najla Bouden participated in the Sharm El-Sheikh summit, meeting with the Israeli president. Tunisia is also a signatory to international agreements that bear “the signature of the occupying state.” All of this, he emphasized, constitutes implicit recognition of Israel. Furthermore, he highlighted that some individuals enter Tunisia, including the city of Djerba (a Jewish pilgrimage site), using Israeli passports, and there are instances of economic and commercial normalization.³⁷¹

Soumaya Ghannoushi, daughter of Tunisian Ennahda Movement leader Rached Ghannoushi, posted on her X page a letter she said her father wrote in prison and was leaked on 22/10/2023. In his letter, Ghannoushi stated, “Palestine is the central issue for the *Ummah*, along with the Holy Mosque, as they represent the core of Islamic sovereignty and the measure and symbol of the *Ummah*’s pride and sovereignty. This light, [represented by] the Holy Mosque and *al-Aqsa* Mosque, is the heart of the *Ummah*, and the presence of any foreign entity in this heart is an alarm, calling for mobilization to address this existential threat.” Ghannoushi also described Operation al-Aqsa Flood as “a gift from the people of

Gaza to the *Ummah*. A force of renewal, motivation, mobilization and awakening, symbolizing heroism. The struggle for the liberation of Palestine uplifts the youth, politicizing them, and shifting their focus from trivial matters to broader national and humanitarian issues.”³⁷²

The Tunisian authorities have implemented a series of measures and initiatives to support the resilience of the people of Gaza. On 24/10/2023, the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research announced several decisions aimed at assisting Palestinian students enrolled in Tunisian universities. These include allowing all registered students in public universities for the 2023/2024 academic year to stay in university residences. The ministry also expanded the eligibility for university scholarships to include master’s students, in addition to undergraduate and medical students.³⁷³ In December 2024, Tunisia received dozens of wounded Palestinians from GS in two separate groups and sent a plane carrying medical and food aid to GS.³⁷⁴

Throughout 2023, Israel intensified efforts to restore diplomatic relations with Mauritania, which had been severed in 2008. Despite official Mauritanian denials of direct contact with Israel and a firm rejection of normalization, Israel pursued the matter through financial and economic incentives, as well as political pressure on the Mauritanian government. In March 2023, the Israel Hayom website reported that sources indicated “Foreign Minister Eli Cohen was working to normalize ties with Mauritania, Somalia, Niger and Indonesia,” adding, “negotiations with Mauritania are in an advanced state.”³⁷⁵

In the context of failed Israeli attempts, the Mauritanian Ministry of Environment denied in March 2023 the report by the Israeli website i24 News about the participation of a representative from the Mauritanian Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development in the “Desertec” training program organized in Israel. The ministry added that it categorically denies the accuracy of what it called “this alleged article.”³⁷⁶ This news sparked a protest from the Mauritanian Student Initiative Against Zionist Infiltration and for Defending Just Causes, which stated that this step is “a clear betrayal of the Ummah’s principles and sanctities and a blatant violation of the consensus among the Mauritanian people, who reject all forms of normalization with the Zionist entity.”³⁷⁷

Like many countries in the region, Israel has sought to establish a presence in Somalia due to its strategic geographic location. Following the re-election

of former President Hassan Sheikh Mohamud (who previously served from September 2012 to February 2017) on 15/5/2022, attention turned to the potential for Somali-Israeli relations. President Mohamud, who has strong ties with the UAE, one of the countries that normalized relations with Israel, made the UAE his first official visit on 19/6/2022.³⁷⁸ The Israeli Broadcasting Corporation (KAN) reported that during this visit, Mohamud met with senior Israeli officials, though the Somali presidency denied these claims.³⁷⁹

After being elected President of Somalia, the Times of Israel published a report stating that Mohamud had made a secret visit to Israel with senior officials in 2016, during his first term, and met with Netanyahu and Israeli officials in Nairobi, Kenya.³⁸⁰

Third: Arab Public Opinion and Its Directions

The Moroccan public continued to oppose normalization agreements with Israel, as demonstrated by dozens of protests in 30 Moroccan cities. These demonstrations condemned repeated Israeli incursions into *al-Aqsa* Mosque and called for an end to normalization, while expressing support for the Palestine issue and its people.³⁸¹ On 16/2/2023, a coalition of youth and student organizations launched the “Arab Maghreb Front Against Normalization and in Support of the Palestine Issue.” This front includes youth and student unions from Morocco, Kuwait, Tunisia, Mauritania, Lebanon, Palestine, Iraq, Sudan and Jordan. In its founding statement, the front announced its support for all “forms of struggle by the Palestinian people” and its opposition to all forms of normalization—be it academic, political, ideological or media-related.³⁸²

In Morocco, the ongoing war in GS has impacted cooperation with Israel, leading to the suspension of direct flights between the two countries due to public pressure. Observers report that Israeli tourists and investors have largely disappeared.³⁸³ Recent boycott campaigns have notably decreased Moroccan exports to Israel. Bilateral trade between Morocco and Israel during the first ten months of 2023 amounted to \$94 million according to the Abraham Accords Peace Institute, reflecting a 112% increase compared to the same period in 2022. However, trade saw a decline in October 2023 “witnessing a 61% decrease, compared to the same period of 2022.”³⁸⁴

In response to the Israeli war on GS, dozens of pro-Palestinian demonstrations were held across various Moroccan cities, demanding a severance of ties with Israel. The most prominent of these was a massive protest in Rabat on 15/10/2023, which drew over a million participants. The march, organized under the banner “The Moroccan people support Operation al-Aqsa Flood and oppose normalization,” featured demonstrators waving Palestinian flags and holding signs condemning the Israeli crimes in GS. During the event, the Israeli flag was burned, and the US flag was trampled.³⁸⁵

The JDP regional branch in Fez shared the results of a public opinion survey conducted within the framework of the “Young Politicians Forum” from 7/11/2023 to 7/12/2023. The poll aimed to measure the extent of Moroccans’ engagement with ongoing events in the Palestinian territories and the impact of Operation al-Aqsa Flood on their opinions and stances. According to the poll results, “93% of respondents believe that the actions of the Palestinian resistance on October 7 were a well-thought-out move that allowed them to reap gains and revive the cause,” while “only 7% view it as a hasty action with little regard for consequences.” A study also showed that “Morocco was among the top five countries globally organizing protests related to the aggressions on Gaza. By mid-November, more than 270 protests were recorded, following the United States, Yemen, Türkiye, and Iran, according to data from [Armed Conflict Location and Event Data] ACLED.”³⁸⁶

Algerians swiftly supported Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the people of GS. Dozens of demonstrations erupted across various provinces, particularly in the capital, where chants of “Palestine” and “martyrs” echoed, reflecting Algerians’ commitment to what they consider their foremost cause.³⁸⁷ The vigorous rejection and boycott campaign in Algeria successfully compelled the newly opened KFC restaurant to cover the giant logo atop its building.³⁸⁸

In Mauritania, dozens of demonstrations occurred, including one organized by the Student Initiative Against Normalization on 22/9/2023. This significant sit-in in front of the Saudi Mosque in Nouakchott opposed the normalization of relations in certain Arab and Muslim countries and expressed support for Jerusalem and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The protest was part of the “Jerusalem is a Trust and Normalization is Treason” campaign, launched by the Coordination Against Zionism and Normalization group in collaboration with several national and international organizations opposed to normalization.³⁸⁹

On 20/10/2023, mass demonstrations took place across Libya, including in Tripoli, Benghazi, Misrata, Msallata and Khums. The protests expressed solidarity with the Palestinian people and condemned the ongoing Israeli war on GS.³⁹⁰

In Tunisia, dozens of demonstrations were held in support of Gaza amidst the Israeli war. On 12/10/2023, the National Committee in Support of the Resistance in Palestine, a coalition of parties and associations led notably by the Tunisian General Labor Union, organized a march. The procession began at the union headquarters and made its way to Habib Bourguiba Street via al-Hurriya Street. Protesters carried Palestinian and Tunisian flags and chanted slogans such as “With soul and blood, we sacrifice for you, Palestine” and “Palestine is Arab, no to surrender solutions.” On the sidelines of the march, Sami Tahri, a member of the Tunisian General Labor Union’s executive office, told Anadolu Agency, “These marches will continue to mobilize all Tunisians to contribute, especially through donations and volunteering for Palestine.” Zied Dabbar, president of the National Union of Tunisian Journalists, told Anadolu Agency, “We do not stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people; rather, we adopt the Palestine issue.”³⁹¹

In Somalia, many demonstrations took place. The Somali Scholars Association organized a solidarity sit-in in Mogadishu to express support for the Palestinian people facing brutal Israeli aggression.³⁹² Similarly, the people of the Comoros held a solidarity sit-in in support of the besieged GS, calling for immediate intervention to halt the war and deliver aid to Palestinians without delay.³⁹³

Across Yemen, millions of people participated in dozens of demonstrations in various cities, protesting against the Israeli war on GS. In the capital, Sanaa, hundreds of thousands gathered in large-scale marches repeatedly held in support of GS and its resistance factions. Similar massive demonstrations took place in the provincial capitals of Hodeidah, Mahwit, Bayda, Hajjah, Raymah, Saada, Taiz, Aden, Marib and other Yemeni cities, expressing solidarity with Palestinian rights and condemning Israeli crimes and massacres.³⁹⁴

In Iraq, sheikhs representing 20 Iraqi tribes signed a covenant document in support of the Palestine issue, reaffirming their commitment to Palestine, defending its rights, and striving for its liberation from occupation.³⁹⁵ On 10/8/2023, the Iraqi Coalition to Support al-Aqsa Mosque (a coalition of civil society institutions) held its inaugural conference to support *al-Aqsa* Mosque. The event was attended by a delegation from the Popular Conference for Palestinians Abroad and the Chief

of Staff of the Iraqi Presidency, Kamel al-Dulaimi.³⁹⁶ Following the outbreak of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, large-scale demonstrations involving hundreds of thousands of Iraqis were held across several Iraqi cities in solidarity with Gaza and in protest of the aggression.³⁹⁷

Conclusion

The period from 2022 to 2023 largely followed the familiar pattern of Arab regimes' responses to the Palestine issue, marked by the same characteristics of impotence, weakness and fragmentation that have long defined the Arab political landscape.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the ensuing Israeli war on GS marked a pivotal moment in modern Palestinian history and a significant milestone in Arab history. However, the Arab world, exhausted by its issues, burdened by suffering, and dominated by inward-focused political regimes, has long been plagued by oppression, corruption and external dependence. These factors, combined with the suppression or bypassing of the people's free will, rendered it incapable of appropriately responding to the "Flood" or seizing the opportunities it presented. Some even wagered on the defeat of the resistance, preventing their peoples from expressing solidarity with Palestine in the face of aggression.

There were, however, variations in how Arab countries addressed the Palestine issue. On the one hand, the wave of "normalization" spread through the Arab world, with the UAE, Bahrain and Morocco making notable progress, while KSA quietly and gradually followed a similar course. Libya experienced a brief breakthrough in normalization, which was swiftly reversed due to strong popular opposition and political discord. In Sudan, internal conflict stalled the normalization process. Meanwhile, Egypt and Jordan continued to advance and sustain their normalization efforts. On the other hand, this trajectory faced a significant disruption following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, sparking anger and discontent among "moderate" Arab countries. Some, like the UAE and Bahrain, condemned Hamas's actions with sharp statements, while others upheld the traditional stance of advocating for a settlement, a two-state solution, and an end to Israeli aggression. Privately, however, they hoped for Hamas's defeat and for the PA in Ramallah to take over GS.

The Arab response was notably hesitant and slow, despite the severe massacres in Palestine, and this was reflected in the LAS performance. Although some countries that had normalized relations with Israel withdrew their ambassadors from Tel Aviv, none cut or froze their diplomatic ties, in contrast to the more decisive actions taken by South Africa and several Latin American countries. The Arab response also fell short in terms of media engagement and financial support, while hindering the public's ability to express their opinion and show solidarity. The UAE even facilitated an alternative trade route to supply Israel via KSA and Jordan after Ansar Allah (the Houthis) severed the trade corridor to Israel through the Red Sea. Meanwhile, the Egyptian government imposed significant restrictions on supplies to GS through the Rafah crossing during a severe Israeli siege and starvation campaign.

Nevertheless, some Arab countries maintained supportive or accommodating stances towards the resistance, including Syria, Iraq, Qatar, Kuwait, Algeria, Yemen, Libya, Oman and Lebanon. Qatar was instrumental in providing relief, media support through Al Jazeera, and mediation in negotiations. Hizbullah in Lebanon and Ansar Allah in Yemen played significant roles in military resistance, with contributions from the Islamic resistance in Iraq.

According to opinion polls, there was widespread popular sympathy with Palestine and its resistance across the Arab world. However, not all peoples were able to freely express their views due to repressive regimes. Nonetheless, in countries where it was permitted, such as Jordan, Lebanon, Kuwait, Yemen and Iraq, strong support for Palestine was clearly expressed.

The Arab situation remains ill-equipped to effectively engage with the Palestine issue or address the Israeli war, due to a narrow focus on local concerns, persistent reliance on US influence in the region, and the assumption that Israel will eventually manage Hamas and stabilize GS without Hamas's involvement. The Arab world continues to rely on the peace process and the PA in Ramallah, and has yet to fully grasp the substantial disruption caused by Operation al-Aqsa Flood. The region remains burdened by hostility towards Islamic movements, fear of revival and reform, and the impact of resistance projects on the local environment. Overall, there is a lack of a civilizational, revivalist and unifying vision to challenge Western US dominance and present an alternative project.

Endnotes

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- ¹⁰ Arabi21, 8/11/2023, <https://arabi21.com/story/1550465>; Aljazeera.net, 11/11/2023, <https://aja.ws/uug48u> (in Arabic); and Baraah Darazi, "The Official Arab Position on Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the Aggression on Gaza: Implications and Repercussions," Al Quds International Institution (QII), January 2024, <https://qii.media/userfiles/1/0-%20papers/arab%20official%20stance%20on%20gaza.pdf>
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- ¹² *Asharq al-Awsat*, 7/10/2023. (in Arabic)
- ¹³ *Al-'Arabi al-Jadid*, 11/10/2023.
- ¹⁴ For more, see Resolutions of the Council of the League of Arab States (LAS) at summit level, 31st Ordinary Session, Algiers, LAS, 1–2/11/2022; Jeddah Declaration, Summit-level Council of the League of Arab States, 32nd Ordinary Session, Jeddah, LAS, 19/5/2023; and Joint Arab Islamic Extraordinary Summit Addressing the Israeli Aggression Against the Palestinian People, LAS, 11/11/2023.
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- ¹⁷ For more, see Resolutions of the Council of the League of Arab States (LAS) at summit level, 31st Ordinary Session, Algiers, LAS, 1–2/11/2022; and Jeddah Declaration, Summit-level Council of the League of Arab States, 32nd Ordinary Session, Jeddah, LAS, 19/5/2023.
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This Report

Al-Zaytouna Centre is pleased to present The Palestine Strategic Report (PSR) 2022–2023, now in its 13th consecutive edition. This report provides an academic, objective and comprehensive analyses of the developments related to the Palestine issue across various dimensions. It offers up-to-date and accurate information and statistics through the end of 2023, complemented by analytical insights and forecasts.

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Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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