



Update on Conflict and Diplomacy

16 FEBRUARY–15 MAY 2015

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The Quarterly Update is a summary of bilateral, multilateral, regional, and international events affecting the Palestinians and the future of the peace process. More than 100 print, wire, television, and online sources providing U.S., Israeli, Arab, and international independent and government coverage of unfolding events are surveyed to compile the Quarterly Update. The most relevant sources are cited in JPS's Chronology section, which tracks events day by day. JPS Chronologies are archived on the JPS website at www.palestine-studies.org.

Highlights of the Quarter: The Palestinian leadership continues to pursue justice in international forums and the state of Palestine gains membership of the International Criminal Court (ICC) on 4/1. PM Benjamin Netanyahu secures a 3d term in office with a Likud victory in the 3/17 Israeli elections and begins forming a right-wing coalition. His campaign rhetoric leads the U.S. govt. to reassess its policy on Israel and the international community joins the Palestinians in their efforts to pass a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) res. setting parameters for a new round of peace negotiations. The Israeli govt. unfreezes its monthly tax revenue transfers to the Palestinian Authority (PA) on 4/17, after the 4-mo. freeze plunged the Palestinian economy into crisis. Continued tension between the PA unity govt. and Hamas hampers reconstruction efforts in Gaza, including a new international push for a long-term cease-fire. An escalation of violence in Yarmouk refugee camp (r.c.) further imperils Palestinian refugees in Syria.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Both Israel and the Palestinians were focused on unilateral measures and domestic concerns this quarter. There were no major efforts to return to peace negotiations, or to follow up negotiations on issues left outstanding in the wake of the 8/26/2014 cease-fire ending Israel's 50-day assault on the Gaza Strip, codenamed Operation Protective Edge (OPE). By and large, the international community was focused on

the multilateral negotiations over Iran's nuclear program and content to delay any new Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts.

Last quarter saw the culmination of the Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership's diplomatic efforts to achieve international recognition for the state of Palestine and justice for the Palestinians in the wake of OPE. The day after the UNSC voted against the Palestinian-drafted res. demanding a timetable for ending the Israeli occupation on 12/30/14, PA pres.

Mahmoud Abbas signed documents to join the ICC, effective on 4/1/15. The Israeli govt. responded by freezing the monthly transfers of tax revenues collected on the PA's behalf, throwing the entire West Bank into an economic crisis that would continue through most of this quarter. Meanwhile, the Palestinians proceeded with discussions to resubmit a UNSC res. and clarified their plans regarding the ICC, although they took no major action on either front. In Israel, Netanyahu's govt. dissolved in 12/2014, leading to new elections on 3/17/15. Despite a strong challenge posed by the center-left Zionist Union Party, Likud won 30 of the Knesset's 120 seats, giving Netanyahu his 3d consecutive term as PM and leading to the formation of a right-wing coalition at the end of the quarter.

On the ground, reconstruction in the Gaza Strip advanced at snail's pace. This quarter saw an increase in donor activity and the announcement of several new rebuilding projects, as well as efforts by some segments of the international community to broach negotiations over the 3–5 year cease-fire that would allow for the reconstruction process to be expedited. Meanwhile, the Israeli govt. loosened a series of restrictions on Palestinian movement and trade in Gaza, East Jerusalem, and the West Bank, marginally alleviating the additional strain on reconstruction from the tax revenue freeze and deflecting international criticism. Low-level violence continued throughout the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) this quarter.

STALEMATE BEFORE THE ISRAELI ELECTION

As the quarter opened on 15 February, the basic dynamic established in the wake of the Palestinian accession to the ICC persisted. Israel maintained its freeze on monthly tax revenue transfers to the PA, with no signs of a thaw in

the run-up to the 3/17 election, and the Palestinians continued to struggle with a growing economic crisis while simultaneously pursuing diplomatic efforts to obtain justice at the UNSC and in other international forums.

In the mo. prior to the election, Netanyahu came under pressure from both his opponents and nonpartisan state bodies. On 2/17, the Israeli state comptroller released a report detailing expenditures at Netanyahu's homes from 2009 to 2013, concluding that expenses had doubled in 2009–11 and resulting in a spokesperson for the watchdog body saying that the comptroller believed there was sufficient evidence for a criminal investigation (*Haaretz*, 2/17). Although it did not lead to criminal proceedings, the report provided further evidence for those of the PM's opponents who leveled accusations of profligacy at Netanyahu and his wife. That same week, Zionist Union Party co-leaders Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni led a tour of communities along the border with Gaza where dissatisfaction with Netanyahu's leadership during OPE was palpable. To burnish their defense credentials and position themselves as a viable alternative, the 2 leaders laid out the 3 central tenets of their security platform: ensuring a return of Israeli forces to the area, building new defense mechanisms (e.g., underground walls to block tunnels), and not negotiating with Hamas. Soon afterward, *Haaretz* (2/25) published a poll showing Likud's declining popularity in comparison with a similar poll 3 weeks earlier, putting it on an even footing with the Zionist Union.

An earlier *Haaretz* poll (2/17) had projected that a bloc comprising Likud, the Orthodox parties, and Likud's other natural allies on the right would win 59 seats for the 52 won by a Zionist Union–led center-left bloc, leaving the Kulanu Party of former Likud official Moshe

Kahlon as kingmaker, since its 9 seats could give either bloc a majority. The Zionist Union's projected results meant that in order for Likud to remain the largest single party in the Knesset and enable Netanyahu to win a 3d term in office and form a ruling coalition, he would either have to increase the potential right-wing bloc's majority or convince Kahlon to support him.

Facing these challenges, Netanyahu focused his campaign on the issue of security, both in terms of Iran and the Palestinians. Having accepted U.S. Speaker of the House John Boehner's (R-OH) invitation to address Congress on the subject of the ongoing multilateral negotiations with Iran, Netanyahu continued to escalate his rhetoric on the issue in the weeks before his 3/3 speech in Washington. Although it appealed to right-wing Israeli voters and other opponents of the P5+1 deal with Iran over its nuclear program, his position and conduct throughout the controversy exacerbated existing tensions with the Obama admin. (see "United States" and "Iran" below).

In addition to maintaining the freeze on monthly tax revenue transfers to the PA, Netanyahu tacked to the right on the Palestinian issue, attracting more international opprobrium. His strategic shift began after 3/6, when *Yedioth Ahronoth* reported on a leaked document from 8/2013 purportedly showing that Netanyahu had accepted the idea in principle of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders by sponsoring secret talks on the subject between his special envoy, Isaac Molcho, and a Palestinian official close to Abbas. While the secret talks had previously been reported, and denied by Abbas's office, the report made Netanyahu's dedication to the 2-state solution a campaign issue. In a statement that it contributed to a weekly Shabbat pamphlet, Likud outlined its stance on the 2-state solution, as follows: "Netanyahu's entire political

biography is a fight against the creation of a Palestinian state." In response to the growing confusion, the Likud Party released (3/8) a statement quoting the PM as saying that his "Bar Ilan speech," in which he first openly supported the 2-state solution (see *JPS* 153), was no longer relevant. But the party's comment did not appear to dovetail with the PM's own message, released by his office at the same time: "PM Netanyahu has made clear for years that given the current condition in the Middle East, any territory that is given will be seized by . . . radical Islam just like what happened [in] Gaza and in southern Lebanon."

Despite the international community's commitment to stay out of the polemics surrounding the Israeli elections, the Obama admin. did comment on the controversy. State Dept. spokesperson Jen Psaki said (3/9), "We count on having Israeli and Palestinian partners who are committed to [achieving an end to the conflict]. A lot of things are said during the election campaign. . . . We will see the policy of the new govt."

Palestinians Stay the Course

In 1/2015, the Israeli govt. froze monthly transfers of tax revenues to the PA, plunging the Palestinian economy into crisis. The monthly transfers, which add up to over \$1 b. per year, comprise 60–70% of the PA budget, affecting 170,000 employees on its payroll. As a result of the freeze, many PA employees received only 60% of their salaries for 1/2015 and 2/2015. The last week of 2/2015, several Palestinian officials revealed that the PA was no longer able to obtain credit from major banks, and the authority once again only paid 60% of their wages to the majority of govt. workers in 3/2015. Additionally, the state-owned Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) temporarily cut power to Palestinian communities nr. Jenin and

Nablus on 2/23 and 2/25 in response to what it alleged were unpaid debts totaling NIS 1.9 b. (around \$487 m.). Following his intervention to stop the blackouts on 2/26, Netanyahu promised to transfer NIS 300 m. (some \$75 m.) of frozen tax revenues to the IEC to offset the Palestinians' debts.

Meanwhile, Israeli settlement growth continued. On 2/16, Israeli authorities approved the construction of a solid waste landfill on approximately 520 dunams of primarily Palestinian-owned land in East Jerusalem affecting some 120 Palestinian bedouins who were set to be evicted. Then, Netanyahu's office announced (2/26) a deal to add several Israeli settlements nr. Ramallah to the water grid, in exchange for connecting Rawabi, a Palestinian development nr. Ramallah. (Rawabi, the first planned Palestinian city, was an enterprise of entrepreneur Bashar al-Masri. In 2013, although hundreds of units had been sold, prospective residents could not move in owing to the lack of water [see "Occupation Data and Trends" for more].)

In response to all these pressures, Palestinian officialdom continued work on international initiatives that were the focus of intense diplomatic activity last quarter. At a 2-day Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Central Council meeting, on 3/4 and 3/5, Abbas indicated he had recently rejected an Israeli offer to unfreeze the tax revenues in exchange for the Palestinians renouncing their impending ICC membership. The council also adopted a number of major policy initiatives calling for an end to security coordination with Israel, a boycott of Israeli products, and for the UNSC to adopt a res. setting a timetable on the Israeli occupation (see "Palestinian Opinion" below). In a statement released following the 2-day meeting, the PLO's Exec. Comm. said it would implement the council's decisions at a time it

deemed appropriate, reflecting the nonbinding status of the measures. While Palestinians from many sectors of society have grown increasingly vocal about the need to end security coordination with Israel, which is viewed as a further entrenchment of the occupation, the official leadership has not taken the plunge. The day after the Central Council meeting, senior PA officials said Abbas would not end security coordination until at least after the 3/17 Israeli elections, and only then if Netanyahu remained PM and maintained the tax revenue freeze. On 3/7, senior PLO official Saeb Erakat further clarified that security coordination would be terminated if Israel did not abide by its previous obligations: ending settlement expansion, releasing prisoners, and ending the occupation.

Also before the Israeli election, Dep. PM Mohammed Mustafa announced (2/24) that the PA had decided to rescind the preliminary agreement signed by the Palestine Power Generation Company (PPGC, a private firm) on 1/5/2014 to import \$1.2 b. worth of natural gas from Israel over 20 years. The deal, to supply fuel to a proposed power plant nr. Jenin, was suspended in summer 2014 due to disagreements over its terms with the Noble Energy and Delek Group, the consortium responsible for extracting natural gas from Israel's offshore fields (al-Araby al-Jadeed, 2/25). Mustafa added that the PA would instead focus efforts on developing natural gas fields off the coast of Gaza. The move came, in part, as a response to growing calls from Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) activists as well as the deal's opponents within the PLO.

Meanwhile, a boycott of 6 Israeli consumer product companies went into effect in the West Bank on 2/24, following the boycott announcement made by the head of the National Comm. against Israeli Punitive Measures on 2/9 in response to the tax revenue

freeze. Activists reported the measure was widely supported and that 80% of shops in the West Bank were complying with the call (3/1) despite the absence of official PA sanction. According to an Associated Press (AP) report on 3/3, a group of Fatah-affiliated youth seized (3/2) the truck of one of the 6 targeted companies and dumped its cargo of dairy products in the middle of Ramallah's Manara Square, with the action greeted by the "cheers of supporters." One of the activist leaders was quoted as saying that the stunt was part of the 2d phase of the boycott campaign, involving the confiscation and destruction of products and designed to show "the campaign is serious."

Throughout this period, the international community continued calling for Israel to unfreeze tax revenue transfers in order to relieve pressure on the PA and alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the oPt. On 2/21, U.S. secy. of state John Kerry said the PA was in danger of collapsing if the freeze continued, adding later that this would have ill effects on the whole region. Nevertheless, Kerry urged Abbas (3/1) to refrain from ending security coordination or embarking on any other unilateral measures until at least after the Israeli election. Also, the EU took no action when the Palestinians requested in 2/2015 that the bloc reactivate their 1995 revolving fund agreement and provide loans equal to amounts being withheld by Israel.

THE ISRAELI ELECTION

As election day approached, polls released on 3/13 projected that the Zionist Union would win 3 or 4 seats more than Likud, confirming Netanyahu's fear that there was "a real danger" that he would no longer be PM (*Times of Israel*, 3/13). Furthermore, the joint non-Zionist list (dubbed the Joint Arab List by some)—a coalition of the 4 major non-Zionist parties in

the previous Knesset, Balad, Hadash, Ra'am, and Ta'al—was projected to become the 3d largest party, and its chair, Ayman Odeh, said (3/12) he was open to recommending that Herzog and Livni be asked to form the next coalition if it meant ousting Netanyahu. The next largest winners were projected to be Yair Lapid's center-left Yesh Atid and Naftali Bennett's right-wing Jewish Home.

Netanyahu redoubled his efforts to buttress Likud's position and create conditions favorable to forming a ruling coalition under his leadership. First, he offered (3/14) Kahlon the finance portfolio, which would have allowed the Kulanu Party chmn. to pursue his economic reform agenda. Kahlon, however, would not commit, holding out for the election to improve his party's negotiating stance in the coalition-building talks and to secure a more powerful post for himself. In a last-ditch effort to draw votes away from other right-wing parties, Netanyahu escalated his rhetoric regarding the Palestinians. On 3/15, he addressed a 25,000-strong campaign rally in Tel Aviv promising to make no territorial concessions. The next day, he pledged that there would be no Palestinian state if he were reelected and that settlement construction in East Jerusalem would expand under his watch. Pandering further to the right-wing electorate, he also framed settlement construction as a strategic effort, saying it is "a way of stopping Bethlehem from moving toward Jerusalem." The day of the elections, early exit polls showed Likud and the Zionist Union in a dead heat. The Central Elections Comm. (CEC) banned Netanyahu from making a live statement before the polls closed, so instead he made a final plea in a video uploaded to his Facebook page: "The right-wing govt. is in danger. Arab voters are coming out in droves to the polls. Left-wing organizations are busing them out."

Netanyahu's rhetoric would prove controversial in the days and weeks after the election (see below), but the immediate consequence of his final push was a Likud victory. When the vote count was certified on 3/19, the PM's Likud Party was awarded 30 seats in the 20th Knesset, followed by Zionist Union (24), the Joint List (13), Yesh Atid (11), and Kulanu (10). The other right-wing parties—Yisrael Beytenu, Jewish Home, etc.—each won fewer seats than the 3/13 polls had predicted.

Even before Pres. Reuven Rivlin asked (3/25) Netanyahu to form a ruling coalition, an international diplomatic controversy broke out over the PM's campaigning. Frustration with the outgoing govt.'s lack of progress on a peace agreement dovetailed with outrage over both his apparent policy reversal regarding the 2-state solution and his racially-charged rhetoric. In the immediate aftermath, EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini said (3/18) that the EU was committed to working with the "incoming Israeli govt. on . . . the re-launch of the peace process." The UN's official stance was more critical, with spokesperson Farhan Haq saying (3/18) that it was "incumbent on the new Israeli govt., once formed, to create the conditions for a negotiated final peace agreement. . . ." UK Dep. PM Nick Clegg went further (3/19), threatening UK recognition of the state of Palestine if Netanyahu did not retract his comments.

The most vocal criticism came from the U.S., however, in what appeared might become a significant policy shift. On 3/18, a senior White House official told the *New York Times*, "We are now in a reality where the Israeli govt. no longer supports direct negotiations. Therefore we clearly have to factor that into our decisions going forward." Another official elaborated (3/18) to *Politico*, "We are signaling that if the Israeli govt.'s position is no longer to pursue a Palestinian state, we're going to have to broaden

the spectrum of options we pursue going forward." There was no official word from the Obama admin. on what shape this new policy might take, but anonymous officials leaked to the media that it might include an end to unconditional U.S. support for Israel in international institutions and even U.S. support for a UNSC res. setting parameters for a new round of peace negotiations (similar to that which the U.S. had blocked the previous quarter; see *JPS* 175 for more). They also floated the possibility that Kerry would be tasked with managing all relations with Netanyahu's next govt. until the end of Pres. Barack Obama's term in 1/2017. The controversy escalated further when Netanyahu attempted to roll back his campaign statements in an interview on U.S. television on 3/19. "I don't want a 1-state solution," he said. "I want a sustainable, peaceful 2-state solution. But for that, circumstances have to change" (NBC). The Obama admin. was unconvinced. State Dept. spokesperson Psaki said, "We believe he changed his position 3 days ago," and White House spokesperson Josh Earnest echoed her statements, saying, "it's pretty clear that Israel is no longer committed to [a 2-state solution.]" That evening, Obama called to congratulate Netanyahu on his victory, but also to reject his explanation proffered on NBC and to confirm that the U.S. would be reassessing its position. A White House official told *Politico* (3/29) that the Obama admin. felt it had made its positions clear and that it would wait for Netanyahu to form a ruling coalition before taking further action.

Resuscitating the UNSC Initiative

Although the U.S. took no further action on any kind of policy "reassessment" during the quarter, other elements of the international community saw an opportunity in the shifting diplomatic landscape. Building on their efforts

last quarter, the French took the lead. On 3/27, FM Laurent Fabius announced that now that the election was over, French diplomats would in the coming weeks start discussions with their international partners on the prospect of introducing an updated draft res. to the UNSC. Fabius said, “I hope that the partners who were reluctant [in 12/2014] will not be reluctant anymore,” referring to the U.S. Even though no text had been issued by the end of the quarter, French officials clarified the scope of the initiative on 3/31. They said their updated draft would not differ greatly from that of 12/2014; specifically, it would lay out parameters for a new round of negotiations (including the 1967 borders, Jerusalem as a shared capital, and a just res. to the issue of Palestinian refugees). They also indicated that the broader effort was still set to encompass an international peace conference in Paris and French recognition of the state of Palestine. The effort received a tacit endorsement from the EU when the bloc’s amb. to Israel, Lars Faaborg-Andersen, said (3/29) that, in principle, it supported a UNSC res. calling for a timetable on the Israeli occupation.

Following the initial French announcement, the Arab League also began taking steps regarding the UNSC. At a summit on 3/28–29 in Sharm al-Shaykh, Egypt, the League agreed to send a delegation to Washington to lobby Congress in favor of the Arab Peace Initiative (first unveiled in 2002) and to form a special comm. to create a detailed timetable for the end of the Israeli occupation. Abbas, who attended the summit, supported both measures. Later, League mbrs. agreed (4/6) to form a special comm. of experts to prepare a detailed plan for assisting the Palestinians in their UNSC-related efforts. Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukri said (4/6) that while they had begun holding meetings with relevant international parties the whole effort hinged on the U.S.

As the Palestinians worked in concert with the Arab League on the issue, the Europeans’ continued effort to build support for their initiative hit a snag. At a meeting of the UNSC on 4/21, UK diplomats joined their French counterparts in calling on council members to adopt the res. following its introduction. Mark Lyall Grant, the UK’s UN amb., said his country saw merit in “setting out the parameters for a peaceful and negotiated solution,” adding that this would “require proper consultation to achieve the full backing of the Council.” (At the same meeting, New Zealand’s amb., Jim McKay, announced that his office was drafting a separate res. designed to “inject new momentum” into the peace process, but that New Zealand would wait to see how the broader French effort evolved before “stepping in.”) Despite the apparent public progress, the French initiative was reported to be facing opposition from other countries in private. According to *Foreign Policy* on 4/28, the U.S. and several Arab states were pushing for France to delay the unveiling of its draft until after the P5+1 and Iran’s 6/30 deadline for a final agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. Accommodating the implicit threat of a U.S. veto, France apparently bowed to the pressure but continued working on the initiative. At the annual French-Israeli strategic consultations in early 5/2015, the routinely cordial talks reportedly dissolved into tension and discord, with Israeli officials reportedly upset that the French had not shown them a copy of their draft res. or even shared its main points (*Haaretz*, 5/14). Further uncertainty was cast on the initiative when the Israeli media (5/8) reported that Obama had recently told his advisers that he intended to veto the French res. if it was put to a vote. Regardless, as the quarter ended, Fabius was signaling that he did not want to delay the submission of the draft

beyond 9/2015 when the UN General Assembly was set to meet in New York.

RETURN TO THE STATUS QUO

With the Israeli election behind them, along with any prospect of a left-wing Israeli govt., both the Palestinians and the Israelis settled back into the general dynamic that prevailed during Netanyahu's previous 2 terms in office: the Israeli govt. continued announcing settlement growth and other nationalist endeavors while attempting to defuse the tension with the international community. The Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership continued their efforts to seek justice in international institutions, including the ICC, the UNSC, and the Swiss-based international soccer organization, FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association).

Unfreezing Tax Revenues

On the same day as the Israeli election, the PA announced that its financial straits were so dire that it would begin operating under an emergency budget starting on 4/1. This stopgap measure was set to include partial payments of employee salaries and significant cuts to ministerial offices. The Israeli security establishment reportedly interpreted these cuts, and the continued freeze on tax revenues, as a likely prelude to increased unrest in the West Bank. According to a 3/23 report in the *Times of Israel*, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) approved 10,000 permits for Palestinian laborers to enter Israel as a means to defuse tension and IDF officials also recommended that the PM terminate the tax revenue freeze. After DM Moshe Ya'alon and the internal security service, Shin Bet, recommended the same, on 3/27 PM Netanyahu announced he was ending the freeze. In his statement, Netanyahu explained that "the decision was made, among other

things, for humanitarian reasons and out of an overall assessment of Israel's interests at this time,"—the last, an oblique reference to the international community's consistent pressure. Accordingly, the U.S., EU, and the Middle East Quartet all welcomed the announcement.

However, the statement also indicated that NIS 1.05 b. (around \$280 m.) would be deducted from the transfer of NIS 1.85 b. (around \$472 m.) in settlement of the Palestinians' debts to Israeli utility providers, including the IEC. The PA Foreign Ministry immediately criticized the deductions, saying they were "an unjustified and illegal procedure that could cause complications." At a speech before the Arab League the day after the Israeli PM's statement, Abbas said (3/28) that since no funds had been transferred, the PA was still planning to "re-evaluate our economic, political, and security relationship with Israel." He also called for the creation of an "Arab financial security net" to limit Israel's ability to undermine the PA. The disagreement over the proposed deductions continued with the PA meeting on 3/31 to reject the move, which it labeled a premeditated crime and a violation of previous agreements. After the Israeli govt. finally transferred the NIS 1.37 b. (some \$350 m.) it owed the PA, Abbas sent the money back saying (4/5), "Either you give us the full amount or we go to the ICC." PM Rami Hamdallah reiterated Abbas's call 3 days later, adding that he supported the creation of an international body to adjudicate on the matter. Finally, on 4/17, reps. of the PA, including Hamdallah, reached an agreement with Israel's Coordinator for Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Yoav Mordechai, for the transfer of the full amount by 4/20 and the creation of a joint economic comm., including Palestinian municipal and private sector officials, to determine how much of the total

would be returned to Israel in order to pay down the outstanding debts. Hamdallah then confirmed that going forward (4/21) all PA employees would receive their salaries in full and the 40% balance that had been withheld from their pay in the previous 4 mos.

Forming a Right-Wing Coalition

From 3/25, when Rivlin formally asked him to form a govt., Netanyahu had 36 days to negotiate with the heads of other parties to form a ruling parliamentary coalition of at least 61 seats. There were rumors in the Israeli media that Herzog and his Zionist Union party would sign on in exchange for the FM's portfolio (*Jerusalem Post*, 4/15) but neither he nor any other left-leaning party made any serious overtures to Netanyahu. The PM, for his part, reached out to his natural allies: the Orthodox and other right-wing parties. By 5/4, Kulanu, the Orthodox United Torah Jerusalem, and Shas had all signed on, bringing the nascent coalition to 53 seats. Netanyahu kept a campaign promise to make Kahlon finance minister and offered the 2 Orthodox parties expanded authority over religious affairs. In a surprise move 2 days before Netanyahu's deadline, Avigdor Lieberman resigned (5/4) as FM and said that his Yisrael Beytenu party, and its 6 mbrs. of the Knesset (MKs), would not be joining the coalition. He had campaigned on a plan to integrate predominantly Palestinian areas of Israel, like Umm al-Fahm, into a future Palestinian state and was angling to be appointed DM with his 3/16 promise to lead the "last campaign against Hamas." In his resignation speech on 5/4, Lieberman said that "what's being built is not a national camp, but a govt. that smacks of opportunism." He also revealed that in spite of being one of the main causes for dissolving the previous govt., the "nation-state" bill was now "off the agenda"

(see *JPS* 175). At this point, Netanyahu began to scramble for the 8 seats of Bennett's national-religious Jewish Home party. Bennett took advantage of his leverage and delayed signing onto the coalition until hours before the expiry of the deadline on 5/6. In exchange, Netanyahu increased the budget of Ariel University, an Israeli settlement in the n. West Bank; appointed Bennett's second-in-command, Ayelet Shaked, as justice minister—Shaked gained international notoriety in 6/2014 after posting on Facebook an article widely regarded as an incitement to murder Palestinians (the never-published article was written 12 years earlier by a close associate of Netanyahu's; see *JPS* 173); and increased the annual budget for the World Zionist Organization's settlement division by NIS 50 m. (\$13 m.).

Netanyahu's new cabinet was approved by the Knesset and sworn in on 5/14. According to the policy guidelines the ruling coalition delivered to the chamber on 5/13, the new govt. planned to "move the diplomatic process forward and strive for a peace agreement with the Palestinians and with all our neighbors, while preserving the security, historic, and national interests of Israel." However, Netanyahu had made no promises or announcements about a return to negotiations with the Palestinians by the end of the quarter. In public comments on the issue following the election, he generally held to the point that he supported the 2-state solution but that conditions were not currently conducive to such a settlement.

Consolidating the Palestinian Minority in Israel

Last quarter, Israel's major non-Zionist parties—Balad, Hadash, Ra'am, and Ta'al—had come together to form the Joint List in an effort to combat recently enforced political discrimination measures. They maintained their

combined efforts this quarter, with the coalition's leadership using its broadened support base to improve living conditions for the Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCI). As expected, the Israeli Supreme Court overturned (2/18) the CEC's 2/12 vote to disqualify Haneen Zoabi (Balad) from the election (see *JPS* 175 for more) enabling the Joint List to win 13 seats on 3/17, including Zoabi's. PCI voter turnout registered at 69%, a significant increase from the 56% and 53% of the previous 2 elections, when the non-Zionist parties ran independently of each other and collectively won 10 and 11 seats, respectively.

The Joint List kept its focus on domestic issues. On 3/26, party leaders announced that they would relinquish their 2 seats on both the Knesset's foreign affairs and defense comms. in exchange for 4 seats on the finance comm., allowing them to address the economic problems of the PCI rather than the broader Palestinian national struggle. As a result, when Abbas passed on an invitation from the Arab League to attend its next meeting, coalition members turned down (4/20) the invitation.

In the weeks following the election, the Joint List staged several high-profile protests, highlighting the coalition's concern with domestic issues. On 3/26, reps. from the coalition joined Palestinian activists on a 4-day protest march from the Negev to the presidential residence in Jerusalem. The protest, to raise awareness about the poor living conditions in the so-called unrecognized villages of the Negev, included handing Pres. Rivlin a plan for the provision of full municipal and civil services to the areas. Although he had previously agreed to meet the protesters once they reached Jerusalem, lending weight to their action, Rivlin was called away unexpectedly to a state funeral in Singapore, leading Joint List MKs to hand (3/29) their report to the pres.'s wife. Following a

series of home demolitions in the Galilee (Kafar Kanna, 4/12), the Negev (4/14), and Beersheba (5/12), the Joint List zeroed in on the issue of housing specifically. The party backed a general strike by Palestinians in the Galilee on 4/13, and 5 Joint List MKs met with the Israeli atty. gen. to discuss the issue on 4/20. That same day, they proposed a special Knesset session on the overall housing shortage and recent demolitions, but they could not gather the support of the 25 MKs necessary. The following week, the Joint List backed a rally (4/28) in Tel Aviv, which over 2,000 PCI attended. In a 5/8 interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, MK Basel Ghattas (Balad) summed up the Joint List's position as follows: "Instead of solving the housing shortage in Arab society, the govt. is destroying homes under the guise of 'illegal construction.'" The Joint List also submitted (5/6) a 2-stage preliminary plan to the Finance Ministry on the issue, requesting the lifting or reform of obstructive regulations and a total freeze on home demolitions in Palestinian areas.

Palestinian Unilateral Efforts Continue

After the state of Palestine officially became the ICC's 123d mbr. on 4/1, the Palestinians elaborated on their plans to seek justice through the Court. As mentioned earlier, Abbas indicated that the Palestinians were considering a formal complaint to the ICC in response to Israel's withholding of tax revenues (4/2 and 4/5). Soon afterward, FM Riyad al-Maliki revealed (4/6) that ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda was being provided with additional documents in order to expedite the preliminary examination into alleged war crimes committed in the oPt since 6/12/2014. Al-Maliki added that the Palestinians planned to make "specific referrals" to the Court and to initiate cases of their own if Bensouda chose not to open a full investigation. Hamas reiterated its support for

the ICC initiative, with a statement by a senior official expressing the group's readiness to cooperate with any investigation (4/10).

Toward the end of the quarter, Bensouda made a number of statements about her preliminary examination. In an interview with *Haaretz* on 5/1, she said that, as expected, she would be investigating a number of Palestinian militants and Israeli soldiers, as well as high-level Israeli officials. Speaking to AP (5/13), she said that she had received no information about OPE from either side hitherto and that Israel's failure to provide reliable information for her preliminary probe might result in her decision to launch a full investigation solely on the basis of Palestinian allegations. She clarified that in reviewing information for a preliminary examination her office would be considering the following 4 questions: Do the crimes fall under ICC jurisdiction? Are there national legal proceedings underway for those crimes, which may take precedence? Are the crimes serious enough to warrant ICC attention? Will justice be served by an ICC intervention?

With regard to the UNSC res. calling for an end to the Israeli occupation and setting parameters for a new round of peace negotiations, the Palestinians primarily worked with the Arab League this quarter (see "Resuscitating the UNSC Initiative" above). Expressing tentative support for the French initiative, the Palestinian envoy to France, Hael al-Fahoum, said (4/7) the French effort was viewed positively but that the Palestinians were reserving judgment until more details were available. In a separate development, Palestine's UN amb., Riyad Mansour, submitted a request to the UNSC on 5/1 to bring Israel to justice for its treatment of Palestinian children and underage youths.

In addition to the UNSC and ICC projects, the Palestinians relaunched their campaign to

suspend Israel from FIFA, the international soccer governing body. After years of complaints about Israeli abuses, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) submitted a formal res. to FIFA on 3/20 calling for the Israel Football Association (IFA) to be suspended, including from the World Cup, until Palestinian players and coaches were allowed to move freely, Palestinian facilities could be built without obstruction, Israeli settler clubs were banned from playing in IFA competitions, and the IFA had taken "firm action" to eliminate racism in its leagues. The res. was put on the schedule for a vote at the 5/29/2015 FIFA congress in Zurich where the approval of 75% of the organization's 209 mbrs. would be required for it to pass. Israeli and Palestinian diplomats proceeded to conduct a series of meetings and negotiations to lobby for support ahead of the vote. The PFA had submitted similar res. to FIFA in 2013 and 2014 but dropped them under pressure from several European nations. Having created a task force in 2013 to examine and address Palestinian grievances, FIFA pres. Sepp Blatter tried to get the Palestinians to drop their res. again, but PFA pres. Jibril Rajoub held his ground. He told Reuters on 5/1 that "a year ago I agreed to drop the proposal, I will not do that again. The aggression towards our sportsmen and women in the West Bank and Gaza continues. It is hostile and racist and the time has come to take action."

GAZA RECONSTRUCTION

Last quarter, the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) began facilitating the entry of reconstruction materials into Gaza. This quarter, despite slight increases in materials, donor reticence and Israeli implementation of the GRM continued to obstruct the overall process. Also, several international actors embarked on a new diplomatic initiative

designed to accelerate the reconstruction process.

The GRM was designed to liaise between the UN Special Coordinator's office, Israel's COGAT, and the PA (see *JPS* 175 for details). However, its effectiveness is contingent on the amount of construction material Israel allows to enter, as well as on donor funding, and private contractors. Overall, there was a slight rise in entry of such materials: in the three-mo. period 2–4/15, totals went from 161,031 to 204,263 and reaching 226,860 tons of steel, cement, and gravel, according to Gisha, the Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO), significantly more than the figures for the 2 previous mos., respectively 112,186 and 105,491 tons. By the end of the quarter, 70,700 homes damaged during OPE had been repaired using these materials. Nevertheless, not one of the 12,600 completely destroyed homes had been rebuilt (OCHA, 5/2). According to an UNRWA report released on 4/9, Israel, the PA, and the UN had yet to agree on a process for rebuilding those structures. An economist and spokesperson for the local chamber of commerce contended that not nearly enough materials were entering the Strip. "Gaza needs a thousand tons of cement a day," Maher al-Tabbaa said, describing the deficiency as "economic warfare" (Reuters, 4/6).

Compounding the slowness of the reconstruction process was the trickle-like rate of disbursement from international donors. On 4/13, the Association of International Development Agencies (AIDA), a coalition of 46 aid groups and NGOs, published a report alleging that Gaza donors had disbursed just over a quarter (26.8%) of the \$3.5 b. pledged to the reconstruction process at the international donor conference in Cairo on 10/12/2014. The report further indicated that 65% of the total, or \$2.275 b., had already been pledged earlier and

that donors merely reprogrammed the aid to reconstruction. The report concluded that "without economic, social and political stability, a return to conflict—and the cycles of damage and donor-funded reconstruction that accompany it—is inevitable."

Despite the GRM's slow implementation, there were several signs of progress. In a report to the UNSC on 3/26, outgoing UN special coordinator Robert Serry stated that over 40 international and private sector projects had been approved and 5 were underway, including a major new housing initiative funded by Qatar. The plan for building 1,000 housing units had been unveiled on 3/10 by the head of Qatar's Comm. to Rebuild Gaza, Mohammed al-Amadi. Nine days after the Qatari official made the announcement, indicating he had received clearance from Israel's COGAT office, 1,000 tons of cement earmarked for the project entered Gaza's Kerem Shalom border crossing, the largest single shipment of reconstruction materials since the end of OPE. Also of note, the EU and UNICEF announced (2/25) the completion of the 1st of 4 components in a €10 m. water desalination project to provide potable water to 75,000 people in Khan Yunis and Rafah. Then, UNRWA announced (4/15) the commencement of a new \$40 m., 3-year program funded by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to improve living conditions in Dayr al-Balah (see "Donors" below for more on reconstruction efforts).

In the 8/26/2014 cease-fire agreement that ended OPE, the Palestinian delegation and the Israelis had agreed to set aside several outstanding issues, to be brokered by Egypt in subsequent talks scheduled for 10/2014. Because of the insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula, the Egyptian govt. canceled the talks, leaving the outstanding issues unresolved (see "Egypt" below). The international community jumped

into the breach, with a number of efforts to address some of the outstanding issues. Serry and Hamas officials met on 3/2 to discuss a proposal calling for a “hudna,” or truce, to allow Gaza’s reconstruction to proceed unfettered for 3–5 years, with the PA taking control of Gaza and the freezing of all military activity “above and below ground”—in Serry’s words, to “give donors confidence for the large-scale, accelerated reconstruction that Gaza desperately needs” (3/26). Switzerland’s rep. to the PA, Paul Garnier, who was working with Serry on the project, also discussed the proposal with Hamas officials on 3/23. In addition, Qatar’s al-Amadi offered to mediate talks over a 3–5 year cease-fire when he met with Hamas, Israeli, and PA officials on a trip to the region (*Times of Israel*, 3/25), and a German delegation to Gaza reportedly conducted similar talks on 4/1 (*Al-Monitor*, 4/14). Throughout the quarter, several Hamas and Israeli officials acknowledged that the proposals were under discussion but communication between them remained indirect.

Despite being inconclusive, the “reconstruction hudna” efforts exacerbated intra-Palestinian tensions. Hamas spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri addressed (3/9) the recent developments, commenting, “Some international parties earlier presented us the proposal document but we haven’t yet given our response. A decision like this one requires national Palestinian agreement.” Despite this caveat, several PLO factions met to discuss the idea, and they released (3/12) a joint statement warning about the dangers of excluding the PA from negotiations with Israel. A senior PA official elaborated on the motives behind the statement to *Al-Monitor* on 4/14, as follows: “[T]he PA and Fatah were concerned about a regional plan to split Gaza from the Palestinian territories and sign a

truce with Israel without Abbas’s knowledge” (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” for more).

OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS

During the quarter, at least 18 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (matching the 18 last quarter), and 1 Israeli was killed as a result of Palestinian actions (down from 5 last quarter). The comprehensive death toll from the beginning of the 2d intifada in 9/2000 was, therefore, brought to 10,546 Palestinians (including 53 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators); 1,214 Israelis (428 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 229 settlers, and 550 civilians); and 67 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). These numbers include individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel’s occupation and the ongoing conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died while being denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents).

Overview of the Violence

In the **Gaza Strip**, 8 Palestinians died as a result of Israeli actions this quarter, up from 5 last quarter: 5 in tunnel-related accidents; 1 fisherman from injuries sustained in a confrontation with Israeli naval forces; 1 from the accidental triggering of unexploded Israeli ordnance; and 1 man who succumbed to injuries sustained during OPE, bringing the total number of Palestinian fatalities from Israel’s 7–8/2014 assault to 2,193. In addition, Israeli forces continued to fire on Palestinians nr. the border fence and fishermen off the coast and there was 1 cross-border incident of note in 4/2015.

Despite rising fatalities, the relative calm along the Israel-Gaza border held this quarter,

except for 1 noteworthy incident on 4/23 when a single rocket was fired into Israel, causing damage nr. Sderot. Because Israel holds Hamas responsible for all rocket fire emanating from Gaza, regardless of its origin, the IDF responded by firing 3 tank shells into the territory, targeting a Hamas military site nr. Bayt Hanun, in the north. Israel's COGAT office closed the Erez border crossing the next day, barring Palestinians from traveling to Haram al-Sharif for Friday prayers.

Apart from killing 1 Palestinian on 2/28, unexploded ordnance injured 3 others this quarter, and another 70 were injured in Gaza City during the dismantling (5/14) of an unexploded IDF F-16 rocket. The explosion reportedly caused a power blackout in the area as well (Ma'an News Agency, 5/14).

This quarter, IDF troops continued to enforce the unilaterally-defined buffer zone along the border, reduced to 100 m in most places following OPE. They opened fire on all Palestinians who approached land nr. the fence whether to play, protest, throw stones at Israeli soldiers, tend to farmland, or to try to cross into Israel. In the 40 incidents of this nature during the quarter (up from 37), 22 Palestinians were injured and none were killed (down from 31 and 1, respectively). The IDF also conducted at least 8 incursions to level land along the border fence and arrested at least 14 Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel. Israeli naval forces continued to enforce the 6 naut. mi. fishing zone off the coast of Gaza. This quarter, they opened fire on Palestinian fishermen within the allotted zone on 46 occasions, up from 43 last quarter. In addition to the 1 fisherman who died from injuries sustained in an attack on 3/6, 7 others were also injured. The Israelis damaged 11 boats, confiscated 3, and arrested or detained 8 fishermen. Also this quarter, the IDF returned (4/29) 15 confiscated

fishing boats to Palestinian fishermen. The head of the Palestinian fishermen's union called on Israel to return 60 other confiscated boats, and he noted that it was the 1st time that confiscated boats had ever been returned by sea, which is more convenient for fishermen than the usual overland method.

The West Bank and East Jerusalem also witnessed 3 mos. of relative calm. In the **West Bank**, 9 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions this quarter, up from 8 the previous quarter. Of these, 7 were killed during confrontations with IDF troops or as a result of such confrontations (2/23, 3/10, 3/25, 4/7, 4/10, 4/25, and 5/2); 1 died of injuries sustained when he fell from the separation wall nr. Jerusalem (3/25), and 1 died from health complications he developed in Israeli prison (4/9). In **East Jerusalem**, 1 Palestinian was killed after he attempted to stab 2 Israeli police officers at a checkpoint on 4/25. According to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the first quarter of 2015 (1–3/2015) marked a low point for injuries caused by Palestinian-Israeli confrontations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Only 25 Israelis, including 7 security forces, were injured during the time period, compared to 88 in the previous 3 mos. Likewise, there were only 436 Palestinians injured, the lowest quarterly figure since the 2d quarter of 2013.

Movement and Access

The Israeli authorities continued easing restrictions on the Erez and Kerem Shalom border crossings into the **Gaza Strip** while ongoing violence in the Sinai Peninsula led to less frequent openings of the Rafah border crossing. At the beginning of the quarter, the Israeli military announced (2/17) that it was increasing the number of permits issued to Gaza

merchants wishing to enter the West Bank. According to Gisha, however, the number of merchants exiting Gaza this quarter rose only marginally. After an average of 5,787 exits per mo. from 11/2014 to 1/2015, monthly exits rose from 7,070 in 2/2015 and 7,693 in 3/2015 to 7,791 in 4/2015. The overall number of people exiting Gaza through the Erez border crossing increased from 31,921 during 11/2014–1/2015 to 38,459 during 2/2015–4/2015. The Israeli authorities also loosened restrictions on exports from Gaza, giving rise to an increase in textile and furniture exports (2/17) and, for the 1st time since 2007, allowing Gazan farmers to export their produce to Israel (3/12). The Israeli decision to import Gazan produce was, in part, motivated by the Orthodox *shmita*, a biblical prohibition on working the land every 7th year, and the resulting shortfall in domestic produce. However, this only led to a marginal increase in overall exports from Gaza. Between 3/12 and the end of the quarter, a weekly average of 16.8 truckloads carrying produce to Israel exited Gaza, but the overall average number of truckloads carrying exports from Gaza during this period was only 19.4, up from 17.4 during the previous 10 weeks, according to Gisha. The Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah border crossing closed for all but 2 days this quarter (3/9–10), when 1,433 people entered Gaza and 1,010 Palestinians exited. They had only opened the crossing for 12 days since 10/24/2014, when the armed group then known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis killed over 30 people in a series of attacks on Egyptian security forces in n. Sinai.

Of note: Israel announced on 3/4 that it would be doubling the amount of water allowed into Gaza from 5 m³ to 10 m³ annually. COGAT Mordechai said he hoped that “ Hamas would not steal water from civilians as they steal construction materials intended for the

reconstruction of homes,” referring to recent Israeli media allegations. A week later, the Israeli authorities decided to allow masonry mortar to be imported into Gaza. The allegedly “dual use” product was previously banned. On the other hand, the Israeli authorities proceeded to cut back on shipments of lumber into Gaza. According to importers in Gaza, the number of boards allowed in fell from 6,000 to 2,400 per day (Reuters, 4/6).

Although the daily raids, detentions, and the configuration of checkpoints in the **West Bank** and **East Jerusalem** remained obstacles to Palestinian freedom of movement throughout the quarter, the Israeli authorities relaxed 3 major barriers in 4/2015. First, on 4/2, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled in favor of Palestinian petitioners in their bid to divert the planned route of the separation wall away from their land nr. Jerusalem. The route, which had been contested since the IDF ordered it in 2006, would have required the appropriation of another 3,000 dunams (around 740 acres) of land owned by Palestinians and a Catholic church. In its ruling, the Court ordered the Defense Ministry to develop a plan that would lessen the burden on Palestinians in the area. Next, PA security forces (PASF) were deployed for the 1st time in Area B of the West Bank, following an agreement between the PA and Israel’s COGAT office. The PASF confirmed the agreement and announced (4/8) that it would be setting up police stations in Abu Dis, al-Ram, and Beddo, outlying Palestinian neighborhoods of Jerusalem. An IDF spokesperson said that “the purpose of these stations [was] to address criminal matters as well as to maintain public order for the Palestinian population.” Under the Oslo accords, Area B was placed under Palestinian civil control but Israeli security control. Finally, Israel’s COGAT office announced (4/14) that Palestinian vehicles

would be allowed to enter Jerusalem for the 1st time since the outbreak of the 2d intifada in 9/2000. Mordechai said the restriction would be loosened in stages, with over 100 Palestinian doctors allowed to drive into Jerusalem starting on 4/14 and then unrestricted travel for Palestinian businessmen and women in the next phase. He did not clarify when the next phase was expected to begin.

In terms of daily movement and access obstructions, conditions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem were largely consistent with last quarter. Between 2/17/15 and 5/11/2015, Israeli forces conducted a total of 1,084 search and arrest operations (OCHA). The weekly average during that period was 90, up from a weekly average of 75 during 2014. As in previous quarters, Israeli forces set up flying checkpoints across the West Bank every day, frequently detaining or arresting Palestinians (see Chronology for details).

Access to Haram al-Sharif continued to be a source of conflict this quarter. Right-wing Jewish activists toured the sanctuary on almost a daily basis, leading to occasional clashes with Muslim worshippers (3/24, 4/8, 4/11, and 4/23). Also, Israeli forces arrested or detained at least 56 Palestinians in the sanctuary and banned another 21 from entering for varying lengths of time. There were 2 other developments of note in this regard. First, the Western Wall Heritage Foundation, a right-wing Jewish organization, invited bids in 2/2015 to conduct excavations under Haram al-Sharif, with plans to create new paths and chambers for use by Jewish visitors. Second, Israel's High Court rejected (5/11) a petition to change the route of the annual Jerusalem Day parade on 5/17 so as to avoid the Muslim Quarter of the Old City. During the 2014 parade, violent confrontations broke out between right-wing Jewish extremists and

Palestinian residents of the area. The Court called on the Israeli police to arrest any parade participants that shouted slogans, but violence and tension were expected.

Protests

Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists in the West Bank continued their regular nonviolent Friday protests against the occupation, settlements, and the separation wall this quarter, particularly in villages nr. Ramallah (Bil'in, Ni'lin, and Nabi Salih) and Qalqilya (Kafr Qaddum). The IDF dispersed the protests violently, using tear gas, stun grenades, rubber-coated metal bullets, and occasionally live ammunition (see Chronology for details).

Last quarter, Palestinian, Israeli, and internationals established a tent encampment in Abu Dis, dubbed "Gate of Jerusalem," to protest the Israeli govt.'s planned relocation of up to 7,000 bedouin in the West Bank to 3 planned townships nr. Jericho (see *JPS* 170–73 and 175). The IDF repeatedly removed the activists from the area and dismantled their camp, as the protesters returned and rebuilt the camp after each raid. This quarter, the activists continued with their protest, and attempted to widen their action with the addition of concrete structures (2/16) while the IDF persisted with its own demolition and dispersal actions. The Israeli raids resulted in clashes (2/16, 3/6, 3/13), the injury of at least 7 activists, and the detention or arrest of at least 22 others. By the end of 3/2015, the IDF had destroyed the camp 11 times and effectively barred the activists from rebuilding, according to the Stop the Wall Campaign, a grassroots coalition of popular comms. based in the oPt (3/27).

Judaization of Jerusalem

This quarter saw several major Israeli efforts to assert control over Jerusalem and to further

Judaize the city via ever-growing settlement expansion and the continued enforcement of the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem (see *JPS* 84). In terms of settlement construction, Israeli authorities approved the construction of a landfill between Issawiyya and Shu'fat on Palestinian-owned land (2/16) and of 900 new settler homes in Ramat Shlomo on 5/7, and they put out tenders for 142 new settler residences in Har Homa on 3/30 and 77 residences in Neve Ya'acov and Pisgat Ze'ev on 4/27. On 3/30, the Interior Ministry's Planning and Building Comm. approved a plan to construct over 2,200 settler residences in Jabal Mukabir and retroactively approved the construction of several hundred other residences in the neighborhood. Also, Israeli settlers, accompanied by Israeli forces, moved into a Palestinian-owned building and 2 plots of land in Silwan on 3/18. Settlers had previously attempted to take control of the building in 2007, but an Israeli court

confirmed in 2012 that it was owned by Palestinians.

In addition to the growing presence of Jewish Israelis in East Jerusalem and Israeli PM Netanyahu's campaign pledge to continue settlement construction in the city (3/16), the Israeli Supreme Court upheld (4/16) the application of the Absentee Property Law in East Jerusalem. Originally enacted in 1950 to allow Israelis to seize and occupy the homes of Palestinians who had fled or were expelled during the 1948 war, the Court's new ruling allowed the Israeli state to seize property in East Jerusalem if its owners lived in the West Bank or Gaza Strip. In a comment illustrating both official and popular Palestinian criticism, PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Hanan Ashrawi said the application of the law was (4/22) "perpetuating the Nakba."

Settler-Related Violence

The number of violent attacks by Israeli settlers on Palestinians and their property in the



Israeli border police restrain a Palestinian taking part in a Land Day commemoration near Jerusalem's Damascus Gate. Thousands of Palestinians across Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza took part in the annual protest to mark the 1976 killing of six Palestinian demonstrators opposed to land confiscations in the Galilee. (30 March, Thomas Coex/AFP/Getty Images)

West Bank decreased this quarter, down to 50 from last quarter's 70. Once again, Nablus (14) and Hebron (23) were the main areas involved, and incidents included price-tag attacks (2/24, 2/26, and 3/4), attacks using cars (2/24, 4/21, and 4/28), assaults (2/17, 2/19, 2/21, 2/26, 3/10, 3/13 [twice], 3/17 [three times], 3/19 [twice], 3/22, 3/28, 4/2, 5/5, and 5/9) and confrontations that led to clashes (3/19, 4/8, and 4/21). The overall total includes 13 reported instances in which settlers attacked Palestinian agricultural assets (down from 15 last quarter), resulting in the destruction of at least 2,783 olive and almond trees and saplings (see Chronology for details). The number of Palestinian attacks against Israeli settlers and their property remained similarly consistent. According to OCHA, in the three-mo. period 2/2015–4/2015, there were an average of 14 such incidents (that led to Israeli settler casualties), down from a monthly average of 7.41 during the comparable period of 2014. They peaked at 27 in 2/2015 before dropping to 9 in 3/2015 and 8 in 4/2015.

Palestinian Prisoners

The situation of Palestinian prisoners remained relatively unchanged this quarter, with the monthly average number rising slightly to 5,567 (2–5/2015) from 5,520 over the previous 4 mos. In percentage terms, administrative detainees fell from 8.1% of the total Palestinian prison population (1/2015) to 6.4% (5/2015) by the end of the quarter.

After the end of another high-profile hunger strike in 12/2014, Palestinian prisoners deployed the tactic again this quarter. On 2/22, the Detainees and Ex-Detainees Comm. announced that if the Israel Prison Service (IPS) did not respond to their demands, a group of prisoners would begin a strike on 3/10 to protest inhumane conditions, overcrowding, and the use of administrative detention. After rolling

back their pledge, and planning a series of protest actions starting on 3/10 instead, the prisoners eventually canceled all protest on 3/10, and Al Jazeera reported that they had reached a preliminary deal with IPS that would allow them more family visits. IPS officials denied the report. Toward the end of the quarter, Islamic Jihad mbr. Khader Adnan launched (5/5) an open-ended hunger strike to demand an end to his administrative detention in Israel's Hadarim jail. Adnan had staged a high-profile 66-day hunger strike that secured his release from imprisonment in 2012, but he was rearrested on 7/8/2014 and sentenced to administrative detention for the 10th time in his life. According to a lawyer who visited him in 5/2015, IPS was holding Adnan in solitary confinement and preventing him from using radio, television, or a pen and paper. His strike continued through the end of the quarter.

In a noteworthy incident, IDF troops arrested Palestinian MP Khalida Jarrar (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, or PFLP) in a late-night raid of her home nr. Ramallah on 4/2. Although he lodged no formal charges, IDF Maj. Gen. Roni Numa ordered her to serve 6 mos. administrative detention on 4/5 on the grounds, according to IDF sources, that she had violated restrictions imposed on her movement in 8/2014 (*Haaretz*, 4/6). Jarrar, who is a senior PLO lawyer, had been heavily involved in the Palestinians' accession to the ICC, and the Palestinian and international media speculated that her arrest was, in part, a vindictive response.

Demolitions and Confiscations

According to OCHA reports, IDF demolitions of Palestinian property in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem increased this quarter from 90 to 113, with 93 structures demolished in the former and 20 in the latter,

displacing a total of 141 Palestinians. These included the demolition of 13 residences during the week of 3/10 alone, displacing 78 people.

Israeli forces also continued the practice of delivering demolition notices to Palestinians building structures without proper permits in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. They delivered demolition notices for a total of 15 homes or other residences, 1 school, 2 water wells, 7 agricultural structures, and a barn.

There were no reported instances of Israeli authorities punitively demolishing the homes of Palestinians accused of serious crimes against Israeli persons or property this quarter. The policy of punitive demolition was reinstated in summer 2014 and has been implemented infrequently since then (see *JPS* 173–75).

In a related development, Israel's High Court approved (5/4) the COGAT office's request to demolish a number of tents and homes in a bedouin village nr. Hebron, displacing some 450 Palestinians.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

THE UNITY GOVT. STRUGGLES IN GAZA

This quarter, the PA unity govt. continued to struggle with the major issues facing it since its swearing in on 6/2/2014. Neither the Ramallah-based leadership nor Hamas in Gaza took any significant steps toward full implementation of the 4/23/2014 national reconciliation agreement. Furthermore, the national consensus govt. came under increasing strain notably over the reconstruction of Gaza, and specifically the proposed "hudna" with Israel (see "Gaza Reconstruction" above).

Tension in the ranks of the unity govt. were exacerbated last quarter when PA PM Hamdallah announced that civil servants brought in by the Hamas-run govt. after 2007

would only be hired (i.e., paid the salaries for the jobs they had been doing for as many as 8 years) after PA employees in Gaza from before 2007 were rehired. And despite initial efforts on both sides to resolve the wage crisis, tension grew this quarter. Ahead of a planned PA delegation's visit to Gaza, senior Hamas official Ismail Haniyeh said (3/22) the group was still interested in national reconciliation. Headed by Hamdallah, the delegation arrived on 3/25 and held meetings with both Hamas and Fatah officials. The parties agreed to form a comm. to try and resolve the wage issue and to proceed with transferring control of the Rafah and Erez border crossing from Hamas to the unity govt. While he did not reverse his earlier statement that all PA employees from before 2007 would be rehired, Hamdallah stressed that a solution would be found that encompassed "all civil servants." Making an explicit linkage between the two issues, he added, "Such solutions couldn't be reached without handing over crossings to the consensus government as a [preliminary] to encourage [*sic*] all donor countries to fulfill their obligations in the reconstruction process" (WAFA, 3/25).

After a mo. of protests (e.g., 4/9) and a lack of progress, the crisis culminated in late-4/2015 around the visit of another PA delegation to resolve the wage issue. Ahead of the visit, Hamas passed (4/18) the National Solidarity Tax law, imposing a new 10% tax on "non-basic" goods imported into Gaza, with the aim of using those revenues to pay the salaries of Hamas govt. employees. The new law proved to be a source of serious discord when the PA delegation arrived on 4/19. Unable to agree on how to implement previous agreements or count the number of civil servants that could be rehired, PA delegates left the following day. A senior PA official said (4/20) Hamas had

“thwarted the visit” and “didn’t allow ministers to implement the plan they came for.” Other PA officials claimed Hamas had barred them from leaving their hotel but a spokesperson for the group alleged that the PA ministers had refused to meet Gaza-based civil servants in their offices, demanding that the meetings be conducted at their hotel.

Through the end of the quarter, relations between Hamas and the leadership in Ramallah deteriorated further. A week after the 2d delegation left Gaza, the PA’s labor minister, Mamoun Abu Shahla, said (4/26) there had been no contact between Hamas and the PA unity govt. and senior Hamas official Ismail al-Ashqar called (5/1) the unity govt. a failure. There was also further unrest in Gaza, with a 400-strong demonstration in Shuja’iya to protest the discord (4/29) and civil servants striking on 5/12 to protest their unpaid salaries and the PA unity govt.’s recent “recklessness” on the issue, according to a statement issued by a workers’ comm.

Contributing further to the tension, Hamas and the Ramallah-based leadership traded accusations of responsibility for a series of violent incidents in the Gaza Strip. On 3/14, Hamas released a number of videos showing purported PA agents admitting responsibility for a string of car bombings that had targeted Hamas in recent mos. (see *JPS* 174–75), with a spokesperson for the group alleging that the “security chiefs in Ramallah [were] spreading chaos in Gaza in order to cover up the govt.’s failure.” The Ramallah-based leadership denied both claims and a Fatah official blamed (3/14) Hamas for the recent bombings. In 4/2015, there were two explosions in Gaza city, one nr. the unity govt.’s cabinet headquarters (4/17) and the other nr. UNRWA offices (4/18). A senior Hamas official accused (5/12) Fatah of responsibility for the attacks and said that at

least 12 mbrs. of Fatah had been arrested on charges related to the bombings.

THE PA’S WEST BANK RULE

Alongside the tensions with Hamas in Gaza, the PA unity govt. faced its own challenges in the West Bank. Starting in 2/2015, the PASF led a major campaign against alleged arms and drug dealers in the Balata r.c. nr. Nablus. The PASF conducted several raids in the camp, resulting in gunfights with residents on multiple occasions and leading to a 2/12 meeting between Nablus gov. Akram Rajoub, Hamdallah, and reps. of the camp as well as various political factions in an attempt to resolve the issue and end the violence. After the meeting, 7 Palestinians from Balata turned themselves in to PA custody. PASF raids on the camp persisted, however, provoking armed opposition from the residents and leading to clashes on 3/7 and 3/20 in which 4 Palestinian youth were injured. There were also protests in the camp on 3/10, 4/5, and 4/13, as well as other incidents on 4/28 and 5/12 (see Chronology for details).

The duration and intensity of the PASF campaign led some observers to speculate about the real motivations behind it. On 2/16, PASF spokesperson Adnan Damiri said, “Hamas, Israel, and Mohammed Dahlan’s group have agreed to stir up chaos in the West Bank, and to get rid of Pres. Abbas,” in reference to the exiled former Fatah official who had taken steps to reassert his influence in the oPt recently (see *JPS* 175). On 3/1, Dahlan was tried in absentia on corruption charges, but on 4/19 the PA court ruled the charges “inadmissible” because Dahlan’s immunity had been lifted by presidential decree in 2012 and not, as required legally, by a vote in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC, which has not convened since 2007). In an attempt to quell rumors of Dahlan’s involvement, camp notable and

Fatah PLC member Jamal al-Tirawi said, “Allegations that the camp people are linked to Dahlan are mere excuses by some who are planning for a plot, which we have uncovered” (Al-Monitor, 2/27). The rumors persisted and by 5/6, the PASF had detained 30 camp residents none of whom were charged with offenses related to arms or drug dealing, according to Middle East Eye.

Although there were no official moves to schedule elections this quarter, 2 West Bank universities held student elections whose results were widely interpreted as an indicator of Palestinian opinion in general. For the 1st time since 2007, the Hamas-affiliated bloc won (4/22) an overwhelming majority of the votes, with 26 seats on Birzeit University’s student govt. body against the Fatah-affiliated bloc’s 19. The previous day, Hamas and Fatah affiliates had won 15 seats each in the elections at the Polytechnic University of Hebron, where Fatah had been dominant for years. In response to the Birzeit elections, senior PLO official Erakat said, “We lost big . . .” (*New York Times*, 5/11). Voters in the 2 student elections said their decisions were partly based on campus issues but also informed by Hamas’s resistance during Israel’s massive attack on the Gaza Strip in 7–8/2014 and Fatah’s failing diplomatic approach.

In an unusual and largely underreported development, Dep. PM Mustafa resigned on 3/31. Mustafa was also the PA’s economy minister and a longtime confidant of Abbas. The official announcement of his resignation provided no details or the reason for the move.

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data was excerpted from a poll conducted by al-Najah University’s Center for Opinion Polls and Survey Studies (OPSSC) on

26–28 March 2015. The results are based on a survey of 1,360 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The poll, the 50th in a series, was taken from the OPSSC’s website at www.najah.edu/opssc.

1. Do you support or reject the PLO Central Council’s decision on ceasing security coordination between the PA and Israel?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza
a. I support	59.0%	59.8%	57.6%
b. I reject	33.5%	34.8%	31.4%
c. No opinion/I do not know	7.5%	5.5%	11.0%

2. Do you think the PA will implement the PLO Central Council’s decision on ceasing security coordination between the PA and Israel?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza
a. Yes	26.6%	24.9%	29.6%
b. No	63.2%	66.0%	58.4%
c. No opinion/I do not know	10.1%	9.1%	12.1%

3. Do you support or reject boycotting Israeli goods and products?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza
a. I support	74.6%	83.1%	59.8%
b. I reject	22.6%	16.0%	33.8%
c. No opinion/I do not know	2.9%	0.8%	6.4%

4. After [Israeli PM] Netanyahu’s declaration refusing the 2-state solution and after the halting of the peace process, what are the steps you would prefer that the Palestinians should take?

	Yes	No	No opinion/ do not know
a. Submit a petition to the UN to recognize a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders	72.2%	22.1%	5.2%
b. Start a new armed intifada (uprising) and confrontations with the Israelis	38.8%	54.4%	6.9%
c. Start nonviolent and unarmed popular resistance	56.6%	35.8%	7.6%
d. Call for a 1-state solution—a state for both Israelis and Palestinians	22.7%	71.0%	6.3%
e. Dissolve the PA	32.2%	59.3%	8.5%
f. Recourse to the ICC	73.5%	18.4%	8.2%

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Continuing a trend that began at the end of OPE in 8/2014, Pres. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi's Egyptian govt. remained largely aloof from Israeli-Palestinian affairs this quarter, except for a series of fruitless negotiations with Palestinian officials on the ongoing closure of the Rafah border crossing. Also, as Egypt failed to hold further negotiations between the Palestinians and Israel on remaining outstanding issues from the 8/26/2014 cease-fire, the field was left open to other segments of the international community to propose new initiatives (see "Gaza Reconstruction" above). Egypt did, however, host the 26th summit of the Arab League (3/28–29), where Palestinian issues were among the subjects at hand (see "Arab League" below).

After Cairo's Court for Urgent Matters designated Hamas's armed wing, Izzeddin

al-Qassam Brigades, a terrorist organization last quarter, it followed up with another ruling on 2/28 conferring the same designation on the political group, ratcheting up the already existing tension between Hamas and Egypt. The ruling, handed down in response to private lawsuits filed by 2 Egyptian attorneys, was based on Hamas's alleged role in the Sinai Peninsula insurgency and the group's connections to the Muslim Brotherhood. A Hamas official described the move as one that "serve[d] the Israeli occupation" and called on Egypt to reconsider, and on the day after the verdict was issued thousands of Palestinians gathered in Gaza City and Khan Yunis to protest. On 3/11, the Egyptian govt. announced that it was appealing the ruling, and on 3/27, the Egyptian attorney who filed the original motion withdrew the case, prompting the court to reconsider.

At the height of the Egypt-Hamas tension, an Islamic Jihad (IJ) delegation traveled (3/1) to Cairo to conduct and mediate talks on opening the Rafah border crossing. The Egyptian authorities had kept the crossing largely closed since the deadly attacks on 10/24/2014 by the group then known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis and they indicated that it would be reopened only after the PA unity govt. took control of all Gaza crossings. IJ's delegates, led by Secy.-Gen. Ramadan Shallah, reportedly attempted to persuade the Egyptians that while Hamas was an Islamist group, it was quite distinct from the Muslim Brotherhood, which the al-Sisi govt. has been systematically harassing since the 7/2013 overthrow of former pres. Mohamed Morsi. When the IJ delegation departed on 3/7, sources close to the talks said the Egyptians had agreed in principle to a forthcoming but episodic opening of the Rafah crossing and to its full reestablishment once violence in the Sinai Peninsula subsided. Two days later, Egypt

opened the crossing for 48 hours (3/9–10) but this still left over 30,000 infirm Palestinians, students, and others on waiting lists for the next reopening (OCHA, 5/14). Thereafter, Rafah remained closed until the end of the quarter (see “Movement and Access” above).

Violence in Sinai persisted this quarter despite the opening of a 2d counterinsurgency front by Egyptian security forces, but compared with previous quarters, casualty counts remained relatively stable. On 2/15, an affiliate of the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) released a video depicting the killing of 21 Egyptian Coptic Christians in Libya to which the Egyptian military responded by launching a series of air strikes and, according to the Israeli press (3/5), cutting deployments in Sinai to beef up its presence along the w. border.

At least 75 security forces and 50 civilians were killed this quarter, as well as a reported 371 fighters affiliated with the Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS, formerly Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis) and other armed groups. On 3/12, SPIS sent out a tweet on its official Twitter account saying the group had the capacity to launch 150 rockets toward Israel, prompting a senior IDF officer to say, “[the threat is] of great concern to the army and influences our preparedness for any incident that might occur.” A few weeks later, the Egyptian govt. announced (4/25) that it was extending for an additional 3 mos. the state of emergency which had been in place in Sinai since the 10/24/2014 attack.

As the Sinai counterinsurgency continued, Egypt made further progress on erecting its buffer zone along the 13-km border with Gaza. On 3/12, Egyptian security officials announced that 1,020 homes in Rafah had been razed, with another 200 demolitions scheduled. At the end of the quarter, al-Sisi announced (5/12) that 80% of the tunnels under the border had been

destroyed and that the buffer zone had been extended to a width of 3 km in some places (it was originally conceived as a 1-km zone). Additionally, Egypt’s cabinet approved (4/1) a new res. further cracking down on tunnel activities, making tunneling itself or knowledge of it, crimes punishable by life imprisonment and home confiscation.

There was 1 incident of cross-border violence this quarter. On 5/11, an unknown assailant on the Egyptian side opened fire on a vehicle as it passed through the Kerem Shalom border crossing into Gaza. The Palestinian driver suffered serious injuries, and Hamas authorities called for the Egyptian govt. to conduct “an urgent inquiry.”

JORDAN

While Jordan had little involvement in major political events pertaining to Israeli-Palestinian issues this quarter, there were a number of significant developments on the economic front. Most importantly was the Israeli PM’s authorization of the agreement for Jordanian imports of natural gas from Israel’s offshore fields (a deal that had come in for considerable criticism from both sides last quarter—see *JPS* 175) to the tune of 1.87 m³ of natural gas over 15 years. Earlier in the quarter, Energy Minister Mohammad Hamed had announced (2/16) Jordan’s intention to import natural gas from the PA. In addition, the Jordanian govt. signed (2/26) a deal with Israel on the construction of a pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, the first stage of a Dead Sea revitalization project. This was the final stage in a decade of negotiations that had been sealed by a memorandum of understanding between Jordan, Israel, and the PA at the World Bank in 12/2013 (see *JPS* 171). At the end of the quarter, the head of the Palestinian Power and Natural Resources

Authority, Omar Kittanah, announced (5/13) the approval of a project connecting the electricity grids of the West Bank and Jordan. Estimated to cost \$100 m., the project was among the first steps in a regional, 3-year initiative to connect the power grids of Turkey, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Egypt, Jordan, and the oPt.

Of note: Ma'an News Agency reported on 3/14 that Israeli security officials had recommended the construction of a 30-km security barrier along the border with Jordan to keep "jihadist infiltrators" out of Israel.

SYRIA

Renewed Violence in Yarmouk

As the conflict in Syria persisted, the relative calm prevailing in Yarmouk r.c. was broken for the first time since the Syrian govt. had laid siege to the camp in 7/2013. Until the outbreak of the Syrian conflict in spring 2011, the country's largest and symbolically most important Palestinian r.c. was home to some 150,000 Palestinian refugees and Syrians, of whom less than 18,000 remained. (See Nidal Bitari's report in *JPS* 169 for more.) As part of its wider push for control of the country, ISIS, in coordination with Jabhat al-Nusra, entered Yarmouk on 4/1, sparking violent confrontations with local armed groups. During the initial battles, there was a dearth of on-the-ground reporting in the international media and stories that emerged came from unverified sources. According to some of these, the camp's defense was led by the Hamas-affiliated and rebel-aligned Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis and also by the PFLP-General Command (PFLP-GC) and Fatah al-Intifada, both aligned with the Syrian regime. Despite their efforts and several bombing raids by regime forces, ISIS reportedly controlled 90% of the camp by 4/4, with at least 26 civilians and fighters reported killed, according to the UK-based Syrian Observatory

for Human Rights (4/5). Other reports indicated that several hundred people had fled the camp, with some putting the figure as high as 2,000. On the same day, UNRWA announced that it had been unable to make aid deliveries since 4/1, adding that "never has the hour been more desperate for the camp's residents." In response to the alarming reports, Palestinians outside Yarmouk took action, with protests staged in Gaza (4/4) and both the PA pres.'s office and Hamas denouncing (4/4) the escalation of violence. The next day (4/5), the PLO announced a delegation would be going to Syria to talk with both govt. and rebel leaders on how best to resolve Yarmouk's situation.

The delegation, led by Exec. Comm. mbr. Ahmed Majdalani, held a series of meetings in Damascus over the following week, including one on 4/7 with Syrian dep. FM Faisal Meqdad. After the rival Palestinian factions agreed to establish a unified position and the Syrian govt. committed to supporting Palestinian resistance groups in the camp, Syria's national reconciliation minister, Ali Haidar, appeared to escalate the situation by saying, "Under [the] present circumstances, a military solution is necessary." On 4/9, 14 Palestinian factions signed on to support a joint military operation with the Syrian govt. to drive ISIS from the camp, and only Aknaf Bayt al-Maqdis demurred, preferring to coordinate separately with local Syrian rebel groups. Clarifying the agreement, Majdalani stated, "There [will] be permanent cooperation with the Syrian leadership and the formation of a joint operations room"—by the end of the day, he reported that the joint operation had secured 35% of the camp. Meanwhile, in response to criticism that it had abandoned its neutral position in the Syrian conflict, the PLO in Ramallah released a statement saying, "We refuse to be drawn into any armed

campaign . . . and we call for resorting to other means to spare the blood of our people.” A senior PLO official later commented as follows about Majdalani: “[H]e is not a Fatah person . . . he was [probably] talking as the head of his organization [the Palestinian Popular Struggle Front] rather than as a PLO envoy because we have a very clear policy when it comes to involvement in foreign conflicts” (*Newsweek*, 4/10). Other mbrs. of the PLO Exec. Comm. were “very upset” with Majdalani, according to the same source.

As the violence in the camp continued, it drew international attention and condemnation. Describing events there, UN secy.-gen. Ban Ki-moon said (4/9) that “what is unfolding in Yarmouk is unacceptable . . . We simply cannot stand by and watch a massacre unfold.” The next day, the UN’s special envoy for Syria, Ramzy Ezzeldin, flew to Damascus for consultations with the govt. UNRWA also mobilized as Commissioner-Gen. Pierre Krähenbühl arrived in Syria on 4/11 for a mission described as urgent “to provide assistance to those who have decided temporarily to leave the camp and find shelter elsewhere.” On 4/14, UNRWA set up a temporary facility in a village nr. Yarmouk to provide humanitarian assistance to people fleeing the camp.

The same day UNRWA set up its off-site services, Palestinian residents of Yarmouk began reporting that ISIS was retreating from its positions, and the following day an official confirmed the reports, saying that most ISIS fighters had withdrawn. (According to the *Guardian* on 4/10, there were as many as 600 of them inside the camp.) Yarmouk’s situation fluctuated for the remaining mo. of the quarter and while there were several days of high-level violence (e.g., 4/27) relief efforts were also reenergized. On 4/17, UNRWA

called for \$30 m. in emergency funds to support its “significantly expanded relief efforts (see “Donors” below) and less than a week later, PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Hanan Ashrawi met with Krähenbühl in Ramallah (4/23) to discuss continuing cooperation on refugee assistance programs. Toward the end of the quarter, another PLO delegation traveled to Syria (5/5) to discuss relief efforts for Yarmouk’s remaining population, reported to have dwindled to some 7,000 residents. Finally, on 5/9, Majdalani reported that relative calm had returned although living conditions were “deteriorating and miserable.”

Cross-Border Violence

Although there were no periods of sustained tension between Syria and Israel as in the last quarter, there were several minor incidents of cross-border violence this quarter. Unknown assailants fired shots (3/10) and a mortar shell (4/15) from Syria toward the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, causing light injuries to an IDF officer. Then, on 4/26, Israeli Air Force (IAF) jets attacked 4 unknown assailants attempting to cross from Syria into Israel, reportedly to plant explosives; 3 of the assailants were killed. In the hours after the attack, there were a number of air strikes against Hizballah and Syrian army positions nr. the border, purportedly by the IAF. Two days later, another 2 mortar shells fired from Syria landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. They caused no injuries and the IDF described them as “spillover” from the Syrian conflict. In a similar incident on 5/4, a number of mortar shells fired from Syria hit a UN Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) base nr. Qunaytra. The IDF again said they had not been deliberately aimed across the Israeli border.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

ARAB LEAGUE

This quarter, Arab heads of state and their FM's met in Egypt on 3/28–29 to address the deteriorating security situation in the region, including the conflicts in Yemen, Libya, and Syria, as well as the Islamist insurgency in Egypt. In addition to calling for the formation of a joint Arab military force to deal with security threats in the region, the 26th Arab League summit meeting focused much of its attention on Palestinian issues and agreed on a number of measures to support the Palestinians, including the formation of a delegation to lobby the U.S. Congress; forming a special comm. of experts to assist the Palestinians in their efforts at the UNSC to obtain a detailed timetable for the end of the Israeli occupation; funding a PA Ministry of Civil Affairs Gaza aid program (providing up to NIS 1,500 [around \$378] per mo. to Palestinian families whose homes were destroyed during OPE). Besides assisting with the UNSC initiative, the Arab League took no further actions relevant to the Palestinians this quarter (see “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” above).

IRAN

Improving Relations with Hamas

There were continued signs of rapprochement between Hamas and Iran this quarter as the 2 sides skirted their differences over Iran's support for the regime in the Syrian conflict. Although Hamas leader Khalid Mishal did not go on a much anticipated visit to Tehran, he did meet with the Speaker of Iran's parliament, Ali Larijani, in Qatar on 3/11. The two discussed the reconstruction of Gaza, among other issues. Amid reports of increasing Iranian military and economic aid to Hamas, the *Sunday Telegraph* quoted (4/4) unnamed intelligence sources as saying that Iran had sent

“tens of millions of dollars” to help the group's military wing rebuild tunnels and restock rockets.

A Major Breakthrough with the P5+1

When the quarter opened, the P5+1 and Iran had approximately 6 weeks left to reach a political accord over Iran's nuclear power program before their 3/31 deadline, already twice-deferred. As in previous instances (7/20/2014 and 11/24/2014), negotiators met with increasing frequency and expressed tentative optimism about reaching a deal.

The negotiators upheld the policy of keeping their statements to the media general, providing only broad characterizations and nothing in the way of details. After 2 days of negotiations in Geneva on 2/22–23, EU foreign policy chief Mogherini opined (2/24) that an agreement was “at hand,” and U.S. secy. of state Kerry said (2/24) negotiators had “made inroads” and that they expected to “know soon whether or not Iran [was] willing to put together an acceptable, verifiable plan.” For his part, Iranian FM Mohammad Javad Zarif stated (3/18) that while differences remained, “we are trying to reduce them . . . We must find solutions.” However, the general issues of contention were public knowledge in the 2 weeks leading up to the deadline: the pace of sanctions relief, with Iran calling for immediate suspension upon completion of a deal and the P5+1 pushing for a phased approach; frequency of inspections, with the P5+1 pushing for inspections at all nuclear sites, including those at military bases; the duration of the deal, with the P5+1 calling for at least 10 years and the Iranians pushing for a maximum of 7; and Iran's capacity to enrich uranium, which the P5+1 hoped to limit in terms of operational centrifuges and stockpiles.

Ahead of the 3/31 deadline, internal and external pressure on the negotiators peaked.

With the backing of Israeli PM Netanyahu, opponents of the negotiations in the U.S. Congress were building bipartisan support for measures to undermine the deal (see “Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Iran” below and congressionalmonitor.org for more). In addition to working with Congress, Israel also reached out to France, which appeared to be most hardline of the P5+1 vis-à-vis Iran. On 3/22, Israeli intelligence minister Yuval Steinitz flew to Paris for meetings with French officials, urging them not to make any concessions to Iran, and he pleaded for the same with UK officials on 3/24. Several Arab govts. had already expressed their concern to the U.S. (*Wall Street Journal*, 2/21) regarding the potential for Iran’s nuclear power program to turn into a weapons capacity that would then set off a regional arms race. Events in the region appeared to impact the negotiations when Russian negotiator Sergei Ryabkov said (3/29), “We hope the situation in Yemen will not bring about a change in the position of certain participants,” in reference to Iran’s support for the Houthi rebels and Western support for Saudi-led air strikes targeting them. At the beginning of the quarter, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the watchdog agency responsible for verifying Iran’s adherence to the agreement governing the negotiations, also reported (2/19) that although Iran was mostly upholding its commitments, it was still not fully cooperating. With the 3/2 statement by agency head Yukiya Amano indicating that Iran had still not provided explanations on outstanding queries regarding alleged explosives tests and other bomb research, it seemed unlikely that a political agreement would be reached by 3/31.

Contrary to the low expectations, the P5+1 and Iran announced a relatively detailed and comprehensive set of “key parameters” for a

final agreement in Lausanne, Switzerland, on 4/2, after working through the night on 3/31 and 4/1. “We have taken a decisive step,” Mogherini and Zarif said in a joint statement while Kerry called the framework a “critical milestone” (4/2). The parameters required that, in the deal to be finalized by 6/30, Iran would, inter alia: uninstall two-thirds of its existing 19,000 centrifuges, leaving the Natanz facility operating 5,060 centrifuges for 10 years; reduce its existing stockpile of 10,000 kg of low-enriched uranium to 300 kg of 3.67% enriched uranium for 15 years; convert the underground Fordow enrichment facility to a research center with 1,000 centrifuges in operation for research purposes, excluding enrichment-related subjects, for 15 years; and dismantle its heavy water reactor at Arak, thereby removing Iran’s ability to produce weapons-grade plutonium. These measures were collectively designed to ensure that Iran’s so-called “breakout time”—the time needed to create a nuclear weapon—would go from approximately 2–3 mos. to at least 1 year for the next 10 years. In counterpart, Iran would receive unspecified sanctions relief as soon as it verifiably completed the steps outlined above, although, the “architecture” of U.S. and EU sanctions would stay in place, allowing for their immediate reinstatement in the case of “significant nonperformance,” which the agreement leaves undefined. On the subject of verification, IAEA inspectors would be given expanded access to all of Iran’s nuclear sites, including Natanz and Fordow, but also its uranium mines and mills, for as many as 25 years. Finally, all UNSC res. on Iran’s nuclear program would be repealed and replaced with one sponsoring the final deal. (See Special Doc. B for the full framework agreement.)

As the P5+1 and Iran then embarked on an international push to gather support for the nascent deal, disagreements surfaced over

unresolved issues. For example, on 4/2, the State Dept. indicated that sanctions relief for Iran would come in phases and Zarif responded by describing the statement as “spin” and noting that the 4/2 “key parameters” did not specify how the sanctions relief would come about. Later, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said that the White House’s fact sheet explaining the 4/2 announcement was “wrong on most issues,” to which a State Dept. spokesperson responded the same day by saying, “We’re not going to respond to every public statement made by Iranian officials or negotiate in public.” Though there were other minor disagreements reported through the end of the quarter, the parties involved generally expressed optimism about the prospect of reaching a final agreement by 6/30.

Meanwhile, the 4/2 announcement galvanized the opposition, specifically in Israel and in the U.S. Congress. On 4/3, after convening his security cabinet to begin planning a response, Netanyahu said, “This is a bad deal not just for Israel, this is a bad deal for the region and for the world.” Three days later, the Israeli govt. published a list of 10 questions designed to expose the agreement’s alleged weaknesses, including wording such as, “Will Iran ever be forced to come clean about its past nuclear activity?” and “What will be the fate of Iran’s stockpile of enriched uranium?” An Israeli official further clarified the govt.’s strategy (4/7), saying it would support legislation in the U.S. Congress that would make it difficult or impossible to reach a final deal and that it would press the Obama admin. to make favorable modifications to the 4/2 “key parameters,” including Netanyahu’s 4/3 demand that Iran be required to recognize Israel’s right to exist. In Congress, the partisan divide around Netanyahu’s 3/3 speech was largely mended, especially since moderate

Republicans in key positions were willing to compromise in order to preserve bipartisan support for their favored initiatives. The coalition behind 1 bill in particular was an instance of bipartisan solidarity against the Obama admin.’s multifaceted opposition to congressional interference in the talks (see “Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Iran” below). When the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (see S. 615 and H.R. 1191 at congressionalmonitor.org for more) passed in the Senate (5/7) and the House (5/14) with veto-proof majorities, it set the stage for a final confrontation between the 2 opposing camps, as it required the Obama admin. to send the final agreement with Iran to Congress for review. Opponents, presumably including Israel and its partisans in the U.S., would then have the opportunity to gather the requisite veto-proof majorities behind a joint res. of disapproval. Were such a res. to pass into law, the U.S. would be forced to maintain all of its sanctions on Iran, effectively scuppering the final deal.

In Iran, the 4/2 announcement was received positively, though hesitantly. During a session of the Iranian parliament on 4/7, reps. widely backed the “key parameters.” MP Nozar Shafiei said (4/7), “We achieved major gains in the talks and made unimportant concessions.” Final approval, however, rested with Khamenei who indicated (4/9) he was neither for nor against the “key parameters” but also alluded to future cooperation, saying, “If the other side avoids its ambiguity [*sic*] in the talks, it’ll be an experience showing it’s possible to negotiate with them on other issues.”

Following the 4/2 announcement, there were several developments that reflected how a final deal could impact the regional and international balance of power. Pres. Obama repeatedly attempted to assuage the concerns of U.S.

allies—also Iran’s rivals—in the region and personally called the leaders of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, and Bahrain on 4/3. The admin. followed up with an invitation to a summit meeting of GCC leaders to a summit meeting on 5/13–14 to discuss the Iran deal, among other issues. However, Saudi Arabia’s King Salman canceled his plans to attend the summit on short notice (5/10), and only Qatar and Kuwait were represented by their heads of state.

Internationally, 2 major announcements presaged Iran’s growing acceptance by the international community. First, on 4/7, China’s Foreign Ministry announced the approval of Iran as a founding mbr. of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), an international financial institution China was promoting as a rival to the U.S.-driven World Bank and IMF. The U.S. was reportedly discouraging its allies from joining the AIIB, although several had already done so, including the UK on 3/28. Second, Russia’s Pres. Vladimir Putin lifted (4/13) the hold on a delivery of S-300 missile systems to Iran. Russian FM Sergey Lavrov said (4/13) that the hold, introduced in 2010 in response to U.S. pressure, was no longer necessary due to the progress made in Lausanne on 4/2. Notwithstanding some international opposition to the move—in Israel and the U.S. Congress specifically—Obama downplayed its importance, saying on 4/17 that he was “frankly surprised” that the hold had lasted so long “given that they were not prohibited by [UNSC] sanctions from selling these defensive weapons.”

SAUDI ARABIA

The Saudi Arabian govt. embarked on new efforts to mediate between Fatah and Hamas this quarter. Within the context of King Salman’s renewed pledge of support for the

2-state solution on 3/10, the Saudis partnered with former U.S. pres. Jimmy Carter on this new mediation effort in 4/2015. According to a Palestinian source, ahead of his trip to Israel and the oPt, Carter met with “prominent Saudi officials and urged their intervention to achieve reconciliation between Palestinian factions” (Middle East Eye, 4/27). The Saudis welcomed the initiative, the same source said, and began “preparations for mediation . . . to reach a ‘Mecca II’ agreement,” referencing the 2007 agreement that led to a short-lived Palestinian unity govt. As the quarter closed, senior Hamas official Haniyeh commended (5/1) Saudi Arabia’s role in the reconciliation process and called for increased Saudi involvement, although no further progress was made toward Palestinian national reconciliation this quarter (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” above).

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Iran

As a result of Speaker of the House John Boehner’s (R-OH) invitation last quarter for Israeli PM Netanyahu to address Congress on the Iran nuclear talks, tensions worsened between Netanyahu and the Obama admin. and the increasingly partisan divide around the issue grew further (see *JPS* 175). Following Netanyahu’s speech on 3/3, a bipartisan coalition regrouped behind a legislative initiative designed to give Congress influence over the talks with Iran.

On 2/18, 23 Democrats signed on to a letter calling for Boehner to postpone Netanyahu’s address until after the 3/17 Israeli election (see Special Doc. C). Then, Sens. Richard Durbin (D-IL) and Dianne Feinstein (D-CA)

invited (2/23) the Israeli premier to a private meeting with mbrs. of Congress but he declined, saying that it could “compound the misperception of partisanship” (2/24). Ultimately, 50 Democratic mbrs. of the House and 8 sens. who caucused with the Democrats skipped the speech (16 mbrs. of Congress had already pledged to do so by the end of last quarter).

Meanwhile, congressional Republicans and other opponents of the deal were trying to build momentum behind legislation that would allow Congress to influence the P5+1 talks with Iran. Specifically, their efforts centered on: the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act, introduced in the previous quarter to establish new oversight mechanisms and trigger the reinstatement of sanctions if the P5+1 and Iran failed to reach an agreement (see S. 269, congressionalmonitor.org); and the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (see “Iran,” above), a more moderate proposal introduced by Senate Foreign Relations Comm. chair Bob Corker (R-TN) on 2/27 and designed to give Congress an opportunity to approve or disapprove of any deal (see S. 615 on congressionalmonitor.org). Both measures were key action items at the annual American Israel Public Affairs Comm. (AIPAC) conference on 3/1–3.

Netanyahu’s speech itself had no significant impact on the talks currently under way in Switzerland (see “A Major Breakthrough with the P5+1” above), but it did give Republicans in the Senate an opportunity to take action on favored legislative measures. The speech covered familiar ground, with the Israeli PM pointing to Iran’s alleged duplicitous history and the threats posed by groups like ISIS, and the congressional responses highlighted the partisan divide (see Special Doc. D for the speech). House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) said (3/3) she was near tears

throughout the speech, saddened by what she described as an “insult to the intelligence of the U.S. as part of the P5+1 nations.” The predominantly Republican audience, for its part, interrupted Netanyahu 39 times with applause breaks. Hours later, Senate majority leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) introduced a new bill, also titled the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act and substantially identical to S. 615, setting the vote on the measure for 3/10 (see S. 625 on congressionalmonitor.org). In an effort to expedite action on the bill, he resorted to a procedural rule circumventing the Senate Foreign Relations Comm., where S. 615 was scheduled for review. The next day, however, 9 Senate Democrats and 1 Independent sent a letter to McConnell protesting his gambit. They remained “committed to working on this bill in a bipartisan manner,” the letter stated, adding that they would only vote for it after it had gone through a markup in the Senate Foreign Relation Comm. and after the P5+1 deadline for a political framework at the end of 3/2015. Because Obama had repeatedly promised to veto any bill that would undermine the negotiations and because McConnell needed Democratic support to preserve a veto-proof majority, congressional attention reverted to the original Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (S. 615). On 3/19, Corker and Robert Menendez (D-NJ), the Foreign Relations Comm.’s ranking mbr., scheduled a markup on the bill for 4/14.

After the speech but before the 3/31 deadline on the framework agreement, Senate Republicans struck out on their own, causing significant controversy. Led by the freshman Tom Cotton (R-AR), 47 Republican sens. signed (3/9) onto a letter addressed to the leaders of Iran, in which they portrayed the anticipated deal with Iran as an “executive agreement” that any future pres. could revoke or alter (see Special Doc. G). Senior Obama

admin. officials decried the move, with VP Joseph R. Biden saying (3/9) it “offends me as a matter of principle,” and Secy. of State Kerry indicating (3/11) that the legal premise of the letter was incorrect, while Iranian FM Zarif called (3/9) the letter a “propaganda ploy.” In response to the following tweet by Cotton (3/29), “Here’s offer: meet in DC, @JZarif, time of your choosing to debate Iran’s record of tyranny, treachery, & terror,” followed by personal accusations of cowardice, Zarif responded on the following day with, “Serious diplomacy, not macho personal smear, is what we need. . . .” Meanwhile, 360 mbrs. of the House of Reps.—a veto-proof majority—sent (3/19) Obama a letter saying that any sanctions relief offered in a final deal would have to be approved by Congress, signaling broad support for the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act in the lower chamber.

The struggle continued in the Senate, focusing further on the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (S. 615). On the day the P5+1 and Iran announced their “key parameters” (4/2), Sen. Mark Kirk said he agreed to delay a vote on his rival measure, the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act, until after the P5+1’s 6/30 deadline for a final agreement. (Kirk reversed his position on 4/9, but his bill had lost momentum by that point.) Also on 4/2, Senate support for the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act reached 64, 3 shy of a veto-proof majority. In the 2 weeks before the 4/14 Foreign Relations Comm. markup, Corker and Ben Cardin (D-MD) conducted a series of negotiations on the bill in an effort to build a substantial bipartisan majority. (Cardin took over as ranking mbr. when Menendez stepped aside to focus on his defense against recent federal corruption charges.) The Obama admin., for its part, was pushing Democrats to oppose the measure (see Chronology for details). Kerry and Under Secy.

Wendy Sherman met (4/8) with reps. of AIPAC, the American Jewish Comm. (AJC), the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), and other pro-Israel Jewish groups in order to build support. Obama also personally called Cardin and Corker on 4/8 to argue against the bill. Despite the admin.’s efforts, Cardin said (4/8) that he was trying to “bridge the difference” between being a “cheerleader” for the pres. and the “legitimate concerns” brought up by Corker. Also, several Senate Democrats signaled that they would be willing to support the bill if some key compromises were made.

By the morning of the markup hearing, the bill’s passage was all but assured and the only uncertainty was whether Corker would allow a vote on any of the amendments offered by his fellow Republicans. (Typifying Republican proposals, Sen. Marco Rubio [R-FL] offered an amendment that would require Iran to recognize Israel’s right to exist as a part of any final agreement.) In an apparent retreat from a veto override, Obama sent Kerry and Energy Secy. Ernest Moniz to meet with Cardin and Corker a final time on the morning of 4/14. They identified particularly objectionable provisions and the 2 sens. agreed to minor amendments that reduced the proposed congressional review period from 60 days to 30 and removed a terrorism-related certification requirement. The comm. approved the amended draft unanimously, after Corker diverted the various Republican proposals. Although Pres. Obama was not “particularly thrilled” with the amended draft, he signaled that he would not veto it. In order to preserve bipartisan backing, the Republican leadership did not allow votes on any of the more than 60 amendments proposed by their fellow Republicans. The Senate proceeded to pass (5/7) the bill 98–1, with only Cotton voting against. The House followed suit on 5/14, with a

400–20 vote. As the quarter ended, White House spokesperson Earnest announced (5/14) the pres.’s intention to sign it into law.

Under this bill, the Obama admin. would be required to deliver the final agreement between the P5+1 and Iran to Congress. If the legislature passed a joint res. of disapproval, all U.S. sanctions would stay in place, effectively canceling the deal. However, Pres. Obama could veto such a joint res., and his veto could only be overridden by a two-thirds majority in both the Senate and the House.

Opposing All Unilateral Efforts

The tension between the U.S. and Israel surrounding Netanyahu’s speech to Congress on 3/3 spilled over into other arenas, notably the stalled Israeli-Palestinian peace process. Despite a purported policy “reassessment” toward Israel, the Obama admin. took no new initiatives this quarter but continued to warn the Israelis, the Palestinians, and mbrs. of the international community against what it called unilateral measures.

In the lead-up to Israel’s elections, the Obama admin.’s attention was primarily centered on the P5+1 talks with Iran, including the Israeli PM’s efforts to undermine the negotiations, but there were also signs that it might be preparing to resume efforts on Israeli-Palestinian talks. Throughout this period, however, the U.S. maintained its opposition to Israel’s freeze on tax revenue transfers to the PA and to the Palestinians’ proposed responses. Warning against the tax revenue freeze, Kerry said (2/21) such a move might cause the PA to disband or dissolve, precipitating “another crisis.” He added that the U.S. was “working hard to prevent that from happening” by “reaching out to key stakeholders to express these concerns.” Later in the quarter, Kerry provided Pres. Abbas with an update on U.S. efforts, reaffirming

(3/13) that he would try to pressure Israel into releasing the tax revenues.

Meanwhile, as the Palestinians were advancing their own efforts to gain international recognition and justice (see “Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” above), Kerry urged Abbas on at least 2 occasions (2/27 and 3/1) to refrain from taking further steps toward unilateral measures until at least after the Israeli general election, and the U.S. maintained its overall stance of defending Israel within international institutions. At a meeting of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva on 3/2, Kerry urged the Council to end its “unbalanced focus” on Israel, adding that the U.S. would “oppose any effort by any group or participant in the UN system to arbitrarily and regularly delegitimize or isolate Israel.”

Nevertheless, there were signs that the Obama admin. might be readying for another push toward Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations. On 3/6, Robert Malley, former Camp David negotiator in 2000, replaced Philip Gordon as the new Middle East coordinator on the National Security Council. That same day, a senior White House official said the admin. was hoping to renew its efforts to restart talks after the 3/17 elections in Israel. Kerry, for his part, expressed the hope (3/14) that the two sides would return to peace negotiations regardless of the election results.

Following the Likud victory ushered in by Netanyahu’s final and controversial campaign statements on settlement construction in East Jerusalem, the 2-state solution, and the Palestinian minority in Israel, the Obama admin. appeared to change tack. The day after the election, several officials signaled the U.S.’s displeasure with the PM’s comments. White House spokesperson Earnest described them as “deeply concerning” and “divisive” while another admin. official told (3/18) the

New York Times that “the premise of our position internationally has been to support direct negotiations between the Israelis and the Palestinians . . . We are now in a reality where the Israeli govt. no longer supports direct negotiations. Therefore we clearly have to factor that into our decisions going forward.” Netanyahu attempted to roll back his comments and recommit himself to the 2-state solution on 3/19, but the Obama admin. held firm. That night (3/19), Obama called Netanyahu to congratulate him on his victory, but also to inform him that the U.S. would be “reassessing” its stance on the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. At the annual J Street conference in Washington, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough clarified (3/23) the U.S. position, saying, “After the election, the PM said that he had not changed his position, but for many in Israel and in the international community, such contradictory comments call into question his commitment to a 2-state solution.” Although Netanyahu continued his efforts to placate the U.S.—broadcasting (3/23) a televised apology to the Israeli public and putting (3/25) a hold on plans to build 1,500 new settler residences in East Jerusalem—the Obama admin. remained undeterred.

But the admin. provided scant details of its “reassessment” during the remainder of the quarter, leaving media analysts to speculate that it could include an end to unconditional defense of Israel in international institutions and possible support for a UNSC res. setting parameters for a fresh round of peace negotiations. The day after the election, a White House official said the pres. was not going to “waste his time” managing relations with Netanyahu’s new govt., and that he would be leaving that to Kerry. Other officials predicted that U.S. action in international forums would likely take place in 2015—if at all—in order to

provide a “buffer” to the 2016 presidential elections (see “Israel and the 2016 Elections” below). The following mo., U.S. amb. to the UN Samantha Power offered more details, saying (4/15) that the U.S. would continue to stand with Israel “when it matters,” but she did not rule out support for a UN initiative that would “advance Israel’s security” and “peace in the region.”

The Obama admin. came under immediate pressure from Congress to revise its new stance. On 3/22, Sen. John McCain (R-AZ) described the admin.’s response to Netanyahu’s comments as a “temper tantrum” and called for the U.S. to reconsider its funding of the UN if the UNSC passed a res. calling for a Palestinian state. Also, 12 Jewish and Democratic mbrs. met with Dep. National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes to ask that the admin. suspend its criticisms of Netanyahu (*Politico*, 3/29) because such messaging was creating a lopsided view of where responsibility lay for the breakdown of the last round of peace negotiations in spring 2014 (see *JPS* 171–72), clarifying that it was making it more difficult for them to support the admin.’s position on Iran (see “Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Iran” above).

Other than continuing to discourage unilateral measures and defend Israel in international forums, the Obama admin. took no further action with respect to its “reassessment.” When the UNHRC held a debate on Israeli violations of human rights in the oPt on 3/23, both Israel and the U.S. were absent. An initial report from Reuters framed the U.S. absence as a component of the Obama admin.’s new reassessment (i.e., no U.S. diplomats were present to defend Israel during the debate) but the U.S. amb. to the UNHRC, Keith Harper, refuted (3/23) the interpretation, saying that the U.S. had instead opted to join Israel’s longstanding boycott of the institution.

The U.S. welcomed Israel's announcement (3/27) that it would release tax revenues owed to the PA and it also encouraged the French to delay their efforts to introduce a UNSC res. setting parameters for a new round of peace negotiations at least until after the 6/30 deadline for the P5+1 to reach agreement with Iran. Two days later, a White House official said (3/29) that the admin. felt it had made its position clear and that it would wait until after Netanyahu formed a ruling coalition to enact any new policies.

Israel and the 2016 U.S. Elections

The most recent tension between the Obama admin. and Netanyahu coincided with the start of several major campaigns leading up to the 11/2016 U.S. presidential election. Prominent Democrats and Republicans announced their candidacies, and regardless of party affiliation, they uniformly positioned themselves as supporters of Israel and critics of Pres. Obama's recent positions on Iran and the Palestinians.

On the Republican side, a preponderance of critical financial backers and popular support gathered behind Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL), Wisconsin gov. Scott Walker, and former Florida gov. Jeb Bush. This made them the chief contenders for the Republican nomination although neither Bush nor Walker had officially announced their candidacy by the end of the quarter. In their initial positioning, each of them took significant steps to display their loyalty to Israel. After announcing his campaign on 4/13, Rubio was an outspoken opponent of the Obama admin.'s handling of the negotiations with Iran. In response to Netanyahu's 4/3 demand, Rubio proposed an amendment to the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act that would require Iran to recognize Israel's right to exist in any final deal with the P5+1. Furthermore, Rubio criticized (4/2) the "key parameters"

announced by the P5+1 and Iran, saying that "this attempt to spin diplomatic failure as a success is just the latest example of this administration's farcical approach." Walker also strove to align his foreign policy with the Israeli gov't. In an attempt to burnish his foreign policy credentials, the Wisconsin gov. hired several advisers in 4/2015 and traveled to Israel in mid-5/2015, where he consulted with Netanyahu and other Israeli officials. When he returned, his position on the 2-state solution echoed what Netanyahu had been saying since the 3/17 election. "I support . . . a 2-state solution, ultimately," he said, adding, "I thought this before going there and I see it even more, [the Palestinians] are not ready for that right now." Bush, for his part, formed 2 political action comms. in 1/2015, and throughout the quarter he appeared at numerous campaign events across the country. On 2/18, Bush announced that he was hiring former secy. of state James Baker III as well as 20 other foreign policy specialists. Shortly after being hired, Baker criticized (3/26) Netanyahu in a speech at the J Street conference, saying that "his actions have not matched his rhetoric." The speech provoked blowback from conservatives, leading Bush to defend his stance on Israel and to distance himself from Baker. "While [Bush] respects Secy. Baker, he disagrees with the sentiments he expressed last night and opposes J Street's advocacy," said Bush spokesperson Kristy Campbell on 3/27. She added that "Gov. Bush's support for Israel and PM Netanyahu is unwavering." Similar or identical views were common within the increasingly vast Republican field beyond these 3 main contenders. In the words of the *New York Times* (3/27), "Republicans have made support for the Jewish state an inviolable litmus test for anyone aspiring to national office."

The field of competitive candidates on the Democratic side was much smaller. Although marginal challenges were expected from Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-VT) and former Maryland gov. Martin O'Malley, the party overwhelmingly lined up behind former sen. and secy. of state Hillary Clinton, who officially declared her candidacy on 4/12. Clinton served in the Obama admin. during the pres.'s first term but took steps to distance herself from Obama on the issue of Israel this quarter. In a 3/2015 call with Malcolm Hoenlein, the executive vice chmn. of the Conference of Pres. of Major American Jewish Organizations, Clinton said "we need to all work together to return the special U.S.-Israel relationship to constructive footing," although she did echo Obama's call for a return to peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. On the issue of Iran, she supported the negotiations, but said (4/5) "the onus is on Iran and the bar must be set high," adding that "no deal" would be "better than a bad deal."

Legislative Crackdown on BDS

With the increasing momentum it has gained, the BDS movement has faced commensurately greater scrutiny and opposition from the U.S. Congress (see the Special Documents File in *JPS* 171 and the Congressional Monitor in this issue for more). This quarter, mbrs. of Congress initiated several new efforts to stymie BDS. In total, 6 bills were introduced with provisions requiring govt. contractors to certify that they do not participate in any boycott against Israel (see H.R. 1572 on congressionalmonitor.org) or establishing anti-BDS objectives for the U.S. to uphold in trade negotiations (see S. 619, S. 995, H.R. 1890, S. 1269, and H.R. 1907). The objectives included discouraging trade partners from actions that would undermine commercial activity between Israel and the U.S.; seeking to

eliminate state-sponsored boycotts of Israel, including the Arab boycott; and discouraging politically motivated BDS actions and other nontariff barriers on Israeli goods and services.

Unlike any of the anti-BDS legislation considered by Congress in recent years, several of these measures steadily advanced through the legislative process, largely because they were components of Pres. Obama's trade agenda. Both the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act (H.R. 1890 and S. 995), commonly known as the "fast track" bill, and the Trade Facilitation and Trade Enforcement Act (H.R. 1907 and S. 1269), known as the "customs" bill, carried oversight procedures and a series of trade objectives, including those designed to counter the BDS movement, summarized above. By the end of the quarter, the House's versions of the "fast track" and "customs" bills were discharged from comm. consideration on 5/1 and 5/14, respectively. Also, the Senate passed (5/14) its version of the "customs" bill and was preparing to pass the "fast track" bill although the full texts of each had been amended for irrelevant procedural reasons (See H.R. 644 and H.R. 1314 for the latest action on the "customs" and "fast track" bills, respectively).

The PA and PLO on Trial in the U.S.

Last quarter, the trial of the PLO and the PA on terrorism charges began in the New York Federal Court, with the families of U.S. citizens killed or injured in 6 attacks in Israel between 2002 and 2004 (see *JPS* 175) suing under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1990. The trial concluded this quarter when the jury found (2/23) the defendants liable for \$655.5 m. in damages. In a statement, the PA and PLO said (2/23) they were "deeply disappointed" with the verdict, and described the lawsuit as "baseless." Several Palestinian officials, including senior

Fatah rep. Nabil Shaath on 2/25, said that they planned to appeal. However, if the verdict held, it was unclear how the Palestinians would be able to pay the penalty, given the PA's concurrent economic woes (see "Israeli-Palestinian Conflict" above). The plaintiff's lawyers signaled that they were confident they would be able to seize the Palestinians' assets in the U.S. and abroad, if the Palestinians did not pay the damages. There were no further developments in the case this quarter.

Egypt

In the evolving U.S.-Egyptian relationship this quarter, the Obama admin. decided (3/31) to release 12 F-16 fighter jets, 20 Harpoon missiles, and up to 125 M1A1 Abrams tank kits to the gov't. of Egyptian pres. al-Sisi. Military aid to Egypt was frozen in the wake of the 7/2013 military overthrow of former pres. Morsi, and unfrozen after a 20-mo. review, according (3/31) to National Security Council spokesperson Bernadette Meehan. In a call to al-Sisi on 3/31, Pres. Obama said the U.S. would begin directing aid to Egypt for counterterrorism, border and maritime security, and for security in Sinai (see "Egypt" above). Chair of the House Armed Services Comm. Mac Thornberry (R-TX) elaborated (3/31) on the purpose of the transfer, saying, "We encourage the gov't. of Egypt to continue its democratic process. But Egypt is also a strong regional ally. Maintaining that relationship must be a priority for the U.S."

RUSSIA

Russia was not involved in any major developments in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere this quarter, though Pres. Putin did reaffirm his support for the Palestinians. He attended the Arab League summit on 3/28–29 and reiterated Russia's support for a Palestinian state with East

Jerusalem as its capital. Also, Abbas traveled to Moscow twice this quarter. He met with Putin on 4/13 to discuss bilateral relations and other current issues and on 5/9, he attended a military parade commemorating Russia's victory in World War II.

EUROPEAN UNION

Like the U.S., the EU this quarter was largely focused on talks with Iran over its nuclear power program. However, frustration with Israel and Netanyahu's settlement policies grew, especially in the wake of the 3/17 Israeli election, and there were several indications that the EU was preparing a renewed push to return Israel and the Palestinians to the negotiating table.

Last quarter, several EU mbrs.—particularly France—had worked with the Palestinians to introduce a UNSC res. setting parameters for a new round of peace negotiations and a timetable on the Israeli occupation. Seizing the apparent opportunity offered by the Obama admin.'s yet undefined "reassessment" of its policy on Israel, the EU and some of its mbrs. renewed their efforts in hopes that the U.S. would not veto a similar res. to the one brought before the UNSC in 12/2014. In the immediate aftermath of the Israeli election, foreign policy chief Mogherini said (3/18) the EU was "committed to working with the incoming Israeli gov't. on a mutually beneficial relationship as well as on the re-launch of the peace process" (see "The Israeli Election" above).

Although it did not publicize any details, a series of reports and related announcements made clear how the EU planned to go forward. On 3/15, it appointed a new chief envoy to the peace process, Fernando Gentilini, after the post had remained vacant since Andreas Reinicke's term ended in 6/2013. Also, after the French

announced that they were embarking on a new initiative to gather support for a UNSC res. on 3/27, the EU amb. to Israel, Lars Faaborg-Andersen, expressed (3/29) the bloc's support in principle for the UNSC track. As in the past, however, efforts originating in the EU's foreign policy apparatus were heavily focused on Israeli settlements. An EU official told *Yedioth Ahronoth* on 3/25 that "if Israel continues its policy beyond the Green Line, it will affect the relationship between European nations and Israel." Two days later, EU officials said the bloc was considering new restrictions on the purchase of products made in Israeli settlements as a way to push the Israelis into returning to negotiations. Faaborg-Andersen, however, signaled that policy changes were not imminent, adding (3/29) that the implementation of any strategy would be based on the policies of the new Netanyahu govt. At the end of the quarter, the European envoy to the Palestinian territories, John Gatt-Rutter, said (5/12) the EU was planning to launch a "kind of political dialogue between the Palestinians and Israel" in the coming mos. Such comments aligned with the U.S. stance to delay launching any new initiatives at least until Netanyahu had formed a ruling coalition.

Meanwhile, EU frustration with Israeli actions appeared to mount. On 4/16, in a letter leaked to *Haaretz*, 16 of the EU's 28 FMs called for uniform labeling of produce originating in Israeli settlements as "an important step in the full implementation of EU longstanding policy, in relation to the preservation of the 2-state solution." The call for settlement produce labeling echoed similar efforts by the EU Council in 5/2012, 12/2012, and 11/2014 as well as a similar letter written to Mogherini's predecessor in 4/2013, which prompted then-Israeli FM Lieberman to say (4/17), "It seems some European nations now want to put a

yellow patch on Israeli products." Several EU officials also expressed (4/24) concerns to their Israeli counterparts in response to proposals being debated in the Israeli coalition-building process about reducing the power of the traditionally centrist or left-leaning Supreme Court. Four days later, 59 mbrs. of the EU parliament called for the release of Palestinian MP Jarrar (see "Palestinian Prisoners" above). After the Jerusalem municipal govt. approved the construction of 900 new settler residences in East Jerusalem on 5/6, EU spokesperson Katherine Ray said (5/7) that it called "into question [Israel's] commitment to a negotiated agreement with the Palestinians."

There were 2 other noteworthy developments involving the EU in 3/2015. At the UNHRC meeting on 3/23, EU reps. called on Israel to allow UN Special Rapporteur Makarim Wibisono into Gaza to investigate claims of human rights violations during OPE. Separately, an EU spokesperson said (3/27) that while the General Court's 12/17/2014 removal of Hamas from the list of terrorist organizations on procedural grounds was being appealed (see *JPS* 175), the designation would continue to attach to the group.

UNITED NATIONS

Other than being the chosen arena for the Palestinians' pursuit of recognition and justice, the UN remained relatively uninvolved in Israeli and Palestinian issues this quarter. There were a few developments of note, however.

Outgoing UN special coordinator Serry initiated international efforts to negotiate a "reconstruction hudna" (see "Gaza Reconstruction" above) in Gaza and several UN bodies approved res. either critical of Israel or supportive of the Palestinians (see 2/26, 3/20, 3/27, and 4/27 in the Chronology for details). After replacing Richard Falk as special

rapporteur, Wibisono delivered his first report to the UNHRC on 3/3, calling on Israel to investigate the killing of over 1,500 Palestinian civilians during OPE. He based his report entirely on interviews conducted in Amman and Cairo because the Israeli authorities barred him from entering the Gaza Strip. Serry's replacement, Nickolay Mladenov, also came on board this quarter and called for increased Palestinian unity the day after his courtesy meeting with PA PM Hamdallah in Ramallah on 4/15.

The 28th session of the UNHRC concluded on 3/27 but the commission investigating possible war crimes committed during OPE did not deliver its scheduled report because of a delay incurred by the resignation the previous quarter of William Schabas, who had been entrusted with heading the investigation (see *JPS* 175). His replacement, U.S. jurist Mary McGowan Davis, asked (3/9) to delay the report's presentation from the originally scheduled date of 3/23 to sometime in 6/2015. A spokesperson for the commission explained (3/9) that "these are complex issues. Weighing the facts and considering the legal questions that arise is something that should not be rushed under any circumstances." UNHRC Pres. Joachim Rucker was supportive of the extension and no further delays were expected.

VATICAN

At the end of the quarter, the Catholic Church took noteworthy action in support of the Palestinians. On 5/13, the Vatican announced it had concluded a treaty recognizing the state of Palestine. In addition, the Vatican announced that Pope Francis would be canonizing two 19th-century nuns from historic Palestine and invited Abbas to attend the 5/17 ceremony.

DONORS

Overall, and in keeping with past trends, international donors left largely unfulfilled the \$5.4 b. aid pledges made at the 10/12/2014 Gaza reconstruction conference in Cairo (see "Gaza Reconstruction" above). However, direct donor support to the PA, to the residents of Gaza, and to UNRWA rose this quarter.

In the face of the mounting economic crisis brought on by Israel's freezing of tax revenues last quarter (on the order of over \$100 m. per mo.), the PA reached out to the international community. While it turned down the PA's request to reactivate their revolving fund agreement, the EU—particularly the Dutch—did unveil other types of support. On 3/11, Dutch and Palestinian reps. signed a new memorandum of understanding governing a €4 m. grant to the Palestinian justice sector; the EU then donated €10.8 m. to improve municipal management practices in the oPt (3/16) and to support Palestinians in Area C of the West Bank (3/24); and, lastly, Brussels and Amsterdam transferred (4/2) €31.6 m. of a previously announced budget support grant to the PA. The PA also received assistance from other, non-European quarters, including \$52.8 m. in budget support from Algeria (3/24), a \$100 m. loan from Qatar (4/8), as well as \$60 m. from Saudi Arabia (3/31) and \$30 m. from Japan (4/2) in partial disbursement of their Cairo conference pledges.

International donors also contributed to alleviating Gaza's massive humanitarian crisis, with assistance channeled either through the PA or via UNRWA. Kuwait and Turkey in particular moved forward with fulfilling their Cairo donor conference pledges. On 3/12, PA Dep. PM Mustafa signed an agreement with the Kuwaiti govt. allocating its \$200 m. grant as follows: \$75 m. to housing; \$60 m. for a water

distribution network; \$35 m. for other infrastructure; \$12.5 m. for industry, agriculture, and livestock; \$7 m. for civil society institutions; and the remainder for advisory services and implementation. Turkey's Foreign Ministry then announced (4/17) that it too would be fulfilling its \$200 m. pledge "soon," with the money going toward health and education services, as well as housing. In addition to the money pledged at the Cairo conference, Japan donated \$3 m. for the removal of unexploded Israeli ordnance (3/16), \$756,000 to humanitarian programs specifically targeting Palestinian women (4/1), and \$5 m. in food assistance (4/2).

During this quarter, UNRWA, the agency responsible for Palestinian refugees throughout the region, also faced desperate conditions. The day before ISIS overran part of the Yarmouk r.c. in Damascus, the U.S. had pledged (3/31) \$57.4 m. to the agency's activities in Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan. In response to the further devastation wreaked by the attacks, UNRWA launched a \$30 m. emergency appeal for Yarmouk to which the U.S. responded with a further \$6 m. contribution (4/24). The EU also pledged (4/18) another €2.5 m. to the agency's Syria-wide activities. By the end of the quarter, however, there were no further announcements of aid for UNRWA's activities in Syria specifically leaving the agency's \$415 m. appeal for activities related to the Syrian conflict in 2015 only 23.6% funded. The agency did obtain some support for its region-wide activities, however. Sweden increased its annual contributions from \$34 m. to \$36 m. on 3/9 and on 3/16 Finland committed to an annual \$4.8 m. in aid for 2015–18. In addition, Japan pledged \$32.2 m. (2/26), Kuwait \$2 m. (3/23), and the U.S. \$20 m. (5/14). Lastly, Germany announced on 5/12 that it would provide UNRWA with a \$41 m. grant for a shelter

assistance program in Gaza, bringing German contributions since OPE to \$93 m., and the EU announced (2/24) a \$5.7 m. grant for a job creation program in Gaza. Despite these pledges, UNRWA's general fund stood at a \$100 m. deficit at the end of the quarter (5/14).

There was 1 other major development of note this quarter as regards international donor activity in the region. In 3/2015, *Yedioth Ahronoth* obtained an internal EU report offering 40 policy suggestions for pressuring Israel into a new round of peace negotiations with the Palestinians (see Doc. A2). Among them was "support and further strengthen the viability of East Jerusalem hospitals," which fell under the broader goal of "preserving the viability of Jerusalem as the future capital of 2 states." Since 2012, EU member-states as well as Brussels have provided nearly \$44 m. to East Jerusalem's hospitals, and Italy pledged an additional \$1.09 m. on 4/28.

The Ad Hoc Liaison Comm., which had not convened since 9/2014, did not meet this quarter.

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement was launched in 2005 by over 170 Palestinian civil society groups. Its aim is to create an international campaign of boycotts, divestments, and sanctions against Israel "until it complies with international law and Palestinian rights."

BOYCOTT EFFORTS

This quarter, the BDS movement continued to slowly build momentum and South Africa remained a primary arena for boycott-related

activity. Last quarter, BDS activists conducted a series of high-profile protests against Woolworths, the country's 2d largest retailer. That campaign, which was organized in the wake of OPE in 8/2014, developed further this quarter. In late 3/2015, dozens of BDS activists broke into a Woolworths location in Pretoria after conducting a protest outside calling for the chain to stop selling Israeli figs, pretzels, and pomegranates (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 3/17). They reportedly threw rocks, broke equipment, and looted food products before 21 were arrested by city police, in an incident reminiscent of a 10/25/2014 protest that sparked controversy when activists left a pig's head in the kosher food section of the store.

After Grammy Award-winning U.S. musician Pharrell Williams signed a promotional partnership with Woolworths on 4/9, BDS activists launched a campaign to convince him to cancel his 2 scheduled concerts in South Africa in 9/2015. The broader Woolworths campaign culminated at the end of the quarter with a massive protest in Welkom in the Free State on 5/15. Arranged by the Congress of South African Students, as many as 13,000 people gathered to call for a boycott of Woolworths. While the giant retailer did not end its import of Israeli produce, South Africa's BDS movement achieved a noteworthy victory in 4/2015 through their outreach efforts to a variety of South African business owners. As a result, more than 20 terminated contracts worth an annual \$500,000 with G4S, the British company providing security services in Israeli prisons through 2017.

There were 3 noteworthy boycott-related announcements from the international business community. First, Suez Environment, a France-based utility company, pulled out of a contract to build a cable car system around the Old City in Jerusalem. On 3/25, two weeks after senior PLO

official Erakat had written (3/10) to the French govt. about the project's illegal appropriation of Palestinian land, a company spokesperson said the decision was made in an attempt to avoid "political interpretations." Second, the French corporation Veolia sold off most of its Israel-based business, after a 7-year campaign by BDS activists calling for an end to its involvement in Israeli projects in the West Bank (*Mondoweiss*, 4/8). The general coordinator of the Palestinian BDS National Comm., Mahmoud Nawajaa, described (4/8) the campaign's success as follows: "Grassroots BDS activism across the world made it very difficult for Veolia to win public contracts in some parts of Europe, the U.S. and the Middle East, leaving the company no choice but to significantly scale back its involvement in illegal Israeli projects." Third, the Brazilian govt. voided (4/8) a \$2.2 b. contract with the Israeli firm, International Security and Defense Systems (ISDS), to provide security at the 2016 Olympics. The contract was announced in 10/2014 and lauded in the *Times of Israel* as "an unprecedented achievement for Israel." Although the Brazilian govt. did not cite the BDS movement's grievances as justification for the cancellation, activists interpreted the move as a victory given the BDS campaign that preceded it; boycott efforts continued as ISDS remained a contracted "official supplier" to the Olympics. The cancellation followed a similar development last quarter, when a Brazilian state canceled a major contract with Israeli defense contractor Elbit Systems (see *JPS* 175).

In the cultural realm, 3 major international music acts scheduled to take place in Israel were canceled, with U.S. R & B artist Lauryn Hill the most prominent of the three. Hill canceled her 5/7 Tel Aviv show after unsuccessfully attempting to book a complementary show in Ramallah after efforts by a group of U.S.-based Palestinian activists encouraging her to respect

the cultural boycott. Additionally, over 11,000 people had signed a petition calling for Hill to observe the cultural boycott, according to the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation on 5/4 (see Palestine Unbound for more). Although the band did not provide a political justification, the U.S. progressive-rock group Primus then canceled (5/8) their 6/10 appearance at the Rock the Park festival in Herzliya. At the end of the quarter, Spanish vocalist Marinah Abad, formerly lead singer of the Catalan group Ojos de Brujo, also canceled (5/15) her scheduled 6/11 performance at a festival in Ashdod and a 2d date in Tel Aviv. BDS activists who knew of Abad's history of involvement in social causes had kicked off a #Marinah4BDS campaign, using social media to urge her to support the cultural boycott.

In the academic arena, students, faculty, and staff at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) overwhelmingly voted (73%) in favor of cutting the university's ties with Israeli academic institutions. The SOAS "Yes" Campaign, which supported the measure, released a statement the same day (2/27) in which it said, "by voting in favor of the academic boycott, the SOAS community has confirmed its unwavering commitment to freedom, quality, and justice for all Palestinians and has reasserted its call for an end to Israeli apartheid, oppressive occupation, and settler-colonialism."

BDS activity came under increasing pressure from the U.S. and Israeli govts. this quarter. Anti-BDS measures in the U.S. Congress gained momentum (see "Legislative Crackdown on BDS" above), and Israel's High Court upheld (4/15) the antiboycott law of 7/2011 over the protests of various left-wing Israeli NGOs. The law provides for sanctions on any individual or organization that calls for a boycott of Israel or the Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

DIVESTMENT

Divestment-related debates were held primarily on U.S. college campuses this quarter, and BDS activists won several significant victories. Student legislatures at the University of Toledo (3/3), Stanford University (2/17), Loyola University (3/26), and Earlham College (4/22) all passed res. calling for their schools to divest from Israeli companies that violate Palestinian rights, illustrating the growth of support for BDS especially after failed attempts at Stanford (last quarter) and Loyola (3/2014). In the UK, 68% of Sussex University students voted in favor of a series of BDS-related measures in a broad referendum that concluded on 3/27. Not all divestment campaigns were successful, however. A Princeton University divestment res., put to separate referenda of undergraduate (4/20–22) and graduate students (4/29), was defeated when 52.5% of the undergraduates opposed it, even though 58.8% of graduate students were in favor. There were 2 other high-profile divestment campaign defeats this quarter: one at McGill University whose Student Society rejected (3/15) divestment in a 276–212 yeayay vote, and the other at Northeastern University where the student govt. blocked (3/16) a similar res. despite a 900-strong student petition in favor.

SANCTIONS

There was only 1 noteworthy sanctions-related development this quarter. In the lead-up to the UK's 5/7 general election, 10,000 people signed on to a Palestine Solidarity Campaign (PSC) petition calling on the next UK govt. to push for sanctions against Israel. The petition coincided with a PSC letter calling for the same published in the *Guardian* on 3/24. In addition to PSC chair Hugh Lanning, the letter was signed by major UK cultural figures, including Brian Eno, Maxine Peake, Miriam Margoyles, and Ken Loach.