



European Security and Defence Assembly
Assembly of Western European Union

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2 December 2009

FIFTY-SEVENTH SESSION

European security and the Middle East

REPORT

submitted on behalf of the Political Committee
by Josette Durrieu (France, Socialist Group), Rapporteur

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Report transmitted to: the President of the Council of WEU; the Secretary-General of the WEU; the President of the Council of the European Union; the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy; the President of the European Commission; the EU Commissioner for institutional relations and communication strategy; the Presidents/Speakers and the Chairmen of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and European Affairs Committees of the 39 national parliaments represented in the Assembly; the Presidents of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Baltic Assembly, the Nordic Council, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation, the CIS Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation; the President of the European Parliament; the Secretaries General of the Parliamentary Assemblies of the Council of Europe, NATO and the OSCE.

European security and the Middle East

REPORT¹

*submitted on behalf of the Political Committee by Josette Durrieu (France, Socialist Group),
Rapporteur*

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MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

¹ Adopted by the Committee on 1 December 2009.

RECOMMENDATION 843²
on European security and the Middle East

The Assembly,

- (i) Considering that the settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remains an absolute prerequisite for the establishment of peace and stability in the Middle East and that under no circumstances should it be made contingent upon a solution first being found to the Iranian nuclear question;
- (ii) Considering that it is urgent to stabilise this region as it is a breeding ground for religious fundamentalism and terrorism, which is spreading beyond the Taliban, Afghanistan and central Asia;
- (iii) Considering that the existence of two states – the state of Israel and the state of Palestine – is a precondition for settlement of that conflict;
- (iv) Considering, however, that a secure future for the state of Israel depends on the creation of a viable Palestinian state and that no other outcome would lead to lasting peace;
- (v) Considering that the creation of a sovereign Palestinian state requires first and foremost the cessation of all violence, the release of prisoners on both sides – in particular Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit – a lasting ceasefire, a lifting of the Gaza blockade and a freeze on settlement activity, including in East Jerusalem;
- (vi) Considering that there can be no prospect of a Palestinian state unless there is reconciliation among the Palestinian people and that the only way to end the confrontation between Fatah and Hamas that began after the 2006 elections – whose results the international community did not recognise – will be to organise fresh parliamentary elections the results of which should this time be recognised by the international community;
- (vii) Considering therefore that it will be necessary to talk to all the protagonists in this conflict and that the speaking partners must therefore include all relevant parties on the Israeli and Palestinian sides and Lebanon and Syria;
- (viii) Considering that Egypt, which signed a separate peace agreement with Israel, is an indispensable mediator making every effort to bring about reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, concerned about the fundamentalism of the Muslim Brothers allied to Hamas and, as a country on the border with the Gaza Strip, concerned also about the current trafficking there, particularly of arms, and the future of this area;
- (ix) Considering the Quartet roadmap and the Arab Peace Initiative adopted by the Arab League at its 2002 Beirut summit to be constructive proposals which have the support of all the Arab states and remain relevant and worthy of implementation; but considering also that there is a need for this peace initiative to include a road map with specific details for its eventual, step-by-step implementation;
- (x) Considering that Turkey has been able to strike a balance in its relations with all the Muslim states and Israel, with which it has historic ties; that it talks to both Syria and Iran and that for all these reasons is in high demand as an acknowledged mediator;
- (xi) Considering that Syria is concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a number of ways: with respect to the Golan and as regards its support for the Palestinians and for armed resistance movements (Hamas and the Lebanese Hezbollah); that it has good relations with Iran and has the potential to be a major player for peace in the region provided that the protection of its interests is guaranteed;
- (xii) Considering furthermore that any nuclear programme undertaken by Iran as a signatory state to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should be exclusively for civilian purposes and subject to the International Atomic Energy Authority (IAEA) control regime;

² Adopted by the Assembly on 2 December 2009 at the 2nd sitting.

- (*xiii*) Considering the desirability of achieving a solution to the Iranian nuclear problem by peaceful and diplomatic means, so as to avoid a military attack against that country's nuclear facilities leading to a regional crisis that is difficult to contain; and that should negotiations fail, tough economic sanctions must be strictly applied;
- (*xiv*) Considering, on the other hand, that there is a need to widen the dialogue with Iran on other concerns of mutual interest as a means of building confidence;
- (*xv*) Considering that a new definition of nuclear proliferation is necessary in order to draw a distinction between civil and military programmes and the different technologies and fissile materials;
- (*xvi*) Considering that, although nuclear deterrence is an integral part of the balance of forces, a denuclearisation of the region would offer the best long-term guarantee of stability and lasting peace and would also be in line with US President Obama's commitment to seeking security in a world without nuclear weapons;
- (*xvii*) Considering that the status quo serves only the interests of the present Israeli Government and of Hamas, not the goal of peace;
- (*xviii*) Considering that the Quartet, Europe in particular, should speak with a single voice so as to bring to bear every means of pressure to re-launch the peace process;
- (*xix*) Considering that, in agreement with the parties involved, the blockade on Gaza should be lifted and that the southern border of the territory where so much arms trafficking goes on should be brought under international control with adequate guarantees of Israel's security;
- (*xx*) Considering that due account should be taken of the recommendations of the Goldstone report;
- (*xxi*) Considering that Israel must not further extend or reinforce settlements, including in East Jerusalem, and be ready to negotiate substantial withdrawal of its existing settlements in the framework of a peace agreement;
- (*xxii*) Considering that Hamas must halt all violent action against the civilian population, the firing of rockets on Israel and the importation of armaments;
- (*xxiii*) Considering that reconciliation between Palestinians must be achieved by holding new parliamentary elections that could lead to the formation of a national authority or government which would be the sole legitimate speaking partner in negotiations;
- (*xxiv*) Considering that the right of return for refugees should be recognised in principle, thus opening the way to negotiations on its implementation by various means;
- (*xxv*) Considering that the countries of the region directly concerned, in particular Jordan, Lebanon and Syria, should begin negotiations with the Palestinian refugees on their territory to ensure that military bases set up outside the camps are dismantled;
- (*xxvi*) Considering that the current situation is a threat to the stability of the entire zone, and hence to peace; and considering also, with High Representative Javier Solana, that, if the parties concerned cannot make further headway, the international community should bring a solution to the table,

RECOMMENDS THAT THE COUNCIL INVITE THE WESTERN EUROPEAN UNION MEMBER STATES, AS MEMBERS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION, TO:

1. Continue giving priority to Middle East policy in order to achieve the settlement of the central Israeli-Palestinian conflict without making this contingent upon a solution to the Iranian nuclear issue;
2. Continue to use all possible means to encourage the necessary reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas;
3. Encourage Palestinians to fix an agreed date for fresh parliamentary elections, so that a national authority or government can be formed which is able to be a negotiating partner with the legitimacy required to reach a peace agreement with Israel;

4. Ensure that the Quartet, a coordinating and operational body, continues to insist on the recognition by all Palestinian factions of the state of Israel, the cessation of violence against civilian populations and of the firing of rockets into Israel, and on the observance of earlier agreements reached between the PLO and Israel; and that at the same time it also prevails upon Israel to freeze all settlement including in East Jerusalem;
5. Have the blockade of Gaza lifted on both the Israeli and Egyptian sides and the border and all cross-border traffic placed under international control;
6. Encourage Egypt and Turkey to pursue their role as mediators for the various protagonists in the Middle East conflict;
7. Encourage the Arab League to persevere in its efforts to keep on the table the Arab Peace Initiative adopted in Beirut in 2002, as the framework for negotiations that should quickly be re-launched, and to bring forward proposals for making progress to a settlement;
8. Encourage Syria to do more to sway matters decisively in favour of an end to war, insecurity and instability in a region; where it is a power of significance;
9. Encourage all efforts to ensure that the Iranian nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes and subject to the IAEA control regime;
10. Ensure that the Iranian nuclear issue is resolved exclusively by peaceful and diplomatic means and that, should negotiations fail, economic sanctions are strictly applied but at the same time a wider confidence-building dialogue continues to be pursued;
11. Encourage unremittingly the prospect of a revision of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty to include a precise and specific definition of nuclear proliferation and end a selective and unfair approach that carries within it the seeds of permanent conflict;
12. Envisage the option of the international community putting a solution on the table if the parties concerned in the Middle East cannot make further headway.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

submitted by Josette Durrieu, Rapporteur (France, Socialist Group)

I. Introduction

The situation in the Middle East is complicated and is not improving:

Three issues dominate within the region: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Iranian military nuclear programme, the problem of building stability and security in Iraq and, of course, the situation in Afghanistan, which this report does not deal with.

Iraq is crucial for stability in the area and, at the present time, a number of questions are in order. Can we talk of genuine pacification, in view of the perceptible improvement in security, belied however by the recent attacks? And will it survive the withdrawal of American troops between now and December 2011?

Stability and democracy in Iraq, its ability to play a role in the region, cannot be taken as read. The same is true of the relative stability within the country between Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds. Another important factor is reconstruction in Iraq.

As far as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is concerned, the peace process would appear to have reached a dead end. The prospects for a peaceful two-state solution no longer seem realistic.

Palestinian lands are occupied and walled off, including even Jerusalem which is cut off from the ruins of Gaza. Most tragic of all is that the Palestinian people are divided and have forgotten that their struggle and resistance were motivated by the desire to have a state of their own.

And yet the challenge is twofold:

- creating a Palestinian state is the only way to guarantee peace and security in the region. The Israel-Palestine conflict is at the heart of East-West relations. It is central to them.
- the continuing existence of the state of Israel depends on the creation of the Palestinian state.

What will happen next? No one can tell. One thing is sure: we have reached “a moment of truth”. There were high hopes of the new US President and of his first speeches. It was believed that it could be Obama's moment in the Middle East. But the United States' U-turn has come as a surprise and disappointment.

So how are we to save Israel and peace? Who are the main actors in all this? Does Europe have a central role to play?

Security and terrorism – which feeds off this conflict – also remain a problem. The destinies of these states are bound up with all these concerns.

II. Israel

A major challenge: twenty years of “peace process”³

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process began in 1991, in the aftermath of the first Gulf war, with the Madrid Conference when Israel agreed to recognise the PLO as a negotiating partner. The process includes all the diplomatic agreements concluded since then with a view to finding a solution to the conflict.

The Oslo Accords, signed on 13 September 1993 in Washington (between Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin, in the presence of Bill Clinton), provided for mutual recognition of the PLO and Israel and for Palestinian self-rule for an interim period of five years. The Oslo process was completed in 1994 and gave the new Palestinian National Authority limited powers. The Oslo II Accords, signed in 1995, divided the West Bank into three areas over which the Palestinian Authority had varying degrees of control.

The Camp David Summit, from 11 to 25 July 2000, brought together Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat, in the presence of Bill Clinton. Three points of disagreement prevented the two parties from reaching a compromise: the extent of territorial concessions, the status of Jerusalem and the right of return for refugees. Nevertheless, they agreed on certain principles that would form the basis of future negotiations: to seek a just and lasting solution; to commit themselves to resolving existing problems as soon as possible and create an environment conducive to negotiations, free from pressure, intimidation and the threat of violence; to undertake to avoid unilateral actions that would prejudice the outcome of future negotiations; to recognise the United States as a vital partner in conducting the peace process.

The Clinton Peace Plan of 23 December 2000 set out the “Clinton Parameters” for a solution to the problem (Shlomo Ben-Ami, Saeb Erekat and Madeleine Albright were party to the talks). The parameters were discussed at the Taba Summit in January 2001. At a later date the delegations admitted that they had never been so close to reaching an agreement.

The Arab Peace Initiative of June 2002 was proposed at the Beirut Summit of the Arab League by Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. It called for a return to the 1967 borders, including in Syria and the Lebanon, in exchange for mutual recognition, the normalisation of diplomatic relations and a peace agreement between Israel and all the Arab states. The Israeli Government refused to consider a complete withdrawal from the West Bank and East Jerusalem and was strongly opposed to the mass return of Palestinian refugees to Israel.

The road map of 30 April 2003: the “road map” for peace drawn up by the Quartet (the United States under the then newly elected President George W. Bush, the European Union, Russia and the UN) called for the creation of a Palestinian state by 2005, on condition that acts of terrorism should cease and democratic elections be held in the Palestinian Territories.

The Geneva Initiative of 1 December 2003 was authored principally by former Israeli minister Yossi Beilin and former Palestinian minister Yasser Abd Rabbo. It provided for shared sovereignty over Jerusalem, the withdrawal of Israel from 98% of the West Bank and all of the Gaza Strip, and resolving the issue of movement between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Compensation was put forward as a solution to the problem of the right of return of refugees. The document was approved by Arafat and rejected by Sharon.

The Sharm el-Sheikh Summit of 8 February 2005, which brought together Ariel Sharon and Mahmoud Abbas in the presence of Hosni Mubarak and King Abdullah II of Jordan, was essentially a ceasefire agreement that put an end to the second intifada and provided for an exchange of prisoners.

The 2005 Israeli Unilateral Disengagement Plan from Gaza, adopted on 6 June 2004 by the Israeli Government, stipulated that the Israeli army would monitor the border between Egypt and Gaza, would remain in control of the borders surrounding the Gaza Strip, its coastline and airspace, and

³ Source: Information report on the situation in the Middle East by Jean-François Poncet and Monique Cerisier-ben Guiga, French Senate Doc 630, 25 September 2009.

would retain the right to conduct military operations inside the territory. Moreover, Gaza would remain dependent on Israel for its water supply, communications, electricity and sewage system. There would be no tax on imports to the Territory, exports would be taxed. Israel would collect customs duties on foreign products entering Gaza. The shekel would still be used.

The Annapolis Declaration of 26 November 2007 was the first time that the “two state solution” was officially agreed upon as a means of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

From 2004 to 2006: Ariel Sharon

Ariel Sharon, elected Prime Minister in March 2001 set out his agenda on a unilateral basis, and in 2004 announced his own road map. This was a plan in four stages, an aspect of which was the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip (8 000 Israelis were in fact withdrawn in August 2005) and from certain of the West Bank settlements; at the same time, he proposed the occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The Quartet’s road map was clearly violated, but the international community did not react.

What was Mr Sharon trying to achieve? The evidence confirms the facts. He had no intention of negotiating the third phase of the Quartet’s road map. He did not wish for an independent, sovereign Palestinian State. He did not wish the Palestinian territories to be joined up. In short, he was not looking for **an end to the conflict**. His desire was for any agreement to be both transitory and provisional. **He did not wish to see the creation of a viable Palestinian State.**

In 2005, Mr Sharon left the **Likud Party** and created his own, **Kadima**, which also attracted the veteran Labour leader Shimon Peres. However, at the end of that year he suffered two strokes, and his deputy Prime Minister Ehud Olmert took over on 16 January 2006.

The legislative elections of 28 March 2006 resulted in a narrow victory for Kadima, led by Ehud Olmert, which won 29 seats (out of 120) in the Knesset ahead of the Labour Party (Centre Left) which won 19, the Sephardic Orthodox Shass 12, and Likud (Nationalist Right) 12 (against 38 seats in 2003). The Extreme Right Russophone party of Avigdor Liberman won 11 seats, the Party of National Unity (ultra Orthodox religious) 9, the Pensioners Party 7, the Unified Jewish Torah Party (ultra Orthodox religious) 6, and Meretz (Left) 5. The parties of the minority Israeli Arab community won 10 seats between them: Ra’am Ta’al 4, Balad 3 and Hadash 3. Overall voter participation was 63.2%, the lowest since the foundation of Israel.

The new government of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that won a vote of confidence on 4 May 2006 was a **disparate coalition** of Kadima, the Labour Party, the Pensioners’ Party and the religiously Orthodox Shass. The Leader of the Labour Party, **Amir Peretz**, negotiated the appointment of seven members of his party to the government, becoming himself the Minister of Defence.

Ehud Olmert and his Defence Minister Amir Peretz felt obliged to demonstrate their martial qualities. Each has been accused of rashness and adventurism in the war against Hezbollah in Lebanon in 2006.

Ehud Olmert proposed a plan to fix Israel’s eastern frontiers by 2010, with or without Palestinian agreement, accompanied by a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank. President Bush accepted that this project might eventually be a solution, but declared that he remained a partisan of “a negotiated settlement on the final status” in accordance with the road map. The failure of the war against Hezbollah in the Lebanon weakened the Israeli Government to the point that Prime Minister Ehud Olmert felt obliged to enter into an Alliance with Israel Beitenou an extreme right-wing party. He appointed its leader, Avigdor Liberman to the post of Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Strategic Affairs. The Olmert government then had a majority of 78 members of parliament out of 120.

In 2004, **Avigdor Liberman** launched the “Liberman Plan”, also known as the “Population Exchange Plan”. His plan proposes an exchange of territory as well as of population.

From 2007-2009: Ehud Olmert

On 13 June 2007, Shimon Peres was elected Israel's President by 86 votes in favour to 23 against. He officially took office on 15 July, replacing Moshe Katzav, who had been suspended on account of his involvement in instances of rape and harassment.

When Hamas took power in the Gaza Strip in June 2007, Ehud Olmert's government decided to impose economic sanctions on the territory, while setting a number of Palestinian prisoners free, by stages, as an indication of support for Mahmoud Abbas and in the context of a resumption of peace negotiations.

In June 2008, after two months of talks brokered by Egypt, Israel and Hamas signed a truce whereby Israel committed itself to a gradual lifting of the blockade on Gaza.

Following accusations of corruption and the publication on 30 January of the Winograd Commission's report on the war between Israel and Hezbollah in the Lebanon, which revealed serious failings in the management and preparation of the war, Ehud Olmert chose not to stand in the Kadima party primary. This was won in September by Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni who was asked to form a new government following Ehud Olmert's resignation. Unable to form a coalition, Tzipi Livni called early parliamentary elections.

The truce with Hamas ended on 19 December amid renewed tension, and escalating violence led to Operation Cast Lead which took place from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009 and cost the lives of 1 383 Palestinians and 13 Israelis⁴ as well as involving massive destruction of homes, roads and other public and private buildings.

2009: Netanyahu

The parliamentary elections held on 10 February 2009 produced a narrow victory for Kadima which won 28 of the 120 seats in the Knesset, against the right-wing Likud's 27, the extreme right-wing party, Israel Beitenou's 15 and Labour's 13, while the Sephardic Orthodox Shass won 11, the right-wing parties Yahadut Hatorah, the National Union and the Jewish Home, five, four and three seats respectively and the left-wing Meretz three. The Israeli Arab parties won 11 seats, one more than in the previous elections, Hadash and the United Arab List (Ra'am) each won four seats and Balad three.

These elections represent a lurch to the right: while in 2006 all the right-wing parties (religious parties included) held 79 seats, in 2009 they obtained 93 (while the number of seats held by the left dropped from 31 to 16). The Kadima party aside, the right gained 15 more MPs (65 as opposed to 50 previously).

Benjamin Netanyahu's government took office on 1 April. The result of an unlikely coalition with Kadima under Tzipi Livni, in view of their differences over the negotiations with the Palestinians, it is fragile and ill-assorted. Likud has the support of 69 Knesset members out of 120, thanks to agreements reached between the right and extreme right-wing parties, Israel Beitenou, led by Avigdor Liberman (who is now Foreign Minister and an important pillar of the coalition), Shass (which obtained the Ministries of the Interior and Religious Affairs) and the Jewish Home. Labour is also now part of the government: Ehud Barak remains at Defence and has a commitment from the government to pursue negotiations with the Palestinians.

Benjamin Netanyahu heads a cabinet of 30 ministers and seven deputy ministers. Of these 30, nine also held office in the previous cabinet.

This is the most right-wing government that Israel has had to date, which has implications for the continuation of the peace negotiations (the Annapolis process has ground to a halt), on policy on the West Bank settlements (on which the government has no settled position) and could also involve a change in the status of Israeli Arabs (whose Israeli citizenship Avigdor Liberman regularly calls into question). The coalition is extremely weak, with the religious parties in bed with the secular nationalist

⁴ According to the Israeli Government, four Israelis were killed by rockets or shells fired by armed Palestinian groups and nine were killed during combat, four of which by friendly fire.

party Israel Beitenou, now the third force in the land, and Labour's support constantly on the verge of being withdrawn.

Labour is in fact in crisis. For the first time since Israel was founded it is no longer one of the two main parties, having fallen back to fourth position. Ehud Barak's decision to go into government was fiercely opposed within the party, with only six of its 13 members of parliament prepared to support the new government. The motion was adopted by 680 votes in favour to 507 against at an extraordinary meeting where the party old guard won through for the time being by against a younger generation, eager to go into opposition, that considers the deal that has been struck a betrayal.

The rightwards lurch at these latest elections has happened at a time when violence from the extreme right, the settlers and ultra-orthodox factions is on the increase, particularly in East Jerusalem. These groups are now attacking the supporters of peace and non-violence while continuing their action against the Palestinians.

Officially Mr Netanyahu's government has not yet revealed its plan for a lasting peace, but the Israeli Prime Minister did reply to Mr Obama's 4 June Cairo speech in an address he gave at Bar-Iran University on 14 June.

The first point he made was that for Israel finding a solution to the Iranian nuclear question took higher priority than concluding a peace agreement with the Palestinians.

Israel wants a demilitarised Palestinian state. If the Palestinians recognise Israel as a Jewish state, he is prepared to conclude a peace agreement establishing a demilitarised Palestinian state alongside the state of Israel.

He rejects a freeze on settlements.

However, no Palestinian land would be confiscated for further settlement construction and any building in the settlements would reflect "natural growth". Mr Netanyahu did not address the issue of illegal outposts, which Israel had promised to demolish under the road map.

For Mr Netanyahu, the most important issues are:

- the land of Israel belongs to the Jewish people by right, although Israel is willing to make concessions in order to obtain peace;
- Jerusalem must not be divided;
- Israel will not allow the return of Palestinian refugees and their descendants, a proposal that would threaten the Jewish state;
- the Palestinian state must be demilitarised and must not be able to sign offensive treaties with other states;
- Israel will not negotiate with Hamas;
- Palestinians must recognise Israel as a Jewish state.

The American U-turn: Nine months after taking office the US President has changed his strategy on the Middle East. His demand for a complete freeze on settlements, including in East Jerusalem, was rejected by Prime Minister Netanyahu. Mrs Clinton's statements endorsing a "partial freeze" and hence Israel's rejection of the initial demand have clouded the issue.

The White House needs to rethink its methodology. However the objective of negotiations must be maintained if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is indeed to remain the central priority.

III. The Palestinian Territories

Death and succession of Yasser Arafat

Yasser Arafat was the “father of the nation”. Following Mr Arafat’s death in late 2004, Mahmoud Abbas was elected President of the Palestinian Authority, winning more than 60% of the votes during the 9 January 2005 presidential elections that were boycotted by Hamas and the Islamic Jihad.

During the campaign Mahmoud Abbas had clearly expressed his resolve to put an end to the intifada. Regarding refugees he prudently avoided talking about the “right of return”, referring instead to a “**just settlement of the refugee problem**”. With regard to the issues described by Yasser Arafat as non-negotiable he preferred to talk about “**rights in keeping with international law**” in order to have greater margin for manoeuvre.

The legislative elections on 25 January 2006 and the split

The Palestinian legislative elections on 25 January 2006 ended in victory for Hamas under the leadership of Ismail Haniyeh, which had an absolute majority, gaining 76 of the 132 seats on the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Fatah won only 43 seats while the independents and four small parties obtained only 13 seats.

Hamas had already won a major victory in the Gaza municipal elections in 2004, taking 70% of the seats in several municipal councils, defeating Fatah, the party in power. In the second ballot of the municipal elections in the Palestinian Territories, Fatah won 55% of the seats.

The international community made the big mistake of refusing to recognise the result of a democratic election won by Hamas. The elections had been called for, monitored and validated. However unexpected and unpopular the result, that political reaction was uncalled for: it discredited the democratic process, with the consequences that we know. Your Rapporteur wrote and said this in 2005. Today we know the current deadlock, the episodes of violence and the split of the Palestinians between Fatah and Hamas can be directly traced back this episode. The failure to integrate Hamas into the political system and to help it as far as possible to evolve and the refusal to talk with Hamas were political and strategic errors the costs of which we are still paying today.

Following the breakdown of the negotiations between Hamas and Fatah in 2006 in an attempt to form a coalition government, Prime Minister **Ismail Haniyeh** came forward with a “**Hamas government**” which obtained a vote of confidence from parliament at the end of March 2006.

Israel decided at that point to stop reimbursing the Palestinian Authority the some 50 million dollars per month corresponding to customs duties and taxes levied on products destined for the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. **International donors, the European Union in particular**, also suspended direct aid – the equivalent of 50 million dollars per month – to the new Hamas government, while **Arab states’ donations** did not reach it either because their banks did not want to infringe anti-terrorist legislation.

This freeze on aid plunged the Palestinian Government into crisis.

The Quartet rapidly perceived the dangers of such a policy and set up the so-called temporary international mechanism (TIM) in **June 2006**.

This new system of external channels was set up in order to allow international aid through while circumventing the Hamas government. It paid for basic supplies such as fuel and medicine and for allowances to the most vulnerable population groups. While it provided real assistance it did not provide a solution to the political confrontation generated by the way in which the situation was being managed.

In May and June the President and government were engaged in a struggle to gain control of the security services. After tough negotiations the competing parties (not including the Islamic Jihad) finally reached agreement on a **Palestinian Prisoners’ National Reconciliation Document** drawn up by officials of the various Palestinian factions imprisoned in Israel.

The document proposed a platform of **national unity** destined to put an end to the internal strife within Palestinian society. It proposed confining the **resistance**, or armed struggle, to the territories occupied by Israel since 1967, which meant ceasing all armed or terrorist operations in Israel itself. It referred to United Nations Security Council resolutions and the proposal put forward in 2002 by the Arab League in Beirut making provision for a complete normalisation of relations with Israel in exchange for the creation of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders. Finally it proposed establishing a government of national unity bringing together Fatah and Hamas.

Palestine since 2006

On 16 December 2006 Mahmoud Abbas announced an early legislative election following the failure of the dialogue with Hamas on the creation of a government of national unity. The decision was rejected by Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, leading to growing violence between members of Fatah and Hamas, first in Gaza and then in the West Bank.

On 17 March 2007, an inter-Palestinian summit meeting between Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Meshaal took place in Mecca, leading to the formation of a government of national unity with Ismail Haniyeh as Prime Minister. In May, Fatah security forces were deployed in Gaza in order to put an end to the general chaos. This sparked another wave of violence which degenerated into a political crisis. On 14 June, Mahmoud Abbas declared a state of emergency and fired the government.

On 17 June a government under Salam Fayyad was sworn in, while Hamas took final control of the entire Gaza Strip. Palestine thus found itself divided into two separate political entities, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Never had there been such deep-seated divisions between the Palestinian factions.

In March 2008 the inter-Palestinian dialogue resumed, culminating in the Sanaa Declaration on the organisation of early elections. The following July and August, however, clashes broke out afresh and Hamas clamped down on numerous Fatah members in Gaza, while Fatah arrested dozens of Hamas militants in the West Bank. Hamas extended its control over Gaza, gradually eliminating the last few pro-Fatah clans on its territory. On 7 March 2009 Salam Fayyad presented his government's resignation. However, in May 2009 he formed a new government in which Hamas refuses to participate and which it does not recognise.

Salam Fayyad's new government submitted its programme in August 2009.

Palestinian institutions and organisations

The Palestinian Authority (PA)

The Palestinian Authority is the government entity created in 1993 by the Oslo Agreements for the administration of the occupied territories. It has a president and government, an assembly (the Palestinian Legislative Council) elected by universal suffrage, a police force and diplomatic representation. It represents the Palestinians of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

The Palestinian Authority has been in crisis since 2006 due to the disagreement between Fatah and Hamas. Since Hamas controls the Gaza Strip, the only area in which the Palestinian Authority exerts real power is the West Bank. It is currently composed of members of the PLO (mainly Fatah) and independent members.

The Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO)

The PLO, set up in May 1964, is a political and paramilitary organisation bringing together the Palestinians of the occupied territories and those of the diaspora. Its membership varies according to the various withdrawals or boycotts on the part of its different component organisations. Historically Fatah is the dominant faction but other movements are also active within it.

The PLO has a Palestinian National Council which the elected members of the Palestinian Legislative Council, as the representatives of the Palestinians of the occupied territories, are automatically members of. It also has an Executive Committee headed by a President and numerous institutions, making it a quasi-state structure.

The PLO has been the recognised speaking partner for the Arab states since 1974. That year it also obtained permanent observer status at the United Nations (from 1988 onwards under the name “Palestine”). In 1993, Israel recognised the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as its legitimate negotiator. **Hence the PLO is currently the only negotiator recognised by Israel.**

However, the double hat worn by Yasser Arafat and after him, Mahmoud Abbas, is somewhat confusing. Were the two posts to be occupied by two different people, it is difficult to say which one would be the main interlocutor for the peace negotiations.

The rise of Hamas has further complicated matters, since this Islamist movement is a member neither of the PLO nor the PA (its election victory having led to civil war). Hence the results of negotiations conducted with Mahmoud Abbas are not binding on Hamas while they are for the PLO (and its constituent organisations) and the PA (which theoretically represents all Palestinians in the occupied territories).

Fatah

Fatah is a secular political and military organisation created by Yasser Arafat in 1959. Initially it was opposed to the PLO, which it saw as a political rival, but took control of it in 1968 and has since become its dominant faction. For a long time Fatah, in the person of Yasser Arafat, ruled the Palestinian political scene. However the 1990s were marked by the rise of Hamas which won the legislative elections in 2006.

Results of the Fatah Congress, August 2009

In August 2009, at the sixth Fatah Congress, there was once again dissent between the establishment and the new generation, and between Palestinians from the occupied territories and those living abroad. The new generation has strengthened its influence within the party.

For the moment Mahmoud Abbas’ position as the President of Fatah has been confirmed, but Marwan Bargouthi and Ahmed Qurei have been sidelined, while Mohammed Dahlan’s position seems also to have been confirmed.

The latter was head of the Preventive Security Service but was unable to prevent Hamas from seizing control of the Gaza Strip in June 2007. He is rumoured to aspire to even more influential posts within the Palestinian institutions.

Fatah’s sixth Congress also adopted a new political programme the main points of which are as follows:

- a complete halt of Israeli settlement construction, especially in East Jerusalem;
- Israeli withdrawal from all Palestinian cities, reverting back to the status existing before the September 2004 intifada;
- a clear and binding timetable for negotiations;
- refusal to postpone negotiations over Jerusalem and refugees;
- insistence on a defined arbitration mechanism;
- no recognition of Israel as a Jewish state;
- formation of a national negotiating committee under PLC supervision;
- a popular referendum on any agreement to do with final-status negotiations;
- sanction all legitimate forms of struggle while working towards peace (armed struggle is not on the table);

However, a short statement issued by the Congress declares that:

“While Fatah is clinging to the option of a just peace and is seeking to achieve it, it won’t abandon any of its options. Fatah maintains its belief that resistance, in all its forms, is a legitimate right for occupied peoples facing their occupiers”.

Nabil Shaath, the author of the programme, maintains that it states clearly that resistance may be exercised within the boundaries of international law and when sanctioned by the United Nations alone.

Finally, the Congress also decided to clarify its position with regard to the Palestinian Authority.

Fatah undertook to preserve and develop the Palestinian Authority and it has been decided to establish a clearer distinction between its own activities and those of the PA, partly by Fatah developing its own financial resources.

No member of Fatah's Central Committee is to be authorised to occupy an official post within the PA, unless it is that of Prime Minister or President of the Legislative Council.

Fatah has drawn up a list of 14 conditions that must be met by Israel as a prerequisite for a resumption of negotiations, including the release of political prisoners, a freeze on settlements and the lifting of the Gaza blockade. Statements by certain Fatah members seem to reflect a radicalisation of the movement with regard to Israel, although traditionally Fatah has been the moderate element among the Palestinian factions. If that radicalisation is real, it could complicate the peace negotiations already seriously compromised by the stance of the new Israeli Government.

Hamas

Hamas is a political and military organisation that was officially created in 1987. Up until now it has refused to join the PLO. It shares the latter's aim of an independent Palestinian state but disagrees with Fatah on the means of achieving it.

Hamas has its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood movement which was founded in Egypt in the 1920s and became established in the Gaza Strip immediately after the 1967 war. The Brotherhood started out as a social movement that was set on changing society rather than winning power. They built a wide network of social institutions based around mosques in the occupied territories. Saudi Arabia in particular donated significant funds to the movement.

The Hamas movement was established during the first intifada in December 1987. At that time Sheikh Yassin, convinced that confrontation with Israel would be too costly for his movement, stood by his traditional line. It was only after the beginning of the uprising and under pressure from the upcoming generations that he changed his views and distributed leaflets urging people to join the intifada. This was the birth certificate of Hamas, an acronym of *harakat al-muqâwama al-islâmiya* ("Islamic resistance movement"). All the Palestinian members of the Muslim Brotherhood joined Hamas, considerably swelling the ranks of the movement, in particular in the Gaza Strip where its members carried out attacks on isolated Israeli soldiers and set fire to Israeli-owned properties.

In August 1988 Hamas adopted its Charter in which it recognises its affiliation with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood and states that the land of Palestine "has been an Islamic Waqf throughout the generations and until the Day of Resurrection".

Hamas positioned itself in opposition to the PLO, adopting what were PLO ideas from the pre-1975 period and calling for the liberation of the whole of Palestine, while Fatah had changed its position and was prepared to recognise the partition of Palestine.

After the 1988 Charter had been adopted, Israel's attitude towards Hamas changed completely: it now sought to hamper the development of this movement whose political line had become more radical than that of Fatah.

In 1993, Sheikh Yassin rejected the Oslo Accords and instead proposed a *hudna* (ceasefire), in accordance with Islamic law which permits a conditional truce limited to a maximum of 10 years with non-Muslims, in return for an Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories. The envisaged ceasefire was to be temporary and the principle of non-recognition of the state of Israel as propounded in the Hamas Charter remained unchanged. This was a very different strategy to that of the PLO.

When the Palestinian Authority was established in Gaza in 1994, Hamas opened dialogue with Yasser Arafat. Arafat took a carrot and stick approach, but his attempts to get the movement to participate in the Palestinian parliamentary elections in January 1996 were rejected by Hamas.

Israeli policy after the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin led Hamas to adopt a radical line of violent opposition that linked Fatah to the failure of the peace process and the ineffectiveness of the Palestinian Authority.

The second intifada, which began in September 2000 with the active involvement of Hamas in a campaign of suicide attacks, led to a definitive split between Hamas and its rival Fatah.

In 2002, Hamas was included on the list of terrorist organisations in Canada, Japan, the United States and Israel, and in September 2003 in the European Union. Sheikh Yassin was assassinated on 22 March 2004 in Gaza in reprisals for suicide attacks on the order of Ariel Sharon. His successor, Abdel Aziz al-Rantissi, was also assassinated a few days after being appointed.

After the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004, Mahmoud Abbas was elected President in January 2005. Hamas did not put forward a candidate, refusing to be part of the Palestinian institutions established by the Oslo Accords. Thereafter, Hamas pursued a determined policy to take over the Palestinian movement.

The victory of Hamas in the legislative elections and the beginning of the Gaza blockade

In 2005 Hamas fielded candidates in the Palestinian municipal elections. Their success confirmed Hamas as a powerful political force against Fatah.

On 25 January 2006, Hamas won the legislative elections in the West Bank and Gaza with 42.9% of the vote.

In the Gaza Strip, Hamas led with 48.2% against 43.6% for Fatah. 74 out of 132 Palestinian parliamentarians were members of Hamas, as against 45 from Fatah.

On 21 February 2006 Ismail Haniyeh, a member of Hamas, was appointed Prime Minister by Mahmoud Abbas. After Fatah refused to join his government, Ismail Haniyeh announced the formation of his cabinet on 19 March 2006.

Israel refused to have anything to do with the Hamas government. Ehud Olmert, the new Prime Minister, decided to halt the payment of customs duties to the Palestinian Authority. Many donors, including the European Union, also froze their financial aid. The crossing points in and out of Gaza were more or less closed, thus preventing everyday supplies from reaching a million and half Gazans who are trapped there. This was the beginning of the Gaza blockade.

In June 2006, after an 18-month ceasefire, rockets were fired from Gaza into Israeli territory. Franco-Israeli Corporal Gilad Shalit was abducted.

Israel retaliated with a bombing campaign, "Summer Rain", and arrested eight ministers, Hamas parliamentarians and leaders, in the Gaza Strip.

In the autumn of 2006, tensions grew between Hamas and Fatah supporters. Mahmoud Abbas demanded that Hamas should recognise the agreements already negotiated with Israel, which the Islamist leaders refused to do, and he declared the Hamas militia illegal, which marked the beginning of violent clashes between the two movements.

The Mecca Agreement and the Government of National Unity

8 February 2007 saw the announcement in Mecca of an agreement between Hamas and Fatah to form a Government of National Unity, to be led by the sitting Prime Minister, Ismail Haniyeh.

President Mahmoud Abbas stated that the new cabinet had to "respect" the agreements signed by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO), including those made with Israel, which constitutes an implicit recognition of the Jewish state.

Hamas seizes power in Gaza by force

Despite the Mecca Agreement, the ceasefire was broken on 18 May 2007. On 7 June, clashes between the two factions left 115 dead and 550 wounded. On 14 June 2007, Hamas took full control of Gaza by force.

Mahmoud Abbas responded by declaring a state of emergency, dismissed the Government of National Unity and asked Salam Fayyad, Finance Minister in the previous government, to form an emergency government.

Salam Fayyad's government was sworn in on 17 June 2007 in Ramallah. Hamas refused to recognise it and declared the appointment of a new prime minister unconstitutional.

Western powers gave their support to Mahmoud Abbas and the government of Salam Fayyad. From this point on, the Palestinian territories were, de facto, split into two parts controlled by rival political powers.

 Hamas' current position

In a recent interview,⁵ Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal gave an update on the position of his movement.

He stated that Israel continued to impose a siege on Gaza, persecuting the population and depriving it of a decent life, in order to provoke a coup against Hamas. The state of siege went on despite the fact that Hamas had observed a ceasefire since January 2009. Of a total of 12 000 Palestinians being held in Israeli detention, around 4 000 were Hamas members and included ministers and parliamentarians. Recently about 10 had been released, but some 40 members of the Palestine Legislative Council still remained in detention.

If Hamas were offered a truce that included lifting the blockade and opening the border crossings, it would respond positively. Hamas would like to see the conflict resolved peacefully, but for that to happen Israel would have to end the occupation and allow Palestinians to exercise self-determination in their homeland.

However, since the Oslo Peace Accords, Israel had only expropriated more Palestinian land in the West Bank, built more new settlements, expanded existing ones and erected a separation barrier that consumed large tracts of Palestinian land – land which, according to the Oslo agreement, should be returned to Palestinians.

Hamas' priority was to end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories.

As for its Islamic beliefs, Hamas' position was complex and clearly spelt out. It would campaign for an Islamic agenda in a fully democratic process. Khaled Meshaal stated that religious features of Gaza society were genuine and spontaneous and had not been imposed by any authority.

He recognised that division weakened the Palestinians and harmed their cause, but noted that this division was not caused by Hamas but by the insistence of certain international and regional parties on reversing the results of Palestinian democratic elections.

In June 2007, Hamas had to act in self-defence against those plotting a coup against the Hamas-led National Unity Government resulting from the March 2007 Mecca Agreement.

Khaled Meshaal notes that while Hamas was making every effort to protect the human rights and civil liberties of the affiliates of Fatah and other factions in the Gaza Strip, Palestinians in the West Bank were being denied their basic rights by the Israeli occupation and the Palestinian Authority and its security force. That security force, specialised in the persecution of critics of the Palestinian Authority, was being trained, guided and funded by the United States and the European Union.

Finally, Khaled Meshaal said that Hamas believed that, realistically, a peaceful settlement to the conflict would have to begin with a ceasefire agreement between the two sides based on full withdrawal by Israel from all the territories occupied in 1967.

⁵ "New Statesman", 17 September 2009.

During talks with a French Senate delegation, Khaled Meshaal replied to a question about whether Hamas' Charter could be amended to allow it to recognise the State of Israel:⁶

“What did Mahmoud Abbas, and Yasser Arafat before him, get in exchange for recognising Israel and renouncing the PLO Charter? Nothing!

The Arabs made a generous peace offer in 2002 (The Arab Peace Initiative proposed by Prince Abdakka of Saudi Arabia). Did Israel respond? No. Hamas itself made a generous offer in 2006, when a consensus between the Palestinian factions was reached following reconciliation.

We implicitly agreed to recognise Israel within its 1967 borders, provided of course that Palestinians' rights were recognised and that they were given genuine sovereignty. (...) So the recognition of Israel is not a problem. (...) The solution is to make a Palestinian state possible and then to ask that state to recognise Israel.”

Inter-Palestinian negotiations

Following the relative failure of the 2007 Mecca Agreement and the Sanaa Declaration of 2008, which did not manage to bring about any long-lasting reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas, Egypt, which was directly affected by events in the Gaza Strip, proposed its services as a mediator in new negotiations between the two factions.

The dialogue resumed in February 2009. A second round of negotiations was launched on the basis of the work of five committees with remits for: the creation of a government; reconciliation; restructuring of the security services; the reorganisation of the PLO; and the preparation of presidential and legislative elections. A number of particularly important issues are at stake in those negotiations:

- the nature of the government of national unity: Hamas wants it to have a political character while Fatah prefers a technocratic government with the task of preparing elections, rebuilding Gaza and promoting territorial unity;
- the question of whether to “recognise” or “endorse” the PLO's commitments vis-à-vis Israel;
- the organisation of the security forces, with each party wanting at all costs to maintain control over its own armed security forces.

The situation in Gaza is further complicated by the emergence of radical Islamist groups including the Jund Ansar Allah, which is close to al-Qa'ida and opposed to Hamas. Its leader Imam Abdel-Latif Moussa has decreed Gaza to be an “Islamic Emirate” and is calling for strict observation of Sharia law. On 14 August 2009, Hamas police officers attacked a mosque in Rafah where hundreds of these jihadists had taken refuge. 24 people died during this assault, including Imam Moussa, who committed suicide. 95 members of the group were arrested. This reveals a political situation that is a lot more intricate than the simple Fatah-Hamas opposition. The rise of new Islamist groups that criticise Hamas for its “moderation” could shift the balance and lead Hamas to adopt more radical positions in order to ward off such accusations.

Egypt has asserted its role as the main mediator not just in the conflict between Israel and Hamas, but also in the inter-Palestinian conflict, although it is at pains to present its action as taking place under Arab League auspices. However Hamas accuses Egypt of being too close to Fatah and of lacking a clear programme for reconciliation.

It would appear from the latest news from Cairo (end of September 2009) that the two sides think they will be able to sign an agreement before the end of 2009.

The two parties have apparently accepted a proposal calling for parliamentary and presidential elections to be held in the Palestinian Territories in the first half of 2010, rather than, as initially foreseen, in January. The Palestinian Territories would be divided into 16 electoral districts and the elections would take place under the supervision of the Arab and western world.

⁶ Talks of 20 January 2009 in Damascus.

It would seem that both parties have also agreed to restructure the security forces, with the creation of a security committee comprising officers from both sides and placed under Egyptian supervision. In particular its task would be to manage the restructuring of the PA's security forces.

Fatah has agreed to the incorporation of Hamas representatives into the Palestinian Authority institutions, the release of all Hamas supporters being held in PA prisons in exchange for the release of Fatah prisoners being held by Hamas and the creation of a government of national unity that would simply "respect" the Oslo Accords rather than committing to them wholeheartedly.

According to the Hamas leader in Damascus, Khaled Meshaal, a condition for signing the agreement is that the Egyptian authorities permanently reopen the Rafah border crossing.

A difficult point remains the date of the forthcoming elections. It would appear in the current circumstances that neither side is in a hurry to see the elections being held early on in the year. In order to boost its popularity Hamas will need the crossing points between Gaza and its neighbours to be wide open and the current blockade to be lifted.

Fatah for its part will need to find a consensus with Israel with regard to the checkpoints and other restrictions imposed by Israel on the Palestinians in the West Bank.

Furthermore, no sooner had the Egyptians announced that Hamas and Fatah would be meeting in Cairo on 26 October 2009 in order to sign a charter of reconciliation than the two factions started arguing about the procedure to be followed with regard to the Goldstone report on the war in Gaza. That disagreement could compromise the meeting.

On 23 October President Mahmoud Abbas called presidential and legislative elections in all the Palestinian Territories on 24 January 2010.

President Abbas was elected in January 2005. His term of office was to have expired in January 2009 but was extended by the Palestinian Authority for one year in accordance with a provision in the electoral law.

Hamas takes the view that President Abbas is no longer empowered to issue such decrees and rejects his election call as illegal and unconstitutional. The decree setting the election date was also denounced by a number of Palestinian extremist factions meeting at the Palestinian National Conference.

In Damascus the head of Hamas' political bureau, Khaled Meshaal, declared that elections could only take place after inter-Palestinian reconciliation.

While Fatah has now signed the reconciliation agreement proposed by Egypt, Hamas has not yet signed the document on the grounds that it needs more time in which to examine and discuss it.

Mahmoud Abbas has stated that if Hamas signs the document he will issue a decree calling elections on 28 June, the election date proposed by Egypt in the draft agreement.

The Gaza war and the ceasefire

On 19 June 2008 Israel and Hamas signed a six-month ceasefire. Between then and October 2008, 38 rockets were fired at the south of Israel. Hamas said it was not responsible for the attacks and that it had respected its commitment to abide by the truce. On the other hand, Israel did not lift the blockade in place since June 2006, in breach of the ceasefire agreement.

On 4 November 2008, the Israeli army made an incursion into Palestinian territory. Hamas counterattacked with rocket fire into Israel. On 14 December 2008, Khaled *Mashaal* announced that the ceasefire would not be renewed. On 19 December, Israel refused to lift the blockade on Gaza. Rocket fire intensified, particularly on 26 December 2008 when over 80 rockets were fired on towns in south-central Israel.

On 27 December 2008, the Israeli Government ordered the bombardment of Hamas infrastructure in a large-scale military operation codenamed "Cast Lead", causing 400 deaths in the first four days of bombing.

On 17 January 2009, on the eve of Barack Obama's inauguration, Israel and Hamas declared unilateral ceasefires which, though never made official, are still in force.

Effects of Operation Cast Lead

Operation Cast Lead, which lasted from 27 December 2008 to 18 January 2009, caused widespread destruction: 3 450 houses were destroyed and 2 870 severely damaged. A further 52 900 sustained less serious damage during the offensive. Worst hit was the north, where 65% of homes were completely destroyed. The operation left 600 tonnes of debris to be cleared away, with serious health and environmental consequences, since many of the buildings contained asbestos.

This devastation came on top of the 2 700 homes destroyed during previous operations and the 1 800 houses under construction that could not be finished due to the blockade. 3 000 homes are also in need of works to bring them into line with health and safety standards (Report published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), August 2009).

268 firms were destroyed and 432 damaged, representing estimated losses of 139 million dollars. 40% were industrial buildings and 60% shops.

The Al Qods hospital (run by the Red Crescent) was struck without warning by explosive white phosphorus shells on 15 January, while the Al Wafa hospital came under attack on 5 and 16 January. In all, 48% of Gaza's medical infrastructure suffered direct or indirect shell damage.

The agricultural sector was also hard hit, with direct losses estimated at some 170 million dollars. 60% of farmland was destroyed, of which 40% during the Israeli offensive. Moreover the land was strewn with unexploded munitions and chemical weapons residue (white phosphorus), making it impossible to resume farming activities. 187 greenhouses representing about 30 hectares were destroyed, of which 68.6% in the north of Gaza.

The devastation caused by the Israeli offensive therefore exacerbated an already critical humanitarian situation that has been denounced in numerous reports.

The only stated military objective – to put a stop to rocket fire from Gaza – was achieved, at the cost of large numbers of Palestinian civilian casualties.

The Israeli army also seems to have regained the confidence of Israeli public opinion that it had lost following the war in Lebanon in 2006.

However the impact on international public opinion was disastrous.

Finally, the strategy aimed at isolating Hamas from the rest of Gaza's population seems to have failed. Hamas has Gaza firmly under its control, although it is difficult to say how popular it really is. On the Palestinian side Operation Cast Lead has sharpened the desire for revenge against Israel. This resentment is shared by Arab public opinion in general and has increased its hostility towards the West, perceived as being in collusion with Israel.

The Goldstone Report

A UN fact-finding mission, made up of four members headed by South African Justice Richard Goldstone and established by the Human Rights Council in Geneva, presented its findings in a report published on 29 September 2009. The investigation found that during the Gaza war both the Israeli Defence Force and armed Palestinian groups in Gaza undertook actions that could constitute war crimes and, possibly, in some respects, crimes against humanity.

The report recommended that the Security Council should require both sides to take steps to launch appropriate investigations into the alleged war crimes committed. If these investigations did not take place, it recommended that the Security Council should refer the matter to the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court.

At the Human Rights Council meeting in Geneva on 2 October 2009, the Pakistani representative requested on behalf of Arab, Muslim and African countries that a vote on a resolution incorporating the majority of the conclusions of the Goldstone Report should be postponed to the next Council

meeting in March 2010. The Palestinian Authority, under heavy pressure from the United States, had already withdrawn its support for the draft resolution.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had declared that international endorsement and advancement of the report would "strike a severe blow to the peace process, because Israel will no longer be able to take additional steps and take risks for peace if its right to self-defence is denied".

The major European countries refrained from comment and Sweden, speaking on behalf of the European Union, stated that it was a "serious report" and wondered whether it might "negatively impact the ongoing peace talk".

The leader of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas had himself given in on the issue of the Goldstone report and made what has since been recognised as a mistake: he had agreed to this report on the war in Gaza (27 December 2008-17 January 2009) being deferred to the next UN Security Council session in 2010. The Israeli Prime Minister had issued a warning that adoption of the report would deal a fatal blow to the peace process. The Americans did not want to take any risks and brought pressure to bear on the Palestinian Authority to prevent a vote from being held on a text accusing Israel (but also Hamas) of war crimes and possible crimes against humanity. The EU confined itself to saying that the report was worthy of consideration.

Following virulent accusations from Hamas and popular demonstrations in the Palestinian Territories Mahmoud Abbas backpedalled. On 16 October 2009 the UN Human Rights Council adopted a resolution initiated by the Palestinians supporting the recommendations of the Goldstone report. Of the 47 member states, 25 voted in favour, six, including the United States, voted against and 11 abstained. Five countries including France and the United Kingdom refused to participate in the vote.

The report recommends holding independent inquiries on the facts mentioned in the report and calls on all the parties concerned, including the UN bodies, to ensure that its recommendations are followed up.

The Human Rights Council is now urging the UN General Assembly and Security Council to take the matter to the International Criminal Court should the inquiries fail to produce results within six months. It is likely that certain Security Council members will use their veto if it comes to a vote.

The blockade of Gaza

The blockade that has been in place since June 2007 imposes a number of restrictive measures:

- the closure of Karni, the biggest crossing point for trade, except for cereals;
- restrictions on imports of industrial, agricultural and building materials (36 staple goods are exempt from the blockade);
- suspension of virtually all exports;
- reductions in the quantities of industrial fuel, benzene, petrol and cooking gas;
- a general ban on use of the Erez crossing – the only passage into the West Bank – except for a limited number of "humanitarian cases";
- closure of the Rafah crossing point, controlled directly by Egypt, except for sporadic periods;
- a significant reduction in fishing zones and arable land;
- restrictions on the transfer of funds to banks in Gaza.

According to the August 2009 report published by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the blockade is affecting all sectors.

As far as the economy is concerned, 120 000 jobs have been lost, pushing unemployment up to 40%. 112 trucks are allowed to enter each day (one fifth of the number of entries before the blockade), while exports have been totally banned, with the exception of 147 truckloads of flowers and strawberries. In order to circumvent the blockade some 400 to 600 tunnels linking Gaza with Egypt are reported to be in use, with frequent accidents.

The blockade has an impact on eating habits and is aggravating problems of malnutrition and obesity. 75% of the population are suffering from food insecurity (at the beginning of 2008 the figure was 56%) and 90% are living below the poverty line.

10 000 people have no access to the water supply network and 60% of 1.5 million Palestinians have only partial access: OCHA has issued warnings about an impending water crisis. The treatment of sewage is no longer guaranteed: 50 to 80 million litres of untreated waste water are poured into the Mediterranean, representing an environmental and health risk.

The restrictions are causing a growing number of electricity failures: 90% of the population are linked up to the electricity supply network, but there are blackouts lasting from four to eight hours a day.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has reported serious health problems, in particular psychological disorders caused by stress and war. 77 different types of basic medicine are lacking and 40% of requests to exit the territory to receive medical treatment are rejected or postponed (compared with 10% in 2006).

Finally, 20 000 people were considered as displaced in July 2009.

Overall Hamas has come out of this conflict strengthened and is controlling the Gaza Strip with an iron hand. The blockade is to its advantage, since it collects taxes on trade through the tunnels in the Rafah area. It is working methodically to Islamise Palestinian society by indoctrinating children, putting pressure on women to wear the veil, ousting Palestinian Authority officials, etc. The PA has come under strong criticism for clamping down on demonstrations of support in Gaza, perceived as a threat to law and order.

Your Rapporteur takes the view that the situation in Gaza must be seen in relative terms. The destruction is real in certain precise sectors, but not necessarily in Gaza City where it is limited, as the attacks were targeted. The damage to roads varies. One sees large numbers of children in schools that are well equipped by the various international bodies, but also misery that does not show its true face. The situation is troubled and one senses it. It must be analysed politically. Who profits from the situation? Hamas, certainly, and Israel probably too. That coincidence of interests should prompt more intensive reflection on the way out of this dangerous situation which takes us further away from a peace process.

The most urgent problems facing the Palestinians

Settlements

While from 2001 to 2004 the settlement process slowed due to the second intifada, since 2004 there has been a resumption of illegal settlements, with the construction of 1 500 to 2 000 homes per year. Israel having officially stopped creating settlements in 1996, anything built after that – known as “outposts” – is non-official. In June 2009 there were 120 official settlements not including East Jerusalem), representing 9.3% of the surface area of the West Bank and 10% of its inhabitants (289 600 settlers plus 190 000 in East Jerusalem). In addition there are 99 outposts, 80 of which are located totally or in part on private Palestinian property. Those outposts comprise some 4 000 settlers living in 1 600 mobile homes and 270 permanent structures. At the beginning of September 2009, Benjamin Netanyahu authorised the construction of 455 new homes in the West Bank and 486 apartments in East Jerusalem.

According to international law, the settlements in occupied territory are illegal, and the UN Security Council, confirming their illegal status, has called upon Israel to dismantle them.

Article 49(6) of the Fourth Geneva Convention, which was ratified by Israel in 1951, states that: “The Occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

UN Security Council Resolution 465 (1980) states that: “Israel’s policy and practices of settling parts of its population and new immigrants in [the Palestinian and other Arab territories occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem] constitute a flagrant violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention... and a

serious obstruction to achieving a comprehensive, just and lasting peace in the Middle East.” The resolution calls on Israel to “dismantle the existing settlements.”

The Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court of 1998 (Article 8(b)(viii)) defines “the transfer directly or indirectly by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies” as a war crime.

In addition to being illegal, Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories pose the single greatest threat to a viable two-state solution, and hence, to a just and lasting peace. Settlements, their infrastructure and areas of control grossly reduce the amount and quality of land remaining for and seriously undermine the contiguity of a future Palestinian state. The PLO argues that under the “land for peace” formula embodied in UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, on which the peace process is based, Israel is to withdraw from the territories it occupied in 1967 in exchange for full peace and recognition from its neighbours.

Logically the evacuation of Israeli settlements would be the most appropriate first step towards satisfying Palestinian rights and allowing for the complete exercise of sovereignty over all territory within their future state.

The PLO is insisting, however, that until a final agreement is reached a genuine and comprehensive settlement freeze is the only way to minimise further prejudice to the current negotiations. The need for such a freeze is clearly stipulated in Phase 1 of the road map calling on Israel to “freeze all settlement activity (including natural growth of settlements)” and to immediately dismantle outposts built since March 2001. The basic elements of such a freeze are: 1) Ending all settlement-related construction; 2) Eliminating all subsidies and economic incentives for settlements and settlers; 3) Ending all planning for settlements; and 4) Ceasing all land confiscations, home demolitions and other property destruction.

Restrictions imposed on Palestinians in the Occupied Territories

The restrictions imposed on Palestinians in the West Bank concern 9.5% of the territory. Essentially these are restrictions on freedom of movement, limiting access to medical care, education, markets and places of work. In June 2009 there were 630 road blocks (concrete blocks, barriers, random patrols) including 60 permanent check points requiring a special permit to get through. The town of Hebron alone has 69 such road blocks, including 18 check points. In addition there are 39 check points between Israel and the West Bank (on the West Bank side). From September 2008 to March 2009 there were 65 mobile check points every week.

Three quarters of the main roads leading to 18 major Palestinian towns are either closed or controlled by the army.

In August 2009 Israel decided to create a visa for the West Bank, banning the holder from entering Israel, in order to restrict the movements of foreign visitors and in particular to hinder their access to Israeli-controlled East Jerusalem.

However, on coming into office Benjamin Netanyahu said he would relax those restrictions in order to promote the economic development of the West Bank: on 16 September 2009 he announced the dismantling of some one hundred road blocks.

A recent World Bank report has clearly mapped out the sectoral implications of Israeli economic restrictions in the West Bank.⁷

The section reviewing the consequences for the land gives an idea of the paralysing effect of Israel’s grip on the occupied West Bank, where approximately 59% of the land is under full control of the Israeli military. The following two paragraphs quoted from the World Bank report provide a telling illustration:

⁷ World Bank report on “The economic effects of restricted access to land in the West Bank”, October 2008; see also the more recent World Bank report “A Palestinian State in two years: Institutions for economic revival”, 22 September 2009.

“The 1995 Oslo Interim Agreement split the West Bank and Gaza into three Areas A, B, and C, with different security and administrative arrangements and authorities. In the West Bank, the land area controlled by the Palestinians (Area A corresponding to all major population centers and Area B encompassing most rural centers) is fragmented into a multitude of enclaves, with a regime of movement restrictions between them. These enclaves are surrounded by Area C, the only contiguous area of the West Bank, and under full control of the Israeli military for both security and civilian affairs related to territory, including land administration and planning. It holds the majority of the land (approximately 59%). This allocation, which establishes the Palestinian administration over most of the populated areas and gives it limited control over natural resources and agricultural lands, was meant to be only transitory, with the PA expecting to assume control over an increasingly larger share of Area C. However, little territory has been transferred to PA control since the signing of the Oslo interim agreement, and this process has been completely frozen since 2000.

The effects on the Palestinian economy of the current territorial distribution extend much beyond the most obvious manifestations. The physical access restrictions are the most visible, with 38% of the land area reserved by the GoI to serve settlements and security objectives and a system of checkpoints, road closures, the Separation Barrier, and permit requirements for access that constrain movement of people and goods within and out of the West Bank. Recurrent destruction of trees, private homes, and public infrastructure, as well as settlers’ encroachments on private land, create a permanent state of insecurity that deters Palestinian investment in Area C. At the same time, the land use and planning regulations in effect in Area C tend to limit development within the confines of existing villages, with too little suitable space for demographic growth, causing irrational land use and unsound environmental management. The construction permit system slows down or halts altogether most construction. And the land administration system does not adequately protect the property rights of the Palestinian people, a source of uncertainty incompatible with investments and growth. Predictably, economic activity in Area C is limited primarily to low intensity agriculture. High intensity agricultural, industrial, housing, tourism, and other investments are hindered by the difficulty in obtaining construction permits from the Israeli authorities and the limited amount of titled land available due to the cessation of systematic land registration since 1967.”

The World Bank report goes on to explain the devastating consequences of these measures for telecommunications, trade, water, health and gender.

The Palestinians note that:

“Israel controls the flow of goods. All imports and exports, and many domestic products, must pass through Israeli security checks. Israeli restrictions and discriminatory practices hamper Palestinian trade, undermine the viability of investment projects, and leave Israel in control of the Palestinian economy. Not only do these policies violate the 1994 Paris Protocol’s requirement that the parties accord respect to each other’s economic policies and goals, reciprocity and fairness, but they also damage the long-term economic interests of the Palestinians”.⁸

The Palestinian authorities are now seeking to assume full control over their economic borders and policies, including import and export policies. Additionally, they seek stable, fair and efficient trade relations with Israel, as a natural trading partner with Palestine, based on a preferential trade regime in accordance with internationally accepted standards.

Until a final agreement is reached, however, they consider it imperative that the Paris Protocol be fully implemented.

The Wall

Begun in June 2002 and intended initially to be some 630 km long, the wall separating the West Bank from Israel now spans a length of 723 km and in terms of practical measurement takes in 9% of the surface area of the West Bank (including 49 settlements that are home to some 200 000 settlers, with

⁸ Palestinian Liberation Organisation, Negotiations Affairs Department, 2009.

71 settlements located to the east of the barrier). 87% of the wall is within Palestinian Territory rather than following the green line which measures 320 km in length.

A United Nations report submitted in August 2009 reckons that 66% of the wall has been built (nearly 500 km) and 10% is under construction. The wall is nine metres high, has surveillance cameras positioned at 50-metre intervals and is punctuated by 66 entrances, half of them requiring a permit to cross, and the other half closed to the Palestinians.

The Wall will enclose about 80 Israeli settlements housing approximately 385 000 settlers, or over 85% of Israel's settler population in the West Bank, making the Wall an integral part of Israel's illegal settlement enterprise;

10.6% of the Palestinian West Bank population is isolated west of the Wall. This includes 35 000 Palestinians holding West Bank ID cards, as well as 268 000 Palestinian Jerusalemites. Approximately 50 000 Palestinians in 38 West Bank villages and towns will be imprisoned in Israeli declared "seam zones" located between the Wall and the 1967 border.

The Wall completely encircles occupied East Jerusalem and severs it from the rest of the West Bank.

Approximately 125 000 Palestinians spread across 28 Palestinian communities will be surrounded on three sides by the Wall;

A further 26 000 Palestinians living in eight communities will be surrounded on all four sides by the Wall;

Israel's Wall separates 12.4% of the Palestinian West Bank population from its cultivated land west of the Wall;

On 9 July 2004, the International Court of Justice ruled that both the Wall and the Israeli settlements were illegal under international law. The Court ruled that Israel must cease construction of the Wall, dismantle those sections already completed and make reparations for the damages caused by the construction. Five years on, Israel continues its construction of the Wall in contravention of the Court's ruling and of international law.⁹

Bilin

Your Rapporteur visited Bilin, a small village not far from Ramallah which offers an example of the evident lack of justice in Israel's continuing settlement activities in the West Bank.

Bilin lost half of its land to the settlement of Modiin Illit and the separation barrier. It filed a petition to Israel's highest court which two years ago ordered a halt to the expansion of the settlement of Modiin Illit and ruled that the Israeli state should move the barrier back towards Israel, thus returning about half the lost land to the village. Two years later, the court's decision has still not been applied. Bilin has returned to the court in an attempt to get the rulings put into effect – so far in vain.

Palestinian refugees

At present, the total number of Palestinian refugees and their descendants is estimated at more than seven million, constituting the world's oldest and largest refugee population. This figure includes the 1948 refugees and their descendants as registered with the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNWRA) and those 1948 refugees who are not registered with UNWRA because they did not do so or did not need assistance when they became refugees, those who became displaced persons as a consequence of the six-day war in 1967 and the internally displaced Palestinians in Israel and their descendants. Palestinian refugees are dispersed throughout the world, but the majority live within 100 miles of Israel's border.

More than 1.3 million Palestinian refugees live in 59 UN-administered refugee camps in the occupied Palestinian territories, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon and in an additional 12 unrecognised refugee camps in the West Bank, Jordan and Syria.

⁹ Barrier to Peace: Israel's Wall and the 6th Anniversary of the ICJ Ruling, July 2009, <http://www.nad-plo.org>

The internationally recognised right of refugees to return to their homes was confirmed in UN Security Council Resolution 194 (III) of 11 December 1948, stating that:

“... the (Palestinian) refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbours should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible”.

Israel refuses to abide by international law with regard to the rights of the indigenous non-Jewish Palestinian Muslim and Christian population who are banned from returning to their homes, and the international community has failed to take any concrete measures to force Israel to abide by international law and allow the refugees to return.

In 1949, UNRWA was created as the primary organisation responsible for the welfare of the refugees.

At Camp David, in 2000, Israel refused to discuss the rights of the Palestinian refugees, arguing that it bore no responsibility for the refugee problem or its solution.

In 2002, the Arab Peace Initiative called for “A just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem to be agreed upon in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194”.

According to the PLO, this position represents a willingness on its part to consider the legitimate interests and concerns of all stakeholders involved in the matter, including Israel’s. However, despite Palestinian overtures to discuss Israeli interest, Israel leaders continue to reject acknowledging their responsibility or addressing the rights of the refugees.

The PLO argues that there can be no comprehensive solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict without honouring the rights of Palestinian refugees. Key to the resolution of the refugee issue is Israel’s acknowledgment of responsibility for the creation of the refugee problem, and Israel’s recognition of the applicable principles and rights of the refugees including the refugees’ right to return to their homes and lands. The recognition of these rights, as a matter of principle, will then open the way to negotiating their implementation between the two parties.

A negotiated solution on the implementation of the refugee rights has to include the following basic principles: voluntary repatriation, or resettlement, restitution and compensation for material and non-material losses. A successful resolution to the refugee issue will be one that includes the option to exercise their right of return to Israel. Some refugees may prefer other options, such as: (i) resettlement in third countries, (ii) resettlement in a newly independent Palestine (even though they originate from that part of Palestine which became Israel) or (iii) normalisation of their legal status in the host country where they currently reside.

The latest developments (October-November 2009) in the Palestinian Territories:

On 12 November the Palestinian Electoral Committee recommended that the parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for 24 January 2010 be postponed. Its reasoning was twofold: Hamas, which controls the Gaza Strip, had refused any form of electoral consultation, and it was impossible to hold elections without Gaza since without it there could be no Palestinian state.

Moreover the Israeli authorities had not agreed to the poll taking place in East Jerusalem. This indefinite postponement has to be approved by the PLO and it marks the beginning of a period of uncertainty for the Palestinian movement. And Mahmoud Abbas, President of the Palestinian Authority, who on 5 November 2009 had announced his intention not to stand again, now remains de facto in office, although his mandate and that of the Parliament are due to expire on 24 January 2010.

On Wednesday 11 November in Ramallah, in the West Bank, a rally was held to commemorate the fifth anniversary of Yasser Arafat’s death. During this carefully orchestrated event, Fatah expressed support for Mahmoud Abbas and asked him not to stand down. In actual fact, however, there are many people who would like to see him go and to take his place. For the moment, Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, Israeli President Shimon Peres, King Abdullah of Jordan and Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak have all asked him to stay. Washington’s reaction has been more nuanced. Which Fatah leader

could replace Mr Abbas? Marwan Barghouti is charismatic, but he is in prison in Israel. That leaves Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who is popular with the international community but has little support within Fatah.

Mahmoud Abbas has nonetheless reiterated his refusal to resume negotiations with Israel for as long as the Jewish state continues to reject a total freeze on settlements in the occupied Palestinian Territories.

IV. The Arab states

During the 1948 war, five Arab states (Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Libya and Syria) attacked Israel on the day of its creation. Since then, Israel has favoured a policy of waging preventive wars often with disastrous results.

Subsequently there were positive developments on the Arab side. Egypt and Jordan concluded peace agreements with Israel.

Besides, all of these states are evolving, some slowly, some more rapidly, and their attitudes are changing and must also be taken into account.

Moreover there are shades of difference, in their history, religion and relations, and their strategies, which overlap in certain areas (as regards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Iran's nuclear policy, the Saudi King's plan – Beirut 2002) are divergent in others. There is no unity in the Arab world and it shows. These states could, however, play a central role in the Middle East region.

According to Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit, the Arab world is uneasy and caught in a vice between the Israel and Iran's nuclear ambitions. It should cast about for a "shield" (a thinly-veiled allusion to Russia and China).

However, White House experts take the view that the United States has not obtained commitments from the most influential Arab States, in particular Saudi Arabia. The United States' efforts to relaunch the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have not given it the expected leverage.

Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia has recently become a relatively stable country under King Abdullah, who is wedded to reform and the initiator of the 2002 Middle East Peace Plan.

The most important effort on the Arab side to date is the Arab Peace Initiative launched by Saudi Arabia, which was adopted by the Arab League in March 2002 and reactivated by Saudi Arabia in March 2007. It proposes peace, not just between Israel and the Palestinians but between Israel and the whole Arab and Muslim world (mention the main points of the Arab Peace Initiative).

Saudi Arabia is one of the Arab states that have actively tried to promote peace in the Middle East. It has also made it clear that the Arab Peace Initiative represents an opportunity that must be grasped, as it will not remain on the table indefinitely.

Prince Turki al-Faisal of Saudi Arabia has called on the United States to condemn acts of violence by Israel against Palestinians, Israel's settlement policy and the blockade of Gaza. He wants it to strive for a Middle East that is free of weapons of mass destruction, offering protection to those states that agree with such an objective and imposing sanctions on those that do not. Israel, he says, must withdraw from the Shebah Farms area of Lebanon, while Israel and Syria should open peace negotiations and a UN Security Council Resolution should guarantee the territorial integrity of Iraq.

Recently he reiterated that he was waiting first for moves from Israel, and in particular for it to withdraw from the territories it has occupied since 1967, as a prerequisite for peace and a lasting two-state solution.

In August 2009, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia warned delegates at the Fatah Congress that the Palestinians' internal divisions were even more detrimental than Israel was to their cause of achieving an independent state.

Qatar

A rich country

Qatar is wealthy, ranking second in terms of per capita income and booming economically (ranked at No. 3 with growth of 13.4% in 2008).

Qatar's economy is based on exploitation of its hydrocarbon resources. Although its oil production at 1 000 Mb/per day is not very high, Qatar shares with Iran the largest deposits of natural gas in the world: the North Field (6 000 km²) and has the third largest gas reserves in the world after Russia and Iran. Estimated at 25 000 billion m³. They will not run out for 250 years and account for 14% of the world's reserves. Production (30 million tonnes in 2007) should reach 77 million tonnes in 2012, a third of global production.

The country is also developing a knowledge-based economy, naturally open only to an elite, but which is turning Qatar into a centre of excellence in the fields of medical research in particular and new technologies. Its Education City campus boasts a number of flagship projects and in the property sector, the Pearl-Qatar island site is home to the new Lusail urban development which is to incorporate Energy City.

Qatar is also spearheading a number of freedoms: freedom of the press in the form of Al Jazeera, an independent justice system and workers' rights (Labour Code). It is probably the most advanced state of the Arab world.

Qatar in the Middle East

Qatar has good relations with all Middle Eastern countries including Iran, with which it has close ties. Relations with Saudi Arabia, which have been tense over the years, have recently improved as a result of the settlement of a border dispute in December 2008. There is still rivalry between them, however, and they often disagree about the questions troubling the region. However, the International Court of Justice's 2008 ruling on the Hawar Islands brought an end to years of strife with Bahrain.

Qatar has no formal diplomatic relations with Israel but the two countries have been developing trade relations since 1996 when Israel opened a trade office in Doha. In 2008, there were high-level meetings (Tzipi Livni, then Israel's Foreign Minister visited Qatar in April to meet the Emir). Relations deteriorated after Israel's invasion of Gaza in December of that year, when Qatar closed the Israeli trade office and called for a conference bringing together Iran and the Arab States at which Hamas represented the Palestinians.

Qatar intends to develop a form of diplomacy that is balanced and pragmatic, acting as a bridge between Sunni and Shiite, extremists and moderates and most importantly between pro-American states, most prominently Saudi Arabia and Egypt, which Qatar thinks plays a constructive, pioneering and historic role, and the "antis"- Syria, which it believes has an important part to play, regretting its past isolation and now moving in the right direction, and Iran, which it feels has only a marginal position in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Qatar is therefore the source of many diplomatic initiatives directed towards the Palestinian factions, Yemen, Sudan and Lebanon.

A major supporter of Hamas since the latter's victory in the 2005 elections, Qatar also supports Hezbollah both financially and diplomatically (it rejected Security Council resolution 1701 (2006), stating that only the Lebanese army was authorised to bear arms) and regularly takes in radical Islamist leaders, offering them sanctuary or acting as a transit point. Lastly, Qatar controls the Al Jazeera television news channel which broadcasts an Arab view of world events.

Qatar realistically takes the view that the West, the United States and the European Union, want peace but that the status quo that Israel is happy with is a dead end. Time is on the Arabs' side and the Arab League is an organisation with a secretary but no initiative. However, there is a need to support Palestine, rebuild Gaza and lift the embargo weighing down upon Hamas. Hamas won in 2005 and 2006 but has had no chance to show what it might possibly have achieved.

It is now time to normalise relations. A distinction has to be made between fighting terrorism and recognition of the right of resistance.

Defence agreements

According to the most recent data available (2005), Qatar's military expenditure accounted for 10% of its GDP, in second place after Oman.

Qatar has signed a number of defence agreements: with France, the United States and the United Kingdom, and plays an active part in the collective defence effort of the Gulf Cooperation Council.

Agreements were signed with France in 1994 and 1998. Under certain conditions France will be involved in defending Qatar in the event of aggression against it. It advises on and contributes to the training of the Qatar army and supplies it with 80% of its equipment (Mirage 2000-5 and F1, Mica and Milan missiles, AMX 3) tanks, Gazelle helicopters etc.). French officers are seconded to Qatar and joint exercises are held regularly ("Gulf shield" in 2008 with France and the United Arab Emirates). Lastly the Saint-Cyr Qatar project should lead to the opening of a school there in 2011, a branch of the French military academy, for training officers drawn from the entire region.

The first agreement with the United States dates back to 23 June 1992, following joint operations at the time of Operation Desert Storm. It was supplemented in April 1996 by a defence agreement proper. Since December 2002, the As-Sayliyah base to the south of Doha houses part of CentCom. The al-Udeid base, the largest American base outside the US acts as a logistical platform for operations in Afghanistan and as a key centre of command for operations in Iraq. The Combined Air Operations Center has been located there since April 2003. Relations have been somewhat tense since Barack Obama became US President: in May 2009, the United States threatened to close down their bases if Doha continued to support Hamas, Syria and Iran.

The first agreements with the United Kingdom concern equipment supplies. Cooperation was then established and the United Kingdom used the al-Udeid base for its Iraq operations.

The international community, along with the United States has made many mistakes. Europe needs to define a clear, joint strategy. It cannot simply be a paymaster. Israel is content with the status quo and is wasting time, while extremist parties are taking advantage of the situation.

There will be no definitive solution for Israel, unless there are some answers for the Palestinians.

Egypt

Particularly since the war in Gaza, Egypt has been trying hard to bring about reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. It is wary of Hamas due its origins in the Muslim Brotherhood movement whose influence it has been trying to curtail in the country, with little success.

Egypt governed Gaza up until the six day war in 1967 and it considers reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas to be very important in order to avoid having a fundamentalist Muslim state on its borders, or even being obliged by Israel to take responsibility for the security of this area.

Egypt has also mediated between Hamas and Israel to secure an exchange of prisoners. Hundreds of Palestinian prisoners held in Israel are to be exchanged for Corporal Gilad Shalit who was captured in June 2006.

Regarding the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Egypt is demanding a freeze on settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, an end to restrictions on Palestinians and a rapid resumption of negotiations.

In spite of the election in 2005 of 88 members of parliament affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood Islamist movement, making it the biggest opposition group with 20% of seats, the government continues its repressive action against the movement, making numerous arrests.

President Mubarak had the constitution amended in March 2007. 34 articles were amended, in order, in particular, to ban political parties based on religious movements, make it compulsory for candidates for the parliamentary elections to be on a party list (making it impossible for Muslim Brothers to stand as independent candidates) and put an end to the supervision of elections by judges, who have been replaced by an "independent election commission".

However, the most critical amendment has been that to Article 179. Although the state of emergency has been abolished, the exceptional measures taken under it have been legalised by incorporating them into the constitution. In the name of fighting terrorism constitutional rights can be suspended, allowing the police to engage in searches, arrests or even telephone tapping without a warrant. The President can take suspects out of the normal judicial system and have them tried by military or special courts.

Political life in the country is still dominated by Hosni Mubarak's party, the National Democratic Party, which holds 80% of seats in parliament. The Muslim Brotherhood, which has no legal existence, cannot form a political party. Nonetheless it represents a real opposition force and regularly organises anti-government protests, that are strongly clamped down upon by the security forces. Political opponent Ayman Nour (El Ghad), an advocate for human rights and democracy, was imprisoned in 2005 after coming second in the presidential elections. He was released in 2009, officially for health reasons. Some people take the view that this was probably more than anything a gesture of goodwill vis-à-vis the new US Administration.

Speaking about the Israeli/Palestinian war, the Foreign Affairs Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit recently said that Israel was one of the states in the region with a military nuclear capability; he noted however that the existence of an Israeli bomb had never been recognised.

On the subject of Iran and the Arab states, he was clear about their hostility to intervention and recalled that since 1974, immediately after the ending of the war with Israel, Egypt had been calling for "denuclearisation of the Middle East".

He asked for a binding resolution prohibiting the use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states.

These statements betray a degree of disquiet, not to say increasing nervousness.

Syria

In the context of the preparation of the present report, your Rapporteur had the privilege on 4 March 2009 of meeting President Bashar al-Assad, who gave a clear explanation of Syria's position with regard to the problems of the region. Syria's Foreign Minister, Walid al-Muallem was able to confirm some of the points made by the President in the course of a brief visit to Paris on 30 September 2009. Both his observations and President Assad's earlier statement have been incorporated into the paragraphs that follow.

Different actors involved in the search for a peaceful solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict

In future negotiations both the Arab world and Israel have an important role to play, but most important will be the role of the US as an active mediator. Mr al-Muallem described President Obama as having brought fresh thinking to the problem with his initiative on freezing settlement and that although for the moment there is no way forward, President Obama's initiative has not failed.

Syria also has high hopes of the role Europe might play, as some countries have a profound knowledge of the Middle East. After a period of relative neglect on account of other preoccupations, Europe is now to play a more prominent role in the peace process.

It has to be recognised that because of its internal differences over the way ahead, Europe has not been very effective and has in fact been relegated to the role of paymaster. But how much longer will European public opinion accept Europe's having to pay without having any political influence in return?

Syria and Israel made substantial progress in negotiations, with Turkey as a mediator, until the war in Gaza brought the talks abruptly to an end.

Nonetheless Syria attaches importance to Turkey's role as mediator and, according to Mr al-Muallem, would be prepared to resume indirect discussions with Israel in order to reach an agreement on the 4 June 1967 line. He said that if the Israeli Government was ready, so would Syria be.

However the Syrians do not believe that an Israeli Government that has incorporated the far right and refuses to put a stop to settlements has the political will to make peace.

Relations with the Arab states

“Our relations with Saudi Arabia are fraternal (...) sometimes with a few clouds. We want to cooperate for the region’s stability”. On 23 September 2009 President Bashar al-Assad visited Saudi Arabia.

Relations with Israel

Relations between Syria and Israel have been on ice for more than 30 years, since Israel’s occupation of the Golan Heights in 1967. In 1973, Israel seized a further piece of Syrian territory. Mediation by the then US Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger, led in May 1974 to the signing of a disengagement agreement that gave Syria back the territory it had lost in 1973 and part of the Golan Heights.

Negotiations took place intermittently throughout the 1990s on the basis of the Madrid Conference, but the outbreak of the second intifada in September 2000 put a stop to them. Relations between the two countries deteriorated from that point on due to Syria’s support for Hamas, and in October 2003 the Israeli army carried out an air raid on what it suspected was a Palestinian terrorist training camp 15 km north of Damascus. The following December, President Bashar al-Assad announced his desire to resume negotiations, but declined an invitation by Israel to go to Jerusalem in January 2004 on the grounds that it was nothing more than a gesture to attract attention on Israel’s part.

From September 2004 to July 2006 the two countries engaged in secret talks that ended with the Israeli army’s invasion of southern Lebanon.

In June 2007, the then Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, announced his readiness to resume direct negotiations without prior conditions. However tensions escalated in September 2007 when Israel destroyed the Al-Kibar nuclear reactor under construction in the north-east of Syria. The IAEA inspected the site in June 2008 and found particles of graphite and uranium. The IAEA Director, Dr Mohamed ElBaradei called for more cooperation from Syria. Despite the tensions the two countries agreed to open indirect negotiations with Turkey as a mediator. However, when Benjamin Netanyahu took office in February 2009 the negotiations were broken off; Turkey is currently trying to relaunch them.

However, in September 2009, President Bashar al-Assad and Foreign Affairs Minister Walid al-Muallem several times denounced the “inexistence of an Israeli peace partner”, accusing Israel of having ruined the chances of peace by attacking Lebanon and then Gaza and of conducting policies (settlements, the blockade) which proved that it was not really interested in finding a solution to the conflict.

The basic principles for peace

The Syrian leadership has the full support of the population in its efforts to come to an agreement with Israel. Progress could be made if Israel were prepared to see the implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 in a positive light. Syria is flexible, but firm on the principle of land for peace and the return to it of the Golan Heights.

Annapolis was not successful. Syria expects Europe to get more involved in the peace process, using the Madrid Conference (1991) and the Arab Peace Initiative as references. While there is little reason to be optimistic in the short term, peace must be the medium-term objective.

A three-phase peace process, according to President Bashar al-Assad

At present, Syria sees a renewed peace process falling into three phases:

The first phase involves the resolution of a number of problems concerning Gaza, including a sustainable ceasefire, the lifting of the blockade and the exchange of prisoners between Israel and the Palestinians. This should be accompanied by international guarantees.

The second consists of reconciling the different Palestinian factions, in other words Fatah and Hamas. “Europe was mistaken in making a distinction between Fatah and Hamas and should from now on support all Palestinians, irrespective of political allegiance”.

The third entails negotiations to achieve peace among all the parties involved. Holding a peace conference, as proposed by the French President, would have offered a possibility had all the objectives been clarified in advance. A second Annapolis would not be useful.

A comprehensive peace agreement

Syria is prepared to conclude an agreement with Israel on the return of the Golan. But this must be seen as a phase in the preparations of a comprehensive peace agreement. “Palestinians in Syria are not restive because they still hope for a comprehensive peace agreement and have confidence in us”.

A separate agreement between Syria and Israel would make no sense and “would be a time bomb in the region if not followed up with a comprehensive peace agreement”.

There is a danger that if Israel were to succeed in concluding a peace agreement with Syria, it would no longer make any effort to resolve the problem with the Palestinians.

Role and position of Hamas

In Syria’s view Hamas “would be prepared to make peace”.

For two years Hamas has made it clear that the destruction of Israel is not the objective. “By accepting Israel’s pre-4 June 1967 borders, Hamas’ political leader, Khaled Meshaal, has de facto implicitly recognised Israel’s existence”. Hamas also accepts the idea of the two-state solution. Europe and the United States cannot ask for more at this point in time.

Syria has problems with the Muslim Brotherhood, but in view of the situation of its Arab brothers in the Palestinian territories has decided to work with Hamas. “This cooperation does not mean that Syria agrees with Hamas’ political philosophy”.

According to the Israeli Government, Syria must cease all support for terrorism, Hamas and jihadist Islamic organisations. It must stop supplying arms to Hezbollah, contributing to the destabilisation of Lebanon and supporting terrorism in Iraq, and it must break off its strategic ties with the Iranian regime.

Relations with Iran

Syria is against nuclear weapons being held by any state in the Middle East. Back in 2003 it proposed that the region should become a nuclear-free zone, without weapons of mass destruction.

Syria has signed and ratified the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and is entitled to use enriched uranium for peaceful purposes. “We have received assurances from the highest authorities in Iran – the Supreme Leader and the President – that its nuclear programme is for civilian purposes”.

Iran, as a NPT signatory state, also has the right to use nuclear energy peacefully. In talks with Iran, the Syrian Government has insisted that Iran should reach agreement with the IAEA on observation and control of its nuclear programme.

Observation would establish the basis for a solution of Iran’s nuclear programme. If Iran fails to agree to an observation mechanism, its position is weakened.

Any solution must be achieved through dialogue. Syria is opposed to a military solution, not least because it is aware of the dangers that it would involve for the region. “For Syria security in the Gulf is a red line which cannot be transgressed”. Moreover a “reckless decision by Israel that could drag the West into a conflict within Iran” cannot be ruled out.

Relations with the United States

At present US sanctions are the stumbling block to complete normalisation of relations between Syria and the United States. “One cannot classify Syria as a state that supports terrorism and at the same time ask it to cooperate in fighting terrorism”. Syria is, however, “ready to cooperate to ensure the security and stability in Iraq that would make the withdrawal of foreign forces possible. Syria is all for an Iraq that is united, independent, safe and prosperous”. Baghdad accuses Syria of the August 2009 attacks in Iraq. “Show us the proof”, is the Syrian leadership’s reply.

Your Rapporteur would add the following as a supplement to the above.

Relations between the United States and Syria relations deteriorated following the United States' invasion of Iraq in 2003 which was condemned by Syria.

After the United States cut the pipeline transporting Iraqi oil to Syria, the latter seemed to change tack: it started cooperating with the CIA, expelled a number of Iraqi officials, stepped up border controls and closed the Damascus offices of Palestinian organisations, while continuing its partial withdrawal from Lebanon. However, it soon relaxed its border controls and Washington once again toughened its stance: the US expressed its approval following the Israeli attack in October 2003. On 11 November the US Congress voted the Syria Accountability and Lebanese Sovereignty Restoration Act (SALSRA) authorising the President to decree sanctions, which is what Georges W. Bush did on 11 May 2004.

The sanctions consist of:

- an air travel embargo (however, there has been no direct air link between the two countries since 1979 when Syria was put on the list of state sponsors of terrorism);
- a ban on the export of goods on the United States Munitions List (weapons, munitions etc.) and Commerce Control List (dual-use goods such as nuclear technology, chemical products, lasers etc.);
- a ban on the export of goods manufactured in the United States, with the exception of food products and medicines.

American investments in Syria continued to be permitted, so all in all the sanctions were not very severe.

President Bush decided to add further sanctions:

- under the Patriot Act American banks were no longer authorised to have direct relations with the Commercial Bank of Syria and the Syrian Lebanese Bank;
- under the International Emergency Powers Act, the American assets of certain individuals were frozen. The 20 or so people concerned had been identified as participating in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, having ties with al-Qa'ida or the Taliban, or being engaged in destabilisation operations in Iraq or Lebanon.

Following the assassination of Rafiq Hariri in February 2005, Washington recalled its Ambassador, putting an end to its diplomatic relations with Damascus. The issues of Iraq and of Syrian support for Hezbollah remained key US concerns.

On 12 September 2006 the US Embassy came under attack. In 2008 George Bush extended sanctions and accused Syria of trying to develop nuclear weapons.

Yet the United States also wants Syria's support in combating foreign jihadists in Iraq, but Syria seems to fear reprisals from al-Qa'ida.

At the same time, however, the US suspects Syria of maintaining ambiguous relations with al-Qa'ida and other armed groups

The US would like to have cooperation but it is not easy to establish.

Control over the flows of jihadists towards Iraq would give Syria useful leverage in its future negotiations with the United States.

Besides, the United States recognises that Syria, which has considerably toughened the conditions for allowing young Arabs aged between 18 and 25 to enter its territory, has made efforts to control such comings and goings. They acknowledge that the flood of some 120 to 140 combatants entering each month has dropped to less than a dozen on average since early 2009.

Damascus hopes to develop new relations with Washington, particularly following the election of Barack Obama. This has indeed brought with it a certain change of US foreign policy: as of February

2009 there were high-level meetings between the two countries. Although Barack Obama decided in May to renew the sanctions, Special Middle East Envoy George Mitchell announced the following July that the sanctions would be lightened. The thaw in relations was marked above all by the announcement on 24 June that the US would be sending an Ambassador to Damascus (although the Ambassador has not yet been appointed).

Although stigmatised as a state that sponsors terrorism and engages in illicit nuclear activities, Syria is currently perceived by Washington as a key player in any solution to the region's conflicts. The Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister said recently with regard to President Obama that he (Obama) had not failed on the issue of settlements, in that he had generated awareness. For the moment there was no way forward. He had not been able to convince Mr Netanyahu. "What is important is the dynamics of dialogue (...) the process has started (...) it will be a slow one (...) other decisions will be necessary". What is important here is the positive nature of those comments.

The Association Agreement with the European Union

Relations between Syria and the European Union are governed by an agreement signed in 1977. Indeed, although Syria is a full participant in the Barcelona Process, it cannot benefit from Europe's Neighbourhood Policy. Implementation of the Association Agreement that was initialled in October 2004 has been suspended by the EU member states (basically France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands) which did not feel that the political context was appropriate for the signing and ratification of an agreement.

However, Syria does benefit from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument defining the strategic framework for its cooperation with the EU.

In March 2007 Javier Solana went to Damascus, breaking the freeze placed on high-level relations in the wake of the spring 2005 crisis. Negotiations resumed on the modalities for partnership; the question of whether it was appropriate to sign an agreement was submitted to COREPER at the beginning of September 2009. Syria's relations with France are currently calm and the UK Government stated at the beginning of August that it did not perceive any obstacles to the conclusion of an agreement, notwithstanding recurring concerns about human rights issues.

The European Union set 26 October 2009 as the date for the final signature of the Association Agreement but Syria announced that it was unable to make it as it needed more time in order to study the impact of opening up its market on the balance of its economy, industry and agricultural sector. No new date has been set for the moment.

Syria then is at the heart of many issues. Yet for the moment it does not play a genuinely constructive or positive role. It has been in real isolation since 2005 and since then more than anything it has reduced its negative activities. Syria seems little inclined to bow to the demands of the international community. It claims to be a "combatant for peace" and to be working in "solidarity with the Palestinian people". It claims to want to be an "active partner" and not dependent like Egypt or Jordan. Its relations with Israel will be defined in "a new context", on the basis of "a new and fair model" that will be built thanks to reconciliation among Arab and Islamic countries. The actions it wants to see are a removal of the blockade of Gaza and a halt to settlements.

President Bashar al-Assad was in Paris on 13 November 2009 where your Rapporteur met him during talks with the President of the French Senate.

The Syrian President expressed disappointment with US policy since the election of Barack Obama. The US needed to draw up a real "plan of action", and the "American godfather" represented "a weak point". "We agree with the declarations of principle", he said, "but what is Obama's plan?"

He said that words were not being followed up with deeds and that the US President was encumbered by the complex domestic situation in the US. "Mrs Clinton's Congress" was against him. Mr Obama had delivered two "slaps in the face" to Mahmoud Abbas that had weakened the Palestinian President: the first was when Mr Abbas was made to come to Washington at the same time as Mr Netanyahu, but failed to obtain a freeze on settlements, and the second was when he was forced to reject the Goldstone report.

The Syrian President claims that a Palestinian reconciliation would be possible if there were elections followed by the establishment of a “provisional government”. He claims that Mahmoud Abbas is in favour of such a solution and says the reconciliation could take place in Syria. He also believes Hamas to be “the alternative to Arafat”.

Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu who was in Paris at the same time said he was prepared “without preconditions” to resume peace talks with Syria. The Syrian President made a similar offer last October.

Lebanon

Lebanon had found peace after the devastating civil wars of 1975 and 1989 with the **signing of the Taef Agreement** in 1989. This comprised a plan for the progressive disarmament of the militias, and an agreement to revise the 1943 constitution and adapt the Lebanese political system to the current demographic weight of the different communities.

The revised constitution includes in its preamble the gradual abolition of confessional politics (the four religious communities are the Muslims – Shi’a, Sunni and Druze – and the Maronite Christians). This stipulation has also remained a dead letter. Religion is still a force in Lebanon; what is more, a new political disequilibrium has arisen with the **emergence of Hezbollah, a Shi’ite Islamic political movement with a well organised and well armed militia**. It was the activities of Hezbollah which led to the withdrawal of the Israeli troops who had occupied South Lebanon since 1982.

This was an Israeli defeat, a **“National Day of Liberation” for Lebanon, and a victory for Hezbollah**, who then controlled the entire south of the country. The Lebanese Army did not thereafter enter this region.

On 14 February 2005, in Lebanon, the former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri was assassinated. Syria was held to be responsible both by the international community and by a large number of Lebanese. This assassination triggered the so-called “Cedar Revolution”. On 28 February 2005, the pro-Syrian Prime Minister Omar Karami submitted his resignation. Legislative elections were held (in four phases) during the period May-June 2005. **They were won** by the **“Forces of 14 March”** (which referred to the giant demonstration which took place one month after Hariri’s death); they won two thirds of the seats in Parliament; and **Fuad Siniora** became Prime Minister.

The pro-Syrian Hezbollah polled 11% of the votes, and obtained 14 seats out of 118 in parliament; the “Resistance and Development” bloc, to which it belongs, got 27.4% of the popular vote. Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah’s leader, called for dialogue and pronounced himself in favour of a “government of national unity”. His movement joined the government for the first time ever on 19 July 2005.

After difficult negotiations with President Lahud, Fuad Siniora succeeded in forming the first Lebanese Government following the Syrian withdrawal; it was also the first to include members of Hezbollah. Most political tendencies were represented in it, with the exception of the Maronite Christian bloc of General Michel Aoun.

The eighth session of the conference seeking to arrive at an agreement to **disarm Hezbollah** opened in Beirut on 8 June 2006 against a background of discord.

The principal Muslim and Christian leaders did not think that the Lebanese Army was a match for Israeli military power. Hezbollah proclaimed itself to be capable of responding to Israeli attacks on Lebanon, and demanded that the Israelis withdraw from the Shebah Farms sector and free the Lebanese prisoners held in Israel. The Israelis insisted for their part on their need for security on their northern border and called for the return of Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah.

In July 2006 after provocation by Hezbollah, the Israeli army launched the biggest attack in Lebanon since the 1982 invasion – unexpected both in scale and brutality. Certain commentators called it “disproportionate.” A significant portion of the Lebanese population, including Christians and Sunnis, supported Hezbollah through animosity towards Israel.

On 5 August, France and the United States agreed to support a draft resolution in the UN Security Council, establishing a permanent ceasefire and allowing a long-term solution to the conflict. This

supported Resolution 1559 and the Taef Agreement, calling for an end to all Hezbollah attacks and all offensive military operations by Israel. **On 11 August 2006 the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 1701, putting an end to the violence.**

The text emphasises the sovereignty of Israel and Lebanon and compliance with their borders, including in the Shebah Farms area.

Hezbollah continued its efforts to impose its will on the government and persistently blocked the latter's attempts to implement its policy.

Finally, the armed branch of Hezbollah took Beirut airport by force and occupied several Sunni quarters in East Beirut.

Thanks to mediation by Qatar, the majority and opposition concluded the Doha Agreement of 21 May 2008 that gave the opposition the blocking minority within the government that it had hitherto been refused. The agreement had the advantage of preventing the situation from spiralling into civil war and put an end to the political and institutional deadlock that had dominated the Lebanese political scene since 2006.

The agreement also put an end to the delay in the election of the President. On 25 May 2008 Michel Suleiman was elected President of the Republic, while on 11 July 2008 a new government of national unity was formed with Fuad Siniora as Prime Minister.

Hezbollah's weapons

The civil war, which the Party of God had not been very much involved in, ended in 1990 with the signing of the Taef Accords permitting Hezbollah, in the name of the "resistance", to keep its weapons in the south. Even after Syria had withdrawn under international pressure, Fuad Siniora's government, formed from the anti-Syrian opposition, allowed Hezbollah to keep its weapons, deferring the negotiations until later.

The Doha Conference almost foundered on this issue in May 2008, with Qatar proposing that the final communiqué include a clause guaranteeing the non-use of weapons for internal political purposes. Hezbollah refused all discussion and threatened to torpedo the negotiations.

Although the United Nations Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) does not have a mandate for the disarmament of Hezbollah, any settlement of the conflict will require the armed branch of this Shi'ite movement to be dismantled. Its integration into the Lebanese army and participation in the national defence remain very hypothetical for the moment. Pending the negotiations on the composition of the new government, the future looks risky. Lebanon lives in a climate of mistrust and some members of the current majority are openly talking about the possibility of rearmament.

Moreover various unofficial sources have reported that Hezbollah is rapidly rearming via Syria. Germany has therefore sent border control experts in order to help the Lebanese Government apply the international weapons embargo. This bilateral technical assistance has replaced the two options that were initially envisaged: to deploy UNIFIL on the Syrian border and to set up a surveillance mission using EU civilian crisis-management capabilities.

On 27 August 2009 the UN Security Council prolonged UNIFIL's mandate for one year. Following the Lebanese Government's undertaking in August 2007 to deploy 15 000 troops in southern Lebanon, the Security Council had already prolonged the mandate and decided to increase it to a maximum of 15 000 troops. UNIFIL's task is to monitor the cessation of hostilities, accompany and support the deployment of the Lebanese army forces and to facilitate access to humanitarian aid for the civilian population in the south of the country.¹⁰

United Nations Independent Investigation Commission and Special Tribunal

Following the murder of the former Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafiq Hariri, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1595 (7 April 2005) establishing an independent commission of inquiry to investigate the murder.

¹⁰ Official site of the United Nations: <http://www.un.org>

The Independent Investigation Commission's first report submitted on 20 October under the auspices of German magistrate Detlev Mehlis concluded that there was a whole body of evidence suggesting both Lebanese and Syrian involvement in the assassination of the former Lebanese Prime Minister and that it had been carried out by a group with an extensive organisation and considerable resources and capabilities.

In his second report submitted to the UN Security Council on 12 December 2005, Detlev Mehlis stated that although Syria was being more cooperative with the Commission, having allowed five Syrian top officials suspected of involvement in the murder to be questioned, it needed to do more to dispel all doubt about its desire to find out the truth. UN Security Council Resolution 1644 adopted on 15 December 2005 prolonged the Commission's mandate and authorised it to extend its technical assistance to the Lebanese authorities with regard to their investigations on the terrorist attacks perpetrated in Lebanon since 1 October 2004.¹¹

Following Mr Mehlis' departure the Secretary-General appointed the Belgian Serge Brammertz to lead the Independent Investigation Commission. Upon submitting the Commission's sixth report to the UN Security Council on 12 December 2006, Mr Brammertz stressed that the investigation was pointless unless it led to judicial proceedings conducted by a special court. Thus, pursuant to UNSCR 1757 adopted on 30 May 2007, the legally binding provisions of the agreement between the UN and Lebanon on the creation of a Special Tribunal for Lebanon and on the statutes of the Tribunal entered into force on 10 June 2007, although the Lebanese Parliament did not ratify them.

On 14 November 2007 the Security Council appointed the Canadian Daniel Bellemare to succeed Mr Brammertz at the head of the Commission. The same day the UN Secretary-General appointed him Prosecutor for the Special Tribunal for Lebanon.¹²

On 26 February 2009 the UN Secretary-General confirmed that the Special Tribunal would start functioning as an independent judicial body on 1 March 2009.¹³

This was the context in which the French daily newspaper *Libération* published an article last May quoting an article from the German weekly *Der Spiegel* claiming that the intensive investigations in Lebanon now pointed to a different conclusion: that it was not the Syrians but Hezbollah special forces that had planned and carried out the attack that had cost Mr Hariri his life on 14 February 2005.¹⁴

The Lebanese Hezbollah denounced this story as pure fabrication intended to influence the election campaign and detract attention from reports about the dismantling of spy networks working for Israel. The murdered Prime Minister's son, Saad Hariri, a leading figure of the anti-Syrian parliamentary majority, refused to comment on the information published by *Der Spiegel*. The STL Prosecutor's Office also refused to comment on questions relating to the technical aspects of the investigation.

During the 7 June 2009 legislative elections the 14 March Coalition kept its large majority (71 out of 128 seats) while the opposition led by Hezbollah and Michel Aoun's Christian party won 58 seats.

By voting against the opposition and in favour of the 14 March Coalition the Lebanese electorate confirmed its alignment with the pro-western Arab states – Saudi Arabia and Egypt – and its openness towards the West. The Christian voters swung the election result with their clear rejection of the Iranian-Syrian option. Indeed the deciding vote was cast by the Christian communities which had been strongly divided between the 14 March camp, firmly opposed to the Syrian occupation, and that of General Michel Aoun. General Aoun, an emblematic figure and former leading opponent of the Syrian occupation who had become an ally of Hezbollah, did not convince voters with his *volte-face*.¹⁵

Saad Hariri, the leader of the majority, was chosen by parliament to form a government. So far he has been unsuccessful in his efforts to constitute a government of national unity composed of 15 ministers from the majority, five ministers appointed by Parliament and 10 ministers from the opposition.

¹¹ Official site of the United Nations: <http://www.un.org>

¹² Official site of the United Nations: <http://www.un.org>

¹³ UN News Centre: <http://www.un.org/news/>

¹⁴ From an article in *Libération*: "Meurtre d'Hariri au Liban : l'enquête pointerait le Hezbollah", 24 May 2009.

¹⁵ From an article in *Le Figaro* "Liban : le camp anti-syrien proclame sa victoire", 8 June 2009.

Under the Lebanese political system the composition of the government does not automatically follow on from the clear election victory of the 14 March Coalition. The latest political crisis – just one year after the Doha Agreement that had put an end to the institutional deadlock by enabling the election of President Michel Suleiman and the formation of a government of unity – lasted several months before a solution was found on 9 November 2009. The government that has been put in place is the result of horse-trading of which Syria appears to have endorsed the outcome.

Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

At present, there are still a few hundred thousand Palestinian refugees living in Lebanon. The official figure is 430 000, living in 12 refugee camps, but nobody is able to assess the exact number, and estimates vary significantly between 200 000 at the lowest and 350 000 at the highest estimates. The Lebanese Government suggests that the real figure may be some 280 000 to 300 000.

The refugees have never been able to obtain Lebanese citizenship because the government is very worried that an influx estimated officially at over 400 000 Palestinians, or some 15% of Lebanon's total population, would further disturb the religious balance that provides the most important foundation of the country's political institutions.

As a consequence, the majority of these refugees, who are excluded from most fundamental citizens' rights and concentrated in camps that often lack basic public services, continue to live under miserable conditions.

Since 2005-2006, the Lebanese Government, aware of the growing problems, has been paying more attention to the problems of these refugees.

United Nations Security Council Resolution 1559 of September 2004 required the disarmament of Palestinian organisations in Lebanon and the government has since created a committee to negotiate disarmament of bases outside the camps and the regulation of weapons inside the camps.

The government has further improved its cooperation with the Palestinian Authority. In order to improve the socio-economic situation of the refugees, it is now allowing Palestinian refugees to take jobs in a defined number of economic activities. It has entered into a dialogue with the leadership in the camps and is now setting up rehabilitation projects.

The Lebanese security forces have no right to enter the camps, where security is a matter for the Palestinian leadership in the camps. Palestinian political factions are active within the camps, but cooperate to ensure security and stability.

All concerned are aware that efforts on the part of radical extremists to take power in the camps must be prevented at all costs. The example of Nahr El Bared, which the radical Fatah al-Islam infiltrated, leading to a battle in summer 2008, is still fresh in everybody's memory. The Lebanese armed forces lost some 150 men and the camp was totally destroyed, making 30 000 refugees homeless. No one wants to see such events repeated.

In Lebanon a debate has begun over the possibility of granting citizenship to a restricted number of refugees, in particular those married to Lebanese citizens or who are the children of such marriages.

Any Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement will need to include a solution to the refugee problem, which Lebanon considers a priority. It sees different possibilities for settling these refugees: in particular installing them in a third country or in Lebanon, returning them to the Palestinian territories, or to Egypt, and compensation.

Iraq

There are three dominant issues at present:

Have things really calmed down, and will they remain so once the American forces leave?

Are the forces of democracy truly stable or are they still precarious after five elections and a period with Nouri al-Maliki at the helm as Prime Minister?

Is the religious and ethnic balance within the countries between Sunnis, Shiites and Kurds a stable one?

Lastly, it is estimated that to rebuild this devastated country some 60 billion dollars will be needed.

1 - Towards the end of the American occupation and withdrawal of foreign troops

Operation Iraqi Freedom was launched in March 2003 by a US-led coalition of up to 38 states. It deployed some 300 000 soldiers (250 000 Americans, some 40 000 British troops and various other contingents ranging from 70 Albanians to 2 000 Australians).

Among the first states to withdraw their troops were Spain, following the election of José Luis Zapatero in March 2004, and Italy in 2006 (following Romano Prodi's election win). Most of the contingents left between October and December 2008, when the UN mandate expired and 13 states withdrew their troops.

In December 2008 the Iraqi Parliament authorised the presence for a further six months of 5 000 foreign troops, for the most part British. Following the departure of the Estonian and Salvadorian soldiers in January 2009, and the withdrawal of the Australian, British and Romanian contingents in July, only 130 000 US troops are now left in Iraq.

The legal basis for their presence is provided by a status of forces agreement (SOFA) adopted by the Iraqi Parliament on 27 November 2008 which makes provision for the withdrawal of the American troops. As of 1 January 2009 Iraqi troops took control of the "green zone" that had symbolised the US presence.

The withdrawal process, a veritable logistics challenge, is divided into three phases:

- In June 2009, the US Army withdrew from all Iraqi towns except Mossul, where there are still strong tensions and high levels of violence;
- In August 2010 most of the troops are to have left, leaving behind a 35 000 to 50 000-strong "support force".
- At the end of 2011, all that will remain will be training and logistics units with no permanent base.

The timescale for withdrawal can be amended by mutual agreement between the two states.

The Iraqi army is some 260 000 strong. Iraq also has 500 000 policemen (in addition to self defence militias and local police).

The Iraqi forces are faced with many problems: a shortage of equipment, a reduced budget due to the fall in oil prices, widespread corruption, variable levels of efficiency, failure on the part of certain of their members to identify with the state and religious differences. These are all problems that can put the future of the country at risk, once the US troops are no longer there to support the Iraqi forces' counter-insurgency operations. There are fears that there may be a fresh outbreak of activity on the part of insurgents awaiting the departure of the Americans in order to launch an offensive.

There was indeed a resurgence of violence in April 2009 (peaking in May with the death of 25 US soldiers), two months before the American forces were withdrawn from the towns. There was a rise in the number of attacks against Shiites, in particular in Baghdad and Mossul. August was the deadliest month that had been seen for a year, with 456 civilian deaths (according to the figures supplied by the Iraqi authorities). The situation appeared to have calmed somewhat in September, although there were still 125 civilian deaths. However in October a violent attack in Baghdad killed 135 people and wounded more than 70.

2 - The security situation had improved but the question is whether it will survive the departure of the Americans and the action by al-Qa'ida. Some authorities are calling for the dismissal of the Interior Minister and an extension of the ultra-protected "green zone" to the whole of the city of Baghdad. The US Army estimates that violence has decreased by 85% in two years, with 594 attacks in August 2009 compared with 4 064 attacks in August 2007. In 2006, which was the most lethal year for civilians, there were 27 652 confirmed deaths (according to the Iraq Body Count Project). In 2008

the figure fell to 9 214 and stood at 1 951 on 10 June 2009. The American death toll stood at 4 352 on 19 October 2009. The US suffered its biggest losses in 2007, when 904 soldiers were killed. Taking into account the losses of the coalition forces (179 British soldiers and 139 soldiers of other nationalities) we arrive at a total of 4 670 deaths, of which 1 386 in the province of Baghdad alone.

While 14 provinces are now considered secure, there are still four in which the situation has not been stabilised and which could continue to be hotbeds of insurgency. The most dangerous provinces, aside from Baghdad and the province of Al-Anbar (which includes Fallujah and Ramadi), are those of Ninevah (in particular the town of Mossul) and Diyala (to the north-east of Baghdad on the border with Iran and an al-Qa'ida stronghold in Iraq).

3 - Kurdistan, Kirkuk and the control of oil: a powder keg

Iraqi Kurdistan, or the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan, is home to 2.5 million Kurds and has wide-ranging autonomy guaranteed by the Constitution establishing the federal state (Article 113). Three provinces – Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimaniye – fall under the authority of the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) inaugurated on 7 May 2006 under Prime Minister Nechirvan Idris Barzani.

The KRG has legislative competence in certain areas and an armed force (some 100 000 strong) – the Peshmerga – equipped with light weapons. It has competence for taxation and control of its police and security forces (the former DPK/PUK militias). The provinces are also free to set the dates of their provincial elections.

The Kurds claim all or part of the provinces of Diyala, Kirkuk, Ninevah, Salah ad Din and Wassit, which form a disputed zone known as the trigger line, in which the Iraqi army stands opposite the Kurdish forces and which could easily degenerate into another battle zone.

The town of Kirkuk is the the subject of particular tensions. The Kurds view it as the capital of Kurdistan (their “Jerusalem”). Above all it is the national oil production centre, accounting for 13% of the country’s proven resources. Article 140 of the Constitution makes provision for a referendum to be held on the future of the town and the surrounding region. The government keeps putting off the referendum, while the Kurds only want it to be held once the Arab inhabitants who were installed there by Saddam Hussein have moved, which would change the region’s population balance.

The Sunni Arabs, the Turkmen and the Turkish authorities are strongly opposed to any form of Kurdish control over the town, since this would shift the balance of power in favour of the Kurds, giving them more resources and influence.

In April 2009 a report submitted to the Iraqi authorities by the UN Secretary-General’s Special Representative, Staffan de Mistura, set out a series of proposals with a view to arriving at a compromise within the framework of the Constitution. In June the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish Regional Government set up a high-level working group with a view to finding a solution to the Kurdish question.

In addition to making the region part of Kurdistan, the Kurds are calling for the right to sign direct trade contracts for hydrocarbons located on the territory under their jurisdiction. Tensions over the control of Iraq’s oil reserves have increased since June 2009, when the KRG started exporting oil without having the contracts validated by the Baghdad government.

4 - The January 2010 elections

Legislative elections will take place on 16 January 2010. The current Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al Maliki, has decided to contest the election as part of a multi-confessional “coalition of the rule of law”, bringing together 40 movements, political parties and independent candidates representing all the Iraqi communities.

The Shiite parties, in particular the Supreme Islamic Iraqi Council (SIIC) and the followers of Moqtada al-Sadr, got together in August 2009 to form the Iranian-backed Iraqi National Alliance.

The Sunni bloc has also divided up following the decision by Tariq al-Hashemi, the current Vice-President, to create a separate formation outside the Concord Front led by Osama al-Tikriti’s Iraqi Islamic Party.

The two traditional Kurdish parties – the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) and the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (DPK) will be standing jointly within a Kurdish alliance. An alliance between them and the SIIC, which like them is opposed to the re-election of Nouri al-Maliki, cannot be ruled out. However they face competition from Nawshirwan Mustafa's Change List which won 23% of the votes in the 2009 Kurdish elections.

Several questions remain outstanding. First of all the Iraqi Parliament is unable to vote on a new electoral law due to two unresolved issues: whether the lists will be open or closed and the form that the election will take in the province of Tamim, which is where the town of Kirkuk is located (possibility of quotas for the different communities). Another issue is the possible influence that may be exerted on the elections by external powers, in particular Iran, which actively supports the Iraqi National Alliance. Finally there is reason to fear a fresh outbreak of inter-confessional conflict, while the absence of a consensus on Nouri al-Maliki makes it impossible to predict the composition of the future government and its likely leader.

For the various ethnic groups, and for President Obama, who has other difficulties at the moment, the prospect of the US pull-out from Iraq must not lead to renewed instability in the area. The problem is a weighty one, particularly coming on top of the rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

President Obama needs to throw some levers politically and act upon his asserted authority. He needs to do so both in Iraq and in Palestine. For Afghanistan it is more problematic.

V. Turkey

Turkey has always endeavoured to strike a balance in its relations with the Arab states of the region, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other. It can play an important role in finding a settlement to the Middle East conflict and the Turkish Government makes every effort to do that.

Introduction: Turkey's foreign policy

Generally speaking, Turkey has not yet succeeded in striking a new balance between ethnicity, cultural differences, religion and other forces, so as to create a truly modern democratic system and fully stabilise its internal situation. For this reason Turkey, which has expanded its diplomatic role and activities in the region, is still not able to play its full part as a regional power.

Since the AKP's accession to government, Turkey's foreign policy has to an extent taken account of religious identity, which is a reason for the country's growing political influence in the region. The recent rapprochement with Armenia is a major development which it must be hoped will open new doors to peace in the region.

Turkey considers its present foreign policy towards its region to be advantageous for its accession to the European Union.

Turkey and Israel

Turkey has historic ties with the Jewish people going back over 500 years. Turkey and Israel are the only non-Arab countries of the western Middle East and are engaged in intensive relations on a number of basic issues at the political, military and commercial levels, based essentially on pragmatic considerations.

Israel sees Turkish mediation as the visible proof of its positive role in bringing Syria and Israel together and it would seem that notwithstanding recent public incidents, this is a door that has not been closed.

Israel of course wants to preserve its good relations with Turkey, but for Turkey to continue to be a useful mediator in the disputes between Israel and its neighbours there must be good personal relations among the Turkish and Israeli leaders, which does not appear to be the case for the moment. Nonetheless Turkey remains, if not a major intermediary, at least an important adviser and partner for the United States in this region.

In October 2009, Turkey cancelled Israel's involvement in its Anatolian Eagle Air Force exercise, for technical reasons according to a government spokesman.

Some analysts consider that Turkey seems to want to distance itself from Israel, while drawing closer to its Muslim neighbours, having realised that it has more to gain by trying to restore the weight it carried in the region during the time of the old Ottoman Empire.

However, military ties between Turkey and Israel remain strong. Israel continues to use Turkish air space for training its pilots and two important cooperation programmes are underway for the upgrading by Israel of Turkish M60 tanks and F16 aircraft.

Hamas and the disputes among the Arab states

Turkey sees Hamas as a political reality and hence argues that no stable or comprehensive peace can be achieved as long as the situation in Gaza is ignored. It has no intention of interfering in the mediation efforts that Egypt is currently conducting between Fatah and Hamas, but is willing to do everything it can to support the efforts aimed at reconciliation between the two factions. It takes the view that peace and stability in the region require the settlement of disputes between and among Arab states.

Iran's nuclear programme

Turkey takes the view that the West is applying a policy of double standards in the present crisis over Iran's nuclear activities, arguing that every other country that is a signatory to the NPT (Non-Proliferation Treaty) is allowed to have a civilian nuclear programme.

Acquisition of nuclear weapons would not necessarily improve Iran's security or that of the region. In its diplomatic contacts with Iran, Turkey tries to adopt a more moderate stance than many western countries and to create opportunities for a pragmatic dialogue.

Turkey believes that both Iran and Syria must endeavour to improve cooperation with the IAEA, and is trying to create an atmosphere in which both of those countries can improve their relations with western countries and with the IAEA.

Turkey is opposed to sanctions, far preferring the diplomatic route.

Turkey has economic and strategic interests in common with Iran. Iran is the second largest supplier of gas to Turkey, after Russia, and there is substantial trade between Turkey and Iran. The two countries have a shared interest in the struggle against the PKK, which is active on both sides of the border.

Disarmament and non-proliferation

Turkey is in favour of transforming the Middle East into a non-nuclear weapon zone and has always supported United Nations Security Council Resolutions to that end.

It is aware, however, that this is a goal that can only be achieved once there is a comprehensive and lasting peace between Israel and all its neighbours.

VI. Iran

Iran is a non-Arab Muslim country which wants at all costs again to become a major player in the region and is endeavouring by all means to do so. As the heirs of the immense Persian civilisation and a glorious past the Iranians are a proud people.

The Shah had already tried to modernise his country and people, and endow it with all the facilities it needed. The mullah regime plunged the country into brutal obscurantism. The current president, Ahmadinejad, is both fanatical and clever. Iran wants to become a leader in the region and in the Islamic world. Iran gives cause for concern. It wants nuclear weapons and is in a position to acquire them. That is the major challenge. Should we impose sanctions or attack? That is the dilemma. President Obama, initially in favour of holding out a hand to Iran, now sees the limitations of that approach. The international community (France, the United Kingdom, Germany) wants to impose sanctions on Tehran, but would prefer China and Russia to cooperate. It is a difficult decision. Caution prevails. But Israel must be prevented from initiating military action. The Israelis demonstrated their capacity to act in 1981 (when they bombed the Tammuz nuclear reactor in Iraq) and in 2007 (with an

attack on a nuclear site in Syria). Such an option would be fraught with major consequences. “The Iranian regime may be reactionary and obstinate, but it is not immune to pressure” writes The Times.

All its neighbours, the Middle East states in general, the United States, Europe and Russia are worried about its nuclear programme. In spite of years of negotiations and sanctions that programme is continuing: recently a spokesman for President Ahmadinejad said that Iran must be viewed as a nuclear power and that there was no way whatsoever that concerned countries could negotiate a halt to the programme.

Since 2005 Iran has been making progress with its nuclear programme, refusing to reveal any information about its illicit activities. The impression one gets looking back at the various attempts at negotiation and all the cancelled agreements is that of a dialogue of the deaf in which Iran has successfully been playing for time in order to avoid a military solution.

The discovery of a second uranium enrichment site raises further suspicions in the West. Up until now, the only known uranium enrichment facility was Natanz which, according to the latest IAEA report, houses 8 308 centrifuges, a thousand of which are new and as yet unused. With this latest discovery, today Iran is thought to have some 11 000 or more centrifuges. It is said that 3 000 are being installed in the new site which is located near the holy city of Qom 70 km south of Tehran. The facility is dug into a mountain and hidden inside a base of the Revolutionary Guard, the regime’s ideological army, which has control of the country’s nuclear programme. The Americans have been monitoring its construction for several years. Before this dramatic disclosure, Israel believed that given the progress made in enrichment technology over recent years Tehran could have enough fissile material to build a nuclear warhead by 2010. The latest revelations are all the more uncomfortable for Iran as a recent IAEA report said that Iran was on the point of developing a delivery vehicle capable of carrying a nuclear warhead.

They have made it possible for the US to take a tougher stand with regard to Iran, to the point even of saying that “no option is excluded”, although a diplomatic solution would be preferred. The end-of-year deadline has been confirmed and linked with the threat of new “biting” sanctions (dual-track policy). Furthermore, the discovery of the Qom site has made it more difficult for Russia and China to “cover” for Iran.

At this stage however it is legitimate to ask a number of questions: why does the Iranian bomb inspire more fear than other bombs? Why should Iran not have the right to build one when Pakistan, India and Israel all did? It is not enough to answer “because Iran has been a signatory to the Non-Proliferation Treaty since 1968”, even if it is true that by signing it undertook not to acquire or seek to acquire nuclear weapons; in exchange it would benefit from international assistance for its peaceful nuclear activities. That right is not contested, but Iran is violating all the international rules of the NPT and UN Security Council.

This situation brings home the inability of the international community to resolve the crises generated by its policy of double standards and the need for a revision of the NPT, even after the withdrawal of North Korea. We are probably at the start of a new nuclear era. We must anticipate all the risks and take their full measure.

Why would deterrence not work for the Middle East as it did during the cold war or as it does between India and Pakistan?

The logic of deterrence is not the prerogative of a chosen few, but the multiplication of nuclear players does constitute a major risk.

Although deterrence as a stabilising factor does not fit with the bellicose rhetoric of President Ahmadinejad, it must be stressed that the issue of a “nuclear Iran” goes far beyond that of “relations of deterrence with Israel” in that it affects the security of all the states of the region and beyond.

Could a solution be to ensure that Iran adopts the Japanese model, stopping at the threshold of a nuclear capability? In that model Japan has full mastery of the nuclear fuel cycle but has placed it under strict IAEA control. Iran, on the contrary, has repeatedly tried to avoid any such surveillance of its sites. Two decades of dissimulation have dealt a blow to confidence in Iran.

And what will the other players in the region do? The worst may never happen but there is nonetheless a serious risk. If Iran becomes a nuclear power, other regional players – Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Turkey and others – will quite understandably also start asking themselves questions.

They have several options: to launch their own military nuclear programme, to acquire missile defence systems or to negotiate agreements with the West. An Iranian bomb could trigger a chain reaction of proliferation in the region that the weakened NPT will be helpless to contain. This makes it all the more urgent to resolve the Iranian crisis and to give serious thought to denuclearising this zone in complete opposition to the Begin doctrine of ensuring an Israeli monopoly of nuclear power in the region.

Are sanctions effective? Iran has been the target of sanctions for 30 years, since the hostage-taking at the US Embassy in 1982. The results are not conclusive. The measures imposed by the UN in 2006 and 2007 have not weakened the resolve of the Iranian regime but they most certainly have impoverished the Iranian people by laying up whole sectors of the economy.

The oil and gas sectors have been hard hit. Production is stagnating at around four million barrels a day (as compared with six million in 1979). Iran has the world's third largest gas reserves (6%) but is unable to exploit them and has to import gas from Turkmenistan. It shares the huge gas reserves of the Gulf with Qatar, which has become the world's leading exporter of LNG. Iran was excluded from the meetings held in Turkey on the Nabucco gas pipeline project, while Syria was invited to attend. It has reason to fear a petrol embargo, having to import 40% of its fuel due to a lack of refineries. However the UN is trying to find "smart" sanctions that will not hurt the population which is already hard hit by the 75% unemployment rate, particularly the younger generation. Sanctions have strengthened the black market and the informal networks of the Revolutionary Guards. That market remains open to the Russians and Chinese. France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom are competitors on it. Iran's economic isolation is both real and relative, but it must delve into its currency reserves.

The option of a military strike in order to stop Iran's nuclear programme is mentioned regularly, but the question is whether it is really realistic. In March 2009 a serious and detailed study of all the different options was published.¹⁶ It comes to the clear-cut conclusion that the destruction once and for all of Iran's nuclear programme has been ruled out by military experts. The best such action could achieve would be to delay the programme by several years, while the price to pay in terms of human lives and of the geopolitical consequences would be extremely high.

And indeed, is Iran in fact a danger to Israel? Over and above appearances and constant carping from the Israelis, there is no territorial conflict between them. Yet, Iranian propaganda constantly refers to the Zionist foe. Iranians are not for the most part hostile to Israel so the regime's extremist stance is mainly for external consumption. Iran does not persecute its Jewish community which, at some 25 000-strong, is the second largest in the Middle East, after Israel itself.

On 1 October 2009 the EU 3+3 (United States, China, Russia, Germany, France and the United Kingdom) held talks with Iran in Geneva.

After the meeting, EU High Representative Javier Solana explained that in the framework of the dual-track approach, the EU 3+3 had put all the issues on the table.

Particular attention was paid to the question of how the freeze-for-freeze proposal should be taken forward as a way to full negotiations. Iran was to be fully transparent to the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) on all elements of its nuclear programme and confidence should be rebuilt through practical steps.

It was agreed to intensify dialogue in the coming weeks and progress was expected in the following areas:

¹⁶ Abdullah Tonkan and Anthony Cordesman: "Study on a possible Israeli strike on Iran's nuclear development facilities", Center for Strategic and International Studies, 14 March 2009.

- First, there would be a second meeting before the end of October. It would focus on nuclear issues, including proposals previously put forward by both sides. It would also deal with global issues that any of the parties wished to address.
- Second, Iran declared that it planned to cooperate fully and immediately with the IAEA on the new enrichment facility near Qom, and would invite IAEA experts to visit the facility within the next couple of weeks.
- Third, in consultations with the IAEA and on the margins of the Geneva meeting, it was agreed in principle that low-enriched uranium produced in Iran would be transported to third countries for further enrichment and fabrication into fuel assemblies for the Tehran Research Reactor, which produces isotopes for medical applications.

Details would be worked out in a meeting of experts from the IAEA and interested countries in Vienna on 18 October so that implementation could begin as soon as possible.

Iran's Arab neighbours are worried. For the Gulf monarchies a nuclear Iran would further the aims of a new Persian expansionism that King Abdullah of Jordan described as a Shiite “crescent” of influence supported by the Syrian ally and the Lebanese Hezbollah.

The Gulf states have been linked to the West for decades by various security treaties with western powers such as the United States, the United Kingdom and France.

For all that they have kept their own counsel, even though each of them has its particular issues with Iran: the United Arab Emirates is still challenging the Shah's annexation of three islands close to the Strait of Hormuz while Qatar on the contrary is exploiting a strategic gas field in cooperation with the Islamic Republic.

The strong Shiite presence in these states – a third of the population in Kuwait and a sizable share of the population in the Emirates (Dubai) or the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – represents “dormant cells” that could be activated if necessary by Iran.

These situations explain why there is no common strategy. Yet the Gulf monarchies are developing a veritable “structural fear” of Iran and are more than anything concerned to protect their security. They will not therefore assert themselves as “stated enemies” of Iran.

Is a dialogue possible? It has been for four years. Iran is stubbornly making its way forward.

Neither has there been a breakthrough by President Obama over the past eight months. President Ahmadinejad's controversial re-election last June has not helped matters.

Nothing has come of the offer that the major powers made to Iran two years ago of cooperation on civilian nuclear energy. But the offer remains on the table. This “freeze for freeze” proposal entails a freeze on stepping up UN sanctions in exchange for Iran freezing the number of centrifuges, which are used to enrich uranium.

However, after more than seven years of tension over the Iranian nuclear question the result is a “slow diplomatic failure”.

The US President is realistic and is showing patience. He is certainly neither naïve nor weak, as proved by the recent shattering announcement in the midst of the G20 summit in Pittsburg of the discovery of the Qom nuclear site .

VII. The United States

Peace efforts under the administration of President George W. Bush

The American administration under President George W. Bush initially tried to revamp the Middle East peace process by proposing the “road map”, an initiative later endorsed by the Quartet. Although one can argue that some of the requirements of the road map have been implemented and that the various parties have repeatedly affirmed their continuing support for it, most analysts have pronounced it dead, given the lack of political will all round to take the reciprocal steps necessary, and the many outbreaks of violence and hostilities perpetrated by both sides.

At the end of his presidency, President Bush took the initiative to organise the Annapolis Conference on 27 November 2007 with a view to resolving the conflict along the lines of the earlier road map. A joint statement for the first time stipulated a two-state solution as the mutually agreed outline for addressing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the negotiation process begun on the basis of the Annapolis Declaration did not produce significant results.

Annapolis was at best nothing more than a theoretical exercise. More than 200 rounds of negotiations were held in the space of a year, but at the same time the construction of settlements increased by about 40% as compared with 2007, according to the Israeli statistics office. European leaders share the disillusionment with Annapolis.

Peace efforts under the administration of President Barack Obama since January 2009

However since the failure of Annapolis Washington has worked hard on the Palestinian question in an effort to put the Bush era behind it. In January 2009 the newly elected President, Barack Obama, confirmed his electoral promise of addressing this issue immediately, appointing George Mitchell as his Envoy for the Middle East. On 18 May 2009 he hosted a meeting with the new Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, in Washington and called for a halt to the construction of settlements in the West Bank.

In a speech he made in **Cairo on 4 June 2009**, President Obama set out clearly his conditions for a resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict.

The United States has strong bonds with Israel which should be considered unbreakable and fully recognises the existence of the state of Israel. At the same time it recognises the Palestinians' legitimate aspirations for dignity, opportunity and a state of their own.

The only solution to the present conflict is the existence, side by side, of two states in which Israelis and Palestinians can both live in peace and security.

Regarding the two parties' obligations, the United States takes as a reference the road map as agreed to in 2002.

The Palestinians must abandon violence and focus on what they can build. The Palestinian Authority must develop its capacity to govern, with institutions that serve the needs of its people.

Hamas has support among some Palestinians, but it also has responsibilities. To play a role in fulfilling Palestinian aspirations, and to unify the Palestinian people, Hamas must put an end to violence and recognise past agreements as well as Israel's right to exist.

Israel for its part must acknowledge Palestine's right to exist. Settlements are illegitimate and their construction, which violates previous agreements and undermines efforts to achieve peace, must be stopped.

Israel must live up to its obligations to ensure that Palestinians can live, work and develop their society.

The ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the continuing lack of opportunity in the West Bank do not serve Israel's security. Israel must take tangible steps to bring about progress in the daily lives of the Palestinian people.

The Arab states must recognise that the Arab Peace Initiative was an important beginning, but that it does not mark the end of their responsibilities. For those states, the Arab-Israeli conflict must prompt action to help the Palestinian people develop their state institutions and recognise Israel's legitimacy.

On 14 June 2009, in a speech he gave in Tel Aviv, Mr Netanyahu dismissed the idea of a complete freeze on settlements which President Obama had demanded in his Cairo speech on 4 June.

For the moment it looks as though Mr Mitchell's latest mission (in the week of 13 September 2009) – aimed at achieving a freeze on settlement activities including natural growth and East Jerusalem, as a prerequisite for a resumption of the negotiations – has failed.

Mr Netanyahu will not hear of slowing down the construction of settlements or of including East Jerusalem which he does not consider to be a settlement and wants to continue construction in order to take account of the “natural growth” of the settler population.

Mahmoud Abbas says he will not come back to the negotiating table as long as Israel refuses to agree to a freeze on all settlement activities.

Nevertheless, President Obama recently attempted to relaunch the peace process when he met on 23 September with both the Israeli and Palestinian leaders in New York. Indeed, after intensive efforts, a mini tripartite summit with MM Obama, Netanyahu and Abbas took place in the margins of the UN General Assembly.¹⁷ Described as a photo opportunity, the value of that meeting was above all symbolic, in that it brought the Israeli and Palestinian leaders together for the first time since March.

The US President said that the time for prior conditions was past and formally invited the negotiators to get back to work in Washington without further delay. Thus the US Administration seems to have formally given up its demand for a prior freeze on settlements in order to facilitate a resumption of the negotiations. Is this the right way to go about this?

At the same time, in the United States, American Jews, especially Jeremy Ben Ami and the pacifist Jewish Lobby, J. Street, are expressing opposition to the Israeli right,. At the same time American partisans of the hard-line Israeli League, made up of Christian Evangelists and Jewish neo-conservatives still pledge their support, despite the cost of this strategic relationship – estimated at three billion dollars.

However, American Jews are changing. 76% are in favour of the two-state solution and a final settlement between Israel and Palestine as opposed to 24% against. 69% were against the appointment of Avigdor Liberman as Minister for Foreign Affairs (as against 24% in favour) believing him to be racist.

They are the progressives who voted for Obama by four to one. Many of these young people also feel that the second world war and the fear that went with it are now distant events. Different voices are now making themselves heard, but it is still too soon to judge.

However, we should think on what Ehud Olmert said just before resigning, that if the two-state solution fell through he would face a civil rights struggle comparable to that in South Africa. Should that happen, the State of Israel “was finished”.

Obama’s ability to save Israel from that fate perhaps depends on the success of these erstwhile lone voices making themselves heard. Similarly the unease of the Arab world, caught in a vice in the Middle East in the face of the Israeli-Iranian duel and the nuclear threat is a powerful source of pressure on the West.

The American U-turn in the Middle East:

Iran, Afghanistan, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process ... nine months after taking office the US President has changed his strategy on all these questions.

As far as the Middle East is concerned, it had become obvious that Mr Obama was not going to attain his initial objective of convincing Israel to call a halt to the construction of new settlements in the West Bank.

Mr Netanyahu’s rightwing government with the support of the extreme right under Mr Berman has dashed Mr Obama’s hopes of creating new prospects for negotiations with the Palestinians. The neighbouring Arab states have not brought the necessary and hoped-for pressure to bear either.

Neither the Arabs nor the Israelis seem prepared to make the necessary concessions. Has the moment of opportunity passed? If it has, all involved in this critical situation will suffer the consequences.

¹⁷ Article in Le Monde, 20 September 2009: “Barack Obama à l’ONU pour faire oublier l’ère Bush”.

VIII. The European Union

The European Union is one of the biggest providers of aid to the Palestinians.

Financial assistance to the Palestinians

The European Community began providing financial assistance to the Palestinians in 1971, when it made its first contribution to the ordinary budget of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA). In 1993 an international funding mechanism (Ad Hoc Liaison Committee – AHLC) was set up to coordinate assistance to the Palestinians. Since 1994, the European Union and its member states have donated more than half a billion euros by way of assistance to the Palestinians.

Since the beginning of the second intifada, European assistance has focused on development. The intifada and the serious economic and social problems that had arisen were a threat to the viability of the Palestinian Authority, which is why European Community assistance was redirected towards direct financial support for the PA budget at the same time as to setting up viable state institutions, relaunching the economy and addressing urgent humanitarian needs.

In 2006 and 2007 much of European Community assistance was distributed through the temporary international mechanism (TIM) for direct aid to the Palestinian people. On 1 February 2008, the European Community launched a new mechanism for aid to Palestinian socio-economic development known by its French acronym PEGASE, which distributes assistance in support of the PA's reform and development priorities. It includes both assistance to cover the PA's recurrent expenditure as well as funds for investment programmes. This budgetary breakdown reflects a gradual shift in priority from emergency aid to increased support for major longer-term projects. The table in the appendix shows European Community assistance to the Palestinians in 2008 and for the period 2000-2009. Also shown in the appendix are the contributions pledged during the International Conference in Support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza, held on 2 March 2009 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt (source European Commission site, last update May 2009).

A major share of European Community assistance to the Palestinians is currently generated by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, ENPI. The Commission's External Relations Directorate is in charge of programming the financial assistance. This means identifying priorities and proposing budgetary envelopes corresponding to each objective. The EuropAid Cooperation Office draws up funding plans and manages projects from the identification through to the evaluation phase. Humanitarian aid comes under the responsibility of the European Commission Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO). The European Commission Technical Assistance Office to the Gaza Strip is in charge of implementing most of the assistance programmes for Palestinians on the ground.

Europe's position with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Up until now the EU has exerted very little political influence on the efforts to find a solution to the conflict. Its political role in any case is far from commensurate with its financial involvement in the repeated efforts to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by the Israeli armed forces.

Let us hope that with the new US Administration's policy the EU will be willing to adopt different positions in the framework of a redefined strategy.

Like the United States the European Union is calling for a freeze on Israeli settlement policy which it accuses of contributing to the stranglehold on the Palestinian economy and maintaining the Palestinians' dependence on international aid.

On 17 September 2009 the High Representative for the CFSP welcomed the United States' pledge to work with the EU to achieve peace in the Middle East. He said that "If the parties are not able to stick to it (the timetable), then a solution backed by the international community should be put on the table". It is a third party then, the international community, that is expected to come up with the solution that the local players are unable to find.

Mr Solana proposes that after a "fixed deadline", a UN Security Council resolution should proclaim the adoption of the two-state solution which should include the following parameters: borders based

on those of 1967, the fate of refugees, the status of Jerusalem and security arrangements. The UN would then accept the Palestinian state as a full member. It should give a mandate for the resolution of other territorial disputes (the Golan, for which talks between Syria and Israel should be launched, perhaps under the auspices of Turkey). The final aim would be to legitimise the final borders of the states of the region. He stressed the importance of actively involving the Arab countries, through the Arab Peace Initiative.

The UN Security Council resolution must also propose solutions to the problems of security, borders, the refugees from 1948 and the control of Jerusalem. The High Representative insisted that “we must first define the space. This means borders. And if we insist so forcefully on the need to freeze Israeli settlements, it is precisely because their continuing expansion is an obstacle to the design of this physical space”. He said that the point of departure must be the 1967 borders, adding that “territorial exchanges can be negotiated between the parties, on the basis of the 1967 line”. He noted that “the various territorial offers fluctuate between 6 and 2%. (...) The parties can negotiate within this margin, not outside”. He described the situation in Gaza as “unacceptable” and called for Hamas to be involved in the search for a solution: “Whether we like it or not, Hamas will have to be part of the solution”. He continued, “I strongly believe the time has come to, finally, bring this conflict to an end. The international consensus is there. But time is of the essence. The second half of this year is crucial if we want to offer a real choice to the Palestinian people (...)”.

The EU Presidency confirmed Europe’s commitment alongside the United States to finding a negotiated settlement on the basis of the two-state solution and called on Israel to put an immediate end to its settlement policy, including in East Jerusalem, and together with the Palestinians and all the Arab states to establish confidence-building measures and security guarantees. It recalled the urgent need to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza by facilitating the distribution of aid and freedom of movement for goods and human beings.

Mr Solana stated that if both sides in the conflict asked the EU to deploy a military force in the territories that the Israeli defence forces evacuated as part of an agreement, Europe would rally to the cause. He recognised, however, that the United States was the best mediator for the region.¹⁸

In 2000 the EU signed an association agreement with Israel, still in force, that includes arrangements for the free trade of industrial goods and concessions for the trade of agricultural products.

A European Neighbourhood Policy Action Plan was adopted in 2005 and extended for three years in 2008. The two parties have launched a procedure for upgrading their relations, but at the request of a number of EU member states the process was slowed down following the war in Gaza.

In October 2009 the European Union and Israel completed negotiations with a view to a free trade agreement on agricultural products that should be signed in the near future.

According to Commission Vice-President Günter Verheugen, the member states’ decision to intensify relations between the EU and Israel remains the rule. He takes the view that the calls to boycott Israeli products coming from those wanting to put more pressure on Israel are unjustified and will do nothing to resolve the conflict.¹⁹

At present the EU is deploying two ESDP missions in the region. EUPOL COPPS (EU Police Mission for the Palestinian Territories) launched in 2006 has a long-term reform focus and provides enhanced support to the Palestinian Authority in establishing sustainable and effective policing arrangements. EUBAM Rafah, the second ESDP mission in the region, focuses its activities on the border area between Gaza, Israel and Egypt. In view of the current situation the mission has been redeployed in Ashkelon.

¹⁸ Haaretz, 23 October 2009.

¹⁹ Bulletin Quotidien Europe 10005, 24 October 2009.

The Quartet and the “road map”

In December 2002 the Quartet composed of the United States, United Nations, Russia and the European Union agreed on a new peace plan known as the road map, which was officially published at the beginning of 2003.

The road map is a three-phase programme whose “destination is a final and comprehensive settlement of the Israel-Palestinian conflict by 2005 (...) [resulting in] the emergence of an independent, democratic, and viable Palestinian state living side by side in peace and security with Israel and its other neighbours”.

The Palestinians accepted it without restrictions; Israel also accepted it but several months later and with 14 restrictions.

The road map has remained a dead letter despite the good intentions of the international community. Palestinian activist groups have continued perpetrating suicide and other attacks despite the ceasefire. Israel has continued to build settlements and so-called “security walls”, even though it was condemned in 2004 by the International Court of Justice for its violations of international law and human rights.

The Geneva Pact (initiated on the Israeli side by Yossi Beilin and Amram Mitzna and on the Palestinian side by Yasser Abed Rabo, a close associate of Yasser Arafat) was signed on 1 December 2003. This pact was complementary to the road map, but like it remained a dead letter. The main points in it were: recognition of Israel as the Jewish State; creation of a Palestinian State within the 1967 borders, following the “green line”; a corridor linking the Gaza Strip with the West Bank; Jerusalem as the shared capital of the two states; the partial evacuation of the settlements; the right of return or financial compensation for refugees.

Since 2007 former British Prime Minister Tony Blair has been the Quartet’s representative in the Middle East.

The representative’s remit has four objectives: mobilising international assistance to the Palestinians; coordinating international support in addressing the institutional governance needs of the Palestinian State, focusing as a matter of urgency on the rule of law; developing plans to promote Palestinian economic development; liaising with other countries.

One can only note that those aims have been only partially achieved.

Nonetheless, the Quartet still meets regularly, most recently on 26 June 2009 in Trieste and on 24 September 2009 in New York.

In its Trieste declaration the Quartet stated that the negotiations being conducted by the United States with all the parties in the region “must result in an end to all claims. It agreed that Arab-Israeli peace and the establishment of a state of Palestine in the West Bank and Gaza in which the Palestinian people can determine their own destiny is in the fundamental interests of the international community. The Quartet called on all parties concerned to take meaningful steps to support this objective”.

IX. Conclusions

The situation in the Middle East poses numerous different challenges for the future of this strategic and embattled region.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a central issue: what solutions are possible?

The two-state solution is the only one that can resolve that dilemma once and for all: yet things have become so complex that the prospect of such an outcome is looking more remote than ever. The division of Palestinian territory, the occupation of the West Bank and the opposition between Fatah and Hamas and slim chances of reconciliation all serve to complicate the prospect of a Palestinian state.

Yet without it there can be no viable Israeli state and no lasting peace. So it would seem that the only possibility, the one people are hoping for, is a political decision imposed from outside. Otherwise, as Ambassador Barnavi recently said, it will be the end of the Jewish national dream.

The reconstruction of Iraq and the establishment of genuine peace there are crucial issues, particularly with a view to the US withdrawal in 2011. There has been real democratic stabilisation under Mr Nouri al-Maliki's first government, but that success may turn out to be relative and somewhat precarious. It depends on maintaining a balance among Sunnis, Shi'ites and Kurds. And how, in those conditions, will the new Iraq fit into the regional environment?

An assertive stance on the part of the Arab and Muslim states of the region together with the resolve to play a part in any peace process are essential. But they do not form a single camp and manage the situation in accordance with their own interests.

Turkey and Egypt are recognised and active mediators. The Arab peace plan put forward in 2002 in Beirut is a document on which there is consensus and cohesion among those states: Saudi Arabia is an influential state in the region. The Gulf States, principally the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrein, are genuinely engaged on the path to modernity, but that modernity stands in contrast to the deeply and durably entrenched Arab-Muslim conservatism.

Syria must be treated as a case apart. President Bashar al-Assad is a lucid strategist. He stands firm on his positions (defence of the Palestinian cause, support for the Lebanese Hezbollah and Hamas) and his alliances with Iran. He notes that in Lebanon it is the Hariri-Jumblatt anti-Syrian coalition that won the elections against Hezbollah and General Aoun. But he takes the view that the establishment of the new government on 9 November 2009 was a necessary outcome and that his country was able to have some influence, according to the impression gained by your Rapporteur during the meeting with the Syrian President in Paris on 13 November.

Bashar al-Assad may be open to provisions within a comprehensive solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that would resolve the problems of the Palestinian state and the Golan in one go and according to a precise timetable. However, the Syrian President continues to believe that peace is far off and that the absence of war is positive in itself. Above all he wishes to normalise relations with the Emirates and the European Union.

The rise of religion in the region as a whole is an expression of identity. Re-islamisation is a reality, as is the rejection of a dominating and unjust West. In fact Islam is a religion that divides as much as it unites. Islam is not always archaic and fundamentalist: Muslim modernity is also on the rise.

The Iranian nuclear programme, which is apparently for military purposes, is now also a reality in this region. This leads us to consider as an obvious solution the denuclearisation of this region. The idea is gaining ground.

The United States

President Obama wanted to initiate a very different policy from that of Bush and also to adopt different methods. In his 4 June 2009 speech in Cairo he described the Middle East conflict as the central issue, which was new.

However, he faces strong internal and external pressures which have forced him to change his strategy. This U-turn on the part of the United States, which was unable to impose on Israel a halt to the settlements, including in East Jerusalem, will come at a cost.

Yet the US is the state with the greatest influence in the region and only it and the international community are able to impose a solution to be put on the table, as Javier Solana has observed ... if the parties concerned cannot get any further.

Israel finds itself in a hostile environment and persists in its self-destructive behaviour. It is shutting itself away in an “armed ghetto”, in the words of Mr Barnavi, with its continued construction of the wall and building of settlements, maintenance of check-points and occupation and blockade of Gaza. Now it is trying to divert attention towards the Iranian nuclear programme which has suddenly become the number one priority and the only issue that counts. The American mediator in the region, George Mitchell, has not achieved the hoped-for results and Mrs Clinton’s remarks have been very damaging for the process. Yet the success of United States policy in this region is an essential prerequisite for the new US President to assert his authority on the international stage.

The role of the EU

Divisions between the member states persist. Europe has no coherent global policy for the Middle East – Tony Blair’s special envoy mission has made not the slightest difference – although there are high expectations of Europe and strong pressure to deliver. And it must be said that although Europe is a major financial contributor to the reconstruction activities, for the moment and paradoxically, it carries little political weight, a situation which is untenable. Yet Europe has an obligation now to define a common policy in order to provide effective support to President Obama.

Peace in this region and in this part of the Middle East will depend on a decision from outside it. It will, in other words, be a solution imposed by the international community and guaranteed by the United Nations. A precondition for peace is the recognition of a sovereign and viable Palestinian state. The situation is tragic, but the logic is simple: it is in Europe’s interests, in concert with the United States, to take rapid and resolute action to arrive, finally, after 60 years, at a peaceful settlement.

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