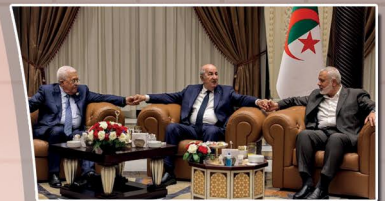


The Palestine Strategic Report 2022 – 2023



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Chapter Eight

*The Palestine Issue and the
International Situation*

The Palestine Issue and the International Situation

Section One: The International Situation Post-Operation al-Aqsa Flood

Introduction

Most researchers in the international relations underscore that discerning shifts in the strategic choices of major powers is less straightforward compared to those occurring in smaller or mid-sized countries. This observation is rooted in the inherent complexities of political systems and the stability of governmental institutions. Turning points in polar countries unfold gradually, spanning extended periods due to the deeply entrenched factors of power, interests and stability. This underscores the need for vigilant monitoring of incremental shifts, their connection to historical trajectories, and the assessment of their cumulative impact to establish a foundation for predicting future implications.

Given the expansive scope of the international stage across political, economic and military realms, our attention will be directed towards the most influential international powers on one hand and the most impactful international organizations on the other. Simultaneously, we will scrutinize trends in international public opinion as a third dimension. The central focus of our inquiry revolves around the Palestine issue and its multifaceted dimensions.

Operation al-Aqsa Flood, occurring in the first weekend of October 2023, marked a pivotal turning point in the local, regional and global dynamics of the Palestine issue. These dynamics are interwoven within a framework of mutual influence, yet our primary focus will be on the international ramifications and the interactions of pivotal international powers with this issue in the first section of the international scene of the Palestine issue 2022–2023.

First: UN

Operation al-Aqsa Flood strategically represented an action to bring the Palestine issue back to the forefront of the international scene. It overshadowed crises such as Ukraine, Taiwan, the civil war in Sudan, and many others. This calls for keeping pace with it in our presentation of the international scene.

1. Security Council

Three attempts were made in the UN Security Council during Operation al-Aqsa Flood to reach an agreement on a specific resolution. Positions within the council varied on two fundamental points:

- a. Ceasefire or reaching an extendable truce.
- b. Condemnation of the Hamas movement for Operation al-Aqsa Flood.

The council held two meetings for discussion and consultation on 8 and 13/10/2023. On 16/10/2023, Russia proposed a Russian draft resolution calling for a ceasefire in GS to provide humanitarian assistance to civilians. However, it received five votes in favour (China, Russia, Gabon, Mozambique and UAE), and four against (US, France, UK and Japan), and six abstentions (Brazil, Ecuador, Ghana, Malta, Switzerland and Albania). As for the second resolution, submitted by Brazil 18/10/2023, it received the approval of 12 members, while Russia and UK abstained from voting. The US vetoed against the passage of the resolution, which stated:¹

Recalling that a lasting solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can only be achieved by peaceful means, based on its relevant resolutions,

1. Firmly condemns all violence and hostilities against civilians...
2. Unequivocally rejects and condemns the heinous terrorist attacks by Hamas that took place in Israel starting 7 October 2023 and the taking of hostages;
3. Calls for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages....
4. Urges all parties to fully comply with their obligations under international law...including in relation to the protection of civilians and civilian infrastructure, as well as humanitarian workers....
5. Strongly urges the continuous, sufficient and unhindered provision of essential goods and services to civilians, including electricity, water, fuel, food, and medical supplies.....

7. Calls for humanitarian pauses to allow full, rapid, safe and unhindered humanitarian access for United Nations humanitarian agencies... and other impartial humanitarian organizations, and encourages the establishment of humanitarian corridors and other initiatives for the delivery of humanitarian aid to civilians;....
10. Emphasizes the importance of preventing spillover in the region....

The third meeting, on 8/12/2023, called for an immediate ceasefire, and was vetoed by the US. Thirteen Security Council members voted in favour, while the UK abstained.²

In the fourth meeting, a Security Council resolution passed on 22/12/2023, with 13 votes in favor while the US and Russia abstained. After stressing that GS “constitutes an integral part of the territory occupied in 1967, and reiterating the vision of the two-State solution,” with GS as part of the Palestinian State, the Security Council stated that it:³

- a. “Calls for urgent and extended humanitarian pauses and corridors throughout the Gaza Strip for a sufficient number of days to enable full, rapid, safe, and unhindered humanitarian access and to enable urgent rescue and recovery efforts.”
- b. “Recalls that civilian and humanitarian facilities, including hospitals, medical facilities, schools, places of worship, and facilities of the UN, as well as humanitarian personnel, and medical personnel, and their means of transport, must be respected and protected.”
- c. Demands that the parties to the conflict facilitate the use of all available routes “in order to ensure that humanitarian personnel and humanitarian assistance, including fuel, food, and medical supplies and emergency shelter assistance, reaches the civilian population,” and it “stresses the importance of respecting and protecting border crossings and maritime infrastructure.”
- d. “Deplores all attacks against civilians and civilian objects.”
- e. Requests the Secretary-General “to appoint a Senior Humanitarian and Reconstruction Coordinator with responsibility for facilitating, coordinating, monitoring, and verifying in Gaza, as appropriate, the humanitarian nature of all humanitarian relief consignments to Gaza,” with an initial reporting within 20 days and thereafter every 90 days through 30/9/2024.

f. “Reaffirms that civilian objects, including places of refuge, including within United Nations facilities and their surroundings, are protected under international humanitarian law, and rejects forced displacement of the civilian population, including children.”

2. General Assembly

The UN General Assembly held two sessions to discuss the war on GS. The first one was on 26/10/2023 adopting a resolution that “calls for an immediate, durable and sustained humanitarian truce” and demands the facilitation of “humanitarian access for essential supplies and services to reach all civilians in need in the Gaza Strip.” The resolution was adopted with 121 votes⁴ (62.6% of the votes) in favor, opposed by 14 countries including US (7.2% of the votes), and 44 countries abstained from voting (22.7%). The total population of the countries that opposed the decision represents 5.2% of the world’s total population.⁵

As for the second meeting held on 12/12/2023, a vote was cast on a resolution that demanded “an immediate humanitarian ceasefire” in Gaza. passed with a large majority of 153 in favour and 10 against including US and Israel, with 23 abstentions.⁶

Upon comparing the two resolutions, it is evident that the support for a ceasefire increased by 32 countries. However, the US maintained its opposition despite 79.3% of the international community endorsing the resolution.

Second: The US

Operation al-Aqsa Flood was a surprise for both official and popular US institutions, especially in terms of planning, precision in execution and the scale of Israeli losses, all achieved in record time. Consequently, US reactions unfolded in three stages: the emotional reaction phase dominated the initial days of the operation, followed by the strategic calculation phase, actively supporting Israel. The third phase aimed at leveraging the course of the battle to prevent its escalation to a regional level, undermining the role of the resistance movement in shaping future Palestinian strategic options, while reinforcing the PA’s role to keep the political settlement option a top priority. This was accomplished as follows:

First Stage: Emotional and Surprise Stage: A report by CRS indicated that the US was shocked by the “apparent [Israeli] intelligence and operational failures” to detect the preparations of the resistance for an operation of this magnitude. President Joe Biden affirmed that “there is no evidence” that Iran helped plan the attack, and “pledged unwavering U.S. support for Israel.” The US administration emphasized the rescue of American citizens believed to be among the captives in GS. There were many US statements regarding the dispatch of US naval forces to the region, as well as various forms of US military assistance to Israel. Additionally, they aim to assert control over GS, while offering reassurances to the Israeli government through warnings directed at Hizbullah and Iran, cautioning them about the repercussions of their engagement in the battle alongside Palestinian resistance. Subsequently, there were reports of Biden “requesting that Congress appropriate up to an additional \$14 billion in U.S. security assistance for Israel.”⁷

Second Stage: Strategic Calculation: It unfolded as follows:

First Dimension: The US position in this stage adhered to its traditional stances, particularly regarding the liquidation of armed Palestinian resistance, its continued commitment to Israeli security and the provision of assistance to Israel, while its call to pave the way for a two-state solution persisted. On the ninth day of the conflict, President Biden said in an interview when asked if he believes that “ Hamas must be eliminated entirely?” Biden responded, “Yes, I do. But there needs to be a Palestinian authority. There needs to be a path to a Palestinian state.” However, Biden cautioned that it “would be a mistake to...for Israel to occupy... Gaza again. We...but going in but taking out the extremists the Hezbollah is up north but Hamas down south. Is a necessary requirement.”⁸ It appears that this was an implicit reference to the Israeli ground war that later occurred and the effective resistance that prevented Israel from achieving strategic security objectives. Subsequently, this war entered phases of de-escalation tied to captives and prisoner exchanges between Palestinian resistance and Israel, with US participation in negotiations to extend these ceasefires, alongside Egypt and Qatar. Israel resumed its military operations on 1/12/2023, despite the US desire to extend the ceasefire. The US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, at the end of his fourth visit to the Middle East since the confrontation erupted on October 7th, indicated the Israeli government agreed with the imperative that “the massive loss of civilian life and displacement of the scale we saw in northern Gaza not be repeated in the south,”⁹

a claim contradicted by media reports, notably continuous reports declared by the UN Secretary-General.¹⁰

Second Dimension: The US strategic calculations include concerns of shifts in war from the local level to the regional. Biden stated that his message to Iran is not to escalate the conflict, a demand reiterated by several US officials. On 14/10/2023, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin announced the deployment of a second aircraft Carrier Strike Group (CSG), stating “The increases to U.S. force posture signal the United States’ ironclad commitment to Israel’s security and our resolve to deter any state or non-state actor seeking to escalate this war.” The USS Dwight D. Eisenhower CSG joined the USS Gerald R. Ford CSG in the eastern Mediterranean, explaining that this move is “to deter hostile actions against Israel or any efforts toward widening this war.”¹¹

It seems that the US concerns about dragging the Gaza war into a regional one was driven by the following:

1. The US concern grows as the conflict in the region widens, with supporting parties entering the war alongside the resistance, raising the prospects of unrest and internal instability due to the prevailing anger and frustration among the peoples and opposition forces.
2. US concerns revolve around the potential repercussions of the escalating conflict in the Middle East, particularly regarding its impact on international focus and the ongoing US involvement in the Ukrainian war. This conflict in Ukraine remained largely overlooked by the majority of news outlets, while the Middle East crisis drew widespread international attention. This divergence prompted the US to perceive a potential alleviation of pressure on Russia, possibly creating an opportunity for the latter to strengthen its position in the Ukrainian theater. The consideration arose, particularly if there were a redirection of military aid from Ukraine to Israel, as hinted at by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.¹²
3. US concerns center around the potential for the conflict to exacerbate the energy crisis, especially in Europe. The widening conflict is expected to impact the flow of oil through the strategic chokepoints of the Strait of Hormuz and the Bab al-Mandab, whether through Iranian involvement or strikes by the Houthi Ansar Allah movement in Yemen, who control over 400 kilometers of the Red Sea coastline. This situation could lead to a significant spike in oil prices during a critical period for the European economy, already grappling with the

repercussions of the Ukrainian war and a decrease in energy purchases from Russia.¹³

Actually, the growing US apprehension was further fueled by the possibility of an escalation towards regional war. This concern intensified as Hizbullah launched attacks from southern Lebanon on Israeli targets, followed by increased assaults on US forces in Iraq and Syria. Furthermore, Ansar Allah in Yemen seized an Israeli cargo ship on 19/11/2023, threatening to target Israeli interests in the Red Sea. Subsequent Yemeni attacks on commercial vessels related to Israel in December, alongside missile launches and drone threats towards the port of Eilat, prompted major commercial companies to suspend their ships' navigation in the Red Sea. This situation led the US to explore the formation of a military alliance to ensure the security of maritime trade in the Red Sea and the Arabian Sea.¹⁴

Third Dimension for the US is the attempt is to manage the repercussions of the Israeli GS siege, along with its humanitarian effects of power cuts, water shortages, and the closure of roads hindering the delivery of humanitarian aid. The US found itself in a dilemma on this front due to the frequent reports from various international bodies, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), World Health Organization (WHO), Médecins Sans Frontières/ Doctors Without Borders (MSF), human rights committees, as well as warnings from intellectuals and journalists about the consequences if Israel continues its blockade and aggression policies on civilians.¹⁵ The US appointed its former ambassador to Türkiye, David Satterfield, as a Special Envoy for Middle East Humanitarian Issues to oversee the arrangements for opening the crossing between Gaza and Egypt for the entry of humanitarian aid, which has been accumulating in Egypt awaiting access. Biden spoke with Netanyahu and 'Abbas urging them to allow humanitarian aid to the region, leading to discussions on successive temporary humanitarian ceasefires to facilitate this process.¹⁶ Nevertheless, all reports suggest that the humanitarian aid delivered during the seven-day ceasefire only addressed an exceedingly small portion of the population's needs.¹⁷

Fourth Dimension encompasses concerns regarding the impact of events in Gaza on US security, viewed through two lenses highlighted by Biden. One pertains to the aspect of "terrorism," while the other relates to the US commitments in the Ukrainian war, stating, "the threat of terrorism in the U.S. has increased due to growing unrest in the Middle East. He said, however, the U.S. can take care of wars in Israel and Ukraine and still maintain its 'international defense.'"¹⁸

Fifth Dimension: Since Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the US reaffirmed its “ironclad support for Israel’s security and right to self-defense,” the urgent need to release both non-Israeli and Israeli captives, and then establishing humanitarian corridor for aid to reach people in GS. Diplomatically, the US position evolved beyond rejecting a “ceasefire” in the Security Council and the General Assembly, it now promotes the concept of a “temporary humanitarian ceasefire.” This includes affirming Gaza as Palestinian territory while restricting resistance forces from remaining in it.¹⁹ However, despite its policy of confusion and double standards, the US continued to refuse endorsing a ceasefire, as evidenced by its veto of a UN Security Council resolution on 8/12/2023, despite two considerations:²⁰

1. The meeting of the Security Council was convened upon the request of the UN Secretary-General António Guterres, to activate Article 99 of the UN Charter. This provision grants him the right to “bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security.”
2. Thirteen security council members voted in favour of the resolution, while the UK abstained.

As for the general framework “theoretically” adopted by the US for conflict resolution, it includes:²¹

1. Considering the two-state solution as the basis for resolving the conflict between Palestinians and Israel (however, this aspect lacks a clear definition of the borders of the Palestinian state, the refugee issue and the status of Jerusalem).
2. Considering unilateral actions by any party unacceptable, and despite viewing settlement activity in WB and Jerusalem as a form of unilateral action, the US position on this matter is shrouded in some mystery.
3. The US labeling all forms of armed resistance as “terrorist acts” and regarding the axis of resistance as “part of Iranian expansion in the region.”
4. Considering that Israeli security represents the highest value in the priorities of US strategy in the region, and any policies or actions must be adapted to serve this high value.
5. Continuing the gradual expansion of normalization of Israeli-Arab relations to transform the conflict from a zero-sum game to a non-zero-sum game.

Most studies and reports agree that the current conditions are not conducive to the two-state solution, the basis of the US-proposed peace settlement, making it no longer feasible. For the Palestinian-Israeli peace talks have been halted since 2014, while the ongoing expansion of settlements, the increase in settlement areas and populations, Israel's refusal to declare its borders, and the rise of the far-right to power in Israel make this solution impossible, especially since the US does not take any practical measures to force Israel in a specific direction. This is in contrast to what it does with Arab countries or others by imposing blockades and political or military pressure when adopting policies the US does not approve of. Additionally, the continued Arab normalization with Israel under pressure on the one hand and political temptation on the other have made the Arab stance more relaxed and passive towards the Palestine issue, leading to a reduction in pressure below the minimum required level.²² This means that the US is not exerting any pressure on Israel to achieve a two-state solution while pressuring Arab countries and the PA to expand the base of Arab recognition and normalization with Israel.

However, there are notable trends in the US government that deserve attention:²³

1. "Angst, unease and outrage" have spread through corners of the US administration due to the strong bias towards Israel, leading to disagreements and protests in official institutions like the State Department, the US Agency for International Development (USAID), and within the two main political parties, Republican and Democratic.
2. Differences in priorities between Israel and the US, especially for the post-war period, where Israel plans to stay in GS or organize affairs regardless of any international considerations. This seems to be less understood by Washington, such as the issue of occupying Gaza or the displacement of Gazans outside the Strip. However, both agree on sidelining the resistance and establishing a "pliant" entity like the PA.
3. There's inconsistency in the US stance. While President Biden "described Netanyahu's coalition as 'the most conservative government in Israel's history... [that] doesn't want a two-state solution,'" and warned it about the loss of global support due to violence against civilians,²⁴ the US voted against a ceasefire three times in the UN Security Council and General Assembly.

Third: The Russian Federation

The Russian position in this round of the Arab-Israeli conflict can be identified as follows:

1. Russia, as previously mentioned, benefited from easing media, political, and to some extent military pressure on it by diverting international attention and effort towards Gaza instead of Ukraine.
2. Due to Russia's "somewhat balanced" relationship with the conflict parties, Russia attempts to present itself as a mediator for crisis resolution. It distributed a draft resolution to the UN Security Council that:²⁵
 - Calls for an immediate, durable and fully respected humanitarian ceasefire;
 - Strongly condemns all violence and hostilities directed against civilians and all acts of terrorism (while the US had requested the Council to condemn only Hamas' actions).
 - Calls for the secure release of all "hostages";
 - Calls for the unimpeded provision and distribution of humanitarian assistance...

While the Russian ambassador to the UN stressed, "We're convinced that the Security Council must act to put an end to the bloodshed and restart peace negotiations with a view to establishing a Palestinian state..."²⁶

However, the Russian Security Council efforts did not result in any ceasefire resolution due to disagreements among its 15 members, and the US attempt to hold Hamas responsible for what happened, supported by some European and a few Latin American countries

Nevertheless, Russian-Israeli relations have become increasingly complicated due to several unfolding events, as Israel rejects Russian positions on multiple fronts:²⁷

1. Russia's urge for a ceasefire.
2. Hosting a Hamas delegation on 26/10/2023, after Operation al-Aqsa Flood.
3. Continuous criticism of Israel's targeting of civilians in GS.
4. Russia's justifications for Operation al-Aqsa Flood, based on:

- President Putin and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s belief that Operation al-Aqsa Flood “did not happen in vacuum,” implying it was a result of Israeli policies towards the Palestine issue, echoing the stance expressed by UN Secretary-General Guterres.
 - The assertion that Operation al-Aqsa Flood resulted from the US paralysis of the peace process and that it has “sidelined other members of the Middle East Quartet.”
 - Following the voting on Security Council resolution, on 22/12/2023, regarding the provision of humanitarian assistance and the protection of civilian, the Russian Permanent Representative to the UN Vasily Nebenzya said, “Had not this document been supported by several Arab countries, we would have undoubtedly vetoed it.” He further explained, “We invariably proceed from the fact that the Arab world is capable of making its own decisions and taking full responsibility for them. This is the only reason why we did not block this document.” Nebenzya then added, “Anyone who votes in favour of the text as it is currently worded would bear responsibility for that, essentially becoming complicit in the destruction of Gaza.”²⁸
5. The enhancement of Russian relations with Iran is perceived negatively by the United States, Israel and certain European countries, particularly due to its implications for Israeli security.

Fourth: The EU

Excluding Britain, which consistently supports Israel, the EU initially showed significant sympathy towards Israel in the conflict. However, European positions on the Arab-Israeli conflict lack consistency among EU members, categorized as follows:

1. Fully supportive nations of Israel, notably Austria, the Czech Republic and Hungary.
2. Nations with lesser support, like Belgium, Luxembourg, Ireland, Malta and Portugal.
3. Countries with fluctuating positions, including France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain and Sweden.

The EU approach to the aftermath of Operation al-Aqsa Flood crisis is delineated by the following indicators:²⁹

1. Initially, there was full solidarity with Israel and condemnation of Hamas. However, later stages saw expressions of discontent towards Israeli policies of displacement and blockade in GS.
2. Following a decision to suspend aid, the EU agreed to triple its humanitarian assistance to GS on the condition that none of it would benefit Hamas. Consequently, the EU increased its humanitarian funding to Gaza from €25 million (about \$27 million) to €75 million (about \$81 million).
3. Concern was voiced regarding the burgeoning of fascist sentiments in Europe (Particularly with a significant Arab population) attributable to the repercussions of Operation al-Aqsa Flood.
4. There is apprehension about the potential surge in migration to Europe, particularly if the conflict escalates to a regional level.

However, the European position gradually shifted as the scale of destruction and civilian casualties widened, prompting EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, to compare widespread destruction in GS to the devastation of German cities during World War II, saying it could be even “higher.” He warned that the recent surge in violence in those areas has allowed an expansion of the Israeli occupation, now “four times greater than it was 30 years ago when the Oslo Accords were signed,” adding that the current situation was making a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “much more difficult.”³⁰

However, the overarching characteristic of European policy on the Palestinian matter is the “challenge of consensus among the 27 members on how to navigate the conflict in Gaza.” Each nation voiced its position independently, exposing disparities, such as Belgium’s notably critical stance towards Israeli policy, in contrast to the positions taken by Germany or France.

It could be argued that Israel’s brutal aggression and unprecedented war crimes against civilians and humanitarian infrastructure reverberated throughout European streets (as we will delve into later). This has placed European governments in a delicate position regarding their previous stances, particularly at the onset of the crisis. Consequently, Britain, known for its staunch support of Israel, opted to

“abstain from voting” on the resolution presented to the Security Council at the behest of the Secretary-General, urging for a ceasefire.

However, the prevailing characteristic of European policy regarding the Palestinian matter is that “the 27 EU member states have been unable to reach a unanimous position condemning war crime.” Instead, each country has articulated its stance independently, highlighting disparities such as the Belgian stance, which is the most critical of Israeli policy, for instance, compared to the German or French position.³¹

It could be argued that the unprecedented level of violence against civilians and humanitarian facilities carried out by Israel has had a profound impact on public opinion across Europe (as we will elaborate later). This has left European governments feeling uneasy about upholding their previous stances, particularly at the outset of the crisis. Consequently, this prompted Britain, known for its steadfast support of Israel, to abstain from voting on the resolution brought before the Security Council at the request of the Secretary-General, calling for a ceasefire.³²

Fifth: China

China’s Foreign Minister Wang Yi reportedly told his Saudi Arabia counterpart Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in a call, “Israel’s actions have gone beyond self-defense and it should heed the call of the international community and the Secretary-General of the United Nations to stop its collective punishment of the people in Gaza.” Also, Wang was reported to have said, in a separate call with his Turkish counterpart, Hakan Fidan, “The exercise of the right of self-defense should abide by international humanitarian law and should not be at the expense of innocent civilian casualties.”³³

Wang Yi said in a phone call with US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken that:³⁴

1. The most pressing task is to stop fighting and end hostilities immediately.
2. Major countries, in particular, should stick to fairness and justice, and prevent a larger humanitarian disaster.
3. Any arrangement concerning the future of Palestine must “reflect the will of the Palestinian people.”

4. The core of the solution is to respect Palestine’s right to statehood and self-determination.

Blinken reiterated “the imperative of all parties working to prevent the conflict from spreading.” Notably, the ministerial discussion occurred amid escalating military actions by Yemeni Houthis against ships bound for Israel via the Red Sea.

The Chinese stances during the crisis included:

1. Exercising veto power against a US resolution in the Security Council due to its lack of a call for a ceasefire.
2. Deeming Israeli military operations in GS as exceeding the bounds of “self-defense.”
3. Drawing upon the Global Security Initiative, announced by Chinese President Xi Jinping in April 2022, China, as articulated by Chinese Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs Nong Rong, “has actively communicated and coordinated with relevant parties, sent its special envoy to visit regional countries, and provided humanitarian assistance to Palestine immediately. We are working for de-escalation of the situation, and to prevent the expansion of the fighting and a humanitarian disaster, in a bid to create conditions for a political settlement.”³⁵

Sixth: India

Perhaps India’s stance, in general, appears to align with that of the US in supporting Israel during Operation al-Aqsa Flood. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, speaking on the third day of the conflict with Netanyahu, stated, “India stands firmly with Israel... strongly and unequivocally condemns terrorism.” However, in response to criticism from the Indian opposition regarding Modi’s remarks, the Indian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi, clarified that India had “always advocated... direct negotiations towards establishing... a sovereign, independent, and viable state of Palestine,” adding that India is aware of a universal obligation to observe international humanitarian law. Describing India’s position on the Palestine issue as “longstanding and consistent,” Bagchi had said the government would like to see negotiations leading to a Palestine state “living within secure and recognised borders, side-by-side (and) at peace with Israel. That

position remains the same.”³⁶ However, India abstained from voting for the UN General Assembly resolution in October 2023, as previously mentioned, which called for a ceasefire.³⁷

It’s commonly known that India is the leading global buyer of Israeli military exports. The governing Hindu party’s policies differ from those of the historically dominant Indian National Congress. India’s position on Indo-Pakistani relations is shaped by the perspective of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), particularly on matters involving Islamic aspects, such as the Palestine issue. Notably, BJP is known for its firm Hindu ideology, especially when addressing issues influenced by Islamic factors.³⁸

Seventh: The African Union

The Chairperson of the African Union Moussa Faki Mahamat has highlighted the denial of the fundamental rights of the Palestinian people as the main cause of the current tensions, urging an end to military hostilities and a return to the negotiating table.³⁹

When considering African countries and their stances on Operation al-Aqsa Flood, we find that they have split into three broad camps:⁴⁰

1. A camp expressed support for Palestine led by South Africa, Zimbabwe and Chad.
2. One that openly backed Israel led by Kenya, Ghana, Zambia, Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of Congo.
3. A neutral camp supporting neither side while calling for de-escalation led by Nigeria and Uganda.

Nevertheless, the comparison of the stances of African countries on the ongoing conflict reveals a clear inclination towards supporting Palestinian demands. The resolution proposal for a ceasefire, voted upon in the United Nations General Assembly at the end of October 2023, garnered support from 35 African countries (excluding African Arab countries). Moreover, certain African countries with historically strong ties to Israel, such as Kenya and Rwanda, have opted to adopt policies opposing Israeli actions.⁴¹

*Eighth: International Public Opinion*⁴²

International public opinion polls reveal various findings regarding the practical impacts of Operation al-Aqsa Flood:

1. US Public Opinion:

- a. Support for Israel fluctuates between 38% and 47%, while backing for the Palestinian stance ranges from 11% to 24%.
- b. Following Israel's response to Operation al-Aqsa Flood between 11/10–9/11/2023, support for Israel saw a decline. Initially, on 11/10/2023, 26% deemed the response "Too much," 44% found it "About right," and 27% considered it "Too little." However, approximately a month later (9/11/2023), the proportion of those viewing the Israeli response as "Too much" increased to 38%, while the percentage perceiving it as "About right" dropped to 38%, with 17% deeming it "Too little." This indicates a waning sympathy towards the Israeli stance, with a 12% increase in those seeing it "Too much," a 6% decrease in those finding it "About right," and a 10% decrease in those advocating for its escalation.
- c. 68% of people agreed that "Israel should call a cease-fire and try to negotiate," a trend contradicting the US government policy.
- d. Surveys indicate that support for the Palestinian stance among youth (aged 18–35) is increasing, with higher levels of support among those who are younger.

2. UK Public Opinion: Surveys conducted before Operation al-Aqsa Flood indicate the following:

- a. The level of sympathy among the British public for both the Palestinian and Israeli sides is equal, with 19% support for each.
- b. Among youth in both the Labour and Conservative parties, sympathy for Palestine is significantly higher. Those aged between 18 and 50 show a 58% sympathy rate for Palestine, compared to only 28% for Israel.

3. EU: It's notable that there's a disconnect between the sentiments of the European public and the policies of the European governments regarding the Palestine issue. A survey conducted before Operation al-Aqsa Flood revealed that this

gap between government and societal views in Europe explains the widespread public reaction to Israeli atrocities against Palestinians.

Table 1/8: Discrepancy Between European Public Opinion and European Governments on the Palestine Issue (%)

Country	Public Sympathy Towards Palestine	Public view/ perception of Government Sympathy Towards Palestine	Public Sympathy Towards Israel	Public view/ perception of Government Sympathy Towards Israel
Germany	15	7	17	38
UK	23	5	10	32
France	22	13	13	25
Spain	31	19	12	20
Italy	19	7	11	27
Denmark	20	8	14	34
Sweden	23	15	16	21
Total Average	21.8	10.5	13.2	28.1

The above table indicates that the European public favors Palestine over Israel by a margin of about 8%, and they perceive their respective governments to exhibit a greater inclination towards supporting Israel, with a margin of approximately 18%. This suggests that the alignment with the general public sentiment in Europe is not distinctly mirrored when dealing with the Palestine issue.

In advocating for a ceasefire, a European survey revealed a persistent gap between official European stances and public sentiment. While 61.4% of Europeans supported a cessation of hostilities and 19.1% opposed it,⁴³ European governments voted on a ceasefire resolution in December, resulting in 17 votes in favor, 2 against and 8 abstentions, in addition to the British abstention.⁴⁴ This marked a significant advancement from the vote on Resolution 27/10/2023, with the number of supporters more than doubling since October.⁴⁵ However, it still falls short of reflecting the level of public support, as illustrated in table 2/8.

**Table 2/8: European Public Opinion Regarding the Ceasefire
(Selected Countries) 10/11/2023–6/12/2023⁴⁶**

Country	Stop and call a ceasefire (%)	Continue to take military action (%)	Don't know (%)
Italy	73	8	19
Spain	70	16	14
UK	59	19	22
France	59	22	19
Germany	57	23	20
Denmark	57	22	21
Sweden	55	24	21

Popular movements, media coverage and social media activity worldwide indicate a palpable shift in international public opinion following Operation al-Aqsa Flood, the Israeli response to it, and the substantial focus of Israeli forces on military attacks targeting civilian and humanitarian sites. The following indicators underscore this transformation:⁴⁷

1. During the period 7–27/10/2023, there were 3,761 demonstrations supporting the Palestinians compared to 529 supporting Israel, meaning that around 86% of the support was in favor of the Palestinians
2. The author conducted a content analysis of newspapers and websites (non-Arabic and non-Islamic), examining 1,080 headlines from Western, Asian, African or Latin American newspapers and websites. These headlines were categorized based on their implications regarding support for either Israel or Palestine. The sample was randomly selected, and upon sorting, it was observed that:
 - 726 headlines supported the Palestinians, accounting for 67.2%.
 - 317 headlines supported Israel, accounting for 29.3%.
 - 37 headlines either supported both parties or opposed them, accounting for 3.5%.

Ninth: The Future Scene

Undoubtedly, the outcomes of the military confrontation will significantly shape future developments. On the Palestinian side, the objectives encompass repelling Israeli forces and securing the release of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Should these goals be accomplished, efforts will shift towards the GS reconstruction. Initially estimated at \$20 billion⁴⁸ during the first month of the confrontation, the cost of reconstruction surged to around \$50 billion⁴⁹ by the end of the second month. This financial burden will pose a considerable challenge for any administration in the region for an extended duration.

The Israeli-US objectives of the war are as follows:⁵⁰

1. Neutralizing armed resistance capabilities in GS, an issue that Israel and the US have declared several times.
2. Replacing Hamas with a revitalized PA and implementing its WB security coordination policies and measures to deter armed resistance in GS.
3. Continuing the joint management of the Rafah crossing between the “revitalized” Gaza Authority, Israel and Egypt, due to its material and security benefits for both Egypt and Israel.
4. Any peace settlement must explicitly and unequivocally mandate the complete renunciation of armed resistance and the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state, regardless of its characteristics.
5. Working to gradually diminish the role of the resistance axis, while concurrently dismantling this axis.
6. Working to broaden the foundation of Israeli normalization with other Arab countries.

Section Two: The International Situation Pre-Operation al-Aqsa Flood

First: UN

Global instability, alongside instability in the Middle East, has contributed to a diminishing prioritization of the Palestine issue. Local, regional and international concerns have overshadowed efforts to address it, as countries focus on organizing their own situations amidst broader geopolitical challenges.

Examining the Middle East Quartet’s activity, entrusted with overseeing the resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, reveals a concerning trend. Since March 2021, the Quartet has not convened any meetings, rendering it inactive for over two years. This stands in stark contrast to the period between 2002 and 2021, during which it held 73 meetings, averaging 3.8 meetings per year. Recently, the Quartet’s engagement has dwindled, with its focus shifting primarily to issuing annual reports summarizing the general conditions of the Palestine issue, predominantly emphasizing the service sector.⁵¹

Russia has accused the US of “freezing” the Quartet’s work, alleging that the US seeks to dismantle international collaboration, particularly following the Ukrainian crisis. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Russian Special Representative of the Foreign Minister on the Middle East Peace Process Vladimir Safronkov have both voiced these concerns. Russia further contends that the EU has aligned with the US in paralyzing the Quartet’s activities post-Ukrainian crisis. According to Kirill Logvinov, Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Russian Mission to the EU Kirill Logvinov, Russia stated, “The Middle East Quartet of mediators is in fact blocked: long before the special military operation started, Washington began to obstruct its work, and now the European Union has actually joined the US in doing so.”⁵² However, the US State Department spokesperson denied “any formal decision regarding the Quartet.” He emphasized the importance of diplomatic efforts involving the parties involved in the conflict that would “help create the conditions for meaningful progress towards that ultimate end goal of a two-state solution.” The spokesperson admitted not recalling last time the Quartet met.⁵³ This confirms the long interruption, as we noted in the previous paragraphs.

The UN resolutions, especially those from the General Assembly, reflect the collective stance of member states, embodying the will of the international community, given the absence of a veto and equal voting rights among members.

Throughout the UN General Assembly’s 77th session from 2022 to 2023, clear support for the Palestinian people emerged, particularly evident in the Assembly’s voting on resolutions concerning Palestine, as shown in table 3/8:⁵⁴

**Table 3/8: Voting on UN General Assembly Resolutions
Regarding the Palestine Issue at the 77th Session**

Res.	Subject	In favor	Against	Abstentions	Notes
77/247	Criticizing Israel's practices in the occupied territories, including East Jerusalem	87	26	53	Most EU countries either abstained or refused
77/208	The right of the Palestinian people to self-determination	167	6	9	High approval rating
77/126	Condemning settlement building	141	7	21	Opponents are a small percentage, and most of them are mini-states
77/124	Palestine refugees' properties and their revenues	153	6	6	Absenteeism is as high as 28 countries
77/123	Assistance to Palestine refugees	157	1	10	Israel was the only one voting against
77/187	Permanent sovereignty of the Palestinian people in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem,	159	8	10	Large support and very modest opposition
77/122	Providing aid to UNRWA	157	5	4	Broad support and very modest opposition
77/25	Rejecting all settlements in the 1967 occupied territories	153	9	10	4.7% opposition
77/24	Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People	149	11	13	About 5.7% opposition
77/23	Division for Palestinian Rights of the Secretariat	90	30	47	Note that the Secretariat's reports include statements condemning both sides of the conflict, which causes countries to hesitate in adopting the report
77/22	Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People	101	17	53	Same observation as above, especially with EU countries

Analyzing the table, we can see that:

1. On average, 138 out of 193 member states support Palestine, representing 71% of countries.
2. Approximately 6% of countries, or less than 12 out of 193, oppose Palestinian rights on average.

3. 43 countries abstained or were absent, comprising approximately 22% of the total.
4. The combined population of the 12 countries consistently opposing Palestinian rights, including the US, Canada, UK, Guatemala, Honduras, the Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau, Vanuatu, Australia, Solomon Islands and Israel, does not surpass 16% of the global population.⁵⁵
5. Israel tops the list of condemned countries in UN resolutions, particularly in the General Assembly. US reports, particularly those of the State Department, tracking UN voting trends, highlight this trend.⁵⁶ In 2015–2022, the UN General Assembly passed 140 resolutions against Israel, including 15 in 2022 alone, and 68 on other countries. Additionally, the UN Human Rights Council adopted 99 resolutions against Israel from 2006 through 2022.⁵⁷

From December 2016 to July 2023, the Security Council primarily held consultations and received reports on the Palestine issue. The only action taken during this period was in February 2023, when on 20/2/2023, the Council adopted a presidential statement, stating, “The Security Council expresses deep concern and dismay with Israel... announcing further construction and expansion of settlements,” and that “The Security Council reiterates that continuing Israeli settlement activities are dangerously imperiling the viability of the two-State solution.”⁵⁸ Russia vetoed two resolutions on Syria in July 2022 and July 2023, while China was absent from both votes.⁵⁹

Second: The US

Key aspects of US Policy Toward the Palestine Issue

Despite significant global changes—particularly the involvement of major international powers such as the US in the Ukrainian-Russian crisis, tensions between the US and China regarding Taiwan, ongoing disputes between the US and Iran over its nuclear program, and conflicting policies in the region—alongside recognized signs of decline in the US’s economic, political and military prowess noted by experts and the public,⁶⁰ the US continues to assert its influential role in the Middle East, particularly concerning the Palestine issue.

During 2022–2023, US policy on the Palestine issue is characterized by:

1. Limiting criticism to mere “verbal criticism” of Israeli actions perceived as “inconsistent” with US positions, while refraining from applying any punitive measures to compel Israel to reconsider its stance. This stance persists despite efforts to portray disagreement with the right-wing Israeli government elected since December 2022, exemplified by statements from US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken during a conference held by the leftist J Street Association, saying, “We will also continue to unequivocally oppose any acts that undermine the prospects of a two-state solution including but not limited to settlement expansion, moves toward annexation of the West Bank, disruption to the historic status quo of holy sites, demolitions and evictions, and incitement to violence.”⁶¹ This criticism lacks accompanying punitive measures against Israel, a departure from the swift actions typically taken against other Middle Eastern countries deviating from US policy. For instance, a significant segment of the US legislative and executive branches endorse a strategy to encircle Iran, involving a pivotal role for the US Central Command (CENTCOM) alongside Israeli forces and those of Iran’s neighboring countries. The reassignment of Israel’s alignment from CENTCOM Europe to CENTCOM Middle East serves as a clear indication that the move aligns with punitive measures against Iran and endeavors to encircle it.⁶²

2. Persisting in supporting Israeli gains, even when they conflict with the explicit positions of the US administration. The administration has neither rescinded President Donald Trump’s decisions regarding Jerusalem, normalization, settlements, the annexation of the Golan Heights, or the Deal of the Century nor has it pursued any political initiatives to enhance its stance toward the Palestinians, such as opening a US diplomatic mission to Palestine. Regarding the issue of Palestinian statehood, while President George W. Bush initially expressed support for it in 2003, subsequent administrations have echoed this support verbally without taking concrete actions to realize it. President Trump acknowledged the concept of a Palestinian state but diluted it by excluding Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley and other key details. The Biden administration has maintained this approach since 2021, merely reiterating commitment to statehood without engaging in substantive efforts towards its establishment. Furthermore, it has persisted in the Security Council in its opposition to granting Palestine full

membership in the UN. In 2021, Biden announced his intention to reopen the Palestinian mission in Washington and the US consulate in East Jerusalem, both of which Trump closed in 2019. But reopening them will be difficult, for a 1987 law circumvented by Trump’s predecessors bans Palestinians from having a mission in the US, and the “Trump administration passed legislation to block future leaders from waiving the restriction. Reopening the consulate in East Jerusalem would require the Israeli government’s approval, which is unlikely,” in light of the consulate’s integration into the US Embassy to Israel, which has been relocated to Jerusalem.⁶³ In June 2022, the US renamed the Palestinian Affairs Unit (PAU) to the US Office of Palestinian Affairs (OPA), considering it an independent body from the US Embassy in Jerusalem. It reports directly to the US State Department, bypassing the embassy, a departure from previous protocol, though this process is essentially a formality.⁶⁴ Furthermore, the US thwarted the adoption of a Security Council resolution denouncing the expansion and construction of new settlements in the 1967 occupied territories. Instead, it opted for a statement urging a six-month “freeze” on settlement construction. However, its endorsement of the freeze was contingent upon the UAE, the drafter of the resolution, condemning Russia for invading Ukraine.⁶⁵

3. Continuing to support and vote in favor of Israeli positions within international bodies, exerting pressure on organizations critical of Israel in various international forums, and issuing ambiguous statements regarding incidents where Israel faces direct accusations, such as the case of the murder of Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Also, the US opposed a resolution in the UN Third Committee (Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Committee) on 17/11/2022, on the “Right of Palestinian People to Self-determination.” This occurred despite the resolution receiving approval from 167 countries, equivalent to 86.52% of UN member states.⁶⁶ The US also opposed a resolution passed by the UN General Assembly at the end of December 2022, calling on the ICJ to “give an advisory opinion on the consequences of the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian territories.”⁶⁷ An analysis of voting practices in the UN indicates that there is a 13–14% voting coincidence between the United States and other member states on matters concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict. This disparity underscores a significant gap between US diplomatic approaches to the Arab-Israeli conflict and those adopted by the broader international community.⁶⁸

4. Sustained efforts to either pressure or incentivize Arab states to further broaden their normalization with Israel, typically intensify during election years. As the US prepares for the 2024 presidential election, this trend is anticipated to intensify further.

5. The ongoing utilization of “financial aid” as leverage over the Palestinian side to compel political concessions, including the persistent marginalization of resistance movements within the Palestinian structure, ongoing security collaboration with Israel, and the discouragement of lodging complaints with international legal bodies against Israeli policies. Meanwhile, in March 2022, “the US Congress authorized \$1 billion in funding for Israel’s Iron Dome air defense system, supplementing the annual \$3.7 billion in security assistance the US provides the country.”⁶⁹

According to the World Bank, the donor aid to Palestine as a percentage of Palestinian GDP decreased from 27% in 2008 to less than 2% in 2022, aligning with the overall trend in US aid to Palestine. Since 2012, the amount of US aid to the Palestinians has been diminishing.⁷⁰ Additionally, a portion of this assistance is allocated to security-related services aimed at thwarting the expansion of resistance in WB, specifically by bolstering the Palestinian security forces and enhancing security coordination. This responsibility falls under the purview of the US Security Coordinator for Israel and the PA (USSC), established in 2005. It is a US-led multilateral mission of more than 75 security specialists from nine North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries based in Jerusalem, with a forward post in Ramallah.⁷¹ It is observed that specific conditions are imposed on US aid to Palestine, where the US law stipulates that:⁷²

1. None of the funds (appropriated in titles III through VI of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022) “may be obligated for salaries of personnel of the Palestinian Authority located in Gaza.”
2. None of the funds “may be obligated or expended for assistance to Hamas or any entity effectively controlled by Hamas.”
3. None of the funds may be obligated or expended for assistance to “any power-sharing government of which Hamas is a member.”

4. None of the funds may be obligated or expended for assistance to any government “that results from an agreement with Hamas and over which Hamas exercises undue influence.”
5. US funds to UNRWA may not benefit any Palestinian refugee who has received military training or participated in armed resistance operations.

The Biden administration has occasionally expressed its intention to reopen the US Consulate-General in Jerusalem, which was integrated into the US Embassy to Israel by the Trump administration in 2019. However, it did not specify the timing of this decision, partly due to opposition from Israeli officials and certain members of Congress. In 2022, the Biden administration appointed the chief of the OPA, which operates under the auspices of the US Embassy in Jerusalem, and reports on substantive matters directly to the Near Eastern Affairs Bureau in the State Department in Washington (as previously mentioned). Additionally, the administration aims to enhance the capacity of Palestinian Authority security forces to address what it perceives as increasing militancy in key areas of the WB through the US assistance program.⁷³

A segment of US assistance is allocated to UNRWA. The average annual US aid to the organization from 1950 to 1999 stood at approximately \$45.2 million, which escalated to \$214.3 million from 2000 to 2022. Notably, the contribution in 2022 surged to \$364 million.⁷⁴

In his September 2022 address to the UN General Assembly, President Biden said that the US “is committed to Israel’s security, full stop.” Prior to that, and during his visit to WB in July 2022, Biden stated that “he envisioned a two-state solution being organized along the 1967 lines...with ‘mutually agreed-to swaps.’” As for Jerusalem, he said, “Jerusalem is central to the national visions of both Palestinians and Israelis.... Jerusalem must be a city for all its people—its holy sites preserving the status quo, with the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan continuing to serve as custodian.”⁷⁵

In May 2022, Israeli forces fatally shot Palestinian-American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Despite substantial evidence implicating Israel in the incident, the US response was limited to the State Department’s call for an independent investigation.⁷⁶

Third: The Russian Federation

Russia, one of the Quartet's parties for the Arab-Israeli conflict settlement, deems the Quartet largely inactive, blaming the US and EU who "decided to unilaterally suspend the activities of the Middle East quartet of international mediators." Amid this stagnation, Russia, holding the UN Security Council presidency in 2023, "advanced an initiative to hold a consultation between Russia, the Arab League and a group of regional states actively involved in the Middle East peace process dossier." It stated that this initiative "proposal is not intended to establish any new formats or bodies. Its goal is to reaffirm and give a fresh impetus to the implementation of... relevant resolutions of the UN Security Council and the General Assembly, the Arab Peace Initiative... and the two-state solution—a framework for Palestine and Israel to coexist in peace and security. Russia is committed to the creation of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital." Additionally, Russia is engaged in diplomatic efforts to reconcile the Palestinian factions.⁷⁷

In 2022–2023, despite Israeli efforts to position itself as a "mediator between the two sides," the Russian-Ukrainian conflict became a nexus influencing both Russian and Israeli policies. A sequence of events unfolded, challenging this diplomatic stance:⁷⁸

1. Israel voted in favor of a UN resolution in March 2022 which condemned Russia's military operation in Ukraine.
2. Moscow issued its sternest warning to "all countries supplying weapons [to Ukraine] should understand that we will consider these [weapons] as legitimate targets for Russia's armed forces." This warning was widely interpreted as directed towards Israel, especially after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu mentioned that Israel was considering providing "other kinds of aid" to Ukraine beyond humanitarian assistance.
3. In July 2022, "Russia's Justice Ministry declared a legal war on the 'Jewish Agency for Israel,' whose mission... has been to facilitate Jewish immigration... [from Russia] to Israel."
4. "Israel responded by bombing Syria at a higher frequency than before," following Russia's decision to tighten control over the Jewish Agency.



5. Due to the decrease in global arms sales by Russia, driven by its deep involvement in the Ukrainian conflict, a surge in demand among Russian customers for Israeli-made weapons was noted. India stands out as one of the leading purchasers, experiencing a notable rise in its military acquisitions from Israel amidst the Ukrainian conflict.⁷⁹

It's important to highlight the recent developments in the relationship between Palestinian armed resistance movements and Russia. Evidence of this includes Russia hosting delegations from Hamas in May and September 2022, as well as a renewed push for a meeting between the two sides in 2023. These developments are particularly notable given the strains in the Israeli-Russian relationship for two main reasons: Israel's stance on the Ukrainian conflict, including its support for condemning Russia and providing aid to Ukraine, and its ongoing attacks on Syria despite Russian warnings about the risks of this policy.⁸⁰

The statement made by Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov at the UN Security Council in April 2023 outlines the Russian position as follows:⁸¹

1. The two-state solution is the most appropriate solution for both parties to the conflict.
2. East Jerusalem should be the capital of an independent Palestinian state.
3. "The right of Israelis to safe and peaceful coexistence with their neighbours and the region as a whole."
4. Rejection of Israeli policies, especially "construction of Israeli settlements..., expropriation of lands, demolition of houses and arbitrary detention."
5. Criticism of "the growing radicalisation of the Palestinian street and a deepening split between the main Palestinian parties, which poses a risk of a military confrontation."
6. The aforementioned objectives can only be attained through direct dialogue between the involved parties, revitalizing the crucial role of the Quartet established by the UN Security Council, and implementing the Arab Peace Initiative.⁸²

However, it's important to note that Russia's financial aid to the Palestinian people is limited. When compared to Western countries, a significant disparity emerges: European countries and the US lead in the percentage of aid provided, whereas Russia ranks 35th in total aid to UNRWA, from the Oslo Accords until 2023.⁸³

Fourth: The EU

The European Parliament can be regarded as the institution representing the official and popular European stances. In its recommendations to the rest of the EU organs, the European position was delineated in a statement on 12/7/2023 as follows:⁸⁴

1. Endorse the two-state solution and recognizing Jerusalem as the capital of both states. The Parliament expresses regret “about the unilateral decisions of some states to recognise Jerusalem as Israel’s undivided capital.”
2. “Work in partnership with Israel, the PA, the United States and Arab partners in the region with a view to preventing the rearming of terrorist groups.”
3. “Reiterate the need for the PA to take charge of the Gaza Strip” and “call on the PA to condemn and sever all links with... terrorist groups active in the region.”
4. “EU financial support for the PA in the area of education should only be provided on the condition that textbook content be aligned with UNESCO standards, and that examples that incite hatred and violence be removed.”
5. Consider the Abraham Accords between Arab countries and Israel as “conducive to the two-state solution.”
6. Continue “to underline that Israeli settlements in the oPt are illegal under international law,” advocating for a boycott of their products, calling for an immediate end to “the eviction of Palestinian families and the demolition of their homes,” and demanding that Israel, as the occupying power, stop “illegally exploiting water and land resources in the [occupied Palestinian territories] oPt.”
7. Highlight the necessity for Palestinian presidential and legislative elections, and urge Israel to respect Palestinian civil society organizations.
8. Advocate for the reopening of Palestinian educational institutions in East Jerusalem that were closed by Israel.
9. Call for an end to all Israeli restrictions on the Palestinian healthcare, education and trade sectors.
10. Maintain support for UNRWA.
11. Commit to helping the ICC to move forward with investigations into war crimes in oPt.

It’s important to mention that the EU stance on the two-state solution didn’t materialize into concrete actions but rather served as a means to urge Palestinians to pursue the peace process. Unfortunately, it lacked corresponding pressure on the Israeli side, which hindered progress. An academic examination of European policy positions (EU countries) concerning the Palestine issue revealed that:⁸⁵

1. The quantitative and comparative measurement of EU statements on the Palestine issue lacks consistency with voting behavior of EU countries at the UN, including the General Assembly, the Security Council and other UN bodies. It appears to be based on the lowest common denominator.
2. The most notable feature of European voting on important issues on the Palestine issue is the predominance of “abstentions or absenteeism” when voting.
3. When the world is divided into political regions, the highest levels of congruence with the US in UN voting on issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict are as follows:

Table 4/8: Voting Coincidence with the US on the Palestine Issue⁸⁶

Region	Percentage (%)
Africa	8
Asia-Pacific	15
Eastern European	16
Latin American and Caribbean	11
Western European and Others	25

Fifth: China

The political transformation in China since 1978 marked a profound shift in Chinese strategy on both domestic and international levels. China became less ideological and revolutionary, with a growing pragmatism in its foreign policy. This paved the way for the establishment of diplomatic relations and recognition of Israel in 1992. Since then, Sino-Israeli relations have steadily developed across various sectors.

Sino-Israeli relations and China's stance on the Palestine issue in 2022 and 2023 can be understood within the context of broader shifts in Chinese foreign policy. Analysts have observed that China's success in fostering closer ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as restoring diplomatic relations between them, suggests a growing Chinese interest in expanding its diplomatic engagement in the Middle East. This interest extends particularly to the Palestine issue, given China's increasing strategic interests in the region, which now surpass those of traditional major powers like the US. However, this proactive Chinese diplomacy is accompanied by a notable decline in China's positive image among the Israeli public from 2019 to 2022, dropping by 18%.⁸⁷ This decline in public opinion poses challenges to China's role in the Arab-Israeli conflict.

During PA President Mahmud 'Abbas's visit to Beijing in 2023, and prior to that, the PA Foreign Minister met with his Chinese counterpart in 2022, China expressed a willingness to revive stalled peace process efforts for several reasons:⁸⁸

1. China seeks to achieve stability in the region, recognizing the impact of instability on the accelerated implementation of its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).
2. It desires to stabilize the region to ensure the continuous flow of crude oil from the Middle East, which covers 40% of China's needs.
3. China aims to bolster its positive image among Muslim communities, which have often raised concerns about discrimination against the Muslim minority in China.
4. China intends to expand its commercial activities in the region. "At the 10th Arab-China business conference in mid-June 2023, China made over 30 investment agreements worth \$10 billion," in addition in 2022, the volume of Arab-Chinese trade reached \$430 billion.
5. Chinese exports to Palestine increased from \$6.15 million in 2000 to \$248 million in 2021.

Sixth: India

Most scholars in the field of international relations tend to view India as one of the emerging powers in the global system. Its recent collaboration with Saudi Arabia to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economics Corridor, connecting

India to Europe via the Arab region serves as a testament to India's expanding influence.

However, it is worth noting that the Indian government, led by the Hindu nationalist BJP since 2014, has significantly bolstered its ties with Israel. Moreover, its political stances diverge from those of the Indian National Congress, aligning more closely with the prevailing international trend, “supporting all efforts to resume direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine to achieve a two-State solution.”⁸⁹

The 2022–2023 period saw a significant increase in mutual visits between Indian and Israeli officials at high levels. The India-Israel bilateral trade progressed rapidly from \$200 million in 1992—when full diplomatic relations were established between the two countries—to \$10.7 billion.⁹⁰ Additionally, there was a notable uptick in India's imports from Israel of arms, climbing from under \$60 million in the 2018–2020 period to approximately \$162 million in the 2021–2023 period.⁹¹

The Indian government has taken a stringent stance against fostering solidarity between Kashmiri Muslims and Palestinians. This is particularly evident as the ruling Hindu party BJP exhibits anti-Islamic religious inclinations, further complicating relations between Palestine and India.⁹²

During the fiscal year 2022/2023, the Indian government presented \$2.5 million in aid to UNRWA, accounting for 50% of India's total aid to Palestine during that period.⁹³

Seventh: Japan

Japanese foreign policy adopts the two-state solution, rejects Israeli settlement policies and the practice of excessive violence against the Palestinian people,⁹⁴ and seeks, within its mercantilist tendency, not to get involved in the circumstances of the Palestine issue except to the extent that it reflects the general direction of the international will on the one hand, and in a way that does not affect its keenness to access energy resources and penetrate the Arab markets on the other hand. The volume of diplomatic activity between Palestine and Japan confirms this trend. During the years 2022 and 2023, three official visits took place between the two parties (the visit of Japanese Parliamentary Vice-Minister for Foreign Affairs to Ramallah, the visit of former Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah to

Japan, and the visit of the Palestinian Minister of Tourism and Antiquities to Japan).

Japan participates in providing aid to the Palestinian people, but the scale of this assistance does not match Japan's economic capacity. Interestingly, it's comparable to Chinese aid in this aspect, despite China's lower ranking in aid volume relative to its economic strength. Japan holds the fifth position globally in terms of financial assistance to the Palestinians.⁹⁵ In 2022, Japan allocated \$3.35 million to GS to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In April 2023, \$1 million was allocated to repair damages in the Jenin refugee camp caused by an Israeli incursion.⁹⁶ Since the Oslo Accord in 1993, Japan's total aid to Palestinians amounts to \$2.3 billion, averaging around \$77 million annually. A key project in Japan's engagement with the conflict parties is the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity Initiative, involving Palestine, Jordan, Israel and Japan. By 2023, 15 factories in the Palestinian Jordan Valley were operational, with eight more preparing to launch under the initiative.⁹⁷

The Israeli-Japanese relations are characterized by the following observations:⁹⁸

1. Military sphere: Israel and Japan signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to continue strengthening "bilateral defense cooperation, including defense equipment and technology cooperation."
2. Japan's share of foreign investments in Israel rose to a record 17% by mid-2023, up from 12.8% in 2022.
3. Israel exports to Japan totaled \$906 million in 2022, while Israel imports from Japan amounted to \$1.4 billion.
4. The US-Japan voting coincidence on the Palestine issue is 18%, which is 7% lower than the 25% US-European voting coincidence. This indicates that Japan's position is less aligned with US policy compared to European countries.

Eighth: International Public Opinion

If we consider the UN as the public expression of international will, only 28% of countries in 2023 view the UN negatively. In contrast, 62% of people in Israel have an unfavorable opinion of the UN, a 4% increase since 2007, making Israel the most dissatisfied country with the UN in the world.⁹⁹

If we consider that the primary support for Israel comes from Western powers, public opinion polls in these countries during 2022–2023 indicate a decline in support for Israel, as shown in the following table:

Table 5/8: Percentage of Sympathizers with Israel and the Palestinians in the US and Western European Countries 2023¹⁰⁰

Country	% Sympathizers with Israel	% Sympathizers with the Palestinians	Notes
US (2022)	55	41	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The younger the age, the higher the opposition. • Democrats exhibit twice the level of opposition compared to Republicans.
Germany	17	15	A significant portion of European society tends to harbor pessimism regarding the prospects of peace between Arabs and Israel, with only 13.7% expressing optimism.
Sweden	16	23	7% difference in favor of the Palestinians.
Denmark	14	20	6% difference
France	13	22	9% difference
Spain	12	31	19% difference
Italy	11	19	8% difference
UK	10	23	13% difference

Ninth: Future Impact of Global Stances on Palestine

To define the future possibilities of the international and regional environment of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it is necessary to define this environment in the current period. At the international level, six central powers shape the global system, each guided by a strategic framework influencing its policies and direction in the short term. This framework will also be reflected in its policies regarding the Palestine issue and the utilization of this conflict to serve these orientations, as follows:

1. **US:** The US is an empire in decline, and its current strategic goal is to halt or slow down this decline. This entails relaxing its international commitments, something that worries Israeli decision-makers in the foreseeable future.
2. **Russian Federation:** The disintegration of the Soviet Union constituted a security concern for the current Russian administration. They feared that the disintegration would spread into Russia and affect the republics inhabited by significant proportions of ethnic minorities, which total about 22% of Russia's total population. Therefore, its strategy is based on internal societal cohesion and ensuring a geographical environment adjacent to its borders that does not include hostile forces in the foreseeable future. This makes Russian diplomacy wary of Western policies, creating a dilemma for Israeli diplomacy in reconciling its historical association with colonial powers and Russia's restoration of its international status, along with all the circumstances that this implies for Israeli policy.
3. **China:** China is often characterized as a "nationalist" state with aspirations to transition into an empire, albeit through peaceful means, despite significant increases in its military capabilities. This ambition is articulated in the "peaceful rise" theory. Perhaps its strategic projects in the Middle East clearly indicate a potential push for a greater diplomatic role in fostering a peaceful resolution to the Arab-Israeli conflict. This is especially notable following its success in easing tensions between Iran and Saudi Arabia. However, such endeavors may unsettle Israel, as they could entail regional concessions or lead to it bearing the consequences of the failure of the Chinese endeavor.
4. **EU:** The EU grapples with two contrasting trends. On one hand, there's a resurgence of nostalgia for the nation-state, particularly evident in the rise of right-wing movements across Europe. On the other hand, there's a push towards federalism, advocating for the development of the EU into a United States of Europe. Interestingly, Israel appears to garner stronger support from the latter trend, despite certain contextual challenges.
5. **Japan:** Japan embodies a contemporary model of the Mercantilist state, with its advocacy for resolving the Arab-Israeli conflict motivated by the aim to reallocate military spending in the Middle East, where it lacks competitive edge against other global powers, towards civilian investments. Leveraging its advanced technology and economic prowess, Japan can effectively compete

internationally in civilian sectors. Such Mercantilist principles could offer Israel a strategic advantage by fostering a shift in the Arab-Israeli conflict dynamics from a zero-sum game to one of mutual benefit.

6. **India:** The BJP ascension signifies a notable departure in India's foreign policy stance, transitioning from "positive non-alignment" to a more assertive international posture. The proposed "India-Middle East-Europe Economics Corridor" project embodies this shift, potentially aligning India with global ambitions. While Israel may welcome this development, contingent upon the BJP's continued governance, it also harbors concerns. The project's realization could inadvertently escalate Sino-Indian tensions, particularly in the Arab East and Gulf region, which could force Israel to choose between these two Asian powers.

It is evident that the preceding landscape is intertwined with a set of indicators warranting attention:

1. The gradual evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict from state-led confrontations to those spearheaded by revolutionary movements. Presently, most Arab countries are not directly engaged in conflicts with Israel, as management of the conflict has transitioned to entities such as Palestinian resistance groups within Palestine, Hizbullah in Lebanon, Ansar Allah in Yemen, and the Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq. The Israeli actions during Operation al-Aqsa Flood may have contributed to a growing acceptance within international public opinion of these forces confronting Israel.
2. There appears to be a disconnect between political backing and economic aid among major powers. Russia and China, despite offering significant political backing for Palestinian rights, provide relatively minimal economic assistance to Palestine, especially to the PA in Ramallah. Conversely, Western powers and Japan, while less politically supportive of Palestine, contribute significantly more in economic aid to the region. This misalignment suggests a disconnect between political stances and actual financial support for Palestine.
3. Operation al-Aqsa Flood heightened global awareness of Palestinian suffering and underscored the extent of Israeli indifference to the human dimension. These events are expected to have lasting effects, particularly among younger demographics who represent the future leaders and elites of society.

Endnotes

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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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