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

Highlights of the Quarter: The Palestinian leadership continues to pursue a diplomatic track at the UN, as there are no indications of a return to peace negotiations with Israel in the wake of Operation Protective Edge (OPE). After their proposed United Nations Security Council (UNSC) res. is voted down on 12/30, Palestinian Authority (PA) Pres. Mahmoud Abbas signs Palestine on to 18 international treaties and conventions, including the Rome Statute, the International Criminal Court’s (ICC) founding treaty. In retaliation, Israel freezes transfers of tax revenues to the PA, precipitating an economic crisis that, in turn, exacerbates growing tension between Hamas and the Ramallah govt. and delays reconstruction efforts in the Gaza Strip; in Israel, the ruling coalition under PM Benjamin Netanyahu collapses, the Knesset is dissolved, and preparations begin for a general election on 3/17.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

There were few significant efforts to restart peace negotiations this quarter as both the Israelis and the Palestinians continued to address the political, diplomatic, economic, and humanitarian consequences of the summer 2014 war in Gaza. In the previous quarter, which began just before the 8/26 cease-fire that ended Israel’s 50-day attack on the territory, OPE, neither side had shown any inclination to return to the moribund peace process and each pressed on with unilateral initiatives.

The Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership, for its part, concentrated on gathering support for a draft res. at the UNSC calling for a timetable on ending the Israeli occupation. PA Pres. Abbas had announced the plan in the previous quarter, in his address to the UN General Assembly (UNGA) on 9/26. After the UNSC blocked the res. on 12/30, the Palestinians spent the 2d half of the quarter acceding to 18 international treaties and statutes (which all the major Palestinian factions had approved in 8/2014) and dealing with the burgeoning economic crisis brought on, in part,
by Israel’s punitive response to the Palestinian diplomatic initiative, in which the Tel Aviv govt. froze tax revenue transfers to the PA. Also a proposed bill codifying Israel as a Jewish state in the country’s Basic Laws, with untold implications for Palestinians both inside Israel and elsewhere, continued to be at the center of political debate in Israel, eventually leading to the collapse of the ruling center-right coalition. On the ground, meanwhile, Palestinian citizens of Israel banded together in response to recent electoral legislation further undermining their status and in a show of solidarity with the bedouin community of the Negev who were again the target of fatal police violence.

In Gaza, reconstruction proceeded slowly, and there was no follow-up to the promised Egypt-mediated negotiations on outstanding issues remaining after the 8/26 cease-fire. Because the Palestinian unity govt. failed to take control of the Gaza Strip and began administering crossing points, the international donors who had pledged $5.4 b. in reconstruction on 10/12 left their obligations largely unfulfilled. In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, tensions remained high: despite the drop in overall levels of violence from the previous quarter, there were several high-profile incidents, notably in the divided city.

UNILATERAL EFFORTS CONTINUE

Push to Submit a Draft Resolution to the UNSC

As the quarter opened, the PA leadership was in the midst of a diplomatic push to garner international support for its plan to obtain recognition and independence through the UN. As leaked to the Associated Press on 10/1, the draft res. scheduled for submission to the UNSC would have, inter alia, called for Israel’s full withdrawal from the territories occupied since 1967 by 11/2016. After consulting with the Arab League on 11/29, the res. was put “in blue,” meaning that it would be submitted to the full council by 1 of its mburs., in this case Jordan, for consideration and a vote. The hope was that 9 of the UNSC’s 15 mburs. would vote in favor, this being the number required to pass any res.

The Obama admin., which had not made known its official position earlier, quickly made clear its intention to veto any res. calling for a firm timetable for Israeli withdrawal, a position consistent with existing policies. On 11/16, U.S. Secy. of State John Kerry called PA Pres. Abbas and promised as much, arguing that resuming direct negotiations with Israel was a more effective strategy for creating an independent Palestinian state. He also warned Abbas that Congress would likely pass sanctions on the PA if the push for the res. continued. According to PA FM Riyad al-Maliki on 11/24, the initiative was being postponed because of strong U.S. opposition as well as the Palestinians’ failure to collect the required support of 9 UNSC mburs., and bad timing since the 5 permanent mburs. were now all preoccupied with their negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program (See “P5+1 and the IAEA” below). However, senior Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) official Saeb Erakat reaffirmed on the same day that the Palestinians were still intent on submitting their res. to the UNSC.

The Palestinian leadership proceeded to push forward with the UN initiative. On 11/29, Abbas addressed the 22 FM’s of the Arab League, asking for their countries’ financial and political backing, which they unanimously agreed to provide. Of the UNSC’s permanent mburs. (with veto powers) besides the U.S., the lineup was as follows: the UK was already pledged to oppose the measure (9/29); reiterating Russian support, Dep. FM Mikhail Bogdanov lauded (11/23) the res. as a possible
“starting point for the renewal of negotiations”; China’s longtime support for Palestinian initiatives at the UN was reaffirmed by Pres. Xi Jinping on 11/2; and, as detailed below, France was preparing a serious initiative of its own.

Following a debate that began on 11/28, the French parliament passed (12/20) a res.—similar to recently passed measures in the legislatures of Ireland (10/23), Spain (11/18), and the UK (10/22, see “International” below)—urging the govt. to use recognition of Palestinian statehood as a diplomatic tool. During the debate, French FM Laurent Fabius unveiled a multifaceted strategy for pursuing Palestinian statehood, including a draft res. to the UNSC calling for a timetable on ending the Israeli occupation. Fabius said the French draft would “create detailed parameters to resolve the conflict that would be adopted by the international community and set the basis of future negotiations.” Designed as a compromise to attract U.S. backing—or at least avoid a U.S. veto—the French proposal was more conservative than the Palestinian one, calling for 2 years of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations on final status issues rather than a full withdrawal within 2 years, followed by international recognition of Palestinian statehood, should the negotiations fail. Fabius also confirmed French pres. Hollande’s statement (11/28) that France was prepared to host an international peace conference as part of such negotiations in an effort to curtail the role of the U.S. as mediator and to boost the influence of the European Union (EU), Arab League, and the UNSC.

In late 11/2014 and early 12/2014, French diplomats began lobbying for support of their initiative from their fellow Europeans, as well as from the Palestinians, Jordanians, and the U.S. On 12/3, Haaretz reported that Germany and the UK backed the basic principles of the French draft although some points of disagreement remained, including a passage that would recognize Israel as the Jewish state, which only Germany supported. Although the U.S. position on the Palestinian draft remained unchanged at this point, Obama admin. officials had yet to comment on the French draft.

Over the next few weeks, diplomats representing UNSC mbrs., as well as Israel, the Arab League, and the Palestinians met to discuss and negotiate the terms of the 2 draft res. It is during this period that the Palestinians began alluding to the possibility of ending the PA’s security coordination with Israel in the event of the diplomatic initiative’s failure. (Under the Oslo accords, the PA is responsible for security in Area A, while the Israel Defense Forces [IDF] control the rest of the West Bank. Effectively, this means that the PA’s security forces [PASF] are responsible for passing on intelligence to the IDF and for quelling Palestinian protests targeting Israeli infrastructure, especially those originating within Area A that then move on to Areas B and C. After he took over as PA pres. in 2005, Abbas overhauled the security sector with U.S. and European help.) In addition to a yearly $70 m. in U.S. financial support for PASF training and equipment, both the Israeli govt. and pro-Israel lobbying groups in the U.S. have long been favorable to maintaining so-called security support to the PA so that it continues providing this service to Israel.

But on 11/28, Abbas himself mentioned the possibility of ending security coordination in his address to the Arab League’s FMs, and senior PLO official Hanan Ashrawi reiterated the point on 12/2, with both officials making clear that ending coordination would result from the failure of the UNSC initiative. The whole question of security coordination became acute following the death on 12/10 of senior PA official Ziad Abu Ein, who suffered a fatal heart
attack during an altercation in which he was struck by IDF soldiers nr. an Israeli settlement outside Ramallah. With the public outcry over Abu Ein’s death, it seemed as if ending security coordination with Israel might be a real possibility, and Hamas and Islamic Jihad both renewed their calls for the policy’s suspension on 12/10. The PA, for its part, scrambled to present a unified response: senior Fatah official Jibril Rajub said (12/10) that the PA would in fact be ending all security coordination, but Abbas backtracked on the statement later in the day, saying merely that “all options are on the table.” Over the next few days, internal discord on the subject was apparent among the Palestinian leadership who held and deferred several meetings and came under additional pressure from the U.S. On 12/11, senior PLO official Nabil Shaath told the press that “redefining” the PA’s security relationship with Israel was likely; on 12/12, Kerry called Abbas and urged him to uphold the policy; 2 days later, the PLO’s senior leadership convened and decided to maintain the policy in place (12/14). After the meeting, Abbas stated that reconstruction in Gaza was the PA’s primary concern, and one of his close aides was reported as saying that Abbas personally opposed ending the security relationship.

Overall, this issue remained secondary as the Palestinian leadership maintained its focus on its original plan. At the same 12/14 meeting, senior PLO officials chose to have Jordan put the draft UNSC res. “in blue,” kicking off a contentious period of lobbying and deliberation. From 12/14–17, there was a flurry of international diplomatic meetings and consultations around the rival French and Palestinian draft res. In Rome, Kerry met (12/14) with his Russian counterpart, Sergey Lavrov, and an anonymous U.S. official confirmed that the U.S. still had no position on the French draft, saying it was “too early to tell.” The next day, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu flew to Rome to meet with Kerry and discuss the 2 drafts. Netanyahu opposed both, saying, “We will not accept attempts to dictate to us unilateral moves on a limited timetable.” Kerry then flew to Paris for meetings with his French, British, and German counterparts (Fabius, Philip Hammond, and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, respectively) as well as the EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini. Fabius also met with Arab League secy.-gen. Nabil Elaraby.

A breakthrough occurred on 12/16 when al-Maliki met with Fabius and offered to use the French draft as a basis, so long as the Palestinians could make a couple of critical amendments. In Ramallah, senior Fatah official Mohammed Shtayyeh confirmed that the Palestinians and the French were creating a joint draft set to be officially circulated on 12/17. Meanwhile, Kerry was in London asking senior PLO official Saeb Erakat and PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj to delay submitting the draft res. by several weeks—he wanted to meet with Abbas and press for further compromises now that the contents were in flux. Back in Washington, a State Dept. spokesperson clarified the admin.’s policy, saying again that it could not support a UNSC res. on Palestine if it contained “unilateral measures,” meaning that the U.S. would veto a res. that called for immediate recognition and a strict timetable on Israeli withdrawal (that is, the original Palestinian proposal); the spokesperson added that the U.S. would not consider the inclusion of specific reference terms for negotiations on core issues to be such a unilateral measure, meaning that it was open to supporting some type of compromise draft (or abstaining from voting on such a draft, at least). It was reported that a further motivation for seeking a compromise
was the fear of Obama admin. officials that a veto on a Palestinian-backed res. in the UNSC would alienate key Arab allies in the anti-Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) coalition, including Jordan, at a time when the U.S. was engaged in a campaign of air strikes against ISIS.

On 12/17, after 6 hours of consultations with reps. of the Arab Group at the UN, Jordan officially circulated the Palestinians’ draft res. to the UNSC. The res., which was based on the original French draft but included substantial changes, recognized all past UNSC res. and affirmed the “urgent need” for a negotiated agreement to end the conflict within 12 mos. of the res.’s passage. It also laid down a series of parameters for such an agreement, including borders based on the 1967 lines with land swaps, security guarantees for both sides, and a just solution to the Palestinian refugee question, as well as Jerusalem as a shared capital, and agreements on other outstanding issues, including water. The other noteworthy parameter in the draft res. called for the phased withdrawal of Israeli troops from the territories occupied since 1967 before the end of 2017. The res. further called for both parties to abstain from unilateral measures, specifically citing settlement activities (i.e., a settlement freeze) during the 12 mos. of negotiations and the 3-year withdrawal period.

As soon as their draft was put “in blue,” the Palestinians began signaling that they were open to further negotiations on the text’s wording, especially after the U.S. announced (12/18) that it would oppose the measure. Abbas welcomed (12/18) further talks bolstering support for the res. and Jordan’s UN amb., Dina Kawar, who was officially responsible for submitting the draft, said (12/18) that talks would take time and that she did not expect a vote soon.

**Knesset Dissolution**

As the Palestinians were shepherding their draft res. to the UNSC, Israeli politicians were predominantly preoccupied with internal politics, particularly the draft “Jewish state” bill and its ramifications for Netanyahu’s ruling coalition and the Palestinian citizens of Israel. As the quarter opened, there were 2 competing drafts of the controversial “nation-state” bill under review in the Knesset. Both bills called for codifying Israel’s status as a Jewish state in its Basic Laws, which function similarly to a constitution, and resolved that Israel’s Jewish nature should supersede its democratic nature in any conflicts arising thereof.

Disagreements over the bill amplified existing lines of division within the govt. coalition. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, whose center-left Hatnua party held 6 of the Knesset’s 120 seats, postponed (11/16) a debate over the bill in the comm. she chaired, delaying a possible vote in the full Knesset. In response, Netanyahu announced that he would sidestep her comm. He submitted to his cabinet a proposal containing 14 principles designed to reconcile the differences in the 2 competing draft bills and the preliminary reading passed on 11/23 by a vote of 14–6. After a lengthy and heated debate, only Livni and the 5 cabinet mbrs. representing Finance Minister Yair Lapid’s center-left Yesh Atid voted against the proposal. Some of the so-called 14 principles included removing Arabic as an official language of the state and allowing citizenship rights to be revoked as punishment for certain offenses, primarily those committed by Palestinian citizens, such as stone-throwing.

As the final version of the bill was taking shape in the Knesset, both domestic and international criticism escalated. Israel’s non-Zionist parties opposed it from the start, with
MK Ahmad Tibi (Ra’am-Ta’al) saying (11/23) that the bill “confirm[ed] that the Jewish and democratic state is a fiction.” Atty. Gen. Yehuda Weinstein echoed Tibi’s complaints on 11/23. Then Israel’s newly-elected pres. and mbr. of Netanyahu’s Likud party, Reuven Rivlin, came out against the bill that he said would facilitate discrimination against Israel’s Arab minority and “play into the hands of those who seek to slander [Israel]” (Guardian, 11/26). In the U.S., the New York Times published a highly critical editorial on 11/24 and most Jewish groups came out against it, including the traditionally pro-Netanyahu Anti-Defamation League and the American Jewish Comm. (JTA, 12/3). Both the PLO institutionally and PA Pres. Abbas individually denounced the bill on 11/25.

With the cabinet factions entrenched in their positions, the dissolution of the Netanyahu govt. appeared imminent. On 12/1, hours after saying that either “harmony” would be preserved in his coalition or he would call new elections, the PM met with Lapid and presented him with 5 conditions to stay in the govt., including support for the “nation-state” bill and other major concessions. Lapid rejected the terms and the next day, Netanyahu sacked both the finance and justice ministers (Lapid and Livni). Without a functional cabinet, the Knesset voted (12/3) to dissolve—though the motion was not officially approved until 12/8—and reps. of all the parties met and agreed to hold general elections on 3/17/2015, 2 years ahead of schedule. From that point, all work was halted on pending legislation other than for emergency bills (e.g., budget measures), and the various parties began their political posturing and planning for their campaigns. Though Netanyahu’s popularity was reported as declining since the end of OPE, according to 2 polls taken on 12/2, Israeli voters would return Likud to power with enough seats for the PM to form an even more right-wing govt. than the outgoing one.

The UNSC Vote

After the 12/17 submission “in blue” of its draft UNSC res., the Palestinian leadership came under renewed pressure. Internally, Hamas called (12/23) for the res.’s withdrawal, denouncing the PA’s consultations with other factions from which the Islamist group was excluded (12/28). Separately, the popular imprisoned Palestinian leader, Marwan Barghouti, urged the PA (12/22) to drastically reword the res. Also in this period, both U.S. and Israeli officials argued against the Palestinians’ UNSC strategy because of the upcoming general elections, with former justice minister Livni and former pres. Shimon Peres telling Kerry that a vote on the UNSC res. would strengthen the campaigns of Israel’s right-wing politicians. Kerry reportedly made the same argument at a confidential luncheon with 28 EU ambs. (12/19) and personally to Abbas on 12/28 (12/29). Haaretz reported on 12/21 that some UNSC mbrs. were pushing for a delay in the Palestinian draft resubmission until 1/1/2015, when 5 new and allegedly more amenable nonpermanent mbrs. would rotate onto the council (Angola, Malaysia, Venezuela, New Zealand, and Spain were set to replace Rwanda, South Korea, Argentina, Australia, and Luxembourg).

Despite intense pressure, the Palestinian leadership took less than 2 weeks to conduct internal and international consultations—particularly with European diplomats—and make amendments to their proposed UNSC res., which was resubmitted for the council’s consideration on 12/29. The amended draft emphasized the illegality of Israel’s West Bank settlements and separation wall, and declared East Jerusalem the capital of Palestine (rather
than calling Jerusalem a shared capital), among other changes (see Doc. B1 for details). The next day, the UNSC rejected the res., with 8 mbrs. voting in favor (Argentina, Chad, Chile, China, France, Jordan, Luxembourg, and Russia), 2 opposing (Australia and the U.S.), and 5 abstaining (Lithuania, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Korea, and the UK). Up until the day of the vote, the UK’s position remained unknown, but then UK Amb. Mark Lyall Grant clarified that he would not be voting for the amended draft due to “problematic language on time scales, new language on refugees” (12/30).

According to senior PLO official Saeb Erakat on 12/31, the Nigerians had pledged to support the res. as little as 45 minutes before the vote, but the U.S. had undeniable leverage. The Times of Israel quoted Erakat as saying that “Nigeria was told, if you don’t abstain or vote against, we [the U.S.] will deprive you of assistance in your war against Boko Haram,” (the Islamist insurgent group that controls large areas of n. Nigeria, 12/31). Rwanda’s envoy to the UNSC explained his abstention on 12/31, citing a “lack of a consensual approach in the region . . . [and the] lack of an inclusive and transparent procedure in New York,” in reference to absence of opportunity for UNSC mbrs. to discuss, amend, or debate the res. (12/31). After the vote, France’s amb. to the UN, François Delattre, said that his country would not stop pursuing a UNSC res. on Palestinian statehood, and the PA leadership agreed to convene an emergency session on 12/31 to discuss their next steps.

Of note: the Nigerian FM Aminu Wali had expressed his govt.’s support for Palestinian self-determination as recently as 12/20. After the UNSC vote, the Nigerian parliament summoned Wali for questioning about the last-minute decision to abstain, which 1 legislator described as “weird” (1/14).

Next Steps: Joining the ICC

At a televised ceremony in the presidential compound in Ramallah marking the 50th anniversary of Fatah, PA Pres. Abbas, under the aegis of the State of Palestine, signed (12/31) a request to ratify the Rome Statute, the founding treaty of the International Criminal Court (ICC), as well as 17 other international treaties and conventions. The 122 mbr.-states of the ICC had voted to give Palestine “observer status” on 12/8, but officially signing onto the Rome Statute—and being accepted by the court—would give the ICC jurisdiction to rule on crimes committed on Palestinian territory or by Palestinian nationals. (See Victor Kattan’s analysis in JPS 173 for more on Palestine and the ICC.) Abbas’s official request—in documents known as instruments of ratification—was delivered to the ICC on 1/2/2015 with the court set to take 60 days to process the request.

UN Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon, acting as depository for Rome Statute ratification documents, announced (1/6) that Palestine would become a mbr. of the ICC on 4/1. Ten days later, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda opened a preliminary examination into events in the oPt since 6/13/2014. She clarified that it was “not an investigation, but a process of examining the information available in order to reach a fully informed determination on whether there is a reasonable basis to proceed with a (full) investigation.”

From their accession request on 12/31 to the end of the quarter, the Palestinians further clarified their plans regarding the ICC. Abbas asked (1/1) the ICC to investigate suspected war crimes committed in oPt since 6/13/2014, the day after 3 Israeli settler teenagers were kidnapped in a West Bank settlement bloc. That same day, senior PLO official Saeb Erakat said that the Palestinians intended to focus their litigation on Israeli settlements in...
the West Bank and on OPE. Later, on 2/7, Abbas put Erakat in charge of a new comm. tasked with overseeing and administering possible cases to bring to the ICC. As soon as it was formed, the comm. began collecting documents and testimonial evidence related to OPE.

The Palestinians had previously attempted to join the court in 1/2009, but after 3 years of preliminary examination, then-ICC prosecutor Luis Moreno Ocampo determined that Palestine, as an “observer entity” at the UN, was not a state and, therefore, could not accept the court’s jurisdiction. Writing in the Guardian on 8/29/2014, prosecutor Bensouda stated that her office had analyzed Palestine’s upgrade to a UN “non-mbr. observer state” in 11/2012 and determined that as a result the Palestinians were legally able to accede to the Rome Statute.

Domestically, the turn to the ICC proved very popular for Abbas and the Ramallah-based leadership, and both Hamas and Islamic Jihad welcomed the move on 12/31. Hamas also greeted Bensouda’s decision on 1/16 favorably, with spokesperson Fawzi Barhoum saying, “We are ready to provide [the court] with thousands of reports and documents that confirm the Zionist enemy has committed horrible crimes against Gaza and against our people” (1/17). Although leaders of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and the Palestinian People’s Party were disappointed at being excluded from the 12/31 meeting where the ICC application was agreed upon, they nevertheless also supported the move, according to PFLP leader Khalida Jarrar (1/6).

The Israeli Response

The day after Abbas signed the request to ratify the Rome Statute—coincidentally, the same day that Netanyahu won 80% of the vote in the Likud party’s leadership primary—the remaining mbrs. of the Israeli cabinet, except for FM Avigdor Lieberman, convened to discuss a response. They proposed and debated a variety of possibilities, including bringing cases to the ICC against individual Palestinian leaders, and ultimately decided to freeze the transfer of NIS 500 m. (around $127.6 m.) in tax revenues to the PA, half of the total collected in 12/2014.

Since the Oslo accords, Israel has collected customs duties and taxes on behalf of the Palestinians and transfers the revenue to the PA on a monthly basis. In the past, the Israeli govt. has intermittently frozen the transfers as a punitive measure, as with the 6-mo. freeze following Hamas’s victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections (see JPS 139) and the 4-mo. freeze after the Palestinians’ 11/2012 UN bid (see JPS 166). In the latter case, the freeze led to a period of such economic hardship for the PA that many commentators at the time predicted a 3d intifada.*

From 1/2, when the Israeli freeze was implemented, through the end of the quarter, the basic dynamic established in the wake of the 12/30 UNSC vote persisted with the Palestinian leadership continuing to plan and prepare for participation in the ICC while dealing with the fallout from the Israeli freeze. As the tax transfers account for around 60–70% of the PA’s monthly budget, the PA struggled to keep the govt. operating. On 1/18, it announced that it could only afford to pay 60% of the salaries of its 170,000 employees, relying on bank loans.

funds originally earmarked for Gaza reconstruction (see “Reconstruction of Gaza” below), and aid from Arab countries to do so. At the 11/29 meeting of the Arab League in Cairo, the 22 FMs had pledged political and financial support for Abbas’s plan to submit a draft res. to the UNSC, with a reported $100 m. collective contribution for every mo. that Israel punitively withheld of tax revenue transfers. Except for the PA’s allusion (1/18) to aid from Arab countries helping to pay employee salaries, there were no public announcements of donations of this magnitude (see “Donors” below).

The dynamic also persisted on the Israeli side: in early 2/2015, the Israeli govt. decided (2/4) to continue the freeze for a 2d mo., withholding another $100 m. worth of tax revenues collected in 1/2015. A senior Israeli official stated (2/4) that the freeze would continue until the govt. “finishes formulating its response to the PA’s unilateral move to the ICC, a step that runs contrary to all previous agreements,” leaving the PA only able to pay (2/8) its employees 60% of their salaries for the 2d mo. in a row.

During this period, Israel also proceeded with further settlement growth. In the 1st of 2 notable announcements, Netanyahu and DM Moshe Ya’alon agreed (1/4) to spend NIS 70 m. (around $17.8 m.) to strengthen the infrastructure of Beit El and to relocate an IDF base away from the area to make room for 300 new residences; the 2d announcement saw the Israeli govt. publishing (1/30) tenders for the construction of 450 homes, a hotel, and offices in 5 West Bank settlements. The 1/30 announcement drew criticism from the U.S. and the EU, but it was overshadowed by disagreements about ongoing negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program (see “P5+1 and the IAEA” and “Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Obama” below).

As the quarter came to a close on 2/15, the prospect of a return to peace negotiations and Egypt-mediated talks on outstanding issues from the 8/26 cease-fire ending OPE (see “Egypt” below) receded even further. The PA began pursuing further unilateral measures in response to Israel’s decision to withhold tax revenues. First, Abbas proposed to submit another UNSC draft res. at a meeting of the Arab League in Cairo on 1/15. The gathered reps. decided to form a joint comm. in charge of organizing the submission, rather than outright approving it. Further details came to light on 1/21, when the PLO exec. comm. met in Ramallah to discuss the res. The resubmission process did not move forward by quarter’s end, as Abbas agreed to respect the Arab League comm.’s decisions regarding timing. Second, Mahmoud al-Aloul, a senior Fatah official and chair of the National Comm. against Israeli Punitive Measures, announced (2/9) a boycott of products manufactured by 6 major Israeli companies—Tnuva, Jafora-Tabori, Osem, Prigat, Strauss, and Elite (which is part of Strauss Group). Although not legally binding like the PA’s boycott of settlement products, al-Aloul and his comm. appeared determined to enforce this ban in the West Bank. Al-Aloul gave merchants 2 weeks to remove the products from their shelves and said special inspectors would be visiting to verify compliance. Finally, on a state visit to Luxembourg on 2/13, Abbas said that the tax revenue freeze was causing a crisis and that, if Israel did not unfreeze the transfers and halt settlement construction, he would be forced to “take harsh steps” (Ma’an News Agency, 2/14).

GAZA RECONSTRUCTION

The reconstruction of Gaza, which began last quarter with a shipment of 2,000 tons of materials on 10/14 and $5.4 b. in pledges from
international donors on 10/12, slowly continued this quarter, but the bureaucracy of the UN’s Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM) and the stagnation of internal Palestinian politics hindered efforts on the ground.

In early 11/2014, the GRM, administered by the office of UN Special Coordinator Robert Serry, began facilitating the shipment of small amounts of construction materials into the Strip. The GRM, however, was plagued by red tape: each Palestinian family in Gaza hoping to receive materials had to submit a detailed report to the UN, which was then passed on to the PA and Israel’s Coordination of Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT), with the latter responsible for approving each individually. When, and if, COGAT gave security clearance for a request, the family had to sign a declaration that the materials were only to be used for reconstruction—rather than for construction of tunnels or other military purposes, presumably. The UN would then exchange those declarations for vouchers, which families were allowed to trade for corresponding materials at warehouses owned by the PA and operated by thoroughly vetted private dealers. However, both the amount of materials available to these private dealers and the funds with which to pay private contractors were contingent on funds pledged by international donors. Thus, for example, over 1 mo. passed between the 1st shipment of construction materials into the Strip on 10/14 and the 2d major shipment of 1,120 tons of cement on 11/25. A Palestinian official was quoted as saying (11/24) that there would be “no reconstruction here if the mechanism stays like this. It will take 20 to 30 years.” (See “Movement and Access” below for more.)

The pace of reconstruction under the GRM did accelerate nonetheless. According to the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, 1/27), around 40,000 of the 100,000 individuals whose homes were damaged during OPE were cleared to purchase reconstruction materials by 1/5. The previous mo., only 8,000 had been approved. (Israel’s COGAT rejected approximately 3,500 families’ requests.) Furthermore, according to Gisha, the Israeli nongovernmental organization dedicated to protecting the freedom of movement of Palestinians, the volume of construction materials entering Gaza drastically increased from November to February, to levels far higher than pre-OPE, though the trend broke in January with a slight drop. In 10/2014, some 17,066 tons of cement, steel, and gravel had entered the territory. The comparative figures for 11/2014, 12/2014, 1/2015, and 2/2015 were as follows, respectively: 48,237 tons; 112,186 tons; 105,491 tons; and 161,031 tons.

Internal Palestinian politics also hampered the reconstruction effort as Hamas, still the de facto ruling authority in Gaza, was excluded from the GRM, but also because international donors were reticent to fulfill their pledges before the PA unity govt. took complete control of the Gaza Strip and its crossings. After dep. leader Musa Abu Marzuq criticized the GRM for excluding Hamas from its planning and implementation processes and described it as a mechanism for PA Pres. Abbas to sidestep Hamas, UN officials were reported to have reached out for consultations with the movement. But despite establishing a comm. to take over the admin. of Gaza’s border crossings, the PA was unable to overcome Hamas’s alleged lack of cooperation or convince international donors to make good. The tension with Hamas continued into 1/2015 (see “Intra-Palestinian Politics” below), and by the end of the quarter, the PA unity govt. had still not taken control of the crossings.

According to OCHA (1/27), only some 15,500 of the 40,000 applicants approved to
acquire construction materials through the GRM actually had been able to do so by 1/5. In addition to the slow progress of the GRM, the donor community’s foot-dragging also directly affected a number of international agencies working on the ground. By 1/22, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) project to survey the damage from OPE to 30,000 non-refugee homes had received only 5% of the $200 m. total pledged. WAFA (Palestine News and Information Agency) quoted Basil Nasser, senior manager at UNDP’s Gaza office, as saying that the donor countries were “linking their donations to the unity govt. and its control of both Gaza and the borders,” and that they had increasing concerns about the possibility of another war (1/22). Then, on 1/27, UNRWA suspended its cash assistance program providing repairs and rental aid to the 96,000 refugee families whose homes were partially or completely destroyed during OPE. While less forthright than Nasser, Operations Director Robert Turner stated that only $135 m. of the $720 m. pledged to his program had been disbursed by international donors.

PALESTINIAN UNITY IN ISRAEL

Long-developing trends in Israeli politics and society unified the ranks of Israel’s Palestinian citizens this quarter.

Acts of violence by Israeli police in the Negev, accompanied by state-sanctioned impunity, went on unabated this quarter, exacerbating already high levels of tension with the Palestinian bedouin community. After Israeli police shot and killed (1/14) Sami al-Ajar in Rahat using live ammunition, the community held a series of protests and went on a 3-day strike, in an action similar to that undertaken after an analogous incident on 11/7 in Kafr Kanna, also in the Negev. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Israeli-planned bedouin city of Rahat has seen its population more than double in the last 10 years, as Israel continues home demolitions and land expropriations in surrounding areas. Despite giving their word to the municipal council that they would stay away, Israeli police violently dispersed the approximately 10,000 mourners at al-Ajar’s funeral on 1/18, shooting to death Sami al-Zayadna. In a statement to the press about the protests and the killings, the pres. of the Regional Council for Unrecognized Villages in the Negev said he had never seen this much anger and violence in the city (2/13). In response to al-Zayadna’s death, local organizers called for the Rahat strike to be extended and for all Palestinian citizens of Israel to heed the call on 1/20. Palestinian youth held protests and solidarity actions throughout the next week, including in Nazareth, Haifa, and Umm al-Fahm, at Ben-Gurion and Tel Aviv universities, and also in Tel Aviv proper.

The killings and outrage in Rahat only accelerated a process that had begun earlier, spurring the 4 major non-Zionist political parties to close ranks as the general elections approached. In 3/2014, the Knesset had passed the Governance Law raising the electoral threshold for winning parliamentary representation from 2% to 3.25%, thus requiring individual parties to win a minimum of 4 of the 120 Knesset seats. Following PM Netanyahu’s firing of Lapid and Livni on 12/2, and the ensuing collapse of the govt. coalition and concomitant dissolution of the Knesset, reps. of the 4 anti-Zionist parties agreed to run as a joint list to ensure that they would collectively maintain their presence in the legislature. The parties formed a comm. to help resolve both ideological and personal differences in their platforms with discussions
continuing for 6 weeks with little progress, but after the killings in Rahat, remaining differences were ironed out and a joint list was announced on 1/22/2015 under the leadership of newly-elected (1/17) Hadash chair Ayman Odeh.

By this time, Israeli polls were projecting that the list would win 11–14 seats in the next Knesset, making the parliamentary bloc the 3rd or 4th largest. Although the leaders of the united list touted those polling figures as an indication of their clout in the next Knesset, MKs Ahmad Tibi and Masud Ghnaim both pointed out (1/17 and 2/1, respectively) that they would not join a ruling coalition of Zionist parties, even if invited. Tibi did, however, allude to the possibility of the united list supporting a center-left coalition led by MK Isaac Herzog (Labor) from the outside in much the same way as non-Zionist parties had done for PM Yitzhak Rabin’s coalition when legislation related to the Oslo accords was under debate in the early 1990s.

In parallel to the Palestinian bedouins of Rahat suffering discrimination and violence at the hands of the police, the united non-Zionist list faced attacks from Israeli politicians across the political spectrum. The most noteworthy incident in this regard concerned MK Haneen Zoabi of Balad. On 1/29, and with the support of the Likud, Shas, and Jewish Home parties, FM Lieberman’s Yisrael Beytenu delivered a petition to the Central Elections Comm. (CEC) calling for Zoabi’s disqualification on the charge that she supported armed resistance against Israel. The CEC, a political body comprised of MKs selected on the basis of proportional representation, proceeded to vote 27–6 to disqualify Zoabi (2/12). The major left-wing parties, led by MKs Herzog (Labor) and Livni (Hatnua), also advocated for Zoabi’s disqualification, having reversed themselves on the issue twice in early 2/2015. Another campaign against the Palestinian MK had sought to disqualify her from the 1/2013 election for having participated in the Gaza Freedom Flotilla (5/2010). However, as the quarter ended, Israel’s Supreme Court was widely expected to overturn the CEC’s decision, as it had done on 12/30/2012, after the earlier attempt to disqualify Zoabi.

**OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS**

This quarter, the relative calm on the ground following OPE continued: 18 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (down from 231 last quarter); 5 Israelis, including 1 Druze policeman, were killed as a result of Palestinian actions (down from 9 last quarter). This brought the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the 2d intifada in 9/2000 to 10,527 Palestinians (including 53 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators); 1,213 Israelis (428 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 229 settlers, and 549 civilians); and 67 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). These numbers include individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel’s occupation and the ongoing conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died while being denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents).

**Overview of the Violence**

Five Palestinians died as a result of Israeli actions in the Gaza Strip this quarter, down from 218 in the previous period: 1 Hamas fighter in a cross-border incident; 1 Palestinian farmer who approached the border fence; and 3 who succumbed to injuries sustained during
OPE, bringing the total number of Palestinian fatalities from the summer 2014 attack to 2,192. In late 12/2014, there were a few occasional cross-border incidents and unexploded Israeli ordnance that caused Palestinian injuries. Finally, Israeli forces continued firing at Palestinians along the border fence and confronting Palestinian fishermen off the coast.

The Gaza Strip was thus relatively free of Israeli-Palestinian violence this quarter, except for the following 2 noteworthy incidents in late 12/2014. On 12/19, a small, armed Palestinian group fired 1 rocket into s. Israel nr. Eshkol, causing no damage or injuries. Israel, whose declared policy is to hold Hamas responsible for all projectile fire from the Strip, retaliated with an air strike on a training site run by Hamas’s Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades (IQB) nr. Khan Yunis. The strike caused moderate damage to the site and minor damage to a nearby UNRWA school. It was the 1st Israeli bombing in Gaza since the 8/26 cease-fire ending OPE. Less than 10 days later, a brief exchange of fire (12/24) between IQB fighters and IDF troops in the vicinity of Khan Yunis killed 1 Palestinian, wounded 2, and left 1 Israeli soldier severely injured by sniper fire. While each side reported the incident differently, both claimed to have struck defensive postures: Israel claimed that IDF troops were attacked as they were protecting a unit mending a section of the border fence, and Hamas alleged that Israeli forces had opened fire first, targeting Palestinian homes and fields in the area.

Up 1 from last quarter, 5 Palestinians were injured by unexploded Israeli ordnance this quarter—one woman on 12/4 and a teenager the next day.

As in previous quarters, IDF troops continued to enforce the unilaterally defined “Access Restricted Areas” along the Gaza border fence, firing on Palestinians who approached or tried to enter, whether to hunt birds, play, protest, throw stones at IDF troops, attempt to cross into Israel, or tend to farmland in the area. In a marked increase over last quarter, there were 37 such incidents in the current quarter, with 1 Palestinian killed and 31 injured (up from 0 and 7, respectively, last quarter). In accordance with the cease-fire agreement ending OPE on 8/26, Israel allowed Palestinian fishermen a fishing zone of 6 naut. mi. from the coast, an increase from the previous 3 but still far lower than the 20 mandated by the Oslo accords. As in previous quarters, however, Israeli naval forces opened fire on Palestinian fishermen or otherwise confronted them within the allotted zone. In the 43 incidents of this nature (a similar number to last quarter), Israeli forces destroyed 2 boats (11/17 and 1/3), damaged 12 (11/17, 12/18, 12/21, 1/11, 1/17 [2], 1/22, 1/24, 1/26 [2], 1/29, and 2/2), and confiscated 5 (12/6), detaining or arresting 21 fishermen (12/6 [12], 12/30 [2], 12/31 [3], and 1/26 [4]), and causing a total of 3 injuries (12/3, 1/3, and 1/21).

In the West Bank, 8 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions this quarter, down from 13 in the previous period. Of the total, 5 were killed during or as a result of confrontations with IDF troops (12/10, 12/15, 12/29, 1/14, and 1/31), 1 died from setting off unexploded Israeli ordnance on 11/23, 1 was hit by a bus driven by an Israeli on 11/25 (although reports differ on whether or not this was an accident), and 1 was crushed to death at a checkpoint nr. Tulkarm (see “Movement and Access” below for more).

In a high-profile incident, senior PA official and minister without portfolio Ziad Abu Ein died following a confrontation with the IDF. The head of the PA’s Comm. against the Separation Wall and Settlements and former dep. minister of prisoners’ affairs, Abu Ein was
leading a nonviolent olive tree-planting action outside Turmus 'Ayya, nr. Ramallah, on 12/10. The action was undertaken to commemorate International Human Rights Day and to protest the expropriation of village land by settlers from the nearby Adei Ad outpost. When IDF troops arrived on the scene, they shot tear gas and stun grenades at the protesters, and struck Abu Ein and several other Palestinians. Abu Ein, who had a history of heart disease and high blood pressure, collapsed and was rushed to a hospital, but died on the way.

As with similar incidents in the past, Palestinian and Israeli officials and media proceeded to offer widely divergent explanations for Abu Ein’s death. The Israelis highlighted Abu Ein’s pre-existing conditions while the Palestinians offered as evidence a video showing an Israeli soldier grabbing at Abu Ein’s neck and striking his chest. Predictably, Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian pathology reports issued after the autopsy (12/10) largely upheld the differing narratives. All agreed that the heart attack was the direct cause of his death, but each offered a different explanation for what caused it.

Abu Ein’s death sparked outrage, setting off a cascade of protests, demonstrations, and clashes between Palestinians and the IDF. His funeral in Ramallah on 12/11 was attended by 1,000s of Palestinians some of whom clashed with IDF troops in nearby al-Bireh afterward, with 19 suffering injuries from rubber-coated metal bullets. Also on 12/11, there were large protests in Hebron and Turmus 'Ayya, as well as several neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. (See “Push to Submit a Draft Resolution to the UNSC” above for details on how Abu Ein’s death affected international diplomacy.)

No Palestinians died in East Jerusalem this quarter, though 1 man from the Old City died on 12/30 in a West Jerusalem hospital after succumbing to injuries sustained in a funeral protest on 9/7 in Wadi al-Juz. After U.S. Secy. of State Kerry, Israeli PM Netanyahu, and Jordan’s King Abdullah reached agreement on lifting restrictions and reducing tensions at Haram al-Sharif at the end of last quarter (11/13), the number of Palestinian injuries in East Jerusalem declined for 3 straight weeks. According to OCHA, these numbers reached a low of 36 in the week of 11/25–12/1, down from 272, 208, and 328, respectively, in the 3 previous weeks. Overall, however, tensions continued to run high, as the following 2 major incidents illustrate.

On 11/16, a Palestinian bus driver employed by the Israeli transport company, Egged, was found hanged to death inside his bus late at night. The Israeli authorities wrote this incident off as a suicide, but the man’s family alleged that he was killed by Israeli settlers as retribution for another Palestinian’s stabbing of a Jewish Israeli nr. the Old City earlier in the day. In response to news of his death, clashes broke out in al-Tur in which 3 Palestinians were arrested. The next day, the PA Foreign Ministry released a statement blaming Netanyahu for the alleged murder, accusing him of incitement. Over the next mo., some 300 Palestinian drivers employed by Egged staged a 2-day strike (11/18–19) to protest the company’s decision not to provide them with enhanced security; fearing attacks from Israeli Jews, around 100 Palestinian drivers either quit or simply stopped showing up to work.

Just 2 days after the bus driver was found hanged, 2 Palestinian men from East Jerusalem’s Jabal Mukabir, armed with knives, axes, and guns, attacked a synagogue in an Orthodox neighborhood of West Jerusalem, killing 4 rabbis and a Druze policeman before they themselves were killed in a firefight. Israeli security forces conducted raids in Jabal Mukabir
hours after the attack and arrested 12 of the men’s relatives, sparking clashes with residents of the neighborhood in which 22 Palestinians were injured. As clashes spread across East Jerusalem, Netanyahu and Abbas traded further accusations of incitement, while Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and the PFLP all framed the attack as a response to the killing of the bus driver. Over the next few days, the international community condemned the attack, the Israeli authorities called up 2 reserve police companies in the city, ordered the demolition of the men’s family homes, and, in an unprecedented move, announced (11/19) that the attackers’ bodies would be punitively withheld from their families, sparking further clashes across the city. (The bodies were eventually returned on 12/24.)

**Movement and Access**

In the Gaza Strip, despite the easing of restrictions after OPE, usage of Israeli-controlled crossings rose or remained the same as compared with last quarter, but violence in the Sinai Peninsula continued to affect the Rafah crossing. According to OCHA, the total number of truckloads entering Gaza with goods and materials from Israel was 12,647 this quarter (down slightly from 13,350 the previous quarter), for a monthly average of 4,216, with 5,986 in the mo. of 12/2014 alone the highest monthly total since 2/2013. At the end of last quarter, and for the first time since 2007, Israel allowed exports from Gaza to the West Bank, once its primary market. According to Gisha, there was a steady rise in the volume of goods exported from the territory and the number of travelers exiting Gaza for the West Bank or to travel abroad: a total of 247 truckloads exited, including 186 with goods bound for the West Bank while 31,921 Palestinians crossed through Erez from 11/2014–1/2015, compared with 16,787 for the whole of the previous 3 mos. At the end of last quarter, the Egyptian authorities closed the Rafah border crossing indefinitely following the 10/24 attack by the group then called Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. In total, they reopened the crossing for 2 days starting on 11/26 and 3 more times during the quarter (11/30–12/1, 12/21–23, and 1/20–22). During those periods, 7,410 people passed through (5,319 entering and 2,091 exiting), a drastic decline from 45,868 crossing both ways from 8–10/2014.

Two developments of note: first, on 12/28, an Israeli nongovernmental organization had arranged for 37 Palestinian children who were orphaned during OPE to pass through the Erez border crossing for a 1-week tour of Israel and the West Bank. Hamas barred the children from leaving, decrying the trip as a publicity stunt with the goal of “normalization.” Second, in 2/2015, the Israeli govt. decided to invest NIS 20 m. (around $5 m.) into the Kerem Shalom and Erez crossings. In addition to stepping up security measures, the money was destined to double Kerem Shalom’s daily transit capacity to around 800 trucks and to install new baggage screening machines at Erez to reduce individual crossing times.

In the West Bank, Palestinian freedom of movement and access remained relatively steady, though the IDF continued to make frequent arrests at checkpoints and to operate flying checkpoints on a daily basis (see Chronology for details). There was 1 noteworthy incident when a Palestinian man was crushed to death at an overcrowded checkpoint nr. Tulkarm on 12/31. This came 10 days after 1,000s of Palestinians had held an impromptu strike protesting poor conditions and slow crossing times at the site.

Despite Netanyahu’s commitment (11/13) to minimizing restrictions on Palestinian access to Haram al-Sharif (see “Overview of the
Violence,” above), entry to the sanctuary continued to be a source of conflict in **East Jerusalem** this quarter. A new restriction requiring Palestinian women to leave their ID cards with security officers on entering Haram al-Sharif resulted in detentions on 11 separate occasions (12/8, 12/9, 12/10, 12/30, 1/4, 1/12, 1/19, 1/23, and 1/26) and to clashes on 2 consecutive days (11/16 and 11/17). Right-wing Jewish activists continued to tour the sanctuary, unhampered, in clear provocation of Muslim worshippers (see 11/16, 11/30, 12/8, 12/10, 12/14, 12/16, 12/18, 12/22, 12/23, 1/1, 1/5, 1/20, 1/25, 2/3, 2/5, and 2/11). Also of note, 75 new security guards were added to the sanctuary’s existing force on 12/11, in response to a request from Jordan’s King Abdullah.

**Protests**

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

In an action similar to one used in the past, Palestinian, Israeli, and international activists established a tent camp “settlement” in Abu Dis (2/3) to protest against the Israeli govt.’s plans to proceed with the relocation of up to 20,000 Negev bedouin in the West Bank (see JPS 170–73). Dubbed “Gate of Jerusalem,” the encampment echoed those of Bab al-Shams and ‘Ayn Hijleh in 1/2013 and 1/2014 (see JPS 167 and 171, respectively), and the IDF troops forcibly removed the activists and dismantled the camp hours after it was established. Though this action did not receive the same level of media attention as earlier efforts, the activists came back to rebuild the camp every day. (For more on the Israeli govt.’s bedouin relocation plans, see “The Prawer Plan, Special West Bank Edition,” by Amira Hass in Haaretz, 6/1/2014.)

**Settler-Related Violence**

Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians and their property in the West Bank continued this quarter. There were at least 78 such incidents, up from 58 and 100, respectively, for the previous 2 quarters. Most frequently, these occurred nr. Nablus (21) and Hebron (24), and they included levelling land (11/17, 12/7–8, and 1/15), destroying olive trees (12/5, 12/9, 1/1, 1/8, 1/9, 1/10, 1/11 [2], 1/17 [2], 1/18, 1/25, 1/31,
2/5, and 2/9), shootings (11/18, 11/21, 12/30, 1/10, 1/24, 2/6, and 2/7), throwing rocks at Palestinian vehicles (11/18 [2], 11/24, 1/10, 1/24, and 1/31), attacks using cars (11/19, 12/4, 12/12, 12/28, 12/31, 1/14, 1/23, 2/1 [2], 2/2, and 2/5), and price-tag attacks (11/22, 11/23, 12/31, and 1/18). In total, 29 Palestinians were injured in these incidents (see Chronology for details). In the immediate aftermath of the attack by 2 Palestinians on the synagogue in West Jerusalem (11/18), settler violence against Palestinians peaked with 11 incidents causing 14 injuries (OCHA, 11/28). There were also at least 75 incidents of Palestinian attacks against Israeli settlers or their property, according to OCHA (the comparative figures for the previous 2 quarters were 117 and 54, respectively).

In a separate and noteworthy incident, Israeli settlers attacked a convoy of U.S. security personnel on 2/2. The settlers threw rocks at 2 vehicles carrying officers from the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem as they approached Turmus ’Ayya village nr. Ramallah, where a high-profile altercation between Israeli security and PA official Ziad Abu Ein in 12/2014 had ended with the Palestinian man’s death (see “Overview of the Violence” above). The U.S. officers were on their way to perform a security check ahead of a larger delegation’s visit to inspect the damage from a series of settler attacks on olive trees over the previous week.

**Palestinian Prisoners**

The status of Palestinian prisoners remained largely unchanged this quarter. According to OCHA, the overall number of Palestinians held in Israeli detention increased slightly, reaching a high of 5,549 (1/2015) compared with the previous quarter’s 5,477 (10/2014). The figure included 20 women (1/2015) and 463 administrative detainees (12/2014).
treat Sa’adi like a regular prisoner; return the strike leaders to their original wards; and phase out the use of solitary confinement “without cause.”

**Demolitions and Confiscations**

There were 90 reported demolitions of Palestinian property this quarter (14 in East Jerusalem and 76 in Area C of the West Bank), displacing 135 Palestinians (down from 493 last quarter), according to OCHA. At year’s end, the agency reported that in 2014 a total of 601 structures had been demolished in the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

The policy of issuing demolition notices to Palestinians building homes without the proper permits also continued. There were 9 reported instances of Israeli forces delivering such notices this quarter (5 in the West Bank and 4 in East Jerusalem), pertaining to the demolition of 31 residences, several tents, and a set of water wells.

In the wake of the kidnapping and killing of 3 teenage settlers in 6/2014, the Israeli govt. had reinstated its policy of punitively demolishing the homes of Palestinians accused, without due judicial process, of serious crimes. The policy was maintained this quarter although it was put to the test by Israel’s Supreme Court. The court twice froze demolition orders delivered to the family home of the Palestinian accused of the 10/29 shooting of right-wing activist Yehuda Glick: once on 11/19, and another time on 12/31 after the Jerusalem municipal authorities had reissued the order on the grounds that the 3-story building was unlicensed. During the 12/31 session, the court nevertheless rejected a petition to ban the practice of punitive demolitions, as well as another petition calling for a reprieve on the family homes of the 2 Palestinians involved in the West Jerusalem synagogue attack on 11/18.

**INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS**

UNITY GOVT. STRUGGLES CONTINUE

Last quarter, the PA’s unity govt. made little progress in addressing the major challenges it faced and the stagnation persisted this quarter, with Hamas applying increasing pressure on the Ramallah-based leadership. This situation was only exacerbated by the failure of international donors to fulfill their pledges (10/12) toward Gaza’s reconstruction (see “Reconstruction of Gaza” above).

Despite the PA’s transfer (10/28) of partial payments to employees hired by the post-2007 Hamas-run govt., the public sector wage crisis in Gaza, under way since the unity govt.’s swearing-in (6/2014), continued unabated this quarter. Early on, there were several calls (e.g., 11/16 and 11/30) by Hamas officials for replacing the unity govt. on the grounds that it had not fulfilled its obligations, notably paying the wages of Gaza’s civil servants but also failing to hold elections within 6 mos. as promised (see the QU in JPS 173). These calls were soon followed by 2 major public sector strikes, 1 for 15 days (12/3–18) by the union of hospital workers and a 1-day general public sector strike on 12/11.

In order to discuss the ongoing wage crisis and other issues, a group of ministers from the unity govt. made an emergency trip to Gaza on 12/29, the 2nd such ministerial visit since the govt. was sworn in on 6/2. (The first was on 10/9.) The next day, the ministers announced that the PA would guarantee the jobs of all of the 70,000 or so employees who had stopped working when the Hamas-run govt. came to power, effectively firing the 50,000 hired by Hamas after 2007. Spokesperson Ehab Bessaiso would later clarify that some civil servants hired by Hamas might be kept on in case of unspecified “need” (1/1). The decision was met with protests (12/29), heavy criticism from Hamas (12/30), and
another 1-day public sector strike (12/31). Despite PM Rami Hamdallah’s suggestion that Hamas civil servants be offered severance pay or small projects to work on (1/7/2015), Hamas looked to settle the problem outside the unity govt. At a meeting of Palestinian factions on 1/11, Hamas proposed the creation of an emergency comm. to administer Gaza, but the PFLP and DFLP both rejected the suggestion. The next day (1/12), the movement announced that it would quit the unity govt. if the wage crisis was not resolved and it reinstated Gaza’s separate Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). Addressing a number of issues, PLC mbrrs. took turns lambasting the unity govt. for its treatment of the civil servants. Protests continued through the end of the quarter, with civil servants going on strike (1/12, 1/18–19, and 1/20), conducting sit-ins (also 1/20), and otherwise demonstrating (1/14 and 1/28) as the unity govt. took no further action.

MOHAMMED DAHLAN TAKES ACTION
Apart from the ongoing wage crisis, attention turned to exiled Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan this quarter, as he and Hamas appeared to overcome their historical enmity and PA Pres. Abbas continued his attempts to marginalize him. Dahlan, who headed Fatah’s security forces during the fighting that erupted in Gaza in the aftermath of Hamas’s 2006 electoral victory, was subsequently expelled from the party in 2011 when he emerged as a serious rival to Abbas, and has lived in exile in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) ever since (for more on Dahlan and his ambitions, see Ramzy Baroud’s article in Selections from the Press, JPS 172). This quarter, Hamas and Dahlan worked together on post-OPE reconstruction efforts in Gaza. Along with his supporters, Dahlan had reportedly raised money in the UAE, including from the Khalifa charity, to be distributed via the National Islamic Comm. for Social Solidarity in Gaza, which includes reps. from both Hamas and Islamic Jihad. The comm. reportedly received $130,000 from the UAE and, at a 12/16 meeting, agreed on distributing aid to victims of OPE as follows: $1,500 to the seriously injured, $700 to the moderately injured, and $500 to the lightly injured. Dahlan’s wife, Jalila, handed out some of these payments in person, on 12/28. As this newly established cooperation proceeded, Hamas approved a request for his supporters to hold a demonstration on 12/18 protesting the PA’s initiation of legal proceedings against Dahlan on corruption charges. (Dahlan had already been tried in absentia once before in 3/2014, when he was found guilty of defamation.) On 1/18, both Hamas and Dahlan criticized the move to withhold the 12/2014 paychecks of some 200 Dahlan-affiliated PA employees.

PALESTINIAN OPINION
The following data was excerpted from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) on 3–6 December 2014. The results are based on a survey of 1,270 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The poll, the 54th in a series, was taken from PSR’s website at www.pcpsr.org.

1. In the last war in the Gaza Strip between Hamas and the resistance factions, who, in your view, came out the winner, Hamas or Israel? [When this question was posed last quarter, a total of 78.7% responded “a” (83.9% in the West Bank, 70% in Gaza); 2.6% said “b” (1.0% in the West Bank, 5.3% in Gaza); 17.0% said “c” (13.5% in the West Bank, 22.8% in Gaza); 1.2% said “d” (0.8% in the West Bank,
1.9% in Gaza); 0.5% said “e” (0.8% in the West Bank, 0.0% in Gaza).]

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Hamas and the resistance factions</td>
<td>66.2%</td>
<td>71.4%</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Israel</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. No one</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>19.7%</td>
<td>26.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Both sides</td>
<td>2.1%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
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2. Now, about 5 months after the formation of the reconciliation government, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with its performance?

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Certainly satisfied</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Satisfied</td>
<td>24.2%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Not satisfied</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
<td>50.2%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly not satisfied</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>24.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
</tr>
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3. Some think that the PA is not doing its job as it should while others think it is doing its job as it should. If you think the reconciliation government is not doing its job as it should, who in your view is responsible for that?

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. The PA and Abbas</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Hamas</td>
<td>20.6%</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
<td>30.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The head of the reconciliation govt.</td>
<td>14.7%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. The PA is doing its job as it should</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>20.4%</td>
<td>28.3%</td>
<td>7.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Did you hear about Abbas’s plan which demands the setting of a deadline for ending Israeli occupation and building a Palestinian state?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Certainly yes</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>10.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Yes</td>
<td>33.7%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. No</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>51.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly no</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. If you have heard about it, do you support or oppose it?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. Certainly support</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Support</td>
<td>52.1%</td>
<td>54.1%</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Oppose</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly oppose</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>2.9%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6. In your view, what are the chances for its success?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. High</td>
<td>8.2%</td>
<td>7.0%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Medium</td>
<td>34.5%</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>42.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Low</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>35.2%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Non-existent</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>25.0%</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td>2.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Focused largely on regional and internal politics, the Egyptian govt. of Pres. Abdel Fattah
al-Sisi was not seriously involved in Israeli-Palestinian issues this quarter, although it hosted 2 meetings of the Arab League that discussed PA Pres. Abbas’s UNSC-related plans (11/29 and 1/15). But there was no resumption of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as was announced the previous quarter in order to follow up on issues left outstanding after the OPE cease-fire agreement (e.g., Hamas’s demand for a seaport/airport).

Days before scheduled talks were set to begin, the Islamist group then known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis launched (10/24) a series of deadly attacks on Egyptian security forces in the Sinai Peninsula, killing over 30 people. (On 11/10, the group pledged allegiance to ISIS and began calling itself the Sinai Province of the Islamic State [SPIS].) After declaring a “state of emergency” in Sinai, shutting down the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip (see “Movement and Access” above), and escalating security in the area, Egypt postponed the negotiations indefinitely (10/26). That response became entrenched during the quarter, further highlighting the Egyptian dimension of the Gaza blockade and reinforcing the al-Sisi gov’t’s antagonistic stance vis-à-vis Muslim political groups.

As with the 10/24 attacks, Egyptian officials continued to accuse Palestinians—and Hamas in particular—of stoking the ongoing violence in Sinai. Citing the group’s alleged role in the 10/24 attacks, the Cairo Court of Urgent Matters (1/31/2015) designated Hamas’s military wing, the Izzedin al-Qassam Brigades, a terrorist organization. An anonymous Hamas official told Reuters the same day that the group would no longer recognize Egyptian mediation in negotiations with the Israelis while hundreds of Palestinians protested the ruling in Gaza City in the following week (2/2 and 2/6). Egypt blamed Hamas for setting off a bomb aboard an Egyptian troop transport in n. Sinai, on 2/3, and Egyptian soldiers stationed along the border with Gaza opened fire on 2 Palestinian military posts the same day. Neither incident caused injuries.

Work on the buffer zone along the Gaza-Sinai border also continued this quarter. After discovering and demolishing 12 tunnels from Gaza, including several between 800 and 1,000 m long, the Egyptian gov’t. announced (11/17) that it would double the width of the buffer zone to as much as 1 km in some places. As preparations for the work began on 1/4, approximately 1,200 homes were set to be demolished, and 3 days later a high-ranking local official confirmed earlier reports (1/7) that the Egyptian city of Rafah would be razed to accommodate the buffer zone expansion. He was reported as saying that “a new Rafah city” was being established for the approximately 2,044 displaced families (1/8).

Throughout the quarter, Egyptian security forces in Sinai stepped up their counterinsurgency measures in response to continued SPIS attacks, killing some 15 fighters, including 1 commander, in and around Shaykh Zuwayd and Rafah (12/15, 12/25, 1/7, and 1/12). After the Egyptian cabinet decided (1/25) to extend the state of emergency in Sinai for an additional 3 mos., including the 7:00 P.M.-6:00 A.M. curfew, SPIS retaliated with another large-scale, phased attack, which set off a period of heightened tension. The insurgent group targeted (1/29) several Egyptian security facilities in al-Arish with a car bomb and rockets, and launched simultaneous attacks on several checkpoints in the area, killing 32 and injuring over 100, including civilians. Following relatively minor clashes on 1/30 and 2/1, in which 4 women and children were killed, on 2/6, Egyptian security forces launched a large-scale operation, killing 27 SPIS fighters. As the
quarter ended, the violence continued unabated, with a SPIS suicide bomb attack on the Shaykh Zuwayd police station on 2/14 injuring 6 people.

In addition to Egypt’s purported retaliation against Palestinian military posts in Gaza on 2/3, there were other incidents of cross-border violence. Egyptian security forces shot and killed a Palestinian security officer on 11/28 in an ambush allegedly targeting someone else nr. Shaykh Zuwayd. Egyptian troops stationed along the border opened fire on Palestinians on multiple occasions, injuring a fisherman on 12/13 and killing a child on 1/2. Off the coast of Gaza nr. Rafah, Egyptian naval forces opened fire (1/23) on a Palestinian fishing boat, injuring 1 fisherman and arresting another.

JORDAN

In the wake of the 11/13 agreement between Israeli PM Netanyahu, U.S. Secy. of State Kerry, and Jordan’s King Abdullah to maintain the status quo at Haram al-Sharif, tensions between Israel and Jordan largely subsided, despite Jordan’s active support for Palestinian diplomatic efforts at the UNSC (see “The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict” above). As the quarter opened, and with tension in Jerusalem still high, Jordanian and Israeli diplomats had a minor spat over the Jordanian PM’s official letter of condolence to the families of the 2 perpetrators of the West Jerusalem synagogue attack on 11/18 (see “Overview of the Violence” above). The Israeli Embassy in Amman lodged (11/24) a formal complaint over the PM’s letter and Amb. Daniel Nevo was summoned to Jordan’s Foreign Ministry and reprimanded for his criticism of the Jordanian parliament as being petty and inconsequential. Nothing further came of the incident and despite continuing high tensions in Jerusalem, relations between the 2 countries went back to normal, after Jordan returned its amb. to Israel on 2/2 whom it had recalled on 11/5 to protest Israeli violations of the status quo in East Jerusalem. On the economic front, Jordan’s $15 b. deal with U.S. company Noble Energy to import natural gas from Israel came under fire in this quarter. In Jordan, the deal proved unpopular despite its promise to alleviate the country’s energy crisis, with the parliament casting a nonbinding vote to cancel the agreement (12/11) and a number of popular protests on the streets (e.g., on 12/19). Legislators argued that the deal would facilitate the costly process of developing infrastructure to take advantage of offshore fields controlled by Israel and that increased economic ties with Israel would further marginalize the Palestinians. In Israel, regulators undermined the deal by challenging Noble Energy and its Israeli partner, the Delek Group, on antitrust charges. On 12/23, the head of Israel’s Antitrust Authority, David Gilo, revoked his 2011 approval of the Delek-Noble Energy partnership, on the grounds that it constituted a cartel. Shortly afterward, Noble Energy halted (12/25) development work on the Leviathan and Tamar fields, citing the uncertain regulatory environment in Israel, and Jordan suspended (1/4) talks on implementing its agreement with the company. At the Antitrust Authority’s annual conference held in 1/2015, Gilo elucidated his position: “We aren’t intervening against the monopoly just because it’s a monopoly. We’re intervening . . . because of the allegation that the monopoly was obtained through an alleged agreement in restraint of trade made by the parties” (1/13).

LEBANON AND SYRIA

The ongoing conflict in Syria completely overshadowed the political and diplomatic scene in both Syria and Lebanon this quarter,
with little of significance pertaining to Israeli or Palestinian affairs. The 2 highlights of the quarter consisted of a period of increased tension on Israel’s n. border with Syria and some internal turmoil within Hizballah, as charges of collaboration with Israel were brought against a senior security cadre.

On 1/18, an Israeli helicopter fired 2 missiles at a 3-car convoy outside the Syrian town of Qunaytra in the Golan Heights, killing 6 Hizballah fighters (including the son of a senior commander who had been killed in 2008) and 6 Iranian Revolutionary Guards, among them 1 gen. Anticipating a swift response from Hizballah, the IDF immediately went on high alert, deploying (1/19) 2 additional Iron Dome batteries and increasing (1/22) troop deployments to the region. The response did not come until 10 days later when there was a 24-hour period of back and forth artillery exchanges, when 2 rockets fired from the Syrian side of the border (1/28) landed in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights, causing no injuries. The IDF retaliated with at least 20 artillery shells fired into Syria, and, in Lebanon, Hizballah fighters killed 2 Israeli soldiers and injured 7 after firing an antitank missile at an IDF convoy in a disputed border area nr. Shaba’ Farms. The IDF responded by targeting known Hizballah locations in Lebanon’s border communities, with 1 Spanish peacekeeper from the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) being killed as a result. Despite another exchange of mortar and artillery fire, Hizballah and the IDF both conveyed messages through UNIFIL that they wished to avoid further escalation. While both sides tried to spin the skirmish in their own favor, neither took further action.

Meanwhile, in late 11/2014, Hizballah arrested the head of its External Operations Unit, Muhammad Shawraba, as well as 4 of his men on charges of spying for Israel. Shawraba, who was, among other things, responsible for the personal security of Hizballah leader Hasan Nasrallah, was accused of sabotaging at least 5 attacks on Israel since 2008.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

On the regional level, major developments this quarter appeared to jeopardize Hamas’s relationship with Qatar, 1 of its key supporters. At the 35th annual meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), reps. of Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, and the UAE pledged (12/9) their full support to Egyptian pres. al-Sisi, ending a period of uncertainty and tension in the region after al-Sisi declared the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) a terrorist organization in 12/2013 (Saudi Arabia followed suit in 3/2014). Qatar’s endorsement of the agreement put into question its position as a patron of Hamas and other groups affiliated with the Brotherhood.

On 12/20, a high-ranking Qatari official traveled to Cairo and after meeting with al-Sisi, a statement was issued saying, “The security of Egypt is the security of Qatar.” This not only cemented the rapprochement between the 2 countries but cast additional uncertainty over Hamas’s future, given the group’s uneasy, often antagonistic relationship with Egypt (see “Egypt” above). There were numerous unconfirmed reports subsequently that Qatar was curtailing or ending its support for Hamas, with multiple Israeli and international media outlets (as well as the Israel’s Foreign Ministry) claiming (1/6) that Hamas leader Khalid Mishal had been expelled from Qatar, his base since leaving Damascus in 1/2012. While Hamas officials consistently denied reports of a shifting Qatari stance, their efforts to court new patrons
died little to stop the rumors (see “Repairing Ties with Hamas” under “Iran” below).

ARAB LEAGUE

There were only 2 Arab League meetings relevant to the Palestinians this quarter (11/29 and 1/15). On both occasions, PA Pres. Abbas addressed the gathered reps. and asked them to support his plans at the UNSC (see “The Palestinian-Israel Conflict” above). The League’s secy. gen., Nabil Elaraby, was active in talks throughout Europe leading up to the 12/17 submission of the Palestinians’ draft res. to the UNSC.

TURKEY

Low-level Turkish-Israeli tensions continued this quarter, with 1 noteworthy incident illustrating the 2 countries’ persisting animosity, as Israeli and Turkish officials traded barbs about Israeli PM Netanyahu’s self-imposed attendance at the Paris demonstrations (1/11) that followed the Charlie Hebdo (1/7) and kosher supermarket shootings. On the occasion of PA Pres. Abbas’s state visit (1/12) to Turkey, Pres. Erdoğan expressed outrage that the Israeli PM had seen fit to attend the Paris march (which Abbas also attended), saying that Netanyahu should instead be “accounting for” all the women and children killed in Gaza; the Turkish pres. also described Israel’s summer 2014 assault on the territory as “waging state terror.” Addressing Israeli diplomats in his dept., Israeli FM Lieberman characterized Erdoğan as an “anti-Semitic bully” (1/14) and PM Ahmet Davutoğlu jumped into the fray the next day, saying, “If Israel is looking for a bully, it needs to look in the mirror.”

Meanwhile, Turkey continued to provide Palestinians with humanitarian and economic support. PA Dep. PM Mohammed Mustafa was in Ankara for a series of meetings with Turkish officials on 11/26–27, when a new memorandum of understanding was signed between the 2 sides, including a Turkish project to build an industrial zone in Jenin. Hamas leader Khalid Mishal also traveled to Turkey this quarter and addressed a supportive crowd at the annual congress of the ruling Justice and Development Party in Konya on 12/27.

IRAN

**Repairing Ties with Hamas**

This quarter saw a thawing of relations between Iran and Hamas after a chill of almost 4 years that set in after the conflict in Syria began in 2011. With Hamas’s economic and diplomatic standing shaky in the wake of OPE, and the Saudi-Iranian fault line increasingly driving regional power realignments, Hamas started putting out feelers to Iran. After an early meeting between Mishal and senior Iranian military commander, Maj.-Gen. Qassem Sulaimani, in Turkey days after the 8/26 cease-fire (al-Hayat, 2/17), Hamas and Iranian officials met in Lebanon in 11–12/2014. They arranged for a delegation of Hamas reps., including Lebanon-based Usama Hamdan, to travel to Tehran on 12/8 for talks on repairing ties and with a view to planning a visit by Mishal in the nr. future. Another Hamas delegation was also in Iran on 1/6 to participate in the 28th International Conference on Islamic Unity. Throughout the quarter, Hamas officials continued to say that Mishal’s visit was in the works, but, by 2/15, it had not materialized.

**P5+1 and the IAEA**

The quarter opened with negotiators from the P5+1 (the 5 mbrs. of the UNSC + Germany) and Iran meeting almost every day ahead of their 11/24 deadline to reach an agreement on Iran’s nuclear program (a deadline that had already been extended from the initial one of 7/20), and
a further extension was widely expected. Although the parties continued to be tight-lipped about specifics, the same key divergences remained. On the P5+1 side: a cap on Iran’s operational centrifuges and its stockpiles of enriched uranium; a limit on other pathways to acquire a nuclear weapon (e.g., plutonium production at the Arak heavy water reactor); continued access for inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) throughout the term of any agreement; a schedule for phased sanctions relief; a minimum term of 10 years, although some P5+1 mburs. hoped for longer. On the Iranian side: more lenient limits on centrifuges (a recent proposal to dismantle or reprogram up to 1,000) and uranium stockpiles; less frequent IAEA inspections; immediate sanctions relief; and a deal covering as few as 7 years.

Ultimately, negotiators agreed (11/24) to yet another extension of the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), the agreement signed exactly 1 year earlier (11/24/2013) governing the negotiations. While the talks were extended 7 mos., the 2 sides agreed to draw up a political accord by the end of 3/2015, leaving final technical details for a set of annexes to be agreed on by 7/1/2015. During this extension period, the P5+1 agreed that Iran would have access to $700 m. per mo. in previously frozen assets and that certain sanctions would be relieved, notably on petrochemicals, precious metals, and auto parts. For its part, Iran agreed to: convert around 75 kg of 20% enriched uranium into fuel for the Tehran Research Reactor (20% enriched uranium can be further enriched to weapons-grade relatively quickly); provide expanded access to the IAEA, doubling the frequency of its visits to Iran’s centrifuges; limit research and testing on any alternative forms of uranium enrichment. Announcing the extension of the agreement, senior officials involved in the talks remained opaque, indicating only that progress had been made but significant gaps remained. U.S. Secy. of State Kerry barely elaborated (11/24), stating, “We have seen new ideas surface . . . At this point, we have developed a clearer understanding of what that kind of deal could look like.”

From the 11/24 extension to the end of the quarter, some of those “new ideas” leaked out to the press. As the negotiations took on a bilateral component, with U.S. and Iranian officials conducting separate talks alongside the 3 major rounds of negotiations, the press reported new developments each time: during the 1st round of discussions, on 12/15–17, U.S. and Iranian diplomats reportedly drew up a list of their remaining differences and overall positions, in an effort to guide subsequent talks (1/2); after the 2d round, 1 mo. later (1/14–18/2015), the public learned that U.S. and Iranian officials had produced a draft document titled “Principles of Agreement,” which was reportedly an element of the political accord negotiators hoped to complete by the end of 3/2015; the 3d round of negotiations, in Munich on 2/6–8, was reportedly the most fruitful. Citing anonymous officials close to the talks, the media reported that the U.S. made a number of proposals on capping Iranian enrichment, each setting Iran’s “breakout” time to at least 1 year, i.e., in the event of an Iranian decision to build a nuclear weapon, Tehran would not be able to enrich sufficient uranium to weapons-grade in under 1 year (2/12).

By the time talks were starting in Munich in 2/2015, some officials began expressing a degree of optimism. On 2/8, Iranian FM Mohammad Zarif said of the 3d round, “This is the opportunity,” and U.S. Pres. Barack Obama...
stated, “The issues now are sufficiently narrowed and sufficiently clarified, where we’re at a point where they need to make a decision.” But a statement by Iran’s supreme leader put a slight damper on the more upbeat pronouncements, with Ayatollah Ali Khamenei indicating on the same day that he would sign off only on a complete agreement, thus rejecting the 2-phase structure that had been agreed on 11/24. Then, the Wall Street Journal reported (2/13) that Khamenei had recently written to Obama, in response to a letter from the U.S. pres. in 10/2014. According to a U.S. admin. official, the supreme leader’s letter detailed U.S. offenses vis-à-vis Iran in the last 60 years, but left the “door open” for an agreement with the P5+1.

Throughout the quarter, critics of the diplomatic track maintained their inimical stance to the talks. More than three-quarters of Iran’s parliament—over 220 out of 290 mbrs.—signed onto (2/3) a bill annulling the JPOA and accelerating the country’s nuclear program in the event that the U.S. imposed additional sanctions on Iran. In the U.S., the Republican-dominated 114th Congress was sworn in on 1/6, and many of its mbrs. promised to prioritize legislation that would apply more congressional oversight to the negotiations. Pres. Obama reiterated that he would veto any such legislation (e.g., 1/16 and 1/20), and it appeared unlikely that the Republicans could drum up enough Democratic support to override a presidential veto. Finally, several Israeli officials, foremost among them PM Netanyahu, were vocal critics of the talks throughout the quarter but their criticism did more damage to the U.S.-Israel relationship than to the ongoing negotiations. (For more details, see Chronology and “Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Obama” below.)

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Opposing All Unilateral Efforts

Following Israel’s assault on Gaza in 7–8/2014, the Obama admin. did not initiate any efforts to restart the peace negotiations that had broken down in 4/2014, and it continued actively opposing the unilateral efforts pursued by both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

According to a report in Haaretz (12/4) early on in the quarter, the Obama admin. was considering stepping up its condemnation of ongoing Israeli settlement growth in East Jerusalem. The newspaper claimed that the admin., which had in the previous quarter stuck to describing such settlement announcements as “concerning” (9/2 and 10/1), was now contemplating some kind of policy escalation. While the report occasioned no official comment, it provoked swift and fierce criticism from Congress. On 12/5, 48 mbrs. of Congress signed on to a letter to Pres. Obama demanding clarification. “The mere notion that the admin. would unilaterally impose sanctions against Israel is not only unwise, but is extremely worrisome,” the letter read. But when on 1/30, the Israeli govt. published tenders for 450 new residences in 4 West Bank settlements and the Jerusalem municipal govt. republished a plan for 93 new housing units in the East Jerusalem settlement of s. Gilo, the official U.S. response was couched in stock language. Speaking to the press, White House spokesperson Josh Earnest said the admin. had “deep concerns about these highly contentious settlement construction announcements.”

U.S. diplomats this quarter also delayed or stymied Palestinian efforts to submit a UNSC res. calling for a timetable on ending the Israeli occupation (see “Palestinian-Israeli Peace
Process" above). After making no comment on the Palestinian move last quarter, Secy. of State Kerry called PA Pres. Abbas on 11/16 to tell him that the U.S. would veto such a res. Although Kerry was primarily preoccupied with the P5+1 negotiations with Iran, he participated in the series of meetings held across Europe on 12/15–17 in an attempt to either delay or stop the Palestinian measure. Kerry met with both European and Russian diplomats to discuss the Palestinian res. and the French counterproposal drafted in an attempt to win over the U.S. (He had earlier been reported as having been in favor of drawing up a U.S. draft res. in place of both the French and Palestinian measures, but Pres. Obama apparently scuppered the idea [Haaretz, 12/3].) For the remaining 2 weeks of 12/2014, the U.S. continued to lobby against the Palestinians’ UNSC plans, arguing for a delay until after the Israeli elections on 3/17 (see above). As the Palestinians were finalizing their draft for resubmission on 12/29 and subsequent vote the following day, Kerry redoubled his efforts, calling 13 different FMs from around the world. The day of the UNSC vote (12/30), Nigeria opted to abstain from voting, leaving the res. with only 8 backers and rendering the U.S. veto unnecessary.

While less active on the Israeli-Palestinian issue in the 2d half of the quarter, the U.S. continued to condemn both sides’ unilateral efforts. Days after Israel announced the freeze of tax revenues to the PA, Kerry contacted Netanyahu to argue against the move and State Dept. spokesperson Jen Psaki said (1/6), “We call on both sides to avoid actions that raise tensions and make it more difficult to return to negotiations.” Psaki also described the Palestinians’ accession to the ICC as “counterproductive” and summed up the U.S. position, saying, “What we are trying to avoid here is a back and forth tit-for-tat.”

While Psaki was referencing Palestinian and Israeli measures and countermeasures, the admin.’s stance also reflected concern over an existing U.S. law that would trigger a cutoff in direct aid to the PA and that does not afford the pres. a waiver. Under this law, Congress would suspend financial aid to the PA in the event that the Palestinians brought or supported a case against Israeli individuals at the ICC. Although no major legislative effort was initiated in this regard, 75 sen. and the entire House Foreign Affairs Comm., with the exception of Karen Bass (D-CA), signed on to letters (1/29 and 1/22, respectively) to Kerry calling for suspending aid to the PA while the Obama admin. reviewed the ICC move.

Netanyahu, Republicans in Congress, and Obama

Having grown increasingly acrimonious in recent years, relations between Netanyahu’s govt. and the Obama admin. deteriorated further this quarter, specifically as a result of partisan politics by congressional Republicans on the P5+1’s ongoing negotiations with Iran. In the 1st week of the legislative session, Speaker of the U.S. House of Reps. John Boehner (R-OH) conveyed a private request to Israel’s amb. to the U.S., Ron Dermer, to invite Netanyahu to visit Washington and address Congress. A vociferous opponent of negotiations with Iran over its nuclear program, Netanyahu accepted the opportunity to warn Congress and the Americans against any agreement the Obama admin. might conclude and toward which progress was being made in the P5+1 international talks (see “P5+1 and the IAEA” above). When Boehner announced (1/21) Netanyahu’s visit, the admin. was caught unaware and a political firestorm ensued. Since neither Boehner nor the Israelis had informed, much less consulted, admin. officials, the
invitation was considered a breach of protocol, as indicated later that day by Earnest. And as Netanyahu scheduled his speech for 3/3, exactly 2 weeks prior to the 3/17 Israeli elections, the State Dept. announced (1/22) that neither the pres. nor the secy. of state would meet with the Israeli PM, citing the “long-standing practice and principle” of not meeting with world leaders ahead of their elections.

In a shift away from traditional bipartisan support for Israel in Congress, Democrats slowly began falling in line with the admin. on the question of negotiations with Iran. On 1/28, House minority leader Nancy Pelosi (D-CA) called Netanyahu to ask him to postpone or cancel his speech. In an attempt to quell the partisan divide, Netanyahu spoke (1/28) with senior Senate Democrats—minority leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Charles Schumer (D-NY)—but little came of the move and one by one, Democrats in Congress began announcing that they would not attend the speech. Rep. John Yarmuth (D-KY), a longtime supporter of Israel, offered (2/12) several reasons for his own planned absence. “There is a demonstrable risk that Netanyahu will use the perception of congressional support in his campaign,” the Jewish lawmaker said. The admin. for its part reached out to Netanyahu’s chief contender in the elections. On the sidelines of a security conference in Munich, both VP Joseph Biden and Kerry met (2/7) with Labor Party leader Isaac Herzog who also called on Netanyahu to cancel his speech to preserve good relations with the U.S.

Tension escalated to such a point that Abraham Foxman, the head of the pro-Israel, right-wing Anti-Defamation League (ADL), took an unusual stand, saying (2/6) that the political uproar surrounding the speech made it counterproductive and that Netanyahu should cancel. The controversy continued to escalate as the quarter came to a close, with at least 16 Democrats pledging to stay away on that day and Netanyahu repeatedly reaffirming and defending his plans.

Also of note this quarter: Pres. Obama signed the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act into law on 12/19 after it had passed in the House on 12/3 and in the Senate on 9/18. The law, strengthening the 2 countries’ strategic alliance in a variety of ways, calls for increased intelligence and military cooperation, as well as new congressional oversight procedures. It also urges Israel’s admittance to the Visa Waiver Program once Tel Aviv satisfies the program’s requirements (see S. 2673 on congressionalmonitor.org and the QU in JPS 174 for more).

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

The PLO and the PA were on trial in the U.S. this quarter on charges brought under the Anti-Terrorism Act of 1990 giving U.S. victims of international terrorism legal recourse in U.S. federal court. The families of U.S. citizens killed or wounded in 6 terror attacks in Israel between 2002 and 2004 had filed a lawsuit in 2004, alleging that the PA and the PLO sponsored the attacks. They were seeking $1 b. in damages and since the charges involved terrorism, any damages assessed to the Palestinians would be automatically tripled. Despite the defense’s efforts to delay or abort on jurisdictional grounds, the trial opened on 1/13/2015 and ran through the end of the quarter. Senior PLO official Hanan Ashrawi and PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj both testified on 2/10, describing the Palestinian leadership’s decision-making structure at the time of the attack. While the witnesses agreed not to discuss the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the results of the trial had the potential to further exacerbate the PA economic crisis stemming from Israel’s tax revenue freeze.
**Syria**

In a major development in the struggle against ISIS this quarter, Obama sent (2/11) Congress a proposal to authorize the use of military force against the group. Specifically, the authorization would allow the use of ground forces, but not in “enduring offensive ground combat operations,” as well as continued air strikes for the subsequent 3 years. The authorization would not be limited geographically, allowing the U.S. military to attack ISIS anywhere in the world. Pres. Obama 1st authorized air strikes against ISIS on 9/10/2014.

As the quarter ended, Congress was deliberating on the authorization and mbrs. from both parties expressed reservations about the proposal. Pelosi said that many Democrats were still “burned” by the debate that led the U.S. to war in Iraq in 2002, adding that “scope” was the debate Congress would be engaged in (2/11). Boehner, however, found the proposal’s wording too restrictive, saying it would not “give our military commanders the flexibility and authorities they need” (2/15).

**Iran**

The ongoing P5+1 negotiations remained the focus of the U.S. govt. with regard to Iran this quarter, and Congress continued to exert its own pressure on the talks. As the U.S. took on more of a leadership role within the P5+1 (see “P5+1 and the IAEA” above), Republicans and key Democrats in the Senate were preparing 3 major new initiatives designed to give Congress additional oversight on the talks and an eventual deal. There was little movement on old bills during the lame-duck session that followed the Republican victories in the 11/4 midterm elections, but the party’s leadership made clear that it would prioritize the talks with Iran once the 114th Congress was sworn in.

In particular, Lindsey Graham (R-SC), the incoming chmn. of the Senate appropriations subcomm. on the State Dept. and foreign operations, said (12/27) that there would be a vote in 1/2015 on a new sanctions bill written by Mark Kirk (R-IL) and Robert Menendez (D-NJ).

When the 114th Congress opened on 1/6/2015, attention rapidly shifted to the brewing controversy around Netanyahu’s upcoming speech. The subsequent growing partisan divide hindered Menendez and Kirk’s efforts to draft and introduce their bill. After weeks of negotiations and a major compromise, they introduced the Nuclear Weapon Free Iran Act of 2015, which would apply several oversight mechanisms on the negotiations, reinstate sanctions should the talks fail to produce an agreement, and offer a nonbinding, yet restrictive, set of parameters for a deal to guide future legislation (see S. 269 on congressionalmonitor.org for more). Reflecting that compromise, Menendez and 9 Democratic supporters of the bill sent (1/27) a letter to Pres. Obama saying that they would not push for a vote before 3/24, giving the negotiators time to reach a political agreement ahead of their deadline at the end of 3/2015. The Senate Banking Comm., which has purview over any international sanctions, approved the measure on 1/29 by a vote of 18–4, clearing the final obstacle for a vote on the Senate floor, if and when one was called. A White House spokesperson reiterated that the pres. would veto the bill if it passed.

Meanwhile, Sen. Bob Corker (R-TN), chair of Senate Foreign Relations Comm., spearheaded another sanctions-related initiative in Congress this quarter. He did not officially introduce the bill but made its basic structure apparent. During a hearing on the talks with Iran on 1/21, Corker reminded the panel that Kerry had said he wanted to make sure any agreement “passes
muster with Congress” and that “one way to do it is an up-down vote.” (Corker would eventually introduce the measure as S. 615 on 2/27.) Sen. Rand Paul (R-KY) and Barbara Boxer (D-CA) announced (1/28) a 3d initiative, designed to allow frequent votes on sanctions in Congress, such that these could be reinstated if the admin. found that Iran was violating any eventual agreement. This bill, like Corker’s before it, had not been introduced by the end of the quarter.

The admin., continuing to insist that efforts like the 3 mentioned above would compromise the negotiations, redoubled its efforts to marginalize Congress’s role. Pres. Obama, who had repeatedly pledged to veto Menendez and Kirk’s previous sanctions bill (see S. 1881 on congressionalmonitor.org), reiterated this quarter that any legislation related to the negotiations would meet with his veto (e.g., 1/16 and 1/20, see “P5+1 and the IAEA,” above). Also, the State Dept. refused (12/2) Menendez’s invitation for Under Secy. Wendy Sherman to publicly brief Congress on the 11/24 negotiations extension, as she had after the previous extension on 7/18, and Menendez was not invited to the closed briefing that was held instead.

RUSSIA

The Russian govt. announced its support for the Palestinians’ efforts at the UNSC on 10/12 and it maintained that stance throughout the quarter. FM Sergey Lavrov and Dep. FM Mikhail Bogdanov both participated (12/12, 12/14, and 12/16) in the series of European meetings leading up to the initial submission of the draft res. on 12/17 and Russia voted in favor of the amended res. on 12/30. Aside from such UN-related activity, Russia signed agreements with the PA on 1/22 setting up joint comms. to combat money laundering and oversee economic cooperation. Russia also participated in the 2 meetings of the Middle East Quartet on 1/26 and 2/8 (see “The Quartet” below).

EUROPE

Continued impatience with the absence of progress on a negotiated resolution of the conflict as well as frustration over Israel’s ongoing settlement construction were reflected in a number of European measures in support of Palestinians’ unilateral actions this quarter. France stood out in this regard, launching (11/28) a major campaign of its own around the UNSC draft res. (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). Ahead of the council’s vote on 12/30, a number of Western European legislatures endorsed the Palestinian bid for statehood.

Following in the footsteps of the UK and Sweden in the previous quarter, when an overwhelming majority of MPs in the British Parliament urged (10/13) their govt. to recognize Palestine, and Sweden officially recognized the state of Palestine (10/30), this quarter legislative measures calling for the recognition of Palestine were passed by Spain (11/18), Portugal (12/2), Ireland (12/9), Luxembourg (12/17), the EU (12/17), and France (12/2 and 12/11), albeit with varying impact depending on the conditions and restrictions attached (see Chronology for details). PA Pres. Abbas traveled to Sweden on a state visit (2/10), meeting with PM Stefan Löfven and inaugurating a full-fledged Palestinian Embassy in Stockholm.

In parallel to the Europeans’ growing impatience and frustration with the stalled peace process, this quarter saw growing tension between Brussels and Tel Aviv over the occupation and settlements. Around the same time that the Obama admin. was reportedly considering escalating its response to continued
settlement expansion (see “United States” above), an internal EU document published by *Haaretz* revealed (11/17) that EU mbr. states were studying sanctions against Israel to impel Tel Aviv to end settlement policies widely regarded as an impediment to a 2-state solution (see Doc. A2 for details). *Haaretz* quoted senior EU diplomats as saying that “a large group of mbr. states pushed for this move after the failure of the talks between Israel and the Palestinians, and after the war in Gaza.” According to the diplomats, several mbr. states behind the move were happy to allow the EU foreign affairs apparatus to play “bad cop” while preserving their individual relationships with Israel. That same day, in the 1st meeting of the EU Council under the chairmanship of the incoming foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, all 28 FMs released a statement expressing concern about the simmering tension in Jerusalem and censuring continued settlement growth in the city. Speaking to the press, Mogherini said the council had not discussed the document in question and she dismissed it as “hypothetical and internal.”

Later in the quarter, 63 of the 751 mbrs. of the European parliament sent Mogherini a letter asking her to suspend the EU-Israel Association Agreement governing the 2 sides’ trade relationship since 2000 (see Doc. A3), citing Israeli violations of international law during OPE as well as support from civil society, including that of some 300 European organizations that had made a similar plea to the EU in 11/2013.

There were 2 other noteworthy incidents concerning the EU-Israel relationship this quarter: First, the Gen. Court of the EU removed Hamas from its list of designated terrorist organizations on 12/17. The ruling was on procedural grounds, and it was in response to a petition submitted to the European Court of Human Rights. According to the court, the initial designation in 2001 was based on media reports rather than an official internal review, as required by EU policy. Later, the EU Council agreed (1/19) to appeal the court’s decision even though there was no indication that the ruling would lead to a change in official policy on Hamas. Second, in response to a report published in the UK’s *Daily Mail* (2/5), Israeli PM Netanyahu ordered the demolition of around 400 Palestinian-owned and EU-funded structures in the West Bank. The newspaper alleged that EU-funded projects had not always secured correct permits from Israel’s Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories Unit (COGAT).

**UNITED NATIONS**

As OPE was still under way in the summer of 2014, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) commissioned an inquiry into alleged war crimes committed in Gaza but Israel had denied the commission entry (11/12) on the grounds of anti-Israeli “bias.” Tel Aviv’s efforts to undermine and discredit the commission continued this quarter.

In 1/2015, Israel’s permanent rep. to the UN in Geneva, Eviatar Manor, sent acting president of the UNHRC Joachim Rücker an official letter of complaint about the commission of inquiry’s leader, William Schabas. The letter alleged that Schabas had been paid $1,300 by the PLO for a consulting job in 2012, and Manor argued that he was inclined to overemphasize Israeli offenses during the Gaza conflict as a result. Before the news became public and as UNHRC looked into the potential conflict of interest, with officials in Geneva sending a request to the UN headquarters in New York for a legal opinion, Schabas resigned (2/2). In his letter of resignation, he cited a series of Israeli allegations of bias and said that he did not want
to be a distraction from the commission of inquiry. Despite his departure, and Israeli PM Netanyahu’s subsequent calls for the inquiry to be shelved, the commission carried on its work and was set to deliver its report to the 28th session of the UNHRC on 3/23. On 2/3, U.S. jurist Mary McGowan-Davis took over Schabas’s position. McGowan-Davis was regarded as being more sympathetic to Israel largely due to her role in the UNHRC’s inquiry into possible war crimes during Israel’s Operation Cast Lead in 2008–9. At the time, and following her cooperation with the IDF, the U.S. jurist concluded that the Israeli army’s own internal investigations were properly conducted.

On the very same day that the Palestinians circulated (12/17), via Jordan, their initial draft res. at the UNSC, the High Contracting Parties to the 4th Geneva Convention (of 8/1949 and relative to the protection of civilians in time of war) met at a UNHRC summit to discuss the Israeli occupation in terms of international humanitarian law. Although the PLO had declared its adherence to all 4 Geneva conventions in 6/1982, Palestine was not an official signatory until 4/1/2014, when PA Pres. Abbas signed on to 15 international treaties and covenants as the U.S.-led peace negotiations were breaking down. After Switzerland, acting as depository for the conventions, accepted Palestine’s accession, Abbas, in concert with the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Arab League, called (7/22) for a meeting of the signatories. Two of these—Israel and the U.S.—lobbied against the proposal, arguing that it would politicize the Geneva conventions. Switzerland sent out invitations on 12/11, and the reps. of 126 signatories met and adopted a declaration by consensus calling on Israel to adhere to international humanitarian law in the oPt and to uphold the principles of the conventions. Israel, the U.S., Canada, and Australia did not attend the meeting.

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) passed a series of res. relating to the broader Arab-Israeli conflict and Palestine this quarter. At the conclusion of the assembly’s annual debate on the question of Palestine, mbr. states adopted (11/25) 6 res. related to the Israeli occupation and the Arab-Israeli conflict, with Palestine’s UN envoy, Riyad Mansour, thanking the delegates for their expressions of support. Then, the UNGA passed (12/2) a res., introduced by Egypt, calling on Israel to give up its nuclear weapons and to place its nuclear program under international oversight. Finally, the UNGA passed another 2 relevant res. on 12/19: one calling on Israel to pay Lebanon $856.4 m. in damages relating to an oil spill that IDF troops caused during the 2006 summer war and the other recognizing Palestinian sovereignty over natural resources in the oPt.

THE QUARTET

After mos. of inactivity following the breakdown of the U.S.-led peace negotiations in 4/2014, reps. of the Middle East Quartet (the EU, U.S. UN, and Russia) held 2 meetings this quarter and the Quartet envoy made 1 visit to Gaza. The Quartet 1st met in Brussels on 1/26 to discuss the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip and how the peace process might be revitalized. In a press statement released after the meeting, Quartet officials emphasized the importance of engaging with their Arab partners. The 2d Quartet meeting took place (2/8) in Munich on the sidelines of a security conference. At its conclusion, Quartet reps. reiterated the importance of the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative (see Quarterly Update in JPS 124), called on both Israel and the Palestinians to abstain from unilateral measures, highlighted the severity of the PA’s financial woes, and...
joined calls for international donors to fulfill pledges made at the international donor conference on Gaza held in Cairo in 10/2014. In the final week of the quarter, Quartet Envoy Tony Blair traveled to Gaza where he met with Palestinian and UN officials, surveyed the destruction from OPE as well as reconstruction efforts, and reiterated (2/15) the Quartet’s call for international donors to fulfill their pledges. In the wake of the visit, Hamas official Musa Abu Marzuq stated (2/18) that the envoy had delivered a set of “preconditions” to Hamas including recognition of the 2-state solution, full implementation of the 4/23/2014 national reconciliation deal (with Fatah), assurances to Egypt that Hamas does not support terrorism, as well as some kind of affirmation dissociating itself from “Islamist” groups active in the region. According to Haaretz, Blair’s office denied the envoy-set conditions and said that he expected confidence-building measures from all parties to improve the situation in Gaza (2/19).

DONORS

Aid in the amount of $5.4 b. toward Gaza’s reconstruction, pledged by international donors in Cairo on 10/12/2014, remained largely hypothetical this quarter (see "Reconstruction of Gaza" above) although a number of direct pledges to the PA and to agencies serving the Palestinians were announced in the 3-mo. period. Japan, in particular, made several disbursements, including over $100 m. for humanitarian relief in Gaza (11/20 and 1/20) and upward of $400,000 to development projects in the West Bank and East Jerusalem (2/8, 1/26, 1/29, and 2/8). Saudi Arabia, for its part, donated (12/3) $1 m. in assistance to food-insecure Palestinians in Gaza, the U.S. disbursed (12/16) $10 m. in previously pledged funds to support rubble removal in the territory, and Qatar transferred (1/14) $25 m. to the PA, primarily for reconstruction, including $10 m. for the still-underutilized Gaza power plant. UNRWA was also the recipient of funds and other forms of support from a number of countries, including: Azerbaijan, which made its 1st ever donation to the agency on 11/28, with $632,000 in relief assistance for Gaza; Brazil and the UAE, which were admitted to the agency’s advisory comm. on 12/9; Pakistan, the UK, and Saudi Arabia, which provided the agency with aid in the amounts of $1 m. (12/8), $4.7 m. (12/17), and $12 m. (12/25), respectively; and Germany, which agreed (12/15) to support the agency’s programs in Gaza and Lebanon with around $31.3 m. in aid. Despite such announcements, UNRWA was forced to suspend its cash assistance program on 1/27 because it had received only $135 m. of the $720 m. needed to continue assisting the 96,000 Palestinians whose homes were damaged or destroyed during OPE (see Doc. A1). In response to the suspension, Saudi Arabia redirected (2/3) $13.5 m. from reconstruction aid to cash assistance for those Palestinians previously served by UNRWA’s program. After Israel froze Palestinian tax revenues in 1/2014, denying the PA 60–70% of its monthly income, there were 3 other notable announcements of international assistance to the Palestinians: direct budget support to the PA from Iraq with a $28.7 m. transfer (1/14); a new 1.5 b. kronor (around $180 m.) aid program from Sweden (2/10), good through 2019; and €2.5 m. (around $2.7 m.) from Finland (2/12) for Palestinian hospitals in East Jerusalem.

There was no meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Comm. this quarter.
BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

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

BOYCOTT EFFORTS

There were few major developments in the BDS arena this quarter, as outrage over OPE began to subside.

In the U.S. academy, participants at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association (MESA) passed (11/24) a res., 265–79, respecting the rights of its mbrs. to endorse BDS campaigns, which, they affirmed, comprise “legitimate forms of nonviolent political action” (mesana.org). According to Martin Kramer (12/3), an op-ed contributor at the traditionally pro-Israel Commentary, MESA’s current pres., George Washington University prof. Nathan Brown, worked out the final version of the res. to reconcile the views of the organization’s pro-BDS elements with those of MESA mbrs. who thought an outright boycott would compromise the organization’s nonpartisan identity. After the vote, the res. was sent to the entire membership for a referendum, a necessary step for the res. to be implemented. Separately, at its annual meeting in Washington on 12/5, the American Anthropology Association (AAA) overwhelmingly defeated a res. opposing the boycott of Israeli academic institutions, paving the way for the organization to pass a pro-BDS res. in 2015. The Asian American Studies (4/2013) and American Studies Associations (12/2013), as well as several other academic orgs., passed similar res. in recent years.

In South Africa, the movement to pressure Woolworths to boycott Israeli products gathered momentum this quarter, although a court ruling threatened to undermine activists’ efforts. The campaign to boycott Woolworths, the country’s 2d biggest retailer, began in 8/2014 in the wake of OPE and it quickly intensified, with BDS activists organizing a series of protests that included placing a pig’s head in the kosher food section of a market in Cape Town on 10/25. The activists eventually bought a small number of shares in the company to be able to protest the company’s sale of Israeli figs, pretzels, and pomegranates at the 11/26 annual shareholders meeting. According to an 11/30 report in Business Day, tension at the meeting was “palpable and occasionally an outbreak of violence seemed possible,” but the atmosphere eased in the weeks that followed. The day before the meeting, the Johannesburg High Court had ordered (11/25) BDS activists to stop organizing inside Woolworths’ stores and to try to resolve their differences with the company in person. BDS activists and Woolworths reps. met on 12/10 in Cape Town and had a “cordial” discussion, according to a company statement issued the same day. Ultimately, Woolworths declined to end its trade agreement with Israel and BDS activists kept up their protests for the rest of the quarter.

In other boycott-related news, the gov. of the Brazilian state of Rio Grande do Sul announced (12/1) that he was canceling the state’s contract with Israeli weapons manufacturer Elbit Systems. In an open letter, Gov. Tarso Genro acknowledged that the contract, which he signed in Haifa in 4/2013, had faced strong opposition from the Palestinian community in Brazil. Separately, the municipal govt. of Durham, North Carolina, did not renew its...
contract with British security company G4S in 11/2014, although city officials claimed the decision was unrelated to recent protests and demands by BDS activists. G4S, which provides prison security services, had earlier announced (6/6/2014) that contracts for such services in Israeli prisons would not be renewed after their expiry in 2017.

Despite the absence of any major BDS announcements this quarter, there were signs that the Israeli govt. was becoming increasingly concerned with the movement, if not preparing to take serious counteractions. In early 1/2015, Israel’s Foreign Ministry allegedly sent a classified report on the subject to its diplomatic missions around the world, according to news leaked to the Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth. The newspaper said (1/14/2015) the report projected increased international isolation for Israel in 2015 and, more specifically, it warned about European states’ creation of “a clear connection between diplomatic relations and economic ones,” adding that the academic boycott against Israel could also escalate.

DIVESTMENT

University campuses in California were the principal arena for debate on divestment this quarter, and more often than not BDS activists prevailed. Countering a reportedly costly pro-Israel public relations campaign, the student senate of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) voted (11/18), 8–2, with 2 abstentions, in favor of divesting the UC system from 11 U.S.-based companies that allegedly profit from the Israeli occupation. The vote made UCLA the 6th campus in the UC system to call for divestment. Then, UC Davis joined their ranks after its student govt. passed (1/29) a similar measure by an identical vote. Also within the UC system, the Student Association passed 2 res., 9–1, with 6 abstentions, calling for divestment, and UC Student-Workers Union, a 13,000-strong labor union, passed a similar res. on 12/10 with 65% of the 2,100 votes in favor.

Outside the UC system, meanwhile, the pro-Israel pushback was more successful. A divestment measure failed to pass in the Stanford University student senate on 2/10, garnering 9 of the 15 possible votes, but not the required 66% approval. (However, the senate passed the res. just after the close of the quarter, on 2/17, after several mbrs. filed complaints about a “hostile environment” during the 1st vote. Senate chair Ana Ordonez was reportedly brought to tears during the 2/10 session, causing her to abstain [Jerusalem Post, 2/18].)

SANCTIONS

There were no noteworthy sanctions-related developments this quarter involving actors and institutions traditionally associated with BDS, but a group of so-called progressive Zionist scholars did use the tactics associated with the BDS movement to promote an initiative of their own. In early 12/2014, the newly formed Scholars for Israel and Palestine (SIP) circulated a letter calling on the U.S. and the EU to impose visa restrictions and asset freezes on 4 extreme right-wing Israeli officials: Jewish Home party leader Naftali Bennett, Housing Minister Uri Ariel, Likud MK Moshe Feiglin, and Ze’ev Hever, the head of Amana, which develops settlements in the West Bank. SIP mbr. and UC San Diego prof. Gershon Shafir explained to Haaretz that the 4 public figures were chosen because their work makes the occupation permanent and the 2-state solution impossible (12/11). SIP was formed by mbrs. of The Third Narrative, a group established in 2013 to counter the BDS movement, 1-state solution advocates, and other Palestinian activist efforts. The letter was SIP’s 1st official initiative.