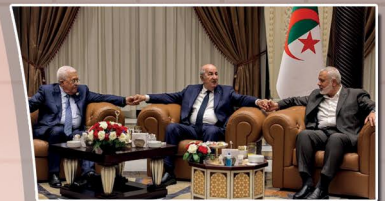


# The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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# Chapter Seven

*The Palestine Issue and the  
Muslim World*



# The Palestine Issue and the Muslim World

## *Introduction*

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) is one of the largest political blocs globally, comprising 57 member countries. These countries hold varying perspectives on issues affecting the Muslim world, including the Palestine issue, complicating efforts to cover the positions of all OIC countries in a single chapter of this report. Therefore, we will focus on the positions and activities of the OIC, using Türkiye and Iran as case studies, while also providing an overview of significant stances from other countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan. Furthermore, we will also examine public engagement with the Palestine issue and the trend of normalization with Israel.

## *First: Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC)*

The dynamics within the OIC reflect the broader realities of its member countries; greater political differences among these countries lead to increased ineffectiveness of the organization. The divide regarding the Palestine issue deepened in 2022–2023, particularly with the wave of normalization among key Muslim countries that are considered central and influential in shaping OIC policies. During this period, the OIC struggled to support the Palestine issue and failed to take meaningful action to prevent Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people. Therefore, observers note a lack of positive change in the Organization’s positions, with some even suggesting a decline, especially in light of the Israeli war in GS at the end of 2023.

The OIC, which was established in 1969 with the Palestine issue—particularly Jerusalem—as a central focus, cannot remain uninvolved in developments related to Palestine, at least not without offering condemnation of Israeli aggressions. In January 2022, the OIC General Secretariat condemned Israel’s ongoing eviction and demolition of Palestinian homes in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of Jerusalem. In its statement, the OIC characterized these actions “as part of the

policies of Judaization, colonial settlement, and forced displacement of Palestinian families in flagrant violation of international law and the Geneva Conventions.”<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, the OIC welcomed the report issued by Amnesty International which described Israel as an apartheid state, and it considered the report “as an international instrument, considering it yet another confirmation of the violations, crimes and racial policies of the Israeli occupation against the Palestinian people.” The OIC called on “the international community to take the necessary measures to hold Israel, the occupation force, to account for its violations, crimes and policies of apartheid against the Palestinian people.”<sup>2</sup>

In the same context, the OIC welcomed the decision of the African Summit “to suspend granting Israel the status of an observer member in the African Union (AU),” viewing it as aligned with the historical support of AU countries for the just Palestine issue. This decision also serves as a rejection of Israel’s policies of colonial settlement, ethnic cleansing and apartheid against the Palestinian people. The Organization stressed that “Israel, the occupying power, should not be rewarded for its grave violations of international law and relevant United Nations resolutions.”<sup>3</sup>

In the context of the centrality of the Palestine issue and Jerusalem, the Islamabad Declaration, issued at the conclusion of the 48th session of the OIC Council of Foreign Ministers in March 2022, emphasized “its principled and continued all-level support to the Palestinian people to regain their inalienable legitimate national rights, including their right to self-determination and the independence of the State of Palestine along the 1967 borders, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.” The declaration reaffirmed that Jerusalem “is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian Territory of the State of Palestine” and called on “the international community to compel Israel, the occupying power, to desist from its colonial practices and abide by all international resolutions” on Jerusalem, and “to refrain from all measures, practices and decisions aimed at altering the character and legal status of the Holy City, including through intensification of Jewish colonial settlements therein and forcible expulsion of its Arab Palestinian inhabitants; and to desist from the desecration” of Islamic holy sites, including attacks on Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

The final communiqué from the extraordinary meeting of the OIC Executive Committee at the Level of Permanent Representatives, held in April 2022 to

address the Israeli attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, stressed that “there can be no security and stability without its full liberation from occupation and return to its Palestinian people and Islamic Ummah [Muslim nation].” The OIC rejected “all illegal measures in the city, including attempts at temporal and spatial division of the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque” and called for urgent action from the international community to halt Israeli violations against holy sites.<sup>5</sup>

The year 2023 saw no improvement for the Palestine issue compared to 2022. Israeli attacks intensified following the formation of a new Israeli government at the end of 2022. This coalition, which included far-right parties and figures, emboldened settler aggression against Palestinian holy sites, villages and cities in WB. The risk to *al-Aqsa* Mosque increased significantly, especially with the full backing given to settler organizations advocating for its demolition and the construction of the alleged temple in its place.

In light of this reality, the Conference of the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC) reaffirmed its support for Palestine’s bid to obtain full member state status at the UN. The final statement issued from the 17th session of the Conference, held in Algiers in late January 2023, expressed “unwavering support to the cause of Palestine and preservation of Al-Quds Al-Sharif,” as well as “support to the people of Palestine in their quest for their legitimate and inalienable rights to self-determination and right to return.” The statement also urged Palestinian factions to “scale up their efforts to face together the Zionist illegal policies and practices.”<sup>6</sup>

Following the storming of *al-Aqsa* Mosque by an Israeli government minister, the OIC held an Open-ended Extraordinary Meeting of its Executive Committee on 24/5/2023, at the OIC General Secretariat headquarters in Jeddah. The meeting condemned the Israeli minister’s action as a provocative step that “would prejudice the feelings of millions of Muslims around the world and threaten security and stability in the region.” The meeting also stressed that “there is no sovereignty for Israel over al-Quds and the holy sites, and that East Jerusalem is an occupied Palestinian land.”<sup>7</sup>

The most significant development in the Palestine issue in 2023 was Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which began on 7/10/2023, followed by what may be considered the largest aggression against the Palestinian people since the *Nakbah* in 1948. Despite the killing of thousands of civilians in GS, mostly women and children,

the OIC did not hold its “emergency” or extraordinary ministerial-level meeting until a month after the aggression began, reflecting the Organization’s inability to effectively support the Palestine issue. This ineffectiveness was further underscored by the meeting’s outcome, which was limited to condemnation and denunciation without any practical steps, not even minimal actions like delivering necessary aid to the people of GS. In this context, the statement issued by the joint extraordinary Arab and Islamic Summit emphasized the importance of protecting civilians and condemned any attempts to target them. It also rejected calls for the displacement of the GS population. The summit strongly condemned the UN Security Council’s failure to take decisive action to halt war crimes committed by Israel against the Palestinian people in GS and across the Palestinian territories. The statement reaffirmed that “peace” and security in the region can only be achieved by ending the Israeli colonial occupation and its oppressive practices, while ensuring the Palestinian people’s inalienable rights, particularly their right to self-determination, independence and return, in accordance with international law and relevant UN resolutions.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Second: Türkiye***

The Sword of Jerusalem Battle in 2021 occurred amid ongoing diplomatic estrangement between Israel and Türkiye. However, many felt that Türkiye’s response fell short of expectations, and the Palestinian resistance issued some criticism at the time.

Several politicians and party leaders in Türkiye have condemned Israeli aggression. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan described Israel as a “terror state,” accused it of committing war crimes,<sup>9</sup> called on the international community to deliver “a strong and deterrent lesson” to Israel for its actions against the Palestinians,<sup>10</sup> and held countries that supported Israel jointly responsible for these crimes.<sup>11</sup> Erdoğan affirmed that Türkiye would support Jerusalem as it supported Azerbaijan.<sup>12</sup> He made bold proposals regarding the status of Jerusalem and the broader Palestine issue, including administering Jerusalem through representatives of the three monotheistic religions and providing international protection for the Palestinian people.<sup>13</sup>



The Turkish president also reached out to Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas and the head of Hamas political bureau Isma‘il Haniyyah, alongside engaging in diplomatic contacts with leaders from Arab, Muslim and Western countries to help halt the Israeli war.

Despite this progressive stance, Ankara appeared to fall short of Palestinian expectations. Statements evaluating Türkiye position after the war underscored this sentiment, calling for a response more aligned with the unique nature of that war compared to previous ones, and one more fitting of Türkiye’s role as a leading regional power and a Muslim ally of the Palestinian people. In his speech, Yahya Sinwar, the leader of Hamas in GS, expressed appreciation for the Turkish position but also called for greater support.<sup>14</sup> Türkiye was not among the countries that Haniyyah specifically thanked at the end of the war,<sup>15</sup> although he later expressed his appreciation for the Turkish position in a subsequent press interview.<sup>16</sup>

Operation al-Aqsa Flood in October 2023 occurred under markedly different circumstances, characterized by the rapprochement and restoration of Turkish diplomatic relations with Israel and several Arab countries. Therefore, the ceiling of the Turkish position was different from that in previous confrontations between the Palestinian resistance in GS and Israel. Nonetheless, the war was exceptional in both its nature and motives, as well as in the intensity of Israeli crimes and massacres against Palestinian civilians and infrastructure.

### **Turkish Foreign Policy**

Ankara’s position during Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the official political statements it issued signify a significant shift in Turkish foreign policy over the past two years, impacting several foreign policy issues, including the Palestine issue and relations with Israel.

Since late 2020 and early 2021, coinciding with Joe Biden’s election as US president and the arrival of a democratic administration, Türkiye has pursued a new foreign policy aimed at calming and addressing points of contention with various regional powers that had experienced lukewarm or tense relations over the past decade, particularly the KSA-UAE-Egypt axis. This approach also extends to Israel, with which diplomatic relations had deteriorated significantly after Türkiye withdrew its ambassador to Tel Aviv and declared Israel’s ambassador persona non grata in 2018. This decline followed then US President Donald Trump’s decision

to relocate the US embassy to Jerusalem and the killing of dozens of Palestinian youths at the hands of Israeli forces in GS during their aggression against the Marches of Return.

The years 2022 and 2023 marked the culmination of efforts to restore relations with Arab countries. Diplomatic and political ties with these and other Arab countries were re-established, accompanied by meetings and reciprocal visits by heads of state. The Turkish president met with his Egyptian counterpart on the sidelines of the World Cup opening in Qatar, visited both the KSA and UAE, and hosted Saudi Crown Prince Muhammed bin Salman and UAE President (former Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi) Mohammed bin Zayed. He also met with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry in Ankara.

In 2023, diplomatic relations with Israel were also restored, leading to the official exchange of ambassadors after years of estrangement. Both sides affirmed the political will to maintain bilateral relations in a “stable state” that will not be disrupted in the future.

The year 2023 was a pivotal one for Turkish domestic politics, dominated by key internal issues. It began with the devastating earthquake in February, followed by the critical presidential and parliamentary elections in May, which brought heightened attention to economic challenges, the refugee and foreign resident situation, and the subsequent government formation process. Additionally, preparations for local elections scheduled for the first quarter of 2024 were underway.

This focus on domestic affairs contributed to the stability and continuation of Türkiye’s rapprochement with various regional actors, including Israel, while underscoring a commitment to avoiding foreign policy crises and attracting foreign investments.

### **Normalization with Israel**

Türkiye severed diplomatic relations with Israel in 2010 after the attack on the Mavi Marmara ship in international waters, which resulted in the deaths of Turkish solidarity activists. Relations were restored in 2016 as part of an agreement to normalize relations between the two countries. However, in May 2018, Ankara expelled the Israeli ambassador and recalled its own ambassador from Tel Aviv after Israel’s attack on the Marches of Return protests in GS, which led to the deaths of dozens of Palestinians, as well as the decision to relocate the US embassy to Jerusalem.<sup>17</sup>

Since then, opposition voices have called for restoring diplomatic relations with Israel and other Arab countries, with figures close to the ruling party gradually joining these calls. The main motivations for renewing and improving relations with Israel included relieving the fluctuating economic situation from the pressures of foreign policy crises, calming tensions in various areas to attract investments, avoiding future economic shocks related to regional stances, improving relations with the US by restoring ties with Israel, and cooperating with Israel on the East Mediterranean gas file.<sup>18</sup> The East Mediterranean issue has become a priority for Turkish decision-makers in recent years, as it involves both energy security and geopolitical competition in the region. Greece has spearheaded an alliance that includes Egypt, Israel and other countries, and later established the East Mediterranean Gas Forum to share the region's resources while disregarding Türkiye's rights, despite having the longest coastline in the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>19</sup> In response, Türkiye has sought to counter or disrupt this alliance, aiming to win over some of its members, by demarcating the maritime borders with Libya, offering similar agreements to Egypt, and attempting to convince Israel to export its gas through Türkiye rather than Greece.<sup>20</sup>

The initial efforts to restore diplomatic relations between Türkiye and Israel began with phone calls between the foreign ministers of both countries,<sup>21</sup> followed by visits from government delegations to lay the groundwork for advancing relations.<sup>22</sup> The most notable step occurred in March 2022, when Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Ankara. During this visit, President Erdoğan described it as “an opportunity to develop our energy cooperation,” stressing the possibility of cooperation in the defense field. Herzog said, “Israel and Turkey can and should have a cooperation that can positively affect this entire region we call home.”<sup>23</sup> During the visit, Erdoğan reiterated his country's support for a two-state solution and urged Herzog to improve conditions for Palestinians, emphasizing Türkiye's sensitivities regarding the Palestine issue, while Herzog acknowledged, “We will not agree on everything,” adding, “But we shall try to restart our relations and build them in a measured and cautious manner, and with mutual respect between our states.”<sup>24</sup>

The process continued with then-Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu's visit to Israel and WB in May 2022, during which he said, “We agreed to reenergize our relations in many areas,” and highlighted “many opportunities in areas such as clean energy, high-tech, agri-tech, tourism and agriculture.”<sup>25</sup>

In July 2022, the two sides exchanged economic and trade attachés,<sup>26</sup> and in August 2022, they agreed to exchange ambassadors.<sup>27</sup> In September 2022, Erdoğan met with Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly.<sup>28</sup> In October 2022, Şakir Özkan Torunlar was appointed Turkish ambassador to Tel Aviv,<sup>29</sup> and in that same month, Defense Minister Benny Gantz announced the resumption of security cooperation between Israel and Türkiye.<sup>30</sup>

Before the end of the year, Erdoğan received a phone call from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, marking the end of years of estrangement. Both leaders emphasized their desire to restore relations and enhance energy cooperation.<sup>31</sup> In February 2023, Erdoğan welcomed Israeli Foreign Minister Eli Cohen, expressing gratitude for Israel’s support and solidarity with Türkiye following the devastating earthquake.<sup>32</sup> In September 2023, Erdoğan met with Netanyahu at the “Turkish House” in New York on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly meetings, where they agreed to exchange visits, though no dates were set.<sup>33</sup>

Meanwhile, Turkish politicians emphasized that the East Mediterranean gas file was a key factor in restoring relations with Israel. They repeatedly stressed that this reconciliation would not come at the expense of the Turkish position on the Palestine issue,<sup>34</sup> even asserting that the restoration of relations was intended to defend the Palestine issue.<sup>35</sup> Ankara sought to maintain a balanced position by denouncing Israeli actions at *al-Aqsa* Mosque, reiterating that Jerusalem is a red line,<sup>36</sup> condemning the assassination of journalist Shireen Abu Akleh and calling for an international investigation.<sup>37</sup> At the same time, it condemned Palestinian attacks in Israel, calling them “heinous terror attacks” in Erdoğan’s words,<sup>38</sup> and labeled one operation in East Jerusalem as a “terrorist” act, despite its location.<sup>39</sup>

While Turkish authorities stopped an Iranian assassination cell that was said to have aimed to assassinate Israeli figures on Turkish soil,<sup>40</sup> they also dismantled several Mossad cells and networks.<sup>41</sup> Ankara received several officials from Israel, and Erdoğan received Palestinian President Mahmud ‘Abbas, emphasizing, “We cannot tolerate any acts attempting to change the historical status quo of holy places, particularly *al-Aqsa* Mosque.”<sup>42</sup>

### **Operation al-Aqsa Flood**

On 7/10/2023, Ezzedein al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, announced the launch of Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which involved crossing into

the 1948 occupied territories, eliminating the Israeli force besieging GS, seizing control and engaging in combat in several settlements in the GS envelope, and subsequently returning to GS with dozens of captured Israeli soldiers and officers. The operation was a surprise to all parties, particularly as it marked a proactive offensive, differing from previous confrontations between the Palestinian resistance and Israel.

The operation was seen as a significant blow to the Israel's military and security apparatus in terms of planning, preparation, camouflage and execution, as well as in terms of losses—both in deterrence and direct human casualties among officers, soldiers, vehicles and equipment. For the first time in decades, Israel declared a state of war and called up over 300 thousand reservists.

In Türkiye's first official response to the operation, Erdoğan urged both Israelis and Palestinians to exercise restraint and avoid actions that could escalate tensions.<sup>43</sup> A statement from the Turkish Foreign Ministry said, "We are deeply concerned about the violence and tension [that have] occurred in Israel and Palestine." The statement strongly condemned the "loss of civilian lives," called "on the parties to act with restraint," and offered "to contribute to the best of our ability to ensure that these developments can be taken under control."<sup>44</sup>

Since the early days of the operation, Turkish political parties have expressed divergent views. The Republican People's Party (*Cumhuriyet Halk Partisi*—CHP), the largest opposition party, labeled Hamas a "terrorist organization"<sup>45</sup> and the İYİ Party referred to the operation as a "terrorist act." In contrast, conservative Islamic parties such as the Felicity Party (*Saadet Partisi*), Future Party (*Gelecek Partisi*—GP), New Welfare Party (*Yeniden Refah Partisi*—RP), and Free Cause Party (*Hür Dava Partisi*—Hüda-Par) openly supported the Palestinian side, the Palestinian resistance, and Hamas in particular.<sup>46</sup> Official Turkish positions focused on "rejecting the killing of civilians,"<sup>47</sup> demanding the release of the "hostages" held by Hamas,<sup>48</sup> seeking to mediate between the Palestinian and Israeli sides,<sup>49</sup> and calling on "all parties" to de-escalate. Media outlets aligned with the government, the ruling party and the opposition, emphasized Türkiye's role as a neutral mediator, similar to its role in the Russian-Ukrainian war. Some Israeli media reports claimed that Türkiye had asked Hamas leaders residing on its territory to leave, but both sides quickly denied these claims.<sup>50</sup>

This official Turkish stance was driven by several key factors, the most significant being:

1. The attack occurred within the 1948 occupied territories, which Türkiye recognizes as part of the “State of Israel.”
2. The spread of misleading Israeli propaganda in the early days of the operation, including false claims of beheading children and raping women, which were later debunked.
3. Efforts to avoid any foreign policy tensions that could impact Ankara’s foreign relations and, consequently, its economy.
4. Commitment to the path of normalization and rapprochement with Israel.
5. An initial assessment suggesting that the operation was influenced by an Iranian decision aimed at disrupting the rapprochement process between Türkiye and Israel.
6. Ankara may have believed that by maintaining a neutral stance and positioning itself as a mediator, it could influence the course of events and help bring an end to the aggression.
7. Ankara sought to align its stance on the Palestine issue with influential Arab countries, particularly Egypt, Jordan, KSA and the UAE, avoiding unilateral decisions that could carry political, economic and potential security risks, as well as affect its relations with third parties, especially the US.

Later, following the start of Israel’s ground operation in GS, Türkiye’s official stance shifted toward stronger support for the Palestinians and direct condemnation of Israel. Ankara condemned Israel’s targeting of civilians, labeled its actions in GS as war crimes,<sup>51</sup> refused to designate Hamas as a “terrorist organization” by recognizing it as a national liberation movement,<sup>52</sup> referred to Israel as a “terrorist state,”<sup>53</sup> threatened to prosecute Netanyahu, and vowed to cut ties with him.<sup>54</sup>

This shift in the official position was influenced by several factors, including:

1. The scale of the crimes committed by Israeli forces in GS, particularly against civilians.
2. The exposure of Israeli propaganda surrounding Operation al-Aqsa Flood on 7/10/2023.
3. A deeper understanding of the operation’s motives, rooted in the Palestine issue rather than external pressures.

4. The steadfastness of the Palestinian resistance on the ground, demonstrating its invincibility and refusal to surrender.
5. Aligning with the sentiment of the Turkish public, which has shown solidarity with the Palestinians and their resistance.
6. The impact of Turkish opposition parties, particularly the conservative ones, which have adopted stronger positions than the government, leaving it embarrassed and concerned about the upcoming local elections.
7. The Israeli government adopted a sharp tone toward Türkiye, particularly President Erdoğan. Israeli security institutions threatened to assassinate Hamas leaders in multiple countries, including Türkiye, prompting a direct warning from Turkish intelligence.<sup>55</sup> President Erdoğan responded firmly, stating, “Israel would pay a very heavy price,” if it followed through with such actions.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, Turkish authorities arrested 33 individuals suspected of conducting intelligence activities on behalf of Israel during the war.<sup>57</sup>

The Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*—AKP) organized a mass demonstration in support of GS, during which President Erdoğan delivered a speech.<sup>58</sup> The Turkish Foreign Ministry engaged in intensive diplomatic efforts, with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan meeting with Hamas leadership and Erdoğan holding a phone conversation with Haniyyah.<sup>59</sup> Ankara also advocated for a political approach based on guarantorship, with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan suggesting that “the countries that will be guarantors to the Palestinian side should be from the region. This includes Türkiye. Other countries should be guarantors for Israel. Once an agreement is reached that both parties agree on, the guarantor countries should assume responsibility for fulfilling its requirements.”<sup>60</sup>

Practical measures announced by Türkiye included the cancellation of Erdoğan’s visit to Israel and the suspension of dialogue on cooperation in the gas sector.<sup>61</sup> Later, Ankara recalled its ambassador to Tel Aviv for consultations<sup>62</sup> after Israel had withdrawn its ambassadors from Arab and Muslim countries, fearing public backlash following the massacre at the National Baptist Hospital.<sup>63</sup> Regarding the potential prosecution of Netanyahu, which Türkiye has repeatedly hinted at, the government has yet to take any concrete action. However, Turkish lawyers have submitted a request to the ICC to arrest Netanyahu and other Israeli officials.<sup>64</sup> The Turkish president emphasized that his country would not remain silent about

Israeli violations, which he described as genocide, and pledged to confront the US and the countries supporting Israel.<sup>65</sup>

Apart from recalling its ambassador, canceling Erdoğan's visit, and freezing gas talks—measures that appear to be natural developments following the outbreak of the war—along with hosting dozens of wounded Palestinians in its hospitals,<sup>66</sup> Türkiye's stance remained largely verbal and rhetorical. However, even within these limits, it was ahead of the positions of many Arab countries. The official Turkish position did not extend to more concrete actions, such as pursuing legal steps to try Netanyahu, filing a complaint with the ICJ to label the events in GS as genocide (a step later taken by South Africa), cutting diplomatic ties with Israel, influencing Israel's supporters, or lobbying to impact trade and economic relations with Israel, including Azerbaijani gas passing through Türkiye to Israel.

Moreover, AKP MPs, along with their allies from the Nationalist Movement Party (*Milliyetçi Hareket Partisi*—MHP), voted against a proposal by opposition parties to have the Turkish parliament investigate goods being exported from Türkiye to Israel during wartime and their impact on the situation in GS.<sup>67</sup>

In light of the slowdown in Turkish diplomatic activity and reduced focus on mediation, Türkiye has limited itself to collective action with other Arab and Muslim countries, following the outcomes of the joint extraordinary Arab and Islamic Summit in Riyadh. As Ankara aligns with the positions of key Arab countries influential on the Palestine issue, it appears to be reserving its efforts for the post-ceasefire phase and the war's aftermath, particularly in areas where it excels, such as relief operations. Türkiye has already mobilized several relief and medical campaigns to Egypt near the Egyptian-Palestinian border and announced plans to build a field hospital in GS. Additionally, Türkiye's considerable experience in reconstruction and its reliable performance could play a significant role in the rebuilding process. This may also extend to a political process that emerges after the war, with Türkiye proposing to serve as a guarantor state for the Palestinian side, alongside other guarantors for both Israeli and Palestinian parties.

At the time of writing this report, Ankara has not provided many details about this proposal, which appears to still be in its early stages and under discussion with various parties. However, the core idea is that a ceasefire without a corresponding political process will likely lead to future military confrontations and escalation. The political process, according to Türkiye, should be based on a two-state solution,



but with a different approach this time. Türkiye envisions the involvement of third-party countries and entities, particularly in GS and WB, to disengage the two sides, monitor the situation, and prevent further escalation. This model draws on examples like Cyprus, where Türkiye, Greece and Britain act as guarantor states, the South Caucasus between Armenia and Azerbaijan (with Russia and Türkiye as guarantors), and to a lesser extent, Syria (with Türkiye and Russia as guarantors).

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Türkiye has generally aimed to separate its relations with Israel from its stance on Palestinian issues. While Türkiye will not hesitate to criticize Israel for actions against Palestinians or holy sites, this does not necessarily mean relations will break down as they have in the past, which was evident during the reporting period. However, the results of the March 2024 Turkish local elections, in which AKP suffered significant losses, signaled public dissatisfaction with Erdoğan, his government, and their handling of GS and Palestine. This outcome has prompted Erdoğan and his government to adopt clearer measures in support of the Palestinians and the resistance, escalating actions against Israel to the point of freezing trade relations and refusing to resume them until the aggression on GS ceases, in addition to backing South Africa's case against Israel at the ICC.

### ***Third: Iran***

Operation al-Aqsa Flood dramatically shifted strategic expectations. Prior to the operation on 7/10/2023, the focus within political, security and strategic circles throughout 2022 was primarily on two key issues. Firstly, there was considerable attention on the growing normalization process between Arab countries and Israel, with keen anticipation regarding the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's stance on this normalization, which the Israeli side has confirmed is advancing. It was widely assumed that further Arab and Muslim countries would follow suit in normalizing relations with Israel, potentially diminishing the priority of the Palestine issue for the peoples of the region. The second event was the Israeli army's confrontation with PIJ in the "Unity of the Arenas" battle that broke out in early August 2022, in addition to the resistance operations that took place in WB. It is important to note that the concept of "Unity of the Arenas" had previously been a concern for

Israel, which recognized the difficulty of fighting a war on more than one front and is incapable of withstanding a full-scale confrontation that would reach deep into Israel.<sup>68</sup> Reserve Colonel Kobi Merom told Israel's Channel 13 that he thinks this will not be the image of the next war. The challenge is to confront Hizbullah and Hamas. The war will not be confined to a single arena but will unfold across multiple arenas, significantly larger in scale, with thousands of rockets targeting the home front and resulting in hundreds of casualties and extensive damage.<sup>69</sup>

The third issue in 2022 was the failure of negotiations between Iran and the US regarding Iran's nuclear program. In that year, indirect nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US have persisted without yielding any tangible results. Certain Israeli officials have acknowledged exerting pressure on the Biden administration to refrain from entering into such an agreement. Additionally, both Israel and the US have maintained their rhetoric and implied military threats against Iran, citing the need for "open options" to deter Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons.

As these negotiations faltered, Israeli statements and threats of military action against this program were relatively muted. However, as Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid became convinced that a deal was becoming increasingly unlikely, he reprioritized national security challenges to focus on countering resistance in WB and the urgent need to strengthen the PA, which was increasingly losing influence.<sup>70</sup>

Meanwhile, National Security Adviser and National Security Council Director Eyal Hulata declared to the 2022 Israel Democracy Institute Annual Conference on National Security and Democracy that "The main security challenge facing Israel continues to be Iran and it is multi-dimensional. The Iranian nuclear issue and Iran's activity in the region are the heart of the matter."<sup>71</sup>

Furthermore, Israel capitalized on the wave of protests in Iran following the death of young woman Mahsa Amini, which began in late 2022. Israeli media cited experts in Tel Aviv who emphasized the opportunity to leverage what they termed the "anti-veil protests in Iran" as a means to overthrow the regime.<sup>72</sup>

One of the most significant and strategically influential events of 2022 was the reestablishment of relations between Hamas and Syria after years of estrangement. This resurgence has been debated and criticized in numerous Palestinian and Arab circles. Iran and Hizbullah in Lebanon played direct roles in facilitating this reconciliation, with the shared goal of uniting all forces in the resistance against Israel. Actually, Operation al-Aqsa Flood underscored the strategic effectiveness

of expanding the resistance front against Israel. This was particularly evident in the subsequent need for broad support for Hamas and the Palestinian population in GS.

Iran has maintained its stance of rejecting any form of normalization with Israel across different levels. Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian “slammed the move of some Islamic countries to establish and normalize ties with the Zionist regime as a betrayal of the Palestinian cause. Amirabdollahian reiterated that those countries will regret their move.”<sup>73</sup> On the occasion of Quds Day, the Leader of the Revolution, Sayyed Ali Khamenei, underscored that “all of Palestine has turned into an arena of resistance,” emphasizing that “no scheme or plan about Palestine is implementable in the absence of Palestine or against the consent of its owners, the Palestinians. This means that all former agreements.... have been nullified.”<sup>74</sup>

### **Determinants of the Iranian Position**

1. Reiterating the pivotal role of Palestine in Iranian foreign policy, particularly in supporting Palestinian resistance and rejecting recognition of Israel.
2. Geopolitical considerations and Iran’s aspiration to bolster its regional presence and influence as a pivotal force, safeguarding significant gains achieved in preceding years.
3. Iran aims to uphold its strategic alliances with affiliated forces and movements in the region, particularly those aligned with the resistance front. This entails bolstering the strength and influence of these movements while ensuring their continued relevance in the regional landscape.
4. Iran seeks to fortify its regional deterrence capabilities, with a specific focus on managing relations with Israel. Accumulating strength is regarded as a pivotal Iranian strategic imperative in this regard.
5. Iran’s desire to steer clear of entanglement in a widespread regional conflict or direct confrontation with the US is evident. The swift dispatch of US warships to the region serves as a clear message aimed at dissuading Iran from direct participation in the standoff.
6. The challenges confronting the Iranian economy amidst ongoing international sanctions, soaring inflation rates and the depreciation of the Iranian currency.

7. Iran's immediate focus on de-escalation with the US and European countries, alongside sustained engagement with influential regional stakeholders.

### **Iranian Stance on Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the Israeli War on Gaza Strip**

Iran, like other parties, was taken aback by the Hamas attack on 7/10/2023 in the GS envelope. This occurred at a critical juncture for Iran, as it had recently finalized a prisoner exchange agreement with the US, unlocking \$6 billion of its frozen oil revenues in South Korea just two months prior.<sup>75</sup> The attack coincided with Iran's efforts to ease tensions in regional relations, exemplified by its landmark agreement with Saudi Arabia on 10/3/2024.<sup>76</sup> This analysis delves into Iran's response to Operation al-Aqsa Flood, examining the factors influencing its stance and actions.

Iran has consistently backed the resistance since the war's onset. However, its stance on Operation al-Aqsa Flood was marked by meticulous calculations and intricate balancing acts, aiming to safeguard and fortify gains while averting potential adverse repercussions.

From the outset, Iran has been eager to disassociate itself from the October 7th attack orchestrated by Hamas. It has stressed that the operation was an independent decision made by Palestinian resistance factions based on their own assessments and considerations. At the same time, the Iranian leadership across all branches (including the Supreme Leader, the Presidency, the government, the military, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), legislative bodies and the media...) has provided robust political backing to the Resistance. They have hosted prominent delegations from Hamas and resistance factions, and has consistently adopted and defended the resistance and its objectives in both regional and international forums. While denying direct involvement in the October 7th attack, Iran has lauded the operation and reiterated its solidarity with the Palestinian resistance. This support was evident during Operation al-Aqsa Flood and in response to Israeli war on GS, where Iran endorsed the political and on-the-ground strategies pursued by the Palestinian resistance in managing the war. Since the outset of the war, Iran has demonstrated a clear intention to swiftly conclude hostilities and secure a lasting ceasefire. Iranian diplomacy, spearheaded by Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, has diligently pursued this goal. Despite its reluctance to engage directly in the war theater and to avert escalation into a broader regional conflict,

Iran has encouraged its allied forces in Lebanon, Yemen and Iraq to actively support the Palestinian resistance, tailoring its involvement to the specific circumstances of each theater. It is evident that Iran has played a significant yet undisclosed role in coordinating actions across the various theaters of the conflict. In terms of public interaction, the Iranian streets witnessed a wide mass movements in support of the resistance and the Palestinians in GS, similar to the ongoing state of popular sympathy in the Arab and Muslim world.

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On the morning after the Operation on 8/10/2023, the world and the region entered a new phase of calculations and expectations, creating confusion among Israel's allies and international sponsors; the US and European countries. These countries issued stern warnings to Iran and Hizbullah, specifically threatening repercussions if they participated in the confrontations against Israel that erupted following Operation al-Aqsa Flood. Meanwhile, people in most Arab and Muslim countries took to the streets, raising slogans in support of the Palestine issue and the resistance.

From the outset of the operation, Israel directly accused Iran, when Israeli President Isaac Herzog said that the attack was “supported and directed by their [Hamas] proxy commanders in Iran.”<sup>77</sup> *The Wall Street Journal* newspaper also confirmed that “Iranian security officials helped plan Hamas’s Saturday surprise attack on Israel.”<sup>78</sup>

Perhaps the aim of these accusations might have been to downplay Hamas’ ability to carry out such an operation, which revealed two contradictory types of accumulations. The first is the positive accumulation in Hamas’ capabilities, notably in terms of preparation, training, steadfastness and determination, which led to the success of this exceptional operation. The second is the negative accumulation of a decline in Israeli deterrence over the past three decades, including the drop in army personnel morale and distrust of its political leadership, which was starkly revealed by Operation al-Aqsa Flood. This prompted an urgent US alert and threats from President Biden to Iran not to engage in this confrontation. He stated, “we stand ready to offer all appropriate means of support to the Government and people of Israel,” and added that “Israel has a right to defend itself and its people. The United States warns against any other party hostile to Israel seeking advantage in this situation.”<sup>79</sup>

At the same time, the US has raised doubts about Iran's role in what happened. A senior White House official told reporters "It's too early to say whether the state of Iran was directly involved or planning, supporting," and "We are going to be looking at that very closely," adding, "That said, there's no doubt Hamas is funded, equipped, armed by Iran and others." As for President Biden, he stated that "The United States unequivocally condemns this appalling assault against Israel," and added, "The United States warns against any other party hostile to Israel seeking advantage in this situation. My Administration's support for Israel's security is rock solid and unwavering."<sup>80</sup> From the outset, Iran, under the leadership of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, disclaimed any involvement in Operation al-Aqsa Flood and stressed that "this action was carried out by the Palestinians themselves. Intelligent designers, the brave youth, and active, self-sacrificing Palestinians have been able to create this epic," and that Israel "has suffered an irreparable defeat, both in terms of military and intelligence," adding, "that this devastating earthquake has managed to destroy some of the main structures of the usurping regime's rule, which cannot be rebuilt so easily."<sup>81</sup>

This is how Hamas's Operation al-Aqsa Flood shifted the focus of discussions, analysis and strategic expectations away from the normalization process, negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, and the future of the Palestine issue. Instead, it initiated a debate about the future of Israel itself. Hamas's operation disrupted the Israeli security and military foundations, exposing the inability of these sectors to anticipate, confront or thwart the attack.

The questions that arose following Operation al-Aqsa Flood concern the capabilities of the resistance and its allies, the regional and international situation, and the potential for a major confrontation in the region. This is especially pertinent after the US deployed an aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean to protect Israel and deter any potential interventions by other parties, such as Iran.

Iran promptly endorsed the operation after it occurred. However, in his praise, Khamenei carefully emphasized that this Palestinian action "was a response to the crimes of the usurping enemy," and that Iran had no role in either its planning or execution. Speaking at the joint graduation ceremony for the cadets studying in the academies of Iran's Armed Forces, Khamenei stated, "We praise the minds and efforts of the resourceful, intelligent designers and the brave youth of Palestine... But those who say that non-Palestinians are behind what the Palestinians have done

do not know the Palestinian nation. They underestimate the Palestinian nation.” He explained that “the courageous, self-sacrificing move of the Palestinians was a response to the crimes of the usurping enemy, which have continued for many years,” and that after Israel:

has been slapped in the face, it has adopted the policy of playing the victim... The media that is owned by Global Arrogance helps it show that it is oppressed... This show of innocence is one hundred percent false. It is a lie! Just because the Palestinian mujahideen [resistance fighters] have been able to escape the siege on Gaza and reach the military and non-military Zionist centers, does that mean the Zionists are innocent?... It is oppressive, aggressive, ignorant, and talking nonsense.<sup>82</sup>

In later statements, Khamenei asserted that “The war in Gaza isn’t a war between Gaza and Israel. It’s a war between falsehood and truth,” and emphasized that “when we take a closer look at what is taking place, we realize that the victors in this battle are the people of Gaza and Palestine.”<sup>83</sup> Also, in a meeting with a number of the academic elites and outstanding scientific talents, Khamenei highlighted the following aspects of Operation al-Aqsa Flood:<sup>84</sup>

- “No matter what the Zionist regime does, it will not be able to compensate for the disgraceful defeat that it has experienced.”
- “What numerous intelligence reports show us is that current policy these days—that is, the Zionist regime’s policy during the past week—is being formulated by the US,” and that “The current usurping government of the Zionist regime must definitely be prosecuted today. They must be prosecuted, and the US government must realize it is responsible in this matter.”
- “Those who are in the settlements are not civilians at all. They are all armed.”
- “What the world is seeing is the genocidal crime of the usurping regime,” and “The bombings must stop immediately.”

In another meeting, Khamenei said:

The events that have unfolded in recent days in Palestine, especially the bombings and the martyrdom of the women, the children, and the men there, have wounded people’s hearts. However, another part of these events have revealed the incredible power of Islam in Palestine... this movement that has begun in Palestine will progress and lead to the complete victory of the Palestinians.<sup>85</sup>

The Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations reaffirmed Khamenei's earlier statement regarding Operation al-Aqsa Flood, asserting that Tehran had no involvement. It associated this stance with the "the inherent right of self-defense for all Palestinians under international law," adding, "Iran unwaveringly stands in solidarity with Palestine; however, it is important to note that Iran is not involved in Palestine's response, as these actions are solely determined by the Palestinians themselves."<sup>86</sup>

Immediately after the operation, IRGC Leader, Major General Hossein Salami, declared that "Israel can no longer 'roister as it used to,' stressing that its era of insolence has ended," adding that, "Today is the end of the occupation and its aggression," and "The heroic Palestinians are pursuing and arresting the [Israeli] soldiers without any fears."<sup>87</sup> In another later speech, Salami said, "The event that shocked the world is an unprecedented event beyond the imagination of all experts, thinkers, strategists, and politicians of the world." He added, "The biggest defeat in the history of the existence of the fake Zionist regime since 1948 for this regime and the biggest victory for the Palestinian movement happened in the Al-Aqsa Flood operation."<sup>88</sup>

On another level, in terms of coordination and consultation between Hamas and Iran, Khamenei met the head of Hamas' political bureau Isma'il Haniyyah in Tehran. Iranian state media said that the latter "briefed Khamenei on the latest developments in the Gaza Strip and the crimes of the Zionist regime in Gaza, as well as the developments in the West Bank." Iran's state TV said, "Ayatollah Khamenei praised the steadfastness and resilience of the people of Gaza and expressed strong regret over the crimes of the Zionist regime, supported directly by Washington and some Western countries," while Iran's Tasnim news agency said that Khamenei "emphasized Tehran's consistent policy of supporting the Palestinian resistance forces against the Zionist occupiers."<sup>89</sup>

Former Iranian President Mohammad Khatami, have hailed the attack as "a significant achievement for the Palestinian people." He emphasized that "after the Arab Spring this is the most important event that happens in the Middle East," and "What has been achieved belongs to the Palestinian people."<sup>90</sup>

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanani, emphasizing the unity of Iranian discourse on Operation al-Aqsa Flood and framing it as a victory for resistance movements, said, "Today's operation opened a new page in the field of



resistance and armed operations against the occupiers,” adding that it is “a turning point in the ongoing process of armed resistance by the Palestinian people.”<sup>91</sup>

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called the leaders of the Palestinian resistance movements, Hamas and PIJ, following Operation al-Aqsa Flood. He spoke with Haniyyah, and expressed his appreciation for the efforts of the Hamas fighters and all the combatants on the battlefields, describing it a “victorious operation.”<sup>92</sup> Speaking at the Tehran International Conference on Palestine, Ebrahim Raisi described the Palestine issue as “the most important concern of the Islamic world and the entire world of humanity,” adding that, “the solution to end the occupation is expulsion, punishment and forcing the occupier to pay damages.”<sup>93</sup>

Iran’s comments and positions on Operation al-Aqsa Flood, particularly from the Foreign Ministry, evolved through distinct stages. In the first stage, Iran supported the operation, denied any involvement, and framed it as a victory and a significant event that revealed Israeli failures and weaknesses.

In the second stage, as the war on GS escalated into a brutal bombardment targeting civilians, including women and children, and the destruction of civilian and medical institutions, mosques and churches amid unprecedented official Western silence, Iran issued threats. They warned that continued aggression would expand the war in the region.

In the third stage, Iran initiated diplomatic efforts at Arab, Islamic and international levels to halt the Israeli war and genocide committed against the Palestinian people in GS. Iran also stressed that the Axis of Resistance factions independently make their own decisions, and that Iran does not dictate actions to anyone. This was reiterated by Quds Force commander Brigadier General Esmail Qaani, who stated, “The resistance groups grew step by step, and today all the elements of the resistance front at the regional level are the owners of their own decisions and judgments.”<sup>94</sup>

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian stressed in a telephone conversation with his Hungarian counterpart Peter Szijjarto that “The continuation of the Israeli regime’s attacks on Gaza under the current circumstances will complicate the situation and increase the possibility of the spread of war.”<sup>95</sup> Amirabdollahian also said, “If the Americans don’t want the war to spread in the region, they need to control Israel,” and “highlighted the importance of holding a high-level meeting of Islamic countries on Palestine.”<sup>96</sup>

The Iranian foreign minister threatened to open new fronts through other resistance movements against Israel if the war and siege on GS continue, the Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) reported. Upon his arrival in Lebanon, Amirabdollahian emphasized that the “Islamic Republic will continue to support the Palestinian nation and the resistance movement in the occupied territories,” and that “some Western officials asked me if it is possible to open new fronts against the Zionist regime, and I said that continuing war crimes by the Zionists, any possibility from other resistance currents is possible,” he added.<sup>97</sup>

The statements and positions of the Iranian Foreign Minister, consistent with those of other Iranian officials at various levels, and in contrast to the positions of any Arab or Muslim countries, have always connected Operation al-Aqsa Flood with the end of Israel.

For Amirabdollahian, the incident was a true disaster for Israel, which “is in its worst state, and the ‘Al-Aqsa Flood’ operation has proven that, and the American presence alongside Israel proves that it is on the verge of complete collapse.” He added that the forced displacement in Gaza indicates that Israel is experiencing unprecedented confusion and shock. It cannot emerge victorious from this war, and the world bears responsibility for the war crimes it committed, adding also that it is the resistance that will set the conditions if the current war of aggression is halted. Amirabdollahian proposed “holding an emergency meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation regarding the situation in Gaza.” In a call with the UN Secretary-General, he emphasized the need for legal action regarding Israel’s crimes and asserted that “no one can impose a project on the Palestinian people.”<sup>98</sup>

Minister Amirabdollahian warned of the threat of a wider war if the aggression is not halted, saying, “We hope that political efforts will prevent the war from expanding, otherwise no one knows what will happen in the next hour; Iran cannot remain as a spectator to this situation.” He added, “If the scope of the war expands, heavy losses will befall the U.S. as well.”<sup>99</sup>

In an interview with the National Public Radio (NPR) in New York City, when attending a General Assembly session on the war in Gaza, on 27/10/2023, Amirabdollahian said, “I met with some leaders of the countries of my region and with the leaders of the resistance in Lebanon and also the Palestinian groups... What I gathered from the plans that they have—they have their finger on the trigger,” adding, “I believe that if this situation continues and women and children

and civilians are still killed in Gaza and the West Bank, anything will be possible... Therefore they have their own calculations for their own security, and as I've said they decide for themselves."<sup>100</sup>

On the diplomatic front, Amirabdollahian met with UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Tor Wennesland and stated that "If the United Nations wants to do something, it should immediately stop the Israeli regime's attacks, especially against citizens and civilians."<sup>101</sup> "We had close and continuous consultations with Russia and China for a ceasefire and the cessation of war in Gaza and the West Bank." In another event he stated, "We had close and continuous consultations with Russia and China for a ceasefire and the cessation of war in Gaza and the West Bank."<sup>102</sup>

This is how Iran's positions have supported Operation al-Aqsa Flood since its announcement, linking this support to the right of Hamas and other resistance movements to defend themselves against the Israeli occupation's decades-long crimes against the Palestinian people. Iran has hinted at expanding the scope of the war to exert pressure and stop the war on GS. Additionally, Iran has engaged in active diplomatic efforts at international, Arab and Islamic levels to try to stop the war, but to no avail.

In parallel to these Iranian diplomatic endeavors, Israel linked the attacks on Syria to a warning that Iran should not interfere in the war. The Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesperson stated that Israel's strikes on Syria during Amirabdollahian's visit to Damascus were a warning to Iran and all "terrorist organizations" to stay out of war. He clarified that the strike was not intended to target the minister but served as a warning to Syria, which acts as a corridor for delivering Iranian missiles to Hizbullah.<sup>103</sup> A spokesperson for US Central Command (CENTCOM) told *Newsweek* magazine, "We are monitoring across the region for any indicators or warnings that these groups [Iran's allied forces] would consider piling on or entering this conflict in a way that escalates it."<sup>104</sup>

US President Joe Biden categorically denied an Israeli media report claiming that "Biden officials have indicated to Israel...that if Hezbollah initiates a war against Israel, the US military will join" the Israeli forces in fighting it. Speaking to reporters, he claimed that it "was never said." White House National Security Council spokesperson John Kirby added to reporters that there was "no intention to put US boots on the ground in combat."<sup>105</sup>

## Ramifications and Projections

Iran's stance during Operation al-Aqsa Flood had numerous repercussions, the most significant being the resurgence of tension in Iranian-Western relations ensued, evidenced by the US House of Representatives' decision on 30/11/2023 to reinstate the freeze on the \$6 billion previously lifted on 10/8/2023 and deposited into Qatari banks, before being accessed by Iran.<sup>106</sup> Subsequent to Iran's assault on Israel on 13/4/2024, the US, along with several European countries, imposed additional sanctions on Iran.<sup>107</sup>

Iran's calculated positions, initially limited to political and media support at the beginning of the conflict, fell short of the expectations of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim public, given the promises and positions expressed in previous years. Many within these circles perceived Iran's response as falling short during a critical moment when robust support, beyond mere political and media endorsements, was direly needed. However, Iran's image and status experienced a notable enhancement following Hizbullah's significant involvement on the northern front during the months of the confrontation. Additionally, the escalating role of the Yemeni Ansar Allah group in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea, particularly in actions against Israeli shipping and vessels bound for Israeli ports, further contributed to this improvement. Moreover, the participation of the Iraqi resistance also played a role in bolstering Iran's reputation and standing. In a late March 2024 Jordanian elite opinion poll, it was revealed that Iran's reputation and influence in the Arab world saw a 42% increase due to its stance on the GS war. Additionally, 45% of respondents stated that Iran and its allies' position contributed to the reduction of sectarian divisions in the region.<sup>108</sup>

Iran successfully navigated the initial challenge of applying the slogan of Unity of the Arenas among the parties within the Axis of Resistance. The increased involvement of its allied forces in the conflict marks a tangible step forward, offering potential for further advancement in realizing the slogan.

The conflict has significantly impacted Israel's strategic standing in the region, tarnishing its reputation as a regional stabilizer and a bastion of Western influence. It has also hindered progress in normalization efforts and fueled increased backing from Arab, Muslim and international public for Hamas and the resistance factions. This dynamic bolstered Iran's political stance, particularly given the perceived

inadequacy of Arab official interaction with the resistance and responses to the brutal Israeli aggression on GS.

In the forthcoming period, Iran is expected to persist in navigating a cautious and balanced strategy concerning the Palestine issue. Within this framework, Iran aims to bolster its backing for the Palestinian resistance and its regional footprint while sustaining a trend of improved relations across the region. Additionally, Iran is likely to pursue efforts to defuse tensions in its dealings with the US and Western countries.

#### ***Fourth: Other Muslim Countries***

##### **Malaysia**

Despite facing internal economic and political crises, and external pressures to normalize relations with Israel, the Malaysian government has maintained its consistent stance on the Palestine issue. It continued to align with the Malaysian people in supporting Palestinian rights, including their right to resist Israeli occupation. Malaysian Foreign Minister Saifuddin Abdullah emphasized that Malaysia will remain loyal to Palestine and committed to supporting it until the occupation ends. In a call with PA Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki, he emphasized Malaysia's solidarity with Palestine against Israeli crimes, particularly those targeting *al-Aqsa* Mosque and other holy sites, and highlighted Malaysia's refusal to normalize relations with Israel, including its decision to ban Israeli players from entering the country.<sup>109</sup>

Given the strong ties between Malaysian policymakers and the Palestinian resistance, particularly Hamas, it was not surprising that Israeli intelligence, Mossad, tracked Palestinian activity in Malaysia. According to Malaysian media, Mossad recruited a cell of at least 11 Malaysians to monitor Palestinian activists. The cell reportedly kidnapped a Palestinian IT expert from GS in central Kuala Lumpur on 28/9/2022, taking him to a rural house on the city's outskirts. However, Malaysian intelligence intervened within 24 hours, arresting the kidnappers and rescuing the hostage. Investigations revealed that the Mossad cell was spying on key sites, including airports, and hacking government electronic companies. Malaysian sources indicated the possible presence of other Mossad cells.<sup>110</sup>

Upon taking office, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim reaffirmed his country's unwavering support for the Palestine issue in a phone call with Hamas leader Isma'īl Haniyyah, and expressed openness to continued communication with Hamas.<sup>111</sup>

Echoing the Malaysian Prime Minister's stance, Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir affirmed Malaysia's foreign policy commitment to criminalizing Israel's apartheid policy as a crime against humanity and a form of ethnic cleansing. He emphasized that Israel's actions violate humanitarian principles and international law. Kadir stressed that the government, through its international contacts, remains focused on ending the suffering of the Palestinian people and securing their legitimate rights to establish an independent state. This official position has been welcomed by grassroots organizations in Malaysia advocating for Palestinian rights. In May 2023, Minister Abdul Kadir met with representatives and leaders of these organizations during Malaysia's *Nakbah* commemoration. According to Professor Mohammad Nazari, former head of the Faculty of Accountancy at the University of Malaya, the government, as a result of this meeting, committed to opposing any form of normalization with Israel until the Palestinian people secure their rights, and to condemning Israeli crimes in all international forums.<sup>112</sup>

Regarding the Israeli aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Malaysia strongly condemned the incursion by Israeli National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir. The Malaysian Foreign Ministry stated that the "orchestrated incursion was a clear provocation and aggression against the political status quo of Jerusalem and Al-Haram Al-Sharif." It called on the international community "to hold the Israeli regime accountable for the continued act of provocation and aggression," and stressed that the UN Security Council must "immediately demand the regime to halt acts of provocation in the interest of peace and stability in the region."<sup>113</sup>

In a joint statement, Malaysia's Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim and Brunei's Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah urged the UN Security Council to "demand the occupying power halt its heinous crimes against humanity as well as apartheid policies against the Palestinians, with a view to ending the occupation and achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the Middle East." This statement followed Ibrahim's meeting with Bolkiah in the Malaysian city of Putrajaya. The two leaders reiterated "their unwavering position that the Palestinians deserve their right to an

independent and sovereign state of their own, based on the pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital.”<sup>114</sup>

In the context of the Israeli war on GS and the attempts by the US and various countries to criminalize and distort the Palestinian resistance following the resistance operation on 7/10/2023, Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim addressed the Malaysian parliament, stating that his country does not support the Western pressure to denounce Hamas. He remarked, “Western and European countries have repeatedly asked Malaysia to condemn Hamas in meetings,” and added, “we, as a policy, have a relationship with Hamas from before and this will continue.” He stressed, “as such, we don’t agree with their pressuring attitude, as Hamas too won in Gaza freely through elections and Gazans chose them to lead.”<sup>115</sup>

Since the start of the Israeli war, Malaysia has consistently used international platforms to defend GS. Malaysia, along with Indonesia and Brunei, issued a statement at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit held in November 2023 in San Francisco, diverging from the US administration’s stance. The statement highlighted the significant disagreement between these countries and the US president regarding the situation in GS, describing it as a “catastrophe.”<sup>116</sup>

Malaysian Foreign Minister Zambry Abdul Kadir called for Israel to be prosecuted for war crimes in the ICJ, stressing that failure to prosecute it would set a dangerous precedent, enabling criminals worldwide. He further criticized the international community for its lack of decisive action in lifting the siege on GS.<sup>117</sup>

In response to US actions, Malaysia firmly rejected the proposed US law aimed at imposing sanctions on entities supporting Hamas and PIJ. Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim stated that any sanctions on Malaysia could influence the government’s assessment of American companies and impact investment opportunities for them in Malaysia.<sup>118</sup>

On 20/12/2023, the Malaysian government took a notable step by overturning a previous government decision that allowed, since 2005, all Israeli owned and flagged ships, as well as any vessels headed to Israel, to dock at its ports.<sup>119</sup> This move is seen as a form of pressure, occurring at a time when the US administration and its allies from the normalization countries were urging Malaysia to participate in the normalization process. However, Operation al-Aqsa Flood has halted this initiative.

## Pakistan

In 2022–2023, Pakistan maintained its support for the Palestine issue despite reported pressure to pursue normalization. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan criticized the position of Muslim countries on key issues affecting the Muslim world, particularly Palestine and Kashmir. He said, “We have failed both the Palestinians and the people of Kashmir. I am sad to say that we have been able to make no impact at all,” adding, “We (Muslims) are 1.5 billion people and yet our voice to stop this blatant injustice is insignificant.”<sup>120</sup>

In April 2022, Pakistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs condemned the Israeli forces for their incursion into the courtyards of *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Pakistan reaffirmed its steadfast support for the Palestinian people and the Palestine issue, which has long been a cornerstone of its foreign policy. Pakistan also urged the international community to take immediate action to halt Israeli violations which Islamabad claimed were exacerbating violence, tension and instability in the region.<sup>121</sup>

In the previous strategic report, we observed various pressures exerted on Pakistan to normalize relations with Israel throughout 2020–2021. However, Pakistani resilience and popular opposition to normalization continued in 2022–2023. This was reaffirmed by Pakistan’s Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari who emphasized that there was a national consensus to support both the Palestinian and Kashmiri people, irrespective of the country’s leadership. He reiterated that Pakistan would not normalize relations with Israel, stressing that the priority was for the Palestinian people to secure their rights first. He also condemned the assassination of Shireen Abu Akleh, while she was wearing the press vest, describing it as an act of unprecedented brutality. The minister expressed hope that Palestinian factions would unite in their pursuit of freedom and reaffirmed Pakistan’s unwavering support for the Palestinian people, pledging that Pakistan would not abandon Palestine, especially in its most challenging times.<sup>122</sup>

Addressing a crowd of supporters, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (F) leader Fazlur Rehman said, “A certain lobby in Pakistan was advocating for recognizing and normalizing relations with Israel. However, your gathering here, at this moment, has raised a strong voice against the ideology of that certain lobby in Pakistan, foiling their plans and silencing them to the point where no one in Pakistan will dare speak of normalizing relations with Israel again.”<sup>123</sup>



Later, the government took a decisive step to reinforce its commitment against normalization in any form. Pakistani Minister for Information and Broadcasting Marriyum Aurangzeb, announced that a Pakistan Television Corporation (PTV) anchor who visited Israel was terminated. In a press conference on 30/5/2022, the minister stated, “A policy which was in contradiction with the people’s wishes and aspirations could not be implemented.” She emphasized that “Pakistan was committed to its traditional and principled position on the Palestinian issue and Israel.” The minister also noted that the Foreign Office had “already made it clear that no delegation from the country visited Israel.”<sup>124</sup>

As tensions escalated in WB and Jerusalem at the beginning of 2023, particularly due to repeated Israeli aggression on *al-Aqsa* Mosque, Pakistan’s representative to the UN, Munir Akram, voiced his country’s concern over the worsening situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, including East Jerusalem, during a Security Council meeting. He emphasized that “the year 2022 was among the deadliest for the Palestinian people,” and conveyed that Pakistan “is also deeply alarmed by Israel’s ongoing acts of aggression, incitement and provocation against Islamic and Christian holy places.” Akram condemned “the provocative visit of Israeli Minister of National Security to the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. Al-Aqsa is a holy site revered by Muslims around the world.” Further stating that the “violation of its sanctity offends the religious sensitivities of Muslims all over the world and inflames an already tense situation in the occupied Palestinian territories.” He stressed his country’s rejection of “all Israeli measures and attempts to alter the historical and legal status quo of the Holy Al-Aqsa Mosque,” and urged the Security Council to “act swiftly and resolutely to bring a halt to all such Israeli violations, ensure its full compliance with International Law, and implement its own resolutions.” He also noted that “Israel’s sense of impunity” has made it persist in taking “punitive measures” against the Palestinian people.<sup>125</sup>

Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari later said, “It would not be possible for Pakistan to normalize relations with Israel without first, the people of Palestine making that decision.” He emphasized, “Our country is clear, our history is clear, our people are clear,” Zardari expressed pride in the fact that “our passport never recognized an apartheid state,” adding, “our passports used to say that our passports are valid for all countries except South Africa and Israel.” He concluded, “Today, there is one apartheid state left in the world, and Pakistan does not recognize it.”<sup>126</sup>

Following the repeated violent attacks on Jenin RC in 2023, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry issued a statement calling on the international community to fulfill its responsibility to halt these illegal actions by Israeli occupation forces and take steps to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people's human rights.<sup>127</sup>

In October 2023, the Pakistani Foreign Office condemned the Israeli aggression against GS, denouncing the attack on the National Baptist Hospital as inhumane, unjustifiable, a grave violation of international law and a war crime.<sup>128</sup>

In the same context, Pakistan's representative to the UN, Munir Akram, emphasized that Muslim countries could leverage economic, diplomatic and other means to pressure Israel and support GS. He also underscored the importance of finding common ground among Muslim countries to develop a unified strategy for exerting such pressure.<sup>129</sup>

## **Indonesia**

During 2022–2023, Israel continued its efforts to penetrate Muslim countries and encourage normalization. Despite strong public opposition in Indonesia, one Israeli initiative succeeded. In January 2022, a Zionist institution Yad Vashem opened the first permanent exhibition on the Nazi genocide of Jews during World War II on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi. Yad Vashem chairman Dani Dayan said, "We will be happy to open an exhibition wherever there's interest in the memory of the Holocaust and its commemoration, and all the more so in the largest Muslim country in the world."<sup>130</sup>

Later, Indonesian President Joko Widodo, during a press conference with Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh in Jakarta, emphasized the close friendship and longstanding solidarity between Palestine and Indonesia. He underscored the importance of achieving Palestinian national unity and expressed Indonesia's readiness to fully support efforts toward Palestinian national reconciliation.<sup>131</sup>

During the UN Security Council's open debate on the Middle East and the Palestine issue in January 2023, the Indonesian representative urged the international community to break "the cycle of concern and inaction." She called on Israel to uphold international law and highlighted the looming threat of an economic recession, warning that, for millions of Palestinians, hardships will only multiply.<sup>132</sup>

Notably, the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA) revoked Indonesia's right to host the U-20 World Cup finals, which were scheduled to take place on 20/5–11/6/2023. This decision followed Indonesia's opposition to Israel's participation in the tournament, after the governor of Bali refused to welcome the Israeli team.<sup>133</sup>

Despite widespread public opposition in Indonesia to normalizing relations with Israel, reports have repeatedly surfaced about efforts to establish such ties. In September 2023, *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported on secret talks between Israeli and Indonesian officials, claiming that Israel has channels of communication with several Indonesian political parties and maintains trade and tourism relations with Jakarta. The paper also alleged that the US administration is working behind the scenes to persuade the Indonesian government to establish relations with Tel Aviv. Nevertheless, Israeli officials are still unsure whether Jakarta will settle for normalization before Saudi Arabia does.<sup>134</sup>

However, Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the subsequent Israeli war have halted any rush by the Muslim country to normalize relations with Israel. The Indonesian president condemned the Israeli war on GS and said, "Indonesia condemns the attacks in Gaza that have resulted in people suffering and an increasing number of civilian casualties, including women and children." Widodo also condemned the Israeli attack on the National Baptist Hospital, citing violations of international humanitarian law. He added, "Indonesia will not stay silent while civilian casualties continue to count, witnessing the ongoing injustices against the Palestinian people." He also called on world leaders to "build a global solidarity to resolve the Palestinian issue fairly by observing agreed international parameters," affirming, "We will continue to voice this issue at various international events and forums."<sup>135</sup>

The strong support for Palestine among the Indonesian public has become a pivotal factor in shaping the country's foreign policies. Some observers argue that Indonesian policymakers' stance on the Palestine issue is a major determinant of their political futures. Comparisons have been made between Indonesia's support for Palestine and the influence of the Israel lobby on US presidential elections, highlighting its impact on domestic politics. In the context of US efforts to build a partnership with Indonesia, the latter's call to end the Israeli war on GS was a central topic in the joint dialogue held in November 2023. However, the

discussions were shaped by the conflicting positions of both countries on the war in occupied Palestine and their potential effects on the future of the ruling parties in each country.<sup>136</sup>

### ***Fifth: Muslim Public Engagement with the Palestine Issue***

Muslim public engagement in support of the Palestine issue persisted throughout 2022 and 2023. On Quds Day in April 2022, rallies were organized in various Muslim countries to commemorate the occasion. Mass demonstrations took place in Iranian cities, where participants emphasized their solidarity with Jerusalem and the Palestinian people in their struggle against Israeli occupation. The final statement of these rallies declared that Quds Day symbolizes the unity and cohesion of the *Ummah* in the face of the conspiracies of a hegemonic and arrogant system. In Istanbul, activists gathered, displaying banners in support of Palestine and condemning Israeli measures in the holy city and *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Meanwhile, in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, political parties and NGOs organized a demonstration outside the US embassy to mark Quds Day and advocate for the Palestine issue. Demonstrators urged the US to cease its support for Israel and rescind its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital. They also denounced the ongoing attacks on worshippers at *al-Aqsa* Mosque. Leaders of the participating parties and NGOs presented a protest note to the US Embassy, demanding that Washington halts its support for Israel.<sup>137</sup>

In the context of public support for the Palestinian resistance, the International Union of Muslim Scholars reaffirmed its support for the Palestinian resistance in general. The Union's President Ahmed Raissouni expressed strong confidence in Hamas's leadership, steadfastness and decision-making, highlighting its effective management in bolstering resistance against the occupation and addressing the necessities of the struggle against the enemy and its allies.<sup>138</sup>

Observers monitoring the situation and the escalation of Israeli aggression against *al-Aqsa* Mosque at the start of 2023 anticipated further developments. This prompted the Pakistani public to participate in demonstrations organized by Jamaat-e-Islami party leader Siraj ul Haq, where they chanted slogans condemning the Israeli attacks on *al-Aqsa* Mosque.<sup>139</sup>

In light of above developments and the Israeli attacks on holy sites in Jerusalem, as well as the targeting of Palestinian cities, villages and RCs in WB, Operation al-Aqsa Flood represents a significant turning point in the relationship between Muslim peoples and the Palestine issue and its resistance. The choice to name the military operation carried out by the Palestinian resistance on 7/10/2023, as Operation al-Aqsa Flood suggests an awareness that its implications would resonate globally. Israel's excessive targeting of civilians, particularly children and women, who have numbered in the thousands under the onslaught of the Israeli army, has starkly exposed the brutality of its actions. Concurrently, the war in GS has highlighted the impotence of Muslim countries. This realization may have spurred Muslim peoples to organize hundreds of demonstrations and thousands of events in support of the Palestinian people. For instance, Jakarta, the Indonesian capital, witnessed a massive demonstration condemning the Israeli war on GS and calling for a ceasefire. Ministers, party leaders, parliamentarians and leaders of Indonesian Islamic organizations actively participated, with organizers estimating that approximately 1.5 million people took part. Protesters raised slogans demanding the lifting of the siege on GS, the entry of humanitarian aid and an end to the war.<sup>140</sup>

In Malaysia, both the government and the people, including Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim, who have marched in tens of thousands since the start of the war, have condemned the Israeli attacks on GS, demanded an immediate end to the war, and intensified protests against governments that support Israel.<sup>141</sup>

In Pakistan, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam organized a rally in the city of Larkana, Sindh province, titled "Al-Aqsa Flood" in support of GS and against the Israeli war targeting the Palestinian people. The event was attended by a representative of Hamas, Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam leader Fazlur Rehman, and other leaders and figures from various Islamic groups. During the rally, Fazlur Rahman emphasized solidarity with "our Palestinian brothers" and condemned the Israeli atrocities against the people of GS. This rally was part of a broader wave of almost weekly demonstrations organized by different Pakistani political parties in various provinces since the outbreak of the war on GS.<sup>142</sup>

In October 2023, Indian police arrested dozens of pro-Palestinian protesters during a demonstration in New Delhi against Israeli crimes in GS. The event, organized by students, featured slogans advocating for the Palestinian people's right

to resist occupation and condemning the war on GS and the killing of civilians.<sup>143</sup> In the southern Indian state of Kerala, political parties, activists and Islamic groups also held marches and events calling for an immediate ceasefire. One of these demonstrations drew hundreds of thousands of participants, marking it as one of the largest displays of support for the Palestinian people in India's history.<sup>144</sup> On 5/4/2024, demonstrators took to the streets of Srinagar in the Indian-administered region of Kashmir to protest the Israeli war on GS, expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people and the residents of GS.<sup>145</sup>

In May 2024, students in Bangladesh organized a demonstration in response to the student movement on US campuses supporting Palestine and denouncing the Israeli war on GS. Protesters chanted slogans condemning the Israeli attacks and marched toward the US embassy in the capital under tight security. They accused US President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken of being complicit in the “genocide” in GS.<sup>146</sup>

Demonstrations in support of the Palestinian people extended beyond the Muslim countries typically associated with the Palestine issue. In Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan, a demonstration was held in solidarity with GS and against Israeli aggression. In Kosovo, the non-governmental organization Collective for Feminist Thought and Action organized a march in support of the Palestinian people in Pristina, the capital.<sup>147</sup> Protests also occurred in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia, as well as in Belgrade and Podgorica, the capital of Montenegro, advocating for Palestine and GS, while calling for an end to Israeli aggression on GS.<sup>148</sup>

In numerous African countries, large crowds took to the streets on Quds Day to condemn the Israeli war on GS. In Nigeria, the Islamic Movement organized mass demonstrations in multiple cities, where protestors chanted slogans against both Israel and the US. In Senegal, rallies were held in the capital, Dakar, expressing solidarity with the Palestinian people in GS and urging the Senegalese government to cut ties with Israel.

In Kenya, activists staging a solidarity protest for Palestinians on 25/1/2024 were met with police violence, including beatings and tear gas in Nairobi.<sup>149</sup> In Niamey, the capital of Niger, demonstrators denounced Israel's crimes in GS and called on the international community to hold Israel accountable. They waved Palestinian flags and set fire to French, US and Israeli flags.<sup>150</sup>

## ***Sixth: Normalization and Israeli Relations with Muslim Countries***

Israel's efforts to normalize relations with Muslim countries have not ceased, they extended beyond the political sphere, posing potential threats to regional security. Among these efforts, Israel has signed cyber cooperation agreements with Albania. Ironically, this agreement was initiated by Israel following a large-scale cyberattack that temporarily crippled numerous Albanian government websites and digital services. Albanian authorities stated that the cyberattack was too sophisticated to have been carried out by individuals or independent groups, characterizing it as an act of state aggression. Iran was accused of the attack but vehemently denied any involvement. In response, Israel offered assistance to Albania in building a cyber defense system and expressed interest in further expanding cooperation in trade and tourism.<sup>151</sup>

Throughout 2022 and 2023, Israel made significant diplomatic inroads in several Muslim countries, including Azerbaijan which borders Iran. Despite earlier reports of strong Israeli-Azerbaijani cooperation, formal diplomatic representation and the establishment of an Azerbaijani embassy in Israel did not occur until late 2022. On 18/11/2022, the Azerbaijani parliament decided to open an embassy in Tel Aviv. Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid welcomed the move, stating "Azerbaijan is an important partner of Israel and home to one of the largest Jewish communities in the Muslim world."<sup>152</sup>

This decision was preceded by a visit to Azerbaijan by Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz, during which he met with senior Azerbaijani leaders and signed several military and security cooperation agreements. This came more than six months after the two countries had already signed an agreement to expand economic relations.<sup>153</sup>

Apparently, Israeli-Azerbaijani relations were developing. In May 2023, Israeli President Isaac Herzog visited Azerbaijan at the invitation of Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, who said, "During the official visit, we had more opportunities to address important issues on our bilateral agenda. Opening of the Azerbaijani Embassy in Israel this year, of course, will elevate relations on a high level and at the same time, will create more opportunities to have closer interaction." Aliyev added that Azerbaijan provides energy and crude oil to Israel and "during

the discussions we also addressed the issue of how to expand cooperation in the energy field.” He stated:

One of the areas, which we started to cooperate in relatively recently, is the area of cybersecurity... it is not a secret that cybersecurity is an important part of national security of every country. Definitely, great experience of Israeli companies in this area will be helpful to us including training of young generation, education, which will be fundamental factor in order to achieve our goals and protect ourselves from threats.<sup>154</sup>

In early 2023, a *Haaretz* investigation revealed that “over the past seven years, 92 cargo flights flown by Azerbaijani Silk Way Airlines have landed at the Ovda airbase, the only airfield in Israel through which explosives may be flown into and out of the country.” The newspaper added, “Israel has had a strategic alliance with Azerbaijan for the past two decades, and Israel sells the large Shi’ite-majority country weapons worth billions of dollars—and in return, Azerbaijan, per sources, supplies Israel with oil and access to Iran,” with which it shares a long border.<sup>155</sup>

In February 2022, Israeli sources revealed, a meeting between Israel’s ambassador to Washington, Michael Herzog, and the Turkish, Azerbaijani, Kazakh and Uzbek ambassadors. According to the sources, the meeting aimed to establish a mechanism for cooperation between Israel and these countries in both bilateral and regional fields, as well as to establish a common framework for coordination across various levels.<sup>156</sup>

In the same context, the Israeli Foreign Ministry announced that it had hosted two large delegations from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. The Ministry viewed these visits as a reflection of its heightened diplomatic engagement with the countries bordering Iran. As part of the visit program, the delegations held several meetings at the Foreign Ministry headquarters in western Jerusalem, where they received briefings on security matters and the Iranian threat. They also visited the Israeli army’s Southern Command, which oversees GS, where they were briefed on “the threats and security challenges Israel faces.”<sup>157</sup>

According to an investigative report based on official Bangladeshi government documents and international export records, Bangladesh, despite not recognizing Israel or having diplomatic relations with it, acquired advanced Israeli surveillance equipment specifically for its National Telecommunication Monitoring Centre (NTMC), “an arm of the Bangladeshi Interior Ministry responsible for tracking



internet and social media use inside the country, as well as for online censorship and eavesdropping on citizens.” One of the cyber companies that supplied Bangladesh with surveillance programs is Passitora, a firm registered in Cyprus and controlled by Tal Dilian, an Israeli businessman and former intel commander.<sup>158</sup>

Israeli press leaks have also revealed that the Pakistani Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) has been using phone-hacking equipment developed by the Israeli company Cellebrite. Notably, these leaks confirmed that the FIA, along with other Pakistani police units, has been employing Cellebrite software since at least 2012, despite the absence of official relations between Pakistan and Israel.<sup>159</sup>

Chadian President Mahamat Déby said during a visit to open the Chadian embassy in Tel Aviv, “This is a country laden with history and this [is] the land of civilization, of all the monotheistic faiths.” He added, “Chad and Israel are today at a decisive turning point in their relationship.” Netanyahu told Déby that Israel sees in Chad “a tremendously important relations with a major country in the heart of Africa. It is something that we want to carry to new levels, new heights.” He also highlighted the role played by the head of Israel’s Mossad intelligence service in orchestrating this relationship.<sup>160</sup>

In 2023, Israel made numerous attempts to expand normalization with Muslim countries. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its efforts to establish contacts with four Arab and Muslim countries, namely Mauritania, Somalia, Niger and Indonesia, aiming to normalize relations and incorporate them into the “Abraham Accords.”<sup>161</sup>

Later, Israeli Transportation Minister Miri Regev announced that Nigeria’s national airline, Air Peace, commenced direct flights to Israel for the first time on 20/4/2023. This agreement allows airlines from both countries to operate regular flights from Ben Gurion Airport to several destinations in Nigeria, such as Abuja and Lagos.<sup>162</sup>

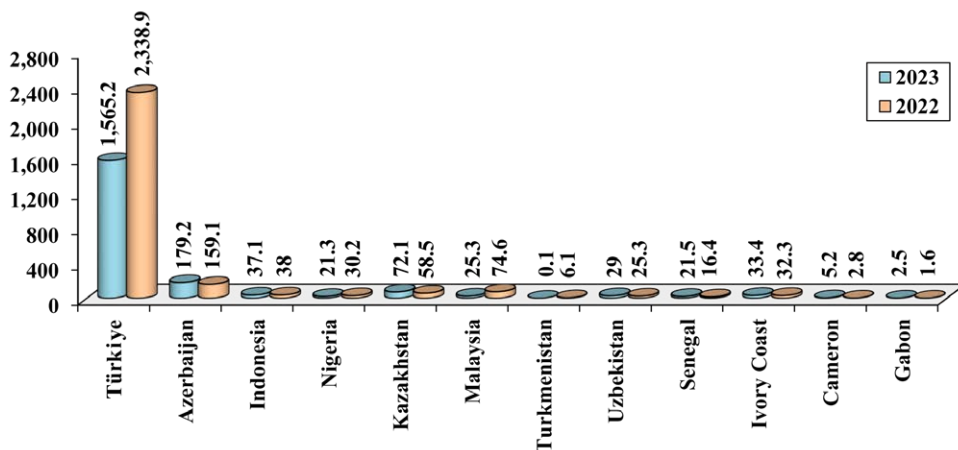
However, all Israeli normalization efforts suffered a significant setback following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, which further revealed Israel’s troubling actions and intensified public pressure to halt normalization.

The following table illustrates the volume of Israeli trade with several non-Arab Muslim countries.

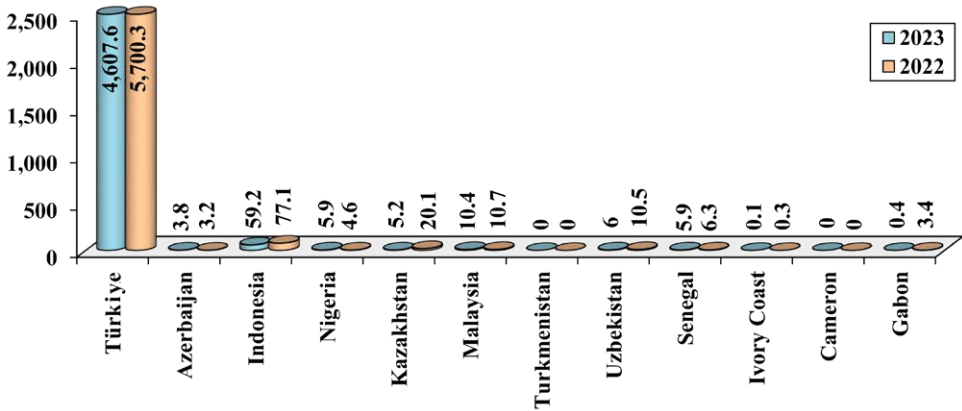
**Table 1/7: Israeli Trade Volume with a Number of non-Arab Muslim Countries 2021–2023 (\$ million)<sup>163</sup>**

Country	Israeli exports to:			Israeli imports from:		
	2023	2022	2021	2023	2022	2021
<b>Türkiye</b>	1,565.2	2,338.9	1,919.1	4,607.6	5,700.3	4,764.3
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	179.2	159.1	119.7	3.8	3.2	1.8
<b>Indonesia</b>	37.1	38	26.1	59.2	77.1	70.7
<b>Nigeria</b>	21.3	30.2	89.5	5.9	4.6	4.9
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	72.1	58.5	32.7	5.2	20.1	1
<b>Malaysia</b>	25.3	74.6	9	10.4	10.7	10
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	0.1	6.1	15.7	0	0	0.2
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	29	25.3	12.8	6	10.5	3
<b>Senegal</b>	21.5	16.4	9.3	5.9	6.3	3.9
<b>Ivory Coast</b>	33.4	32.3	10.3	0.1	0.3	0.3
<b>Cameroon</b>	5.2	2.8	6.6	0	0	0
<b>Gabon</b>	2.5	1.6	3.2	0.4	3.4	0.5

**Israeli Exports to a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries 2022–2023 (\$ million)**



**Israeli Imports From a Number of Non-Arab Muslim Countries  
2022–2023 (\$ million)**



**Conclusion**

The Muslim world’s response to the Palestine issue followed its typical pattern throughout the 2022–2023 reporting period. The OIC remained in a state of “slumber,” characterized by a reliance on traditionalism and formality.

The Turkish model discussed in the report exhibited a more restrained and less reactive approach to events and developments, primarily due to the government’s focus on internal political and economic issues and its efforts to strengthen relations with Israel and the Arab “moderation” countries. However, Operation al-Aqsa Flood and the Israeli war on GS came as a shock to these policies, which had been in place for some time. As the pro-resistance and anti-Israeli public sentiment in Türkiye surged, the government shifted its stance, adopting a clearer and more assertive political position, followed by several punitive economic measures. Nevertheless, the Turkish position remained “measured” and fell short of the expectations shaped by the AKP’s and Erdoğan’s leadership over the past two decades. The party’s position appeared to align more closely with its history after losing the March 2024 municipal elections, where many voters penalized it for its stance on the resistance and the war on GS.

The second model examined in the report, the Iranian model, remained steadfast in its principles by consistently refusing to recognize Israel, rejecting normalization and supporting the Palestinian resistance. Consequently, Operation al-Aqsa Flood

aligned with its objectives, and Iran provided political, media, financial and military support while asserting that the operation was a purely Palestinian-Hamas decision. Iran also encouraged its regional allies to support the resistance, with Hizbullah in Lebanon and Ansar Allah (Houthis) in Yemen playing significant roles, along with contributions from the resistance in Iraq.

The official response in several Muslim countries has been positive, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, Senegal and others. Muslim public engagement has also been significant in many Muslim countries, with large-scale activities and demonstrations taking place in India and Sri Lanka. Additionally, Muslim communities in Europe, US and Australia have actively shown their support for Palestine.

In this context, the momentum for normalization has diminished, leading to an increase in boycotts of Israeli and US goods.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood may represent a historic milestone in the Muslim world's united stance on the Palestine issue and its liberation project.

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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.

This PSR, prepared by 12 specialized professors and researchers, consists of eight chapters that explore various aspects of the Palestinian situation. It examines the internal Palestinian scene, demographic and economic indicators, and the status of Jerusalem and its holy sites. The report also analyzes the courses of aggression, resistance and the peace process, while providing insights into the Israeli political, demographic, economic and military landscape. Furthermore, it discusses Palestinian, Arab, Islamic and international relations. Notably, Operation al-Aqsa Flood has significantly influenced the report's findings and perspectives.

The PSR has consolidated its position as an essential reference in Palestinian studies, serving as an indispensable resource that provides invaluable insights for those interested in Palestinian affairs. Al-Zaytouna Centre aspires for this PSR to make a significant qualitative contribution to the field of Palestinian studies.

Prof. Dr. Mohsen Mohammad Saleh

# The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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