

RESEARCH REPORTS 19

**Initial Impact of the Democratic Protests in the
Arab World for the Middle East Peace Process**

Boryana Aleksandrova

Institute for Security and International Studies

(ISIS)

Sofia, September 2011

RESEARCH REPORTS 19

**Institute for Security and International Studies
(ISIS)
Sofia**

THIS RESEARCH REPORT BUILDS ON THE AUTHOR'S PRESENTATION ON A SIMILAR SUBJECT AT A SESSION OF A REGULAR LECTURE COURSE ON THE TOPIC: "INTERNATIONAL NEGOTIATIONS" IN THE FIELD OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AT THE FACULTY OF LAW, SOFIA UNIVERSITY "ST. KLIMENT OHRIDSKY", ON JUNE 2, 2011. THE AUTHOR EXTENDS HER GRATITUDE TO MS. DESISLAVA STOEVA FOR HER SUPPORT IN TRANSLATING THIS REPORT INTO ENGLISH.

The author

© Institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS), 2011

ISBN 978-954-9533-23-1

Introduction

This report explores the correlation between the democratic protests in the Arab world and the Middle East negotiation process. In this sense, the content concentrates primarily on the development of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiation track as the central line of the Israeli-Arab relations.

Impressive in its domestic political nature and decisive in its immediate ruling consequences, has the dissent in Northern Africa and beyond produced any effect on the already long-lasting Israeli-Palestinian antagonism and its regulation? Can we expect a change in the pat situation, which had been formed at the end of 2010 after the fall of the Tunisian and the Egyptian regimes and the revolts following in the neighbour countries? Where and how are the crossing points between the internal and external negotiation context in the respective regional environment to be defined?

Taking into account the specific regional, international/global and local dimensions of the Israeli-Palestinian contention, the answer to the questions above will be pursued by examining the new geopolitical map of the Middle East, the behaviour of the most influential third party for this particular conflict – the government of the United States of America, as well as the unfolding of the local Israeli-Palestinian conflict dynamics before and after the events in the region.

1. Political modifications in the region

After Mohammed Bouazizi set himself on fire on December 17, 2010 expressing his deep discontent with the marginalizing economic, social and political conditions of living of a significant part of his fellow-citizens, a mass mobilization of the population in the region took place demanding a (profound) reorganization of the governing political elites and/or the existing common social and economic conditionalities. The prevalent until that moment status quo of more or less Arab-Israeli intergovernmental recognition and exchange, with the exception of Syria, seemed to be put in jeopardy.

In Mid-January 2011 the President of Tunisia, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, who had already left the Tunisian capital, was replaced by the chairman of the Parliament, Fouad Mebazaa. Elections were promised for a special council that would rewrite the Constitution by July 24, 2011. In the beginning, the former premier of the country, Mohamed Ghannouchi, took office as acting prime minister. Regarded as too closely aligned with the regime of Ben Ali,

he left his position on February 27, 2011. The current government still does not enjoy the citizens' confidence. The almost everyday street protests initiated by the various social formations, the public accusations of hindering the reforms and the massive defections among the police forces are only a few examples for this state of affairs. Highly positioned personnel has been discharged, the provincial administration has not been functioning in practice, the judicial system remains impeded by operative bonds with the old rule.

Under these circumstances the population of Tunisia and the stability in the country remain dependent on foreign financial sources, for which the newly appointed cabinet, last but not least, approaches Washington. Supporting its presence in the Middle East for many decades through its narrow connections with the just brought down from power or severely shaken regimes, the administration in the White House at that time was in a process of reformulating its regional political line, according to which Israel was assigned a prominent strategic role in the future and the particular Israeli-Palestinian negotiation issues, as President Barack Obama would declare during his speech on the American foreign policy in the Middle East and North Africa on May 19, 2011 were supposed to be settled by the two parties concerned.¹

Just over a week after President Ben Ali had fled to Saudi Arabia Washington dispatched Jeffrey Feltman, the Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs, to Tunisia, followed by William Burns, the US Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs. In March 2011 the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton herself went on an official visit to the Mediterranean state and promised an economic engagement, which Obama would later concretize as a competitive integration of the trade between both countries and a creation of favourable investment conditions in Tunisia. Additionally, the Secretary of State expressed her support for the consolidation of democracy in the country, though without specifying her own interpretation on this.

Building economic and political affiliations with the White House on the part of Fouad Mebazaa was met with disagreement by hundreds of Tunisians chanting in the streets of the capital during the visit of the Secretary of State: "Hillary Clinton, you are not welcome, get out", "No colonisation after the revolution", "No to US tutelage on Islamic soil".² As a compensation of similar moods and the growing discontent with the pace of the domestic reforms Fouad Mebazaa turns to the Israeli-Palestinian front showing a relatively strong pro-Palestinian leaning. The Tunisian population, just as the population in the rest of the

Arab countries, is notably sensitive of and in solidarity with the destiny of the Palestinians in the occupied territories.

After the outbreak of the second intifada (uprising) in 2000 Tunisia broke its diplomatic relations with Israel, heavily criticizing the conduct of the Israeli security forces with respect to the Palestinian protesters.³ On its insistence, the diplomatic sections in Tel Aviv and Tunis, respectively, were closed. Despite this gesture of formal political estrangement, relations between the two states continued to develop unofficially in a couple of sectors, including tourism and trade. Israel didn't stop thinking of Tunisia as of a „moderate“ political factor, an important guarantor for its own recognition in the region – in that context, for its response to the expectations of the Palestinian side.

In a telephone conversation in March 2011 Fouad Mebazaa assured the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, of the unwavering support of his country for the Palestinian cause and the right of the Palestinian people to establish an independent state.⁴ In April 2011 Mahmoud Abbas visited Tunisia for three days⁵, and the reconciliation agreement between Hamas and Fatah signed on May 04, 2011 setting for the conduct of future elections for a national unity government, which was persistently denied by Israel, was met with a great deal of approval and encouragement in Tunis.⁶ The Israeli government reacted rather sceptically to the democratic shift and the regime change in this Northern African country, it expressed fear of the possible disruption of its unofficial ties with Israel and interpreted the events as a way towards empowerment of extreme forces.⁷

In February 2011 another autocratic regime left the scene under huge public pressure. After 30 years in reign Hosni Mubarak was forced to leave his position relinquishing the power to the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces under the chairmanship of the former Minister of Defence, Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. Parliamentary elections were planned for the upcoming September. The first appointed interim Prime Minister, Ahmed Shafik, left his office because of grave dissatisfaction of the demonstrators with his association with Mubarak's circle. Essam Sharaf, a former minister but an active participant in the events on the Tahrir Square, became the new Premier, known for his unease at normalizing contacts with Israel before the solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict⁸.

The new approach of the Egyptian government became visible immediately after its coming into power – in correspondence with the sympathy of the whole society for the

Palestinian longings. Whereas Mubarak had upheld the illusion of a „peace process“ through exerting pressure on the Palestinian Authority to take part in the talks and regularly receiving Israeli officials in Sharm el-Sheikh, even without their active pursuit of a peaceful agreement,⁹ now Cairo started mediating successfully between the two biggest Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, for their rapprochement. While before ousting Mubarak Egypt was maintaining the blockade against the Gaza Strip, sharply disputed by different international institutions and governments¹⁰, on May 26, 2011 the country declared it would lift the blockade and all women and all men up to 18 and over 40 years old would be allowed to cross into the Sinai Peninsula through the border at Rafah (those between 18 and 40 years of age would need a visa).

Beyond that, after the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces took control, the army, which de facto had held the basic power positions in the country since the overthrowing of the monarchy in 1952¹¹, succeeded in reasserting its political supremacy. Indications for this were the security forces repressions against the still ongoing street protests for far-reaching reforms in Egypt¹², the yet unabolished state-of-emergency law in the country, the establishment of military tribunals against civilians, primarily demonstrators, among other things. Having been financed by Washington with 1,3 billion dollars annually for the past three decades, the Egyptian military apparatus was deemed a faithful ally and a serious pillar of the White House's policy in the Middle East. (Even under the current emergency circumstances and with yet indeterminate political power configurations in Cairo, the American government refused to reconsider its military policy.) In his speech on May 19, 2011 Obama underlined the United States' intention to stimulate not only Tunisia's but also Egypt's economy by using its influence with the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, guaranteeing Egyptian loans for 1 billion dollars, remitting Egyptian debt in exchange for its modification as local investments and promoting the free bilateral trade.

After taking over the leadership of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, Mohamed Tantawi assured the international community that Egypt would abide by the previously entered arrangements with Israel, namely the Camp David Accords from 1978 and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty from 1979. The attempt of thousands of Egyptians to express solidarity with the Palestinians for the commemoration of the Nakba Day (Arabic: catastrophe – the massive displacement of over 700 000 Arabs from Palestine (in the political-geographical sense of the term) during the first Israeli-Arab war) by showing presence at the border crossing at Rafah was prevented by the security forces. The

demonstrations on the same occasion in front of the Israeli embassy in Cairo were dispersed with tear gas, rubber and real bullets. More than 130 people were arrested.¹³ Although noticeably affected by the new internal political setting in its latest diplomatic steps regarding the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, the government of the country with largest (and actively protesting) Arab population was obviously not willing to abandon the strategic global and regional logic of the relations in the Middle East known from the past.

The advancing events in Tunisia and Egypt soon found repercussions in Yemen, Bahrain, Libya, Jordan and Syria. Immediately bordering on Israel and the Palestinian territories and sharing complex political and demographic relations with both of them, the behavior of Amman and Damascus is as relevant for the leading research question in the current report as the one of the country with the broadest influence in the Arab League, Egypt. Under the pressure of the street protests, aiming mainly at economic reforms and not at the replacement of the regime, the King of Jordan, Abdullah II, actively encouraged by the traditionally closely linked to the Jordanian royal family American administration, appointed a new government. Jordan welcomed the agreement marking the end of the division between Hamas and Fatah, which according to the Jordanian Foreign Minister, Nasser Judeh, „was used as a pretext to procrastinate the implementation of the two-state solution (Israel and Palestine, A/N) in line with a regional formula that would attain lasting peace in the Middle East“¹⁴. On May 23, 2011 the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, met with the Jordanian King, stating that the stance adopted by Barak Obama in his major Middle East speech on May 19, 2011 about basing the future Palestinian borders on the armistice lines prior to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip in 1967 was due to the efforts of the king during his latest visit to the US.¹⁵ Jordan, 60% of whose population consists of Palestinians, more than one million of them officially registered Palestinian refugees, signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994 and actively supported the regional peace initiatives, formulated by Saudi Arabia in 2002 and 2007, providing for the normalizing of the (official) relations between Israel and the whole Arab world in exchange for a full withdrawal of the Israeli troops from the territories occupied in 1967 together with East Jerusalem.

The impact of the current domestic unrest in Syria, openly hostile toward the Israeli policy, on its foreign political activities is still to be manifested. The fact that the Syrian army allowed Palestinian refugees to cross into Israeli territory during the commemoration of the Nakba testifies to the desire of Bashar al-Assad's entourage to find a way out of its

political morass. For years, Khaled Mashal, one of the leading figures of the militarized and anti-status quo oriented Palestinian formation, Hamas, has been residing in Syria. The Syrian Golan Heights are still under Israeli occupation and Damascus has been consistently applying the economic boycott measures against its neighbor since their introduction.

Despite the hitherto illustrated influence of the Arab discontent on the foreign policy agenda of the different regional governments, the issue of Israel and Palestine, it should be noted, was not instrumental for its appearance. In Cairo the organizers themselves deliberately discouraged anti-American and anti-Israeli slogans because of their wish to concentrate on one single adversary, namely, the regime – a wish easily understandable to everyone.¹⁶ It was only later (in Egypt, for example, after the fall of the regime) that the disaffection for Israel, known for decades, and the display of pro-Palestinian solidarity found any, although quite limited, presence in the street protests.¹⁷ Just as nationally focussed was the participation of religious groups and movements (The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, the movement Ennahda in Tunisia, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan etc.) in the massive popular demonstrations.¹⁸ Provided also the predominantly secular and independent orientation of the protest waves¹⁹, it is difficult to say that the cause of the military Islamic Palestinian groups has gained more power at this stage. Hamas has even pursued and reached a strategic rapprochement with the leaders of the secular Fatah. In conclusion, the reaction of Iran under the given circumstances, being another important regional player connected to Hamas, speaks for losing positions rather than imposing its own political views. „The Iranian leadership may have welcomed the revolution in Egypt but it has put down its own protesters and intensified repression.”²⁰

2. The American approach on the background of the protest events

Barack Obama's coming to power coincided with the completion of the military operation "Cast Lead" in the Gaza Strip which, according to the report of the UN Human Rights Council fact-finding mission specially formed on that purpose, cost the life of 13 Israelis and about 1 400 Palestinians.²¹ His refraining from taking a substantial position on the broadly denounced disproportionate military actions, conducted both by Hamas and Israel, in the course of his electoral campaign, the new American President tried to compensate with diplomatic steps.

Just two days after the inception of the new presidency, George Mitchell, known for his

fruitful interventions in the negotiations in Northern Ireland, was appointed as the administration's Special Envoy for Middle East Peace. During his speech in Cairo in June 2009, Obama pointed at the relations between Israelis, Palestinians and their Arab neighbours to be the second potent source of tension in that part of the world deserving serious attention. In the same speech the strong relations between America and Israel were underlined. Generally, the right to live in an own state in peace and security was acknowledged for both Palestinians and Israelis. The Israeli settlements in the occupied Palestinian territories were qualified as illegitimate. The President appealed for their construction to be stopped. The Israeli government was expected to create conditions for the cessation of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and not to impede the development of the population in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority was required to strengthen its institutions and the isolated Hamas in Gaza, without being exclusively referred to as a terrorist organization in the speech, was reminded that it was bearing responsibilities and that it could contribute to the reconciliation of the Palestinians, if it gives up the use of violence, recognizes earlier Israeli-Palestinian agreements and accepts Israel's right to exist.²²

Facing a "freezing point" in the negotiations, the White House opted for pushing its efforts towards bringing both sides back to the negotiating table. On September 02, 2010 Mahmoud Abbas and the new Israeli Prime Minister of the right-wing party Likud, Benjamin Netanyahu, opened direct negotiations. Less than a month later, on September 26, 2010 these negotiations came to a dead end, after Israel unilaterally suspended the moratorium on the construction activities in the settlements.²³ On their part, the Palestinians were cautioned by the Administration not to declare an independent state in the territories occupied by Israel in 1967 - something the Palestinian Authority is ready to do in the United Nations in the coming September.

For the first time in the last four years high-ranking American officials were sent to Syria as well. Signals of reconciliation were directed towards Iran, accompanied also by the message that its assistance for terrorist groups in the region and its presumed nuclear program are unacceptable.²⁴ Saudi Arabia's insistence for Barack Obama to take into consideration the two above mentioned regional peace initiatives made in 2002 and 2007 on behalf of the Arab countries was left unfulfilled.²⁵

The American government was not willing to adopt a comprehensive regional approach, convincingly binding Israel's point of view with that of all interested Arab capitals, even on the background of the intensive street demonstrations in the Middle East and their potential for mobilizing regional backing for the solution of the conflict. Not only the regional dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian antagonisms, but also its balancing in favour of the materially more dependent conflict actor, Ramallah, remained de facto unaddressed by Washington. In May 2011, when the American President presented his vision for the region, he reiterated that the Israelis and the Palestinians were essentially the ones to deal with the regulation of their dispute.

On the other hand, it should also be added that in the context of the Arab uprising Barack Obama showed himself more inclined to assume a more categorical tone to redress the conflict asymmetry. Unlike his predecessor, George W. Bush, who, contrary to the provisions of the international law, maintained that going back to the territorial reality from before 1967 was not realistic anymore, the current Head of State of the USA claimed that the future borders between Israel and the state of Palestine should reproduce the armistice lines of 1949. During her travel around the Middle East in March 2011, the Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, insisted that the creation of a Palestinian state was "unavoidable" without referring to the cessation of the construction in the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem in the same manner. In February 2011 the United States of America put a veto on a draft resolution of the UN Security Council aiming at condemning Israeli construction.²⁶ Hours before delivering his speech on the Middle East and North Africa Obama found out that on the same day the Israeli government had authorized plans for the construction of 1550 additional housing units on a land around East Jerusalem, annexed after 1967.²⁷

Despite being influenced by the events in the region with regard to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the present American administration remains hesitant in its reactions. Its engagement with the conflict, as exemplified by Hillary Clinton's visit in the region in March 2011, which excluded Israel and the Palestinian territories, or by the general tenor of Obama's remarks directed to the Arab world in May 2011, the White House understands as a subsidiary policy element subordinated to its overall Middle East strategy. Neither a detailed plan similar to the plan of President Clinton, nor other alternative bargaining ideas on the conflict resolution formula have been submitted so far, although the Israeli-

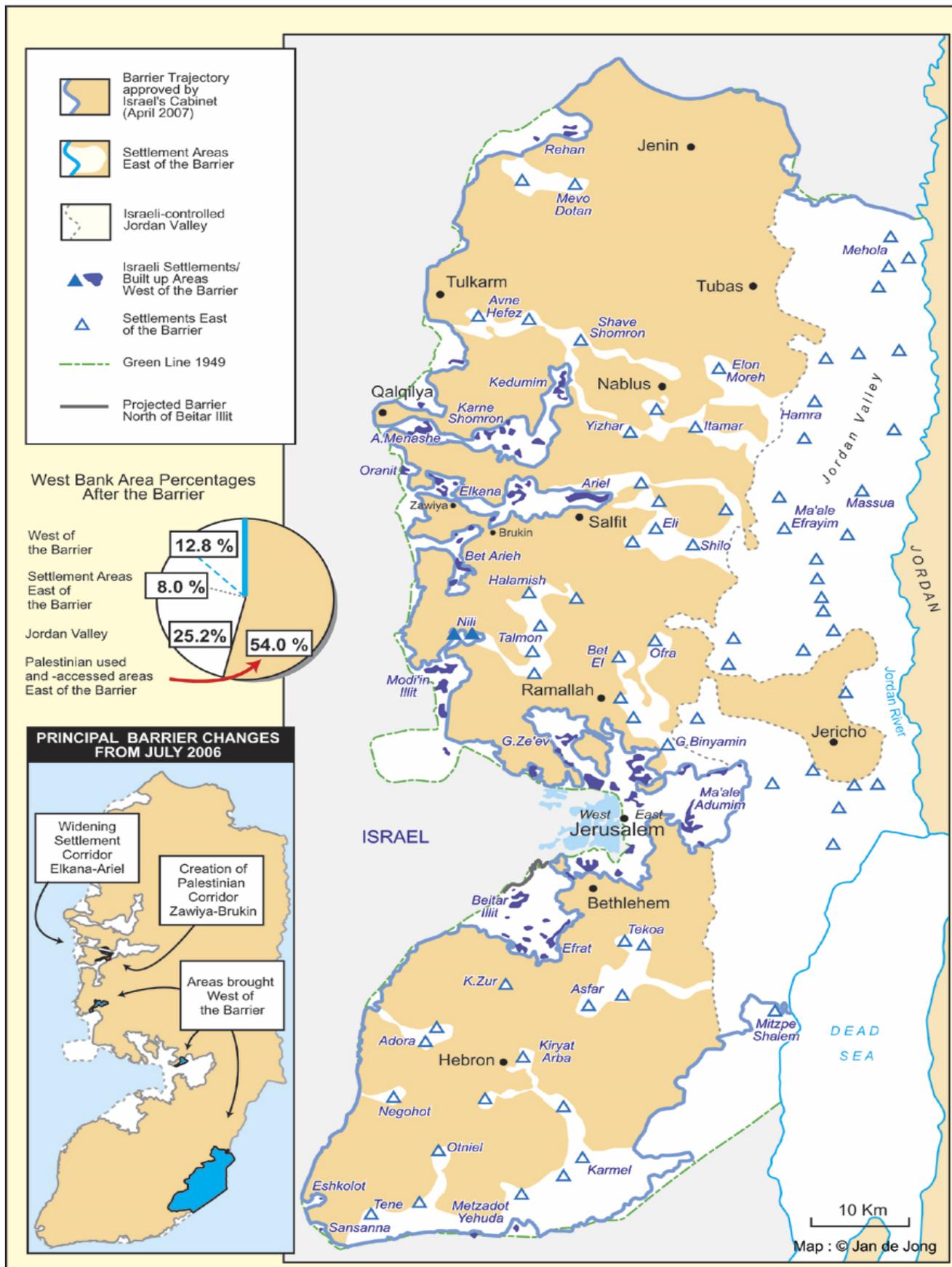
Palestinian conflict has been characterized by regular American interventions in the last 50 years. There have been no confidence-building measures or real steps undertaken for the compensation of the conflict asymmetry, e.g., through expressing support for the announcement of a Palestinian state, the full lifting of the Gaza blockade, the West Bank politicians' contacts to Hamas and a pro-peace consolidation of the Palestinian side, or through manoeuvring with the military aid for Israel.

The most difficult negotiation points such as Jerusalem, the settlements, the borders and the refugees have been mentioned by the White House, but without being treated thoroughly. After coming to Washington, Obama has sparked hope for a politically active and diplomatically balanced stance on the Israeli-Palestinian front. There is danger, due to insufficient determination of his cabinet and the predominance of own economic and strategic interests as well as complex regional political configurations, this chance to encrust in the form of a promising but unfruitful rhetoric.

3. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the eve and after the changes in the Middle East

At the time when the first demonstrations erupted on the Tahrir square, relations between the Israelis and the Palestinians were at a standstill. American diplomacy's attempts to bring the parties to direct negotiations in September 2010 came to nothing. During the following months Mahmoud Abbas refused to restart the talks until the construction of the Israeli settlements in the West Bank was entirely frozen. The Palestinian President insists on the formation of a Palestinian state according to the armistice lines before the 1967 war. For his part, Benjamin Netanyahu categorically asserts that these lines would not be respected and that Israel would not withdraw to their, according to him, „indefensible“, delineations.

Although unequivocally identifiable as a legal criterion for the achievement of a future accord (the lines are mentioned in the two fundamental UN Security Council resolutions on the regulation of the conflict 224(1967) and 338(1973)), in the meantime, these lines are encircling one, politically quite obscure, territorial reality in the occupied Palestinian areas that is producing a correspondingly intricate conflict architecture.



Israeli settlements and the separation barrier in the West Bank, April 2007 (Foundation for Middle East Peace, <http://www.fmep.org/maps/west-bank> (02.06.2011))

Prior to the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Israel possessed 75% of the territory of Palestine, geographically speaking. In the course of the military operations in 1967 the remaining 25% were seized. In 1980 the Israeli state unilaterally proclaimed all of Jerusalem, both East and West sections, as its eternal and inseparable capital, even though not recognized as such by the international community until today. For many years the territory of the Gaza Strip and the West Bank has been fragmented into pieces by large-scale settlement projects as well as road infrastructure, designated exclusively for Jewish settlers.

According to the Foundation for Middle East Peace, in 2009 approximately 290 000 Jewish settlers lived in the West Bank and around 190 000 in East Jerusalem.²⁸ Israel has been constructing a separation barrier (wall) in the occupied Palestinian territory, declared illegal by the International Court of Justice in The Hague. In 2005 the Israeli military forces unilaterally and without signing any agreement or providing any international guarantees for the observation of the new status quo, withdrew its soldiers from Gaza and demolished the settlement infrastructure there. The Israeli government retained control over the sea waters, the air space and a border land strip of Gaza's territory.

Just as complex turned out to be the territorial, demographic and political transformation of the Palestinian side. Here the territorial developments took course towards shrinking, including the opening of overcrowded refugee camps in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Gaza, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria. Currently, the UN Agency for Palestinian refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA) speaks for over 4 800 000 officially registered refugees.²⁹ In the last years the Palestinians living in the West Bank outside the refugee camps have often experienced confiscations of land or crop, difficulties in the access to neighbouring places, including on health and education grounds, and it has been almost impossible for them to leave the West Bank. The Palestinian resistance was previously organized mainly by the Organization for the liberation of Palestine (PLO) and its leader, Yasser Arafat, and took the form of active military actions against civil and military persons, including terroristic. While denouncing the existence of the Israeli state at its inception, the positions of the PLO evolved to a degree of official recognition of Israel and the abandonment of the use of terror means for the achievement of its goals. In 1993 Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin signed the Oslo agreements, which were supposed to open a negotiation process regarding the conditions for the gradual withdrawal of the Israeli army from the Palestinian territories and the eventual treatment of the most uncompromising issues (Jerusalem, the Palestinian refugees, the borders). Choosing to divide the conflicting issues into smaller units (fractionating) did not ultimately result in a durable conflict settlement and effectively lead

to its complication. The Interim Agreement (Oslo II) from 1995 officially provided for the partitioning of the West Bank into separate Palestinian regions (enclaves), surrounded by Israeli presence. The connection between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank became insecure. The geopolitical disintegration of the occupied territories was aggravated after the Palestinian elections in 2007, when Hamas came to power. In the context of the regional search for new political alternatives to the unsolved problems in the area in the beginning of the 1980s, Hamas gained ground as the most influential religious military group in the Palestinian territories, relying on the use of violent methods against Israel even during the Oslo negotiations. The results of the elections held in 2006 caused uneasiness in the Western political circles. The foreign economic aid for the Gaza Strip was suspended and an economic blockade was imposed on it. In the end, the Palestinians suffered a four-year power split that weakened their negotiating position in many ways and exacerbated the conflict asymmetry. Katyushas started flying into Israel from Gaza, to which Israel responded with several massive military attacks. The reciprocal exchange of blows and the absence of any trust between the parties intensified the conflict escalation.

The protests in the neighboring Arab countries rapidly produced an effect on the local dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian dispute. Even in February Mahmoud Abbas refused to yield to American pressure and to retrack the draft resolution, introduced by the Palestinian delegation, on the cessation of the construction work in the Israeli settlements. By means of Egyptian mediation Hamas and Fatah reached an agreement for the creation of a technocratic government and the conduct of elections. One of the leading figures in Hamas, Khaled Mashal, living in Damascus, stated: „Our aim is to establish a free and completely sovereign Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip, whose capital is Jerusalem, without any settlers and without giving up a single inch of land and without giving up on the right of return [of Palestinian refugees].“³⁰ The reconciliation deal does not require Hamas to explicitly recognize the Israeli statehood. Benjamin Netanyahu rejected the accord between both Palestinian fractions a priori and continued to bring pressure on the EU and the USA to halt their aid for the Palestinian Authority, in case Hamas joins the government. In the meantime, the border crossing at Rafah was opened for the larger part of the population.

4. Conclusions

The hitherto schematically laid out development of the complex processes, which have been taking place throughout the Middle East since the middle of January this year, brings

us to the following conclusions in response to the questions raised at the outset of the present report.

1. The current stage of development of the democratic Arab movements does not allow us to foresee with an absolute certainty what direction they are going to take after a year. In Egypt and Tunisia elections are to take place; in Yemen, Syria and Libya the street battles have not come to an end, they are even becoming more vigorous.
2. The manifestation of the economic, social, political and organizational problems, associated with the protest events described in this paper, should be situated predominantly in a domestic political context. Obviously, local political grievances prevail in the streets of the Middle East. In this sense, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its pertaining aspects do not find a direct resonance during the demonstrations – especially at their culminating point.
3. There are indications that the new ruling cabinets are directly influenced by the internal political circumstances in their various countries in a way to enhance their support for the Palestinian cause. Due to historically or socioeconomically preconditioned proximity to traditionally strong economic and political factors in the region (the USA, the Gulf Cooperation Council, joined by Jordan and Morocco in the recent weeks), it is likely for the „new democracies“ to continue to balance between the asymmetric conflict reality and the pursuit of their own strategic goals.
4. The Arab protests have lead to the modification of the conflict relation’s structure in favor of the solidification and stabilization of the occupied side. So far, even the intention of the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, to proclaim a Palestinian state at the session of the General Assembly in the coming autumn seems unwavering.
5. The negotiation process as a form of regulation of the intricate interests of the conflicting parties is in a stalemate. Viewed from the perspective of May 2011, we can speak about greater flexibility in the Palestinians’ positions (the negotiations in September 2010 started not after the irrevocable termination of the construction activities in the West Bank but after the enforcement of a temporary moratorium for them; rhetorically, Hamas is inclined to accept a future Palestinian state within the territory occupied in 1967) and an unyielding behavior of the Israeli government (an opposite Israeli proposal was made on April 06, 2011 in the name of the Israeli peace initiative, gathering together prominent Israeli figures, including generals, based on the Arab peace initiative from 2002). It remains contestable whether the opening of direct bilateral negotiations under the prevailing conflict circumstances would produce a

- successful compromise without going along with real territorial concessions.
6. The latest summit between Benjamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama in Washington signalled the desire of the American administration to stay engaged only diplomatically, and not politically, with the conflict, namely by offering specific negotiating proposals, as well as the American indecisiveness to reshape the conflict structure.
 7. If we apply the analogy with the negatively constructed concept of the „democratic peace“ (democracies do NOT go to war with democracies) to the problem examined in this report, one future theoretical effort could address the possibilities for the elaboration of a positively conceptualised generalization about the interrelation between democratic domestic changes and the encouragement of external political peace processes.

Endnotes

¹ Remarks of President Barack Obama on the Middle East and North Africa - „A Moment of Opportunity“, 19.05.2011, at: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/05/19/remarks-president-barack-obama-prepared-delivery-moment-opportunity> (25.05.2011)

² Al Jazeera, Clinton Pledges to Aid Tunisia Reforms, 17.03.2011, at: <http://english.aljazeera.net/news/middleeast/2011/03/201131712487729281.html> > (25.05.2011)

³ Jewish Virtual Library, Israeli Cooperation with Arab Countries, 2005/2006, at: <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Politics/Arabs.html> (25.05.2011); People's Daily, Israel Regrets Tunisia's Decision to Break off Relations, 23.10.2000, at: http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/english/200010/23/eng20001023_53337.html (25.05.2000)

⁴ Saudi Press Agency, Abbas and Mebazaa Discuss on Phone Palestinian-Tunisian Relations, 05.03.2011, at: <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Abbas+and+Mebazaa+Discuss+on+Phone+Palestinian-Tunisian+Relations.-a0250792543> (24.05.2011)

⁵ TunisiaLive, Interim President Confers with Palestinian President, 19.04.2011, at: <http://tunisialive.net/2011/04/19/350/> (24.05.2011)

⁶ Tunisian News Agency, Tunisia Voices Satisfaction with Palestinian Reconciliation Agreement, 05.05.2011, at: <http://news.marweb.com/tunisia/economics/tunisia-voices-satisfaction-with-palestinian-reconciliation.html> (24.05.2011)

⁷ Muhareb, Mahmoud, Why is Israel Worried about the Tunisian Revolution?, 07.02.2011, at: <http://english.dohainstitute.org/Home/Details?entityID=5ea4b31b-155d-4a9f-8f4d-a5b428135cd5&resourceId=2252aae6-511b-416f-b233-ae0027efbf19> (24.05.2011)

⁸ BBC, Egypt Country Profile, 09.05.2011, at: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/country_profiles/737642.stm (24.05.2011)

⁹ Gresh, Alain, The New Arab Awakening. Neither with the West nor Against it, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Engl. ed., March 2011, at: <http://mondediplo.com/2011/03/02arabworld> (25.05.2011)

¹⁰ The European Parliament, Israeli Attack on Gaza Ships: Parliament Calls for International Inquiry and End to Blockade, 17.06.2010, at: <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/9a798adbf322aff38525617b006d88d7/faedc05cd121e7f48525774500536154?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,gaza,blockade> (25.05.2011); Statement by Humanitarian Organizations, NGOs and UN Organizations on the Second Anniversary of the Gaza Blockade, 17.06.2009, at: <http://unispal.un.org/unispal.nsf/d0911f77d9bb1f14852574050052b8d6/6f5724c1c40257c0852575d80046cdd5?OpenDocument&Highlight=0,gaza,blockade> (26.05.2011); Wiener Zeitung online, EU insists on opening the Gaza Strip, 14.06.2010, at: http://www.wienerzeitung.at/nachrichten/politik/europa/43286_EU-draengt-auf-Oeffnung-des-Gazastreifens.html (25.05.2011) (German: EU drängt auf Öffnung des Gazastreifens)

¹¹ Gehlen, Martin, The Ambivalent Army of Egypt, 07.02.2011, at: <http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2011-02/aegypten-armee-machtfaktor/seite-1> (26.05.2011) (German: Ägyptens ambivalente Armee)

¹² El-Wardani, Lina, Is Egypt's Revolution in Danger?, 20.05.2011, at: <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/64/12454/Egypt/Politics-/Is-Egypt%E2%80%99s-revolution-in-danger.aspx> (27.05.2011)

¹³ Democracy Now, Report by Sharif Abdel Kouddous, „Violent Crackdown“ on pro-Palestinian Protesters in Kairo Leaves 350 Injured, 17.05.2011, at:

http://www.democracynow.org/2011/5/17/violent_crackdown_on_pro_palestinian_protesters (18.05.2011)

¹⁴ Quoted in Xinhua, Jordan Welcomes Hamas-Fatah Reconciliation Deal, 29.04.2011, at:

http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/world/2011-04/29/c_13850729.htm (25.05.2011)

¹⁵ Indonesia Katakami, Mahmoud Abbas: No Hamas or Fatah Figures in New Government, 24.05.2011, at:

<http://indonesiakatakami.wordpress.com/2011/05/24/mahmoud-abbas-no-hamas-or-fatah-figures-in-new-government/> (25.05.2011)

¹⁶ Gresh, Alain: I.c.

¹⁷ Yaari, Ehud, The Arab Revolutions: An Israeli Perspective, 15.03.2011, at:

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC05.php?CID=3328> (20.05.2011)

¹⁸ Interview with Jean-Pierre Filiu and Mehdi Khalaji, The Muslim Brotherhood Today: between Ideology and Democracy, 22.03.2011, at: <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/templateC07.php?CID=565> (25.05.2011)

¹⁹ Achcar, Gilbert, (lecture) „Revolution in the Arab World: Tunisia ... Egypt ... and Beyond“, 19.02.2011, at:

<http://www.zcommunications.org/revolution-in-the-arab-world-tunisia-egypt-and-beyond-by-gilbert-achcar> (15.04.2011)

²⁰ Gresh, Alain: I.c.

²¹ Report of the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, 25.09.2009, pp.90-91, at:

<http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/12session/A-HRC-12-48.pdf> (26.05.2011)

²² Remarks by the President on a New Beginning, Cairo University, 04.06.2009, at:

<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/remarks-president-cairo-university-6-04-09> (26.05.2011)

²³ CNN, Israel's Moratorium on Settlement Building in West Bank Ends. 26.09.2010, at:

http://articles.cnn.com/2010-09-26/world/israel.settlement.moratorium_1_danny-danon-future-palestinian-state-palestinian-response?_s=PM:WORLD (20.05.2011)

²⁴ Black, Ian, Arab World Fears Barack Obama's Stance on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is Just More of the Same, 20.03.2009, at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/20/ian-black-middle-east> (20.5.2011)

²⁵ Muasher, Marwan, Palestinian-Israeli Direct Talks: the Case for a Regional Approach, August 2010

<http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/?fa=view&id=41421> (20.05.2011)

²⁶ Pilkington, Ed, US Vetoes UN Condemnation of Israeli Settlements, 19.02.2011, at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/19/us-veto-israel-settlement> (22.05.2011)

²⁷ IrishTimes, Palestinians Condemn New Settlement Plan, 20.05.2011, at:

<http://www.irishtimes.com/newspaper/breaking/2011/0520/breaking13.html> (25.05.2011); For more

information about the renewal of the construction work after the end of the moratorium see Peace Now, Interim Report: Settlement Activity since the End of the Moratorium, 20.05.2011, at:

<http://peacenow.org.il/eng/content/interim-report-settlement-activity-end-moratorium-0> (30.05.2011)

²⁸ Foundation for Middle East Peace, Statistics and Tables: West Bank Settlements, East Jerusalem Settlements, at: http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info (25.05.2011)

²⁹ UNRWA: Palestinian refugees, at: <http://www.unrwa.org/etemplate.php?id=86> (01.06.2011)

³⁰ Cit. in Black, Ian and Conal Urquhart, Palestinian Joy as Rivals Fatah and Hamas Sign Reconciliation Pact, 04.05.2011, at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/04/palestine-joy-fatah-hamas-reconciliation-pact> (25.05.2011)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Boryana Aleksandrova – (b. 1976), Research Associate of ISIS, Ph.D. and Senior Assistant-Professor in International Relations at Sofia University „St. Kliment Ohridsky“. Her research interests are in the fields of international conflicts, International Relations theory, globalization.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR SECURITY AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (ISIS)

The Institute for Security and International Studies (ISIS) is a non-governmental non-profit organisation, established legally in November 1994. It organises and supports research in the field of security and international relations. Fields of research interest are: national security and foreign policy of Bulgaria; civil-military relations, democratic control of the armed forces and security sector reform; European Integration, Euro-Atlantic security and institutions; Balkan and Black Sea regional security; global and regional studies; policy of the USA, Russia and the CIS; information aspects of security and information warfare;

quantitative methods and computer simulation of security studies; theory and practice of international negotiations. ISIS organises individual and team studies; publishes research studies and research reports; organises conferences, seminars, lectures and courses; develops an information bank and virtual library through the Internet; supports younger researchers of security, and develops independent expertise in security and international relations for the Bulgarian civil society.

The institute networks internationally and establishes links with academic organisations and official institutions in the country and abroad on a contract basis. ISIS is not linked to any political party, movement, organisation, religious or ideological denomination. The institute has a flexible group of voluntary associates – five senior research fellows, eight PhD holders and five MAs – varying annually between 5 and 13 in all.

PUBLICATIONS OF ISIS

Research Studies:

"Bulgaria and the Balkans in the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union" (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Venelin Tsachevsky), 44 pp., July, 1995. Research Study 1. In Bulgarian and English.

"Problems of Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria: Approaches to Improving the Civilian Monitoring of the Armed Forces" (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Todor Tagarev), 96 pp., April, 1996. Research Studies – 2. In Bulgarian.

"Bulgaria and the European Union in the Process of Building a Common European Defence" (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Tilcho Ivanov), 51 pp., September 1996. Research Studies – 3. In Bulgarian and English.

"Strengthening of the Balkan Civil Society: the Role of the NGOs in International Negotiations" (Plamen Pantev), 24 pp., March 1997. Research Studies – 4. In Bulgarian and English.

"The New National Security Environment and Its Impact on the Civil-Military Relations in Bulgaria" (Plamen Pantev), 50 pp., May 1997. Research Studies – 5. In English.

"Pre negotiations: the Theory and How to Apply it to Balkan Issues" (Plamen Pantev), 24 pp., October 1998. Research Studies – 6. In English.

"Balkan Regional Profile: The Security Situation and the Region-Building Evolution of South-Eastern Europe" (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Tatiana Houbenova-Delisivkova), 17 pp., April 1999. Research Studies – 7. In English (only an electronic version).

"Black Sea Basin Regional Profile: The Security Situation and the Region-Building Opportunities" (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Tatiana Houbenova-Delisivkova), 17 pp., April 1999. Research Studies – 8. In English (only an electronic version).

"Security Risks and Instabilities in Southeastern Europe: Recommended Strategies to the EU in the Process of Differentiated Integration of the Region by the Union" (Plamen Pantev), 36 pp., November 2000. Research Studies – 9. In English (only an electronic version).

"Civil-Military Relations in South-East Europe: A Survey of the National Perspectives and of the Adaptation Process to the Partnership for Peace Standards", in cooperation

with IIF, Vienna and the PFP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, (Plamen Pantev ed.), 218 pp., April 2001, Research Studies – 10. In English.

“The Evolution of Civil-Military Relations in South East Europe: Continuing Democratic Reform and Adapting to the Needs of Fighting Terrorism”, ISIS, Sofia/NDA, Vienna/DCAF, Geneva, Plamen Pantev, etc (eds.), 276 pp. (Hardcover), July 2005, Springer Verlag, Heidelberg, Research Studies – 11. In English.

“Bulgaria in NATO and the EU: Implications for the Regional Foreign and Security Policy of the Country” (Plamen Pantev), 28 pp., September 2005, Research Studies – 12. In English.

“Post-Conflict Rehabilitation: Lessons from South East Europe and Strategic Consequences for the Euro-Atlantic Community” (Plamen Pantev, Jean-Jacques de Dardel, Gustav Gustenau - Eds.), National Defense Academy and Bureau for Security Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Defence, ISIS Research Studies – 13. Vienna and Sofia, 2006, 235pp.

“U.S. Relations in the Age of Obama” (Plamen Pantev), in: A. Wess Mitchell and Ted Reinert (Eds.), “U.S.-Central European Relations in the Age of Obama”, CEPA Report No 22, July 2009, pp. 23-25. ISIS Research Studies – 14. Also available online at: <http://www.cepa.org/Publications>, July 2009

“Joint task Force East and Shared Military Basing in Romania and Bulgaria” (Plamen Pantev et al), Occasional Papers Series, George C. Marshall Center, No. 21, August 2009, 23 pp. ISIS Research Studies – 15. The paper is also available at: www.marshallcenter.org/occpapers-en September 2009.

“Rehabilitation and Multi-stakeholder Partnerships on Security in Post-Conflict Situations: the Case of Afghanistan and Consequences for the European Union”, (Plamen Pantev, Velko Atanasoff), St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, ISIS Research Studies–15, Sofia, 2010, 200 pp.

Research Reports:

“The Balkans in the Cooling Relations Between Russia and Western Europe” (Dinko Dinkov), 29 pp., November 1995. Research Reports-1. In Bulgarian.

“The Political Dialogue Between the European Union and the Central and Eastern European Countries” (Vladimir Nachev), 15 pp., November 1995. Research Reports- 2. In Bulgarian.

“The Bulgarian Foreign Policy in the Post-Conflict Period: Tendencies, Roles, Recommendations” (Plamen Pantev, Valeri Rachev, Venelin Tsachevsky, Tatiana Houbenova-Delisivkova, Dinko Dinkov), 35 pp., November 1995. Research Reports-3. In Bulgarian.

“The Bulgarian Military Education at a Crossroads” (Todor Tagarev), 29 pp., September 1996, Research Reports-4. In English.

“An International Methodology for Evaluation of Combat Capabilities of Military Systems: the Bulgarian Perspective of Greater Transparency and Confidence” (Volodya Kotsev), 13 pp., October 1996, Research Reports-5. In English.

“Confidence and Security in the Balkans: the Role of Transparency in Defence Budgeting” (Tilcho Kolev), 22 pp., November 1996, Research Reports-6. In English.

"NATO Enlargement: Two Looks from Outside" (Laszlo Nagy, Valeri Ratchev), 82 pp., February 1997, Research Reports-7. In English.

"Bulgaria and NATO: 7 Lost Years" (Jeffrey Simon), Translation from English into Bulgarian from "Strategic Forum" 142, May 1998, 15 pp., November 1998, Research Reports – 8. In Bulgarian.

"Reengineering Defense Planning in Bulgaria" (Velizar Shalamanov, Todor Tagarev), 28 pp., December 1998, Research Reports – 9. In English.

"Peacekeeping and Intervention in the Former Yugoslavia: Broader Implications of the Regional Case" (Plamen Pantev), 17 pp., November 1999, Research Reports – 10. In English.

"The Emergence of a New Geopolitical Region in Eurasia: The Volga-Urals Region and its Implications for Bulgarian Foreign and Security Policy" (Nikolay Pavlov), 23 pp., December 2000, Research Reports - 11. In English.

„Regional Identity in the Post-Cold War Balkans“ (Dimitar Bechev), 22 pp., August 2001, Research Reports – 12. In English.

„The Balkans and the Caucasus: Conceptual Stepping Stones of the Formation of a New Single Geoeconomic, Geopolitical and Geostrategic Region“ (Plamen Pantev), 8 pp., November 2002, Research Reports – 13. In English.

"Control, Cooperation, Expertise: Civilians and the Military in Bulgarian Defence Planning Expertise" (Todor Tagarev), 19 pp., April 2003, Research Reports – 14. In English.

"Bulgaria's Role and Prospects in the Black Sea Region: Implications of NATO and EU Enlargement" (Plamen Pantev), 12 pp., August 2004, Research Reports – 15 In English.

"Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asiatic Concerns of an Enlarged Europe – a Bulgarian View" (Plamen Pantev), 7pp., August 2004, Research Reports – 16. In English.

"Security Threats and Risks in South Caucasus: Perceptions from the Western Black Sea" (Plamen Pantev), 12 pp., June 2005, Research Reports – 17. In English.

"The 'Europeanisation' of National Foreign, Security and Defence Policy" (Plamen Pantev), 11pp., November 2005, Research Reports – 18. In English.

Note: All publications in English have electronic versions at the Institute's website:
<http://www.isis-bg.org>

ISIS Address

1618 Sofia, lc "Krasno selo", bl. 194 , ent. B, ap. 36

P. O. Box 231, Bulgaria

Phone: ++359888289605

Fax: ++(359-2-) 551 828

E-Mail Address: isis@mgu.bg

Website: <http://www.isis-bg.org>