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UPDATE ON CONFLICT AND DIPLOMACY

16 NOVEMBER 2011–15 FEBRUARY 2012

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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.

Highlights of the Quarter: *Jordan hosts Israeli-Palestinian "exploratory talks," Abbas temporarily suspends the Palestinian statehood bid at the UN, Hamas and Fatah take limited steps to implement the May 2011 national reconciliation agreement, the 2d half of the Shalit prisoner release takes place, U.S. presidential candidates urge support for Israel while the Obama administration puts its diplomatic efforts on hold for elections, Israel considers early elections in fall 2012, international sanctions and support for a preemptive strike on Iran escalate, Hamas leaves Damascus as Syria descends into civil war, Egypt holds its 1st elections since the Arab Spring, Saleh leaves Yemen.*

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

This quarter, the Palestinians agreed to suspend their drive for UN recognition of statehood for a brief period to give the Quartet another chance to broker mutual understandings on the baselines for final status talks necessary for reviving serious negotiations. Though Jordan made the significant gesture of hosting the Israeli-Palestinian "exploratory talks," in the absence of bridging proposals or guarantees by the international community, no progress was made toward closing the gaps between the sides. The failure left Palestinian pres. Mahmud Abbas at quarter's close poised to revive both the statehood effort and reconciliation efforts with Hamas.

Meanwhile, conditions on the ground remained unchanged. Israel maintained its tight siege on the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip, severely restricting its economy and undermining quality of life. In the Fatah-controlled West Bank, Israeli restrictions and Israel Defense Forces (IDF) military operations remained relatively low, with the focus on containing

Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). As of 11/15, at least 7,886 Palestinians (including 51 Israeli Arabs and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,113 Israelis (including 354 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 226 settlers, and 533 civilians), and 66 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers) had been killed since the start of the al-Aqsa intifada on 9/28/2000.

The U.S.-Led Quartet Drive to Restart Talks

Last quarter, Palestine submitted its much anticipated application for full UN member-state status at the UN General Assembly (UNGA) session on 9/23/11. Hours later, in a last-ditch U.S.-led effort to preempt the application's consideration, the Quartet proposed a timetable for Israel and the Palestinians to return to negotiations. The idea was that if the sides were discussing even basic procedural elements, the UN could be persuaded to delay consideration of the application to give the sides time to reach a settlement themselves, without international interference (see Quarterly Update [QU] in *JPS* 162 for background).

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The vague Quartet timetable called on the sides to: (1) begin preliminary discussions within 1 month on resuming formal talks; (2) produce “comprehensive proposals” on borders and security (i.e., restart substantive negotiations) within 3 months thereafter; and (3) reach a final status agreement within 1 year. When the sides made no move to start preliminary talks by 10/23/11, the 1-month deadline, Quartet reps. traveled to the region to meet (10/26) with the negotiating teams separately and called on them to submit their borders and security proposals by 1/26/12. The Palestinians held fast to their longstanding demand that Israel cease all settlement expansion in the West Bank and East Jerusalem before and during negotiations, arguing that Israel’s ongoing settlement construction predetermined final borders. Israel rejected the Palestinian demand as an unacceptable “precondition” to resuming talks.

As of the opening of the quarter in mid-11/2011, the sides had yet to make any move to meet. Instead, in absence of serious peace diplomacy, Palestinian Authority (PA) pres. Abbas and Hamas leader Khalid Mishal agreed to meet in Cairo on 11/24 to discuss implementing their suspended 5/2011 national reconciliation agreement as an alternative way forward (see “National Reconciliation” below). Before the meeting could take place, the U.S. dispatched Dep. Secy. of State William Burns to the region to press Abbas (11/20) and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu (11/21) to return to the table and to warn Abbas against forming a unity government with Hamas. Anonymous U.S. officials said that Burns sought to eliminate Palestinian demands for a settlement freeze as an obstacle to reviving talks, but gave no details. Anonymous Israeli officials later claimed (*Ha’Aretz* 12/28) that Burns placed heavy pressure on Abbas to scale back his settlement freeze demand and that Abbas had offered to drop it altogether if Israel would release 100 Palestinian prisoners jailed since before the Oslo process began in addition to the 550 yet to be released under the Shalit prisoner exchange (see “Stage 2 of the Shalit Prisoner Swap Is Implemented” below). They said Israel had rejected the offer because: (1) it replaced

1 precondition with another, and (2) Abbas was unclear about whether the deal would result in preparatory talks only or direct negotiations between Abbas and Netanyahu. Palestinian and U.S. officials declined to confirm or comment.

Of note: On 11/21, Burns was in Israel, King Abdallah of Jordan made a sudden, unannounced visit to Ramallah (his 1st in 10 years) with the stated purpose of briefing Abbas on Jordan’s independent efforts to reconcile with Hamas and informing him personally that Jordan had invited Mishal (barred from Jordan since 1999) for an official visit to Amman (see “Jordan” below). A week later, on 11/28, King Abdallah hosted Israeli pres. Shimon Peres in Amman to discuss reviving Israeli-Palestinian talks. No details of either meeting were released and no breakthroughs were reported.

With the stalemate continuing, Quartet reps. returned (12/13–14) to the region to press the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams in Jerusalem and Ramallah once again. No success was reported, and Palestinian sources noted (*New York Times* [NYT] 12/14) “a growing disconnect between the Quartet talks and the situation on the ground,” but did not elaborate.

Subtle Changes Alter the Prospects for Talks

Though Quartet diplomacy went nowhere, by mid-12/2011 several developments had unfolded that were seen (particularly by the U.S.) as improving conditions for resuming peace talks. Most notably, ever since winning full membership in UNESCO on 11/1/11 (see QU in *JPS* 162), Abbas made no effort to press the statehood issue at the UN, either by urging quick consideration of Palestine’s application or by seeking membership in other UN bodies or international organizations. Second, Abbas’s 11/24 meeting with Mishal in Cairo, while deemed positive and productive by the leaders, resulted in little substantive movement toward implementing the 5/2011 national unity deal (see “National Reconciliation” below). In light of these 2 points, Israel gave in to heavy U.S. and international pressure to restore (11/30) the transfer of VAT taxes collected on the PA’s behalf, which it

had suspended on 11/1 to punish the Palestinians for winning UNESCO membership. Lastly, Israel completed the 2d stage of the Shalit prisoner release, freeing mostly West Bank Fatah cadres as a gesture to Abbas (see “Stage 2 of the Shalit Prisoner Swap Is Implemented” below).

At base, however, neither side seemed to have changed its fundamental positions: Abbas stressed (ca. 11/28) that he remained committed to the statehood initiative. Israel warned (11/30) that VAT transfers could be suspended again if Abbas moved toward reconciliation with Hamas or revived statehood efforts. A Netanyahu aide acknowledged (11/23) that threatening to bankrupt the Palestinian Authority (PA), thus jeopardizing the salaries of a third of the Palestinian population and the PA’s ability to provide basic services, was intended “to influence Palestinian decision making.” On 12/28, with 2 of the 3 months intended for preparatory talks having passed unproductively, an Israeli official expressed (*Ha’Aretz* 12/28) Israel’s concern that if talks did not resume by 1/26/12, Abbas would revive and aggressively pursue the quest for membership in all UN organizations, possibly leading to a new crisis.

Jordan Hosts Israeli-Palestinian “Exploratory Talks”

With the Quartet’s self-imposed 1/26 deadline looming, Jordan on 1/1/12 made the surprise announcement that Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to send their chief negotiators to Jordan to meet with Quartet officials on 1/3. Though the parties stressed that the meeting would not be a formal negotiating session, it would mark the 1st time the negotiators had met since 9/2010. The Quartet hoped that Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat and Netanyahu’s personal emissary Yitzhak Molcho would present their positions on security and borders and agree on the agenda for future direct talks, enabling the Quartet to claim that the parties were on track to reach a final status deal within a year. Erakat stated (1/1), however, that the Palestinian demand for a settlement freeze still stood and that the Palestinians had agreed to

attend out of respect for Jordan. Observers noted (NYT 1/4) that the planned meeting was highly unpopular with Palestinians in the territories, who saw it as caving in to Israeli and U.S. pressure. Acknowledging the criticism, Abbas vowed (1/3, reiterated 1/19) that in the absence of serious progress by 1/26, he would take “harsh measures against Israel,” including reviving the Palestinians’ UN statehood bid.

On 1/3, Israeli and Palestinian negotiators met with Quartet reps. (including special envoy Tony Blair) and then with Jordanian FM Nasser Judeh. Afterward, Judeh stated that the Palestinian team had turned over its position papers on security and borders as requested, and that the Israeli team had formally received them. The sides agreed to hold talks “on a continual basis” in Jordan and to observe a media blackout, with only Judeh issuing public statements after the sessions (this was ignored by all the parties almost immediately). Israel did not submit its own comprehensive position papers, but pledged “that through this continuing dialogue there will be an Israeli counterproposal or an Israeli response.” Israeli DM Ehud Barak later stated (1/5) that the Palestinian package was “unacceptable in its present state. . . . Long negotiations await us.”

Through the end of the quarter, 4 additional rounds of talks were held in Amman (1/9, 1/15, 1/21, and 1/25). The sides downplayed the meetings, calling them “exploratory sessions,” so as not to raise expectations of a negotiating breakthrough. The 2d and 3d sessions were described (e.g., NYT 1/10) as having been “kept at such a low profile . . . that it was almost as if [they] had not happened at all.” No details were released, but sources indicated (e.g., NYT 1/6, 1/10) that neither side offered anything new.

After the 3d session, King Abdallah traveled to Washington to brief (1/17) U.S. Pres. Barack Obama, telling reporters afterward that he was convinced that Israel and the Palestinians were each making sincere efforts to find a way to jumpstart serious peace talks, but cautioning that there were serious obstacles to overcome and time was running out. Separately,

State Dept. spokeswoman Victoria Nuland stated (1/17) that the U.S. knew that the 1/26/12 target date for restarting final status negotiations was “out there, [but] we do not want to see it be a rigid sort of straitjacket that chills the atmosphere.” In Israel, PM Netanyahu told (1/17) Israeli lawmakers in a closed meeting that “the Palestinians have no interest in entering peace talks.”

At the 4th session held on 1/21, Erakat clashed with Molcho when he brought a military expert without advanced notice to list the security concerns the Palestinians were to address in amending their initial security and borders proposals, which Israel had found insufficient. Erakat insisted that the sides were not at the stage of negotiating and that Israel was attempting to ambush the Palestinian side. The Palestinian team also noted publicly for the 1st time (on 1/21) that Israel had not turned over its comprehensive position papers on borders and security as requested by the Quartet and so was in no position to request amendments from the Palestinian side. Israeli officials replied that the 3-month period for them to produce detailed positions only began running with the 1st meeting of the negotiating teams on 1/3, and that they therefore had until 4/3 to follow through. The Quartet did not directly respond to this claim, and Quartet, EU, and U.S. officials continued to refer to a 1/26 target date.

At the 5th round of talks on 1/25, Molcho verbally outlined Israel's “guiding principles” on borders and security but offered nothing new and gave nothing in writing. According to anonymous Israeli and Palestinian officials (see Reuters 1/27), these principles included: (1) “preserving the social and economic fabric of all communities, Jewish or Palestinian”; (2) maintaining Israeli control over a united Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and “almost all settlements”; and (3) leaving most Israelis under Israeli sovereignty and most Palestinians under Palestinian sovereignty. Immediately following the session, Abbas met (1/25) with King Abdallah in Amman and issued a statement saying the exploratory talks with Israel had ended without progress. Given the lack of substantive change by the Quartet's 1/26

deadline, Abbas said he would weigh his next steps in consultation with the Arab League at a meeting between Palestinian officials and Arab League representatives in Cairo on 2/4 (later moved to 2/12). Abbas stated: “If we demarcate the borders, we can return to negotiations, but the Israelis do not want demarcation of borders.” Israel, reasserting its own interpretation of the Quartet timetable, stated that it technically had until 4/3 to produce detailed position papers and that if the Palestinians refused to continue talks through that date, they would be the ones walking away from the table.

EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton, already in the region, held several meetings with Abbas and Netanyahu separately on 1/25 and 1/26 to urge them to keep the talks going, especially pressing Israel to make some kind of confidence-building gesture. (The Palestinians, as noted above, had requested a further prisoner release; Ashton recommended transferring more authority to the PA.) UN Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-Moon announced (1/25) that he would make his own visit to the region the following week (1/31–2/2) to encourage the sides to continue (see “United Nations” below). Late on 1/25, after Ashton's 1st set of meetings with Abbas and Netanyahu, the Israeli team gave the Palestinians a document (not publicly released) putting their guiding principles in writing. Israeli officials stressed (1/26) that they did not include maps. After Ashton's last meetings on 1/26, Judeh stated that no further Israeli-Palestinian meetings were scheduled, as the sides needed time to “assess where we are and how to move to the next stage.” PLO Executive Committee member Hanan Ashrawi confirmed (1/26): “There has been no progress whatsoever. . . . There are no talks anymore. We don't want to be complicit in this game of deception.”

On 2/11, before leaving for Cairo to brief the Arab League on the status of talks, Abbas met in Jordan with Quartet special envoy Blair, who urged him to at least continue low-level talks on borders. He said he had urged Israel to make goodwill gestures to revive talks, including easing security restrictions in the West Bank and releasing prisoners.

Abbas replied that he would reserve a final decision on resuming talks until after the Arab League session.

At the Arab League on 2/12, Abbas called on member states to support his decision not to renew direct negotiations with Israel without firm understandings on the baselines of talks (including 1967 lines as the basis of final borders) and a settlement freeze, and they agreed. He said he would put his demands in a letter to Netanyahu and if the response was not favorable, he would resume statehood efforts at the UN. There was no further word before the end of the quarter.

Of note: While there was no movement on the Palestinian application for statehood at the UN this quarter, Iceland (11/29) and Thailand (1/19) officially recognized Palestine as a state within 1967 borders. As of 2/15, at least 131 nations had passed legislation recognizing Palestinian statehood.

Stage 2 of the Shalit Prisoner Swap Is Implemented

Last quarter, Israel and Hamas had agreed to a 2-stage prisoner release that would free IDF Cpl. Gilad Shalit (held in Gaza since 6/2006) in exchange for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. The 1st stage was completed on 10/18/11, with 477 Palestinians released (260 to Gaza, 175 to the West Bank, and 52 sent abroad because they were deemed too dangerous to be repatriated to the occupied territories) and Shalit returned to Israel (see QU in *JPS* 162). The 2d stage freeing the other 550 Palestinian prisoners was to be completed within 2 months.

The 2d stage of the release was implemented on 12/18. Under the terms of the agreement, Israel picked which prisoners to free and chose mostly Fatah-affiliated West Bankers as a gesture to Abbas; none were members of Hamas or Islamic Jihad or were involved in killing or wounding Israelis. Only 41 were released to Gaza, 2 to East Jerusalem, and 2 to Jordan. Palestinians complained (NYT 12/19) that "many of those being released were due to get out within months anyway. . . . If Israel had wanted to make a real good-will gesture, the list would have been totally different."

Soon after, Israeli DM Ehud Barak reported (1/5) that the Netanyahu admin. was in the process of rewriting its guidelines on prisoner exchanges in light of the Shalit release, with elements within the government wanting to make it impossible via new regulations to have such a lopsided exchange (e.g., 1 Israeli for 1,000 Palestinians) in the future. New guidelines were not finalized by the end of the quarter.

Soon after the releases, the IDF began harassing a number of the freed Palestinians in the West Bank, bringing them in for questioning and warning them not to leave the immediate confines of their hometowns (e.g., 3 on 1/9, 2/10), conducting late-night searches of their homes (e.g., 11/30, 1/15, 2/10, 2 on 2/13, 2/15), and even rearresting a few on suspicious of reviving their old militant ties (e.g., 11/17, 11/30, 1/15, 1/30, 2 on 2/13, 2/15). In addition, Jewish settlers in Hebron attacked (11/20) the home of 1 freed Palestinian, hung posters urging that he be killed, and vandalized a grocery store owned by a relative. (The Palestinian, Hani Jaber, had been sentenced to life in prison for fatally stabbing a settler in 1993 and had been released in the 1st stage of the swap that included prisoners who had harmed Israelis.) On 1/2, the Knesset passed a law requiring that any Palestinian prisoner who has been released early and commits another crime (misdemeanor or felony) be rearrested and made to serve the remainder of his or her original term.

Of note: On 12/20, Abbas met in Turkey with 11 Palestinian prisoners released in the 1st stage of the swap but sent abroad as too dangerous to remain in the occupied territories. Israel denounced (12/20) the meeting as "provocative."

Intifada Data and Trends

During the quarter, at least 17 Palestinians and no Israelis were killed as a result of Israeli-Palestinian violence (down significantly from 58 Palestinians and 2 Israelis last quarter), bringing the toll at 2/15 to at least 7,903 Palestinians (including 51 Israeli Arabs and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,113 Israelis (including 354 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 226 settlers, and

533 civilians), and 66 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 when denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents).

The Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics reported (11/17) that in 2010, 16% of West Bank households and 31.9% of Gaza households lived below the poverty line, and that 19% of West Bank children and 38.4% of Gaza children lived below the poverty line.

Overview of the Violence

Overall, Israel-Palestinian violence in the occupied territories was moderate in Gaza and low in the West Bank this quarter (see Chronology for details).

Of the 17 Palestinians who died this quarter as a result of Israeli actions, 16 were in **Gaza**: 3 were targeted for assassination, 4 were militants laying explosive devices along the border or firing rockets, 3 were civilians killed in IDF air strikes carried out in retaliation for Palestinian rocket fire, 3 were killed in smuggling tunnel accidents on the Rafah border, 1 was a guard at a municipal sewage treatment facility mistaken for a militant by IDF soldiers, 1 was a suicidal Palestinian who deliberately approached the border fence knowing he would be shot, and 1 died of injuries received in an IDF air strike in 2001. Those assassinated were senior **al-Aqsa Martyr's Brigade (AMB)** commander Issam al-Batash, his nephew Subhi al-Batash (a member of **Hamas's** Izzed-din al-Qassam Brigades), and **Salafist** Abdallah al-Talbani. The Batashes were killed in an IDF air strike on Gaza City on 12/8; Israel claimed both were planning to infiltrate Israel and that Issam had been involved in plotting an AMB-Islamic Jihad suicide bombing in Elat on 1/29/07. Talbani was killed in an air strike on Jabaliya on 12/27; no reason was given. A total of 8 bystanders including 7 civilians (one a child) were returned in the attacks.

Israelis carried out at least 51 air strikes (warplanes and drones) and 15 artillery strikes; Palestinians fired at

least 45 rockets (mostly homemade Qasams but including at least 2 manufactured Grads) and 6 mortars (2 of which Israel alleged contained white phosphorous scavenged from IDF shells fired during Operation Cast Lead in 2008–9). These numbers were significantly lower than last quarter, when Israel made at least 99 air strikes and 23 artillery strikes, and Palestinians fired 209 rockets (22 of them Grads) and 30 mortars. This quarter, Israeli air strikes killed 8 Palestinians (5 militants, 3 civilians) and wounded 51 (including at least 13 militants and 27 civilians). IDF artillery fire killed 2 militants and wounded 4. Palestinian rocket and mortar fire harmed no Israelis and caused damage in only 1 instance.

Throughout the quarter, IDF also regularly fired warning shots at Palestinian civilians (typically farmers working their land, shepherds herding flocks, civilians scavenging for construction materials in former settlement areas or the demolished Erez industrial zone, and nonviolent protesters demonstrating against Israel's imposition of no-go zones) who accidentally strayed into the no-go zones on the Gaza side of the border, killing 2 (the suicide and the security guard mentioned above) and wounding 5 (including 2 children; see the Chronology on the IPS website for details).

Incidents of Israeli naval vessels intercepting or firing on Palestinian fishing boats that sailed too far off coast were up significantly, from 4 reported cases last quarter to 23 this quarter (see Chronology for details); at least 1 fisherman was wounded and 2 boats were confiscated in these incidents. The IDF also made at least 10 brief incursions into Gaza, mostly to bulldoze land and to clear lines of sight along the border fence. In a rare instance on 1/29, the IDF briefly entered s. Gaza to arrest 2 Palestinians (including 1 member of the defunct Gaza branch of the Fatah-affiliated PA security forces) at the abandoned Dahaniyya airport site.

In the **West Bank**, settler violence remained high, while IDF operations returned to a weekly average of 91 (the average for 2011) after a nearly unprecedented low of 71 last quarter. Only 1 Palestinian was killed this quarter: a

Palestinian activist taking part (12/9) in a nonviolent demonstration against the separation wall in Nabi Salih, who was struck in the head at close range by an IDF tear-gas canister and died the following day.

Israeli arrest raids this quarter targeted mostly Hamas. Among those detained were 6 Hamas-affiliated Palestinian Council (PC) members. About 24 Hamas-affiliated PC members were already in Israeli detention, having been rounded up as part of an IDF effort launched soon after peace talks broke down in 2010 to rearrest many of the senior West Bank Hamas figures who were first detained in the months after Hamas's 1/2006 parliamentary election victory (see QUs in *JPS* 159 and 160 for background). The 6 detained this quarter were: Ayman Daraghmeh (12/13), 'Abd al-'Aziz Dweik (1/19), Khalid Thwaib (1/19), 'Abd al-Jabir Fuqaha (1/23), Khalid Abu Arafa (1/23), and Muhammad Toutah (1/23). The IDF also searched (2/15) the homes of another 3 Hamas-affiliated PC members (Ibrahim Dabhour, Khalid Abu Hassan, Khalid Yahya) in Jenin, confiscating computers, documents, cell phones, and videotapes but making no arrests; raided the Reform and Change Party's offices in Tulkarm (12/5) and Jenin (2/15), confiscating computers and documents; and sealed (1/29) a charity and kindergarten in East Jerusalem with alleged ties to Hamas.

While most of the 6 PC members detained this quarter were placed under administrative detention without charge, Abu 'Arafa and Toutah were expelled to the West Bank for "being in Jerusalem illegally." The two were arrested at the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) offices in East Jerusalem's Shaykh Jarrah neighborhood, where they had lived and been holding a sit-in since 6/2010 to protest Israel's 9/2009 decision to revoke their Jerusalem residency status on the grounds that they were affiliated with a "terrorist organization" (Hamas). Israel had warned them in 5/2010 to leave the city or be deported to the West Bank (see QU in *JPS* 157). Another Hamas-affiliated PC member, Ahmad 'Atwan, whose Jerusalem residency status had been revoked at the same time as Abu 'Arafa's

and Toutah's and who was detained last quarter for "being illegally present in the city" (see QU in *JPS* 162), was released on 12/6 but deposited by the IDF at the Qalandia crossing and ordered to Ramallah. Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat denounced (12/7) his "forcible transfer" to the West Bank as part and parcel of Israel's policy "to ethnically cleanse occupied East Jerusalem from its indigenous Palestinian population." Hamas-affiliated PC member Ismail Ashkar, commenting on the detentions of his colleagues, noted (1/23), "Every time we move toward reconciliation and reactivating the Palestinian parliament, we see Israel targeting our lawmakers."

The IDF also carried out several (e.g., 11/22, 11/30, 12/4, 12/6, 12/8) late-night arrest raids targeting the PFLP in Jenin, Nablus and neighboring Balata refugee camp (r.c.), and Ramallah, arresting as many as 54 PFLP members, including PFLP Central Comm. member Nasser 'Aziz. No explanation was given.

The IDF also detained (12/17) West Bank Islamic Jihad spokesman Khader Adnan during a search of his home near Jenin, placing him under administrative detention. Adnan immediately declared a hunger strike to protest his detention without charge and Israel's discriminatory criminal justice system. On 2/9 Adnan's hunger strike entered its 55th day, making it the longest by a Palestinian prisoner ever recorded. By then, the 33-yr.-old Adnan had lost 60 lbs. and weighted only 140 lbs. Israeli authorities had hospitalized him, and his condition was rapidly deteriorating. He was still in detention at the close of the quarter. The IDF also arrested senior Islamic Jihad member Usama Shalabi in Jenin on 1/2.

Of note: The IDF continued to aggressively enter PA-controlled Jericho (e.g., twice on 11/18, 11/20, 11/28, 11/30, 1/1, 1/2, 1/15, 1/6, 1/13, 1/20, twice on 1/22, 1/27, 1/28, 2/10, 2/12) as it has for the past year. Entering Jericho, the 1st West Bank area turned over to full PA control and a PA security headquarters, is considered particularly provocative.

Movement and Access Issues

This quarter, Palestinian freedom of movement in the West Bank remained

relatively good (i.e., it was possible to go almost anywhere, though not necessarily by the most direct route). In general, travel between major population centers continued to be easier than travel to outlying villages. From 12/13 through the end of the quarter, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) reported 585 roadblocks (mostly earthen mounds and unmanned barriers) across the West Bank, up slightly from 523 last quarter; only a few dozen of these were permanent manned checkpoints. (The IDF's checkpoint infrastructure remained intact, however.)

In Gaza, Israel maintained near total control of borders except at the Rafah crossing, where Egypt limited access to prevent a rift with Israel. Egypt opened the crossing 5–6 days per week and on average per day granted entry to 648 Palestinians, turned back 28 Palestinians that Hamas authorities had granted permission to leave, and allowed 601 Palestinian to return to Gaza via Rafah (comparable to last quarter when a daily average of 625 Palestinians were allowed out, 24 were denied entry, and 564 were allowed in). For a brief period when traffic out of Gaza seemed lower than usual (12/18/11–ca.1/24), Gaza's Interior Min. lifted restrictions requiring Palestinians to register with the ministry before exiting Gaza, but reimposed the requirement when numbers exiting climbed. Israel continued to restrict use of the Erez crossing on a case-by-case basis to urgent medical cases, VIPs, and employees of international organizations. The IDF also continued to enforce the 300-m no-go zone along the full length of the Gaza border and limited Palestinian fishing off Gaza to 500–1,000 m off Bayt Lahiya and Rafah and 3 naut. mi. elsewhere—restrictions that placed 17% of Gaza's total landmass, including vast agricultural areas, off limits to Palestinians.

Movement of goods remained restricted to the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing in s. Gaza. (Indeed, by 1/3, the IDF had demolished the remaining structures on the Palestinian side of the Qarni crossing, which Israel closed on 3/2/2011 when the Kerem Shalom crossing became fully operational.) On average, 1,047 truckloads

of goods per week entered Gaza (up from 854 last quarter, but still only 37% of the weekly average before Hamas's takeover of Gaza in 6/2007), with food items constituting 41% of imports on average (down from 51% last quarter, but still high compared to 20% before the siege, indicating that imports were still providing subsistence rather than economic stimulation). While Israel on 11/16 allowed the first shipment of construction material for private building projects in Gaza (for reconstructing 10 factories), the range of imports remained limited largely to construction material for UN and donor-funded projects and Palestinian public works projects necessary to maintain public health standards, as well as wheat and fodder. Commercial goods were mainly foodstuffs, clothing and shoes, washing machines, refrigerators, electricity generators, water tanks, pumps, and machines for factories, and limited livestock. From 11/24, Israeli allowed limited exports of strawberries, cut flowers, tomatoes, and bell peppers to the Netherlands under a humanitarian agreement with the Dutch government (approved in 2009) to aid Gaza farmers; these were the 1st exports allowed since the strawberry and carnation season ended 6 months earlier (see QU in JPS 161). Israel also allowed the 1st shipment of furniture (18 pieces on 1/22) to leave Gaza since the siege was imposed in 2007.

Smuggling goods through the Rafah tunnels, especially construction materials for private projects, remained high overall except for fuel. In late 1/2012, Egyptian police began imposing restrictions on fuel trucks heading to Rafah; by 2/7, 70% of gas stations in Gaza had closed for lack of supplies. The fuel shortages, combined with increased fuel demands during winter and an unexplained decline in electricity from Israel as of 2/7 through 2/15, caused rolling blackouts in Gaza to increase dramatically, from 4–6 hours/day at the start of the quarter to 6–8 hours/day when usage rose because of the temperatures dropped, and 12–18 hours/day from 2/1 through the end of the quarter.

Also of note: As of 12/6, health officials in Gaza reported that Gaza's Central Drug Store was lacking 120

essential medicines and 140 essential medical supplies, including medicine for anesthesia, cancer, hemophilia, and kidney dialysis (450 patients). Officials blamed the shortage on poor coordination between the Min. of Health branches in Gaza and the West Bank (where no shortages were reported). As a result of the alert, Gaza's Central Drug Store received 2 urgent shipments (12/18, 1/5) of medicine and supplies from Ramallah, enough to replenish its stores until mid-2/2012.

Nonviolent Protests in the Territories

This quarter, Palestinians in the West Bank continued their regular weekly protests against the separation wall, land confiscations, and demolitions, often with the participation of Israeli and international activists (see Chronology for details). Most were held in Bil'in and Ni'lin near Ramallah, Nabi Salih in the north central West Bank, Kafr Qaddum village near Qalqilya, and outside Karnei Tsur settlement near Hebron. On 2/10, Palestinians in Kafr al-Dik village near Salfit held their first nonviolent protest against recent IDF actions in the nearby Dayr Sam'an archeological area that were interpreted as preliminary steps to annex the land. IDF troops routinely fired rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, and percussion grenades to disperse protesters. Occasionally they fired live ammunition, often causing minor-to-moderate injuries, though 1 Palestinian demonstrator was killed by a tear-gas canister fired at close range on 12/10. Most Palestinian injuries from IDF action in the West Bank this quarter occurred at these weekly demonstrations (see OCHA weekly reports).

At the start of the quarter, many of these weekly demonstrations also called for national reconciliation, Palestinian rights, and the release of Palestinian prisoners. These calls had begun in mid-9/2012 in connection with the UNGA statehood bid and the 10/2011 Israel-Hamas prisoner swap (see QU in *JPS* 162) but tapered off by early 12/2011. Calls for solidarity with Palestinian prisoners resumed in early 2/2012 when the health of hunger-striking Palestinian prisoner Khader Adnan began to deteriorate (see "Overview of the Violence" above). In addition, a

sit-in protest tent was erected (by 2/4) in Ramallah and at least 3 nonviolent protest marches to Ofer prison (2/11, 2/13, 2/15) were held in solidarity with Adnan.

In Gaza, Palestinians and international activists held at least 4 nonviolent marches (12/13, 1/17, 1/24, 1/31) toward the Israeli border to protest Israel's imposition of no-go zones along the length of the border inside the strip. The IDF routinely fired warning shots to disperse the protesters, causing no reported injuries.

Settlers, Settlements, and Judaization of Jerusalem

Settlement Expansion and Consolidation

Israeli settlement expansion continued apace this quarter with the government approving several new settlement projects, mostly in and around East Jerusalem. For example, Israel's Housing Min. issued (12/18) tenders for construction of 1,028 Jewish settlement units in East Jerusalem (500 in Har Homa, 348 in Beitar Illit, and 180 in Givat Ze'ev). Israel also announced (1/2) plans to implement a 9/2011 decision to confiscate 13 dunams (d.; 4 d. = 1 acre) of East Jerusalem property in Wadi al-Juz located between Hebrew University and the Palestine Archaeological Museum; the move would displace 170 Palestinian stores employing some 700 workers.

Israel approved (2/14) plans for the right-wing settler group Elad to build a new archeological tourism center in Silwan, near the Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. The complex would include offices, museum and conference space, an underground car park, and 2 underground "archeological tunnels" running north under the Mughrabi gate and south under the area housing the Umayyad Caliphate palaces (which Israel calls the Temple of Solomon). In a setback for Elad, however, Israel's Jerusalem Magistrate's Court rejected (mid-12/2011) 2 lawsuits brought by the group demanding the eviction of Palestinian families from their Silwan homes.

In a major incident in the Old City, Israel closed (12/12) the old wooden Mughrabi footbridge (deemed unsafe) used by non-Muslims to reach the

Haram al-Sharif/Temple Mount. After Jordanian, PA, and Waqf officials protested, saying Israel's true intent was to build a larger permanent structure to assert its control over the site, Israel (on 12/14) reopened the bridge and agreed to reinforce it rather than replace it.

On 12/12, the IDF acknowledged that Israel plans to relocate some 2,000 Bedouin from 20 encampments in the hills east of Jerusalem (in area C) in order to clear the way for expanding Ma'ale Adumim settlement into the E1 zone to link it with Jerusalem. Construction in the E1 zone and settler preparation for expanding Ma'ale Adumim into the area had been in the works since 2009, but this marked the 1st admission that the government intends to remove the Bedouin population from the area.

In areas s. of Jerusalem near Bethlehem, Israel approved (12/28) construction of another 130 housing units in Gilo settlement and announced (12/12) the establishment of a new 40-unit settlement neighborhood and farm near Efrat settlement to expand the Gush Etzion settlement bloc. The new settlement, to be called Givat Hadagan, was approved for development in the 1990s and eventually envisions building 500 housing units.

The IDF also bulldozed (1/10) Palestinian land in Azariyya, just outside Jerusalem, for construction of a "biblical garden."

Regarding areas deeper in the West Bank: The Israeli High Court accepted (1/3) an agreement reached between the state and settlers whereby the state would agree to suspend plans for the immediate demolition of 9 structures in the Ramat Gilad unauthorized settlement outpost near Qalqilya and give the settlers until 3/2012 to remove the structures themselves. The settlers claimed that the state agreed in exchange to expand the zoning boundaries for nearby Karnei Shomron settlement to include Ramat Gilad (retroactively legalizing the outpost), but the official documents submitted to the court did not say this.

On 1/30, a day before Likud party primaries (see "Israeli Legislation and Government Affairs" below), Netanyahu approved new financial incentives for Jews to move to 70 West Bank settlements deemed "national priority

areas." He also appointed a committee to "study the status" of unauthorized settlement outposts, which some saw as a move to legalize those (the vast majority) not built on private Palestinian land. Both steps were widely seen as aimed at appeasing party hardliners.

Netanyahu Takes Action against Price-Tag Attacks

Meanwhile, however, concerns over escalating price-tag attacks by settlers (intended to punish Palestinians and the IDF for steps that curb their actions) prompted unprecedented Israeli government action to curb radical settlers. The trigger was the 12/13 takeover by right-wing settlers (angry over Netanyahu's decision to allow the Mughrabi bridge in Jerusalem to reopen; see above) of several abandoned churches in a closed military zone (CMZ) near the Jordanian border (to protest Jordan's intervention in the matter). They also blocked a main West Bank road and stoned passing Palestinian vehicles. The IDF removed the settlers from the CMZ and arrested 17, but took no action against the settlers blocking the road. Meanwhile, information had been leaked to the settlers that the government had covertly planned to remove the Mitzpe Yitzhar settlement outpost near Nablus that same day (12/13), prompting about 50 of them to break into an IDF base in the West Bank, setting fires, vandalizing vehicles, clashing with troops, and stoning and injuring a senior IDF officer in effort to prevent the action. (Troops were able to detain only 2 of the assailants.) Israeli DM Barak condemned (12/13) the incidents as "home-grown terror," while PM Netanyahu vowed (12/13) to "act aggressively against those harming Israeli soldiers and their commanders." Overnight 12/13-14, a group of ultra-Orthodox settler youths entered Nablus to pray at Joseph's Tomb but without the usual coordination with and escort of the IDF and defaced a mosque, in what was seen as a further act of defiance.

In response to these incidents, the Israeli cabinet on 12/14 approved several measures aimed to contain right-wing Jewish extremists. These included permitting settler detention without trial (administrative detention) and trial in military courts, allowing soldiers in the

West Bank to arrest them, and banning them from entering the West Bank. The measure did not label Jewish extremists who attack Israeli security forces as “terrorists,” however, which would have allowed the security forces greater leeway to act against them. In announcing the decision, Israeli spokesman Mark Regev stated (12/14): “One of the criticisms of Israel is that there are two systems of law in the West Bank, one for Palestinians and a second for Israelis. Now rioters from both sides will be tried under the same system.” Hours later, Israeli police raided a Jerusalem apartment and arrested 6 Israelis for involvement in “recent events” targeting Palestinians and the IDF. In apparent price-tag attacks to protest the government moves: Jewish extremists set fire to the Nabi Ukasha mosque in West Jerusalem (Israeli authorities had long barred Palestinians from using the mosque, while allowing settlers affiliated with the extremist Kach party to use the courtyard as a playground) and Jewish settlers set fire to Palestinian cars in Douma (near Nablus) and Salfit.

When the IDF finally removed the mobile homes at Mitzpe Yitzhar on 12/15, settlers retaliated by setting fire to and spraying racist graffiti on a mosque in Burqa village near Ramallah. Some days earlier, on 12/3, the IDF removed settlement structures at Itamar settlement near Nablus, prompting 2 price-tag attacks in retaliation: the kidnapping and beating a 63-yr.-old Palestinian farmer, and the beating of a Palestinian shepherd and killing 4 of his sheep. These were the only 2 instances this quarter of IDF demolition of settler structures.

On 1/5, Israel temporarily banned 12 Jewish extremists from the West Bank for periods of 3–9 months as part of Netanyahu’s crackdown against price-tag attacks. On 1/8, the government charged 5 Jewish settlers for: (1) orchestrating the 12/13 riot at the IDF base to prevent the removal of Mitzpe Yitzhar outpost; (2) operating a hotline to collect tips on IDF and Israeli police movements in the West Bank; and (3) using the information collected via the hotline to direct settlers to interfere with IDF operations. Prosecutors alleged that some of the tips received (including

regarding the planned evacuation of Mitzpe Yitzhar) were received from active duty IDF soldiers and included classified aerial photos and maps. The charges (which could bring up to 5 years in prison) were filed in a civil court in Jerusalem, despite the 12/18 decision to allow military courts in the West Bank to try such cases.

Separately, the IDF reported (12/6) that 3 IDF soldiers had been arrested on suspicion of participating in price-tag attacks in the West Bank.

Settler Attacks on Palestinians

Incidents of settler violence against Palestinians were down this quarter (37 incidents compared to 59 last quarter), though the severity of attacks seemed greater, including more arsons, more attacks on Palestinian religious sites, and larger groups of settlers (sometimes 100s) taking part in incidents (see Chronology for details). The breakdown of incidents by region was as follows: Nablus (12), Hebron (8), Salfit (5), Qalqilya (4), Ramallah (3), East Jerusalem and the Jordan Valley (2 each), and Bethlehem (1). Settler actions included: placing mobile homes on or fencing off Palestinian land to expand settlement outposts (2/4, 2/9); bulldozing Palestinian land and planting trees to stake claim to Palestinian land (2/5, 2/6, 2/10); arson, mostly to cars but including 3 mosques and 2 houses (12/7, 12/12, 2 on 12/14, 12/15, 12/19, 1/11, 1/15, 2/4); vandalizing property, including 2 mosques and a Greek Orthodox church (11/20, 11/23, 2 on 12/12, 12/13, 12/15, 2 on 2/7, 2/9); entering Palestinian population centers in shows of force, sometimes under IDF escort (12/13, 12/15, 12/26, 2/1, 2/3, 2/9); beating, stoning, or harassing Palestinians (2 on 12/3, 12/16, 2/3, 2/11); obstructing Palestinian traffic (12/12, 12/13, 12/17, 2/1); and uprooting trees (2/11). At year’s end, OCHA reported (1/5) that Jewish settlers had vandalized more than 10,000 Palestinian olive trees in 2011.

Of special note: Israeli journalist and historian Gershon Gorenberg noted in a *New York Times* Sunday Review piece on 11/27 that radical Jewish settlers had expanded their Judaization effort into Israel, executing a strategic plan to “save” mixed (Arab-Jewish) towns by moving

Jewish families into Arab areas of the towns with the intent of stirring up trouble and encouraging the Arabs to relocate to predominantly Arab villages.

Demolitions and Confiscations

IDF demolitions were up this quarter and were mostly concentrated in East Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, and Hebron. In total, the IDF demolished at least 25 Palestinian homes (compared to 12 last quarter). In the Jerusalem area, Israeli authorities demolished 15 homes completely and 4 partially, demolished several Bedouin caves in al-Tur, bulldozed 4 workshops in Azariyya and a warehouse in Sur al-Bahir, and leveled a playground and recreation center in Silwan. In Hebron, the IDF demolished 7 homes and 3 warehouses completely and 2 houses partially, and bulldozed dozens of wells, irrigation networks, and water tanks. In the Jordan Valley, the IDF leveled 17 Bedouin tents and caves, 9 shops, and over a dozen animal pens in several Bedouin villages. Another 3 homes in Jericho, a factory in Qalqilya, and 2 warehouses and 2 irrigation networks in Salfit were also demolished. At year's end, OCHA reported (1/5) that the IDF had demolished at least 622 structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem during 2011 (compared to 431 in 2010), displacing 1,094 Palestinians (compared to 594 in 2010).

In addition, the IDF bulldozed (11/16–22) 130 d. of Palestinian agricultural land, uprooted 500 trees, and forced Palestinians to dismantle 9 greenhouses and 7,000 m of irrigation networks to allow the rerouting of the separation wall near Qalqilya. During the same period (11/16–22), the IDF bulldozed 18 d. in the Jericho area and 400 d. in the Salfit area claimed by Israel as state land. Israel troops leveled (12/8) 150 d. of Palestinian agricultural land near Gush Etzion settlement near Bethlehem; fenced off and uprooted trees (2/15) from 300 d. near Shilo settlement near Ramallah; and bulldozed (2/1) 30 d. of land in Jayyus near Qalqilya that Jewish settlers had previously sought to occupy.

Separation Wall

The IDF completed a section of the separation wall bordering Shu'fat r.c.

in East Jerusalem on 12/11. Simultaneously, it closed its Shu'fat checkpoint into Jerusalem, redirecting traffic to a new hi-tech checkpoint nearby that was begun in 2009 to serve as an international border crossing into Jerusalem in the future. The changes left more than 50,000 Palestinians living in Shu'fat and several surrounding Jerusalem suburbs (Ras Shihada, Ras Khamis, al-Salam, and part of 'Anata) who hold Jerusalem IDs completely isolated from Jerusalem.

The IDF also confiscated (11/29) 12 d. of Palestinian agricultural land n. of Hebron for construction of the separation wall, ordering the owners to remove a well and clear the land of trees within 45 days or face a fine.

ISRAELI LEGISLATION AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Netanyahu won Likud primaries on 1/31 with 75% of the vote. Some analysts (e.g., *Washington Post* [WP] 2/2) saw the sudden move (announced on 12/5) to hold a party primary as indicative of a possible call for early elections in 10/2012 (a year ahead of schedule) insofar as it would give his internal party opposition less time to organize. Others noted (e.g., WP 2/1), however, that Netanyahu's only challenger within the party, ultranationalist settler Moshe Feiglin, made a strong showing, seen as indication that many Likud supporters feel Netanyahu is "too soft on peacemaking with the Palestinians."

In a sign of dissension within Netanyahu's coalition, Israel's right-wing FM Avigdor Lieberman ordered the FMin. to cut ties with Mossad, saying Mossad was "trespassing on the ministry's turf abroad while refusing to share any intelligence material." Insiders said (e.g., *Washington Times* [WT] 12/18) that Lieberman was irked that Netanyahu relied more on Mossad officials than on him to conduct diplomacy abroad, noting that Netanyahu recently dispatched retired Mossad official David Meidan to Turkey to try to improve bilateral relations after having involved him the negotiations for the Shalit release.

On 1/12, Israel's High Court upheld (6–5) a controversial law that bans most Palestinians who marry Israeli

citizens from obtaining citizenship on the ground this would pose a security threat.

The Israeli cabinet unanimously approved (2/5) a \$2.3-b. project to build a "Red-Med" railway line linking Tel Aviv and Elat to create a Asian-European cargo corridor bypassing the Suez Canal. Israeli officials said China has expressed interest in the project.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

National Reconciliation

On 11/24, Damascus-based Hamas leader Mishal and PA pres. and Fatah head Abbas met in Cairo for their 1st detailed talks (lasting 2 hours) on implementing their 5/2011 reconciliation agreement since 8/2011, when Abbas effectively suspended reconciliation efforts so as not to jeopardize the 9/2011 UN statehood bid (see QU in *JPS* 161). At the end of the meeting, Abbas and Mishal approved a 2-page document (leaked to Agence France-Presse [AFP], which published excerpts on 11/24) reiterating their commitment to the main elements of the 5/2011 unity deal, agreeing to observe a truce in the West Bank and Gaza Strip (including halting political arrests), vowing to increase "popular resistance" to oppose Israel's settlement expansion and construction of the separation wall, and pledging further talks among the factions (not held this quarter) to agree on the "style" of popular resistance and "a framework to direct it." In an interview with AFP later in the day, Mishal clarified that Hamas believed in both armed and popular resistance, stating "armed struggle is our right. How we use it, and when we use it, is something different." Mishal and Abbas failed at this meeting to resolve key issues regarding the composition of an interim unity government and elections. Though both called the talks positive, sources said (e.g., WP 11/25) that the meeting "raised new questions about whether the rivals are serious about working together or just going through the motions."

Meeting again in Cairo 12/21–22, Abbas and Mishal agreed in principle to 3 points: (1) to form the interim unity government called for in the 5/2011

agreement by the end of 1/2012; (2) to bring elected Hamas-affiliated legislators back into the PA's parliament, the Palestinian Council (PC), in 2/2012; and (3) to both sit on the committee that would prepare for the next elections of the PLO's parliament-in-exile, the Palestinian National Council (PNC). This last point would be a significant step toward Hamas joining the PLO. Substantive discussions on the actual makeup of the interim government were postponed until late 1/2012. Separately, Fatah and Hamas announced (12/20) that, in keeping with the reconciliation deal, they had agreed on formation of a new Central Elections Commission (CEC) to prepare for presidential and parliamentary elections. On 1/24, Hamas allowed the CEC office to open a voter registration office in Gaza to prepare for eventual elections.

No reconciliation meetings were held from the time the Israeli-Palestinian exploratory talks in Amman were announced on 1/1 until they ended on 1/25. Soon after, on 2/5–6, Abbas and Mishal met in Doha, where Qatar's emir joined them as they held detailed discussions on forming the transitional government of independent technocrats with the limited mandate of taking the Palestinians to new elections and to lead reconstruction of Gaza. Three major issues had hindered implementation before (see QU in *JPS* 161): (1) international concerns about bringing Hamas back into the PA; (2) differences between Fatah and Hamas regarding which independent to appoint as PM for the transition (Hamas adamantly opposed the current PM, Salam al-Fayyad); and (3) the division of government portfolios for overseeing day-to-day governance. To address the first 2 concerns, the sides agreed (2/6) that Abbas would lead the transitional government, serving as both pres. and PM. They also reiterated that the interim government would be "a technical one more than a political one" and that diplomacy would continue to rest with the Fatah-dominated PLO, led by Abbas and to which Hamas did not belong. Abbas and Mishal called for a meeting of all Palestinian factions on 2/18 to endorse the plan. The international response ranged from guarded to critical: Netanyahu

denounced (2/6) Abbas for “joining forces with the enemies of peace.” The EU and U.S. said (2/6) that they looked forward to continuing their support, provided the new government was committed to the Quartet principles of nonviolence, recognition of Israel, and adherence to existing peace agreements.

PA's West Bank Rule

The *New York Times* reported (2/1) that since mid-1/2012, Palestinians (including the private sector, unions, elements of Fatah, and youth groups) had been holding demonstrations against PA PM Salam al-Fayyad in Ramallah and other cities to protest soaring prices and proposed PA austerity measures, including tax increases, cutbacks on services, and a plan of forced retirement for 20,000 civil servants. (Electricity costs, for example, had nearly tripled in the past year.) Protesters demanded salary increases and subsidies to compensate for inflation, but as it stood, the PA carried a \$350 m. budget shortfall from 2011. Even with Israel's VAT transfers restored (see “Subtle Changes Alter the Prospects for Talks” above), the foreign aid received by the PA was not enough to cover recurrent expenses. The demonstrations were so heated that Fayyad suspended imposition of the tax hike until mid-2/2012 and dropped the early retirement proposal pending talks to ease tensions.

The PA Tourism Min. launched (12/13) a campaign in Bethlehem to coincide with Christmas called “Palestine Celebrating Hope.” Tourism M Kholoud Daibes said that the intention was to convey to the estimated 50,000 foreigners visiting Bethlehem for Christmas “that we have hope of having our own independent state, and we need international support for that.” The initiative included special tours of the separation wall around Bethlehem and free postcards of the Church of the Nativity, which tourists could mail at the Manger Square post office with Palestinian stamps.

Hamas in Gaza

With the Hamas government in Gaza facing its own budget crisis, a Hamas-appointed lower court in Gaza ruled (11/17) that 2 major banks in Gaza, the

Bank of Palestine and Palestine Islamic Bank, must pay 10s of millions of dollars in fines and back fees for refusing to recognize the Hamas authority's power to levy taxes and for remitting taxes collected to the West Bank PA. Bank officials boycotted the hearings and said that they might simply shut down to avoid paying Hamas authorities. The ruling was seen as precedent setting and possibly applicable to Gaza's 7 other banks, as well as companies that import fuel and electricity and operate cell phones. The issue remained unresolved at the close of the quarter.

On 12/29, the independent Palestinian Center for Human Rights accused Hamas authorities in Gaza of harassing Fatah members, saying Hamas police had summoned about 50 former members of the Fatah security forces since 12/26, questioning them at length, detaining some, and searching some homes.

On 1/14, Hamas-affiliated police raided a house in Bayt Lahiya, beating and detaining 15–20 Palestinians before releasing them later in the day. Palestinian media sources (e.g., Ma'an News Agency 1/17) claimed that the small group was performing prayers to mark a Shi'i holy day and were targeted because they are Shi'i minorities. Hamas officials denied (1/17) this, saying that “police tracked an illegal group with corrupted views that were planning to commit crimes.” Palestinian human rights groups demanded an investigation, but there were no reports that one was conducted.

Gaza courts sentenced 2 Palestinians to death this quarter: 1 for collaborating with Israel (1/11) and 1 for murder (1/20). As of 1/20, Palestinian courts had issued 123 death sentences since 1994 (25 West Bank, 98 Gaza); 36 have been issued since 2007 (after Hamas took over Gaza). Of those sentenced, 11 in Gaza were executed between 1994 and 2007; 8 in Gaza have been executed since 2007.

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data are excerpted from a poll conducted by the Jerusalem Media and Communication

Center (JMCC) between 17 and 20 November 2011. Results are based on a survey of 1,200 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. The poll, the 75th in a series, was taken from JMCC's site at www.jmcc.org.

1. The Palestinian leadership has recently ceased its participation in bilateral negotiations with Israel and it has turned to the UN. To what extent are you satisfied with this matter?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Satisfied	55.3%	44.2%	51.2%
b. Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	25.7%	30.4%	27.5%
c. Dissatisfied	12.1%	20.0%	15.1%
d. Don't know/No answer	6.9%	5.4%	6.2%

2. There is a debate among the Palestinian circles on the evaluation of the role of the PNA and whom it serve more. Some people think it serves the interests of Israel more than it does to the Palestinian people's interests, while others believe that it serves the Palestinian people's interests more. What do you think?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Serves Israel's interests more	27.2%	20.2%	24.6%
b. Serves Palestinians' interests more	58.8%	69.3%	62.7%
c. Don't know/No answer	14.0%	10.5%	12.7%

3. There is a debate on the future of the PA whereby some people believe that dissolving the PA is necessary now while others believe that perpetuating the PA and maintaining it is a necessity. What do you think?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Dissolving the PA is necessary	23.2%	20.4%	22.2%
b. Perpetuating the PA is necessary	62.7%	71.1%	65.8%
c. Don't know/No answer	14.1%	8.5%	12.0%

4. Do you think that the policy of U.S. Pres. Obama will increase or reduce the chances of reaching a just peace between the Palestinians and Israelis?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. It will increase the chances	6.1%	2.9%	4.9%
b. It will reduce the chances	39.1%	51.8%	43.8%
c. It won't make any difference	48.0%	42.4%	45.9%
d. Don't know/No answer	6.8%	2.9%	5.4%

5. What do you think of the Quartet Committees' role in the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Positive	15.9%	16.0%	15.9%
b. Neutral	30.7%	25.8%	28.8%
c. Negative	36.4%	50.2%	41.6%
d. Don't know/No answer	17.0%	8.0%	13.7%

6. What do you think of the Quartet Committees' position towards Israeli-Palestinian relations? Do you think it is neutral, more biased towards the Palestinians, or more biased towards the Israelis?

	West		
	Bank	Gaza	Total
a. Neutral	17.2%	17.6%	17.3%
b. More biased towards Palestinians	6.0%	5.1%	5.7%
c. More biased towards Israelis	59.7%	69.8%	63.5%
d. Don't know/No answer	17.1%	7.5%	13.5%

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Egypt, focused on its first elections since Husni Mubarak's fall in 2/2011 (see "Regional Affairs" below), was not deeply involved in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process or mediating between Fatah and Hamas this quarter. Egypt hosted meetings between Abbas and Mishal on 11/24 and 12/21-22 and between Abbas and Arab League representatives on 2/12, but did not attempt to broker any deals.

Israel's new ambassador to Egypt, Ya'akov Amitai, arrived in Cairo on 12/12. Israel had evacuated its embassy staff from Egypt and briefly closed the embassy in early 9/2011 after Egyptians occupied and ransacked the building to protest a cross-border incident in which IDF soldiers shot dead 3 Egyptian border police (see QU in *JPS* 162). The embassy had reopened on 9/19, but without an ambassador as Israeli debated staff changes.

Security along the Egypt-Israel border remained a prime concern for both countries this quarter. On 11/23, smugglers attempting to sneak across the Egyptian border into Israel clashed with Egyptian border police inside Egyptian territory (killing 2 border police) and then crossed into Israel, where they exchanged fire with IDF soldiers (causing no reported injuries) before fleeing back into Egypt and escaping.

By late 11/2011, Israel had accelerated construction of a 15-ft. fence along the length of its 140-mi. border with Egypt to prevent such cross-border incidents and to deter illegal workers from sneaking into Israel. Israel's cabinet unanimously approved (12/11) \$160 m. for the next stage of the security fence construction, as well as for expansion of detention centers to hold infiltrators and increased policing of companies that hire illegal workers. Since 1/2006, nearly 50,000 illegal workers, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan, have entered Israel via the Sinai, raising concerns among Israelis that the mounting influx of illegal Africans could undermine Israel's Jewish character.

Unidentified assailants blew up (2/4) Egypt's natural gas pipeline to Israel for the 12th time in the past year, temporarily disrupting exports. No group took responsibility. Israel generates 40% of its electricity from natural gas, and 43% of that natural gas is supplied by Egypt.

JORDAN

Jordan's increased involvement in the peace process and Palestinian affairs this quarter was seen by some (e.g., WP, WT 1/25) as an effort by King Abdallah to confront his internal opposition, which had been encouraged by the Arab Spring protests nationwide

to increase pressure for government reform. His visit to Ramallah (11/21) for the first time in 10 years, his hosting of Israeli-Palestinian exploratory talks to advance the Quartet's latest peace effort (1/3-25), intervention against Israeli plans in the Mughrabi bridge dispute (see "Settlers, Settlements, and Judaization of Jerusalem" above), and tentative moves toward relations with Hamas (11/2011) all seemed calculated to raise Jordan's regional and international profile, arguably bringing his regime some credit with its Islamist opposition.

The invitation to Hamas leader Mishal for talks in Jordan may have improved the king's image at home, but it complicated his foreign relations. Aside from prompting his visit to Ramallah on 11/21 to assure Abbas personally on his intentions, the planned visit also brought (ca. 11/21) expressions of displeasure from Washington and hints that U.S. aid could be cut if Jordan reconciled with Hamas.

While Abdallah initially seemed geared to receive Mishal in late 11/2011, he delayed the meeting once Israel and the Palestinians agreed to exploratory talks in Amman. As those talks came to an impasse, Jordan officially announced (1/24) that the king would receive Mishal on 1/29 but would continue to bar Hamas from undertaking political activities on its soil.

Mishal arrived in Amman on 1/29 with Qatar's crown prince Shaykh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani and a senior Hamas delegation (including his deputy, Musa Abu Marzuq, and 4 other officials). He told Abdallah that Hamas was eager to establish "unique relations" with Jordan, would "respect the limits and ceilings of any relationship determined by the two sides," and would seek to maintain the security and stability of Jordan. He did not say whether he had asked to reopen a Hamas office in Jordan. No official agreements were announced.

LEBANON

Lebanon kept a low profile this quarter, particularly in light of the growing instability in neighboring Syria. The most significant Lebanese events this quarter related to spying and internal security issues.

The Hariri Assassination's Ongoing Effect on Politics

While there was no significant movement this quarter on the UN's investigation into Hariri's assassination, the unresolved issue continued to affect Lebanese domestic and international politics. For example, rallies in Beirut marking the 7th anniversary of Hariri's assassination on 2/14 were strongly supportive of the Syrian opposition movement, blaming the Asad regime for Hariri's killing.

Allegations that Hizballah was involved in Hariri's killing weighed heavily in the U.S. decision to prominently link Hizballah to a terrorism investigation of the Lebanese Canadian Bank. The *New York Times* ran (12/14) a long special report on a 6-yr. U.S. investigation of the bank and its suspected role supporting terrorism. U.S. officials alleged—though without releasing evidence—that the investigation revealed money laundering by the bank of millions of dollars from Hizballah criminal enterprises as well as significant ties between Hizballah and Latin American drug cartels. U.S. investigators said that the transactions also revealed a pattern “in which entities tied to Hezbollah have been buying up militarily strategic pieces of property in largely Christian areas” of Lebanon. Hizballah called the claims “politically motivated propaganda.” U.S. admin. sources said that when the connections first came to their attention in fall 2010, some argued that the Hizballah link should be left unstated, but the admin. changed course (1) after Hizballah brought down the Saad Hariri government and secured the appointment of an ally as PM and (2) when the UN tribunal accused Hizballah of involvement in Rafiq Hariri's assassination.

Spy Cases

On 11/20, the *Los Angeles Times* broke the story that the CIA had recently been forced to scale back its operations in Lebanon because Hizballah had identified and detained some dozen informants on the CIA payroll using software analysis of cell phone records and calling patterns to identify and track them and some of their CIA handlers. Anonymous U.S. officials

confirmed the gist of the report but disputed the number of informants involved. On 12/9, Hizballah broadcast a TV segment naming 10 alleged CIA officers working in Lebanon. The CIA refused to comment, though former CIA officials said that at least 1 name (of the CIA bureau chief in Lebanon) appeared to be accurate.

A Lebanese court sentenced (1/24) former brig. gen. Fayiz Karam to 2 years in jail (including time served) for giving classified information to Israel. Karam, jailed in mid-2009, was scheduled to be released in 6 months.

Security Incidents

On 11/28, unidentified assailants fired (11/28) 3 rockets from s. Lebanon into n. Israel, damaging 2 buildings in the western Galilee but causing no injuries. Israel responded with artillery fire on s. Lebanon, causing no reported casualties or damage. The incident marked the 1st Lebanese-Israeli cross-border attack since 10/2009. A claim of responsibility was issued in the name of the Shaykh Abdallah Azzam Brigades (which claims ties to al-Qa'ida), but there was no corroboration. Some experts (e.g., BBC 8/6/2010) question whether the brigades even exist, calling it “name of convenience rather than an actual organisation.” Since 2004, attacks staged in Gaza, Iraq, Jordan, Syria, the Persian Gulf, Pakistan, and Japan have been attributed to the group, which is named for Palestinian from Jordan who volunteered to fight the Russians in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

On 12/9, unidentified assailants detonated a roadside bomb near a UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) patrol near Tyre in s. Lebanon, wounding 5 French UNIFIL soldiers. No group claimed responsibility for the attack, the 3d targeting UNIFIL in 2011. (In 5/2011, 6 Italian UNIFIL soldiers were wounded in Sidon; in 7/2011, 6 French UNIFIL soldiers were injured in the same area.) On 12/11, French FM Alain Juppe said that France suspected the 12/9 attack to have “originated in Syria,” and former Lebanese PM Saad Hariri called the attack a warning from Asad; neither offered evidence.

Earlier, on 11/16, unidentified assailants simultaneously detonated 2 bombs

in Tyre, damaging a hotel and a liquor store but causing no injuries. Though the hotel was frequented by UN employees, the UN said (11/16) that it did not believe its employees were targeted.

SYRIA

Syria was entirely preoccupied with its domestic crisis this quarter (see "Regional Affairs" below). The security deterioration raised particular security concerns for Israel with possible broader ramifications for Israeli-Arab relations. Briefing the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Comm., IDF chief of staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz said (1/10) that the IDF was preparing for a massive influx of refugees into the Golan Heights if the Asad regime should fall, which in the IDF's assessment was "inevitable." Israel would try to keep the refugees in a strategic buffer zone between the Golan and Syria. Israel would likely move Alawite refugees to the divided Alawite city of Ghajar straddling the Lebanon-Israel border to prevent any conflict between Alawis and the Druze population of the Golan.

Meanwhile, the Knesset passed (1/10) an amendment to an existing law to discourage infiltrators that makes it legal to detain illegal migrants and their children for up to 3 years without trial. Though directed at African migrant workers attempting to enter Israel from Egypt, Israeli rights groups feared the measure could be used to detain refugees fleeing violence in Syria.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The only major regional meetings related to the peace process this quarter was the Arab League session on 2/12 to discuss the failure of the Israeli-Palestinian exploratory talks hosted by Jordan (see "Jordan Hosts Israeli-Palestinian 'Exploratory Talks'" above). In addition to backing Abbas's decision not to continue talks with Israel, the FMs, at Abbas's request, called for an international conference to discuss the Palestinian issue. No firm plans were made, however. Overall, regional attention was highly focused on the Arab Spring protests still sweeping the region.

POPULAR PROTESTS REGIONWIDE

With the 1st anniversary this quarter of the Arab Spring protests that began in 12/2010, much of the optimism of the initial months was gone, while uncertainty, instability, and continued violence led many to dub the new phase the Arab Winter.

Most attention this quarter was focused on **Syria**, where violence was escalating drastically, with widespread reports of army defectors and armed protesters battling government forces and growing evidence of sectarian fighting. Activists inside the country (organized in local coordination committees) had tacitly aligned with other, more formal internal and external opposition groups to form the Syrian National Council (SNC), intended as framework for a transitional government (see QU in *JPS* 162 for background). As of 11/16, the death toll since protests began in 2/2011 had reached 3,500; 1,000s more had been injured and jailed, and as many as 24,000 had fled the country for Turkey and Lebanon.

On 11/16, after Syria failed to respond to Arab League demands to restore peace and move toward democracy, withdraw troops, release political prisoners, and open talks with the opposition, the League led by Qatar suspended Syria's membership and threatened economic sanctions. Almost immediately, army defectors claiming to be part of the Free Syrian Army (FSA) attacked the Syrian air force intelligence compound outside Damascus with machine guns and rocket-propelled grenades, marking an unprecedented offensive attack on a highly symbolic target. In response to intensified raids by government forces, rebel forces staged further high-profile attacks on Ba'ath Party offices in Damascus and near the Turkish border. In an interview on 11/20, Asad declared that he had no choice but to keep fighting the dissidents and promised parliamentary elections in 2/2012 or 3/2012 to form a new government that would amend the constitution to allow for presidential elections, but did not give details or a timeframe.

Meanwhile the Arab League had refused the Asad regime's 11/18 insistence

on itself choosing the Arab League observers it would allow into Syria, and on 11/27, the League overwhelmingly approved (19–0, with Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon abstaining) economic sanctions cutting off all dealings with Syria's central bank, freezing the assets of senior Syrian officials, and barring Syrian diplomats from visiting Arab states. Member states stressed that their aim was not to overthrow Asad but to force him to compromise. Syria called (11/28) the move "economic war."

On 11/28, the UN's Independent International Commission on Syria released a report based on interviews with 223 Syrian victims of violence that accused Syrian military and security forces of crimes against humanity for the "systemic torturing and killing" of civilians since protests began, stating concerns that incidents had been underreported because of the government's tight control of the media and refusal to accept monitors. This paved the way for UN Human Rights Commission (UNHRC) head Navi Pillay to declare (12/1) that the violence in Syria had crossed into a state of civil war and for the full UNHRC to approve (on 12/2 by a vote of 37–4, with 6 [including China and Russia] abstaining) a measure citing Syria for "gross and systemic" violations that may amount to crimes against humanity and calling for international intervention to protect civilians.

Syria replied (12/5) by agreeing to allow Arab League observers on the condition that economic sanctions be dropped immediately. In a rare public speech in Beirut on 12/6, Hizballah leader Hassan Nasrallah gave clear support to Asad, denouncing Turkey, the U.S., Israel, and the SNC for trying to "destroy Syria," which he called "a resistance regime." Meanwhile, violence on the ground continued unabated and reports of sectarian violence escalated (including beheadings, dismemberment, and torture; see NYT, WP 12/7).

Russia, which with China had vetoed the first attempt at a UN Security Council (UNSC) res. in 10/2011 (see QU in *JPS* 162), indicated (12/15) that it would submit its own draft res. demanding that "all parties in Syria immediately stop any violence irrespective of where

it comes from." The U.S. objected to the formula's failure to differentiate between state violence and peaceful protests. As debate at the UNSC continued, the Arab League gave (12/17) Syria until 12/21 to sign a pledge to allow international observers, withdraw forces, and open a dialogue with the opposition. Qatar's PM Hamad Bin Jasim Bin Jabr al-Thani said that if Asad did not sign, the League would formally call on the UNSC to take action.

Bowing to pressure, Syria signed an agreement in Cairo on 12/19 acceding to conditions and allowing international monitors into the country, specifying that it would allow as many as 500 observers to enter and be "free" to move around the country "under the protection" of government forces. The Arab League dispatched a team to Syria on 12/22 to discuss logistics. Reports of Syrian government atrocities against civilians and army defectors in Idlib and other areas near the Turkish border, coupled with acute shortages of fuel, heating oil, and medicine, led the SNC for the 1st time to endorse (12/20) the FSA's role in the uprising and to broker an alliance with Syria's 2d leading opposition group, the National Coordinating Comm. for Democratic Change.

The first 50 Arab League observers arrived in Syria on 12/26, demanding 1st to go to Homs, where fighting had been most violent. The army pulled tanks out of Homs before bringing the monitors into the city under tight escort, with thousands of residents turning out to protest against the regime and to plead with observers to go deeper into the city, where they claimed soldiers were still hiding in government buildings or on the streets wearing civilian dress or police uniforms. While more observers arrived over the coming days, this pattern of visible army escorts continued and violence failed to abate significantly overall. On 1/8, the Arab League held an emergency meeting to discuss whether to cancel the mission in protest, but opted to continue until at least 1/19, when the monitors' 1st report was due.

On 1/10 and 1/11, Asad made 2 major speeches blaming foreign plotters for the protests against his regime and

warning that terrorism would be tackled with an “iron fist.” In response, 4 Arab League observers quit (1/11, 1/12), saying the mission had only bought Asad time to crush the opposition and calling the situation in Syria a “humanitarian disaster.” By mid-1/2012, reports suggested (e.g., NYT 1/15; WP 1/19, 1/20, 1/22) that Asad was losing control of some regions, particularly near the Lebanese border, and that his authority was waning in suburbs around Damascus and in Homs and Hama, noting that government checkpoints for the 1st time were going up in Damascus. Qatar’s emir called (1/14) for sending Arab troops to Syria to impose a cease-fire.

The Arab League met again on 1/19 to receive the monitors’ first report, along with UN assessments that killings had increased during the monitors’ mission (the UN put the number killed since 12/26 around 400; Syrian human rights groups put the number at 746). On 1/22, member states agreed to extend the mission for 1 month and, although Saudi Arabia withdrew its contingent, to increase the number of observers. It also called on Asad to transfer power immediately to his VP, as Ali Abdallah Saleh had done in Yemen, but did not specify which of Asad’s 2 VPs—his close ally Farouk al-Shara or Najah al-Attar, seen as closer to the opposition—should receive authority. The League plan (endorsed by all member states except Lebanon) also called for negotiations with the opposition to begin within 2 weeks, a national unity government to be formed within 2 months, and Asad to leave office ahead of presidential and parliamentary elections (to be held within 5 months). The opposition, however, said (1/22) that it would not negotiate with the regime until Asad stepped down, all violence ceased, and security forces were withdrawn. Asad rejected (1/23) the plan outright.

On 1/26, with violence escalating across Syria and heavy government shelling in Homs, Hama, and Idlib, the Gulf states pulled out of the monitoring mission, and on 1/28 the Arab League suspended it altogether, after calling (1/24) on the UN to “address the escalating crisis.” The UNSC convened on 1/31 to debate an Arab-drafted res.

calling for transition in Syria. Debate stretched over several days, with Russia insisting that the text not explicitly call for Asad to step down or authorize foreign military intervention. On 2/2 UNSC members reached a “wobbly consensus” on a draft that they sent back to their capitals for approval. In effort to get Russia and China onboard, drafters dropped specific reference to Asad leaving power and called for a voluntary arms embargo and sanctions, but kept wording acknowledging support for Arab League calls for an immediate halt to violence and a “Syrian-led” transition to democracy (without affirming the Arab League’s call for Asad to transfer authority to his VP, form a national unity government, and hold new elections). Diplomats described (NYT 2/3) the wording as intended to leave enough “constructive ambiguity” to convince Russia to sign on “without leaving the resolution open to wide interpretation.”

After weeks of negotiations and the Syrian government forces’ single deadliest attack (2/3) since the start of the uprising (on Homs, leaving over 200 dead and up to 700 wounded), China and Russia issued (2/4) their 2d joint veto when the new UNSC res. went to vote on 2/4, dealing a blow to U.S.-led efforts to rally international support for the Arab League transition plan. Russian amb. Vitaly Churkin said Moscow simply could not support a UN res. aimed at regime change and that unfairly blamed only the Syrian government for the violence. Following the vote, protesters attacked the Syrian embassies in Egypt, Germany, Greece, and Kuwait; the U.S. closed (2/6) its embassy and withdrew all diplomats from Syria; Gulf Cooperation Council states (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the UAE) recalled (2/7) their ambassadors and expelled Syrian diplomats. Britain, France, and Italy recalled (2/7) their ambassadors; Tunisia expelled the Syrian ambassador; and Jordan’s Muslim Brotherhood called (2/5) for a Muslim and Arab boycott on Russian and Chinese goods.

On 2/7, Russian FM Sergei Lavrov met with Asad in Damascus to press him to talk to the opposition, essentially telling him (according to WP 2/7,

2/8) that Russia had held off foreign military intervention for the moment, but that if the crisis were not quickly resolved Moscow could not guarantee what would happen. Meanwhile, Pres. Obama dispatched (2/9) Asst. Secy. of State for Near East Affairs Jeremy Feltman to Morocco, France, and Bahrain to help organize an inaugural "Friends of Syria" meeting (set for 2/24 in Tunis) to explore ways the U.S., EU, and Arab allies could isolate Asad and support the oppositions. On 2/12, Arab League FMs meeting in Cairo called for creation of a joint Arab-UN peacekeeping mission for Syria and urged all member states to sever all diplomatic ties with the Syrian government and provide "all forms of political and financial support" to the Syrian opposition.

Meanwhile, Asad's assault on Homs continued, prompting the UNGA to hold (2/13) a public debate on Syria's human rights conduct. UNHRC head Pillay stated that "The failure of the [UNSC] to agree on firm collective action appears to have emboldened the Syrian government to launch an all-out assault in an effort to crush dissent with overwhelming force," adding that "the gross, widespread, and systematic human rights violations have not only continued [since the UNSC vetoes], but also sharply escalated." The same day, diplomats began drafting a UNGA res. on Syria that they hoped to send to vote within a week, with France lobbying to include provisions for humanitarian aid corridors into Syria.

In a preemptive move on 2/15, Asad announced a vote for 2/26 on a new draft constitution that would: (1) allow multiple political parties to run for the parliament (with elections held within 90 days of the constitution's approval); (2) limit the president to 27-year terms; and (3) remove laws guaranteeing Asad's Ba'ath party political supremacy. The draft would, however, leave the political system largely intact: the president would still have sweeping powers to decree laws and dissolve parliament, authority to decide which parties could run in elections, supreme control over the security forces, and the right to take unspecified "measures needed to remedy the situation" in the event of a "grave danger that threatens national

unity or well-being, territorial integrity, or that hinders state institutions."

At the close of the quarter, security conditions in Syria continued to deteriorate. By 2/2012, the UN stopped revising its casualty estimates for Syria, deeming the situation too fast moving and the reports from the field impossible to confirm. Its last estimate, released on 1/27, put the death toll at 5,400 (compared to the Syrian rights groups' estimate on 1/5 of 6,874).

In **Yemen**, by 11/16, Pres. Ali Abdallah Salah had returned from an extended stay in Saudi Arabia (see QU in *JPS* 161), but an edict from his time abroad transferring most powers to VP Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi was still in effect. Saleh had agreed in principle to step down so that democratic elections could be held, but refused to finalize the deal until his main political rival, Gen. Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, agreed that his clan would not run in elections or hold positions of power in the future government. Saleh also demanded immunity from prosecution for himself and his family, and the right to remain head of the ruling General People's Congress (GPC).

On 11/23, following news that Yemen's formal opposition (an alliance of 6 parties not necessarily representing the grassroots) had agreed to grant the immunity if he would sign the transfer of power deal immediately, Saleh returned with opposition representatives to Saudi Arabia and signed the pact. Saleh's remaining powers immediately transferred to Hadi, who would serve as interim president alongside a PM appointed by the opposition until elections were held in 90 days (on 2/21/12). On 11/27, Hadi appointed the opposition's choice, veteran independent politician Mohammed Basindwa, as PM and charged him with forming an interim government. Meanwhile, massive popular protests erupted in Sana'a and Taiz to denounce the opposition for agreeing to immunity; on 11/24, demonstrators clashed with security forces in Taiz, leaving 5 dead.

The issue of Saleh's control of the ruling party had not been clarified under the 11/23 agreement and quickly proved to be an issue. Back in Yemen on 11/26, Saleh promptly declared

(11/27) amnesty for people who committed “follies during the crisis” (except those behind the assassination attempt against him) and reportedly (WP 12/4) issued other lesser decrees and continued to receive international dignitaries, much as if he were still president. In addition, Saleh’s clan remained in firm control of the military. By 12/1, opposition parties and the GPC agreed on an interim unity cabinet, sworn in on 12/10, where key ministries (e.g., defense, foreign affairs, oil) remained in the hands of the GPC and the opposition figures heading other ministries had all previously served in Saleh governments. From the time the government makeup was announced, popular protests escalated in Sana’a and Taiz, leaving another 56 dead by 12/5.

On 12/23, an estimated 500,000 demonstrators took part in the largest nationwide protests to date to call on the new government not to grant immunity to Saleh and his family. Government forces controlled by Saleh’s son opened fire on the crowds, killing at least 9 protesters and wounding 200 wounded. About the same time, labor unions began to strike, demanding the removal of corrupt supervisors with ties to Saleh, while Islamist forces stepped up attacks on government forces around the country.

The day of the massive protests (12/23), Saleh for the first time hinted that he would leave for the U.S. “not for treatment, but to get out of sight . . . to calm the atmosphere for the unity government to hold the presidential election.” The U.S. said (11/23) that it was considering granting his visa request “for the sole purpose of medical treatment,” but had not decided. Anonymous sources indicated (e.g., NYT 1/5, WP 1/22) that the U.S. was quietly looking for a 3d country to grant him asylum.

On 1/8, the interim cabinet ratified the provisions of the 11/23 agreement granting Saleh and his senior officials amnesty from prosecution for any crime committed during his rule, precipitating new nationwide protests demanding that Saleh be tried. On 1/17, Saleh met with high-level security officials to propose that elections be put off until 5/22 because of the deteriorating security situation in the country. U.S. Secy. of State

Hillary Clinton called (1/17) this a violation of the agreements on ceding power. UN and U.S. diplomats quickly met with Yemeni officials, who reaffirmed (1/18) the plans for 2/21 elections. At the close of the quarter, Hadi was running for president unopposed.

Saleh’s visa request to travel to U.S. for medical care was approved on 1/22, and he departed immediately via Oman, vowing to return to Yemen in time for the swearing in of the new president after the 2/21 elections. Separately, an aide said (1/22) that Saleh planned to return before elections and to remain afterward as leader of the GPC.

In **Egypt**, the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF), the interim military government headed by Field Marshall Mohammed Hussein Tantawi that took power in 2/2011, had stated intentions to retain full control after parliamentary elections (slated to begin on 11/21) and until formation of a new constitutional assembly, ratification of a new constitution, and election of a new president—a process they said could stretch beyond 2013 (see QU in *JPS* 162 for background). On 11/16, the U.S. for the first time publicly warned SCAF that continued insistence on holding power and delaying transition to civilian rule threatened to undermine the Arab Spring movement regionwide and could lead to new domestic violence.

Parliamentary voting began a week late and was held in 3 rounds: 11/28–29, 12/14–15, and 1/3–4. Voter turnout was estimated at more than 60%. Voting was smooth, with no violence or serious improprieties reported. Islamists were the overwhelming winners but no single party secured a majority. The Muslim Brotherhood’s (MB) Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) was the top vote getter (41%), followed by the ultraconservative Salafist al-Nour Party (21%). The FJP opted to form (1/17) broad-based coalition with centrist, liberal, and leftist parties, but gave the al-Nour party several top cabinet positions to guarantee that the government “expresses national unity.”

The makeup of the coalition government was considered key since it would be the new cabinet that would select the committee to draft Egypt’s new constitution. SCAF briefly threatened (12/7)

to assume the role of selecting the constitution committee because the newly elected Islamist-dominated parliament was not “representative enough,” but retracted (12/9) under the pressure of massive popular protests.

Separately, however, the MB agreed (1/8) to SCAF demands to allow the SCAF-appointed caretaker PM to remain in place until a new constitution was approved and presidential elections were held (both to be completed in 6/2012). The MB also said it would distance itself from radical Islamist parties in hopes that the U.S. would continue present aid levels to Egypt. The decision regarding the PM prompted popular protests against the MB for being too willing to accommodate SCAF and against SCAF for obstructing the transition to democracy. On 1/31, the MB physically blocked protesters calling for the immediate ouster of SCAF from reaching the parliament building, deeply angering the protesters. On 2/15, SCAF, under popular pressure to transfer power quickly, agreed to move presidential elections up to 5/2012 instead of 6/2012.

Meanwhile, 3 U.S. democracy-building organizations and 3 other nonprofits in Cairo were raided and sealed (12/29) in an escalation by SCAF, which had repeatedly accused foreign organizations of orchestrating the Arab Spring revolt. The U.S. immediately denounced the action as the most definitive indication to date that the military rulers did not intend to cede power and warned that U.S. aid could be withheld. Nonetheless, on 1/25, SCAF barred 6 Americans and 40 foreigners overall who worked for prodemocracy nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including the son of a U.S. cabinet secy., from leaving Egypt. Though the individuals had been accredited by the Egyptian government, they were threatened with prosecution on charges of tax evasion, entering the country on tourist visas to work, and illegally training Egyptian political party personnel. The U.S. threatened twice more (1/25, 2/4) to withhold military aid, calling the incident a “dramatic worsening” in its relations with Egypt. By early 2/2012, Congress had approved new restrictions, including that aid to Egypt could only be transferred if the

State Dept. could certify that Egypt was committed to fair elections, was abiding by the 1979 peace treaty with Israel, and had enacted policies to “protect freedom of speech, association, religion and due process of law.” (The new law included a presidential waiver provision, but the administration stated its intention to use the legislation as leverage with Egypt.) The issue remained unresolved at the close of the quarter.

Also of note: Deposed pres. Hosni Mubarak’s trial (for ordering the deaths of antigovernment protesters) resumed on 12/28, with closing arguments made on 1/5. The prosecution asked for the death penalty, but the verdict was not expected until 6/2012.

Conditions in postrevolution **Libya** remained very unstable as the country headed to elections in 6/2012. The Transitional National Council (TNC) struggled to transform itself from a loosely organized rebel coalition based in Benghazi to an interim government headquartered in Tripoli. Demonstrators in Benghazi held several large protest (e.g., 12/12, 1/22) against the TNC’s lack of transparency and the slow pace of reforms, prompting some turnover of midlevel positions. Meanwhile, TNC efforts to forge a fledgling Libyan National Army (LNA; intended to integrate the nation’s militias) foundered as the regional militias carved up control of Tripoli and divided the country into fiefdoms. The militias were given until 12/20 to leave the capital, and while they did remove most checkpoints and limited their visible presence, they still controlled their bases in the capital, refusing to give them up until a credible central security force was in place. TNC head Mustafa Abdel-Jalil, while continuing preparations for a summer vote, warned (1/4) that deadly tribal militia clashes in Tripoli could lead to civil war.

Tunisia, which held its 1st democratic elections for a constituent assembly in 10/2011 after ousting Pres. Zine El Abidine Ben Ali in 1/2011 (see QU in *JPS* 162 for background), swore in a new cabinet on 11/21 that included a PM from the Islamist Ennahda party (the biggest vote getter), a president from the Congress for the Republic party (2d biggest vote getter), and a speaker from the left-of-center Ettakatol

party (3d biggest vote getter). The assembly was expected to call general elections for 7/2012.

Morocco held (11/25) its 1st parliamentary elections since adopting a new constitution in 7/2011 against the background of popular prodemocracy protests (see QU in *JPS* 161). A moderate Islamist party, the Justice and Development Party (JDP), won, taking 107 seats. The former ruling Istiqlal Party came in 2d, winning 60 seats. On 11/28, King Muhammad VI, who under the new constitution had to pick a PM from the winning party rather than the person of his choice, appointed the JDP's Abdellilah Benkirane as Morocco's 1st PM from an Islamist party. Benkirane's government, sworn in on 1/3, allotted top posts to the JDP but also kept allies of the king in key positions.

In **Bahrain**, sporadic antigovernment protests were reported throughout the quarter—a sign of persisting tensions. The opposition continued to demand transition to a constitutional monarchy in which the royal family would “govern without powers.” On 11/23, an independent investigative comm. (invited by Bahrain's king and led by an Italian jurist and human rights expert M. Cherif Bassiouni) issued its final report, which concluded that security forces tortured and abused prodemocracy protesters, killing at least 30 during the 2011 demonstrations. The king welcomed the report and pledged reform, while human rights activists called for the immediate release of those arrested during protests, reinstatement of activists purged from government jobs, and prosecution of those in the security forces involved in torture. None of these demands were met. On 1/15, the king announced new constitutional reforms that would give the elected parliament more power, but the opposition said the changes did not go far enough. In particular, the reforms did not give the parliament power to dismiss the appointed PM (the king's uncle, Prince Khalifa bin Sulayman al-Khalifa, in place since 1971).

In **Kuwait**, which had seen small protests since the Arab Spring began, antigovernment protesters and members of opposition parties stormed the parliament building on 11/16, while others rallied outside denouncing government

corruption and calling for the emir to step down. Those who entered the building sang the national anthem and then dispersed. Police beat some protesters, moderately injuring 5. As a result, the PM (on 11/28) and the cabinet (on 11/29) resigned. The emir dissolved (12/6) parliament and called for new elections on 2/2. Opposition groups, including hardline Islamist parties, won the majority of the parliament in the voting, but the royal family maintained full control over key government positions.

Isolated antigovernment demonstrations were also reported in **Jordan** (e.g., 11/17) and **Saudi Arabia** (e.g., 1/13, 2/9, 2/10).

HAMAS GAUGES THE ARAB SPRING

This quarter, the deep effects of the Arab Spring on Hamas became apparent. Logistically, it became impractical for Hamas to maintain its operational headquarters in Damascus because of the deteriorating security conditions and the increased tensions with the Asad regime, which pressured Hamas to voice support for its crackdown. After nearly 6 weeks of rumors that Hamas was scaling back its presence in Syria, Hamas officials announced on 1/17 that the leadership had decided to evacuate their families. By 2/4, Hamas confirmed that all its officials had left Syria and that it had closed its Damascus headquarters temporarily but indefinitely. Of note: Hamas leader Mishal's family reportedly moved to Amman, while the family of his second in command, Musa Abu Marzuq, relocated to Cairo.

While many analysts speculated that Hamas's center of operations would likely shift to Egypt, Jordan, or Qatar, others believed that Hamas would not centralize in 1 new location but would create multiple main offices. Cambridge expert Khaled Hroub argued (NYT 1/30) that “with newly emerging governments in the post-Arab Spring era, many of them Islamist, Hamas wants to be hosted and embraced and to have offices in these countries.” Hroub argued that for Hamas led by Mishal to embrace the Arab Spring's promotion of nonviolence marked a “paradigm shift” for the movement and should make it

easier for new governments to welcome and support it.

As far as Hamas “inside,” senior Hamas official in Gaza Mahmud Zahar stated (ca. 12/21) that Hamas overall felt strengthened and validated by the popular support shown for Islamist parties in countries affected by the Arab Spring, and suggested that the new Tunisian model of power sharing among Islamist and secular nationalist parties could be a model for Palestine. Hamas’s acting PM in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, made 2 diplomatic tours abroad—the 1st since Hamas seized control of Gaza in 2007—to promote the movement’s interests in light of the Arab Spring, including seeking financial help to rebuild Gaza. The 1st tour (12/25–ca. 1/7) took him to Egypt, Sudan, Turkey, and Tunisia; the 2d tour (1/30–2/12) included Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and Iran.

Meanwhile, Hamas’s former rep. in London, Mustafa Lidawi, stated (1/17) that Mishal had decided to retire and would not seek another term as politburo head when the organization held its next elections in the coming months (Hamas keeps the date secret) to allow “a fresh leader to steer Hamas towards a new strategy.” While another Hamas official confirmed this on 1/21, others denied (1/17, 1/21) that Mishal’s decision to leave the post he had held since 1996 was final. Some analysts (e.g., NYT 1/30) believed that Lidawi’s statement was a ploy orchestrated by Mishal to generate grassroots calls for him to stay on, which would give his leadership of the movement added legitimacy, particularly vis-à-vis more militant strains of Hamas. Other experts (e.g., Carnegie Endowment expert Nathan Brown, “Is Hamas Mellowing?” released 1/17), however, thought Mishal might be sincere, arguing that his departure as politburo head could signal a new stage of Hamas’s reform and evolution process (began in 2005, when Hamas decided to participate in the 1/2006 elections) in light of the Arab Spring. According to this analysis, the aim could be to recast the movement less as a resistance group and more as a Palestinian Muslim Brotherhood (PMB), giving more emphasis to the movement’s religious, educational, social, charitable, and political dimensions. In this case, Mishal might

be given even greater authority as “general supervisor” of a new PMB.

Of note: At a massive Hamas rally in Gaza City on 12/14 to mark the movement’s 24th anniversary, the flags of the all Arab states except Syria’s were displayed.

ISRAEL POISED TO INCREASE COVERT OPERATIONS ABROAD

IDF chief of staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz announced (12/8) that in light of the dramatically increasing number of covert foreign operations Israel had undertaken in the previous year, the Israeli DMin. had formed a new operational branch called the Depth Corps specifically to handle special operations “deep in enemy territory.” The new branch (separate from the existing Northern, Southern, and Central Commands) would be headed by former special operations commander Maj. Gen. Shai Avital and would pull and coordinate resources from the military’s various elite commando units on an ad hoc basis, depending on the mission. While Israel never officially confirms or denies covert operations abroad, media reports over the previous year have indicated Israeli operations in Sudan (targeting arms traffic to Hizballah and Hamas), Iran, Lebanon, and Syria. According to *Ha’Aretz* (12/18), since most recent covert operations targeted Iran, IDF insiders were commonly referring to the Depth Corps as “Iran Command.” (For more information see the Amos Harel article “Appointment of IDF’s New ‘Iran Command’ Chief Raises Eyebrows” in the Selections from the Press section in this issue.)

On a similar note: *Jerusalem Post International* republished (1/6) Sudanese media reports claiming that in the previous month, the Israeli air force struck at least 2 weapons convoys in Sudan believed to be headed for Gaza. The Sudanese military denied the reports, and Israel declined to comment. The Israeli navy has been operating in the Red Sea in recent years in effort to halt arms smuggling to Hamas and Hizballah.

CYBERTERROR AND ISRAEL

A computer hacker identifying himself as a Saudi Arabian teenager with

the handle 0xOmar hacked (1/6) 3 Israeli credit card companies and published online the credit card data and security information of more than 20,000 Israelis. While unable to confirm the identity of the hacker or hackers, the Israeli government called it an act of cyberterrorism intended to harm the Israeli economy. On 1/15, 0xOmar emailed the Israeli daily *Yedi'ot Abaronot* to warn that "pro-Palestinian cyberattackers called Nightmare" planned to disrupt the websites of El Al airlines and the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange. Both sites were overloaded with access attempts for several hours on 1/16.

In retaliation, Israeli hackers brought down (1/17) the Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency and the Abu Dhabi Securities and Exchange websites, released the email addresses and passwords of 89 Saudi university students, and stole and threatened to release the Facebook login information of 30,000 account holders in Muslim countries (85,000 by 1/19 and as many as 1 million by 1/25). One of the Israeli hackers, Anonymous 972, issued a statement saying "Usually we do not like to hurt innocent sites, but there is now a cyber war, and every war has victims. . . . Every time an Israeli site get[s] hacked, the same thing will happen to Saudi sites." The Israeli hacker Hannibal Hacker, who claimed to have the Facebook information, also claimed that he could publish bank account details of 10 million Arabs and the credit card details of 4 million Arabs if cyberattacks on Israel continued.

TURKEY

As Turkey shifted attention to the deteriorating situation in neighboring Syria, it took no active part in Palestinian or peace process issues this quarter. Meanwhile, relations between Turkey and Israel, which fell out over Israel's 2008–9 Operation Cast Lead assault on Gaza, remained strained, although relatively close military relations continued.

Israel canceled (12/23) a \$141 m. contract to supply Turkey with an advanced aerial intelligence system. While Israel refused to state the reason publicly, anonymous DMin. officials said (12/23) that the decision related directly to the technology involved, not to strained

relations with Turkey, adding that Israel viewed its military ties with Turkey as "extremely important" and hoped they would improve. Officials also revealed that the diplomatic strains had made it uncomfortable for Israel to send teams to Turkey for service provision under existing military contracts; instead, Turkey had been shipping equipment to Israel for repair.

The Knesset's Education and Culture Committee held (12/26) its 1st open, televised debate on whether Israel should declare an official day to mark the massacre of Armenians by Turkey during World War I. For years, left-wing parties have been lobbying for a commemorative day, arguing that it is Israel's duty to remember other "genocides." Previous debates had been held behind closed doors to avoid straining relations with Turkey. This is the 1st year that right-wing parties, angry at Turkey for other political reasons, seemed ready to support the motion, but the committee took no decision. (Of note: In the previous week, Turkey cut political and economic ties with France, suspended military coordination, and recalled its ambassador from Paris to protest a new law making it illegal to deny that the Armenian killings amounted to genocide.)

Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan received Hamas's acting PM in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, in Ankara on 1/1 for talks on regional issues. Erdogan praised Hamas-Fatah reconciliation efforts and expressed hope that progress would be made toward bringing Hamas into the PNC. Turkish officials denied media reports that Erdogan had pledged substantial aid to fund the budget of the Hamas authority in Gaza and downplayed the possibility that Hamas might open an office in Turkey soon, but said that Turkey might contribute to international humanitarian projects to rehabilitate Gaza.

IRAN

This quarter, the U.S. aggressively lobbied allies to support a slow but steady tightening of international sanctions on Iran over several months in the aim of convincing Iran to back away from pursuing a nuclear weapons

program. At the same time, the U.S. pressed major oil-producing allies to increase production to keep world supplies up and prices down. While some (especially Israel) wanted immediate sanctions, the U.S. warned that imposing sanctions too quickly could cause oil prices to spike and leave countries dependent on Iranian oil with no time to find alternative sources, meaning that Iran could actually gain financially from the sanctions. China and Russia (major economic and defense partners with Tehran) were particularly opposed to sanctions, arguing that Iran had a right to pursue nuclear energy and no solid proof that Iran had a nuclear weapons program existed.

Significant New Bilateral Sanctions

As the quarter opened, the U.S. hoped that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) governing board would issue a strong statement against Iran to facilitate the sanctions campaign, but the IAEA board, while concerned by Iran's actions, did not want to be seen as giving the U.S. political cover for hostile actions. When the board met on 11/18, it formally reprimanded Iran for suspicious nuclear activity and expressed "deep and increasing concern about the unresolved issues" (wording welcomed by the U.S.). However, it deferred any discussion of sanctions or other consequences of Iran's continued lack of cooperation until spring 2012, when IAEA inspectors would update their assessments.

Citing the IAEA reprimand, the U.S., Britain, Canada, France, and the EU announced (11/21) plans for a coordinated increase in bilateral sanctions aimed at cutting off Iran's access to international markets through barring their own banks from dealing with any foreign bank that conducts business with Iran's central or commercial banks. The move was expected to be hard on some allies, such as Japan, that were dependent on Iranian oil and needed to engage in transactions with Iranian banks to make purchases.

Britain was the first to enact legislation imposing the agreed new sanctions, effective 11/23. Iran retaliated (11/28) by expelling the British ambassador and downgrading diplomatic ties. The

following day (11/29), Iranians attacked and ransacked the British embassy and a separate diplomatic residence in Tehran in what observers called (WP 11/30) an "apparently deliberate decision by Iranian authorities to allow demonstrators and paramilitary members to pillage the two sites." On 12/1, Britain closed its embassy in Tehran, expelled all Iranian diplomats from London, and downgraded its ties with Iran to the lowest level short of complete rupture.

Days later (on 12/1), the EU approved another round of sanctions on Iran, expanding bans on economic transactions to 180 Republican Guard officials allegedly tied to Iran's nuclear activity and to companies affiliated to them, notably including Iran's main shipping line. On 1/23, the EU, which receives nearly 6% of its crude from Iran, agreed that as of 7/2012 it would ban new oil deals with Iran and bar Iranian Central Bank deposits in the EU with "limited exemptions to permit the continuation of legitimate trade." (Iran called this an act of "economic war.") By then, China had cut back its purchases of Iranian oil and was looking (along with Japan and South Korea) for alternative suppliers or resources to avoid violating the international embargos.

Meanwhile, the U.S. incorporated the proposed sanctions into its Defense Authorization Act for 2012, with the White House demanding wording that would allow Obama to waive sanctions if they caused sharp increases in oil prices or threatened national security, thereby giving the administration a way to reduce the impact on allies if necessary. The act passed both houses of Congress by late-12/2011 and was signed into law by Pres. Obama on 1/2. The U.S. issued more sanctions on 2/6, giving U.S. banks additional powers to freeze assets linked to the Iranian regime and to close loopholes in previous sanctions legislation passed by the U.S. and EU to deprive Iran of oil income.

The new sanctions had quick and dramatic impact. By mid-12/2011, Iran's currency value was in free fall against the dollar in panic selling sparked by domestic concerns about Iran's growing international isolation and possible additional sanctions. (The rial hit record lows in black-market trading on

12/20, 1/2, 1/5, and 1/18, losing more than 35% of its value by 12/20 and more than 63% by 1/18, compared to 9/30/11 prices.) As a consequence, prices of basic goods in Iran soared, prompting Iranians to start hoarding essential supplies and to openly worry about war with the West. Economists called (see NYT, WP 12/21) this the most serious financial crisis Iran had faced in recent memory. The *Washington Post* (1/6) described government officials and analysts across Western capitals as viewing these developments with “cautious satisfaction” and U.S. officials as feeling “vindication of a year-long policy of increasing pressure, including through clandestine operations, on Iran’s clerical rulers without provoking war.”

Iran’s New Diplomatic Offers

Amid public panic, Iran made diplomatic offers to the IAEA regarding inspections and to the P5+1 (the 5 permanent UNSC members and Germany) regarding negotiations. With regard to the IAEA, Iran invited (12/19) officials to visit Iran to discuss their concerns, but the IAEA replied (12/19) that it would not send a team unless Iran specifically agreed to a serious investigation and discussion of allegations that Iran had undertaken secret research on nuclear arms (requests previously refused). On 1/13, Iran gave the IAEA assurances that these issues could be discussed if an IAEA team were sent.

With regard to the P5+1, Iran’s chief nuclear negotiator, Saeed Jalili, publicly called (12/31) on the group to open a new round of talks concerning its nuclear program, stating that he would soon send a formal letter to EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton. In 10/2011, after the last round of serious discussions ended in 1/2011 (see QUs in *JPS* 159 and 162), Ashton had called for a resumption of talks and had since been waiting for a serious reply. When the P5+1 did not immediately comment on Jalili’s call, Pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad publicly stated (1/26) that Iran was ready to resume negotiations with the P5+1. Ashton welcomed (1/26) this statement but warned that talks must be meaningful.

Ultimately, the 2 initiatives produced nothing of substance. The IAEA

inspection team made a 3-day visit from 1/29 to 1/31. Iran, clearly hoping to lower tensions with the West, offered (1/30) to extend the visit if the IAEA so requested. The IAEA declined, however, noting (2/1) that the meetings had been cordial but that Iran still refused to answer key questions regarding research that appeared related to nuclear war-head designs. The IAEA team planned to return for another visit on 2/21. At the very end of the quarter, after 3 weeks of inaction, Iran’s nuclear negotiator Jalili sent (2/15) Ashton a formal letter welcoming and accepting the EU’s 10/2011 call for new P5+1 talks to defuse the crisis, officially opening prospects for renewed talks.

Shows of Force

Throughout the quarter, Iran peppered its diplomacy with threats or shows of force. For example, it repeatedly warned (e.g., 12/27, 1/2, 2/15) that if further sanctions were imposed, it would cut off oil exports to countries observing the sanctions and block the Strait of Hormuz (which provides vital access to 20% of the world’s oil supply). In late-12/2011, it held 10-day naval exercises in the strait to test new missile and torpedo systems. In response, Israel announced (1/5) plans to take part in the largest joint exercises yet (Austere Challenge 12) with the U.S., intended to improve missile defense coordination. Days later (on 1/15), however, the U.S. delayed the exercises until late 2012, stating that it did not want to raise military tensions with Iran further.

In addition, Iran tested (1/1) a new medium-range radar-evading missile (1/1), new laser-guided artillery shells (1/30), and a drone capable of carrying a tiny (11-lb.) payload (1/30). By way of comparison, Israel tested (1/30) a modified long-range Heron TP (Eitan) drone, which some believed (see NYT 1/31) was being refitted for a possible military strike on Iran. The Heron TP is typically fitted with jamming and intelligence equipment but has a 1-ton payload capacity capable of carrying a bunker busting bomb. It can stay aloft for 40 hours, travel 4,600 miles, and perform in-flight refueling missions. The modified drone crashed on test flight.

On 1/1, Iran announced that it had produced and tested its 1st domestically produced nuclear fuel rods—a step toward being able to run a full nuclear fuel cycle without foreign assistance. On 1/8, Iran declared that it had begun enriching uranium at its Fordo underground facility near Qom, a claim that nuclear experts said (e.g., NYT, WP 1/19) was plausible but impossible to confirm. In a major address on 2/15, Iranian pres. Ahmadinejad and Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei claimed to have inserted the 1st domestically produced rod made from fuel produced at Fordo into Iran's medical research reactor in Tehran. A senior U.S. security official, speaking anonymously, noted (WP 2/16) that the ability to make fuel rods for the medical reactor domestically "in no way enhances Iran's ability to make nuclear weapons." Commenting on these actions, the U.S. called them "provocative acts, defiant acts, statements that are designed to distract attention from the demonstrated impact that the sanctions are having" and that it did not take the threats seriously.

Israel and the U.S. Send Mixed Signals on a Preemptive Strike

While U.S. and Israeli officials toned down the calls for a preemptive military strike on Iran that were made last quarter (see QU in *JPS* 162), ongoing speculation about the possibility and advisability of such a strike raised tensions throughout this quarter.

U.S. Defense Secy. Leon Panetta, who as a congressman had prized his close relations with Israeli officials, dropped several statements indicating that Israel and U.S. were at least studying the contingency of a preemptive strike on Iran, though the Obama admin. discouraged notions that active consideration of a strike was underway. For example, in an interview on 12/19, Panetta said that in "sometime around a year" Iran would be able to produce a nuclear weapon, adding that if Iran has "a hidden facility somewhere" enriching uranium, the window could be even narrower. Though the Pentagon clarified (12/20) that Panetta was basing his statements "on a highly aggressive timeline and a series of actions that Iran has not yet taken" and stated that the U.S. has "no

indication that the Iranians have made a decision to develop a nuclear weapon," Panetta reasserted on 1/29 that Iran could build a nuclear weapon within a year and could build a delivery system within a year or two beyond that. He went further on 2/2, telling the *Washington Post* that Israeli officials had recently indicated to him a "strong likelihood" that Israel would strike Iran between 4/2012 and 6/2012.

Similarly, U.S. Dir. of National Intelligence James Clapper, testifying before Congress on 1/31, cited the alleged Iranian plot to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the U.S. (see QU in *JPS* 162) to declare that Iran had "crossed a threshold in its adversarial relationship" with the U.S. and was prepared to launch terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. Other intelligence officials at the session acknowledged, however, that they had seen no evidence that Iran was actively plotting any attacks. (Of note: Iran's intelligence chief met with Saudi officials in Riyadh on 12/14 to refute U.S. claims that Iran plotted an assassination on U.S. soil. No details were released.)

Meanwhile, Pres. Obama reportedly (*Washington Jewish Week* 1/5) had been aggressively attempting to persuade the Netanyahu admin. that sanctions could sway Iran without a military strike, but the Netanyahu government remained divided (see QU in *JPS* 162 for background). Obama dispatched Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) head Gen. Martin Dempsey to Israel (1/19–21) to coordinate positions on Iran and regional security and to urge Israel against a preemptive strike. Dempsey met with IDF chief of staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz on 1/20; with PM Netanyahu, Pres. Peres, and DM Barak on 1/21; and again with Gantz and senior IDF commanders on 1/21. While no details were released, Israeli DM Barak told IDF Radio (1/18) on the eve of the visit that Israel's decision on whether to strike Iran was "very far off" and that Israel did not believe that Iran had either started building nuclear weapons or ended IAEA oversight of its facilities. (Barak had also previously stated on 12/1 that Israel had no plans "at the moment" to make a preemptive strike on Iran's nuclear facilities.)

The tone of Israeli speakers at Israel's annual Herzliya policy and security

conference on 2/3 was entirely different, however. DM Barak notably reversed himself, making one of Israel's strongest calls to date for a preemptive strike to contain Iran, stating: "Whoever says 'later' may find that later is too late." Also at the conference, Israel's Dep. PM Moshe Ya'alon claimed that an Iranian missile testing site had been developing missiles with a long-range capability to strike the United States (more than 6,000 mi.). U.S. experts and officials discounted (NYT 2/3) this, saying that such assertions were "at best premature and at worst badly exaggerated," noting that the maximum range of Iran's existing rockets was 1,200 mi. and that Iran was known to be working on rockets with a 2,000-mi. capability. Meanwhile, a number of Israeli intelligence and academic assessments concluded (see WP 1/27) that concerns that a preemptive military strike on Iran's nuclear targets would result in a major Iranian retaliation or regional war were overblown (arguably making a preemptive strike more attractive).

Finally, U.S. military officials confirmed (12/14) that when the U.S. completed its exit from Iraq later that month, Iraq would have no planes or missiles to prevent an unauthorized overflight of its territory until the first shipment of F-16s ordered from the U.S. arrived in fall 2012. Military experts acknowledged (WT 12/15) that this would give Israel "a theoretical window of about 12 months if it wants to fly over Iraq unimpeded" to strike Iran, but also noted that conditions would make it equally easier for Iran to target Israel by air or land.

Rhetoric and speculation aside, Obama stated at the close of the quarter (on 2/4) that he did not believe that Israel was preparing a preemptive strike on Iran. While not ruling out military intervention and stating that Israel was right to be very concerned about Iran's nuclear program, he stressed that diplomacy was the "preferred solution."

Covert Operations against Iran

The U.S. and Israel also apparently kept up efforts to destabilize Iran through covert operations. Analysts this quarter concluded (NYT 12/5) that a mysterious explosion at an Iranian

military base on 11/12/11 that killed an Iranian general involved with Iran's nuclear program and 20 Republican Guard members including several senior military officers (see QU in *JPS* 162) may have been carried out by Mossad and likely dealt a major setback to Iran's long-range missile program. (Iran claimed the explosion was an accident.) Similar explosions at an alleged uranium enrichment facility near Isfahan that caused no reported injuries (11/28) and at a steel plant that killed 7 Iranians (12/12) raised suspicions that foreign saboteurs were again at work. In addition, on 1/11, Iranian nuclear scientist Mostafa Ahmadi-Roshan and his bodyguard were killed in a car bombing in Tehran, making Ahmadi-Roshan the 4th nuclear scientist assassinated in 2 years. Iran blamed the U.S. and Israel. The Obama admin. denied (1/11) involvement; Israel refused to confirm or deny. (For more on Israeli and U.S. covert actions against Iran, see the article "False Flag" by Mark Perry in the Selections from the Press section in this issue.)

On 12/4, a U.S. stealth surveillance drone crashed inside Iran. Anonymous U.S. officials confirmed (e.g., WP 12/8) that the drone was part of a fleet of CIA-operated RQ-170s that had been surveilling Iran's nuclear sites for at least 4 years. They also noted that the CIA had recently stepped up surveillance and covert operations against Iran while increasing arms sales to regional allies (including bunker busters and fighter jets) in what they called a modest strategy shift to increase pressure on Tehran. They did not see the crash as a major intelligence failure or loss, stating that given the extent of operations, "it was never a matter of whether we were going to lose [a drone] but when." Iran formally protested U.S. flights of spy drones over its territory to the UNSC on 12/9.

Also of note: Iran sentenced (1/9) a former U.S. Marine of Iranian descent, Amir Mirzaei Hekmati, to death for allegedly spying for the CIA. His lawyers immediately appealed to Iran's Supreme Court. Hekmati, a dual U.S.-Iranian citizen born in Arizona, was detained in Iran in late 8/2011 or early 9/2011 while in Iran to visit his grandmothers. (Iran

does not recognize dual citizenship and considers Hekmati Iranian.) The U.S. denied Hekmati was a spy and called his arrest and prosecution politically motivated.

Iran Suspected in Attacks on Israelis Abroad

There were several attacks this quarter on Israeli targets abroad that Israel and the U.S. viewed as most likely linked to rising tensions over the Iran nuclear issue. Though Israel accused Iran and Hizballah in several of the cases, both denied responsibility.

On 1/13, officials in Thailand announced that they had been working with Israel for weeks to track "a group of people who appear to be from the Lebanese group Hizballah" who allegedly planned to attack tourist sites frequented by Israelis in mid-1/2012 in response to escalating U.S.-Israeli tensions with Iran. Thai police detained a Lebanese man in connection with the case who later (1/16) led police to a warehouse containing large quantities of ammonia and fertilizer, commonly used to make bombs. The U.S. and Israel issued (1/13) warnings of a "real and credible" terrorist threat against Americans and Israelis in Bangkok. Hizballah officials denied (1/13) the allegations as an Israeli fabrication.

On 2/13, unidentified assailants staged what appeared to be synchronized attacks against Israeli diplomatic targets in New Delhi, India, and Tbilisi, Georgia. In New Delhi, an unidentified motorist slapped a magnetic bomb on an Israeli embassy car in traffic; the bomb detonated, wounding the wife of an Israeli diplomat, her driver, and 2 bystanders. The same day, an unidentified assailant in Tbilisi strapped a grenade to an Israeli embassy vehicle, but it was discovered and disarmed. The attacks came a month after the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Ahmadi-Roshan and on the 4th anniversary of the assassination of Hizballah military commander Imad Mughniyah, both thought to have been carried out by Israel's Mossad. Israel blamed Iran, which denied responsibility.

Israeli embassies and missions in Europe (The Hague, Brussels, London) and the U.S. (Boston, Houston, New

York) received (1/23) envelopes containing a suspicious white powder that turned out to be flour but raised fears of an anthrax attack. Israel refused to comment on the incidents, and no group took responsibility.

On 1/24, police in Azerbaijan arrested several people allegedly linked to an Iranian-backed Hizballah cell for plotting attacks against the Israeli ambassador to Azerbaijan and on a Jewish school in Baku.

On 2/14, 3 Iranians were arrested as they fled a mysterious explosion in their Bangkok apartment. One of the men threw grenades at a taxi that refused to stop for him and at approaching police, seriously injuring himself. The 2d man was arrested at Bangkok airport attempting to leave the country. The 3d made it out of Thailand but was detained upon landing in Malaysia. Israel and the U.S. suspected the bombings were linked to the 2/13 Indian and Georgian attacks and earlier incidents in Thailand (see 1/13) and Azerbaijan (see 1/24), but they gave no evidence the men were plotting against Israeli or Jewish targets. Thai police and outside experts doubted (but did not rule out) an Israeli connection, saying the operation was very amateurish and the men could have been arms runners or involved in other illegal activity in Bangkok.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

This quarter, the Obama admin. seemed to put Middle East diplomacy on hold to focus on the upcoming presidential elections. Though the U.S. had been deeply involved last quarter in drafting the latest Quartet proposal for resuming Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, the U.S. did not seem to make great efforts to see the plan implemented. Only 1 U.S. diplomatic visit to the region, by Asst. Secy. of State Burns, was reported (see "U.S.-Led Quartet Drive to Restart Talks" above). Further signaling that U.S. engagement in the peace process had run its course for Obama's 1st term, Obama's chief Middle East adviser Dennis Ross stepped down as planned as of 11/30 (see QU

in *JPS* 162) to return to work at the pro-Israel Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

Pres. Obama's final State of the Union address for this term (on 1/24) was devoted to domestic affairs in light of the elections. He touched on the Middle East only briefly, notably issuing a pointed call on Syrian pres. Assad to realize "that the forces of change cannot be reversed and that human dignity cannot be denied" and to urge the international community to "isolate" his regime. Hitting on 2 key issues in the presidential race (Iran and Israel), he also stressed that the U.S. would not take any options (i.e., a military strike) off the table in dealing with Iran and emphasized "our ironclad commitment—and I mean ironclad—to Israel's security."

This quarter, Pres. Obama fulfilled his campaign promise to bring all U.S. troops home from Iraq, with the last U.S. convoy pulling out on 12/18, 2 weeks ahead of Obama's 12/31/11 target date. U.S. priorities in the region appeared to be evolving rather than diminishing, however. The U.S. confirmed (1/13) that given concerns over regional stability in light of the Arab Spring and escalating tensions with Iran, it had re-deployed some 15,000 troops evacuated from Iraq (including 2 combat brigades) to Kuwait to bolster defense of the Gulf. In addition, the Pentagon confirmed (1/27) that it was rushing to modify the aging amphibious assault ship *USS Ponce*, previously scheduled for decommission, to send to the Persian Gulf by summer 2012 for use as a floating staging base for commando teams and a docking station for small high-speed boats and helicopters. The U.S. Central Command, which oversees military operations in the Middle East, recommended the move amid concerns about rising tensions with Iran, al-Qa'ida in Yemen, and Somali pirates.

The 2012 Election Campaign

Though campaigning for the 2012 presidential race was already in full swing last quarter (see QU in *JPS* 162), the Republican primaries officially began on 1/3 with the Iowa Caucus and were set to run through 6/26/11, with the Republican National Convention set

for 8/27–30. The 4 Republican frontrunners (and only ones left in the race by the end of the quarter) were: former House speaker Newt Gingrich (GA), U.S. Congressman Ron Paul (TX), former governor Mitt Romney (MA), and former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum (PA). This is the first presidential primary to be affected by a Supreme Court ruling that allowed unlimited fundraising for candidates through super PACs (political action committees).

In the run-up to the Iowa Caucus, the conservative Republican Jewish Coalition held (12/7) forum with 6 Republican presidential candidates. Romney and Gingrich both criticized Obama for his weak and confused foreign policy and mistreatment of Israel. Romney pledged that his first trip as president would be to Israel. Gingrich promised that he would move the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Both called on Obama to recall U.S. amb. to Belgium Howard Gutman for statements he made at a 11/30 conference on anti-Semitism in Europe (see "Lobbies" below). Neither Romney nor Gingrich endorsed a 2-state solution, even though the Republican Party platform officially supports this. The other 4 candidates (Michele Bachmann, John Huntsman, Rick Perry, and Rick Santorum) promised new approaches to the Middle East but did not go into detail.

In an interview on 12/9 with an American Jewish cable TV channel, Gingrich sparked controversy by calling Palestinians an "invented people" who want to "destroy Israel." He also described the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a battle "between a civilian democracy that obeys the rule of law and a group of terrorists that are firing missiles every day." The PLO representative to Washington, Maen Areikat, officially responded in a op-ed essay on Palestinian identity and national history in the *Washington Post* on 12/27.

The *New York Times* ran (1/29) a special front-page report on Casino magnate and staunch Israel supporter Sheldon Adelson's huge financial support of Gingrich's campaign for president (about \$17 m. overall, including \$10 m. to a super PAC supporting him in the few weeks before the article), saying Adelson "has long been enamored of

Mr. Gingrich's full-throated defense of Israel." Adelson has given hundreds of millions of dollars to Jewish causes and is one of AIPAC's biggest donor. (For another report on Adelson's involvement in organizing congressional junkets to Israel, see the article by Max Blumenthal, "The Bibi Connection," in the Selections from the Press section in this issue.)

On 1/9, the day before the New Hampshire primaries, Republican presidential candidates Paul and Santorum both stressed that the U.S. must maintain close ties with Israel. Paul, who opposes all foreign aid, however, said he was against continuing massive assistance to Israel. Santorum criticized Obama's weak response to the serious threat from Iran, whereas Paul called the danger of Iran achieving nuclear weapons "way overblown."

Indeed, much of the discourse in Washington and on the campaign trail this quarter surrounded the Iran nuclear issue, with many pro-Republican pundits criticizing Pres. Obama for not taking quicker, harsher actions to punish Iran and for playing up diplomacy and playing down the military option. In response to a 12/11 *Washington Post* op-ed accusing the Obama admin. for "containing" Iran instead of taking more aggressive action (including military intervention) to halt its nuclear program, former Obama Middle East adviser Dennis Ross, who had orchestrated Obama's policy, replied (12/13) that the U.S. government's approach was "prevention," not containment, arguing that there was still time to pressure Iran to change its nuclear policy. Obama defended himself as well, as in the State of the Union address mentioned above.

There was also broader public concern that in the process of skewering Obama for his approach to Iran, Republicans and pro-Israel supporters were drumming up support for war on Iran by manipulating facts and intelligence data, as had occurred in the rush to war on Iraq. In 12/2011 the *Washington Post* received some 1,500 complaints that the headline of an article on the paper's website falsely portrayed Iran as already having nuclear weapons and a recent IAEA report (see QU in *JPS* 162) as concluding that Iran definitely was pursuing

a nuclear weapons program. *Washington Post* ombudsman Patrick Pexton investigated the issue and ordered (12/11) the headline changed, agreeing that the headline contradicted the content of the story and could "play into the hands of those who are seeking further confrontation with Iran."

U.S.-Israel Relations

The U.S. and Israel held a regular strategic dialogue meeting on 12/1 focused on Iran and the impact of sanctions. Further discussions on military-to-military coordination and formulating a joint strategic approach toward Iran were held by JSC head Gen. Dempsey during his visit to Israel 1/19-21 (see "Israel and the U.S. Send Mixed Signals on a Preemptive Strike" above).

Speaking at the Brookings Institute's Saban Center in Washington on 12/2, U.S. Defense Secy. Leon Panetta stated that the U.S.'s "unshakable" commitment to Israel, maintenance of regional stability, and prevention of Iran from obtaining nuclear weapons (by military means if necessary) are the "firm principles" on which U.S. Middle East policy is based. In a rare rebuke, however, he also said that Israel bore significant blame for a peace process that "has been effectively put on hold" and must do more to revive peace talks and improve relations with Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey.

Also of note: The U.S. finalized (12/29) a \$30 b. deal (first announced in 2010) to sell F-16 fighter jets to Saudi Arabia in effort to contain Iran, stating the deal will not undermine Israel's qualitative military edge.

Congress

With Congress on winter recess for over a month and attention largely focused on domestic and election issues, there was little legislative action related to the peace process or Palestinians this quarter. Of note: The House Appropriations Subcommittee on State-Foreign Operations, which froze the transfer of \$192 m. in humanitarian aid to the Palestinians last quarter to punish Abbas for the Palestinian statehood bid at the UN (see QU in *JPS* 162), agreed (12/28) to release \$40 m. of economic support funds, which were transferred to the PA in early 2012. The U.S. Agency

for International Development and the White House were pressuring Congress to release the rest of the money, calling it “in the interest of the Palestinians, Israel, and the United States” to ensure continued development “vital to establishing and strengthening the foundations necessary for a future Palestinian state.” The issue was not resolved by the end of the quarter.

Lobbies

On 1/9, the White House announced that Pres. Obama had tapped his director of the Office of Budget and Management, Jack Lew, to replace his outgoing chief of staff William Daley. American Jewish organizations praised the selection of Lew, an Orthodox Jew deeply involved in Jewish affairs, stating (*Jewish Telegraphic Agency* 1/10) that since Dennis Ross’s departure as Obama’s chief adviser on the Middle East they had worried that there was no one “left to call in a White House that has hemorrhaged top Jews over the last year or so” who could directly weigh in with the president on issues important to Israel.

Responding to complaints from U.S. Jewish groups (including the Anti-Defamation League [ADL] and the Jewish Federations of North America), Netanyahu on 12/2 ordered Israel’s Immigration and Absorption Min. to pull a series of ads and billboards in the U.S. aimed at American Jews and expatriate Israelis that suggest that moving to America leads to assimilation and erodes Jewish consciousness. The groups had protested that the ads were arrogant and culturally insensitive.

Various pro-Israel groups (including the ADL and AIPAC) urged the administration to dismiss U.S. amb. to Belgium Howard Gutman for statements he made (11/30) at a conference on anti-Semitism in Europe that differentiated between the historic anti-Semitism of the Holocaust and the new anti-Semitism he said was bred in part “as a result of the continuing tensions between Israel and the Palestinian territories and other Arab neighbors in the Middle East.” According to the lobbies, Gutman had “blamed necessary Israeli security policies for the hatred against the Jews.” As noted above, Republican candidates Gingrich and Romney raised the Gutman case

and called for his dismissal in their appearances before Jewish voters.

Pro-Israel groups (including the ADL and American Jewish Committee [AJC]) accused (ca. 1/19) the Center for American Progress (CAP; a Washington-based think tank seen as close to the Obama admin.) of “anti-Semitism,” citing several Twitter posts by CAP staffers to their private Twitter accounts referring to “Israel-firsters” (i.e., Americans who put Israel’s national interests before America’s) and to AIPAC’s pushing the U.S. toward war with Iran. The staffers quickly deleted the comments and issued an apology; 1 of the staffers resigned to take another job. The ADL and AJC alleged that the private Tweets were part of a “very troubling” pattern of “anti-Semitism and borderline anti-Semitism” at CAP. Former AIPAC spokesman Josh Block said that the pro-Israel groups had gone public with their complaints only after CAP officials ignored a compilation of CAP staffer’s writings and public statements that were quietly presented to them in 12/2011, and which he said amounted to “outrageous vilification of pro-Israel Americans.” CAP declared itself to be “baffled and appalled” by the charges. Some groups on the left of the pro-Israel spectrum, such as J Street, said the issue was overblown and suggested that it was being brought forward now “to shut down needed policy debates,” cautioning groups such as the ADL and AJC to “tread lightly” with accusations of anti-Semitism or “people won’t take you seriously.”

RUSSIA

Russia did not play a major role in the peace process or the Palestine issue this quarter, generally limiting its involvement to the Quartet. The Arab League’s call (2/12) for an international conference to discuss the Palestinian issue (see “Regional Affairs” above) raised some speculation that Russia’s long-standing offer to host an international peace conference might be revived, but there was no follow-up.

Of note: After a failed UNSC meeting on 12/20 to discuss recent Israeli settlement authorizations and the stalled peace process (see “United Nations” below), Russian amb. to the UN Vitaly

Churkin made an especially strong statement denouncing the U.S. (though not by name) for blocking a UN statement calling on Israel to halt all settlement construction as a step toward reviving peace talks. He accused “one delegation” of believing that things would “miraculously” sort themselves out on their own, adding that without international pressure on Israel to halt settlement expansion, the Palestinians would never get a fair deal in negotiations.

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU largely restricted its participation in the peace process this quarter to the Quartet, with EU foreign policy director Ashton making a strong effort to urge Abbas and Netanyahu to pursue the exploratory talks held throughout 1/2012 in Jordan (see “Jordan Hosts Israeli-Palestinian ‘Exploratory Talks’” above). In the only other direct intervention, EU member states surprised and angered Israel at the UNSC by issuing (12/20) a rare joint statement strongly criticizing the U.S. for blocking a statement condemning Israeli settlement expansion and increasing settlement violence (see “United Nations” below).

Though the EU kept a generally low profile, EU envoys in the region were clearly active in monitoring conditions on the ground and advocating a stronger European stand against Israeli mistreatment of Palestinians, to the extent of urging a greater and stronger European role in the peace process. Though no official EU decisions were taken in this regard, the picture emerged through 3 internal EU documents leaked to the press this quarter that further angered Israel:

- In a 16-page report dated 7/2011 and leaked ca. 1/12 (see Doc. A2), EU envoys said that Israeli actions in Area C, the 62% of the West Bank under full Israeli security and civilian control, were “closing the window” on the 2-state solution and undermining the peace process by allowing extensive settlement expansion, obstructing Palestinian movement and access, destroying Palestinian civilian property, undermining Palestinian economic

development, and hindering delivery of humanitarian aid. The report especially urged the EU to be more vocal in raising objections to “involuntary population movements, displacements, evictions and internal migration” forced by Israel.

- An EU Heads of Mission Report on East Jerusalem dated 2011, leaked ca. 1/17 (see Doc. A3), similarly criticized escalating settlement activity in the city for undermining the 2-state solution. It also urged the EU to consider legislation “to prevent/discourage financial transactions in support of settlement activity.”
- An EU working paper reportedly urged Brussels to “consider Israel’s treatment of its Arab population a ‘core issue, not second tier to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,’” and to take a stronger stand against mistreatment of Israeli Palestinians. The 27-page document, sent to Brussels in 11/2011, was not leaked in full, but excerpts were published in the press in 12/2011 (see the article by Barak Ravid titled “Secret EU Paper Aims to Tackle Israel’s Treatment of Arab Minority” in the Selections from the Press section in this issue).

UNITED NATIONS

As noted above (see “Jordan Hosts Israeli-Palestinian ‘Exploratory Talks’”), after Israeli-Palestinian exploratory talks collapsed, UN Secy.-Gen. Ban made (1/31–2/2) a special trip to the region to meet with Jordan’s King Abdallah and FM Judeh, PA pres. Abbas, and Israeli PM Netanyahu to encourage the parties to continue the dialogue. He urged Israel to draft a package of goodwill gestures, including a settlement freeze, to offer in exchange for the Palestinians agreeing to resume direct talks. Ban also made (2/2) a brief visit to Gaza to inaugurate a UN-funded housing project. Relatives of Palestinians jailed in Israel tried to block his entry to the Erez crossing to protest his refusal to meet with them. During the visit, Ban called on Israel to maintain the cease-fire with Gaza and allow Gaza’s borders to open for trade. Later, he addressed the Herzliya

conference, telling Israeli officials and analysts to “think carefully about how to empower those on the other side who wish for peace.”

With Palestine having achieved full membership in UNESCO last quarter (see QU in *JPS* 162), PA Tourism and Antiquities M Hamdan Taha stated (11/21) that the government’s next priority would be to seek world heritage status for the old cities of Hebron and Jericho. An application for Bethlehem was already in the works and was expected to have a better chance of approval now that Palestine has membership. The PA also planned to seek recovery of artifacts looted by Israel, increase funds for preservation and excavations, and use its status to force Israel to stop calling West Bank sites “Israeli antiquities.” On 12/13, PA Pres. Abbas and UNESCO Dir. Gen. Irina Bokova attended a formal ceremony to raise the Palestinian flag outside the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. The Palestinians made no further efforts to gain membership in UN bodies this quarter.

On 12/20, after a UNSC briefing on the Middle East, 14 UNSC members came out in strong, united denunciation of the U.S. (without naming it directly) for blocking all criticism either of Israel’s new settlement construction in East Jerusalem and the West Bank or of escalating settler violence, as well as for threatening to veto any UNSC res. supporting Palestinian statehood. Immediately after, British UN Ambassador Mark Lyall Grant read a statement prepared jointly by the UNSC’s EU members (Britain, France, Germany, and Portugal) calling recent Israeli settlement and settler actions “devastating” to the 2-state solution. Emphasizing that “the viability of the Palestinian state that we want to see and the two-state solution that is essential for Israel’s long-term security are threatened by the systematic and deliberate expansion of settlements,” which it called “illegal under international law,” the statement declared that the “mutually reinforcing objectives” of Palestinian statehood and Israeli security could not be achieved as long as settlement activity continues (see Doc. A1). Shocked by the tone of the statement, Israel denounced (12/21) the EU states for interfering in Israel’s internal affairs. Israeli FM spokesman Yigal

Palmor added: “We felt that the European statement broke all the diplomatic rules. You aren’t meant to issue such a harsh statement by surprise, without prior consultation.”

OTHER

The **Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)**, an NGO with permanent observer status at the UN, formally apologized (1/17) to Israel for allowing a Hamas member (part of a Palestinian delegation) to take part in a dialogue in Geneva (ca. 1/14) on Israel’s treatment of Palestinian prisoners. Israel had threatened (1/16) to withdraw from the IPU in protest, but the NGO vowed that Hamas would be barred from future events. The IPU was formed in 1889 to arbitrate conflicts, but has evolved into an organization that promotes democracy and interparliamentary dialogue. Any sovereign state may participate; 157 countries are currently members.

The **Vatican** announced (2/7) that Pope Benedict XVI would visit Lebanon in 9/2012 to issue a statement on the future of the Catholic church in the Middle East and “the plight of Christians in the Muslim-dominated Middle East.”

DONORS

Only routine donor meetings were held this quarter. The Development Forum (the main donor body dealing with day-to-day affairs in the territories) held a quarterly meeting on 12/13 to discuss the PA’s reform and development priorities, budget issues, and plans for Palestinian elections. While none of the 4 main donor “strategy groups” (SGs) met this quarter, various SG subcommittees held routine meetings. These included: the economic SG’s agriculture sector working group (SWG; 2/19), fiscal SWG (12/14) and micro and small finance task force (11/17); the governance SG’s elections working group (11/22, 2/2), judicial reform SWG (1/19), municipal development and local government SWG (12/7), and security SWG (12/14); the infrastructure SG’s solid waste thematic group (12/6); and the social and humanitarian assistance SG’s education SWG (2/2) and social protection SWG (2/9).