

Asad TAFFAL

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An-Najah National University in Nablus

## THE IMPACT OF THE ARAB SPRING ON THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION<sup>1</sup>

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the implications of the Arab Spring on the Palestinian question are both positive and negative and are illustrated in political, social and economic terms. In order to prove the implications are positive and negative, a historical and analysis research method will be applied. This article suggests that the issue of present developments in the Arab region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the peace process in the Middle East are highly correlated. This historical relationship between the political developments in the Arab region and the Palestinian cause has always been a detrimental factor for the conflict. Within this context, a few examples are warranted:

1) The United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine was a proposal developed by the United Nations, which recommended a partition with the Economic Union of Mandatory Palestine to follow the termination of the British Mandate. On 29 November 1947, the U.N. General Assembly adopted a resolution recommending the adoption and implementation of the Plan as Resolution 181(II). The resolution recommended the creation of independent Arab and Jewish States and the Special International Regime for the City of Jerusalem. The Partition Plan, a four-part document attached to the resolution, provided for the termination of the Mandate, the progressive withdrawal of British armed forces and the delineation of boundaries between the two States and Jerusalem. Part I of the Plan stipulated that the Mandate would be terminated as soon as possible and the United Kingdom would withdraw no later than 1 August 1948. The new states would come into existence two months after the withdrawal, but no later than 1 October 1948. The Plan sought to address the conflicting objectives and claims of two competing movements: Arab nationalism in Palestine and Jewish Zionism. The Plan also called for an Economic Union between the proposed states, and for the protection of religious and minority rights (Bregman, 2002).

The Plan was accepted by the Jewish public, except for its fringes, and by the Jewish Agency despite its perceived limitations. Arab leaders and governments rejected the plan of partition in the resolution and indicated an unwillingness to accept any form of territorial division. Their reason was that it violated the principles of national self-determination in the UN charter which granted people the right to decide their own destiny. Immediately after adoption of the Resolution by the General Assembly, civil war broke out. The partition plan was not implemented (ibidem).

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Seeing the coming end of British control over Palestine, and the inevitable conflict between the Arabs and the Jews, the newly-created United Nations took up the issue in 1947. It came up with a plan known as the United Nations Partition Plan for Palestine. The plan advocated the creation of two states in what has historically been known as Palestine. One for Jews, known as Israel, and one for Arabs, Palestine. While the Jews in Palestine accepted the plan with enthusiasm, the Arabs vehemently rejected it. In their view, it took away land that had been historically Muslim Arab Territory since the Crusades and gave it to the new Jewish minority in the country. Tensions rose again between the two sides (Ochsenwald, Fisher, 2003).

2) In 1948 five Arab states entered into conflict with several Zionist militias that constituted the Israeli army's main force. This engagement of the Arabs was specifically directed towards the goal of deterring the establishment of the state of Israel on Palestinian land. The eventual defeat of the Arab forces created new political facts in the region and dramatically changed the nature of the Middle East.

3) The result of the 1967 war, between the Arab States and Israel, was the occupation of what has remained of historic Palestine, known as the West Bank and Gaza Strip, in addition to the occupation of some Arab Lands; namely: the Egyptian Sinai Peninsula and the Syrian Golan Heights. The defeat of the Arab world in this second war had great impact in the balance of power in the region and was considered a massive political earthquake. Based on this failure of Arab states in dealing with the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian people decided to take the lead and established the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).

4) The Arab Summit declaration in 1974 confirming that the PLO is the sole and legitimate representative of the Palestinian People had a strong impact on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and the independence of the Palestinian decision-making process and structures (*Arab Summit*, 1974: Art. 2).

5) In this context, the aggressive confrontation between the PLO and the Jordanian Government in 1970 resulted in the withdrawal of PLO from Jordan to Lebanon. Furthermore, the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 and the withdrawal of PLO from Lebanon in 1982 as a result of the Israeli-Palestinian War that occurred the same year has changed the political balance of power between the relevant parties especially after the signing of the Camp David agreements between Israel and Egypt and accordingly the withdrawal of the Biggest power in the Arab world in the region, from the Israel Palestine conflict.

6) In addition, the two Gulf wars had devastating consequences of the Balance of power in the region and have enforced Israel and PLO to sign the Oslo Agreement in September of 1993.

It can be concluded from what has been mentioned above, that the core issue and root cause of the problems in the Middle East is concentrated or focused on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and the region will not settle down and enjoy stability until this issue is resolved. Also, it is noticed, at current times that besides the local and domestic objectives of Arab revolt against dictatorship and corruption it is still the Palestinian cause persisting and strongly presented through the various Arab Summits and Arab League meetings and in the squares of revolutions.

The government of Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) signed peace agreement referred to as the Oslo agreement was signed in Washington, D.C., in

1993 and the Oslo II Accord, signed in Taba in 1995. The Oslo Accords marked the start of the Oslo process, a peace process that is aimed at achieving a peace-treaty based on the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 and 338, and to fulfill the “right of the Palestinian people to self-determination.” The Oslo process started after secret negotiations in Oslo, resulting in the recognition by the PLO of the State of Israel and the recognition by Israel of the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people and as a partner in negotiations (*Declaration of Principles*, 1993).

The Oslo Accords created the Palestinian Authority, whose functions are the limited self-governance over parts of the Bank and Gaza Strip; and, it acknowledged that the PLO is now Israel’s partner in permanent status negotiations about the remaining issues. The most important issues are the borders of Israel and Palestine, the Israeli settlements, the status of Jerusalem, the question of Israel’s military presence in and control over the remaining territories after the recognition of the Palestinian autonomy by Israel, and the Palestinian right of return. The Oslo Accords, however, did not create a Palestinian state (*ibidem*).

### **THE ARAB AND PALESTINIAN BASIS AND FOUNDATIONS FOR SOLVING THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT**

The Arab position towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has polarized around The “Arab Peace Initiative” that has been adopted by the Arab Summit in Beirut/Lebanon in 2002, and has further been confirmed and stressed upon by consecutive Arab Summits. This Peace Initiative has been the formal plan of Arab and Palestinian mobilization on the international arena to resolve the Palestinian cause.

The Arab Peace Initiative is a comprehensive peace initiative first proposed in 2002 at the Summit of the Arab League by then Crown, King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, and re-endorsed at the Riyadh Summit in 2007. The initiative attempts to end the Arab-Israeli conflict, which means normalizing relations between the entire Arab region and Israel, in exchange for a complete withdrawal from the occupied territories (including East Jerusalem) and a “just settlement” of the Palestinian refugee crisis based on UN Resolution 194 (which calls for a diplomatic resolution to the conflict and resolves that any refugees “wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors” should be able to do so or, if they otherwise wish, should be provided with compensation). The Initiative was initially overshadowed by the Passover Massacre, a major terrorist attack that took place on March 27, 2002 (the day before the Initiative was published) that had been claimed by the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, Hamas’ military wing. The Arab League has since readopted the Initiative on several occasions, including during the 2007 summit (MacLeod, 2009).

Although a number of Israeli officials have responded to the Initiative with both support and criticism, the Israeli government has swiftly rejected the initiative, saying it was a “non-starter”. Then Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon said the new plan could not be accepted because it would replace UN resolutions 242 and 338, which call for negotiations. In 2007, Benjamin Netanyahu, as opposition leader, as well as a number of Likud members, rejected the initiative outright. In 2009, President Shimon Peres

expressed satisfaction at the “u-turn” in the attitudes of Arab states toward peace with Israel as reflected in the Saudi initiative, though he did qualify his comments by saying: “Israel wasn’t a partner to the wording of this initiative. Therefore it doesn’t have to agree to every word.” (ibidem). The Palestinian Authority strongly supports the plan and Mahmoud Abbas officially asked U.S. President Barack Obama to adopt it as part of his Middle East policy. The Islamist political party Hamas, the elected government of the Gaza Strip, is deeply divided, with most factions rejecting the plan. George Mitchell, then the United States special envoy to the Middle East, announced in March 2009 that President Barack Obama’s administration intends to “incorporate” the initiative into its Middle East policy (ibidem). The most important points that are mentioned in this initiative in achieving peace between the two parties are as follows:

- establishing normal relations with Israel in exchange of complete Israeli withdrawal from the Palestinian and Arab Occupied Territories in 1967;
- supporting the two-State solution vision, the establishment of a Palestinian Independent state within 1967 borders coexist peacefully with the state of Israel;
- a just and accepted solution to the Palestinian refugees issue based on the United Nation Resolution 194, which includes the right of the Palestinian refugees to return and/or to be compensated.

This position adopted by the Arab States and Arab League is based on the Palestinian National Program adopted by the PLO in 1988 supporting the two-state solution, in addition to the Oslo Declaration of the mutual recognition made by both the Palestinian and Israeli parties, which also, supports the two-state solution. In 2009, President Abbas and Yehuda Olmert, the former Israeli Prime Minister, had agreed on certain understandings regarding the Final Status Issues should this be capitalized such as potential borders between the forthcoming Palestinian state and Israel (Territorial Change and Swaps), Dividing Jerusalem, accepted solution to the refugees issue, security arrangements among others. These agreed upon understandings are important within any future framework to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Having recognized the firm basis for any future political deal between the Palestinians and Israelis, the main question in this context is: Are there going to be any positive or negative implications of the Arab Spring in supporting the above mentioned principles, concepts and understandings that have been concluded by the Arabs and the Palestinians?

Are these understandings going to be sustained in front of Arab Spring? Perhaps the Arab Spring will impose changes to these principles and understandings, thus proposing a new framework for Arab joint cooperation, and in particular, with regard to the rise of the Islamic brother hood movement taking power in Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and maybe in Syria. It could also depend on the positive response of the Israeli government to the requirement of a new deal and agreement to Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Since the various revolts in the Arab world started in 2010, October in Yemen and the same year correct, the Palestinians too have mobilized. However, the Palestinians are in a somewhat different position than the other Arab states. First, the Palestinian Authority (hereinafter: PA) is a self-ruling authority and not a state (at best an embryonic state structure). Second, the PA has been split into two parts since 2007. The Fatah movement controls the West Bank PA with President Mahmoud Abbas in the frontline,

while the *Hamas* government of Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh controls the Gaza Strip PA. Third, the Oslo II Agreement, which divides the West Bank into three parts (area A in full control of PA, area B under joint Israeli and Palestinian control and area C under full Israeli control), places Palestine under both *de jure* and *de facto* continued Israeli occupation. The Gaza Strip is isolated and under siege due to the Israeli boycott of the *Hamas* government. This boycott came after *Hamas* victory in 2006 elections when *Hamas* failed to meet the three conditions of the United States and the EU: to announce the prevention of armed struggle against Israeli occupation, to accept Israel's legitimate right to exist, and to accept the previous agreement the PLO signed with Israel. This contributed to harsh living conditions for the Palestinians and for *de facto* continued occupation, making basic human rights and democracy issues complex (Schulz, 2012: 66).

The Palestinian Authority (PA) is not an actual government. Therefore, it makes little sense to speak of the PA's "foreign policy". However, when it comes to the PA's relations with its neighbors, the Arab Spring revolutions have been a mixed blessing. On the one hand, the PA did not enjoy warm relations with the deposed dictators of the region, especially Ben Ali from Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak from Egypt. These two used pro-Palestinian rhetoric to curry favor with their citizens, but in practice they were more accommodating of Israeli government policies toward the Palestinians than the PA would have liked. That is particularly true of H. Mubarak, whose military received more than one billion dollars in U.S. aid to maintain a peace treaty with Israel (Aslan, 2013).

The dramatic changes sweeping across the Middle East over the past three years have largely bypassed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Popular forces confronting long-standing autocracies in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Syria, and elsewhere focused their demands on domestic political and socioeconomic reforms rather than Israeli or Palestinian concerns. Policymakers in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority have viewed the new regional dynamic as either tangential or completely irrelevant to the issue of Israeli-Palestinian peace, at least in the short term. However, despite the perceived lack of impact on the current status of the conflict, the mobilizing power of the Arab Spring has reshaped the environment for negotiations in Israeli and Palestinian societies and created new demands and opportunities for a comprehensive, sustainable peace between the parties (Stevenson, 2014).

Islamist governments that have arisen in the region, such as the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, tend to be more aligned with the religio-political philosophy of *Hamas* in Gaza than with the *Palestinian Liberation Organization* (hereinafter: PLO), which currently dominates the PA. Nevertheless, if the Arab Spring revolutions result in greater democracy and political participation in the region, then one can assume that this will be a good thing for the PA. After all, the people of the region are overwhelmingly pro-Palestinian, and if they are allowed to have a voice in their governments policies regarding the Israel-Palestinian conflict, that is sure to be of benefit to the PA.

There is, however one last thing to consider the tenure of Mahmoud Abbas, the president of the Palestinian Authority, officially ended years ago. He has remained in his position by fiat and canceled elections to replace himself. In other words, in the eyes of many Palestinians, Abbas is as much a legitimate president as was Ben Ali and

Mubarak. The fear that this sentiment may result in a “Palestinian Spring” is something that the leaders of the PA intensely feel (*ibidem*).

### THE ARAB SPRING IN 2010

The Arab Spring is a revolutionary wave of demonstrations and protests (both non-violent and violent), riots, and civil wars in the Arab world that began on 18 December 2010 and spread throughout the countries of the Arab League and surroundings. While the wave of initial revolutions and protests had expired by mid-2012, some refer to the ongoing large-scale conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa as a continuation of the Arab Spring, while others refer to the aftermath of revolutions and civil wars post mid-2012 as the Arab Winter (Spencer, 2011). By December 2013, rulers had been forced from power in Tunisia, Egypt (twice), Libya, and Yemen; civil uprisings had erupted in Bahrain and Syria; major protests had broken out in Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Israel and Sudan; and minor protests had occurred in Mauritania, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Djibouti, Western Sahara, and Palestine. Weapons and Tuareg fighters returning from the Libyan Civil War stoked a simmering conflict in Mali that has been described as a fallout from the Arab Spring in North Africa (Rayan, 2011).

The protests have shared some techniques of civil resistance in sustained campaigns involving strikes, demonstrations, marches, and rallies, as well as the effective use of social mediator organization, communication, and raising awareness in the face of state attempts at repression and internet censorship. Many Arab Spring demonstrations have been met with violent responses from authorities, as well as from pro-government militias and counter-demonstrators. These attacks have been answered with violence from protestors in some cases. A major slogan of the demonstrators in the Arab world has been *Ash-sha`b yurid isqat an-nizam* which means – the people want to bring down the regime.

Some observers have drawn comparisons between the Arab Spring movements and the Revolutions of 1989 (also known as the “Autumn of Nations”) that swept through Eastern Europe and the Second World, in terms of their scale and significance (Sullivan, 2012). Others, however, have pointed out that there are several key differences between the movements, such as the desired outcomes and the organizational role of Internet-based technologies in the Arab revolutions (Salem, 2012).

The Arab revolts that started in late 2010 have ushered in a new political era in the region that is likely to affect Arabs societies and politics for a long time. Thus far, the revolts have led to overthrow of five rules, spread to countries such as Jordan and Bahrain, and severely afflicted Syria, where a bloody internal conflict is being fought. This changing political landscape also has consequences for Palestinian political groups, particularly *Hamas*. In reacting to the ongoing changes, the movement may have to adjust its political and ideological outlook profoundly, both in its approach towards internal Palestinian relations and in its handling of the conflict with Israel (Ezbidi, 2013).

After the Arab Spring started in 2010, the Arab leaders can no more ignore or take individual positions that are not in coherence with the interest of their people and their



political, economic and social agenda, and they can no more serve other agendas of foreign countries. This leadership is elected and accounted for in front of its people and this accountability will create responsibility for the elected governments as partners within international community. This means that these emerging democracies will not adopt uncalculated risks taking into consideration the check and balance mechanisms created by an accountable system. The Arab Spring is creating a window of opportunity for Israel to; seriously, revise its extreme/strict positions towards the Israeli-Palestine conflict, and to adopt a more practical and pragmatic approach to strengthen the peace process instead of continuing to adopt stands that are based exclusively on power, naked power or religious, ideological, and historical concepts. Therefore, at present, there is a historical opportunity to reach a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; if Israel grasps the opportunity and benefits from the democratic changes sparked by the Arab Spring. Israel claims consistently, that it is the only democracy in the Middle East and does not have partners for peace. The opportunity is there now and Israel should show leadership and take this opportunity. Resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will strengthen the democratic process in the Arab world and will create new horizons for the Middle East.

In this context, it is expected that the new emerging leadership will abide by the principles and foundations of the current peace process to resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and will adopt a foreign policy coherent with these principles and foundations. Furthermore, it is also expected that the new leadership, as a responsible party, will not adopt any diplomatic initiatives or activities or to impose on the Palestinian leadership to take steps that are not coherent with these principles and foundations, and that includes the establishment of a just and sustainable solution for the Middle East and not temporary solutions based on the principle of power and ideologies. Moreover, these resolutions should be in coherence with the international law and UN resolutions as a general framework of resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The peaceful demonstrations and the non-violent approach of Arab revolts have weakened the groups calling for violent means to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, and in particular the extremist Islamic groups supported by some regional powers. This change has also, positively, impacted the strategies of some Islamic groups in Palestine, like *Hamas*. For example: *Hamas* has declared to abide by popular resistance against occupation. In addition, it has declared its support to the establishment of a Palestinian independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, i.e. within 1967 borders. In addition, it has joined the temporary leadership framework of the PLO. Furthermore, the non-violent approach has produced an alternative option to terrorism and counter terrorism strategies in the region and may provide an opportunity and create an environment for a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the above-mentioned peaceful principles.

Arab Spring has paved the way to start a dialogue between the US and the western block from one side and the brotherhood movement from the other side, which may result in more moderation of this movement towards the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. If Israeli authorities do not respond positively to these important changes and believes that the current marginalization of the Palestinian cause is creating an opportunity for it to continue its settlement expansion policy, Israel may lose support from its current partners.

Extreme Islamic groups have seized the opportunity brought about by the current state of chaos to bring down any progress of the peace process by “filling in the vacuum” and committing military attacks as demonstrated by, the recent attack of Egyptian police in Sinai. The continuation of status quo within the Israel-Palestine conflict will lead to deterioration and accordingly the control of the extremists from both sides on the political process. The discontinuation of the democratic process in the Arab world and the “victory” of the most conservative groups within the *Muslim Brotherhood Movement* may result in adopting extreme positions regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and accordingly lead one to losing the opportunity of the two-state solution. The continuation of the marginalization of the Palestinian cause and the delay by the US to support the Palestinian bid to the UN as a member state will encourage certain groups and individuals to start thinking of an alternative to the two-state solution as not feasible and to start adopting a vision of the one state solution. This movement is gradually growing in the Palestinian Diaspora and within the Palestinians inside Israel. Many Palestinian youth groups have been influenced by the Arab spring and the failure of the peace process and have started inquiring about their civil rights and raised the issue of “one person one vote” as a democratic solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in opposition to PA approach of negotiations and *Hamas* strategy of resistance.

Although the Arab Spring was the spark that led to the reconciliation agreement, the issue of *Hamas*'s joining the PLO had been under discussion for two decades. During this period, *Hamas* had repeatedly adjusted its political line, each time becoming more and more conciliatory towards the PLO. What were once perceived as insurmountable differences between secularism and Islamism have been replaced by discussions about election modalities. Today *Hamas*, not *Fatah*, is the movement most eager to have the PNC restored. Within *Fatah* there are fears that if the Cairo agreement were implemented, *Hamas* might take control of the PLO. It could then revoke previous agreements and attempt to amend the PLO charter in a direction of its own. Such worries underestimate the significant changes that have occurred within *Hamas* and its relationship with the PLO. *Hamas*'s entry into the PNC would, first of all, implies increased democratization rather than radicalization within the PLO. For the first time in its history, *Hamas* is now seeking PLO membership without demanding that the PLO first amend its charter. As will be outlined below, *Hamas* has come a long way (Tuastad, 2013).

Israel remains a source of geostrategic threat to Arab security in various dimensions. It is the neighbor who possesses nuclear weapons, creating serious military imbalance between Israel and the Arab states. The apparent absence of the will of Israel to resolve the Palestinian issue – by establishing an independent Palestinian state according to UN resolutions and implementations to the roadmap also creates instability. However, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is losing some prominence in the actual geopolitics of a region confronted by all the other issues arising from the Arab Spring, issues that create greater concern among Arab states who appear much more focused on internal tremors and the national policies required to deal with them, than on this conflict (Elakawi, 2014).

As far as the Palestinians are concerned, the Arab Spring revolutions highlight the importance of enhancing national awareness to restore freedom and enhance their unity, transcending tribal, ethnic and ideological differences. They must concentrate on



regaining their rights stolen from them; promoting freedom, justice and dignity; developing democratic change; and building new state institutions. Revolutions that foresee the establishment of a new Arab reality must, in all sincerity, work for the liberation of Palestine, not only from the Israeli occupation but also from the custody of the current factions. They must also inspire and encourage the Palestinians to take internal initiatives to improve their own political system. In this, the Arab Spring can play an important role by prompting Palestinians to restructure their national movements to include humanitarian and democratic elements. The aim should be to liberate the values of equality and democracy as well as the land (Kayali, 2013).

Even so, the Arab revolutions, with all their shortcomings, have opened windows of opportunities for the Palestinians to widen their options from the limitation of an independent state in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. By creating a new political reality in the region, and by ending the myth of Israel being the “only democracy in the Middle East” with the establishment of Arab democracies, a new legitimacy is given to the “one-state solution” for Palestinians and Israelis. This can be established by undermining the security and ideological mantras of Zionism in their various manifestations. Indeed, the establishment of democratic states in various Arab countries will back Israel into a corner, no longer able to boast about being an oasis of democracy and exposed as a colonial, racist state which insists on defining itself as a “Jewish state”. Palestinians must learn from the revolutions and move away from a political system defined and controlled by factions with little or no legitimacy and support in society. This will open the way for Palestinian unity based on a national, institutional, and democratic representative basis. In those countries hosting Palestinian refugees, an Arab Spring change in the political scene should bring fairness and justice to their case. In the end, it has to be realized that a country cannot be free unless its people are free. Having revolutions with a veneer of the Palestinian cause will simply not suffice. Palestine and the Palestinian cause is more than a conflict over some land – It is a political allegory for freedom, dignity and justice (*ibidem*).

Mention of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the Arab Spring has been conspicuous by its absence, featuring little in demonstrations across the wider Middle East. It is unclear how the events in the Middle East will unfold, but the societies and new governments of the Middle East are likely to turn their attention back to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They will also judge activities of the European Union (as well as other international actors) with respect to Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The international community responded to the events of the past year with renewed efforts to bring Israel and the Palestinians back to negotiating. However, the unresolved question of Palestinian reconciliation and national unity, the predominance of the 2012 American presidential elections, and the EU preoccupation with the Euro crisis, the prospects for any significant progress for a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the next eighteen months are low (Peters, 2011: 90).

In 2012 the economic situation in the Palestinian Authority was serious. The budget deficit has nearly reached 1 billion USD (other data speak about a budget deficit of 1.5 billion USD) and the Palestinian Authority has been cutting costs as was revealed by the Palestinian Finance Minister Nabil Qassis in July. He also clarified that a decline in foreign aid and failure of donor countries to fulfill their financial pledges to the PA

were responsible for the current economic crisis. According to Palestinian sources, in September 2012 the unemployment reached 21% in Palestinian territories, whereby the unemployment in Gaza was 28.4% and in the West Bank 17.1%. It is necessary to state that these figures given by the Palestinian side are lower than indicated by other sources and are based on a relaxed definition of unemployment. Usually, the female labor force does not appear in statistics of employment at all. Civil servants especially became the victims of these measures. Besides economic hardships, one has also to measure the original goals of the Arab Spring against the development in the Palestinian Autonomy (Ivo, 2012). Still in 2011, the Arab Spring was accompanied by the ideas of spreading democracy and installing legitimate rulers elected in free, western-styled elections. Looking at the political representation of the Palestinian Autonomy in the West Bank, one can hardly resist the opinion that Mahmud Abbas is not a legitimate president any more. Elected in 2005, his mandate ended in January 2009, two years before the start of Arab unrest in the Middle East. Admittedly, he extended his mandate until January 2010 but this mandate has also long expired. Together with Mahmud Abbas, the Palestinian Legislative Council's legislatures are hardly democratic: their period of legality expired in January 2010. According to western democratic norms, both the executive and legislation of the official Palestinian Autonomy cannot be regarded as legitimate, although the last elections met basic democratic standards and one can speak about the original legitimacy and, despite the rampant corruption, also about current legality of the ruling Palestinian political elites (*ibidem*).

It should be noted that the Palestinian cause was on a smooth path to a just resolution acceptable to Palestinians before the Arab Spring; however, neither can we accept what some Palestinian figures proclaimed – that the Arab revolutions were a source of strength and momentum for the Palestinian cause. Both points of view have suspect validity and need to be corrected. Today, the Palestinian issue has almost transformed into an internal issue; the Palestinian cause has become solely “Palestinian”, and is not an Arab nationalist issue as it was in the past (Mousa, 2014). This has been true at least since the revolutions in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Yemen and Syria. Indeed, the decline in the number of Arab countries concerned about Palestine goes back to the start of these revolutions. Of course, the revolutions were not born of or for the Palestinian issue. However, one only needs to understand the centrality of this issue and its political, cultural and social weight in the Arab world, the coverage it has received in the press, the political alliances that arose from it, and the powerful diplomatic efforts expended on it (regardless of their outcome) to see that it could have been one of the secondary or marginal slogans of the Arab revolutions. Thus the Palestinian issue has become more complicated, because it has lost both its position and its prominence among the major powers (*ibidem*).

It can be concluded that the foundations and basis for a just, comprehensive peace in the region, especially the vision of the two state solutions, will not be heavily influenced by the Arab spring. It is also my belief that the new leadership in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen, either Islamic, national or liberal, will support a solution to Israeli-Palestinian conflict based on the International law principles, UN resolutions, the Arab Peace initiative and the vision of the two – state solution – additionally Hamas will not challenge the new leadership in Egypt and will try to adopt a moderate political

program according to the above – mentioned principles if they decide to survive-politically. Israel cannot escape from the peace requirements or maintain the status quo any more after the peace process. The balance of power will be changing soon and the strong Israeli allies have left with the US being unable to continually ignore the developments in the region and the demands by the people to find a just solution to the Palestinian cause.

Furthermore, Israeli authorities cannot ignore any more the emergence of new democracies in the Arab world with strong mechanisms of accountability to their people and cannot ignore that their claim of being the only democracy in the Middle East, will gradually disappear. Israel has to take immediate decision, either to choose isolation and to face a very difficult political option, such the one state solution, or take a courageous decision to support the two state solution. The Arab Peace initiative is a golden opportunity for Israel to grasp. It is fair, comprehensive and responsive to all needs and concerns of all parties.

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**ABSTRACT**

The Palestinian question has been deeply influenced by regional political trends for the last six decades. Palestinians have been exposed to external and internal Arab politics, suffering – from the Lebanese civil war of 1976–1989, the Iranian Revolution of 1979, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1991, the American occupation of Iraq in 2003, and the Arab Spring since 2010. Those examples remind of the fragility of the Palestinian issue and its deep dependence on stability in the Arab World. The issue of present developments in the Arab region, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and the peace process in the Middle East are highly correlated.

**WPLYW ARABSKIEJ WIOSNY NA KWESTIĘ PALESTYŃSKĄ****STRESZCZENIE**

Kwestia palestyńska od ponad sześćdziesięciu lat jest determinowana wydarzeniami regionalnymi. Palestyńczycy byli narażeni na konsekwencje międzynarodowych i wewnętrznych niepokojów w państwach arabskich, poczynając od konfliktu w Libanie (1976–1989), rewolucji w Iranie (1979), przez iracką agresję na Kuwejt (1991), amerykańską okupację Iraku (2003–), po Arabską wiosnę zapoczątkowaną wydarzeniami z 2010 r. Przykłady te wskazują w jak dużym stopniu przyszłość tzw. sprawy palestyńskiej jest uzależniona od stabilizacji w świecie arabskim. Obecne wydarzenia w państwach arabskich, konflikt izraelsko-palestyński i proces pokojowy na Bliskim Wschodzie są ze sobą ściśle powiązane.