

In the wake of the genocide in Gaza, a major political, economic and humanitarian effort is required to rebuild Gaza and the West Bank, as well as to restore relations between Israel and Palestine. As two leading middle powers, Turkey and Spain have spoken out firmly in defence of the rights of the Palestinian people, the reconstruction of Gaza and the two-state solution. Both countries share certain common views and could make a positive contribution to the stabilisation and prosperity of the Middle East.

What can Spain and Turkey do together to redirect this process towards a common goal? Is there any way to make progress in the current context of regional conflict? The main aim of this document is to analyse the current situation and explore ways to strengthen the role and leadership of both governments in this endeavour—the common ground and the differences—whilst building broad coalitions in Europe and across the Islamic and Arab world to achieve a fair, balanced and lasting resolution to the conflict.

TURKEY, SPAIN AND THE PALESTINE QUESTION

Convergence and difference

Authors

Carmen Rodríguez (UAM) and Isaías Barreñada (UCM)

FUNDACIÓN ALTERNATIVAS

Working Paper

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GENERAL FRAMEWORK

The Palestinian question occupies a central position in regional dynamics; moreover, its significance extends to the global stage, demanding that positions be taken on the specific situation of the Palestinians, testing the functioning of the international order and raising questions about the meaning of international law at a time of particular upheaval.

The situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories necessitates addressing fundamental issues such as the principle of self-determination, international humanitarian law, human rights, and the right to justice and redress. In particular, the genocide¹ in Gaza and the prolonged occupation of the West Bank directly affect the rules-based multilateral architecture, calling into question the functioning and effectiveness of organisations such as the United Nations and the European Union, and tribunals such as the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court. Regardless of the effectiveness of the implementation of the rules and the scope of international treaties—

Given the proliferation of international human rights instruments in recent decades, there can be no doubt as to their benchmark and aspirational significance, as evidenced by the large number of countries that have formally acceded to these various instruments, as well as by the establishment of international human rights courts. In a turbulent and increasingly challenged international system, international law and multilateralism have become a fundamental anchor for colonised and occupied peoples, and for the victims of conflicts and undemocratic regimes. For this reason, the Palestinian question must be considered within these legal frameworks.

Currently, despite the declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza in October 2025, Israeli attacks on the civilian population have not ceased, and Israel continues to severely restrict the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip. In February 2026, with the closure of the border crossings, the entry of humanitarian aid, fuel and basic supplies was blocked, suspending medical evacuations and the rotation of humanitarian workers.

This situation prevents the effective protection of the population, as well as the provision of humanitarian aid and basic services. Israel is blocking the entry of UNRWA aid and has a clear political agenda: to force the agency into collapse.

In the West Bank, settlement activity has intensified at the hands of radical settlers who have resorted to veritable pogroms, causing casualties, displacement and material damage, as reported by human rights organisations such as al-Haq, Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International and B'Tselem. Meanwhile, the occupying forces have stepped up roadblocks and demolished several refugee camps.

This brief report aims to analyse the positions of Spain and Turkey on the Palestinian question as a starting point for exploring diplomatic avenues through which to promote multilateral cooperation initiatives in this field.

1. We use the term 'genocide' and its meaning as set out in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (1948), the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (1998) and the International Association of Genocide Scholars (IAGS).



RELATIONS TURKEY–ISRAEL/PALESTINE

In 1925, Turkey established a consular mission in Jerusalem, under British Mandate rule. It opposed the Partition Plan in 1947 (UNSCR 181) and, alongside the United States and France, formed part of the United Nations Conciliation Commission for Palestine in 1948. The Turkish government recognised the State of Israel in 1949, motivated by geopolitical and strategic considerations in the context of the Cold War, during which Turkey played an active role in the Western bloc.

In the 1950s, the two states cooperated in military and economic spheres within the framework of an informal alliance, part of the so-called 'periphery doctrine' set out by Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and aimed at countering the pan-Arabism of Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Despite this, Turkey was critical of Israel during the Suez Crisis in 1956 and eventually recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv.

In the 1960s, following the independence of Cyprus, Turkish governments sought to the support of Arab countries for the Turkish Cypriot

community on the island. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli War, Turkey refused to allow military bases on its territory to be used against Arab countries and opposed the annexation of territories by force, although it did not expressly condemn Israel as the aggressor. In 1969, it participated as an observer in the first Islamic Conference held following the attack on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, and during the 1973 Arab-Israeli War, it again refrained from supporting Israel from its military bases, whilst allegedly allowing the Soviet Union to resupply Egypt and Syria. In 1979, Bülent Ecevit's government approved the opening of a diplomatic office in Ankara for the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO). Ankara closed its consulate in Jerusalem in 1980 following the Israeli parliament's decision to proclaim the city, in its entirety, as the capital of Israel. Following the 1980 coup d'état in Turkey, diplomatic representation in that country was reduced to the post of second secretary, although he was promoted back to chargé d'affaires in 1986. During

this decade, a difficult balancing act was performed. Relations with Israel improved both politically and economically, fostered within the framework of Turkey's transatlantic relationship with the United States. At the same time, Israel's treatment of the Palestinian population during the first Intifada was condemned, in line with the critical view held by the Turkish public, and the State of Palestine was recognised following its proclamation by the PLO in Algiers in 1988. It was not until 1991, however, that the diplomatic missions of Israel and the PLO attained the status of embassies. The negotiations following the Madrid Conference (1991) – sponsored by the United States – and the signing of the Declaration of Principles between the PLO and Israel in 1993 made it possible, three years later, for cooperation with Israel to be stepped up in the military and intelligence spheres, with the signing of a treaty on military cooperation and training; for economic ties to be strengthened, with the signing of a free trade agreement; and for cultural and academic exchange to be promoted. The exchange of official visits at the highest level between the two countries would serve as a clear sign of the strengthening of their bilateral relations, although the Turkish authorities sought to, as part of these

visits, also hold meetings with Palestinian representatives.

This rapprochement between Turkey and Israel was, however, heavily criticised by Islamist sectors on the right and by sectors on the left. Sympathy for the Palestinian cause within Turkish society was also evident in surveys conducted at the time. Thus, in a survey carried out following the outbreak of the Second Intifada in October 2002, 60% of the population called for the Turkish government to play a more active role in support of the Palestinian people.

Indeed, the Second Intifada marked a new phase in relations, during which the discourse of the Turkish ruling elite was highly critical of the actions of the Israeli government of the time. During the siege of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat at his headquarters in Ramallah in 2002, the Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ismail Cem, mediated alongside his Greek counterpart, Yorgo Papandreou, between the Palestinian Authority and the Israeli government.

With the rise to power of the Justice and Development Party (AKP) that same year, successive Turkish governments cited their close ties with both Israelis and Palestinians as a means of making a positive contribution to both the Quartet's Roadmap and the Arab Initiative—the 2002 Peace Plan, proposed by Saudi

Arabia and adopted by the Arab League in Beirut. The Turkish elite also played a mediating role in the indirect peace talks held between Syria and Israel in 2008. Although relations with Israel were not without tensions, they also saw significant progress, such as that achieved following the presentation of the plan for Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2004 and the subsequent visit by the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, to Israel a year later. The Prime Minister supported the idea of promoting the Ankara Forum as a framework for launching trilateral cooperation between Palestinian, Israeli and Turkish representatives for industrial recovery at the Erez Crossing. In 2006, following talks with the Palestinian authorities, the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TIKA) established an office in Ramallah and a liaison office in Gaza in 2012.

With regard to engagement with Palestinian representatives, in 2006 the Turkish Government openly distanced itself from the positions of the United States and the European Union, which had chosen to isolate the Islamist movement Hamas—classified by both as a terrorist organisation—after it won a majority of seats in the Palestinian National Council, during the elections held that same year. For its part, the Turkish govern-

ment decided to recognise Hamas's political leaders as legitimate interlocutors, citing their democratic victory at the ballot box. This stance, upheld and championed by Turkey in its foreign policy, has been justified as a means of playing an active role in the diplomatic arena. This has been reflected in the mediation processes aimed at achieving a ceasefire in Gaza in 2025, as well as in its contribution to the reconciliation efforts between Fatah and Hamas in recent years, fostering dialogue between the two sides.

Bilateral relations between Israel and Turkey were, however, significantly affected by Israel's attacks on Gaza during the so-called Operation Cast Lead between December 2008 and January 2009. The Turkish government emphasised the humanitarian tragedy in Gaza, but continued to offer itself as a mediator in the Middle East peace process and, in particular, between Syria and Israel if the parties so agreed.

The most serious crisis, however, occurred in 2010 following the assault in international waters by Israeli commandos on the Mavi Marmara, part of a humanitarian flotilla aimed at breaking the blockade of Gaza. Nine citizens Turks were killed. Turkey demanded that the Israeli government apologise, compensate the families and lift the blockade on

the Gaza Strip. US mediation² helped Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to acknowledge in 2013 “operational errors” in the mission, “express regret for the injuries and loss of life”, “apologise to the Turkish people” and “agree to reach a settlement on financial compensation”. This step paved the way for an agreement to be reached in 2016 that allowed bilateral relations between the two countries to be revived, with financial compensation agreed for the families of the Mavi Marmara victims and Turkey agreeing to withdraw the lawsuits filed against the Israeli soldiers involved in the raid³. Although no progress could be made on lifting the maritime blockade imposed by the Israeli government on the Gaza Strip, the agreement facilitated the delivery of humanitarian aid from Turkey via the Israeli port of Ashdod.

Relations between the two countries deteriorated once again in 2018, following US President Donald Trump’s decision to move the US embassy to Jerusalem. At least 60 Palestinians who took part in demonstrations against this move were killed by Israeli security forces. The arrival of a new government in Israel in 2021, together with the impetus provided by the US administration to the process of normalising relations between neighbouring countries and

Israel, led to a rapprochement with Turkey, which materialised in 2022 with the restoration of diplomatic relations at the highest level between the two countries.

The attacks carried out by Hamas on 7 October and the Israeli response once again strained relations between the two states. Following the attack on 7 October, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement strongly condemning the deaths of civilians and calling on both sides to exercise restraint to prevent an escalation, whilst advocating for a lasting solution to the conflict through the two-state framework. The deterioration in relations became evident, however, very quickly, with the withdrawal of the Israeli ambassador from Ankara in October and the Turkish ambassador from Tel Aviv in November 2023.

In his speeches to the United Nations General Assembly in 2024 and 2025, Turkish President Tayyip Erdoğan accused Israel of committing the crimes of ethnic cleansing and genocide in Gaza. During this period, in addition to condemning the Israeli offensive in Gaza, the Turkish Government called in various international forums and bodies for an indefinite ceasefire and the entry of humanitarian aid into the Strip, and promoted the two-state solution, with an independent and sovereign Palestinian

state, with full territorial integrity, based on the 1967 borders and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

The Turkish government unilaterally imposed restrictions on trade with Israel. In April 2024, the Turkish Ministry of Trade announced restrictions on exports of 54 products to Israel until Israel declared a ceasefire and allowed the continuous and sufficient passage of humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip. This embargo was tightened in May 2024, when Turkey announced the suspension of all commercial transactions involving exports, imports and transit with Israel. This prohibited vessels affiliated with Israel from entering Turkish ports, as well as foreign-flagged ships carrying military cargo to Israel, and closed Turkish airspace to Israeli aircraft. Despite the difficulties in enforcing a total embargo, as trade flows frequently through third countries, according to UN Comtrade⁴, Turkey's exports to Israel stood at \$5.434 billion in 2023 and fell sharply in 2024 to \$1.521 billion. Meanwhile, Turkey's imports from Israel reached \$1.641 billion in 2023 and fell in 2024 to \$596 million. Similarly, exports to Palestine amounted to \$796 million in 2024, compared with \$132 million the previous year. In turn, Turkey imported goods worth \$22 million from Palestine in 2023; this figure

fell slightly in 2024 to \$21 million. Within the framework of the economic embargo, the transit of Azerbaijani oil to Israel via the Turkish port of Ceyhan was also called into question. In this regard, legal action has been taken: the London-based International Centre for Justice for Palestinians (ICJP) filed a complaint in December 2024 against British Petroleum, accusing it of negligence in facilitating the supply of oil to Israel as the operator of the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline⁵.

The disagreement between certain Turkish political parties and the government has centred, above all, on two issues: dialogue with Hamas and the call for, on certain occasions, tougher measures against Israel. The Turkish Parliament has, however, adopted a common stance on the situation in Gaza. As evidence of this, on 12 October 2023 a joint declaration was adopted calling on all parties to exercise restraint in order to avoid “irreparable consequences”, “protect civilians in all circumstances and avoid practices amounting to collective punishment⁶”. The statement also called on Palestine and Israel to resume negotiations to reach a permanent solution based on the two-state solution. In August 2025, a motion was unanimously⁷ adopted condemning in “the strongest terms” “Israel's actions, in particular

the genocide against the people of Gaza, all actions that threaten regional peace, and its recent attacks on Iran. “We also call upon all international institutions and governments that have remained silent in the face of Israel’s aggression to assume their responsibility in accordance with international law and diplomacy.”

Public opinion reveals widespread sympathy for the Palestinian people. In a survey conducted by the company Gündemar⁸ in July 2025, with over 2,000 participants, 83% expressed support for Palestine, whilst only 10% expressed an opposing view. Furthermore, 81% of participants considered the events unfolding in Gaza to be important, whilst only 15% considered them to be of little relevance.

Turning to the international stage, whilst over the past two and a half years Arab countries such as Qatar and Egypt have played a leading role in the negotiations between Israel and Hamas, the Turkish government, for its part, made a significant contribution as a mediator in the talks held between Hamas and Israel in the Egyptian city of Sharm El-Sheikh, which concluded with the declaration of a ceasefire in Gaza in October 2025.

For Turkey, the Palestinian question has a structural historical significance that dates back to its

Ottoman heritage. During the Cold War, the geopolitical context significantly shaped its stance, leading to the immediate recognition of the State of Israel, with which it would cooperate in economic and military spheres. Over the decades, however, the Palestinian question has had a significant influence on their bilateral relations, as evidenced by events such as the attack on Al-Aqsa in 1969 or the declaration of Jerusalem as the eternal capital of Israel in 1980.

With the AKP’s rise to power in 2002, the Middle East became a key focus of Turkish foreign policy, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict playing a central role. This stance resonates with a broad political and social spectrum of Turkish society to varying degrees, and therefore has a direct link to domestic politics whilst also helping to shape the country’s international image. According to data from the 2025 Arab Opinion Index, Turkey is the second most highly rated country after South Africa in its approach to the Palestinian issue, with the approval of 49% of those surveyed⁹.

2. Israeli Prime Minister apologises for deaths on Gaza flotilla. 22 March 2013. *BBC News*. Available at: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-21902273?utm_source=chatgpt.com
3. Israel pays \$20 million compensation for Mavi Marmara victims, ambassadors to be appointed within 10 days. 30 September 2016. *Daily Sabah*. Available at: <https://www.dailysabah.com/diplomacy/2016/09/30/>

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4. See UN Comtrade Database. Available at: <https://comtradeplus.un.org/>
5. Gaza war victims take legal action against BP over oil supply to Israel. 23 December 2024. The Guardian. Available at: https://www.theguardian.com/business/2024/dec/23/gaza-war-victims-legal-action-bp-oil-supply-israel?utm_source=chatgpt.com.
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RELATIONS

SPAIN–ISRAEL/PALESTINE

Spain occupies a unique position with regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, sharing certain aspects with other EU Member States whilst having others that are specific to itself. The Middle East, together with North Africa and the Mediterranean region in general, is a priority area in Spanish foreign policy. This is nothing new and dates back to the foreign policy of the Franco regime and even earlier.

Spain has maintained a continuous diplomatic presence in the Middle East since the Ottoman period. In the mid-19th century, it opened a consulate in Jerusalem, from where it was able to observe first-hand the Ottoman withdrawal, the British Mandate, the Zionist colonial enterprise and the rise of the Palestinian people's demands for emancipation. Being excluded from the United Nations, Spain did not take a firm stance on the partition (A/Res/181 of 1947), except – like the Vatican – to insist on the internationalisation of Jerusalem in order to safeguard its properties in the Holy Land (administered by the *Obra Pía de los Santos lugares*).

However, the First Arab-Israeli War, the death of a Spanish vice-consul in a Zionist attack, and the diplomatic imperatives of the time brought Franco's Spain closer to the Arabs. In need of allies in a hostile international context, the Franco regime then intensified its relations with the Arab countries of the Middle East, both monarchies and Arab nationalist regimes, as a form of substitute diplomacy, deploying a rhetoric of 'Hispano-Arab brotherhood' despite the fact that it still held colonies in North Africa. Spain did not establish relations with Israel because the newly created State of Israel was particularly hostile to Spain's entry into the United Nations in 1955. Whilst there was anti-Semitism in certain Falangist and ultra-Catholic sectors, the regime's position regarding Israel was essentially driven by political and diplomatic considerations.

In the 1960s, the first Palestinian students from the West Bank, Gaza and the diaspora arrived in Spain. Meanwhile, in United Nations Spain generally aligned itself with positions recognising Palestinian rights,

abstaining when resolutions clashed with its (colonial) interests or those of its Atlanticist allies. During the 1973 war, Franco did not allow the United States to use the bases for its military support of Israel.

During the transition, Spain was one of the few European countries to maintain close political ties with the PLO. Suárez received Arafat in 1979 and authorised the opening of a permanent mission. However, the lack of consensus on the recognition of Israel during the transition meant that Spain did not establish relations with Israel until 1986, making it an exceptional case in Western Europe. The issue was settled with Spain's accession to the European Communities and the confirmation of its Atlanticist stance. The letters of recognition included an explicit statement that recognition and normalisation did not alter Spain's position regarding Arab countries. This allowed Spain, from the 1990s onwards, to maintain a discourse—undoubtedly a strained one—as a 'privileged interlocutor with Arabs and Israelis', and the country, by virtue of its history and location, as a place of encounter and dialogue.

In 1991, Madrid hosted the US-sponsored Middle East Peace Conference; Spain played no significant political role, but reaped high-impact symbolic benefits, as the city and the country became asso-

ciated with the peace-building process between Arabs and Israelis. All subsequent governments, both during the peace process (1993–2000) and thereafter, committed themselves to the Palestinian cause, both bilaterally and within the European Union and the United Nations. Whilst during the Franco era the non-recognition of Israel was a factor in fostering closer ties with Arab countries, from the 1990s onwards, despite the normalisation of relations with Israel, this commitment to the Palestinians was essentially a source of diplomatic prestige.

It has been 40 years since the establishment of relations with Israel. For Israel, the normalisation of relations with Spain in 1986 not only resolved what it regarded as an anomaly in Europe, but also served as a means of legitimisation: at last, a major European state that had previously kept its distance had taken the step and recognised its legitimacy. The years that followed saw the development of intensive bilateral relations to make up for lost time. Since then, the narrative has always been that 'close relations' are maintained "positive and constructive". Nevertheless, Israel has consistently viewed Spain with suspicion due to its special relations with Arab countries. Added to this are the limited means of exerting pressure given the

economic ties, a public opinion critical of Israeli policies, and the lack of a well-organised pro-Israeli lobby. Israel's strategy towards Spain has always been to separate Spanish-Israeli bilateral relations from the Palestinian issue, that is, to isolate the Palestinian question on the grounds that it was dealt with in multilateral forums. In contrast, Israel has sought to foster an image of closeness to Spain by engaging in everything related to Spanish Jewish history.

Over the past four decades, Spain's relations with Israel have grown closer, with technical agreements being signed across a wide range of fields. However, there is no cooperation agreement or high-level dialogue framework of the kind that exists with other Mediterranean countries, including with the Palestinians since 2010. Much of the relationship is Europeanised. Israel ranks 34th among Spain's trading partners (in 2022, bilateral trade stood at 3.2 billion, with a positive balance for Spain). There are mutual investments in various sectors, but the most sensitive issue is the import of military technology and intelligence relations. Furthermore, Israel has succeeded in establishing itself as a key partner in the field of innovation and as a highly developed, export-oriented 'start-up nation', driven by AI, cybersecurity and high-tech innovation. This makes Israel

a significant partner in the Middle East. Despite this, although the Spanish authorities do not acknowledge it, bilateral relations have always been characterised by latent tension. Israel perceives Spain as a necessary partner (within the European and Western framework) but not entirely reliable. On more than one occasion, friction has arisen when Israel has accused the critical stance of the government or the population of 'atavistic anti-Semitism'. A former Israeli ambassador to Spain confessed at the end of his term: "For Israel, Spain is a lost cause in Europe". For its part, Spanish diplomacy has always sought to contain these tensions through a deferential approach explicitly based on moderation and dialogue, at times verging on a complacency that has fuelled the arrogance of Tel Aviv embassy¹⁰.

There have been moments of high bilateral tension: during the Catalan independence process, when Israel appeared to show sympathy for the separatists, or when Spain did not comply with Israel's request to block a condemnation resolution in the United Nations Security Council.

It complied with Israel's request to block a condemnation resolution in the United Nations Security Council (S/RES/2334 of December 2016), which led to unilateral Israeli measures against Spain. There have been other examples of disagree-

ments, such as the repeated lack of judicial cooperation, the arrest and imprisonment in Israel of a Spanish citizen detained in Beit Sahour (in violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention), and protests over aid to Palestine channelled through NGOs considered by Israel to be linked to the Palestinian resistance.

It should be noted that there has traditionally been a consensus among all political forces (right, left, nationalists) on the Palestinian question, reflected in the existence of a parliamentary inter-group (since 2004). However, the neoconservative shift within part of the PP, and more recently the emergence of Vox, have given rise for the first time to a sector clearly aligned with Israel. This breakdown of consensus is part of a broader phenomenon of the politicisation of foreign policy affecting Spain as well as other European countries.

As regards relations with the Palestinians, since the transition all governments have maintained direct and close dialogue, first with the Palestine Liberation Organisation (with official representation in Madrid), then with the Palestinian Authority and finally with the State of Palestine. Prior to state recognition, Spain already accorded diplomatic status to the PA and signed bilateral agreements with it; Madrid has been one of the capitals most frequent-

ly visited by Palestinian authorities. Conditions in occupied Palestine do not allow for normal trade relations, which remain marginal. However, the Palestinian community has grown with the arrival of refugees, who have always found it easier than others to obtain such status.

Spain's position on the Palestinian question can be summarised as follows: recognition of the Palestinians right to self-government; support for the two-state solution; condemnation of the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza and of the annexations; condemnation of the human rights violations resulting from the occupation; proactive action within the European Union and the United Nations; and humanitarian and development aid. However, the position regarding the right of return for refugees and apartheid within Israel is not entirely clear. The Palestinians view Spain as an ally, both bilaterally and within Europe and the United Nations.

During the peace process (1994–2000), Spain took on a role of a key partner, aligning itself with European policy initiatives, deploying diplomatic efforts, supporting the Palestinian Authority and, above all, using aid as a tool for state-building and for the maintenance of UNRWA (the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees).

For three decades, the Palestinians have been among the top ten recipients of Spanish official development assistance (ODA). In 2020, the two countries a Country Partnership Framework for 2020–2024, which centred on economic development and job creation, with a commitment to disburse at least €100 million over the five-year period. In 2012, Spain voted in favour of Palestine being recognised as a ‘non-member observer state’ at the United Nations. In 2014, the Congress of Deputies almost unanimously approved a motion urging the Government to recognise the State of Palestine. Although it was not binding, it was interpreted by Israel as hostile diplomatic pressure. The crisis in the Oslo process from 2000 onwards and the deterioration of the situation led to numerous occasions on which Spain intervened in delicate situations (such as the crisis at the Church of the Nativity in 2002), and provided opportunities for mediation and dialogue. It also there was a growing trend towards repeated condemnation of violence and the expansion of settlements.

However, Spain has also faced many constraints and issues of consistency: at the United Nations, it has abstained (along with other European countries) when resolutions have been considered that could be seen as sanctions against Israel (such

as the request for an advisory opinion from the International Court of Justice in 2003 on the legality of the West Bank wall or in 2022 on the legal consequences of the occupation); for decades, it has placed no restrictions on the activities of Spanish companies in the Occupied Territories nor has it prevented the entry of goods from settlements; it has maintained an arms trade with Israel; it has allowed Spanish citizens to join the Israeli army or live in settlements; it has delayed recognition of the Palestinian state by more than a decade, etc. The most significant problem has been maintaining seemingly normal bilateral relations with a country that continuously commits illegal acts, whilst ensuring that this does not affect those relations, thereby contributing to normalisation, which amounts to a failure to fulfil the international obligations of states.

Spain’s stance on the Palestinian question since October 2023 has taken on greater significance striking in comparison with its European neighbours, a fact that has earned it praise from numerous countries in the Global South, particularly Arab and Islamic nations. The surprise armed attack by the Palestinian resistance on 7 October and its lethal impact on Israel initially prompted a message of condem-

nation and solidarity with Israel¹¹. However, as Israel's all-out war on the Gaza Strip unfolded, criticism and condemnation began to emerge. During a visit to Israel and the Gaza-Egypt border, President Sánchez, then President-in-Office of the Council of the EU, pointed out that the right to self-defence had limits set by international humanitarian law and that the civilian population had the right to be assisted. The Israeli government's response was to reproach and accuse Spain of "acting as a spokesperson for Hamas".

Whilst a widespread protest movement against the genocide was taking hold on the streets, in the months that followed the Spanish government took a series of steps that clearly distanced it from Israel and its European allies: it ignored the sanctions against UNRWA, increased humanitarian aid, agreed to suspend the arms trade and refused to grant transit authorisation through its territory – albeit belatedly and with many ambiguities¹²– and adopted measures prohibiting the entry of leaders of radical groups, etc. The most significant decision was the recognition of the Palestinian state on 24 May 2024, following attempts to secure the support of other European states. The Gaza Contact Group—comprising Arab and Islamic countries and a couple of European

nations—immediately convened in Madrid. Within the EU, supporting Josep Borrell's futile attempts, Spain denounced the inconsistency of double standards (referring to the European response to Russian aggression against Ukraine) and sought a review of the association framework with Israel; its results were meagre. Faced with the slim chances of rallying the Europeans, Madrid opted to take independent action and not be paralysed by the EU's deadlock. It thus joined South Africa's initiative before the ICJ against Israel for the alleged crime of apartheid. In June 2025, Spain coordinated with Palestine to table a resolution at the General Assembly, co-sponsored by 70 countries, on the humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and condemning the use of hunger as a weapon of war. In September 2025, Spain was one of the first European countries to join the Hague Group, an international coalition formed to take legal and diplomatic action against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. Spain increased humanitarian aid; in 2023, the Palestinians were the leading recipients of Spanish official development assistance worldwide. In 2025, he even deployed a warship to shadow from a distance the Gaza solidarity flotilla seeking to break the blockade. There have been numerous decisions and public

statements against the occupation, the attacks and the restrictions on the entry of aid. In September 2026, King Felipe addressed the issue of Palestine in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly, and the Spanish delegation walked out of the plenary session when Netanyahu took the floor.

The result of all this was the recall of the Israeli ambassador from Madrid, Israel's ban on certain Spanish ministers entering Palestine, and an unprecedented deterioration in bilateral relations. In late June 2025, the Israeli embassy in Spain issued a statement accusing Sánchez of "demonising" its country and adopting a "morally indefensible" stance on the conflict in the Middle East¹³. In March 2026, Spain recalled its ambassador to Tel Aviv and the embassy was placed under the charge of a junior official. The Israeli government's hostile response can be explained by the fact that Madrid's stance cracked Israel's shield of impunity in Europe to such an extent that by 2025, the began to change their stance¹⁴ and a debate opened up on revising the Association Agreement. Months later, in March 2026, Germany even withdrew its support for Israel at the ICJ¹⁵.

One might well wonder about the reasons behind Spain's stance. It is undoubtedly a continuation of a long-standing position, compoun-

ded by the gravity of the situation, the paralysis of the European Union, social pressure on the streets and pressure from the coalition partner in government. There is undoubtedly an element of consistency with international law (a principle enshrined in the 2014 Foreign Action Act), but it cannot be overlooked that for Spain, its stance on the Palestinian question has been a source of prestige in the Middle East and a mechanism for protection against the territorial disputes with its Magreb neighbour¹⁶.

The 2024/2025 Arab Opinion Index revealed that Spain was the European country most highly rated by Arab citizens for its policies towards Palestine. 43% of those surveyed view Spain's stance and the initiatives undertaken in support of Palestine positively. Far behind Spain are France and Germany (with 23% approval) and the United Kingdom, which scores just 19%.

10. In 2004, the Council of Ministers designated 27 January as the Official Day of Remembrance of the Holocaust and the Prevention of Crimes against Humanity; Israeli diplomats always play a prominent role in the events. In 2006, the Sefarad-Israel Centre was established in Madrid, a public institution intended to serve as a meeting point between Spain and Jewish culture and society, but which in practice has served to normalise Israel's image. In July 2020, Spain, following the recommendations of the EU Council of 8 December 2018, endorsed the working definition of antisemitism adopted by the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) in 2016, as a useful tool for guidance in education and training. This controversial definition considers criticism of Israel's policies to be a form of anti-Semitism.

11. "We strongly condemn the extremely serious terrorist attacks launched from Gaza against Israel. We are appalled by this indiscriminate violence. Our full solidarity goes out to the victims. Spain is firmly committed to peace, security and stability in the region." Message from Minister Albares on X on 7 October 2023.

"The position of the Spanish Government as a whole regarding the terrorist attacks carried out by Hamas is clear: unequivocal condemnation, a demand for the immediate and unconditional release of hostages, and recognition of Israel's right to defend itself within the limits set by international law and international humanitarian law." Statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation, 16 October 2023. https://www.exteriores.gob.es/Comunicacion/Comunicados/Paginas/2023_COMUNICADOS/20231016_COMU040.aspx

12. It was not until 23 September 2025 that an urgent legal ban was introduced on the trade in arms with Israel and on products originating from the occupied Palestinian territories. 23 Sept. Royal Decree-Law (10/2025) on urgent measures against the genocide in Gaza and support for the Palestinian people.
13. Zuloaga, C. "Israel accuses Spain of leading the 'anti-Israel crusade': 'It is on the wrong side of history'." 26 June 2025. ABC. Available at: <https://www.abc.es/espana/israel-responde-sanchez-espana-lado-equivocado-historia-20250626181239-nt.html>
14. ADC (2025): Transformations in European Attitudes toward the Genocidal War on Gaza, Arab Centre Washington DC. The Unit for Political Studies. 4 June 2025. Available at: <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/transformations-in-european-attitudes-toward-the-genocidal-war-on-gaza/>
15. "Germany withdraws support for Israel in ICJ genocide case as it faces accusations of its own". 21 March 2026, The Times of Israel. Available at <https://www.timesofisrael.com/germany-pulls-support-for-israel-in-icj-genocide-case-as-it-faces-own-accusations/>
16. Around the same time, Spain abstained in the General Assembly during the vote on A/Res/80/106 (5 December 2025) on the establishment of the International Day for the Elimination of Colonialism in All Its Forms and Manifestations.

4

THE POSITION OF TURKEY AND SPAIN ON KEY ASPECTS CENTRAL TO THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AT PRESENT

Below are a number of key issues in the Palestinian question and the stance adopted by Turkey and Spain.

The inalienable rights of the Palestinian people. These rights were defined in United Nations General Assembly Resolution 3236 (XXIX) in 1974; they are regarded as the “inalienable rights of the Palestinians”, *ius cogens*, and include the right to self-determination, to independence and sovereignty without external interference, as well as the right of return for refugees. Turkey and Spain voted in favour of the resolution in 1974. Turkey is a member of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People; Spain is not, although it has hosted meetings of the Committee. Spain does not usually make explicit mention of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people in its statements.

The refugee issue. Refugees account for more than half of the Palestinian population, and this reality is an inescapable aspect of the Palestinian question. Article 11 of Resolution A/Res/194 (1948) recognises the right of Palestinians to return to their homes and properties from which they have been displaced and uprooted. Since the 1990s, Spain has considered the refugee issue to be a matter for negotiations on the final status within the framework of the peace process. At the same time, it supports humanitarian assistance and the work of UNRWA. Turkey has been a member of the UNRWA Advisory Commission since 1949. It also supports the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative, which, in one of its points, called upon a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem, in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194.

The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, including Jerusalem. Turkey and Spain consider the occupation to be unlawful and condemn the annexations. They have expressed this on numerous occasions. They do not recognise the unilateral annexation of Jerusalem, in line with Resolution S/Res/478 (1980). Spain maintains its Consulate in East Jerusalem, which reports to Madrid rather than to the Embassy in Tel Aviv. Turkey has contributed written and oral statements to the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice, No. 141 of 19 July 2024, on the illegality of Israel's presence in the Occupied Territories. In 2022, Spain abstained on the resolution requesting an advisory opinion from the ICJ on the occupation, but once adopted, it endorsed it in the General Assembly.

Recognition of the State of Palestine. In 1988, the government of Turgut Özal recognised the State of Palestine, becoming one of the first to do so. It maintains a free trade agreement with Palestine, signed in 2004, which led to the establishment of a Joint Committee to oversee its implementation. Palestine has diplomatic representation in Ankara with the rank of ambassador. The Turkish Consulate General in Jerusalem opened in 1925 and is one of the country's oldest diplomatic mis-

sions. Since 2005, Consuls General with the rank of Ambassador have been appointed to the Consulate General in Jerusalem. The Consul General in Jerusalem also serves as Turkey's Ambassador to Palestine.

Spain did not do so in 1988, despite having close ties with the PLO and recognising the Palestinians' right to self-government. It was waiting for a common European position. In 2014, Parliament backed the recognition of Palestine; the government only took this step in May 2024. Spain does not have an embassy; the Consulate General in Jerusalem acts as its representative. Engagement with the parties.

Both Turkey and Spain maintain relations with both sides. With regard to the Palestinian authorities, Turkey has had official relations with the PLO since 1975 and with the State of Palestine since 1988; Spain has also maintained relations since the 1970s, and with the Palestinian Authority since 1993. On the Palestinian side, Turkey has also had a direct relationship with Hamas. Khaled Meshaal's visit to Ankara in 2006 also highlighted the importance the Turkish Government would attach to its relationship with Hamas.

Since then, and particularly in recent times, through its political arm. The Turkish Government has acted as a mediator on numerous oc-

casions to facilitate the formation of a Palestinian unity government between Hamas and Fatah and the subsequent holding of elections. Spain has confined itself to official relations with the PLO, the Palestinian Authority and, now, the State of Palestine. The inclusion of certain Palestinian organisations (Islamist and revolutionary) on the European list of terrorist organisations prevents it from having contact with these entities of the Palestinian resistance¹⁷. From 2007 onwards, Spain avoided any kind of direct relationship with the government authorities in Gaza, effectively joining in the international isolation of the Strip.

Two-state solution. Both Turkey and Spain have supported the peace process since its launch in 1993, within the framework of a two-state solution, which entails Israel's withdrawal from the territories occupied in 1967. Spain has left the decision on any territorial adjustments to the Palestinians. Both countries have supported mediation initiatives, such as the Quartet (2002) following the Second Intifada. Its three-phase Roadmap, which envisaged the two-state solution, was adopted...

Guided by Security Council Resolution 1515 (2003) and also endorsed by Turkey. Both countries have supported the 2002 Arab Initiative, which offered recognition of Israel's

right to exist in exchange for its withdrawal from the Occupied Territories in Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights, the division of Jerusalem with the eastern part as the future capital of the Palestinian State, and the right of return for Palestinians.

Position on the genocide in Gaza (2023–2026). In all forums, both countries have been at the forefront of publicly condemning Israeli practices against the civilian population and civilian infrastructure, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, and settler violence in the West Bank. Both governments have called on the international community to stop “looking the other way” and to exert pressure to secure an immediate ceasefire. They have denounced the humanitarian impact of Israeli military operations, demanding compliance with international law.

Voting at the United Nations. If we review the resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on Gaza and the Palestinians from October 2023 to the end of 2025, we see a complete alignment of votes.

Humanitarian assistance. Both countries have been major contributors of aid (humanitarian, development and financial) through various channels. Both are contributors to UNRWA, although Turkey prioritises direct aid. Spain and Turkey are

Resolución A/RES/ES-10/21: "Protección de civiles y cumplimiento de las obligaciones legales y humanitarias" del 27 de octubre de 2023.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/RES/ES-10/22: "Protección de los civiles y cumplimiento de las obligaciones jurídicas y humanitarias" del 12 de diciembre de 2023.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/RES/ES-10/23 "Admisión de nuevos Miembros en las Naciones Unidas / Derechos adicionales para el Estado de Palestina" del 10 de mayo de 2024.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/ES-10/24 "Opinión consultiva de la Corte Internacional de Justicia sobre las consecuencias jurídicas derivadas de las políticas y prácticas de Israel en el Territorio Palestino Ocupado, incluida Jerusalén Oriental, y de la ilegalidad de la presencia continuada de Israel en el Territorio Palestino Ocupado" del 18 de setiembre de 2024.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/ES-10/25 "Apoyo al mandato del Organismo de Obras Públicas y Socorro de las Naciones Unidas para los Refugiados de Palestina en el Cercano Oriente" del 11 de diciembre de 2024.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/ES-10/26. "Exigencia de un alto el fuego en Gaza" del 11 de diciembre de 2024.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución ES-10/27. "Protección de los civiles y cumplimiento de las obligaciones jurídicas y humanitarias" del 12 de junio de 2025.	Turquía y España a favor
Resolución A/80/537: "Renovación del mandato de la UNRWA" del 5 diciembre de 2025	Turquía y España a favor

members of the UNRWA Advisory Commission, comprising 29 states. Spain chaired this commission from July 2024 to June 2025)¹⁸. Neither joined the 2023–2024 sanctions against the UNRWA. Both have supported the renewal of the agency's mandate.

According to reports published by TIKA on Turkish development aid in 2023, Palestine was the third-largest recipient of development aid, after Syria and Kazakhstan. In 2025, an agreement was signed between the agency and the Turkish Government

to host a UNRWA office in Ankara in the context of the 51st meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which took place in Istanbul.

Palestine has been a priority destination for Spanish Official Development Assistance since the early 1990s. In 2023, Palestinians were the largest recipients of aid globally. One of the first national committees supporting UNRWA was established in Spain; it is responsible for raising funds from the autonomous communities, local

4. THE POSITION OF TURKEY AND SPAIN

	2022	2023	2024	2025
España	13.592.803 (17º)	30.715.278 (11º)	43.050.075 (8º)	38.347.678 (4º)
Turquía	25.199.080 (10º)	22.103.820 (15º)	41.187.326 (12º)	10.000.000 (19º)

Contributions to UNRWA (in US dollars, ranked by donor).

Fuente: UNRWA <https://www.unrwa.org/how-you-can-help/government-partners/funding-trends/donor-charts>.

authorities and private donors; these funds are in addition to the central government's contribution.

However, given the Agency's current catastrophic financial situation, in which the main donors are drastically cutting their contributions – threatening the Agency with collapse and restructuring – the response of the two countries differs. Turkey – which is on Trump's Board of Peace – has reduced its contributions, whilst Spain – which is not on the Board of Peace – has increased them.

Position on international legal proceedings. Turkey and Spain have supported the proceedings at the International Court of Justice in the case of South Africa v. Israel, concerning the application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip. Spain is a signatory to the Rome Statute and has fulfilled its obligations regarding the arrest warrants for the identified perpetrators. Turkey, for its part, is not a signatory to the Rome Statute. Unilaterally, in November 2025, the

Istanbul Public Prosecutor's Office announced arrest warrants against 37 senior Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, accused of 'crimes against humanity' and 'genocide'.

Imposition of sanctions. Spain has always been very reluctant to use coercive measures in its relations with Israel; the genocide has led it to adopt some: entry restrictions on certain radical settlers, an arms embargo, a ban on products from the settlements... It has not even resorted to pressure tactics in bilateral diplomatic relations (such as calling for prolonged consultations, recalling ambassadors or suspending relations), limiting itself to verbal protests, statements of condemnation and reciprocal measures. In the case of Turkey, the deterioration in relations between Turkey and Israel became apparent very quickly in 2023 with the withdrawal of the Israeli ambassador from Ankara in October and the Turkish ambassador from Tel Aviv in November. Turkey imposed unilateral sanctions, first

restricting the export of 54 products to Israel in April 2024 until a ceasefire was declared and continuous humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip was permitted, and then extending the embargo in May 2024 to suspend all commercial transactions, ban access by Israeli vessels and close its airspace to Israeli aircraft. Despite the difficulties involved in effectively implementing such an embargo, it represents a significant step in their bilateral relations, given that trade relations had remained insulated from the serious diplomatic disputes of the previous decade.

Multilateral efforts. Turkey is a member of the Hague Group and the Arab-Islamic Contact Group for Gaza. Spain joined the Hague Group in September 2025 and has facilitated meetings between the Arab-Islamic Contact Group for Gaza and various European states.

The Contact Group was established as an ad hoc mechanism for diplomatic coordination in November 2023, within the framework of a joint summit of the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, with the aim of coordinating diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and move towards a two-state solution. In Spain, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, José Manuel Albares, hosted a meeting of the Contact Group, the Palestinian

Prime Minister and the Arab-Islamic Contact Group for Gaza, which was also attended by the Palestinian Prime Minister, Mohammad Mustafa, and took place in May 2024.

The Hague Group is an international coalition established in January 2025 by countries from the Global South, on the initiative of Colombia and South Africa, to take legal and diplomatic action against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories. It brings together more than thirty countries.

Position on the Trump Plan (September 2025). Turkey participates in the Board of Peace established under the Trump Plan and set out in Security Council Resolution S/RES/2803 (2025) in November 2025. Initially, Spain welcomed the ceasefire and access to humanitarian aid, and stated that it could contribute to the joint efforts; Sánchez attended the conference in Egypt where the Peace Plan was presented. However, it has subsequently distanced itself from the initiative, noting the plan's biased approach, the absence of the United Nations and the exclusion of the Palestinians.

The Peace Board has been conceived as the governing body of a temporary administration for the reconstruction of Gaza, which also includes an International Stabilisation Force (ISF). However, it marginalises

Palestinians, disregards all international legal frameworks and fails to address issues of reparations and international justice. The Trump Plan is not a coherent proposal for peace in Palestine. It reconfigures the Israeli occupation and peddles a mirage of reconstruction led by the private sector. Furthermore, the Peace Board has been the subject of significant criticism, as its founding charter makes no reference to either Gaza or Palestine, yet it sets out broader ambitions that have been questioned by the United Nations Secretary-General himself, António Guterres, alongside the decision-making process, which is heavily influenced by President Donald Trump¹⁹.

Public opinion on the Palestinian question. In both countries, the Palestinian question is an issue that mobilises support across a broad political spectrum. Unlike in other European countries, a broad and diverse social movement emerged in Spain that did not encounter the legal obstacles faced in Germany, France or the United Kingdom. This came to affect Israel's participation in cultural and sporting events and exerted significant pressure on the government, which sought to bolster its social support through its response to the genocide. It also restrained and moderated the opposition's stance. Available polls and academic

studies also indicate that the Turkish population shows broad support for the Palestinian cause, which, although it may vary in intensity according to party preferences, demonstrates widespread support across the entire political spectrum. There have been numerous demonstrations of support for the people in Gaza. There have also been prominent protests calling for tougher sanctions against Israel and criticising shortcomings in the implementation of the economic embargo.

17. It so happens that some of the organisations included on that list are members of the PLO, such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. In such cases, successive Spanish governments have allowed the PFLP to operate freely.
18. <https://www.unrwa.org/who-we-are/advisory-commission/members-advisory-commission>
19. McElvoy, A. UN secretary general says he's cooperating with Trump's Board of Peace in Gaza but doesn't want it in Hormuz. 21.03.2026. Politico. Disponible en: <https://www.politico.eu/article/un-secretary-general-antonio-guterres-cooperating-donald-trump-board-of-peace-gaza-but-doesnt-want-it-in-hormuz/>

5

CONCLUSIONS

In the international context, Spain and Turkey are classified as middle powers. Numerous analysts point out that, in the current situation, middle powers have developed areas of autonomy in their foreign policy and can make substantial contributions at the multilateral level, as they are regarded as a source of innovation and have on certain occasions played a significant role in conflict prevention and de-escalation²⁰.

The high degree of alignment between Turkey and Spain on the Palestinian question is evident. Indeed, it has helped to strengthen bilateral relations between Spain and Turkey, culminating in the 2024 Spain-Turkey Summit, where both reaffirmed their 'clear and resolute' commitment to peace in the region.

The Palestinian-Israeli issue is of particular importance in the foreign policy of both countries, albeit for different reasons. The Levant was part of the Ottoman Empire, and that long-standing connection has shaped a unique and understandable bond between them; the modern Middle East is an area central to the Repu-

blic of Turkey's international projection, where geopolitical, economic and security interests intersect. Furthermore, the symbolic significance of Jerusalem is a key factor for the AKP and a powerful mobilising force for public opinion. For Spain, the Palestinian question, despite its geographical distance and limited historical connection, has been a source of prestige amongst Arab and Muslim countries, and an area of European foreign policy in which Spain wishes to play a leading role. Furthermore, for socio-cultural and political reasons, the Palestinian question enjoys broad social and political consensus, with few exceptions.

As two middle powers that could exert influence in certain spheres, for various reasons, neither Spain nor Turkey finds it easy to rally its closest partners. This has certainly been evident in Spain's case within the European Union.

Any prospects for convergence and joint initiatives must take this weakness into account, as well as significant differences (regarding inalienable rights, the return of refugees,

or the legitimacy of all Palestinian political forces). In any case, their common position on core issues such as the Palestinians' right to a viable state, the rejection of the occupation and annexations, and the obligation to guarantee humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians, could form the basis for concerted action.

20. *Shaping cooperation in a fragmented world*, White paper, published in 2024 in the context of the World Economic Forum.

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