Update on Conflict and Diplomacy
16 MAY–15 AUGUST 2015

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This update is a quarterly 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 Palestinians continue pursuing a diplomatic track in international forums as feelers are put out on the possibility of returning to peace negotiations with the new right-wing Israeli government. Hamas takes steps toward an internationally brokered long-term cease-fire agreement with Israel, leading to an increase in tension with Ramallah that further obstructs the work of the consensus government. Small Islamist groups in Gaza respond to an ongoing Hamas crackdown by sporadically launching rockets into Israel, threatening both sets of negotiations and a possible return to large-scale cross-border violence. International activists sail Freedom Flotilla III to Gaza and are blocked from entering the territory by Israeli naval forces. Reconstruction in Gaza advances slowly as Israel loosens restrictions on Palestinian movement and access one year after Operation Protective Edge (OPE). The P5+1 (the 5 permanent mbrs. of the UN Security Council plus Germany) and Iran reach a final agreement, trading sanctions relief for limits on the Iranian nuclear program.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

The Israeli govt. and the Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership began exploring a possible return to peace negotiations this quarter, as international pressure on Israel grew in the wake of Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu’s victory in the 3/17 general election. The Palestinians were publicly reticent about the prospect of negotiations, however, and they focused their efforts on diplomatic initiatives at the United Nations (UN), International Criminal Court (ICC), and in the realm of international soccer. Meanwhile, as a result of shifting regional dynamics, and, with the help of international mediators, Israel and Hamas overcame dissent within their own ranks and explored the possibility of a long-term cease-fire agreement. They also staked out possible negotiating positions on the return of 2 Israeli
civilians, reportedly being held in Gaza, as well as the bodies of 2 Israeli soldiers killed in Gaza during OPE.

Tensions on the ground increased this quarter, with many high-profile incidents of Israeli settler violence toward Palestinians and a resumption of sporadic rocket fire from Gaza into Israel. Furthermore, with the 1-year anniversary of the onset of OPE marked on 7/8, the Gaza reconstruction advanced slowly and living conditions remained dismal. In an effort to draw the world’s attention to the humanitarian crisis, international solidarity activists embarked on the 3d major aid flotilla to Gaza in 5 years.

TENTATIVE SIGNS OF A RETURN TO NEGOTIATIONS

Following the Israeli general election last quarter and the formation of a new right-wing govt. under Netanyahu, the international community began escalating pressure on Israel to take steps to end the occupation. Netanyahu responded with a well-worn tactic, nominally calling for negotiations while simultaneously setting down conditions incompatible with the Palestinian leadership’s public positions. Frequently utilized during Netanyahu’s previous terms as PM, the strategy appeared to work and damped down international criticism of Israel. Still, a meeting between Palestinian and Israeli negotiators at the end of the quarter, following rumors of secret talks in the press, signaled a possible return to negotiations.

Last quarter, Netanyahu had gone back to stating support for a 2-state solution but claimed that conditions were not yet appropriate for its implementation. At the same time, he formed a new ruling coalition, comprised primarily of far right-wing parties opposed to the 2-state solution. The Palestinian leadership was thus skeptical about the new govt.’s intentions when Netanyahu’s office confirmed (5/18) that Interior Minister Silvan Shalom (Likud), who also serves as dep. PM, would oversee any future negotiations with the Palestinians. Speculating (5/19) that there was little chance of resuming negotiations and echoing the position of Palestinian Authority (PA) pres. Mahmoud Abbas a few days earlier, Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat stated, “It’s not about names but about policy.” In his 5/15 statement, Abbas had said there would be no peace negotiations unless the Israelis agreed to: limiting the talks’ duration to a year; having as a goal to set a specific timetable for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank; freezing settlement construction; and releasing the final batch of prisoners that had been slated to be freed in connection with the U.S.-led talks that collapsed in 4/2014 (see JPS 43[3]).

The international community cautiously welcomed the Israeli PM’s position. Two days after appointing Shalom, Netanyahu met with European Union (EU) foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini (5/20), who had traveled to Israel for the express purpose of determining whether talks could be renewed. Israeli and European officials said Mogherini was pleased with the meeting but that she also encouraged “steps on the ground.” At the meeting, Netanyahu proposed a new round of peace negotiations with the specific goal of establishing borders for Israel’s settlement blocs, “so that we can advance toward understandings on which areas we can continue building in, since in any case, they’ll remain under Israeli control” (Haaretz, 5/26). The proposal met with no enthusiasm on the Palestinian side. On 5/26, PA spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudayna indicated that “nothing related to final status issues can be segmented or postponed,” and Erakat described
Netanyahu’s proposal as just “a request to continue illegal settlement construction with Palestinian consent.”

Soon after this opening exchange of positions, rumors and unconfirmed reports of secret Palestinian-Israeli negotiations began appearing in the Arab press (e.g., 6/4). However, both Israeli and Palestinian officials denied them and maintained their public positions. Shalom called (6/8) for a regional peace conference to discuss economics and peace with the Palestinians, and senior Israeli Foreign Ministry official Dore Gold met (6/28) with Egyptian officials in Cairo to discuss the prospects of relaunching peace talks. In a show of goodwill, Netanyahu called (6/9) on the Palestinians to return to negotiations “without preconditions.” The Palestinians maintained their stance, however, reiterating the conditions Abbas had outlined on 5/15 and his 5/13 call for a “new framework” for talks under the sponsorship of the EU and the UN, as well as of the U.S.

Amid all the public posturing, there was a minor breakthrough some weeks later. As initially reported by the Israeli press on 7/26, Shalom and Erakat met in Amman on 7/23 and considered suggestions for restarting formal peace talks. Despite their agreement to meet again in the near future, the 2 sides held no further meetings for the rest of the quarter. According to the Israeli media, private discussions about a meeting between the 2 officials had begun shortly after the 5/18 announcement that Shalom would be in charge of negotiations.

PALESTINIANS’ UNILATERAL EFFORTS CONTINUE

Meanwhile, the Palestinian leadership focused on ongoing, international diplomatic initiatives wending their way through the UN and the ICC, as well as at the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), international soccer’s governing body.

A UNSC Resolution

At the end of last quarter, the U.S. and several Arab states were urging France to delay its draft UN res. calling for a timetable on the Israeli occupation until after the 6/30 deadline had passed on the P5+1 and Iran reaching a final agreement on Iran’s nuclear program. The Palestinians were coordinating with the Arab League on a separate draft res. along the same lines. Although the U.S. had scuttled Palestinian efforts to pass such a res. in 12/2014, there was some speculation that U.S. pres. Barack Obama’s announced “reassessment” of his policy on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict might include an end to unconditional U.S. support for Israel in international institutions like the UN Security Council (UNSC; see JPS 44[4]). But there was no reported progress in this regard during the current quarter.

On 5/18, PA FM Riyad al-Maliki said that the Arab states were reviewing a French draft res. and that they would submit proposed changes soon. As reported by Le Figaro on 5/19, the French draft called for, inter alia: a new round of Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations to culminate within 18 mos. in a permanent agreement; borders “based on the 4 June 1967 lines, with mutually agreed and equal land swaps”; and a “just solution” for Palestinian refugees. According to the French daily’s report, France intended to table the res. during the upcoming session of the UN General Assembly in New York in 9/2015.

A sense of momentum built behind the initiative throughout most of 5–6/2015, with Palestinian officials evincing cautious optimism. On 5/31, PA PM Rami Hamdallah said the U.S.
would likely not veto the French draft and that he had received assurances from U.S. officials that Washington would “resume negotiations” between Israel and the Palestinians after the P5+1 and Iran reached a final deal. A few days later, in an interview with Israel’s Channel 2, Obama stated (6/2) that Netanyahu’s position on the 2-state solution was putting Israel’s international credibility in jeopardy and, in a reference to the French draft res., that it may therefore be “more difficult” to push against “European efforts.” Later in the mo., French FM Laurent Fabius traveled to Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) for discussions with Netanyahu and Abbas, which were held on 6/21. Ahead of the meeting, Netanyahu reaffirmed his opposition to the UNSC track, saying, “We will forcibly reject any attempt to force upon us international dictates,” while Fabius, at the end of his visit with Abbas, stated that going by the recent statements of Obama admin. officials, the U.S. was “more open than ever before to a UNSC resolution.”

Netanyahu’s vehement response to Fabius’s visit undermined the initiative, however. In comments interpreted as indicating a shift in French strategy away from the UNSC, in a briefing at UN headquarters, Fabius proposed (6/29) the formation of a new international group with a mandate to support peace negotiations. He described it as a kind of “Quartet plus,” since it would include the mbrs. of the all-but-defunct group (the U.S., EU, UN, and Russia) as well as a number of Arab states. Specifically, Fabius indicated that “the first thing is this question of getting back to negotiation and having this international accompanying body and if a resolution—if and when a resolution is necessary—we will think about it [sic].” The shifting French stance was lent further credence on 7/5 when Malcolm Hoenlein, executive vice chmn. of the Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations, said, “We’ve met with French officials, and they’re telling us now that they’re essentially hesitant or reconsidering and don’t want to introduce [their draft UNSC res.] if it will face an American veto or if both parties don’t really want it.”

However, the UNSC initiative appeared to be back on track at quarter’s end. Following a statement by al-Maliki speculating (7/7) that France had backed away from the res. in favor of the “support comm.” mooted by Fabius, the French Foreign Ministry responded (7/8) by saying, “We have reached the conclusion that a UNSC res. could help.” Al-Maliki confirmed on 8/11 that the French res. was “still on the table,” even though the Palestinians had begun consultations (8/5) with the Arab League and various UNSC mbrs. on the formulation of a new, separate draft res. regarding Israeli settler-related violence in the wake of a deadly arson attack on 7/31 (see “Settler-Related Violence” below).

**War Crimes Charges at the ICC**

As ICC chief prosecutor Fatou Bensouda continued her preliminary investigation into alleged war crimes committed in the oPt since 6/12/2014 (see JPS 44[3, 4]), the Palestinian leadership focused on facilitating her efforts. On 5/13, Bensouda commented on the failure of both the Israeli and Palestinian govts. to supply her with OPE-related information, and she indicated that her decision to open a full investigation would, therefore, be based on Palestinian allegations and publicly available information alone. On 6/25, al-Maliki delivered a reportedly extensive file of case material to Bensouda supporting allegations of Israeli responsibility on 23 criminal counts in the oPt.

In a related development, the special commission of inquiry of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) published (6/22) its report. The commission concluded that “substantial information point[ed] to the possible commission of war crimes” by both Israelis and Palestinians during OPE (see Doc. A3). The UNHRC then voted, 41–1 (the sole “no” vote was cast by the U.S.), with 5 abstentions, to adopt a res. welcoming the report (7/3), in the face of Israeli and U.S. lobbying for softer wording or the report’s outright rejection (see “United Nations” below). As the report was released amid the ICC’s preliminary investigation into the situation in Palestine, it was widely assumed that Bensouda would consider the UNHRC’s report in her decision to investigate alleged war crimes. While she kept her evaluation private, Bensouda had earlier made known that justification of ICC jurisdiction, which the UNHRC report treated specifically, would be germane to her decision. The report recognized that multiple human rights organizations had found “flaws” in Israeli investigations of OPE-related allegations, which were described as needing improvement. It also noted that several Israeli internal investigations were “pending” and that final conclusions could not yet be drawn. If Bensouda concurred with the UNHRC’s assessment and concluded that Israel was unwilling or unable to investigate alleged war crimes in good faith, she could justify ICC jurisdiction for an investigation.

The issue of complementarity also went to the heart of Bensouda’s preliminary examination. In 6–7/2015, the Israeli govt. made several efforts to prove it was investigating OPE-related allegations in good faith. The Israel Defense Forces (IDF) also processed its own internal investigations (e.g., 6/11 and 7/13; see Docs. C1 and R2) and its extensive, internal report on OPE (6/14) concluded that Israeli soldiers did not commit war crimes but that Hamas and other armed Palestinian groups did.

Culminating the effort, Netanyahu decided in early 7/2015 to shift Israel’s defense strategy against possible war crimes charges, to “engage” with the ICC, but only on the question of jurisdiction, according to a senior Israeli official (7/9).

There were no further related developments through the end of the quarter but the Palestinians continued to threaten ICC action in response to Israeli offenses. For example, hours after the 7/31 Jewish extremist arson attack (see “Settler-Related Violence” below), the Palestinians began working on a request to the ICC to open an investigation, with al-Maliki filing a formal complaint and providing a report on settler violence to Bensouda on 8/3.

Separately, a special ICC panel ordered (7/16) Bensouda to reconsider her 11/2014 decision not to investigate Israel’s deadly raid on the 1st high-profile Gaza freedom flotilla in 5/2010. The Comoros, where the flotilla’s flagship *Mavi Marmara* was registered, appealed her decision on 1/29/2015 and the panel concurred, finding that “mistakes [had been] made” in the process, including “errors of fact.” On 7/21, Bensouda responded that the panel’s order would not necessarily lead to a full investigation and that it would depend on “the facts and circumstances of each situation.” She then filed (7/27) an appeal, alleging that the panel had reported technical errors only on issues that they disagreed with, thereby invalidating their order. The ICC’s appeals court began evaluating her
complaint, and there were no further developments through the end of the quarter.

**Barring Israel from International Soccer**

Palestinian Football Association (PFA) chair Jibril Rajoub submitted a formal res. to FIFA last quarter calling for Israel to be suspended from international soccer competitions until: teams based in the Israeli settlements were banned from playing in Israel Football Association (IFA) competitions; the IFA had taken “firm action” to eliminate racism in its leagues; Palestinian players and coaches were allowed to move freely; and, Palestinian facilities could be built without obstruction (see JPS 44 [4]). The res. was scheduled for a vote at the annual FIFA congress in Zurich on 5/29 and needed the support of 75% of the organization’s 209 mbrs. in order to pass. In the fortnight preceding the congress, the PFA, IFA, FIFA, and FIFA’s European governing body (UEFA) conducted a series of negotiations to resolve the dispute. Rajoub remained resolute, repeating on multiple occasions that he hoped FIFA mbrs. would show Israel the “red card.”

In an unrelated development, the U.S. Justice Dept. announced (5/27) a series of indictments against 14 FIFA officials implicated in a massive corruption scandal. Although this dominated news coverage of the FIFA congress, closed-door vote counting and negotiating leading up to the vote on the PFA res. went ahead. In the words of the UEFA chief, Michael van Praag, “there will be no UEFA boycott [in protest of FIFA’s corruption] because there are important issues to be decided like the Israel/Palestinian question” (5/28). With UEFA’s 54 votes set to count against the PFA’s bid, and the negotiations stacked against him, Rajoub started signaling on 5/28 that he was open to compromise and reportedly offered to cancel the vote if Israel committed to making the reforms the PFA res. called for.

Hours before the scheduled vote on 5/29, negotiators reached an agreement. Rajoub amended the res. and the delegates approved it, 165–18, establishing a comm. to monitor movement restrictions on Palestinian soccer players, Israeli racism, and the status of teams based in Israeli settlements. Rajoub described it as a “great achievement,” and Netanyahu also celebrated (5/29) the news, saying it “proved our international efforts paid off.”

By appearing to back down on a popular issue and to have delivered Israel a diplomatic victory, Rajoub sparked a backlash among Palestinians (see “Palestinian Opinion” below). In the following days, the PFA’s website was hacked and manipulated to label Rajoub a “traitor.” Various critical hashtags proliferated on Palestinian social media, including #SoldOutGibril [in Arabic] and #RedCardJibrilRajoub [in Arabic and English]. The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) called (5/30) for an investigation into Rajoub’s decision while a Hamas spokesperson said (5/31) that the Palestinians could no longer trust the Ramallah-based leadership to handle the war crimes allegations against Israel at the ICC.

The backlash prompted Rajoub to hold a press conference on 6/2 where he explained that in the absence of sufficient votes in favor, Israel would have been “exonerated” if he had gone through with the res. Rajoub specifically cited South African official Tokyo Sexwale’s role in convincing him to abandon the vote. Sexwale, who FIFA later appointed (6/12) chair of the new monitoring comm., reportedly argued that given the corruption scandal, it was not the right time for such a vote.

In anticipation of Rajoub’s 5/29 move, the Israeli authorities reduced restrictions on the
movement of soccer players into and out of Gaza and, according to the *New York Times* (8/16), lifted tariffs on the import of sports equipment into the oPt. This allowed the PFA to reinstate the original structure of the Palestine Cup, a symbolically important national competition. (Israel has barred West Bank–based teams from traveling to Gaza since 2000 and Gaza-based teams from traveling to the West Bank since 2007). Despite the new agreement, Israeli authorities imposed restrictions and delays on the travel of both the West Bank and Gaza champions (8/2 and 8/7). The PFA complained to FIFA’s new monitoring group as the Palestine Cup had to be postponed on multiple occasions, but it ultimately went ahead, with the Hebron-based Ahli al-Khalil winning the tournament after defeating Gaza City–based Ittihad al-Shuja’iya, 2–1, in their 2d match (8/14). (See Palestine Unbound for more.)

**ISRAEL AND HAMAS EXPLORE THE PROSPECT OF NEGOTIATIONS**

Under the terms of the cease-fire ending OPE, Israel and the Palestinians had agreed to return to Cairo for mediated negotiations on outstanding issues (see *IPS* 44[2]) but these remained unresolved after the Egyptian govt. canceled the talks due to security concerns in the Sinai Peninsula. Seeking to fill the void, mbrs. of the international community had proposed new initiatives both to address those issues and to secure an extended cease-fire that would facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza. Similar efforts continued this quarter, as the outline of various possible agreements became clear (see “Palestinian Opinion” below).

During the first 2 mos. of the quarter, rumors and unconfirmed reports emerged of Hamas and Israel exploring the possibility of a long-term truce, or *hudna*—first proposed by then UN special coordinator Robert Serry on 3/2. The Jordanian daily, *Ad-Dustour*, quoted unnamed “Western sources” as saying (5/19) that Hamas and Israel had engaged in mediated talks in recent mos. in both Israel and Europe. According to the sources, the idea was also discussed in the context of a long-term truce of a “floating seaport,” located between Gaza and Cyprus to facilitate imports into the territory and thereby accelerating reconstruction. The talks reportedly also “reached deeper issues such as borders.” Ahead of German FM Frank-Walter Steinmeier’s trip to Gaza on 6/1, additional rumors appeared speculating that he would mediate further negotiations (both Hamas and Israel issued denials). Weeks later, more details emerged, with new reports claiming (6/13) that the dep. head of Hamas’s political bureau, Musa Abu Marzuq, had flown to Doha to discuss a 5-year truce proposal with Hamas leader Khalid Mishal, which was backed by Qatar and Turkey and facilitated by UN special coordinator Nickolay Mladenov. While Abu Marzuq was in Doha, the Palestinian press reported that both Israeli and Palestinian sources had confirmed that some form of mediated talks had taken place (6/16). In an effort to defuse the exacerbated tension between Hamas and the PA unity govt. over these unconfirmed reports, a senior Hamas official gave a candid interview (6/16) in which he not only denied the reports but specified that “the only initiative that existed was presented by the former UN Mideast envoy Robert Serry and it did not bear fruit.” He also rejected the idea that Hamas was seeking a bilateral agreement with Israel outside of a national Palestinian consensus and noted that the reports indicating otherwise originated in West Bank–based newspapers that were generally linked to Fatah and the PA (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” for more on the PA/Hamas tension).
In early 7/2015, the focus shifted from a reconstruction hudna to a possible prisoner swap. On 7/8, Mishal claimed that Israel approached Hamas through a European mediator to explore the possibility of recovering the bodies of 2 IDF soldiers killed during OPE. The Hamas rep. said he and other officials had indicated that they would only conduct negotiations if Israel released the 70 Hamas prisoners who had been rearrested in 6/2014 after having been released in 2011 in exchange for captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit (see JPS 41[2]). The next day, Israel’s DM Moshe Ya’alon lifted (7/9) a gag order on the news that 2 Israeli civilians—a Palestinian bedouin and a Jewish Ethiopian—were being held in Gaza. Few details were available about the unidentified bedouin man who had crossed into Gaza in early 2015, but the Israeli press covered the story of Avera Mengistu extensively, describing him as a “mentally handicapped” person who had entered Gaza of his own accord on 9/7/2014.

Israel’s Coordinator for Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT), Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, stated (7/9) that “credible intelligence” suggested Hamas was holding the 2 men captive while other Israeli officials explained that the gag order was lifted in hopes that it might lead to negotiations over their release. Hamas neither confirmed nor denied the story, but a Gazan source quoted in the Israeli press covered the story of Avera Mengistu extensively, describing him as a “mentally handicapped” person who had entered Gaza of his own accord on 9/7/2014.

Israel’s role in the process, if any, was unclear. Palestinian sources claimed (8/5) that the Israeli govt. had recently assured the PA that there had been no secret negotiations and the Israeli PM’s office released (8/17) a statement broadly denying the existence of talks. When Haaretz reported (8/18) senior Israeli officials as saying that “Blair has made no progress so far in his two meetings with Mishal,” it was taken to indicate that the Israeli govt. was at least being
briefed on the cease-fire proposal talks. As the quarter ended, uncertainty over the initiative persisted and it was unclear whether the various efforts would lead to an agreement in the near future.

ESCALATION OF CROSS-BORDER VIOLENCE

As Hamas’s political wing attempted to facilitate the reconstruction of Gaza, the military and political apparatus in Gaza was focused on de-escalating cross-border tension with Israel, heightened by rogue rocket action on the part of Islamist groups based in Gaza. Causing retaliation by the IDF against Hamas infrastructure, the militants involved were estimated to number just a few hundred and considered as disgruntled Islamists bent on undermining Hamas.

Following a series of unclaimed rocket attacks from Gaza last quarter, Hamas had launched (5/5) a crackdown on several groups that claimed affiliation with the Islamic State in Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS), making several arrests.

Although it caused no damage, one such rocket attack took place on 5/26, with the projectile landing in an open area near Ashdod. Holding Hamas responsible for any projectile fire from Gaza and asserting that Islamic Jihad was the culprit, the IDF launched (5/26) air strikes on four Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and Popular Resistance Committee (PRC) targets in Rafah, Khan Yunis, and Bayt Hanun. Ya’alon warned that Gaza would “pay a heavy price” if the rocket attacks continued. Citing as evidence recent reports (5/27) of the construction of a new road along the border fence by the group’s military wing, MK Avigdor Lieberman (Yisrael Beytenu) accused (5/30) Netanyahu of ignoring the buildup of Hamas military capability. On 6/1, the Islamist faction involved claimed the rocket attack and issued Hamas an ultimatum, giving it 48 hours to end its crackdown.

The tension escalated throughout early 6/2015. On 6/2, Hamas security forces shot and killed the leader of a small Islamist faction during an arrest raid on his home, prompting a companion group, Sarayat al-Shaykh Umar Hadid, to launch into Israel 2 rockets on 6/3 and 1 on 6/6. Again, the rockets caused no injuries or serious damage, and the Israeli Air Force (IAF) responded with air strikes on alleged Hamas military sites. Following the 1st attack, a senior Hamas official sent (6/3) a message to the Israelis via an Egyptian emissary explaining the rogue rocket attacks. The next day, Ya’alon declared that the IDF would “strike harder if we must” in order to stop the rocket fire.

The exchange divided Israel’s political and security establishments. IDF Maj. Gen. Sami Turgeman countered Ya’alon, saying (6/7) that the recent attacks were “isolated incidents” and that the IDF would not initiate “an operation in the Strip because of them.” While he reaffirmed that Israel held Hamas responsible for all rocket fire, he noted that the movement was making efforts to deter the smaller groups. Hamas continued its crackdown on the small groups through the rest of the quarter as they kept up their rocket attacks on Israel (See “Overview of the Violence” below), frequently citing the crackdown as justification. Many right-wing Israeli politicians continued to press Netanyahu for a stronger response—Education Minister Naftali Bennett (Jewish Home) was a notable exception, coming out (6/27) in favor of so-called civilian-led reconstruction if Hamas halted its rearmament.

Thereafter, and until the end of the quarter, on 4 of the 5 occasions when rockets were launched at Israel, the IAF responded with air strikes on vacant Hamas military sites, causing
substantial damage and 5 Palestinian injuries (7/15 and 8/7).

**GAZA RECONSTRUCTION**

There were few reconstruction-related developments this quarter, and the overall process continued at a slow pace. The same factors remained in place that had restricted the flow of construction materials into Gaza earlier, including the Israeli govt.’s alleged security concerns and international donor reticence. Illustrating the resulting “inherently fragile” situation, the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) found (7/31) that 100,000 Palestinians who were displaced by damage to their homes in the summer 2014 assault were still without proper shelter.

The Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, allowing Israel to vet Gazans’ requests for construction materials (see JPS 44[3]), continued to constrain progress this quarter. The monthly volume of construction materials (steel, cement, and gravel) allowed in began to shrink, after peaking in 4/2015. According to Tel Aviv–based nongovernmental organization (NGO) Gisha, 215,590 tons and 193,242 tons were allowed in during 5/2015 and 6/2015, respectively, compared with 204,263 and 226,860 tons in 3/2015 and 4/2015. The Norwegian Refugee Council, for its part, regarded such totals as a drastic deficit, with country director for Palestine Vance Culbert saying that as of 6/2015, only 1.9% of the building materials required had entered Gaza and that at this rate it would take 19 years “just to reconstruct what was destroyed last year” (BBC, 7/8).

With Hamas-PA relations still deteriorating (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below), donor reticence continued to be an issue. Since the PA did not take control of the border crossings into Gaza (see JPS 44[3]) as expected, international donors who were conditioning pledges from the 10/24/2014 Gaza reconstruction conference on such a development continued to withhold their funds. UN dep. special coordinator Robert Piper noted on 7/7 that since the Association of International Development Agencies’ 4/13 findings estimating that 26.8% of the total $3.5 b. pledged had been disbursed, only another $42 m., or 1.2%, had been paid up.

In an effort to facilitate the vetting process, Israel and the PA agreed in 6/2014 to a new mechanism designed to allow Palestinians in Gaza easier access to building materials. According to PA minister of public works and housing Mufid Hasayneh (6/24), Palestinian homeowners in Gaza would have to register with local authorities to receive a building permit, after which the ministry in Ramallah would work with the Israeli authorities to get approval on their individual projects. Hasayneh asserted that 90,000 partially damaged homes had already been repaired, and that the proposed mechanism would allow for the reconstruction of the approx. 12,600 homes that were completely destroyed.

**ISRAEL BLOCKS FREEDOM FLOTILLA III**

After mos. of preparation, international solidarity activists attempted to sail the Freedom Flotilla III this quarter in an effort to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza and call the world’s attention to the Israeli blockade (see JPS 40[2] and 41[1] for the previous 2 flotillas). The flagship, a trawler named Marianne of Gothenburg, set sail from Sweden on 5/10, carrying solar panels and medical equipment, in addition to 5 crew mbrs. and 8 passengers. According to the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) behind the action, the Marianne was set to arrive in Gaza sometime in late 6/2015.
As the Marianne progressed through the Mediterranean, the Israeli govt. began a campaign to delegitimize the FFC’s efforts. In a letter to UN Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon, the dir.-gen of Israel’s FM said (6/22) Israel would not allow the flotilla to reach Gaza and that its “sole purpose” was to “create provocations that . . . constitute[d] a breach of international law.” On the same day, the IDF then confirmed that its naval forces would not allow the flotilla to breach the blockade of Gaza. Meanwhile, MK Basel Ghattas (Joint List) announced (6/21) that he intended to participate in the flotilla, saying that blocking it would “entangle Israel in another difficult international crisis”—a reference to the IDF’s infamous 5/2010 raid on the 1st flotilla, when Israeli commandos stormed the Mavi Marmara and killed 9 activists. Like his fellow Joint List MK, Haneen Zoabi, who had participated in the 1st flotilla, Ghattas was immediately singled out for attack by right-wing politicians. Lieberman (Yisrael Beytenu) said, “the Joint List is just 1 big terror ship” (6/21) and the Knesset House Comm. voted 10–2 on 6/23 to strip the Arab MK of his parliamentary immunity (the comm.’s decision was later overturned in the Ethics Comm.).

Despite the warnings from the Israeli military, the flotilla set sail for Gaza from Greece on 6/25. Due to reported technical issues on the final leg of the journey, including suspected sabotage at the Greek port, only 47 activists on 4 boats were ultimately able to participate. As the flotilla approached Gaza, Netanyahu published (6/28) a letter in which he told the activists: “Perhaps you meant to set sail for a place not far from here—Syria. There the Asad regime is slaughtering its own people every day with the support of the murderous regime in Iran.”

Overnight on 6/29, 3 Israeli naval vessels surrounded the Marianne in international waters over 100 naut. mi. from the Gaza coast and Israeli forces stormed the Marianne (see Chronology for more). The other vessels in the flotilla had turned back to their ports of origin earlier in the night, leaving only 18 activists aboard the flagship, which sailed into Ashdod under escort. The activists were searched, interrogated, and detained, with 3 deported immediately and others remaining in detention. Ghattas was released and went before the Knesset Ethics Comm. on 7/13.

**OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS**

During the quarter, at least 19 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (up from 18 last quarter), and 2 Israelis were killed as a result of Palestinian actions (up from 1 last quarter). The comprehensive death toll from the beginning of the 2d intifada in 9/2000 thus reached 10,565 Palestinians (including 53 Palestinian citizens of Israel [PCI] and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators); 1,216 Israelis—428 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 230 settlers, and 551 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**

Six Palestinians in the Gaza Strip died this quarter as a result of Israeli actions, down from 8 last quarter: 4 when an unexploded piece of Israeli ordnance went off (8/6); 1 protester in a confrontation with IDF troops along the border fence (7/31); and 1 who succumbed to injuries sustained during OPE (5/28), bringing the total
number of Palestinian fatalities from Israel’s summer 2014 attack to 2,194. The overall number of casualties in Gaza was largely consistent with the previous 2 quarters reflecting a continued, relative calm along the border fence and off the coast. However, this quarter saw the return of sporadic rocket fire into Israel and Israeli retaliation.

In 8 separate incidents, small armed groups in Gaza fired rockets into Israel (see “Escalation of Cross-Border Violence,” above, and Chronology for details), none of which caused injuries or serious damage since they either fell short of the border or landed in open areas. The IAF responded to 6 of the attacks by launching air strikes on Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and PRC military targets across Gaza. Taking place mostly at night when the sites were deserted, the IAF attacks caused substantial damage but relatively few serious injuries (1 Palestinian woman was slightly wounded on 7/15 and 4 other Palestinians were injured on 8/7).

The only major incident involving unexploded Israeli ordnance this quarter occurred on 8/6, when Palestinians were clearing away the rubble of a destroyed home in Rafah. A total of 4 Palestinians were killed and over 30 injured (1 woman succumbed to her injuries on 8/16, and her death will be included in the “Occupation Data and Trends” section of next quarter’s Update).

As in previous quarters, Israel continued to enforce the so-called and unilaterally defined Access Restricted Areas (ARA), large swaths of land and sea in the Gaza Strip whose access by Palestinians is restricted. Near the border fence, where the ARA was reduced to 100 m in most places following OPE, Israeli soldiers opened fire on Palestinians approaching the area to farm, play, or protest in 23 instances this quarter (down from 40), killing 1 and injuring 8. On 1 occasion, IDF troops shot (5/21) firebombs into Palestinian-owned farmland e. of Jabaliya, causing a large fire. They also conducted limited incursions to level land in the ARA on at least 5 occasions this quarter, down from 8, and arrested 7 Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel, down from 14. Israeli naval forces also continued to enforce the 6 naut. mi. fishing zone off the Gazan coast. They fired warning shots or otherwise confronted Palestinian fishermen on 34 occasions, down from 46 last quarter. No Palestinian fishermen were killed, but at least 5 were injured (5/25, 5/26, 6/1, and 7/21) and at least 23 were arrested or detained (6/1, 6/3, 6/4, 7/6, 7/7, and 8/9).

Also, Israeli naval forces damaged 4 fishing boats (5/19, 6/8, 7/14, and 8/12) and destroyed or confiscated fishing boats or materials on 4 occasions (6/3, 6/11, 6/16, and 7/7). In a related incident, Egyptian naval forces confronted Palestinian fishermen on 5/25, opening fire and injuring 1 fisherman (see Chronology for details).

In the West Bank and East Jerusalem, 13 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions this quarter, up from 9 last quarter. Of these, 11 were killed in confrontations with Israeli troops and 2 were killed in an Jewish extremist arson attack (a 3d died on 9/6 from burns sustained in the attack). Except for the escalation in settler-related violence at the end of the quarter (see “Settler-Related Violence” below), the number of Palestinians injured as a result of Israeli actions remained in line with last quarter’s figure. According to OCHA on 8/28, 478 Palestinians were injured in 5–7/2015, compared with 565 over the previous 3 mos.

Movement and Access

As it has since the end of OPE, the Israeli govt. continued easing restrictions on the Erez and Kerem Shalom border crossings, resulting in a concomitant growth in movement through
the Israeli-controlled crossings into the Gaza Strip. According to Ma’an News Agency, the Israeli authorities issued (6/5) so-called BMG permits to 90 Palestinian merchants, allowing them to enter Israel for up to 6 mos., whereas Gazan merchants had not been able to obtain anything other than so-called BMC permits, valid only for a few days. The overall monthly number of Palestinians exiting Gaza via Erez rose this quarter, with 15,888 and 18,418 exiting in 5/2015 and 6/2015, respectively, compared to 13,280 in 3/2015 and 13,300 in 4/2015, according to Israeli NGO Gisha. Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities increased restrictions on PCI hoping to visit relatives in Gaza. After the Defense Ministry lifted (7/9) its gag order on the news of the 2 Israeli civilians allegedly being held in Gaza and after Ramadan ended on 7/17, PCI were allowed to enter Gaza for “humanitarian purposes” after undergoing a security check. Previously, they had been permitted to enter the territory to visit 1st-degree relatives with permission from Israel’s COGAT (Haaretz, 8/21). The Israeli decision last quarter to loosen restrictions on exports from Gaza was slow to affect the number of truckloads exiting via the Kerem Shalom crossing (see JPS 44[4]), but there was a marked improvement this quarter. From 5/2015 to 7/2015, a monthly average of 110 truckloads of goods exiting Gaza compared with the previous 3 mos.’ average of 7, with the sharp rise attributable to the number of truckloads with goods for overseas export, which rose from 14 in 2–4/2015 to 96 in 5–7/2015. At the same time, truckloads entering Gaza through Kerem Shalom steadily decreased throughout the quarter. After peaking at 7,083 in 4/2015, totals fell from 6,820 in 5/2015 to 6,683 in 6/2015 and 6,311 in 7/2015, according to Gisha.

Violence in Sinai continued to affect Egypt’s management of the Rafah border crossing this quarter, although improved relations with Hamas improved the frequency of openings until 7/2015 (see “Egypt” below). After opening it for only 2 days last quarter, the Egyptian authorities opened Rafah for 13 days this quarter (5/26–28, 6/13–19, and 6/23–25), allowing 2,710 people to enter Gaza and 4,987 to exit, according to OCHA. The New York Times reported (6/20) that Hamas dep. chief Abu Marzuq met with Egyptian officials 4 times between 5/2015 and 6/2015 in an effort to assure the Egyptian govt. that Hamas was not providing refuge to extremist groups operating in Sinai. His efforts resulted the opening of Rafah for 7 consecutive days, on 6/13–19, the longest stretch since before OPE, when 4,840 people passed in both directions and around 8,000 tons of Qatar-donated cement destined to reconstruction projects entered Gaza. The Egyptian authorities kept the crossing closed through the end of the quarter after a series of Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS) attacks on Egyptian security forces in early 7/2015.

Despite the loosening of Israeli restrictions on movement during Ramadan, overall Palestinian freedom of movement and access in the West Bank and East Jerusalem remained on par with previous quarters. The IDF operated mobile checkpoints all across the West Bank and East Jerusalem (see Chronology for details) in addition to the permanent roadblocks where arrests regularly take place. According to OCHA, they also conducted 898 search and arrest operations between 5/12 and 8/10, or a weekly average of 69 (down from 90 last quarter).

As in past years, the Israeli govt. announced (6/16) a loosening of restrictions on movement during Ramadan (6/17–7/17): Palestinians from the West Bank, except men under the age of 40, would be allowed entry to East Jerusalem without a permit (though their buses would be subject to security inspections); the hours at relevant border
crossings would be extended; 500 Palestinians from the West Bank would be given permits allowing them to fly abroad via Ben Gurion Airport; 650 Palestinians from other countries and who do not hold Palestinian ID cards would be permitted to visit relatives in the oPt; and 50 Palestinian reporters would be permitted to cover Ramadan festivities in Jerusalem. Furthermore, the IDF planned to grant permits to 200 Gazans to visit relatives in the West Bank and to allow more Gazans to travel to Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem, with COGAT Mordechai lowering the minimum age from 60 to 50.

Over the course of Ramadan, however, the Israeli govt. reinstated some restrictions. After a shooting attack in the West Bank on 6/19 and a stabbing in East Jerusalem on 6/21, Israeli PM Netanyahu and DM Ya’alon canceled (6/21) the permits allowing overseas travel and revoked the permits for entry into Israel issued to residents of the home village, nr. Hebron, of the perpetrator of the 6/21 attack. Also, following the 6/23 rocket fire from Gaza (see “Overview of the Violence” above), COGAT announced (6/24) that no Palestinians from Gaza would be allowed to travel to Jerusalem for Friday prayers on 6/25. That same day, the Israeli press reported that Palestinians from the West Bank were still entering Jerusalem via military checkpoints instead of the special buses arranged for permit-less travel. An Israeli official blamed (6/24) the PA for the absence of such buses, faulting it for failure to implement the necessary “administrative arrangement.” After another Palestinian shooting attack in the West Bank on 6/29, COGAT announced (6/30) that women between the ages of 16 and 30 and men younger than 50 would need a permit to enter Jerusalem (under routine restrictions, Palestinian men up to age 55 are required to have a permit).

Of note: COGAT launched (5/19) a 3-mo. pilot project requiring Palestinians who worked in Israel to enter and leave the West Bank via the same checkpoints, effectively barring them from using Israeli settlers’ bus lines, which bypass the checkpoints. Several Israeli human rights organizations said the segregation was discriminatory and that it would increase the average Palestinian’s travel time by hours. The next day, Netanyahu canceled the project, with his spokesperson Mark Regev saying that “the proposals are unacceptable to the PM.” Also during the quarter, Hebron mayor Dawud al-Zaatari announced that COGAT had recently approved the reopening of around 70 Palestinian-owned shops in c. Hebron (the IDF shuttered over 500 shops in the area at the beginning of the 2d intifada in 2000).

As in the past, access to Haram al-Sharif was a source of conflict this quarter. Israeli forces arrested or detained at least 46 Palestinians at the sanctuary, and right-wing Jewish activists toured it on a near-daily basis, sparking clashes on at least 9 occasions (5/19, 6/5, 6/21, 7/25, 7/26, 8/2, 8/4, 8/10, and 8/12). In the wake of major clashes there on 7/26, and the Jewish extremists’ arson attack on 7/31, the Israeli authorities briefly restricted Palestinian access to the sanctuary: Palestinian men under 50 were barred from entering on 8/1, and Palestinian men and women under 30 were barred the next day, sparking clashes in and around the Old City (see Chronology for details). When thousands of Jewish Israelis paraded through the Old City’s Muslim Quarter to commemorate Jerusalem Day on 5/17, some chanting anti-Muslim and anti-Palestinian slogans, clashes with dozens of stone-throwing Palestinian youth ensued; 2 Israeli policemen and 19 Palestinians were injured, and 5 Palestinians were arrested. Last quarter, Israel’s High Court of Justice rejected (5/11) a petition calling for the parade route to be altered in order to avoid a repeat of the violence seen the previous year.
Settler-Related Violence

While the absolute number of Israeli settler attacks in the West Bank fell slightly this quarter, the issue of settler violence regained prominence after several high-profile incidents at the end of the quarter. There were at least 43 incidents of Israeli settler attacks on Palestinians or their property, leading to 2 deaths and 4 injuries among the victims. Incidents around Nablus (14), Ramallah (11), and Hebron (10) were the most frequent, some of which turned into confrontations that then led to clashes (6/17 and 8/4), price-tag attacks (6/21, 7/31, and 8/13), and 17 instances of destruction or theft of Palestinian property (see Chronology). Israeli settlers damaged or destroyed some 400 olive trees in 5 of those instances, (5/18, 6/21, 7/12, 7/31, and 8/3), down from 8 instances last quarter when almost 3,000 trees and saplings were destroyed. According to OCHA, Palestinian-on-settler violence also fell this quarter, with 33 such attacks in 5–7/2015, a monthly average of 11 for the period (down from 19 in the previous period).

Following Netanyahu’s ambiguous statements regarding the possibility of a 2-state solution at the end of his election campaign in 3/2015, and in spite of his return to power and formation of a new and more extreme right-wing govt. at the end of last quarter, many of his supporters feared that the PM would abandon settlement expansion. This translated into escalating tension throughout the quarter, eventually leading to a major settler attack on Palestinians and their property.

At the beginning of the quarter, Netanyahu had reassured settlers and their political reps. that he was committed to his settlement policies, pledging on Jerusalem Day (5/17) to continue settlement construction and to ensure the city would never be divided. As the quarter progressed, however, the PM came under increasing fire from the right for what was perceived as a de facto settlement freeze. After the Israeli High Court upheld (6/23) its earlier ruling ordering the demolition of 2 illegal structures—the Dreinoff buildings that were constructed without permits in the Beit El settlement and whose demolition the govt. had appealed in 3/2015—Netanyahu allegedly told a closed meeting of an influential settler...
organization (7/14), “We cannot develop the settlements further, but rather we need to preserve what we have.” The Yesha Council, an umbrella organization of municipal councils from West Bank settlements, responded with the statement, “A govt. that does not build in Judea and Samaria loses its right to exist.” Although the Likud Party proceeded to deny the PM’s words as well as the perceived settlement freeze and DM Ya’alon reportedly attempted to authorize the construction of the Dreinoff buildings with retroactive effect, the settler community persisted with its pressure. Education Minister Bennett’s Jewish Home party, which ran on a platform of settlement expansion in the 3/17 election, sent (7/19) a letter of protest to the PM, threatening to vote against the coalition until the alleged freeze was lifted (with only 61 seats in the Knesset, the coalition risked having all its legislative initiatives halted by an inside rebellion). In an announcement widely seen as an effort to placate the settler community and its Knesset champions, the Israeli Civil Admin. announced (7/23) approval of or retroactive authorization for various stages of construction or planning on 1,065 housing units in settlements across the West Bank, including 296 in Beit El. The announcement proved ineffective at defusing the tension. With the High Court of Justice ordering an immediate halt to construction preparations in Beit El and reaffirming the demolition order for the Dreinoff buildings on 7/26, Beit El became a flashpoint. In the lead-up to the court’s 7/31 deadline for the Dreinoff building demolitions, hundreds of settlers converged (7/26–29) on the site for several days of protests, openly clashing with Israeli troops (see Chronology for details). In a last-ditch effort to stave off the demolition, Bennett and his Jewish Home colleague, Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked, went to Beit El on 7/28 and called on Ya’alon to challenge the court order, but on 7/29 the demolition went ahead as ordered. On the same day, Netanyahu countered the court’s decision and gave the go-ahead for “immediate” construction of the 296 Beit El residences to begin, and for 500 units in East Jerusalem, drawing condemnation from the UN, EU, and U.S. State Dept., as well as Egypt and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

On 7/31, a group of 4 Jewish extremists set fire overnight to 2 Palestinian family homes in the village of Duma, near Nablus, causing the death of an 18-mo.-old child and the severe injury of his parents and brother (the father succumbed to his injuries on 8/8). In graphic photos of the scene, graffiti on the burned walls of the house read “long live the Messiah” and “revenge.”

In the wake of the arson attack, the Palestinian leadership introduced settler violence into their international dossier (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). PA pres. Abbas announced (7/31) a request for the ICC to open an investigation into the incident and FM al-Maliki submitted documentation on the attack (8/3). In addition, the Palestinian amb. to Jordan, Atallah Khairi, announced (8/3) that Jordan had agreed to join the PA in submitting a joint res. to the UNSC calling for international defense of Palestinian civilians, which a Fatah official clarified (8/3) might entail the addition of certain Jewish groups to lists of international terror organizations. On 8/5, the Arab Peace Initiative’s follow-up comm. met in Cairo to discuss the draft res., and a report released the same day by the PLO drew further attention to the issue as it provided documentary evidence of 11,000 settler attacks since 2004.

Coming 1 day after a stabbing attack at the Jerusalem Gay Pride Parade, the 2 events precipitated a public outcry over “Jewish terror” within Israeli society. On 8/2, the Israeli security cabinet approved the use of administrative
detention for Jewish Israelis suspected of committing terror-related crimes and formed a special ministerial commission, headed by Ya’alon and including Shaked, to explore ways to counter such attacks. In an op-ed in the *New York Times* (8/7), Bennett distanced the perpetrators of the attacks from his Jewish Home party, asserting that “fringe” groups were threatening Israeli society. Of note, Israel’s 2015–16 budget was approved on 8/6, including the NIS 340 m. special grant (around $88 m.) for infrastructure in the settlements, as stipulated in Likud’s coalition agreement with Jewish Home (see *JPS* 44[4]).

**Protests**

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

**Palestinian Prisoners**

While the overall number of Palestinians in Israeli custody declined this quarter, prisoners conducted several high-profile hunger strikes to protest Israel’s use of administrative detention and other practices. The number of Palestinian security detainees and prisoners held in Israeli prisons dropped from a high of 5,609 last quarter (2/2015) to 5,538 in 5/2015 and 5,442 in 6/2015, according to the Israeli human rights NGO, B’Tselem. The number of Palestinians held under administrative detention also fell, going to 370 in 6/2015 from a high of 424 in 2/2015.

As the quarter opened, Islamic Jihad mbr. Khader Adnan was 10 days into an open-ended hunger strike in protest of his administrative detention and Palestinian MP Khalida Jarrar (PFLP) was awaiting trial despite international protests at her arrest under administrative detention (4/5; see *JPS* 44[4]). Adnan’s condition deteriorated through 5–6/2015, drawing censure from the Palestinian public as well as the PA and the Arab League. On 6/28, Adnan made a deal with the Israel Prison Service and ended his strike overnight. While the prison authority agreed to release him on 7/12, it required Adnan to drop his demand that he never again be the object of administrative detention. (After being released as agreed, Adnan was temporarily detained the next day when trying to enter the Old City of Jerusalem without the proper permits, according to the IDF.) Meanwhile, Jarrar’s status remained largely unchanged. After being placed in administrative detention last quarter, she was formally charged (4/15) with 12 offenses relating to incitement and held in prison throughout the legal proceedings. This quarter, an Israeli military court ruled (5/21) to release her, imposing a NIS 20,000 bond, but the ruling was appealed. At her 6/22 trial, she pleaded innocent to all charges. She was held in prison through the end of the quarter with Israeli military courts postponing subsequent hearings (8/4 and 8/10).

As both cases were being litigated, the Israeli Knesset began considering new legislation to increase pressure on Palestinian prisoners protesting their detention. Gilad Erdan, concurrently minister of public security, of strategic affairs, and of information, sponsored a bill allowing hunger-striking prisoners to be force-fed if their lives were determined to be in danger. Erdan alleged, “Hunger strikes by imprisoned terrorists have become a weapon with which they are trying to threaten the State of Israel,” and claimed his bill sent the message that Israel “will not blink in the face of any
threat” (Reuters, 6/14). On 7/30, the Knesset passed the bill. The new law came under criticism from Israeli and Palestinian human rights NGOs, and the Israeli Medical Association urged doctors not to follow the law, considering force-feeding a form of torture. Additionally, the Knesset passed (7/20) an amendment to the penal code allowing convicted stone-throwers to be sentenced to 10–20 years in prison and reducing the govt.’s burden of proof for obtaining such convictions.

There were other prisoner-related hunger strikes and protests throughout the quarter (e.g., 5/21, 5/31, 6/9, 7/30, 8/4, and 8/5–9), with the most significant being the high-profile hunger strike of another Islamic Jihad mbr., Muhammad Allan. His action, which began on 6/16, became the focal point of the force-feeding controversy following the passage of the new law. On 8/7, the International Comm. of the Red Cross (ICRC) said Allan’s life was “at immediate risk,” and the head of the PA’s prisoner affairs comm. said the IDF prosecutor had requested permission from the courts to begin force-feeding him. PA Health Minister Jawad Awwad criticized (8/7) the move, and the UN released (8/8) a statement condemning the new law and describing force-feeding as a human rights violation. Israeli doctors at Soroka Medical Center refused (8/9) to force-feed Allan. Israeli authorities moved him to the Barzilai Medical Center in Ashqelon, which released a statement saying that Medical Director Chezy Levy’s position was that force-feeding was “unacceptable,” but the center would consider the practice to save a life. As Allan’s condition deteriorated, the quarter ended with: protesters clashing outside Barzilai (8/12); Joint List MKs calling for Allan’s release (8/12 and 8/14); and Allan’s doctors medically inducing a coma (8/14). His lawyer reported (8/15) that before losing consciousness, Allan had refused an offer by the prison authorities to limit his administrative detention to 2 years, and that negotiations between the 2 sides had broken down.

DEMOLITIONS AND CONFISCATIONS

The IDF continued demolishing Palestinian property in Area C of the West Bank and East Jerusalem at the same pace as in previous quarters, with only 1 major incident drawing international criticism of Israel. According to OCHA, between 5/12 and 8/10 Israeli forces razed 110 Palestinian-owned structures, displacing 92 Palestinians (the comparable figures for the previous quarter were 113 and 141, respectively). As in the previous quarter, there were no reported punitive demolitions, a standard Israeli practice targeting Palestinians accused of serious crimes against Israeli people or property (the policy was reinstated in summer 2014—see JPS 44[1–3]). The Israeli Supreme Court did, however, order (6/16) a room to be sealed in the East Jerusalem home of the Palestinian accused in the 10/29/2014 shooting of Yehuda Glick, leader of the messianic Temple Mount movement (see JPS 44[2]), and Israeli forces sealed with cement the Jabal Mukabir home of 1 of the Palestinians who attacked a West Jerusalem synagogue on 11/18/2014 (see JPS 44[3]).

Last quarter, Israel’s High Court rejected (5/5) a petition calling for the govt. to freeze its plans to evacuate and demolish Susiya village nr. Hebron, displacing 340 Palestinians. COGAT had denied the residents’ requests for a reprieve on the grounds that they lacked proper proof of ownership. Following the 5/5 ruling, the protests increased in frequency and reach (e.g., 6/5), resulting in Israel’s condemnation by the EU and U.S. On 6/8, EU rep. to the PA John Gatt-Rutter accompanied PA PM Hamdallah on a visit to Susiya where he stated, "On behalf of the EU, I call on the govt. of Israel to reverse its
plans to carry out demolitions here in Susiya.” That same day, village residents filed another petition with the High Court. Even though a hearing was scheduled for 8/3, the protests and international criticism continued after the Civil Admin. announced (7/12) that it would go ahead with the demolitions after the end of Ramadan on 7/17. On 7/16, a U.S. State Dept. spokesperson said, “We strongly urge the Israeli authorities to refrain from carrying out any demolitions,” which he described as “harmful and provocative.” There were also protests from within Israel, with around 200 artists, scientists, and intellectuals calling (7/20) on the govt. to avert its plans in an open letter. In what appeared to be a major development, Haaretz revealed (7/26) the existence of an internal IDF document showing that Susiya’s Palestinian residents had legitimate ownership claims to their land dating back to 1881. The Civil Admin. was then reported to be reevaluating its plans and the 8/3 hearing was postponed.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

TENSION WITH HAMAS THREATENS PA CONSENSUS GOVT.

This quarter marked the 1-year anniversary of the PA consensus govt.’s swearing in on 6/2/2014. Two weeks after that milestone, however, ongoing tension with Hamas led PA pres. Abbas to announce his intention to dissolve the govt. and replace it with one that could effectively administer both the West Bank and Gaza. After unsuccessful negotiations with Hamas and other Palestinian groups on the composition of the new govt., the PLO approved and implemented a minor cabinet reshuffle, effectively maintaining the status quo and further alienating Hamas (see “Palestinian Opinion” below).

After the breakdown of negotiations between the Ramallah-based leadership and Hamas over the payment of the Hamas-run govt.’s Gazan employees in 4/2015 (see JPS 44[4]), there were no further efforts to resolve the wage crisis, and rivalry between the 2 leaderships persisted. Hamas was critical of PFA pres. Rajoub’s decision to drop the bid to suspend Israel from FIFA (see “Barring Israel from International Soccer” above and in Palestine Unbound), and PA officials were openly hostile to Hamas efforts to engineer a long-term cease-fire with Israel (see “Israel and Hamas Explore the Prospect of Negotiations” above). Thus, for example, when there were reports on progress on that front, PA spokesperson Abu Rudayna responded (6/16) by saying, “Any cease-fire must seek to end the suffering of our people without paying the toll of breaching national consensus.” Furthermore, Hamas officials were generally critical of the consensus govt., as evidenced in the words of senior official Ismail Haniyeh who deplored the lack of humanitarian or economic progress in Gaza since the govt.’s advent.

Following the emergence of reports that Hamas and Israel were engaged in indirect talks, Abbas told (6/16) a meeting of the Fatah Revolutionary Council that he intended to dissolve the consensus govt. within days. A Fatah official elaborated further, telling the press that the decision was based on the fact that the govt. was “weak and there [was] no chance that Hamas [would] allow it to work in Gaza.” The same day, a Hamas official speculated that Abbas’s decision had resulted from being caught “off guard” by the news of contacts between Hamas and Israel, but other sources maintained that the govt.’s dissolution had been on the table for mos.

Notwithstanding this back and forth, the consensus govt. was not dissolved and it remained in place as the various Palestinian
factions struggled to articulate their vision for reform. While Hamdallah’s resignation was both reported and denied in the next 24 hours—the PM was allegedly asking for a cabinet reshuffle that Hamas blocked—Hamas and Islamic Jihad officials met (6/17) with PFLP, Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), and PPP reps. to discuss Abbas’s announcement, claiming that they had not been consulted in advance. According to a statement by a senior official on 6/25, Hamas was in favor of a “transitional leadership” to administer consultations on a new govt. and for the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) to be reactivated. Abbas, for his part, allegedly favored a cabinet of politicians (rather than technocrats), as other Fatah officials pushed for the inclusion of Palestinian factions not represented in the current cabinet. In a statement to the press after meeting with Abbas on 6/21, French FM Laurent Fabius said the Palestinian pres. had told him that “he was trying to build a national unity government” whose mbrrs. would have to “recognize Israel, renounce violence, and agree with the principles of the Quartet,” ipso facto excluding Hamas—which “suits us perfectly,” the FM added.

Little progress was made, however. Hamas rejected a PLO-designed restructuring plan on 6/26, then the PLO Exec. Comm. appointed (6/27) Fatah official Azzam al-Ahmad to head a consultative comm. in an attempt to come up with a new, more representative, formula that would include other Palestinian factions. In the next 2 days, the comm. approached Hamas and Islamic Jihad, but according to a senior PA official, Hamas placed impossible conditions on its participation in talks, and al-Ahmad canceled his scheduled trip to Gaza for consultations with Hamas officials. Al-Ahmad clarified (6/29) that the consultations had reached an impasse and that he was receiving conflicting messages from Hamas officials, claiming that Hamas’s public position, as articulated by dep. chief Abu Marzuq, was that it supported a nonpolitical cabinet but that the senior Hamas official told him privately that the opposite was true. In response, a Hamas spokesperson issued (6/29) a statement saying that the consultations had not even begun and “all that happened were some phone calls in which Fatah tried to impose its diktat.”

After the breakdown, Hamas continued to oppose the PLO-led process through 7/2015. At a meeting on 6/30, senior PLO officials approved a minor reshuffle of the cabinet, including 5 ministers who were either reassigned from the existing cabinet, or newly appointed, according to PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Ahmad Majdalani (6/30). Abu Marzuq rejected (6/30) any reshuffle so long as the consultations were under way, but the PLO-led process continued, nevertheless, with a senior Fatah official saying (7/5) that Hamas had laid down several “preconditions, which widen the gap between the Gaza Strip and West Bank.” Further exacerbating tension, the PA security forces (PASF) arrested (7/2–3) more than 100 Hamas mbrrs. in and around Hebron, Nablus, and Bethlehem, a “stab in the back” according to a Hamas official (7/3). The following week, Hamdallah and Abbas met (7/11) to weigh the strengths of candidates for various portfolios and agreed to delay the formation of a new govt. until at least after the end of Ramadan on 7/17.

Ultimately, the PA announced (7/30) that 5 new, unaligned ministers would be sworn in on 7/31, implementing the reshuffle approved on 6/30 (see Chronology). Hamas called (6/30) the decision, which it described as lacking any consensus, “unconstitutional” and Abu Marzuq said (8/4) that Hamas would not work with the new cabinet.
RUMORS OF RETIREMENT FOR PA PRESIDENT ABBAS

As consultations over the PA consensus govt. proceeded, 2 significant developments sparked a new wave of speculation about Abbas’s alleged plans to consolidate power ahead of his rumored retirement. On 6/22, the PASF seized around $700,000 from former PA PM Salam Fayyad’s NGO, Future for Palestine, on suspicions that the funds were destined “for political purposes,” according to a security official. Then, on 6/30, Abbas fired PLO secy.-gen. Yasser Abed Rabbo, citing his absence from recent meetings as the cause. According to unnamed sources quoted by the Times of Israel, Abbas saw Abed Rabbo as a threat who was working to undermine him in concert with Fayyad and exiled Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan—the money confiscated from Fayyad’s NGO having come from Emirates Red Crescent in the United Arab Emirates, where Dahlan is based. Although the reports remained unconfirmed (and the Palestinian High Court canceled the 6/22 seizure of Future for Palestine’s funds on 7/8), the narrative persisted throughout the quarter, particularly after Abbas’s 7/4 appointment of longtime ally and chief Palestinian negotiator Erakat as PLO secy.-gen.

Of note: a Palestinian appeals court upheld (7/8) Dahlan’s parliamentary immunity this quarter, overruling a previous court’s decision to recognize Abbas’s 2012 presidential decree stripping the former Fatah leader of his privilege. A legal aide to Abbas said (7/8) that the pres. planned to abide by the court’s decision. Last quarter, a PA court had ruled corruption charges “inadmissible” because Dahlan’s immunity had been lifted illegally, i.e., without PLC approval (see JPS 44[4] for details).

HAMAS RULE IN GAZA

With the reconstruction of Gaza proceeding slowly and Palestinian national reconciliation at an impasse, Hamas increasingly faced challenges to its control of the Gaza Strip. Small Islamist groups grew more influential and escalated their challenge to Hamas’s crackdown, while a major Palestinian business challenged Hamas’s efforts to cultivate new revenue streams.

Apart from provoking Israel into attacking Hamas’s infrastructure with cross-border attacks (see “Escalation of Cross-Border Violence” above), small Islamist groups in Gaza were reported to have begun receiving support from ISIS and its regional affiliates. On 5/28, there was a purported SPIS post on Facebook calling on fighters to “make their way to the Gaza Strip . . . and take over control.” After the IAF launched air strikes targeting Hamas sites in early 6/2015, reportedly in retaliation to a series of rocket attacks, IDF lt.-gen. Gadi Eisenkot claimed (6/16) that Israel had intelligence confirming that ISIS affiliates in Gaza were growing stronger, with as much as 14% of Gaza’s population supporting their efforts. Tension escalated further at the end of the mo. when ISIS’s main branch in Syria purportedly released (6/29) a video addressing the “tyrants of Hamas” and threatening to implement Shari’a law in Gaza “in spite of [Hamas]” before going on to “uproot Israel.” There was only 1 other major development in this regard on 7/19, when purported ISIS affiliates blew up cars belonging to mbrs. of Hamas and Islamic Jihad’s military wings in simultaneously timed blasts in c. and s. Gaza City, lightly injuring 2 people and damaging several homes. The 2 organizations condemned the attacks (providing conflicting reports on the number involved) and Hamas police arrested 10 people purported to belong to allegedly ISIS-affiliated groups.
Compounding the pressure on the Hamas-run govt., the World Bank released (5/21) a report showing that economic conditions in Gaza were “unsustainable” and that OPE and Egypt’s campaign to shut down Hamas’s smuggling tunnels into Sinai were responsible for an almost $500 m. reduction in Gaza’s economy. Hamas continued seeking alternative revenue streams this quarter including pursuing Gaza’s only mobile phone service provider, Jawwal, for tax fraud. On 6/26, public prosecutor Ismail Jabr ordered the PalTel subsidiary to stop operating, and on 3/30 Hamas police shut down Jawwal’s 16 offices in Gaza, leaving the company’s 1.3 m. Gazan clients uncertain about their cell service. Later that day, Hamas-appointed PalTel’s chief executive, Ammar Aker, explained that all relevant taxes had been paid to the PA and that filing separate taxes to the Hamas-run govt. could “expose national economic institutions that work within an international system to questions and sanctions.” After a private agreement of undisclosed terms with Jabr, Jawwal was allowed to reopen on 7/5.

### PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data was excerpted from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) on 4–6 June 2015. The results are based on a survey of 1,200 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The poll, the 56th in a series, was taken from the PSR’s website at www.pcpsr.org.

1. Now, more than a year after the formation of the reconciliation government, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with its performance?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Certainly Satisfied</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Satisfied</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
<td>23.7%</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Not Satisfied</td>
<td>43.9%</td>
<td>40.7%</td>
<td>42.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Certainly Not Satisfied</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
<td>28.8%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
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</table>

2. Hamas has conducted indirect negotiations with Israel over the issue of a long term truce in return for ending the Israeli siege over the Gaza Strip. Do you support or oppose the Hamas negotiations with Israel?

<table>
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<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) Certainly Support</td>
<td>5.1%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Support</td>
<td>56.0%</td>
<td>54.8%</td>
<td>55.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Oppose</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
<td>23.1%</td>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Certainly Oppose</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
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</table>

3. At the FIFA meeting [on 5/29], the Palestinian side dropped the call for expelling Israel from [the] organization after Israel accepted most of the demands of the Palestinian Football Association. In your view, who came out a winner in this round inside FIFA, the Palestinian or the Israeli side?

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<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a) The Palestinian</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) The Israeli</td>
<td>29.0%</td>
<td>39.8%</td>
<td>32.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Both Won</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Both Lost</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>6.1%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) None Won; None Lost</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td>15.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The Iranian and American sides have succeeded in reaching a framework agreement on the Iranian nuclear program. In your view, is this agreement good or bad for the Arabs? [This question referred to the “key parameters” announced by the P5+1 and Iran on 4/2. See JPS 44(4) for details.]

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<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tr>
<td>a) Certainly Good</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>5.5%</td>
<td>3.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b) Good</td>
<td>20.8%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>21.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c) Neither Good nor Bad</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d) Bad</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>23.8%</td>
<td>29.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e) Certainly Bad</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f) Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
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</table>

5. And what about Israel—is the American-Iranian agreement good or bad for it?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g) Certainly Good</td>
<td>11.6%</td>
<td>20.1%</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h) Good</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>35.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i) Neither Good nor Bad</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>12.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>j) Bad</td>
<td>23.0%</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k) Certainly Bad</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>l) Don’t Know/Not Applicable</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
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FRONLINE STATES

EGYPT

Egypt’s involvement in Israeli and Palestinian diplomatic initiatives this quarter was relatively minor. The Egyptian govt. had been set to mediate indirect negotiations between the 2 sides on a long-term cease-fire in Gaza but there was little tangible progress on that front. While shifting regional dynamics were considered partly responsible for a thawing of relations with Hamas, the persistent insurgency in Sinai highlighted the fragility of the rapprochement, and despite an initial relaxation of the Rafah border crossing closures, Egypt tightened its side of the blockade on Gaza this quarter.

Confirming signs of a rapprochement, in the 1st half of the quarter Hamas officials reported (6/10) that ongoing meetings with Egyptian intelligence officers had recently evolved to include diplomatic and strategic issues. According to Haaretz (6/10), the Egyptians were looking for “confidence-building measures” as Hamas pressed for more frequent openings of the Rafah border crossing. The UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) already had 30,000 registered humanitarian cases waiting to cross into Egypt from Gaza (6/4). In 4 meetings over a 2-mo. period (5–6/2015), Abu Marzuq, the dep. head of Hamas’s political bureau, was reported to have assured Egyptian officials that his organization was not supporting SPIS or other insurgents in Sinai (New York Times, 6/20). Also, a senior Hamas source was quoted as saying that a recent meeting in Qatar had produced an agreement whereby Egypt pledged to open Rafah more frequently and Hamas committed to refraining from criticizing Egypt in the press and to halting “operations through underground tunnels” (Haaretz, 6/24). It was not clear whether this was a reference to commercial smuggling or military operations.

Further indicators of the improving relationship this quarter included the overturning on 6/6 of Hamas’s designation as a terrorist organization (2/28; see the quarterly Update in JPS 44[4]) following an appeal from the State Litigation Authority; and the opening of the Rafah border crossing for 13 days in late 5/2015 and 6/2015, allowing over 7,000 people
to pass in both directions and at least 8,000 tons of Qatar-funded cement to enter Gaza for reconstruction projects, according to OCHA (see “Movement and Access” above). Officials repeatedly touted the improvement in relations, with the Hamas-appointed director of Gaza’s border crossings, Maher Abu Sabha, describing (6/23) the opening of Rafah as “a sign of warming relations with Egypt.” In a barely veiled reference to the Egyptian govt., senior leader Haniyeh indicated (6/30) that Hamas was now stronger militarily than during OPE, because of “openness” on the part of “those who had pressured us in the past.”

These developments took place against the background of a shifting regional balance of power. The Saudi monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz—who had come to power in 1/2015 and was regarded as a reformer compared with his predecessor—was credited with reversing Saudi policy on the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and, by extension, Hamas. Saudi Arabia was seen as consolidating a region-wide Sunni alliance against Iran, now poised to become a regional power in the wake of the nuclear deal with the P5+1, according to observers (see “Iran” below). In 3/2014, the Saudi govt. had designated Hamas a terrorist organization after having cheered then-gen. al-Sisi’s military overthrow of the MB govt. in Egypt in 7/2013.

Meanwhile, both Saudi Arabia and Egypt made appeasing gestures toward Israel this quarter (see “Saudi Arabia” below). On 6/21, the Egyptian govt. announced the appointment of a new amb. to Israel, Hazem Khairat, replacing Atef Salem who had been recalled in the midst of the IDF’s 2012 assault on the Gaza Strip. At Cairo’s invitation, the newly appointed dir.-gen. of Israel’s FM, Dore Gold, went to Egypt on 6/29 for discussions including the possible relaunch of peace negotiations with the Palestinians, making this the 1st high-ranking Israeli visit to Egypt since 2011.

Owing to an escalation of violence in Sinai in the middle of the quarter and despite the emerging rapprochement with Hamas, Egypt reinstated the closure of the Rafah crossing in early 7/2015. Following a relative lull in the counterinsurgency, with a corresponding drop in the number of casualties (3 soldiers, 4 civilians, and 43 insurgency-affiliated fighters were killed in the 1st half of the quarter), on 7/1 SPIS launched a series of coordinated attacks on some 15 Egyptian security positions in and around Shaykh Zuwayd. The group claimed to have killed 23 Egyptian troops while the Egyptian army reported (7/6) that 17 soldiers, 3 civilians, and 241 SPIS fighters and their affiliates had been killed in the 5 days of clashes. Of note, in this context, was SPIS’s launch of 3 Grad rockets into Israel (7/3), causing no damage or injuries.

In the aftermath of the renewed violence, Israel supported Egypt’s retaliation against Hamas, which it sought to implicate in the attacks. Quoting its own intelligence sources as reporting (7/2) that Hamas had supported SPIS with arms and supplies, Israel authorized (7/13) Egypt to beef up its military presence in Sinai, overriding a provision to the contrary in the 2 countries’ 1979 peace treaty. Hamas’s political leaders in Gaza vehemently denied (7/1–3) any connection to SPIS, leading to speculation in Israeli and international media that the organization’s military wing may have been operating independently. Commentators pointed to reports that residents had seen Hamas military vehicles transporting wounded people to the Abu Yousef al-Najjar Hospital in Rafah in the wake of Sinai attacks (Al-Monitor, 7/6).

The violence in Sinai persisted through the end of the quarter and in the absence of reports confirming Hamas-SPIS cooperation, Egypt
resumed its conciliatory stance vis-à-vis Hamas. In the period 7/5–31, the Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah border crossing closed, claiming that 167 fighters affiliated with SPIS and other armed groups were killed in the period with the loss of only 7 soldiers on the govt. side. There was no official rhetoric accusing Hamas of supporting SPIS and on 8/6 Hamas officials stated that Egypt had recently conveyed that it wanted to calm tensions. Following an urgent request from Hamas on 8/7, the Egyptian authorities announced they would be opening the crossing for 4 days starting on 8/17.

JORDAN

Jordan did not play a major role in any Israeli or Palestinian diplomatic initiatives this quarter, but the Jordanian govt. did engage in talks with the PA and Israel on specific issues, including development in the Jordan Valley, Jordanians laborers working in Israel, the administration of Haram al-Sharif, and Israel’s proposed construction of an airport in Eilat. Two agreements were concluded in this regard.

On 6/9–10, Palestinian, Israeli, and Jordanian activists and officials endorsed a master plan for sustainable development in the Jordan Valley, designed to “promote peace, prosperity, and security” by identifying $4.58 b. worth of regional and international pollution-combating measures to be undertaken by 2050. On 6/13, Ma’an News Agency quoted an Israeli official as saying that Israel had agreed to permit 1,500 Jordanian laborers to cross into Israel to work in Eilat. The agreement was also set to govern the creation of new border crossings between Israel and Jordan as well as a joint industrial zone in the Jordan Valley.

Negotiations on the other 2 issues were inconclusive. According to International Crisis Group (6/30), which has a unit entirely devoted to Jerusalem, negotiations between the Israeli and Jordanian govt.s over the status of Haram al-Sharif had been ongoing since 11/13/2014 (see Doc. R6), when U.S. secy. of state John Kerry, Jordan’s King Abdullah, and Israeli PM Netanyahu agreed on a series of measures to reduce tensions at the sanctuary (see JPS 44[2]). The negotiations had reportedly covered the opening of certain sites—al-Aqsa Mosque, the Dome of the Rock, and the Islamic Museum—to non-Muslims for the 1st time since 2000, with the increased tourism revenue designed to enable the Islamic Waqf to enhance its administration of the sanctuary.

After the Jordanian govt. filed a formal complaint to the UN on 7/25 regarding Israel’s plans to construct an airport nr. Eilat, Jordanian transportation minister Lina Shbeeb indicated (8/15) that negotiations over the airport were ongoing. Since the Israeli govt. approved plans for the airport in 7/2010 and especially after construction began in 5/2013, the Jordanian govt. has complained that the new facility would impinge on the operations of Aqaba’s King Hussein International Airport, only 10 km away on the Jordanian side of the border.

These negotiations aside, there were signs of tension between the Jordanian govt. and the PA this quarter, especially following the 5/29 FIFA congress when Jordan alleged that PFA chair Rajoub had voted for Sepp Blatter to serve another term as FIFA pres. rather than for Jordan’s candidate, Prince Ali Bin Al Hussein. While Rajoub repeatedly claimed that he did, in fact, vote for Prince Ali, the Jordanian govt. barred him from entering Jordan and several Jordanian officials called for his Jordanian citizenship to be revoked (Jerusalem Post, 6/6). PA pres. Abbas met with Prince Ali on 6/2 and PA PM Hamdallah met with Jordanian officials on 6/6 in efforts to defuse the tension. There were rumors that Abbas might dismiss Rajoub
to appease the Jordanians but no further developments ensued.

SYRIA

**Conditions in Yarmouk Deteriorate**

As part of its broader push to expand its presence in Syria, ISIS broke the Syrian govt.’s siege of Yarmouk refugee camp last quarter, leading to a major escalation of violence in the area. On 4/1, ISIS claimed that it controlled 90% of the camp but after a counteroffensive, Syrian govt. forces and their allies among the local Palestinian factions said they had regained control of 35% of the camp (4/9; see JPS 44[4]). While the international community provided some aid, residents continued to endure desperate living conditions amid unabated violence.

Although reports from the camp could not be independently verified, it was clear that the fighting continued. As the quarter opened, Palestinian factions controlled the n. and e. sections of the camp and ISIS had been pushed to the s. and w., according to a PLO official quoted by Ma’an (5/23). The number of Palestinian refugees and Syrian civilians trapped in Yarmouk had fallen to around 7,000, according (5/23) to the head of the coalition of Palestinian factions in the camp, Khalid Abdel Majid—when ISIS stormed the camp on 4/1, there remained 18,000 people living in Yarmouk from an original population of 150,000 before the Syrian conflict began in 2011. There were sporadic reports of violence throughout the quarter, with allegations of Syrian govt. air strikes on ISIS positions killing a number of fighters and a Syrian security official reported as saying that the fighting was intermittent (AFP, 5/26).

Relief efforts continued to be obstructed and underfunded. On 5/20, UNRWA said that 95% of Palestinian refugees remaining in Syria relied on its services to meet their daily needs, adding that to date international donors had provided only 21% of the funds required for 2015. By the end of the quarter, the agency revised (8/18) that figure to 30.8% (see “United Nations” below for more on UNRWA’s underfunding). In his 5/23 statement, Abdel Majid indicated that the PA had collected $6.4 m. through deductions to employees’ salaries and donations from individuals and civil society organizations but there were no independent reports that the money had been successfully distributed to refugees in Syria or organizations serving them. Further obstructing the provision of aid, the Syrian govt. withdrew (6/8) its permission for UNRWA to continue the humanitarian aid missions it had set up nr. the camp during the previous quarter. These initiatives were UNRWA’s only means to deliver any aid or assistance to refugees living in or fleeing from Yarmouk after the agency decided to withdraw from the camp after it fell to ISIS forces.

As the quarter came to a close, the camp’s already insalubrious conditions deteriorated further, giving rise to fears of an epidemic. In a statement on 8/18, UNRWA said that in late 7/2015 it had received credible reports of a typhoid outbreak in Yarmouk, “putting the lives and well-being of thousands of civilians at greater risk.”

**Druze in the Golan Heights**

In early 6/2015, Syrian rebel groups advanced through s. Syria, targeting Druze communities and sparking protests from the Druze of n. Israel. In 2 separate incidents, the protesters attacked (6/22) Israeli ambulances transferring injured Syrians from the border in the Golan Heights to a nearby Israeli field hospital, arguing that by doing so Israel was providing support to mbrs. of the same rebel groups that had been attacking the homes of their relatives.
across the border in s. Syria. (Israel claimed to have treated at least 1,600 Syrians since the conflict started in 2011.) Speaking on the same day, IDF lt. col. Peter Lerner said a “mob of 150 first blocked and then assaulted the ambulance [in the 2d attack],” and an IDF spokesperson alleged that the protesters had smashed the ambulance’s windshield with rocks, dragged the injured Syrians out, and assaulted them. After Israeli forces arrested 12 people in connection with the protests in the following days, officials sought to quell the fears of the Israeli Druze. Netanyahu met (6/24) with leaders of the community and said, “Your sons, all of our sons, serve and fight in the IDF and defend the nation, which belongs to all of us.” And in a 6/29 statement, in which he confirmed for the 1st time that Israel had been providing aid to certain Syrian rebel groups, DM Ya’alon said, “We’ve assisted them under two conditions . . . that they don’t get too close to the border, and that they don’t touch the Druze.” Community leader Shaykh Moafaq Tarif welcomed the DM’s comments, expressing confidence that the “security establishment will work to ensure” that humanitarian assistance to the rebels would be delivered in accordance with the parameters set by the state.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

IRAN

A Historic Agreement with the P5+1

After agreeing to “key parameters” last quarter (see JPS 44[4]), Iran and the P5+1 entered the last leg of negotiations over Iran’s nuclear program ahead of the 6/30 deadline for a final, comprehensive agreement. While the parameters provided a detailed framework for the final deal, several major issues remained unresolved as the quarter opened. With the deadline only 6 weeks away, opponents stepped up their rhetoric, maneuvering for greater influence over the talks, and negotiators met almost around the clock to tie up the deal.

Since their beginning, in the wake of Hassan Rouhani’s ascent to the Iranian presidency in 8/2014, the negotiations had generated opposition from 4 main groups: the Arab Gulf states, particularly Saudi Arabia, which feared that a deal would consolidate Iran’s emergence as a regional power (see “Saudi Arabia” and “Egypt” above); Iran’s so-called hard-liners, who feared that the ideology of the 1979 revolution would be undermined by an agreement with the P5+1; and both the Israeli political establishment and their allies in the U.S. Congress who argued that the deal would free Iranian funds, further bolstering Tehran’s support for Hizballah and the Syrian regime, and enable Iran to secretly produce a nuclear weapon threatening Israel.

As the deadline approached, pressure rose from every quarter. Congress passed the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act with veto-proof majorities in 5/2015 (see JPS 44[4] and S. 615 and H.R. 1191 at congressionalmonitor.org for more), and Pres. Obama signed it into law on 5/22, thereby establishing the oversight role of U.S. lawmakers over the final agreement (see “United States” below). Israeli officials, for their part, lauded the passage of the act and kept up their anti-negotiation rhetoric all the while maintaining their behind-the-scenes consultations on the talks. CIA dir. John Brennan was in Israel in early 6/2015 for meetings with PM Netanyahu and Israeli security officials (Haaretz, 6/9) and on 6/15, an Israeli delegation led by National Security Adviser Yossi Cohen headed to Washington to make a final attempt at influencing the unfolding negotiations. At the same time, Israeli officials began preparing to support the
opponents of the deal in Congress and their push for a vote of disapproval (see “Congressional Oversight on the Iran Deal” below).

In Iran, while “hard-liners” wanted more influence over the talks, their role remained marginal. On 6/17, 225 of 290 parliamentarians signed onto a bill establishing “criteria” for a final agreement and claiming a formal supervisory role in its implementation. After Rouhani and his followers in the Iranian Majlis opposed the bill, 199 parliamentarians approved (6/21) amendments that shifted oversight responsibilities to the Supreme National Security Council, chaired by Rouhani and controlled by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The new bill passed, 214–10, on 6/23, cementing the Iranian parliament’s role. While not the formal supervisory one desired by the more hawkish legislators, the new law conferred the right on the Iranian parliament to cast a symbolic vote on any agreement.

Meanwhile, in Vienna, negotiators were struggling to finalize the deal. Key outstanding issues as diplomats drew closer to the finish line included: the nature of international oversight on Iranian implementation; Iran’s transparency (or lack thereof) about its past nuclear ambitions; and the pace of sanctions relief. Although the 4/2 framework provided for International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections at Iran’s nuclear sites, including Natanz and Fordow, Khamenei reiterated (e.g., 5/20 and 6/23) that the IAEA would not be allowed to inspect military sites, including the Parchin base, where nuclear testing had allegedly occurred in the past. In the interval between Khamenei’s 2 statements, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano indicated (5/27) that Iran would have to accept inspections at its military sites as part of a final deal—a stance confirmed the same day by French FM Fabius who declared that France would not agree to a deal unless IAEA inspectors were allowed access to Iran’s military sites. Following a spate of Israeli and international press reports in early 6/2015 that the P5+1 had dropped their demand for Iran to reveal its past nuclear activity, the U.S. State Dept. issued a statement saying (6/16) that “the IAEA’s concerns about possible military dimensions, past and present” would need to be resolved before there was a deal, but this was belied by the secy. of state who subsequently clarified (6/16) that the negotiators were not focusing on the issue. Sometime later, Reuters reported (6/25) that U.S. secy. of state Kerry had called his Iranian counterpart to reiterate that Iran’s history of nuclear dealings needed to be made public. While the 4/2 key parameters designated sanctions relief to go into effect after IAEA verification that Iran “has taken all of its key nuclear related steps,” Iranian officials sought reassurance on this front. The bill introduced in the Majlis on 6/21 called for sanctions to be lifted across the board and comprehensively on the day of the final agreement, and Khamenei had reiterated that demand in his 6/23 speech.

After multiple extensions and 18 straight days of negotiations in Vienna (see Chronology for details), the P5+1 and Iran concluded the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) overnight on 7/14. The same day, Amano announced that Iran and the IAEA had agreed to a “road map” for a sequence of activities enabling the IAEA to assess any possible military dimensions to Iran’s nuclear program by the end of 2015.

The JCPOA basically conformed to the negotiations’ initial premise—trading sanctions relief for limitations on Iran’s nuclear program—and the key parameters announced on 4/2. In terms of enrichment, Iran agreed to: transform the Fordow site into a research center; dismantle the core of the Arak heavy water reactor; cut
down the number of operational centrifuges from nearly 20,000 to 6,104 (and to only use 5,000 of them for the next 10 years); limit enrichment of uranium to 3.7%; and cut stockpiles of low-enriched uranium by 98%, limiting it to 300 kg for 15 years. Collectively, these measures would extend Iran’s “breakout” time to 1 year for a period of 10 years, meaning that over that decade it would take Iran an estimated 12 mos. to be able to produce a nuclear weapon if it reneged on the deal. As soon as the IAEA was able to certify that Iran had implemented such enrichment limits, the U.S. and EU would suspend sanctions—starting with the oil embargo and frozen bank accounts—and the P5+1 would pass a UNSC res. voiding all previous sanctions res. (and extending the ban on sales of missiles for 8 years and other arms for 5). Additionally, both sides agreed to participate in a new monitoring comm., comprising the P5+1, Iran, and the EU, that would manage a “snap back” procedure if Iran was found to be violating the deal. Regarding inspections, Iran agreed to give the IAEA conditional access to any site, including the Parchin military base, according to the following protocol: after the agency requested access to a site, Iran would have a right to challenge the request, and, if it did, the new monitoring comm. would have 24 days to decide whether or not to grant the inspectors access. The parties also agreed that the new monitoring comm. would meet every 2 years at a ministerial level to review and assess the deal and to make any changes needed by consensus (See Doc. A1 for excerpts).

Before the UNSC had even approved its unanimous res. endorsing the JCPOA on 7/20, opponents had already begun mobilizing for the battle in the U.S. Congress. On the day of the signing, Netanyahu immediately denounced the deal, calling it a “historic mistake.” Israel’s security cabinet unanimously rejected it and Netanyahu met with his electoral adversary, opposition leader Isaac Herzog, to “coordinate their efforts.” The next day, the America Israel Public Affairs Comm. (AIPAC) declared, “We strongly believe that the alternative to this bad deal is a better deal.” Although the formal text of the JCPOA had not yet been delivered to the legislature, 166 mbrs. of the U.S. House of Representatives signed onto (7/19) a symbolic res. expressing their disapproval.

In the weeks that followed the 7/14 announcement, official supporters of the deal, both in Iran and the U.S., went to bat for the agreement. The Obama admin. immediately began lobbying mbrs. of Congress and the U.S. public (see “United States” below) and also made overtures to Israel and several Arab states, sending officials and delegations on tours of the region. Obama was reported to have called Netanyahu on the day the deal was signed, offering to make it up to Israel with increased military aid, and National Security Adviser Susan Rice reiterated the offer on 7/15. Over the coming days and weeks through the end of the quarter, the same scenario obtained with Israel snubbing U.S. overtures and the Gulf states and Jordan expressing various degrees of enthusiasm. After a visit to Israel (7/19–20), Jordan (7/21), and Saudi Arabia (7/22) by Defense Secy. Ash Carter, the Israelis stuck to their position, Queen Noor of Jordan appeared (7/28) alongside a series of U.S. celebrities and politicians in support of the deal, and Saudi FM Adel al-Jubeir said (7/23) the agreement appeared to have all the provisions necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon. In addition, Kerry met with officials from several Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) mbr. states on 8/3, after which Qatari FM Khalid al-Attiya said (8/3) that the GCC welcomed the deal, calling it “reassuring.” While the Majlis took no further action until the end of the
quarter, a speech by Khamenei on 7/18 led to speculation that Iranian lawmakers would come out in support since the supreme leader did not criticize the deal, although his address fell short of endorsing it.

Through the end of the quarter, there were signs that the JCPOA was being implemented on schedule. Most importantly, the IAEA confirmed (8/15) that Iran had passed along key documentation of its nuclear program’s past and present activities, meeting the 1st deadline outlined in the road map. The IAEA began assessing the documents and, in accordance with the terms of the agreement, was permitted to ask for clarification by 10/15.

**Iran and the Palestinians**

The Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership took steps to improve relations with Iran this quarter. PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Majdalani traveled to Tehran to meet with Iranian FM Mohammad Javad Zarif on 8/9 and deliver a letter from PA pres. Abbas to Pres. Rouhani. They agreed to jointly push for an international conference on a nuclear weapon-free Middle East and discussed 3 main issues: boosting cooperation, the Syrian conflict, and Palestinian national unity. Specifically, Majdalani said that the 7/14 nuclear deal with the P5+1 could lay the groundwork for an international conference to “clear the region of nuclear weapons, including Israel’s.” Both Palestinian and Iranian officials described the meeting as productive, and Majdalani later announced (8/11) that arrangements were being made for Abbas to visit Iran sometime before the end of 2015.

After growing signs of rapprochement between the 2 sides in the previous 6 mos. (see *JPS 44[3, 4]*), Hamas appeared to be out of favor with the Iranian govt. once again this quarter. Although Abbas had reportedly requested the abovementioned meeting after Iran and the P5+1 reached a nuclear deal on 7/14, it took place 1 day after *Huffington Post* ‘Arabi reported that Iranian officials had recently canceled a Hamas delegation’s planned trip to Tehran. “Informed sources” were reported as saying that the Iranians were disenchanted with Hamas leader Mishal’s meeting with Saudi officials in 7/2015 in an apparent bid to seek improved relations with the kingdom (see “Saudi Arabia” below). Hamas officials, who had been touting a Mishal visit to Tehran for months, denied the reports, however, declaring (8/9) that consultations were under way on arranging such a visit. Meanwhile, senior Hamas official Abu Marzuq announced (7/27) that the organization was trying to improve relations with Iran following Tehran’s recent suspension of financial assistance.

**SAUDI ARABIA**

Saudi Arabia sought to improve relations with Hamas and Israel this quarter within the context of its broader effort to be a counterpoint to Iran’s projected emergence as a regional power (see “Egypt” and “Iran” above). Saudi officials had facilitated international efforts to broker a long-term cease-fire deal between Hamas and Israel in the previous quarter, with Hamas officials calling for increased Saudi involvement in Palestinian national reconciliation.

This quarter, the Saudis invited Mishal to meet with King Salman in Riyadh. At the 7/17 meeting, the 2 men discussed Palestinian unity and the regional political situation. The meeting marked a “clear shift in relations and a breakthrough with Saudi Arabia,” according to senior Hamas official Salah Bardawil (7/18).

Further illustrating the kingdom’s shifting priorities, former Saudi military official, Gen. Anwar Eshki, and the incoming dir.-gen. of Israel’s FM, Dore Gold, appeared (6/4) on the
same panel at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington to discuss Iran's regional ambitions. After the presentation, Gold said, “We're both allies of the U.S. . . . I hope this is the beginning of more discussion about our common strategic problems.”

TURKEY

More than a year after the last talks between Israeli and Turkish officials focusing on reparations for the victims of the IDF’s deadly raid on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in 5/2010, gold secretly met with the Turkish under secy. of foreign affairs, Feridun Sinirlioğlu, in Rome on 6/22. Later, Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu confirmed (6/24) that meetings had been going on “for a while” and that it was “quite normal” for the 2 countries to be attempting to reestablish ties.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Congressional Oversight on the Iran Deal

After a bipartisan coalition formed last quarter to pass the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (see JPS 44[4] and S. 615 and H.R. 1191 at congressionalmonitor.org for more), U.S. pres. Obama signed the bill into law on 5/22, giving Congress the right to pass a joint res. of disapproval and block the U.S.’s implementation of any final agreement with Iran. After the deal was announced on 7/14 (see “Iran” above), the world’s attention turned to Congress, where the most serious battle over the deal’s implementation formed along largely partisan lines.

The admin. delivered the deal to Congress on 7/19 and lawmakers had until 9/17 to consider it, as stipulated by the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act. Since Obama had repeatedly stated that he would veto a joint res. of disapproval, opponents of the deal set about to organizing veto-proof majorities in both chambers—67 votes in the Senate and 290 in the House—in order to override him.

As soon as the deal was announced on 7/14, the Obama admin. launched a massive lobbying campaign to build support for the deal. Several senior officials, including the secretaries of state, the treasury, and energy went to the legislature in person to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Comm. (SFRC) and House Foreign Affairs Comm. They also appealed to the public directly, giving interviews to national media outlets (New York Times, 7/14) and creating an exclusive website and Twitter profile (@TheIranDeal; see Palestine Unbound for more). Strategically, the admin.’s pitch was centered on the argument that the deal closed off Iran’s pathways to a nuclear weapon for at least 10 years and that censuring the agreement would hasten Iran’s acquisition of such weapons. Obama delivered (8/5) a high-profile address to that effect at American University, where Pres. John F. Kennedy had famously delivered his nonproliferation speech 52 years earlier (see Doc. D1). The admin. also went to great lengths to reassure its Israeli ally on the benefits of the deal. In his SFRC testimony, U.S. secy. of state Kerry cited (7/23) the positive comments that Israeli military strategists had recently made, and Obama personally met with 20 leaders of major U.S. pro-Israel and Jewish organizations on 8/4.

Meanwhile, opponents of the deal were conducting a series of campaigns of their own. Republicans in Congress and Israeli PM Netanyahu led the charge, frequently criticizing the contents of the deal in media appearances and through direct public outreach. After Netanyahu rebuffed Obama’s 7/14 offer to...
discuss increasing U.S. military aid to Israel (see “Iran” above), he challenged (7/19) the underlying motivation, saying, “Why should we need to be compensated if the deal is supposed to make us safer?” He called (8/4) on U.S. Jews to oppose the deal in a live webcast to over 100 U.S. Jewish communities and met with Democrat (8/9) and Republican (8/12) congressional delegations. The Israeli PM’s efforts built on his earlier opposition to the negotiations and exacerbated existing tension with the Obama admin., prompting Israeli pres. Reuven Rivlin to say (8/6) that he was “worried” because of the unprecedented “isolation” of Israel. Major Israeli lobby groups also opposed the deal. On 7/22, AIPAC officials unveiled their plans, saying they would be placing television ads, holding town hall meetings throughout Congress’s 8/2015 recess, and lobbying mbrs. of Congress personally.

Opponents of the deal adopted the mantra that the alternative to the deal was a better deal. Notable examples of this came during the 1st Republican primary debate on 8/6, when candidates were highly critical, including Wisconsin gov. Scott Walker, who said that if elected he would “terminate” the deal on his 1st day in office. (Walker also tried to smear the deal by linking it with his Democratic presidential opponent, Hillary Clinton, who served as secy. of state during Obama’s 1st term.*) Furthermore, those opposing the deal also argued that the sanctions relief would give Iran access to over $50 b. in previously frozen funds, which it could then use to support forces inimical to U.S. interests across the Middle East, including Hizballah and the Syrian govt. (See Doc. D2 for more on the deal’s opponents within Congress.)

Although more than 1 mo. of the congressional review period remained as the quarter ended, the deal appeared to have garnered enough support in Congress for U.S. implementation to proceed. As of 8/14, only Chuck Schumer (D-NY) had joined the Republicans in the Senate, leaving opponents 5 votes shy of the filibuster-proof majority needed to pass a joint res. of disapproval and 12 shy of the veto-proof majority they would need to defend it. Likewise in the House, where only 11 Democrats came out against the deal, giving opponents 257 votes—enough to pass a joint res. of disapproval—but 33 short of a veto-proof majority.

**Continued Military Support for Israel**

With the Obama admin.’s “reassessment” of Israel and Palestine (see JPS 44[4]) apparently on hold until after the nuclear deal with Iran was settled, the U.S. and Israel took a series of steps to ensure uninterrupted U.S. military support for Israel this quarter. According to a Defense News report on 5/24, bilateral working groups had begun negotiations in recent mos. on a new long-term agreement to replace the 10-year, $30 b. memorandum of understanding set to expire in 2017. According to an Israeli security source, the govt. in Tel Aviv was pushing for a $1.5 b. annual increase, or 50% more than the current $3 b. per year, or a 10-year total of $45 b. from 2018 to 2028. These figures did not include annual funding of joint missile defense programs (see the Congressional Monitor in JPS 44[4]) or contributions to the U.S. war reserves that are kept in Israel for emergency use (such as during OPE; see JPS 44[1, 2]). Separately, the U.S. Defense Security Cooperation Agency published (5/19) a

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* For more on the 2016 presidential election, see the series of candidate profiles published by the Institute for Palestine Studies’ blog, Palestine Square, at blog.palestine-studies.org.
notification of a proposed sale of missiles and other military equipment, worth $1.879 b. Commenting on the move, an Israeli security expert said (5/21), “These items are often sold to Israel in separate deals. ... There’s no doubt that packaging them all together in one sale, and announcing it now, is clearly linked to the Iran agreement.” No Israeli or U.S. officials would confirm the statement. After the nuclear deal with Iran was announced on 7/14, however, Netanyahu refused to carry out further discussions of increasing U.S. military support to Israel (see “Iran” and “Congressional Oversight on the Iran Deal” above).

Support for Palestinian Children in Congress

In a rare show of congressional support for the Palestinians, Betty McCollum (D-MN) and 18 of her fellow House Democrats signed (6/19) a letter to Kerry calling for him to “elevate the human rights of Palestinian children to a priority status in our bilateral relationship with the govt. of Israel.” The letter cited the 2013 UN Children’s Fund (UNICEF) report, “Children in Israeli Military Detention”: 7,000 Palestinian children between the ages of 12 and 17 had been arrested, detained, interrogated, and imprisoned by Israeli forces over the previous 10 years. The reps. also “fully expect[ed]” that the State Dept. address the IDF’s detention system in its next annual human rights report.

Legislative Crackdown on Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS)

Last quarter, several anti-BDS measures had steadily advanced through Congress. Two of them, both large, multifaceted measures and components of the Obama admin.’s trade agenda, progressed further this quarter—the Bipartisan Congressional Trade Priorities and Accountability Act of 2015 (see H.R. 1314 and H.R. 2146 at congressionalmonitor.org), also known as the “fast track” bill, and the Trade Facilitation and Enforcement Act of 2015 (see H.R. 644), known as the “customs” bill.

After the Senate passed its version of the customs bill on 5/14, the House amended it by modifying the anti-BDS provision, passing it on 6/12. The new provision required the president to: begin submitting annual reports on the BDS movement and any actions taken by the U.S. govt. to counter it; establish that no U.S. court could “recognize or enforce” rulings in foreign courts based on laws against business in Israel or the Israeli settlements; and establish a series of objectives for the U.S. to uphold in trade negotiations, including seeking to eliminate state-sponsored boycotts of Israel (e.g., the Arab boycott), dissuade trade partners from taking any action that would undermine the U.S.-Israel commercial relationship, and discourage politically motivated BDS actions and other nontariff barriers on Israeli goods and services. Furthermore, “BDS against Israel” would be defined as any politically motivated action that sought to discourage commercial relations with Israel, persons doing business with Israel, or commerce in the Israeli-controlled territories. The House and Senate leaderships then began attempting to reconcile their differences, and no further progress was made on the customs bill.

After negotiations over elements unrelated to BDS, the fast track bill passed in both the House (6/18) and the Senate (6/24), and Obama signed it into law (6/29), including the 3 anti-BDS trade objectives and the definition of BDS outlined above. Several left-leaning pro-Israel and Jewish groups rallied against the provision conflating Israel and its settlements in the oPt, thereby sparking a minor controversy over what was seen as a change in admin. policy. After Obama had signed the bill into law, the State Dept. issued (6/30) a statement upholding the
admin.’s view of the settlements as “illegitimate.” It said that while the admin. “strongly oppose[d]” BDS efforts targeting Israel, it did not take that position regarding the “Israeli-controlled territories” because the settlements made “it harder to negotiate a sustainable and equitable peace deal in good faith.” J Street’s Dylan Williams lauded (6/30) the statement, tweeting that the Obama admin. had refused to “legitize settlement activity” and that the “attempt to block EU steps against Israeli settlements backfire[d].” Americans for Peace Now’s Lara Friedman echoed his sentiment, saying (6/30), “It’s very positive that the Obama administration has drawn a line in the sand, reiterating what has long been U.S. policy.”

As the customs and fast track bills were progressing through the federal legislative process, Illinois and South Carolina became the 1st states to pass laws designed to target the BDS movement. South Carolina gov. Nikki Haley signed (6/4) into law a bill that barred public entities from entering into contracts with any person or business engaging in “the boycott of a person or an entity based in or doing business with a jurisdiction with whom South Carolina can enjoy open trade,” including Israel, although the bill did not mention it by name. Illinois gov. Bruce Rauner signed (7/23) into law a new requirement that all state pension funds divest from companies supporting the BDS movement. The 2 new laws illustrated a growing trend of anti-BDS legislation across state legislatures. On the occasion of Haley’s signing, exec. dir. of the Israel Allies Foundation Willem Griffioen issued a statement applauding South Carolina and announcing that “a bloc of sponsors across 18 states has already committed to introducing similar legislation in their next legislative cycle.”

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

Last quarter, a New York Federal Court jury found the PA and PLO liable for $655 m. in damages on terrorism charges brought by 10 U.S. families whose relatives were killed in 6 attacks in Israel between 2002 and 2004. The Palestinians began the process of appealing the verdict, and there were no further developments directly related to the case this quarter. However, the Obama admin. filed a formal “statement of interest” with Judge George Daniels on 8/10, expressing the govt.’s position on the case and asking him to “carefully consider” the size of the bond he would require the Palestinians to post while they appeal. Included in the file were statements from the Justice Dept. “strongly” supporting the rights of the victims, but also a declaration from Under Secy. of State Antony Blinken on the political ramifications of a sizable bond. He wrote that it “would likely severely compromise [the PA’s] ability to operate as a governmental authority” and that “PA insolvency would harm current and future U.S.-led efforts to achieve a 2-state solution.” Several mbrs. of Congress weighed in on the case as well, including Schumer, who wrote (8/6) in a letter addressed to the atty. gen. and the secy. of state that “the wheels of justice should be allowed to move forward without interference from the admin.”

Supreme Court Rules on the Status of Jerusalem

In a 6–3 ruling with important implications for Washington’s relationship with Israel and with the Palestinians, the Supreme Court overturned part of a 2002 law requiring the State Dept. to list “Israel” as the country of birth in the passports of children born to U.S. parents in Jerusalem, if the parents requested it. When then-president George W. Bush signed the bill
in question into law on 9/30/2002, he said that he would not implement the abovementioned section on Jerusalem, 214(d), because it would “impermissibly interfere with the President’s constitutional authority to formulate the position of the United States,” by effectively recognizing Israeli sovereignty over Jerusalem.

Weeks later, when Menachem Zivotofsky was born on 10/17/2002, the State Dept. followed Bush’s order and refused his parents’ request to list “Jerusalem, Israel,” on his passport. The Zivotofskys then filed a lawsuit. After over a decade of litigation, the case went to the Supreme Court, which heard oral arguments in 11/2014. Several pro-Israel organizations and Congress supported the family’s case with amicus, or “friend of the court,” briefs arguing in favor of Congress’s authority to write laws (see S. Res. 504 of 7/16/2014 at congressionalmonitor.org). Obama and the State Dept. maintained Bush’s initial defense of executive authority and, ultimately, Justice Anthony Kennedy affirmed (6/8) in the majority opinion that “the president has the exclusive power to grant formal recognition to a foreign sovereign” and that the purpose of section 214(d) was to “infringe” on that power.

**Egypt**

After the Obama admin. released military aid to Egypt that it had frozen last quarter (see JPS 44[4]), the U.S. resumed its assistance to the Egyptian military. This quarter, the U.S. delivered (7/30–8/1) 8 F-16 fighter jets to Egypt and, according to a statement from the U.S. embassy in Cairo, 4 more were slated for delivery in the autumn. Egyptian and U.S. officials also met in Cairo on 8/2 for a strategic dialogue, their 1st since 12/2009, at which they discussed the Iran nuclear deal and avenues to improved strategic cooperation, including more frequent joint training exercises. In a press conference with Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukry, Kerry reiterated (8/2) the admin.’s position on Egypt’s human rights record, saying that “the success of our fight against terrorism depends” on Egypt improving its human rights protections. Both sides agreed to hold another strategic dialogue meeting in the U.S. in 2016.

Of note: U.S. delegates to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference in New York blocked Egypt’s renewed efforts to convene a conference on a nuclear weapon-free Middle East this quarter. At the 2010 NPT review, delegates agreed on holding such a conference by 2012, and when the deadline passed without action, Egypt, backed by other Arab states, renewed the call in a res. tabled at this year’s conference (4/27).

Israel, the U.S., UK, and Canada objected to the resolution’s call for the conference to be held regardless of Israeli participation or agreement to an agenda, and they sought amendments. After 4 weeks of negotiations and a failed Spanish attempt at a compromise, no agreement was reached and the conference ended (5/22) with each side accusing the other of obstructing the proceedings.

**RUSSIA**

Aside from its participation in the P5+1 negotiations with Iran, Russia was largely uninvolved in any major Israeli or Palestinian developments this quarter. Lebanon’s as-Safir newspaper reported on 6/8 that Russia had offered to host a meeting of Hamas and Fatah officials in Moscow in an attempt to facilitate Palestinian national reconciliation (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” above). At quarter’s end, Hamas had reportedly accepted the invitation but Russia was still awaiting Fatah’s response. Finally, at a UN-sponsored conference on the
Israeli-Palestinian conflict (7/1–2) in Moscow, PA FM al-Maliki met (7/1) with his Russian counterpart to discuss bilateral relations and follow up on the implementation of economic agreements signed by Pres. Vladimir Putin and PA pres. Abbas in 4/2015. Later, the Russian FM also met in Doha (8/3) with Hamas leader Mishal, whom he invited to Moscow. According to a Hamas statement, they discussed conditions in Gaza and recent “Zionist terrorism.”

EUROPEAN UNION

**Labeling Israeli Settlement Produce**

Although the EU was largely focused on the nuclear negotiations with Iran this quarter (see “Iran” above), European frustration with settlement growth under Netanyahu led to a renewed push to label produce originating in Israeli settlements. The proposal had been on the table for several years and was deferred in 2013 at the request of Kerry, then trying to build confidence for a return to Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations (see JPS 43[3]). Mbrs. of the EU Council had called for labeling in 5/2012, 12/2012, and 11/2014, and 16 of the EU’s 28 FMs renewed the call in 4/2015 (see JPS 44[4]). Early this quarter, EU foreign policy chief Mogherini told (5/18) a meeting of the EU Council that she intended to pursue the labeling initiative and publish a directive soon, and she reportedly discussed the initiative with Netanyahu (5/20) during her visit to Israel. As momentum began to build, the Israeli govt. organized an EU-wide effort to stop or delay the initiative. On 6/7, Haaretz reported that the 3 Israeli officials involved in the campaign said their efforts centered on persuading at least 4 of the 7-mbr. European Commission, the EU’s executive body, to vote against the directive. But with no progress made on restarting Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations in the intervening 2 months, “senior levels” of the European Commission approved the preparation of a technical guidance document to facilitate the implementation of a labeling directive. On 7/19, the Financial Times quoted a senior EU diplomat as saying, “We will finally see this emerge,” and others close to the process predicted that Mogherini’s directive would be out by the end of 2015.

Near the end of the quarter, the produce-labeling initiative gained additional support from the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), an influential think tank with offices across Europe. In a report on EU policy toward Israel published on 7/22 (see Doc. R4), the ECFR supported labeling of settlement produce and proposed a number of other measures designed to curb settlement growth, including sanctions against Israeli banks. Illustrating the organization’s clout, the stock prices of 4 Israeli banks fell precipitously within hours of the report’s publication, causing a senior EU official to clarify that the EU had “no intention of imposing restrictions on Israeli banks.”

**A New Cypriot Initiative**

As the EU moved forward with the settlement produce-labeling initiative and individual mbr.-states pursued multilateral efforts aimed at restarting Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above), Cyprus’s Pres. Nicos Anastasiades made substantial progress on a new, complementary enterprise. The Cypriot pres. met with Rivlin (6/14) and Netanyahu (6/15) in Israel to discuss issues of mutual interest, including development of natural gas fields in the e. Mediterranean. According to a senior Israeli official, Anastasiades told Netanyahu that EU
leaders were receiving information about the situation in Israel and the oPt through the “filters” of FMs who visited the region, and he reportedly suggested “that you and Abbas come [to Brussels] and present your positions directly to all the leaders of the mbr.-states” (Haaretz, 6/29). After discussing the idea with Abbas (6/19) and EU pres. Donald Tusk (6/24), both of whom were receptive, and following the approval of both Mogherini and Egypt’s Pres. al-Sisi, Anastasiades confirmed Abbas’s and Netanyahu’s interest on 6/26. On 7/28, Netanyahu formally accepted Anastasiades’s proposal during a trip to Cyprus, and PA sources reported that the Cypriot pres. had expanded the idea into a larger European-Cypriot initiative to restart peace negotiations. According to the same sources, Anastasiades discussed his new idea with Abbas by phone on 7/27, proposing an end-of-the-year deadline for its implementation and emphasizing that it would not replace the French initiative (see “A UNSC Resolution” above).

UNITED NATIONS

UN Reports of Possible War Crimes

Last quarter, Israeli allegations of bias caused the UNHRC’s commission of inquiry to delay the publication of its report into alleged war crimes committed during OPE. Further allegations dogged the commission this quarter, although it went ahead and published the report, sparking a minor conflict over its adoption and lending weight to the Palestinians’ efforts at the ICC.

The commission—U.S. jurist Mary McGowan Davis and Senegalese legal expert Doudou Dièné—formally presented its report to the UNHRC in Geneva on 6/29 after releasing it to the public a week earlier (see Doc. A3). According to a press release announcing the report’s publication, the commission found “substantial information pointing to the possible commission of war crimes by both Israel and Palestinian armed groups,” and McGowan Davis clarified (6/22) as follows: “We do not talk in the report about evidence. What we have collected instead are witness accounts, submissions and other material that could point the way to a more thorough investigation” (see “War Crimes Charges at the ICC” above).

While it did not have the same impact as the earlier UNHRC commission report on Operation Cast Lead (2008–9), commonly known as the Goldstone Report (see Special Document File, JPS 39[2]), the UNHRC’s findings did prove controversial. Israel immediately set about trying to prevent the report from being endorsed by the UNHRC, and State Dept. spokesperson John Kirby said (6/23) the U.S. “challenge[s] the very mechanism which created it.” According to Israeli media (7/1), following consultations with U.S. and European reps. the Palestinians and their Arab allies softened the wording of the draft UNHRC res. to adopt the report, which had included provisions for new monitoring mechanisms. The UNHRC ultimately voted (7/3) in favor of the resolution, 41–1, with 5 abstentions, and the U.S. cast the lone “no” vote, as expected. The res. welcomed the special commission’s findings and called for the “implementation of all recommendations.” Noting the allegations of serious human rights violations during OPE, it deplored the “unprecedented levels of destruction, death, and human suffering caused” but fell short of explicitly naming names.

In an unrelated development that further exacerbated Israeli-Palestinian tension, UN secy.-gen. Ban Ki-moon circulated (6/8) the UN’s annual report on violations of children’s
rights, known as the “list of shame” or “black list,” to the UNSC. U.S. and Israeli officials had lobbied for Israel to be excluded from the report, with Israel’s amb. to the UN, Ron Prosor, meeting with Ban’s special rep. for children and armed conflict, Leila Zerrougui, in early 2015 and Netanyahu calling the secy.-gen. directly. Both the Obama admin. and Republicans in the U.S. Congress weighed in as well, with Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX) going so far as to say (6/3) that Congress would “reassess” the U.S. relationship with the UN if Israel appeared on the list. Ultimately, the official list failed to include Israel, the IDF, or armed Palestinian groups but the report did criticize Israel’s treatment of Palestinian children and its conduct during OPE (see “Support for Palestinian Children in Congress” above, and Docs. R1, R5, and R6 in JPS 44[4]).

**UNRWA’s Financial Crisis**

In the words of Commissioner-Gen. Pierre Krähenbühl (6/15), UNRWA faced its “most serious financial crisis ever” this quarter as a result of escalating demand for its services and insufficient donor support. Krähenbühl indicated that the agency’s emergency appeals for Palestinian refugees in Syria and reconstruction in Gaza were only 27% and 30% funded, respectively, leaving Palestinians already enduring desperate situations even more vulnerable. Despite a few relatively small donations early in the quarter, UNRWA’s general operational fund (which includes employee salaries) still faced a $101 m. shortfall and the agency would be unable to continue its core operations beyond 9/2015 if donors did not respond to the deficit. Inter alia, that meant that the salaries of the 22,000 UNRWA education staff at its 685 schools across its areas of operation would not be paid, leaving around 500,000 Palestinian refugee children without education. As UNRWA officials repeatedly pleaded for more support throughout the summer, announcements of new funds slowly trickled in (see “Donors” below for other pledges of international support for the Palestinians). The U.S. (7/23) and EU (7/30) pledged $13 m. and around €2 m. ($2.2 m.) to the agency’s crisis response in Syria and to Palestinian refugees from Syria living in Jordan, respectively. In the final weeks of the quarter, the Slovak Republic (7/25), Switzerland (7/30), Saudi Arabia (8/12), the UK (8/12), and Norway (8/6) all confirmed pledges to the general fund, collectively paying down the deficit by $31.33 m. With the deficit still running at almost $70 m. at the end of the quarter, it was unclear if UNRWA would be able to open its schools at the start of the new school year in 9/2015.

**MIDDLE EAST QUARTET**

Following earlier commitments to increase engagement with Arab states (see JPS 44[3]), envoys of the Quartet met with Shoukry in Cairo on 6/29 and with Jordanian FM Nasser Judeh and adviser Abdullah Wreikat on 7/13 to discuss ways to advance the 2-state solution. Separately, Blair announced his resignation on 5/27 after 8 years as Quartet envoy. He stepped down formally in 6/2015, but said he would continue consulting with U.S. and EU officials on Middle East–related issues. Later in the quarter, he held talks with Hamas leader Mishal on a long-term cease-fire with Israel (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above).

**VATICAN**

The Vatican took a number of steps this quarter to display symbolic support for the Palestinians, which in turn led to an increase in tension with Israel. On 5/17, Abbas attended a canonization ceremony at the Vatican for two
19th-century nuns from historic Palestine. Following a 5/16 meeting between Pope Francis and Abbas, reports quoted the pontiff as complimenting Abbas for being “angel of peace,” prompting criticism from Israel’s FM. In the days that followed, it became clear that something had been lost in translation but Vatican officials refrained from stepping into the fray to comment on the controversy. Later, the Vatican officially recognized the State of Palestine in a treaty signed on 6/26. Archbishop Paul Gallagher, the Vatican’s equivalent to a FM, said (6/26) he hoped that the treaty might “in some way be a stimulus to bringing a definitive end to the long-standing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.” Over the next 2 weeks, the Israeli govt. made 4 requests to see the text, but all of them were turned down.

DONORS

The Ad Hoc Liaison Comm., the main policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinian people, met in Brussels on 5/27, the 1st time since meeting in New York City on 9/22/2014 (see JPS 44[2]). Hosted by EU foreign policy chief Mogherini and chaired by Norwegian FM Børge Brende, the comm. discussed reports submitted by Quartet envoy Blair, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the UN, collectively describing the deterioration of the PA’s financial situation. Attendees reaffirmed the Palestinians’ readiness for statehood, called for both sides to take trust-building steps to facilitate a return to peace negotiations, urged donors to increase their assistance to the PA, reiterated the need for Israel to lift restrictions on movement and access in the oPt, called on Palestinians and Israelis to “strengthen the dialogue” on all economic issues, and urged Palestinian factions to allow the PA to resume governance of Gaza. The comm. also agreed to a follow-up meeting in New York City in 9/2015.

In light of the PA’s deteriorating financial situation and worsening conditions in the oPt, several new international funding announcements were made this quarter (see “United Nations” above for UNRWA-related donations). The World Bank announced (6/25) a $2 m. grant to the Palestinian water sector, authorized (6/19) the transfer of $55 m. to replenish its trust fund for the oPt’s economic development, and transferred (5/20) $77 m. to support the budget needs of the PA. Within the EU, Sweden announced (5/19) a SEK 40 m. (around $4.8 m.) contribution to help pay the 5/2015 salaries and pensions of PA employees and former employees in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. PA PM Hamdallah signed (6/15) a deal with Spain’s consul gen. in Jerusalem governing a Spanish grant of €1 m. (around $1.1 m.) to support Palestinian families. Then, the EU announced (7/14) its 2d quarterly payment of $46 m. to the PA, fulfilling its pledge from the 10/12/2014 Gaza reconstruction conference; a €18.1 m. (around $20 m.) contribution to PA employee salaries in 6/2015, including €1.1 m. from the Netherlands in particular; and a $26 m. donation to hospitals in East Jerusalem, including $14 m. from Denmark to cover PA-referred patients who received care in 2014. When the quarter opened, Turkey had only fulfilled 0.26% of its $200 m. pledge, made at the Gaza reconstruction conference, but senior Hamas official Haniyeh reiterated that Turkey had agreed to fund the construction of 20 apartment buildings in Gaza and donate $225,000 in support of Palestinian sports organizations (6/1 and 7/12, respectively). Finally, Australia donated (7/2) $2.1 m. to UNICEF for a project to improve Palestinian
students’ access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities in the West Bank.

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

The BDS movement continued to grow this quarter, with campaigns in Egypt and developments in the UK leading to international news coverage and major controversies. The Israeli and U.S. govt.s, as well as a number of megadonors (see “Legislative Crackdown on BDS” above), took unprecedented steps to counter the movement’s growing strength.

The most high-profile BDS action of the quarter took place in Egypt, where activists launched (5/24) a campaign calling on Egyptians to end their service contracts with the telecom company Mobinil, a subsidiary of the French multinational Orange (formerly France Télécom). Citing its sponsorship of several IDF units that participated in OPE, BDS activists argued that Orange was complicit in Israel’s oppression of Palestinians. The campaign did not garner international news coverage or widespread support until a week later, when CEO Stéphane Richard announced (6/3) that his intention was to withdraw the company from Israel as soon as possible, saying he would be ready to do it “tomorrow.” Speaking in Cairo, Richard admitted that Orange’s role in Israel was “a sensitive issue here in Egypt, but not only in Egypt,” referring to the similar calls for boycott from French solidarity activists and human rights groups. His comments were widely interpreted as being favorable to the BDS campaign and quickly drew the ire of the Israeli govt. On 6/4, Israel’s amb. to France, Yossi Gal, sent an official protest to the French government (Orange is 25% state-owned) calling for a public condemnation of Richard’s comments, and Gal spoke with both the French FM and finance minister in person. Orange’s Israeli subsidiary, Partner Communications, distanced itself from Richard, issuing (6/3) a statement saying that “the only connection between us and France Telecom is the brand name.” Although the next day, Orange released a statement confirming that it wished to “put an end to . . . brand licensing [in Israel],” it discouraged any political interpretation of its move, claiming to be in the process of moving away from brand licensing in general. After tit-for-tat statements between the Israeli premier and the French FM, with the former denouncing the French company and the latter defending its right to decide for itself, Richard then redoubled his efforts to quash the controversy. He called (6/5) Israeli Dep. PM Shalom apologizing, and a statement released by Shalom’s spokesperson said that Richard had told the deputy premier, “I’m a friend of Israel. I love Israel. My words were taken out of context and misunderstood. We at Orange condemn boycotts of any kind.” The following week, Richard went to Israel (6/11), met with PM Netanyahu (6/12), and after expressing deep regret for the “impact resulting from” his 6/3 comments pledged that Orange would continue investing in Israel. By the end of 6/2015, when the 2 companies announced (6/30) a new contract giving a window of time
to each side in which to end the brand licensing agreement, the Orange affair was no longer as much of a BDS victory as first appeared.

BDS developments in the UK were lower profile, but more conclusive. In a 19–14 vote on 6/2, the leadership of Britain’s National Union of Students reaffirmed its 8/2014 decision to boycott Israel and align with BDS. Israel was quick to criticize the move. The next day, Israeli Justice Minister Shaked warned that “we will boycott the boycotters” and Netanyahu resorted to smear tactics, saying, “They boycott Israel but they refuse to boycott ISIS. That tells you everything you want to know about the BDS movement.”

In another major development, Israeli academics began reporting the effects of a “latent boycott” this quarter. In remarks to the press (6/2 and 6/4) and in the Knesset (6/17), heads of Israeli universities and research organizations said that over the past few years, invitations to Israeli conferences had increasingly been turned down, requests for recommendation letters had been ignored, and Israeli submissions to academic journals had been rejected. Saying, “this is a slippery slope,” the pres. of Technion, Peretz Lavie, warned (6/2) that Israeli scholars might find themselves “in 10 years cut off from the academic world . . . and somebody needs to sit down and decide what we should do.”

Meanwhile, major funders and the Israeli govt. took further steps to organize a coordinated response to the BDS movement’s growth. On 6/1, the Jewish daily Forward first reported on secret efforts by a group of pro-Israel organizations to coordinate a strategy countering BDS activity on college campuses in the U.S. And on 6/5–6, billionaire Sheldon Adelson hosted a 2-day meeting at his Las Vegas casino titled the “Campus Maccabees Summit.” The meeting was attended by at least 20 major donors—each reportedly required to pledge at least $1 m. to the titular campus group Adelson was hoping to fund—and over 50 right-leaning pro-Israel organizations, including Birthright Israel, the Zionist Organization of America, and the Jewish fraternity, Alpha Epsilon Pi. No details were made public on whether the group would serve as an umbrella organization or a means to channel funding to existing campus organizations. A letter from Netanyahu was read aloud on the 2d day exhorting attendees: “You are on the front lines of [the] fight against BDS, and Israel must stand with you.” The same day, Netanyahu met with Public Security, Strategic Affairs, and Information Minister Erdan, whose portfolio includes BDS, and announced (6/6) that Erdan’s office would receive an additional NIS 100 m. (around $25.4 m.) to escalate its anti-BDS efforts. Specifically, the ministry would acquire 10 new employees whose sole task would be to counter BDS and other “delegitimization” activities worldwide, in coordination with Israel’s military and intelligence agencies.

DIVESTMENT

There were several divestment-related developments this quarter. Joining growing calls for BDS at New York University, 130 faculty mbrs. signed (5/27) an open letter addressed to the administration calling for divestment from “companies that profit from the occupation of Palestine.” The next day, the student senate at the University of California, Davis voted, 10–0, with 2 abstentions, in favor of a new res. calling for the UC system to divest from 4 U.S. and multinational companies—Caterpillar, G4S, Veolia Environment, and Raytheon—deemed complicit in Israeli violations of Palestinian rights. The student organization had passed a
similar res. in 1/2015, but it had been found “unconstitutional” by a student court.

Outside the U.S. academy, Norwegian insurance firm Kapitalforvaltning announced (6/11) that, effective 6/1, it had divested its holdings from Heidelberg Cement and Cemex on the grounds that they were involved in the “exploitation of natural resources in occupied territory on the West Bank.” The 2 target corporations were conglomerates that had recently acquired Israeli subsidiaries operating in Area C of the West Bank.

Of particular note, divestment was on the agenda for a number of religious organizations in the U.S. and Canada this quarter. On 6/30, the legislative assembly of the United Church of Christ (UCC) passed a res., 508–124, with 38 abstentions, in support of boycott and divestment from companies profiting from the occupation of Palestine. It required the UCC pension board to divest the church’s holding from such companies and called on the church’s 1.1 m. mbres. to boycott products made in Israeli settlements in the oPt. In passing the res., the UCC joined the Presbyterian Church USA and United Methodist Church, which had taken similar steps a year earlier (see JPS 44[1]). Other U.S. church denominations delayed or defeated similar resolutions, however. At the Episcopal Church’s week-long general convention (6/26–7/3), the leadership body, the House of Bishops, barred from consideration 2 BDS-related resolutions proposed by regional mbrs. and rejected a 3d. That same week, the Mennonite Church USA’s convention decided (7/2) to postpone a vote on their BDS res. until 2017. Finally, the United Church of Canada passed a symbolic res. (8/11) encouraging divestment. The church had approved a boycott of Israeli settlement products 3 years earlier.