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

Highlights of the Quarter: The surge (habba) of resistance, random attacks, and protests that began in Jerusalem in 9/2015 continues to dissipate this quarter as the Israeli govt. maintains and strengthens its crackdown on the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt), left-wing Israeli activists, and the Palestinian minority in Israel. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu rejects international efforts to push Israel toward peace talks with the Palestinians and shifts his ruling coalition further to the right. The French peace initiative advances with Palestinian backing despite Israeli opposition. Egypt lends its weight to the international peace efforts, but fails to break the Palestinian-Israeli diplomatic impasse. Internally, Palestinians prepare for municipal elections on 10/8. In an important regional development, Israel and Turkey reach a formal reconciliation agreement, paving the way for a return to full diplomatic relations.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

Protests, random attacks, and resistance activities in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, widely known as the habba (surge or revolt), continued to ebb this quarter. Markedly fewer knife attacks, stabbings, and car rammings by Palestinian youths took place compared to the previous 2 quarters, resulting in substantially fewer Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Despite this relative lull, the Israeli govt. expanded its military crackdown in the oPt. Intermittent outbreaks of violence punctuated the lull, however, particularly at Haram al-Sharif in the final days of Ramadan and in the Hebron district in 7/2016, threatening a more generalized resurgence.

Internal Israeli politics were in flux this quarter. By bringing former foreign minister (FM) Avigdor Lieberman into the ruling coalition as defense minister (DM), Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu consolidated his power base, shifted his govt. to the right, and effectively spurned an emerging international peace effort.
Meanwhile, the French peace initiative advanced with Palestinian support, and the Egyptian govt. signaled a willingness to play a larger role in the process, which the Israelis, who were resisting France’s efforts, welcomed.

REVOLT AND RESPONSE

The nr.-daily protests, clashes, and random, uncoordinated attacks that characterized the *habba* since it began in the wake of the 9/2015 Jewish holidays decreased again this quarter, having significantly dropped off earlier in the spring (see *JPS* 45 [4]). Eighteen Palestinians were killed, down from 32 and 92 respectively in the previous 2 quarters. This brought the Palestinian death toll from the surge to 227. Meanwhile, 6 Israelis were killed, an increase in the Israeli death toll over the previous 2 quarters, but still down from the *habba*’s peak (28 Israelis were killed between 10/1/2015 and 2/15/2016). According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of Palestinians and Israelis injured this quarter was comparable with last quarter’s statistics: 709 Palestinians and 60 Israelis were injured in 5–7/2016, compared to 1,148 and 56 in 2–4/2016, respectively.

Since it began, the revolt has seen intermittent random attacks by Palestinian youths, including stabbings, alleged or staged stabbings, vehicular rammings, and shootings, as well as disproportionate Israeli responses to these attacks (see *JPS* 45 [2–4]). Palestinian and Israeli media narratives of the incidents continued to diverge significantly this quarter, sparking further violence. (For details of this quarter’s events, see Chronology.)

The uncoordinated nature of individual attacks made it difficult to identify which specific aspects of the Israeli occupation have motivated any given Palestinian attacker. His or her village may have been subject to numerous Israel Defense Forces (IDF) raids; a family mbr. may have been incarcerated without trial (see “Palestinian Prisoners” below); or a friend may have been arrested and assaulted at a flying checkpoint. As in previous quarters, a primary source of Palestinian anger continued to be Israel’s policy of withholding the bodies of Palestinians killed after allegedly perpetrating violence against Israelis. Israeli authorities were inconsistent in applying this policy, however, withholding some bodies for mos., breaking promises to return others, and placing onerous conditions on body returns that they did eventually authorize.

With the appointment of Lieberman as DM (see below), internal Israeli disagreements over the use of this policy died down (Lieberman’s predecessor, Moshe Ya’alon, had been the policy’s main opponent). The new Israeli leadership modified the policy, creating protocols meant to deter further attacks.

Public Security Min. Gilad Erdan, who held jurisdiction over the bodies of Palestinians killed in confrontations in East Jerusalem, had been Ya’alon’s main opponent, but he had relented during the previous 2 quarters, allowing 4 Palestinian corpses to be returned to families in East Jerusalem (see *JPS* 45 [3, 4]). After imposing substantial fines (between NIS 20,000 and 40,000, approximately $5,240–$10,350) and limitations on the size of funerals, Erdan allowed 3 more corpses to be returned (5/16 and 5/24) early this quarter. Once Ya’alon was on his way out, Erdan reversed the funerals policy on 5/24 after seeing footage of a large funeral crowd in which he described the mourners as guilty of “incitement,” deeming the funeral “inadmissible by all standards and measurements everywhere.”
Upon taking over the Defense Ministry, Lieberman quickly reversed Ya’alon’s more lenient withholding policy. After 2 West Bank Palestinians shot and killed 4 Israelis in Tel Aviv on 6/8, the Netanyahu govt. expanded its crackdown on the West Bank. In addition to declaring the alleged attackers’ home village (Yatta) a closed military zone and freezing 83,000 Palestinians’ entry permits, Lieberman also officially suspended the return of all Palestinian corpses, stating (6/8) that returns would send the “wrong message.”

In the wake of the Tel Aviv attack, Erdan and the Israeli police hardened their stance once again (6/8), such that funerals in their home villages or neighborhoods would no longer be allowed for Palestinians killed for committing serious crimes against Israelis. The police said they would be choosing “appropriate” cemeteries instead. After meeting with the Israeli general prosecution, Erdan appeared to reverse his position yet again on 6/13, agreeing to return the bodies of 7 Palestinians. When he took no action to do so, however, Israel’s High Court of Justice later ordered him and the Israeli police to outline their new stance on 7/25.

The police later agreed (8/15) on dates for the return of the 7 corpses, but the policy for future returns remained unclear.

Also of note: portions of the Israeli police’s new rules of engagement, which were approved by Israel’s atty. gen. in 9/2015 during the habba’s initial escalation (see JPS 45 [2]), were publicly revealed on 7/4, in response to a petition filed by the Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) Adalah in 12/2015. The revelations confirmed that Israeli police were authorized to “open fire [with live ammunition] directly on an individual who clearly appears to be throwing or is about to throw a firebomb, or who is shooting or is about to shoot fireworks, in order to prevent endangerment.” Adalah stated (7/5) that it would pursue further legal recourse to force the police to reveal the remaining new rules of engagement, such as the use of Ruger sniper rifles, but there were no further developments during this quarter.

UPENDING THE STATUS QUO AT HARAM AL-SHARIF

Palestinians’ limited access to Haram al-Sharif during Jewish holidays was the flashpoint that 1st sparked the habba in 9–10/2015. Before each major Jewish and Muslim holiday since then, such as Passover in 4/2016 (see JPS 45 [4]), fears of renewed violence returned, although they proved largely unfounded. In the lead-up to Ramadan (6/6–7/5/2016), Israeli authorities eased restrictions on Palestinian movement, including at Haram al-Sharif. Yoav Mordechai, the commander of the IDF’s Coordinator of Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT) Unit announced (6/3) an extension on the hours of operation at West Bank and Gaza border crossings allowing 200 Gazans to visit relatives in the West Bank; 500 West Bank Palestinians and 300 overseas Palestinians to visit family in Gaza; and 500 West Bank Palestinians to visit family abroad using Ben Gurion International Airport.

Following the 6/8 Tel Aviv attack, Israeli authorities rolled back many of these so-called concessions (see Chronology). Furthermore, Erdan decided (6/26) to allow Jews and other non-Muslims to continue visiting Haram al-Sharif in the final 10 days of Ramadan, marking a significant deviation from Israeli policy in recent years. Palestinians viewed this decision as a breach of the status quo at the sanctuary. Erdan’s decision sparked 3 days of clashes at Haram al-Sharif (6/26–28): 14 Palestinians (including 2 journalists) and 2 Israelis were injured (1 of whom was praying at the Western Wall when Palestinian youths
threw stones on the crowd below), and at least 13 Palestinians were arrested (see Photos from the Quarter). After the 3d day of violence, the Israeli police barred non-Muslims from the sanctuary through the end of Ramadan.

RISING TENSIONS IN THE WEST BANK

Apart from the 3 days of clashes in East Jerusalem toward the end of Ramadan, the most significant violence of the quarter took place in the Hebron district in a 48-hour period on 6/30 and 7/1, leading to a sustained Israeli crackdown on Hebron and the surrounding area, and illustrating the retaliatory posture of the new Lieberman-led Defense Ministry.

The 3 days of violence began in Netanya on 6/30; a Palestinian from Shweika (nr. Tulkarm) allegedly stabbed and injured 2 Israelis before being shot and killed by an Israeli civilian. Hours later, a Palestinian youth infiltrated the Kiryat Arba settlement nr. Hebron and stabbed an Israeli settler youth to death. Settlement security forces proceeded to shoot and kill the Palestinian attacker. In addition to conducting numerous raids and patrols in the Netanya and Kiryat Arba attackers’ home villages of Shweika and Bani Na’im (nr. Hebron) respectively, Israeli forces shut down several areas of Hebron and began processing punitive demolition orders regarding the attackers’ homes. The next day, unidentified armed Palestinians opened fire on an Israeli settler vehicle nr. Hebron, killing 1 settler and injuring 3, and IDF troops shot and killed a Palestinian in c. Hebron after she allegedly attempted to stab 1 of them at a security checkpoint. In the immediate aftermath, the IDF placed (7/2) all of Hebron under an indefinite, general closure and sealed the entrances to at least 20 nearby villages, with exceptions permitted only for humanitarian cases. OCHA reported (7/14) that the closure “significantly disrupted” the lives of over 400,000 Palestinians.

While the IDF’s treatment of the Shweika and Tulkarm areas resembled their approach to other recent incidents, the impact on Hebron in 7/2016 was qualitatively different. In addition to levying new security measures, conducting numerous raids, threatening punitive demolitions of the attackers’ homes, and punishing the families of attackers, Netanyahu and Lieberman also approved (7/1) a tender for the construction of 42 new residences in Kiryat Arba (the security cabinet confirmed the tender on 7/2). Under pressure from some right-wing mbrs. of his ruling coalition, Netanyahu also announced (7/3) his intention to strengthen the settler communities around Hebron. The Israeli cabinet approved (7/10) a NIS 6 m. (approximately $1.57 m.) transfer of funds for education and infrastructure in Kiryat Arba in what appeared to be the 1st tranche of a reported NIS 50 m. (around $12.8 m.) allocated to settlements nr. Hebron.

By the end of the quarter, the IDF had lifted its restrictions on the Hebron area. According to OCHA, the IDF reopened 8 major junctions in the Hebron district during the week of 7/19–25. After reopening 1 entrance to Bani Na’im on 7/19, the IDF fully lifted its siege of the village on 8/11, removing roadblocks and reinstating around 2,000 Palestinian work permits.

CRACKDOWN ON LEFT-WING CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS AND THE PALESTINIAN MINORITY IN ISRAEL

The right-wing Israeli govt. advanced new measures to stymie dissent and deter further violence within Israel proper this quarter, culminating in 4 new laws levying punishments on Palestinians, heightening

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scrutiny of left-wing NGOs, and instituting a mechanism allowing a majority of the Knesset to suspend fellow members (MKs).

Two of the new laws were specifically designed to deter Palestinian violence. The controversial antiterrorism law, spearheaded by Justice Min. Ayelet Shaked (Jewish Home Party) and passed on 6/15 by a vote of 57–16, granted the state broad new powers in “terrorism” cases. It expanded the definition of membership in a terrorist organization to include “passive mbrs.,” giving the DM the power to confiscate the property of any individual identified as such without obtaining prior court approval, and intensifying punishments for “acts of terror.” The Joint List, a coalition of the 3 major non-Zionist parties, opposed the measure from the beginning, calling (6/15) it a “draconian” attempt to further bisect the country’s legal system and justify more severe punishments for Palestinians. The other legal measure that passed (8/2) was the so-called youth bill, which allows Palestinian citizens of Israel under the age of 14 to be convicted of serious crimes, such as murder and manslaughter. Again, Joint List MKs argued that the bill enshrined discriminatory differences in treatment between Palestinian and Jewish youths in Israel.

Meanwhile, on 7/11 the Knesset passed (57–48) into law the so-called NGO bill, requiring Israeli nonprofits receiving more than half their funding from public foreign entities to disclose the fact in all communications with public officials, as well as in newspapers, on television, on billboards, and online. Reps. of such groups will also be required to state the sources of their funding when participating in Knesset comm. meetings. While the bill’s backers claimed that the new measures would promote transparency, the Israeli Left and the international community had pilloried the bill for mos. leading up to the vote, arguing that it would disproportionately target human rights NGOs and other groups opposing the right-wing govt. In fact, when the Ministry of Justice published (6/2) a list of 27 NGOs that would be affected by the bill, critics quickly noted that 25 had a clear left-wing slant or a focus on human rights, including B’Tselem, Terrestrial Jerusalem, Breaking the Silence, Gisha, and Yesh Din. After the bill passed its 3rd reading, Peace Now, which was not on the 6/2 list, announced that it would challenge the bill before the Supreme Court, launching a long litigation process as the govt. began implementing the law.

Lastly, this quarter also saw the enactment of a new law that had been initiated by Netanyahu himself in 2/2015 following the visit of 3 Joint List MKs to the East Jerusalem family of a Palestinian who had been killed in a recent confrontation with Israeli forces (see JPS 45 [3, 4]). After their visit, Netanyahu filed an ethics complaint against them, claiming that they were unfit to serve in the Knesset, and began formulating legislation to punish similar acts of solidarity. The “suspension bill,” as it came to be known, passed its 1st reading on 3/28, before going back to comm. for revisions. On 7/13, Haaretz reported that the bill had been modified so much in comm. that some sources in the governing coalition now complained that it was pointless to pursue it further. The critiqued draft featured 3 major changes, all proposed by Likud MK Benny Begin: it would require 70 MKs’ support to launch suspension proceedings, (including 10 from opposition parties) up from 61 in the original draft (90 MKs would still be needed for approval of any suspension); suspended MKs would have to sit out an entire term; and suspension proceedings would not be
permitted during campaign season. As in the original draft, MKs could only be suspended if they were found to have incited terror or racism, or otherwise undermined Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The amended bill passed (7/19) in a 62–54 vote. Joint List MKs again opposed the measure, claiming that it disproportionately targeted them, and vowed to challenge it before the Supreme Court.

A number of related developments in the Knesset this quarter illustrated the impact of the right-wing crackdown. On 6/13, the Knesset extended the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law for another year, barring Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from obtaining legal residency in Israel or East Jerusalem through marriage to an Israeli citizen. The law has been extended every year since it was 1st passed as a temporary measure in 2003. Also in the Knesset, Netanyahu pledged (6/29) to expel Palestinian MK Haneen Zoabi (Joint List) after she described (6/29) the IDF soldiers who conducted a deadly raid on the *Mavi Marmara* in 5/2010 as “murderers.” The *Mavi Marmara* was the flagship of the 1st Gaza Freedom Flotilla, and Zoabi was its most high-profile Israeli passenger (see *JPS* 40 [1]).

Meanwhile, B’Tselem announced (5/25) that it would no longer attempt to hold the IDF accountable for occupation-related crimes through internal IDF mechanisms: “B’Tselem has gradually come to the realization that the way in which the military law enforcement system functions precludes it from the very outset from achieving justice for the victims. Nonetheless, the very fact that the system exists serves to convey a semblance of law enforcement and justice.”

On 6/23, Erdan banned the Musawa (Equality) satellite TV station, formerly known as Palestine 48, from broadcasting or operating in Israel for 6 mos. because of its connection to the Palestine Authority (PA). The station had also been closed down for 6 mos. in 7/2015. Erdan, along with Interior Min. Aryeh Deri, later announced (8/7) the formation of an anti-Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) taskforce to “expel and ban the entry of BDS activists” from Israel. Erdan stated on 8/8 that the task force had “formed a legal team” to look into what other measures could be taken against BDS activists, “even if they are Israeli.”

**A NEW ISRAELI COALITION AND THE PEACE PROCESS**

Israeli PM Netanyahu renewed his efforts this quarter to expand his party’s influence. Through the 3/17/2015 election and subsequent coalition-building process, he and his Likud Party had been able to secure only a slim ruling majority (see *JPS* 44 [4] and 45 [1]), with the coalition holding a mere 61 of the Knesset’s 120 seats that left it very vulnerable to defections (i.e., a single MK from a coalition party could scuttle 1 of the PM’s proposals by voting against). Despite numerous rumors about the possible interest of several opposition parties, Netanyahu was interested in only 2 new potential partners this quarter: Avigdor Lieberman, who had been Netanyahu’s FM in 2013–15 and whose right-wing Yisrael Beytenu Party held 6 Knesset seats; and opposition leader Isaac Herzog whose centrist Zionist Union held 24.

As the quarter opened, the Israeli media’s attention focused on Herzog and the implications of his potential participation in the govt. for the peace process. Herzog had started negotiations on his possible take-over of the unclaimed FM portfolio and reports (5/17) indicated that he was eager to proceed.
Negotiations reportedly centered on 4 points: the formulation of a new diplomatic strategy that would include a regional peace conference; a commitment from Netanyahu to spike pending legislation targeting Palestinians (see “Crackdown on Left-Wing Civil Society Organizations and the Palestinian Minority in Israel” above); a budget increase for services to non-Jewish Israeli sectors; and several ministerial portfolios for mbrs. of his party, including foreign affairs, agriculture, and Negev and Galilee development. Herzog said (5/18) that he had agreed with Netanyahu that “once the new admin. in the U.S. begins we would also get the Defense Ministry so that we could work with the Americans on 2 fronts: foreign policy and defense.” In reference to several conversations with Netanyahu about the Arab Peace Initiative in recent mos., Herzog stated (5/21) that they had “labored” over related plans, including possible steps they could take to normalize relations with Israel’s Arab neighbors.

Aware of the nature and implications of these talks, international proponents of the 2-state solution perceived an opportunity and mobilized. According to Israeli press reports on 5/18, U.S. secy. of state John Kerry, Egyptian pres. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, and former Middle East Quartet envoy Tony Blair all urged Netanyahu to bring Herzog into the coalition. Blair reportedly viewed Netanyahu’s 5/8 agreement with Finance Min. Moshe Kahlon on a return to the 2-year budget system—budget disagreements in 2012 and 2014 had led to early elections—as evidence that Netanyahu would be in power at least through 2019. Blair had been traveling around the Middle East in a personal capacity to meet with Arab and Israeli leaders every 2–3 weeks since leaving his post as Quartet envoy in 5/2015 (see JPS 45 [1]), and was also reportedly involved in persuading al-Sisi to make a major speech in support of a 2-state solution on 5/17 (see “A New Egyptian Dimension” below).

The potential Herzog-Netanyahu partnership faced numerous obstacles, however. On 5/17, 11 of the 24 Zionist Union MKs pledged to stay out of the coalition, significantly weakening Herzog’s bargaining position. Even more significant, the press reported on 5/17 that Lieberman was also in talks to join the govt. and that he was demanding the defense portfolio (Lieberman had stayed out of the coalition after Netanyahu refused to appoint him DM). Herzog responded (5/18) to these reports with an ultimatum: he would only join a ruling coalition if Lieberman was a no tp a r t . Netanyahu ultimately made the conservative choice, offering Lieberman the defense ministry on 5/18 and beginning final negotiations on his other demands, specifically Yisrael Beytenu’s call for new legislation authorizing the death penalty to be applied in the case of Palestinians accused of committing serious crimes against Israelis. After Netanyahu agreed to support such legislation on 5/19, the rest of the proceedings were all but a formality. Lieberman signed on to enter the coalition on 5/25 and, after alleviating Education Minister Naftali Bennett’s concerns about Lieberman’s poor security qualifications, the cabinet and Knesset approved his appointment on 5/30. (Bennett, who had publicly campaigned for the DM job in the past, insisted on the inclusion of high-level intelligence professionals as “military attachés” to the security cabinet and Netanyahu ended up appointing [5/27] a “security cabinet secy.” to update ministers on security and diplomatic information.)

Despite rumors to the contrary throughout the rest of the quarter, Herzog did not go
back on his ultimatum. On 5/28, a Likud source said that Netanyahu had resumed his efforts to bring Herzog and Zionist Union into the coalition. Kahlon called on Herzog (6/1) to join because regional peace efforts, such as those led by Egypt (see “Frontline States” below), were “more substantial” than was reported. Herzog himself left the option open on 6/4, saying that he would be willing to join the coalition if Bennett dropped out. The day after Herzog successfully postponed Labor’s next leadership contest to 7/2017, effectively securing his leadership of the Zionist Union coalition’s largest party for another year, Netanyahu reached out (8/1) again, indicating that he would be keeping the FM’s portfolio open, just in case. Herzog rejected (8/1) the implicit offer, stating that the PM had chosen “to form a right-wing extremist govt.,” which he would not be “entering.”

With Herzog and the possibility of renewed Israeli interest in a 2-state solution out of the picture, the question of the new Netanyahu-Lieberman govt.’s position on Palestinian-Israeli negotiations came to the fore. Prior to the coalition restructuring, Netanyahu’s spokesperson reiterated (5/17) that Netanyahu continued “to call on [PA pres.] Abbas to meet anytime, anywhere, without preconditions.” Netanyahu’s position was a nonstarter, however, given the Palestinians’ basic requirement for restarting talks, namely: Israel’s release of the 4th batch of prisoners scheduled for release in 2014 (in connection with the 3–4/2014 round of U.S.-led peace talks); Israel’s commitment to set a timetable on the talks, freeze settlement growth, and agree to base any final deal on the 1967 borders.

Given Lieberman’s credentials as a hardline right-wing Israeli politician, his participation in the Israeli govt. did nothing to break the impasse. The PA Foreign Ministry released (5/19) a statement criticizing his appointment, which it described as Israel’s “response to the regional, international, and French efforts to reinvigorate the Israeli-Palestinian peace process” (see below). Despite the disbelief of the Palestinians, the U.S., and the Israeli public, Netanyahu insisted (5/22) that he planned to seek peace with the Palestinians, even with Lieberman as his DM. Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) secy.-gen. Saeb Erekat said (5/25) that “the existence of this govt. brings a real threat of instability and extremism to the region.” A U.S. State Dept. spokesperson stated the same day that the reports of the most right-wing coalition in Israeli history raised “legitimate questions,” and the Obama admin. planned to “judge this govt. based on its actions.” Finally, a poll of the Israeli public conducted for the Knesset Channel and broadcast on 5/26 found that only 26% of the population believed that the new govt. would advance “a diplomatic process.”

A NEW EGYPTIAN DIMENSION

While Netanyahu was in final talks with potential coalition partners, international peace efforts spearheaded by the French quickly gained an Egyptian dimension. Reportedly at Blair’s urging, Egyptian pres. al-Sisi announced a major new peace effort on 5/17, giving the new Israeli govt. an alternative to the French peace initiative without providing a clear path for further action. On 5/17, al-Sisi said he saw a “real opportunity” for peace in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in his reportedly impromptu speech. He lauded recent French and U.S. efforts, touted the Arab Peace Initiative, and announced his willingness to “make every effort” to contribute to peace. He also offered to mediate Palestinian national reconciliation talks as a means to help the process (see “Intra-Palestinian
Since French pres. François Hollande had just indefinitely postponed the Paris summit kicking off the French peace initiative, and after Hamas, the PLO, Abbas himself, and Netanyahu all welcomed al-Sisi’s comments, Egypt’s foray into the peace process became the focal point of international efforts in 5/2016.

When it became clear that Netanyahu was opting for a more right-wing govt., the Egyptian initiative was put to the test. After al-Sisi’s speech, Herzog had commented (5/17) that he and Netanyahu had received messages from senior regional and international officials saying that there was “a significant regional opportunity to restart the [peace] process.” The officials responsible for those overtures were clearly caught off guard by the news of Netanyahu’s offer to give Lieberman the defense portfolio. Several Egyptian officials said, on 5/18, “What’s happening right now in Israeli politics teaches Egypt an important lesson: We must conduct ourselves cautiously, slowly.” Later, Palestinian officials confirmed (5/23) that the Egyptian govt. was, in fact, still working to organize a tripartite summit bringing together al-Sisi, Abbas, and Netanyahu, noting (5/26) that the Egyptian effort neither conflicted with nor replaced the French peace initiative.

A week after an Israeli delegation (5/24) presented proposals for restarting the peace process in Cairo, Netanyahu and Lieberman gave a joint press conference (5/30) in which they presented a more nuanced response to al-Sisi’s 5/17 speech.

**THE FRENCH PEACE INITIATIVE**

Despite Israeli opposition and notwithstanding the focus on Egypt’s renewed pledge to advance the process, the French peace initiative gathered momentum this quarter. Although significant uncertainties remained, including how any potential agreements might be implemented, the Palestinian leadership decided to focus on the French-led process, and put on hold their ongoing international initiatives, particularly at the UN Security Council.

Struggling to drum up support, the French had initially signaled willingness to postpone the 1st stage of their initiative, a 5/30 summit of FMs from the international community, were Kerry and the U.S. to confirm their participation. Only after Hollande preemptively postponed (5/17) the summit did Kerry confirm (5/19) that he would attend. Later, PM Manuel Valls traveled (5/21) to Israel and the oPt for 4 days of talks with Israeli and Palestinian officials. According to reports on 5/31, the French govt. had disseminated a 3-page document to prospective summit attendees outlining their goals for the meeting and indicating that they planned to discuss parameters for a solution to the core issues of the conflict, including strict time frames and the “broadest consensus” possible. After a meeting of senior diplomats (6/1) and ahead of the rescheduled 6/3 summit, French FM Jean-Marc Ayrault announced (6/2) his 2 main goals: the parties agree to meet again by the end of 2016, with both Israeli and Palestinian participation, and the creation of working groups for each of the various final status issues.

Despite the U.S. commitment to participation and the endorsement of the Arab League (5/28), the Israelis maintained their strong opposition to the initiative. During Valls’s visit, Netanyahu reiterated (5/23) that the French should scrap their plans and organize instead a summit between him and Abbas. Later, Netanyahu said (6/1) that “the path to peace is not via international conferences that attempt to force a settlement, that make the Palestinian demands
more extreme and in the process distance peace.” That same day, the Jerusalem Post reported that Israeli diplomats were pushing their U.S. counterparts to soften the recommendations of the 6/3 summit.

Rep. of 29 countries convened for 3 hours in Paris on 6/3. The gathering’s results were underwhelming given French FM Laurent Fabius’s initial vision—he had pledged (1/29) that France would recognize Palestinian statehood if the effort failed (Ayrault later backpedaled [3/9] on that commitment; see JPS 45 [3, 4]). Attendees released a statement that reaffirmed support for the 2-state solution, expressed “alarm” at the deteriorating situation, recognized that “the status quo is not sustainable,” and described Israeli settlements and “acts of violence” as obstacles to peace. The statement was nonbinding, reportedly because of U.S. pressure, and it did not set a timetable for a new round of talks or for an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank, as some Palestinians had hoped. (Arab League secy.-gen. Nabil Elaraby later confirmed [6/5] that the statement “could have been more firm, but the Americans objected.”) After the meeting, Ayrault summed up the results: “The goal isn’t to force the parties to negotiate,” he said, “but we are not doomed to do nothing, doomed to stay sit [sic] idly by as observers, simply expressing regrets.” The French also pledged to convene another conference, this time including the Israelis and Palestinians, by the end of 2016. The immediate responses to the Paris summit were mixed and unsurprising. A U.S. State Dept. spokesperson confirmed (6/3) that the Obama admin. had still not “made any decisions about what, if any, our role would be . . . going forward.” When Ayrault called Netanyahu on the evening of 6/3 to discuss the meeting, the Israeli PM simply reiterated his opposition to the entire initiative.

According to a Haaretz report, Ayrault told Netanyahu that he would nonetheless continue pursuing it. Speaking for the Ramallah-based Palestinian leadership, Erekat described (6/3) the meeting as a “step in the right direction.” The major Palestinian factions, Hamas, Islamic Jihad, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP), all signed onto (6/3) a statement rejecting the French peace initiative, saying “the ideas suggested by France as an initiative impose a dangerous violation [of] agreed-upon national rights, especially the right of return.”

More public support came from the international community through the rest of the quarter, but all the principal players held to their positions. The European Union’s Foreign Affairs Council unanimously endorsed (6/20) the initiative, lending their weight to the French call for another summit by the end of 2016. They also requested the EU’s diplomatic service, the European External Action Service, to devise a set of economic and security incentives to cajole the Israelis and Palestinians into an agreement. Luxembourg’s FM said that the French were hoping to convene another summit in 9/2016 at the time of the annual meeting of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), as well as a working group meeting at some point in 7/2016. (No such meetings came to pass, however.) Later, after a speech to the European Parliament in support of the French efforts (6/23), Abbas met with Hollande (7/21), Ayrault (7/30), and Kerry (7/30). Meanwhile, the dir.-gen. of Israel’s Foreign Ministry, Dore Gold, asserted (7/21) that Israel would probably not attend a follow-up summit in Paris, if invited, because such a meeting would “undermine the whole peace process.”
With the ebbing of the surge in the oPt, the overall number of casualties fell for the 3d quarter in a row. While the number of Palestinians killed as a result of Israeli actions fell by 50% to 23 from 47 the previous quarter, the number of Israelis killed as a result of Palestinian actions tripled to 6 from the previous quarter’s 2. By the end of the quarter, the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the 2d intifada in 9/2000 reached 10,837 Palestinians (including 56 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 unidentified cross-border “infiltrators”); 1,252 Israelis (432 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 246 settlers, and 574 others); and 71 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). This toll includes individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel’s occupation or the conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died while being denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents). Excluded from this count is the 1 Palestinian killed by unidentified Egyptian gunmen outside his home in al-Arish in the n. Sinai Peninsula on 6/11. The alleged killers, said to be aligned with the Sinai Province of the Islamic State, reportedly accused the man of collaborating with the Egyptian army against their group.

Overview of the Violence

There were markedly fewer random attacks, protests, and clashes in the West Bank and East Jerusalem this quarter, resulting in the killing of 15 Palestinians, down from 22 the previous quarter. Of these, 6 died as a result of clashes with Israeli forces, 7 were killed after alleged attacks on Israelis, 1 was killed in a motorcycle collision with a settler (it was unclear if the collision was intentional), and 1 was killed during an IDF assault on his home (7/27; see Chronology for details). While the overall number of Palestinians injured also decreased, down to 624 (from 1,139 last quarter), the monthly number of Palestinian injuries increased throughout the quarter: 161 in the 1st mo. (5/17–6/13), 218 in the 2d (6/14–7/11), and 245 in the 3d (7/12–8/8), according to OCHA.

Likewise, the number of Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip as a result of Israeli actions fell by more than half this quarter, down to 6 (from 15). Of these, 2 succumbed to injuries sustained in border clashes with the IDF (7/7 and 7/27; see Chronology for details), and 4 were killed in tunnel collapses or other tunnel-related incidents (7/10, 7/18, 8/6, and 8/13). According to OCHA, the number of Palestinians injured in Gaza also fell substantially this quarter, from 80 to 19.

Unlike the previous quarter, when 4 days of sustained violence punctuated the relative calm along the Gaza border (5/3–7), there were few incidents of cross-border violence this quarter, and the uneasy cease-fire between Israel and the armed groups in Gaza largely held. Of the 5 days that saw notable bouts of cross-border violence (5/25, 5/27, 6/14, 7/1, and 7/13; see Chronology for details), only 1 exchange led to injuries on either side: late at night on 7/1, unidentified Palestinian fighters fired a rocket into Israel, which landed in Sderot, causing mild damage to 1 building and light damage to several others. In keeping with the Israeli policy of holding Hamas responsible for any rocket attacks emanating from Gaza, the IDF retaliated with air strikes on at least 9 Hamas and Pal. Islamic Jihad sites in Gaza City, Bayt Lahiya, and Bayt Hanun, causing substantial damage and 1 minor injury.

As in previous quarters, the IDF strictly enforced Israel’s unilaterally defined buffer
zone, or Access Restricted Areas, running between 300 m and 2 km wide along the border fence. IDF troops opened fire on Palestinian farmers and shepherds working nr. the fence on at least 20 occasions (5/16, 5/18, 5/21, 5/25 [4], 6/4, 6/12, 6/18, 6/27, 6/28, 7/11, 7/20, 7/22, 7/24, 7/26, 7/30, 8/7, and 8/11), causing 2 injuries, which marked a decrease from last quarter, when 10 Palestinians were injured in 31 such incidents. IDF troops also shot and injured (5/18) a Palestinian whom they claimed was attempting to damage the border fence; arrested 2 Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel (5/26 and 6/1); fired on Palestinian land or property 7 times (6/10, 6/12, 6/19, 7/23, 7/31, 8/1, and 8/13); and violently dispersed Palestinians gathering along the border fence for Friday demonstrations 8 times (5/20, 5/27, 6/3, 7/1, 7/15, 7/29, 8/5, and 8/12). In a related development, the IDF claimed to have discovered and dismantled (6/22) a suspected explosive device planted along the border fence nr. Khan Yunis. Matching last quarter’s total, Israeli forces conducted at least 15 limited incursions to level land along the border fence (5/30, 5/31, 6/1 [2], 6/2, 6/8, 6/13 [2], 6/15, 7/11, 7/19, 7/20, 7/21, 8/3, and 8/15). They also established sand barriers across the border fence nr. Rafah on 5/29 and a new watch tower nr. Gaza City on 5/30.

While rumors of Israel’s involvement in tunnel collapses and other supposed accidents continued to circulate, there was only 1 confirmed development with regard to continuing Israeli efforts to stop Hamas’s tunneling efforts this quarter. On 8/3, the Israeli press reported that the Defense Ministry had issued tenders for the construction of an underground wall to encircle Gaza. The project was reportedly projected to start in 10/2016.

Despite the Israeli authorities’ temporary extension of the permitted fishing zone off Gaza’s s. coast (see “Movement and Access” below), Israeli naval forces continued to harass Palestinian fishermen throughout the quarter, opening fire on or otherwise confronting Palestinian fishing parties on at least 36 occasions (up from 22 last quarter), injuring 7 fishermen, and arresting or detaining 50. Israeli naval forces also confiscated 8 fishing boats, damaged 4, and sank 1. (See Chronology for dates and details.)

**Movement and Access**

Israeli authorities again lifted as many major restrictions on Palestinian movement and access in Gaza as they imposed this quarter, leaving the status of the blockade unchanged. COGAT announced (5/22) that Israel would allow imports of cement for private purposes on 5/23 after suspending such imports on 4/4 (see JPS 45 [4]) on the grounds that Hamas was diverting construction materials for its own use. Despite the policy reversal, the allegations continued. On 5/24, Foreign Ministry dir.-gen. Gold said that Hamas was stealing 95% of cement imported to Gaza for private purposes, adding that “Israel has let into Gaza 4,824,000 tons of building materials [since 10/2015] and these have often times been seized and used to build new attack tunnels penetrating Israeli territory.” According to Gisha (the Israeli NGO dedicated to protecting Palestinians’ freedom of movement), the volume of cement allowed in this quarter went back up to pre-suspension levels after dropping in 4–5/2016: 66,023 tons had been allowed in 3/2016, followed by 19,985 in 4/2016 and 39,675 in 5/2016, and reaching 70,905 in 6/2016 and 62,270 in 7/2016. Later, the gold merchants’ guild in Gaza announced (6/8) that the Israeli authorities had decided to lift the ban on gold imports and exports, which they had decreed on 3/29 (see JPS 45 [4]).
In terms of new or newly implemented restrictions, COGAT reversed its 4/3 decision to extend the fishing zone off Gaza’s s. coast, narrowing it from 9 to 6 naut. mi., on 6/6. When the Israeli authorities announced the reversal, the COGAT unit explained that the extension was always intended as a temporary measure during the fishing season. Adding to a sense of uncertainty about the issue, during Ramadan COGAT extended the zone back to 9 naut. mi. for 1 week between 6/19 and 6/26.

Meanwhile, COGAT suspended (7/14) public postal service to Gaza after Israeli forces intercepted a shipment of products with alleged military purposes (this includes items that could be used to construct drones, items that are deemed to be weapons components, as well as scuba diving equipment). However, Gazans were still permitted to send packages and mail via private carriers, which were subject to the same level of screening as the public service. (COGAT had suspended postal service to Gaza when Hamas took power in 2007, but reinstated it in 2015.) As of 7/14, Israeli forces had reported at least 315 attempts to smuggle contraband into Gaza in 2016, up from 8 in all of 2015, according to Haaretz (7/14).

Last, but not least, were new Israeli restrictions on Gazan merchants. First reported on 7/15, Israel’s Shin Bet revoked or failed to renew around 1,400 merchants’ exit permits in late spring and early summer 2016, substantially reducing the number of merchants permitted to leave the territory. A mo. later, an Israeli official confirmed that COGAT had been revoking permits and that only 1,600 remained active, down from 2,800 in the same period of 2015. Thus, the number of merchants exiting Gaza for Israel or the West Bank fell substantially: in the 1st 5 mos. of 2016, the average number of merchant departures per mo. was 8,074; over the summer mos., they plummeted to 6,930 in 6/2016 and 5,728 in 7/2016.

Gazans encountered restrictions outside Israel as well. Haaretz reported (5/16) that Jordan had been making it more difficult for Gazans in general to acquire permits to enter Jordan, leaving many without any way of leaving the Strip, since Egypt was keeping the Rafah border crossing all but completely closed (see below). Until 8/2015, Jordan had routinely granted entry visas to Gazans, but observers had recently noted a “wide-scale refusal,” according to a New York-based official at Human Rights Watch.

Also of note: Gaza’s Agriculture Ministry temporarily lifted its 7-year ban on the import of Israeli watermelons (6/23–25), allowing 600 tons to enter Gazan markets in an effort to pressure local watermelon farmers to lower their prices, which had increased dramatically when the land under watermelon cultivation dropped from 4,500 dunams (1,112 acres) in 2015 to 3,500 dunams (865 acres) in 2016. Following the 3-day import period, the ministry decreed that watermelon prices would be reduced from NIS 10 (around $2.50) per 5 kg to NIS 10 per 8 kg.

The Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah border crossing closed for nearly the entire quarter, as they had been doing ever since the intensification of violence in n. Sinai starting in 10/2014 (see JPS 44 [2]). Up from 5 last quarter, the crossing was open for 9 days (6/1–2, 6/4–5, 6/29–30, and 7/2–4), allowing 2,514 people to enter Gaza (up from 1,220) and 6,103 to exit (up from 739), according to OCHA. The infrequent openings left over 30,000 people on waiting lists, including around 9,500 medical cases and 2,700 students (OCHA, 6/9).

Palestinian movement in and access to the West Bank and East Jerusalem, regularly limited by nr.-daily IDF raids, house searches,
and checkpoints, was further circumscribed this quarter. Both before and after Yisrael Beytenu chair Lieberman took over as DM and expanded the restrictions, especially on the Hebron district (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above), West Bank Palestinians were subject to collective punishment measures such as village closures and roadblocks. Some restrictions on Palestinian movement were relaxed however: the IDF confirmed that it did not renew its closure of the Tal Rumayda neighborhood in Hebron on 5/15, which an IDF spokesperson explained (5/19) as follows: “The restrictions which were implemented for security purposes [on 11/1/2015] have been relieved.” Meanwhile, then-DM Ya’alon and Finance Min. Kahlon unveiled (5/19) a new 2-year plan to improve West Bank border crossings. It is estimated that the NIS 300 m. (approximately $77 m.) plan will cut wait times at crossings by 30–50% while also increasing the volume of goods passing through by 30%. Ya’alon explained (5/19) that the plan was “designed to increase the number of Palestinian workers who go through the checkpoints, as well as improve their conditions and adherence to quality and service.” When Ya’alon left office in the 5/2016 cabinet reshuffle, it was unclear how the plan would evolve. Lieberman, however, proclaimed (7/25) that he also wanted to improve conditions at the crossings and said he intended to allocate additional funds to this end.

In addition to the violence caused by issues over access at Haram al-Sharif (see “Upending the Status Quo at Haram al-Sharif” above), the Israeli authorities restricted the Islamic Waqf’s ability to administer the sanctuary on at least 2 occasions during the quarter. On 5/31, the Jerusalem Municipality ordered the Waqf to stop building restrooms in the n. section of the sanctuary ahead of Ramadan. And in 8/2016, Israeli forces interfered with repair work at Haram al-Sharif, alleging that the Waqf did not have proper permission from the Israeli Antiquities Authority. By 8/8, the Israeli authorities had arrested, summoned, or banned from the sanctuary 21 employees of the organization, according to a Waqf spokesperson.

**Restrictions on Palestinian Soccer**

In the spring of 2015, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) launched an effort to have Israel suspended from international soccer. After a series of negotiations and controversies, the PFA agreed to a compromise: while soccer’s international governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) would not bar Israel from competition, it would establish a comm. to monitor restrictions on Palestinian soccer players, Israeli racism, and Israeli teams based in settlements (see JPS 44 [4] and 45 [1]). The compromise allowed the PFA to reinstate the original structure of the Palestine Cup, with top clubs from the West Bank and Gaza facing off to determine a national champion. The Israeli authorities, however, foiled the PFA’s objective, citing security concerns for obstructing the competition.

On 7/26, the West Bank champion Ahli al-Khalil defeated Shabab Khan Yunis in the 1st round of the Palestine Cup final. Israel had blocked 6 of the Hebron team’s 34 mbrs. from traveling to Gaza for the match, but the club was able to play anyway. Days later, the PFA announced (7/28) that the 2d round of the final would have to be postponed by at least 48 hours because the Israeli authorities only permitted 10 of the Shabab Khan Yunis players to travel to the West Bank. PFA chair Jibril Rajoub then formally complained (8/1) to FIFA about the restrictions and FIFA officials reportedly
pressed Israel into allowing more mbres. of the Gazan team into the West Bank, resulting in the exit of the remaining 6 players through the Erez border crossing. The 2d round was ultimately held in Hebron on 8/2 when the teams tied 1–1.

“Hydro-Apartheid”

Beginning in 6/2016, the Palestinian inhabitants of West Bank villages nr. Salfit, Jenin, and Nablus started complaining that they were not getting sufficient amounts of water from Israel’s national water company Mekorot (see Photos from the Quarter). To make up for the shortage, they reportedly began collecting water from agricultural wells and paying for bottled water at markup prices, although this provided only partial relief. Water shortages proved particularly painful during Ramadan, when many people were fasting throughout daylight hours. The exec. dir. of the Palestinian Hydrology Group, a water and sanitation NGO, indicated (6/14) that some communities had been without water for over 40 days, and that the city of Jenin had seen its supply cut in half (Al Jazeera, 6/16). Several weeks into the crisis, the Palestinian leadership mobilized: PA PM Rami Hamdallah’s office issued (6/16) a statement accusing Israel of “waging a water war,” noting that “while illegal Israeli settlements enjoy uninterrupted water service, Palestinians are forced to spend great sums of money to buy water that is theirs in the 1st place.”

Once the Palestinian leadership and NGOs got involved and the media began reporting on the water shortages, Israeli officials responded. A Mekorot official told Al Jazeera (6/16) that the company had, in fact, been supplying less water to the n. West Bank, adding that all residents in the area, including settlers, were experiencing reductions in supply. Settlers, of course, are allotted more water to begin with—according to UN figures, settler consumption is around 350 liters/person per day, 5 times more than the 60 liters/day Palestinians consume. Later, an Israel Water Authority (IWA) spokesperson made a statement (6/21) that would become an Israeli refrain for the rest of the summer: the unusually hot weather was leading to a shortage, but the Palestinians were exacerbating the issue by refusing to participate in the Joint Water Comm. (The JWC was established as a temporary measure by the Oslo II Accord of 1995 to approve water infrastructure projects; see “Water and the Challenge of Palestinian Institution Building” in JPS 29 [2] and “Power and Water in the Middle East: The Hidden Politics of the Palestinian-Israeli Water Conflict” in JPS 40 [1] for more on the water issue.) Since late 2010, the Palestinian leadership has boycotted the JWC, alleging that it had become a tool for the Israelis to coerce them into approving projects for the settlements. A 2013 study conducted by Jan Selby of the University of Sussex supported the Palestinian position. Selby’s research found that the JWC approved only 66% of Palestinian project proposals compared with 100% of Israeli proposals between 1995 and 2008 (Haaretz, 7/2).

As shortages continued in Palestinian communities through the end of the quarter, Israeli officials offered new, additional excuses. On 7/4, Mekorot and IWA officials told a Knesset comm. that the water shortage was chiefly due to Palestinian theft, presenting data purportedly showing that 5,000 m³ were being “stolen” through illegal connections to the water network (estimates of the daily shortage in the West Bank ranged between 7,000–10,000 m³). At the same meeting, MKs urged the Civil Admin., which has jurisdiction over the oPt, to accelerate...
implementation of an existing IWA master plan for doubling water supplies to both Palestinian and Israeli communities in the West Bank from 73 m. to 142 m. m\(^3\) annually by 2030. The Civil Admin. was reportedly holding up the plan due to objections to proposed infrastructure links with Palestinian cities.

Buried in the IWA data presented on 7/4 was a statistic corroborating Palestinian allegations. According to that data, water consumption in the settlements rose 20%–40% in 2016 compared to the same period in 2015. IWA dir.-gen. Alexander Kushnir noted that “such a sharp increase at the beginning of the irrigation season can only be explained by increased agricultural requirements.”

The growing settler demand for water and the corresponding deficit in Palestinian communities contributed to a situation that a foreign water expert called “as implicit consequences of hydro-apartheid” (Electronic Intifada, 8/1). German hydrologist Clemens Messerschmid, who started working on water issues in the oPt in 1997, said that Israel had “induced” water scarcity in the oPt ever since 1967; citing the IWA’s own data on settler consumption, he warned that water shortages would likely continue: “The summer water crisis is the most reliable feature of the Palestinian water calendar.”

In another major water development at the end of the quarter, the Jerusalem Post reported on 8/14 that Mekorot had drilled a new well, dubbed Ariel 1, to alleviate the shortage in the n. West Bank that would be supplying the entire West Bank population—Palestinians and Israeli settlers—with an extra 4,500 m\(^3\)/day as of the following day. In addition to that reported measure, Mekorot also began operating a new pumping station nr. Ramallah, boosting the region’s supply by 2–3,000 m\(^3\) of water/day while also cracking down on illegal water connections.

**Settlement Growth**

The Israeli govt. announced several new measures this quarter to expand and bolster settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, sparking consistent criticism from the international community. In the context of ongoing efforts to Judaize Jerusalem, the Israeli authorities approved permits for 82 new residences in Ramat Shlomo (6/6), as well as the construction of a 4-story residential building in Silwan (6/15), 140 new units in Ramot (7/3), and about 100 in Har Homa and Pisgat Ze’ev (7/3). Also announced this quarter were new plans for 770 residences in Gilo and Bayt Jala (7/24) as well as the publication of tenders for 323 new residences in Gilo, Neve Ya’acov, Pisgat Ze’ev, and Har Homa, according to Israeli NGO Peace Now (7/27). Meanwhile, the Jerusalem District Planning and Building Comm. approved (8/14) the expansion of an existing plan for new residences in Ramot, adding 56 new units to the current construction project. The Israeli press reported (7/7) that the Finance Ministry had submitted a request for an extra NIS 40 m. (around $10.3 m.) in the 2016 security budget allocation for Israeli settlers in East Jerusalem, bringing the year’s outlay so far to NIS 94.5 m. (approximately $250.7 m.), the same figure as for all of 2015.

In a related development, the Israeli authorities approved (7/3) the construction of 600 new residences for Palestinians in East Jerusalem’s Bayt Safafa neighborhood. According to reports in Haaretz on 5/24 and 7/3, an Israeli court overruled the Netanyahu govt.’s covert efforts to freeze the development indefinitely, paving the way for approval on 7/3, the same day that a major expansion of
settlements in East Jerusalem was announced. One senior Israeli official described (7/3) the timing of that announcement as an effort to “sweeten the pill” for right-wing lawmakers.

Settlement growth continued apace in the West Bank this quarter. As noted above (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict”), Netanyahu approved (7/1) 42 new residences in Kiryat Arba nr. Hebron as a “punitive measure” hours after a Palestinian youth had stabbed a settler youth to death there. He later approved (7/3) 560 new units in Ma’ale Adumim nr. Jerusalem, and also took steps to step up security at the settlements. The cabinet approved (6/19) a NIS 72 m. (approximately $18.6 m.) increase in the budget due to the settlements’ “unique daily security situation.” The increase was in addition to the NIS 340 m. (approximately $87.9 m.) already budgeted for settlements across multiple ministries. The Knesset’s Ministerial Comm. for Legislation gave (7/27) preliminary approval to a bill that would qualify West Bank settlements facing severe security situations for special tax breaks.

Each of these announcements gave rise to rote condemnation from the U.S., EU, UN, and other mbrs. of the international community. On 1 occasion, the PA Foreign Ministry issued (7/28) a statement in Arabic “relieving” the international community from “issuing useless condemnations against Israeli settlement” activities, indicating the Palestinian leadership’s growing frustration.

Apart from sustained and relentless settlement growth, a long-dormant issue returned to the fore this quarter, possibly setting the stage for a conflict between the settlement movement and the Netanyahu govt. later this year. In 2006, Israel’s High Court of Justice had ruled that the Amona settlement outpost, established in the mid-1990s nr. Ramallah, was illegal under Israeli law. After years of litigation, the court ruled in 12/2014 that the govt. would have to evacuate and demolish the outpost by 12/25/2016. With the residents of the outpost adamantly committed to staying despite the approaching deadline, Atty. Gen. Avichai Mandelblit established a comm. in 6/2016 to try and resolve the issue (Haaretz, 8/14). Meanwhile, the Justice Ministry started working on its own plan. According to Peace Now (8/12), the Israeli authorities were seizing plots of land nr. Amona to relocate the outpost’s 40-odd families. As justification for the seizure, they placed (8/11) an ad in Al-quds, a Palestinian daily, calling for its owners to step forward and claim the land within 30 days. The quarter ended just as this process was getting underway. Mandelblit had not yet authorized the Justice Ministry’s plan, and the settler community’s fate remained unclear.

**Settler-Related Violence**

The quarter witnessed a continuing uptick in settler-related violence, particularly in late-6/2016 and early 7/2016 (see fig. 1). Overall, there were 35 reported instances of settlers attacking Palestinians or their property between 5/17 and 8/15 (up from 24 in each of the preceding 2 quarters), according to OCHA. Twelve of these attacks led to injuries and the remaining 23 resulted in property damage. Of note, Israeli settlers stole furniture from a Palestinian home on 5/23 and rammed a flock of Palestinian-owned sheep on 6/10, killing at least 25. Unlike last quarter, settlers targeted Palestinian olive groves on 1 occasion, burning down 15 trees nr. Nablus on 5/28. Furthermore, random Palestinian attacks led to the deaths of 2 settlers this quarter (6/30 and 7/1) and 2 Palestinians died in confrontations with settlers (6/30 and 8/10), including 1 in a vehicular collision that may or may not have been intentional.
Palestinian Prisoners

According to Palestinian prisoners’ rights NGO Addameer, the total number of Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli facilities remained unchanged—7,000—throughout the quarter, with 7/2016 marking 6 mos. of this trend. The number held in administrative detention dipped slightly in 5–6/2016 to 715, before going back up to 750 in 7/2016. The most significant trend to note was the growing number of female prisoners. After rising consistently throughout the habba, their numbers peaked in 4/2016, remaining level through 7/2016 (see fig. 2).

Last quarter, high-profile hunger strikes by Muhammad al-Qiq and Sami Janazreh drew international attention to the plight of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. Both strikes came to an end soon after this quarter began (al-Qiq’s administrative detention was not renewed and he was released on 5/19, and an Israeli court ruled to end Janazreh’s detention on 5/23), but soon gave way to other prisoner-related incidents, including another high-profile hunger strike by Bilal Kayed.

Kayed, a leader of the PFLP prison chapter, started an indefinite hunger strike on 6/15. A frequent participant in prison protests, Kayed had completed a 14-year sentence when he was transferred to administrative detention on the day scheduled for his release. As Kayed’s health deteriorated and his case captured public attention, Palestinians staged popular protests, as well as solidarity strikes inside Israeli prisons. Media coverage of Kayed’s family, particularly his sister Suha’s poignant return from Germany to celebrate her brother’s release, kept Kayed’s hunger strike in the headlines. On 7/17, Kayed’s 33d day without food, his condition was so grave that the Israeli authorities transferred him to Barzilai Medical Center in Ashqelon, where he received treatment handcuffed to his bed.
By 7/29, more than 100 imprisoned Palestinians had started hunger strikes in solidarity with Kayed, including PFLP secy.-gen. and long-term political prisoner Ahmad Saadat (see JPS 43 [4] for an interview with Saadat). According to a report in the Times of Israel, the Israel Prison Service (IPS) tried to break the striking prisoners’ will by fining them NIS 600 each (approximately $156), placing them in solitary confinement, and barring family visits. At the end of the quarter, neither side had relented: Kayed continued refusing food, and an Israeli court in Beersheba denied (8/12) his request to have his handcuffs removed. In a letter addressed to the Palestinian people, Kayed said (8/1) he would no longer be accepting medical examinations. “What I have received from you through your struggles, your sit-ins, your demonstrations, gives me more determination to continue forward until victory,” he said, signing off: “Victory is inevitable” (see Documents and Source Material for the full text of the letter).

In other prison-related developments this quarter, the IPS barred (7/29) Ma’an News Agency’s TV channel from broadcasting inside Israeli prisons, accusing it of “incitement and harming the security of Israel.” The International Comm. of the Red Cross announced (5/26) that it could no longer facilitate multiple monthly family visits to male Palestinian prisoners because of funding.
shortfalls, leading to protests both inside and outside Israeli prisons. Women and minors would still be afforded 2 visits per mo. Also, senior PFLP official Khalida Jarrar was freed on 6/3 after serving 15 mos. in prison, including several as an administrative detainee (see JPS 44 [4]–45 [4]).

**Demolitions and Displacement**

Down from 314 last quarter, 145 Palestinian structures were demolished by Israeli forces between 5/17 and 8/15: 82 in Area C and 63 in East Jerusalem. According to OCHA, these demolitions led to a drop in the number of displaced Palestinians, from 463 and 571 in the preceding 2 quarters to 185 in the current quarter.

There was no comparable decrease, however, in the number of people displaced by home demolitions carried out in retribution for individual Palestinians’ alleged crimes against Israelis. In continuing and illegal acts of collective punishment, Israeli forces fully demolished 7 homes (6/11, 6/21, 7/3 [2], 7/18, 8/3, and 8/15) and partially destroyed 1 more (8/3), displacing at least 43 people and sparking clashes that led to the injury of 8 Palestinians.

Last quarter, the comparative figures were 6 full home demolitions and 3 partial ones (see JPS 45 [4]) resulting in the displacement of 15 Palestinians. In a related development, the IDF conducted an overnight assault on the Hebron-area home of an Islamic Jihad mbr. alleged to have taken part in the killing of an Israeli settler on 7/1. The IDF declared his village, Surif, a closed military zone, cut off Internet access and electricity supply, and laid siege to the man’s home for 7 hours before firing antitank missiles at the structure and demolishing it. The wanted man died in the wreckage (see Chronology for details).

**INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS**

**THE NATIONAL RECONCILIATION STANDOFF**

With the Qatari-mediated reconciliation talks between Hamas and Fatah effectively stalled, there was little progress this quarter with regard to healing the rift in internal Palestinian politics. Despite international facilitation efforts and an agreement to hold municipal elections, major issues hindering Palestinian national unity remained unresolved, including most notably the questions of the PA pres.’s succession, the unity govt.’s takeover of control in Gaza, and the unpaid wages of some of Gaza’s civil servants.

After mos. of intermittent and inconclusive meetings between the 2 sides (see JPS 45 [4]), there was a major announcement early in the quarter that heralded a possible break in the deadlock. Senior Fatah official Nabil Shaath announced (5/16) that plans were in place for a Hamas-Fatah reconciliation conference in Geneva on 6/30. Citing Hamas sources, al-Hayat reported (5/29) that Swiss officials had visited Gaza in recent weeks to coordinate the effort. The same sources were reported as saying that reps. from the Middle East Quartet, the EU, Sweden, Norway, China, Russia, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia planned to attend the talks, which would focus on the unpaid wages of civil servants employed by the Hamas-run govt. in Gaza and the implementation of the 9/25/2014 Hamas-Fatah agreement calling for the PA unity govt. to take control of Gaza (see JPS 44 [2]). Furthermore, the Swiss were expected to present a new international mechanism to facilitate reconciliation.

The conference was scuttled even before seeing the light of day, however. On 6/15, senior Hamas and Fatah officials met in Doha for a 3d round of talks (they had met in the Qatari
capital on 2/7-8 and 3/26-27). While they remained tight-lipped about their progress during the 1st 3 days of negotiations, it was clear the discussions were not going well when Hamas security forces forcibly dispersed (6/15) a pro-reconciliation rally in Gaza City. The process ultimately broke down on the last scheduled day of the Doha talks. According to Hamas official Sami Abu Zuhri on 6/18, the Fatah delegation withdrew from the meetings that day after reneging on commitments made in earlier sessions. In response to Abu Zuhri’s censure of Fatah for what he described as a “lack of political will to achieve reconciliation,” a Fatah spokesperson responded with a counter-accusation in the same vein. Reiterating that Fatah had participated in the talks in good faith, the spokesman claimed that Hamas was not ready “for national unity and political partnership.” Scant details emerged on the specific nature of the disagreements but they were significant enough to derail the Swiss reconciliation effort.

With the reconciliation process on hold, the Ramallah-based PA unity govt. announced (6/21) that it would hold a round of municipal elections on 10/8. The previous round of local elections 4 years earlier had been mired in controversy (see JPS 42 [2]): Hamas had boycotted the election, the Central Election Commission was unable to organize any ballots in the Gaza Strip, and voting took place in only 92 of the West Bank’s 353 municipalities. Combined with the current heightened tension, the memory of the 2012 local elections cast a shadow over the preparations for 10/8/2016.

An acrimonious campaign season followed the unity govt.’s announcement. Preparations for the 10/8 ballot went ahead as scheduled amidst heated controversy about the legitimacy of campaign efforts. Despite threatening to boycott the ballot, surprisingly Hamas pledged (7/15) to participate and by the end of the quarter, no Hamas official had followed through on earlier threats to boycott the vote.

The prospect of holding a legitimate electoral exercise was put in doubt on 8/10, when Pal. Islamic Jihad announced that it would not participate in the elections on the grounds that there was no “appropriate way out of the Palestinian national impasse.” A few days later, PA pres. Abbas even called (8/14) on leaders of the Palestinian minority in Israel to help mediate the Hamas-Fatah dispute and facilitate the 10/8 election. As the quarter came to a close, it was unclear whether Joint List MKs or other leaders of the Palestinian community in Israel would answer his call, or whether the municipal elections would proceed at all.

GAZA’S CIVIL SERVANTS GET PAID

At the opening of the quarter, employees of the Hamas govt. in Gaza had not been paid in full since 6/2014. The continuing dispute over who was responsible for their salaries—Hamas or the PA unity govt.—was a central and repeated sticking point in the national reconciliation talks held in Qatar (see above). In an effort to alleviate pressure from the wage crisis, Qatar pledged $31 m. toward civil servants’ salaries on 7/21. The head of Qatar’s Comm. for the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, Mohammed al-Emadi, then clarified that the money would go only to civilian mbrs. of the admin. and not to security personnel (as Hamas had insisted), and that the funds would be processed by the UN.

In a related development, the Associated Press reported (7/30) that Hamas began putting into effect its 11/21/2015 pledge to distribute land for govt. employees to build on or sell, in lieu of full salary payments (see JPS 45 [3]). Around 13,000 employees were reported to have signed up for the program.
TRANSITIONING PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP

As PA pres. Abbas’s repeated announcements in recent mos. that his departure from politics was imminent, the prospect of a power vacuum at the highest level of leadership in the PA, Fatah, and the PLO (all headed by Abbas) resulted in a comparable power struggle within the highest echelons of Palestinian politics. While imprisoned Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti continued to dominate the conversation, an old rival of Abbas returned to the arena this quarter. On 5/27, Middle East Eye, citing Palestinian and Jordanian sources, reported that the UAE, Jordan, and Egypt were joining forces to promote the candidacy of exiled Fatah official Mohammad Dahlan as part of a long-term plan to undermine Hamas, influence Palestinian institutions, and facilitate an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. UAE officials had reportedly discussed the plan with Israel, and the 3 Arab states were planning to inform Saudi Arabia as soon as they could agree on final details. Rumors of Dahlan’s return to Palestinian politics have emerged every time Abbas has broached retirement (see JPS 44 [4] and 45 [1]), but there was no further evidence this quarter to lend credence to such reports.

While rumors swirled about regional actors conspiring to interfere in Palestinian politics, Hamas appeared to be on the verge of its own tricky leadership transition. According to a report in Raialyoum on 6/14, Hamas leader Khalid Mishal was intending to step down rather than run in the movement’s forthcoming election, tentatively scheduled for early 2017. Although similar claims had been made in the run-up to the previous such voting exercise on 4/1/2013, nothing had come of them, and Mishal ended up running unopposed. At the quarter’s end, his intentions remained unclear.

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data comes from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) on 2–4 June 2016. The results are based on a survey of 1,270 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The complete poll, the 60th in a series, was published on PSR’s website at www.pcpsr.org.

1. The French Initiative calls for the formation of an international support group for Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the holding of an international peace conference to find a solution based on the 2-state formula within the context of the API [Arab Peace Initiative] and in accordance with a specified timetable. Do you support or oppose this French Initiative?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Strongly support</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>7.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Support</td>
<td>41.6%</td>
<td>42.8%</td>
<td>42.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Oppose</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>34.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Strongly oppose</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
<td>8.7%</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
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2. In your view, will the French Initiative succeed or fail in strengthening the prospect for making Palestinian-Israeli peace?

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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>1) Strongly support</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Support</td>
<td>21.0%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
<td>25.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Oppose</td>
<td>44.5%</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>40.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Strongly oppose</td>
<td>17.7%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
<td>18.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>6.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
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3. Two candidates are currently competing in the U.S. presidential elections, Hillary
Clinton from the Democratic Party and Donald Trump from the Republican Party. In your view, which of the 2 candidates is best for Palestinians?

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<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Hillary Clinton</td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>16.8%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Donald Trump</td>
<td>2.6%</td>
<td>13.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Both are the same</td>
<td>75.1%</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>69.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
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4. During the last few months, Hamas-Egypt relations improved and some reconciliation meetings took place in Doha. Do you see in these 2 developments a real opportunity to open the Rafah border crossing on regular basis in the near future?

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<th></th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
<th>Total</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Certainly yes</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>10.7%</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Yes</td>
<td>51.5%</td>
<td>43.3%</td>
<td>48.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) No</td>
<td>33.5%</td>
<td>31.2%</td>
<td>32.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Certainly no</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>6.5%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

5. What expectations do you have for the future of reconciliation? Will it continue and succeed or will it fail, leading to a return to the split?

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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>1) Certainly succeed</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Succeed</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Fail</td>
<td>46.3%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
<td>45.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Certainly fail</td>
<td>14.9%</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
<td>14.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
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FRONLINE STATES

EGYPT

Since taking office in 6/2014, Egyptian pres. al-Sisi has supported Palestinian efforts in international fora, but remained largely removed from the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. This quarter, he made a high-profile speech in which he pledged that Egypt would push for direct Israeli-Palestinian talks (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). However, despite its enthusiastic embrace of the Egyptian initiative, Israel refused to reconsider its negotiating position, which alongside Cairo’s strained relations with Hamas, weakened al-Sisi’s hand.

Al-Sisi’s 5/17 speech did not clarify the specific nature of Egypt’s overtures to Israel and the Palestinians. There were 2 significant incidents, however, that pointed to the seriousness of Cairo’s intentions. On 6/16, Egypt’s amb. to Israel Hazem Khairat made a rare statement, his 1st in public since taking up his post in 2/2016, in which he called for the resumption of peace talks and reaffirmed Cairo’s willingness to help create an “appropriate Palestinian environment” for a resolution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict (Palestinian national reconciliation as a prerequisite to any peace deal was a key element in al-Sisi’s 5/17 speech). Later in the quarter, reaffirming al-Sisi’s commitment, Egyptian FM Shoukry visited (7/10) Israel to discuss his country’s efforts with Netanyahu and to advance plans for a meeting between the Israeli PM and PA pres. Abbas in Cairo (see “A New Egyptian Dimension” above).

The Israelis welcomed Egypt’s initiative as an alternative to the French one, even though neither the Egyptians nor the French viewed their efforts as distinct. A week after al-Sisi’s speech, Israel’s Foreign Ministry announced
(5/23) that it had returned 2 Egyptian relics to Cairo (the lids to wooden coffins that had been smuggled from Egypt to Dubai, then London, and ultimately to Jerusalem), framing this as an improvement in bilateral relations. “The return of the Egyptian [artifacts] is symbolic, more than anything, of the changing relations [between] Israel and Egypt,” an official stated. For his part, Netanyahu repeatedly commended al-Sisi, saying (7/21) that Cairo had made a “serious effort” to “break the deadlock that has hung over peace efforts.”

Egypt’s counterinsurgency in n. Sinai continued unabated this quarter, along with Israel’s efforts to strengthen the Egyptian authorities’ hand. On 7/5, Israel’s amb. to Egypt Haim Koren asserted that the 2 countries were having the “best times we’ve ever had,” and that there’s “good cooperation between the armies, we have understandings about the Sinai Peninsula, and basically, we see [eye to eye] on development of the region.” The day after Shoukry met with Netanyahu in Israel, a senior Israeli official praised Israeli-Egyptian security coordination in n. Sinai, emphasizing that IDF drone strikes in Sinai in recent years had all taken place with Cairo’s knowledge and approval.

The burgeoning Hamas-Egypt rapprochement stalled this quarter after Hamas put out (6/7) a press release in which it claimed to have made every possible effort to secure the s. border and calling for Egypt to reopen the Rafah crossing (Egypt has kept the crossing almost entirely closed since the escalation of violence in n. Sinai in 10/2014; see JPS 45 [4]). Cairo reportedly invited, then disinvented, Hamas for another round of talks. According to an Egyptian security source, the meetings had been planned as part of Egypt’s efforts to push for Palestinian national reconciliation, and the initial invite included a request for the presence of a rep. of Hamas’s military wing (Ma’an News Agency, 6/14). After the invitation was canceled, Raialyoum revealed (7/5) that Egyptian security officials were dissatisfied with the steps Hamas had taken since the last round of meetings. Although a senior Hamas official described it (7/5) merely as a “delayed” meeting, no Hamas delegation had traveled to Cairo by the end of the quarter, and the Rafah border crossing remained almost completely closed (see “Movement and Access” above).

SYRIA

The Palestinian community’s fate in the ongoing conflict in Syria appeared increasingly precarious this quarter. While humanitarian conditions in Yarmouk r.c. outside Damascus remained dire, renewed fighting nr. the Syrian capital put another predominantly Palestinian community, Khan Eshieh r.c., at risk. Fighting between armed rebel groups and Syrian govt. forces escalated nr. the camp late on 5/16, killing at least 12 people. According to the Jafra Foundation for Relief and Youth Development, based in Yarmouk, the fighting prevented needed supplies from reaching Khan Eshieh, endangering the well-being of the camp’s 9,000 residents. By 6/20, Jafra reported that a hidden path which residents used in order to bring supplies into the camp had been regularly targeted with sniper fire and artillery shelling. Furthermore, 3 Palestinian refugees were killed on 6/14 when an artillery shell landed nr. a camp mosque after evening prayers (UNRWA, 6/15). The violence continued through the end of the quarter. Russian warplanes targeted the camp on 6/30, killing 6 and reportedly causing massive damage. Two days of relative quiet followed the strikes before air strikes hit the camp again on 7/3, killing 3 more residents and demolishing a children’s center run by the Jafra Foundation.
While the violence nr. Khan Eshieh continued, a high-profile killing underscored the plight of Palestinian refugees in the Syrian conflict. In mid-7/2016, videos began circulating online depicting the beheading of a Palestinian child amid heavy fighting in Aleppo. The 5 rebel perpetrators claimed the boy was a pro-govt. fighter out of whom they sought to make an example.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

TURKEY

Seven mos. after resuming in 11/2015 (see JPS 45 [3]), the Israeli-Turkish reconciliation process culminated in a formal agreement this quarter. The 2 sides overcame the remaining sticking points hampering the talks—Turkey’s demand that Israel ease its blockade on Gaza and Israel’s demand that Turkey stop enabling Hamas (see JPS 45 [4]). Champions of the deal on both sides faced significant obstacles in shepherding the final agreement through.

At the end of last quarter, the negotiations had been postponed indefinitely amid a reshuffle in Turkey’s political leadership. About 3 weeks after PM Ahmet Davutoğlu resigned on 5/5, his replacement, Binali Yildirim, took office. Israel viewed the move as a positive sign for the reconciliation process, given Yildirim’s reputation as a close ally of Turkish pres. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. The new PM reinforced that perception when he said (5/24) that his govt. would be pursuing a new foreign policy based on having “more friends than enemies.”

Over the next mo., other announcements and comments by Turkish and Israeli officials provided further indications that the new govt. would back reconciliation. On 5/30, PM Netanyahu told a visiting U.S. congressional delegation that a deal with Turkey was very close. Sources involved in the meeting reported him as saying that he was waiting for Ankara to set a date for a final, decisive meeting. On the same day, Turkish dep. PM Numan Kurtulmuş said that 2 of Turkey’s 3 major conditions had been met, without specifying what these were. Then, Erdoğan removed 2 senior officials close to the talks: Feridun Hadi Sinirlioğlu was promoted from undersecy. for foreign affairs to UN amb. while Hakan Fidan, a known opponent of the talks and the head of Turkey’s national intelligence organization, was made amb. to Japan. Israeli diplomatic officials said (6/4) that Sinirlioğlu was the chief Turkish architect of the talks and that his promotion, along with Fidan’s removal, signaled Erdoğan’s confidence that the final deal was imminent (YNet, 6/4).

International and regional opposition to the Israeli-Turkish reconciliation receded in early 6/2016. In a meeting with Netanyahu, Russian pres. Vladimir Putin reversed (6/7) Moscow’s earlier position, saying he now “welcome[d]” Turkish-Israeli rapprochement as a “positive matter.” Russian-Turkish relations had been strained since Turkish forces downed a Russian jet over Syria in 11/2015, and Putin had reportedly been wary of Erdoğan’s gathering stature as a result of improving relations with Israel. Although Turkey’s efforts to mollify Hamas were not as productive, Hamas did not upend the momentum toward a deal. On 6/22, Turkish FM Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that his deputies would continue meeting with Hamas officials in the context of their broader efforts to promote peace in the region, notwithstanding the reconciliation talks with Israel. He also said that Turkey’s relationship with Hamas was not an obstacle to the process. Not long after, however, a dispute emerged between the 2 over Ankara’s pledge to get Israel to loosen its siege on Gaza. The dispute did not escalate beyond...
allegations and counter-allegations, however. Also, Erdoğan met (6/24) with Hamas leader Khalid Mishal 2 days before a round of Israeli-Turkish talks were scheduled, and while no details were released, the 2 reportedly discussed the blockade on Gaza and the upcoming negotiations.

Ultimately, officials announced a final agreement in Rome on 6/27, concluding the 9-mo. Israeli-Turkish reconciliation process. According to an Israeli official on 6/26, a compromise on the final sticking point—Hamas activities in Turkey—was reached 10 days earlier when the Turkish govt. pledged to allow Hamas to operate in Turkey only for diplomatic purposes, and not to use the country as a staging ground for military activity against Israel. The rest of the deal included: the reestablishment of full diplomatic relations; the resumption of bilateral talks on military cooperation and intelligence sharing; Ankara’s agreement to drop its demands for Israel to lift its blockade on Gaza; Turkey resuming aid to Gaza; Israel allowing Turkey to build a new power plant, desalination plant, and hospital in Gaza; Israel transferring more than $20 m. to a Turkish humanitarian fund for the families of Turkish nationals injured or killed in the IDF assault on the Gaza aid flotilla in 5/2010 (see JPS 40 [1]); and Turkey terminating all legal proceedings related to the flotilla attack. The 2 sides also agreed to begin talks on the prospects for building a gas pipeline in the e. Mediterranean.

Both sides moved quickly to implement the agreement. After the dir. gen. of Israel’s Foreign Ministry signed it on 6/28, the Israeli security cabinet approved the agreement the next day, with only 3 ministers voting against (DM Lieberman, Education Minister Bennett, and Justice Minister Shaked). On 7/1, the Lady Leyla set sail with 11,000 tons of humanitarian aid for Gaza; it berthed in Ashdod on 7/3, and its contents were shipped overland to Gaza over the next 2 days.
Meanwhile, Hamas’s leadership presented a united front in favor of the deal, releasing a statement on 6/27 expressing gratitude to the Turkish govt. for its efforts to ease the blockade on Gaza. But there were reports of mixed reactions on the part of Hamas. Some cited officials criticizing Turkey for “normalizing” the blockade on Gaza; others denied the Turkish allegation that Hamas’s leadership approved the agreement in advance.

Before its parliament could ratify the deal, however, Turkey witnessed an attempted coup on 7/15. In Istanbul, soldiers occupied Taksim Square, jets flew low over key bridges, and approximately 200 people were killed in the fighting. Eventually, forces loyal to the govt. prevailed. Erdogan announced that he was back in full control early on 7/16, and proceeded with a widespread crackdown against opponents. Both Hamas and the Israeli govt. expressed support for the Turkish govt. in the wake of the coup, and senior Turkish and Israeli officials pledged (7/17) that the attempted coup would not hinder their reconciliation.

By the end of the quarter, the process, though delayed, remained firmly on track. On 8/12, Çavuşoğlu said that the Turkish parliament would ratify the deal before going on recess in mid-8/2016 and the Israeli govt. was reportedly waiting for the ratification to appoint a new amb. to Turkey (Jerusalem Post, 8/3).

SAUDI ARABIA

Along with the apparently growing sectarian rift in the region in recent years, the Israeli govt. under PM Netanyahu has attempted to strengthen ties with the Saudi-led so-called Sunni axis as a counterweight to Shi’a-dominated Iran. Although past Israeli overtures have been depicted as unwelcome, there have been a few instances when the Saudis were interpreted as having reciprocated, and this quarter saw 1 such instance.

In mid-7/2016, retired Gen. Anwar Eshki visited Israel to build support for the Arab Peace Initiative, meeting with the dir.-gen. of the Foreign Ministry, Dore Gold, COGAT commander Yoav Mordechai, and a group of MKs. Heading a delegation of Saudi academics and businessmen, Eshki, once a top advisor to the Saudi leadership, was widely viewed as being a de facto emissary of Saudi Arabia’s incoming monarch, King Salman bin Abdulaziz. In his response to the news, Hezbollah leader Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah described (7/28) Eshki’s visit as “in effect, normalizing [Saudi relations with Israel] for free, without receiving anything in return.” Hamas also released a critical statement (7/31), calling on Saudi Arabia to “take measures to prevent such normalizing visits that [Israel] uses to undermine the rights of Palestinians.” In an interview with the Nazareth-based al-Shams radio station on 8/2, Eshki rebuffed his detractors stating that his visit had not been “coordinated with” the Saudi royal family. “I came on my own behalf and that of the research institute,” he told his interviewer, decrying those “who tried to exploit the visit and its timing in order to attack Saudi Arabia. In Israel, too, they exploited the visit to report on closer [relations] and normalization.”

IRAN

Iran was largely uninvolved in the Israeli-Palestinian sphere this quarter. After an Islamic Jihad delegation’s visit to Tehran in 4/2016, Asharq Al Awsat reported (5/25) that Iran intended to resume supporting the group and end 2 years of strained relations. There were no follow-up reports this quarter indicating whether, or how, Iranian support for the group had resumed.
Meanwhile, in the context of the 1st anniversary of Iran’s nuclear agreement with the P5+1 (China, France, Russia, UK, U.S., and Germany), the Associated Press reported (7/18) on a leaked document connected to the deal, apparently the only relevant text that had not been made public. According to a diplomat involved in the leak, the document, depicted as an “add-on” rather than an explicit part of the deal, outlined a process by which Iran would be allowed to cut its nuclear breakout time to 6 mos., starting in 1/2027, by replacing its old centrifuges with thousands of newer models. Since the U.S.’s signature demand in the talks had been for Iran to have at least a 1-year breakout time (see JPS 45 [1]), the leaked document sparked renewed criticism by opponents of the deal, particularly U.S. congressional Republicans.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Continued Tension with Israel

By bringing Yisrael Beytenu chair Lieberman into his ruling coalition instead of opposition leader Herzog, Israeli PM Netanyahu exacerbated existing tensions between his govt. and that of U.S. pres. Barack Obama. In his 1st few mos. in office, Lieberman exhibited a strong-arm stance vis-à-vis the occupation as well as bullish opposition to the P5+1’s nuclear deal with Iran, which combined with Netanyahu and Obama’s specific and lingering disagreements further strained the Israel-U.S. relationship.

The tension was particularly evident during a press conference at the Pentagon on 8/4, when Obama used the occasion to note that Iran was holding up its side of the 7/14/2015 nuclear deal and that this was even recognized by some Israeli officials: “It’s the assessment of the Israeli military and intelligence community—the country that was most opposed to this deal—that acknowledges this has been a game-changer.” Lieberman took issue with Obama’s comments and released (8/5) a statement through the Defense Ministry comparing the nuclear deal with Iran to the 1938 Munich Agreement, the so-called appeasement of Hitler. The latter, he argued, “did not prevent the Second World War and the Holocaust . . . because the leaders of the world at that time ignored the explicit statements by Hitler and the rest of the leaders of Nazi Germany.” As the U.S. and Israeli press geared up for another major war of words, Netanyahu quickly undertook damage control, with his office releasing a statement (8/5) rephrasing Lieberman’s criticism of the U.S. president’s comments. The statement noted that, while Israel “has no greater ally than the U.S.,” Tel Aviv’s position on the nuclear deal “remains unchanged.” According to senior Israeli officials, the P.M.’s office also contacted (8/5) U.S. amb. to Israel Dan Shapiro to further defuse the tension and make clear that Netanyahu did not approve of Lieberman’s historical comparison. Days later, the Israeli Defense Ministry effectively retracted (8/8) Lieberman’s initial response: “Friday’s statement was not intended to make a direct comparison, either historically or personally,” the new statement read; “We are sorry if it was understood otherwise.”

Despite these tensions and persistent rumors that the Obama admin. was considering changing its approach to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in its final mos. in office (see JPS 45 [4]), no developments during the quarter evidenced any change in official U.S. policy. Washington signed a joint declaration on cybersecurity with
Tel Aviv on 6/21, making Israel the 1st state to join the U.S. Dept. of Homeland Security’s new information-sharing platform, and it urged international diplomats to tone down their condemnations of Israel at the Paris peace conference and via the Middle East Quartet (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above and “Middle East Quartet” below).

**Military Aid to Israel**

Bilateral U.S.-Israel talks on a new military aid agreement advanced this quarter, with the 2 sides overcoming some remaining disagreements that left only technical details unresolved by quarter’s end. As the quarter opened, the Israeli and U.S. negotiating teams were meeting with increasing frequency to hammer out the details of a new memorandum of understanding (MoU) to replace the current 10-year deal set to expire in 2018. The Obama admin. was reportedly pushing for an “all-inclusive” follow-up agreement worth no more than $3.7 b. per year, or a total of $37 b. over 10 years, while the Israelis pushed hard to obtain additional annual support for missile defense programs and the opportunity to lobby for more money each year on an ad hoc basis (see JPS 45 [4]).

U.S. govt. sources initially said (5/21) that DM Lieberman’s involvement complicated the talks, but both sides were clearly committed to reaching a compromise. On 6/6, National Security Advisor Susan Rice assured the American Jewish Comm.’s 2016 Global Forum in Washington that the Obama admin. was ready to sign a new military aid deal with Israel exceeding all previous agreements. Two weeks later, when Lieberman met (6/20) with Defense Secy. Ash Carter in Washington, an Israeli official described the deal (6/20) as “very close.” Then, in response to a letter from U.S. senators urging the deal’s completion, the Obama admin. informed (7/1) Congress that it had offered to substantially increase Israel’s aid package (even compared with earlier rounds of talks on the new MoU) although no details were released.

According to the New York Times (7/1), the sums involved were said to be over $40 b., but the admin. was insisting that the entire amount would have to be spent exclusively in the U.S. (Under the previous MoU, Israel, unique among all U.S. military aid recipients, was permitted to spend around 26% of its annual military allocation outside the U.S. and 13% of it on fuel.)

In late 7/2016 and early 8/2016, the 2 sides achieved a breakthrough. Starting on 7/25, official statements conveyed optimism and the media reported that the gaps were closing. Senior Israeli officials indicated that Netanyahu was poised to compromise in order to get a deal done before Obama left office in 1/2017: the PM was reportedly ready to back down on his demand to lobby for more missile defense support on an annual basis and agree to the U.S. requirement that Israel increase incrementally the amount of U.S. military aid spent on U.S.-produced items. On 8/1, Ynet confirmed that Israel would no longer seek annual ad hoc funding opportunities for its missile defense programs and agreed to a gradual phaseout of the approx. one quarter of U.S. funds it spent on its own military industry, slated to reach zero in 2028, the final year of the agreement. After the talks in Washington concluded, a U.S. official confirmed that they had “made progress” and that “a final agreement” was close. Only technical details remained, said senior U.S. and Israeli officials (Haaretz, 8/3).

**The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict and the 2016 Presidential Race**

Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump, who secured the Democratic and Republican U.S.
presidential nominations respectively, maintained their unwavering support for Israel this quarter, competing only over who could be more strident in their expressions of support.

On the Democratic side, Clinton’s main rival, Bernie Sanders (I-VT), was effectively out of the running by the time the quarter began. Clinton had what was considered an insurmountable lead both in the delegate count and in overall votes, as well as commanding nr.-unanimous support among the party establishment. Rather than dropping out of the contest, Sanders opted to campaign through the Democratic nominating convention in the hope of building progressive ranks in preparation for the battle over the party platform (Washington Post, 5/20). Sanders reportedly wanted to see the party’s official position change on key domestic issues, including labor rights and trade agreements, as well as on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

To that end, 3 of his 5 allotted nominees to the 15-mbr. party platform drafting comm. went to vocal critics of the Israeli occupation: Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), public intellectual and academic Cornel West, and James Zogby, the founder and president of the Arab American Institute. (Clinton selected 6 of the comm. mbrs. and National Comm. chair Debbie Wasserman Schulz the remaining 4.) After the comm. was announced on 5/23, Sanders said (5/26) he believed most Democrats thought lasting peace in the Middle East would not occur “without fair and respectful treatment of the Palestinian people.” He wanted the Democratic Party platform to reflect that, he said.

After Clinton locked up (6/7) the nomination, the platform comm. went to work. At the 1st round of hearings, a mo.-long debate over the party’s position on Israel opened with a heated exchange between Sanders and Clinton allies (6/9). After former congressman Robert Wexler outlined Clinton’s plans to maintain the U.S. commitment to Israel, West was particularly outspoken. “For too long, the Democratic Party’s been beholden to the American Israel Public Affairs Comm., [and] didn’t take seriously the humanity of Palestinian brothers and sisters,” West affirmed. He also asked whether the platform would use “the word ‘occupation,’” which was the very question that ultimately divided the comm.

On 6/25, the comm. finalized a draft platform, which was published on 7/1 and approved on 7/8–9 and included calls for a $15/hr. minimum wage and the abolition of the death penalty. It did not, however, include the provision calling for Israel to end its occupation and settlement enterprise, which Sanders’s allies had pushed for. Compared to the 2012 platform, the 2016 draft had no new language on Israel, although it did include a single reference to Palestinian rights: “We will continue to work toward a 2-state solution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict negotiated directly by the parties that guarantees Israel’s future as a secure and democratic Jewish state with recognized borders and provides the Palestinians with independence, sovereignty, and dignity.” The draft also asserted that the party would oppose what it referred to as “any effort to delegitimize Israel, including at the UN or through the BDS movement.” In the wake of the draft’s initial approval, Zogby told (6/27) the Jerusalem Post that Clinton appointees had blocked any mention of the word “occupation” in reference to Israel.

Although the divide between Sanders and the progressive wing, on the one hand, and Clinton and the establishment wing, on the other, over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was substantial, it was only 1 of many disagreements besetting the party in the lead up to the nominating convention, held in Philadelphia on 7/25–28. While Sanders himself endorsed Clinton on
7/12, his supporters continued to turn out for him at state primaries and at protests outside the convention. Typifying a segment of Sanders’s base, West pledged (7/14) to vote for Green Party candidate Jill Stein instead of Clinton. By the end of the quarter, the intraparty divide did not appear to be harming Clinton in national head-to-head polling against Trump, but it did portend further discord over the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the future.

Now the official nominee, Clinton continued to tout her pro-Israel credentials. After accepting the party’s nomination, she published (8/9) a factsheet on her website outlining her “30-year record of friendship, leadership, and strength” and describing her “vision” for the U.S.-Israel relationship under future Clinton admin. This included pledges to expand U.S.-Israel military exercises, increase support for Israeli rocket and missile defense, and defend Israel from “anti-Israel bias in UN bodies” and the BDS movement.

Divisions within the Democratic Party appeared minor in comparison with the imbroglio resulting from Donald Trump’s victory in the Republican primaries. The popularity of his overtly racist comments, brash disposition, and lack of govt. experience led to an upheaval within the party on numerous issues. The Palestinian-Israeli conflict, however, was not one of them.

Although Trump’s pledge to stay “as neutral as possible” remained on his campaign website throughout the quarter (see JPS 45 [4]), his position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict tacked further and further to the right toward in a near-full embrace of the Netanyahu govt.’s stance. On 6/23, Trump’s co-advisor on Israel David Freidman said that Trump would support Israel if it chose to annex parts of the West Bank. Later, at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Friedman further clarified by saying that Trump would approve of Israeli annexation if the Palestinians continued avoiding peace negotiations.

A young man working a campaign event for U.S. presidential hopeful Donald Trump in the Israeli city of Modiin. In its first-ever campaign in Israel, the Republican Party attempted to attract dual-nationality voters using the slogan “Trump—in Israel’s interest.” (15 August, Menahem Kahana/AFP/Getty Images)
Meanwhile, the Republican platform drafting comm. also made some changes to the party’s positions on Israel, sparking a minor disagreement with a key pro-Israel lobbying group. In a draft platform approved on 7/12, the comm. dropped the party’s support for a 2-state solution, which had been a feature in both the 2008 and 2012 versions of the platform (see “The 2016 U.S. Presidential Campaign: Changing Discourse on Palestine” in this issue). Trump appeared to approve, tweeting (7/13) that the new platform was the “most pro-Israel of all time!” But the Anti-Defamation League disagreed, urging (7/13) the party to reconsider and arguing that the platform differed from “the stated position of PM Benjamin Netanyahu and prior [Republican] platforms.” In the end, the party did not reconsider. The final version of the platform approved at the Cleveland convention did not include pursuit of a 2-state solution among its tenets. In contrast, it harshly condemned the BDS movement as a modern-day manifestation of anti-Semitism and pledged to support Jerusalem as Israel’s “indivisible” capital, while never mentioning a Palestinian state or Palestinian rights. The Republicans had dropped the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital from their 2012 platform, after including it in 2008.

**Aid to the Palestinians**

For the 1st time since 2004, U.S. and Palestinian officials held (5/22) an official joint economic dialogue in Ramallah, to address economic challenges associated with achieving a 2-state solution. Asst. Secy. of State for Economic and Business Affairs Charles H. Rivkin and Dep. Under Secy. of Commerce for International Trade Ken Hyatt led the U.S. delegation, while on the PA side, Natl. Econ. Min. Abeer Odeh, Min. of Finance and Planning Shukri Bishara, and Min. of Telecom. and Info. Tech. Allam Mousa led the Palestinian delegates. Participants discussed possible job-creation programs to address unemployment in Gaza and the West Bank, among other economic development projects. In a statement dated 5/23, the U.S. consul gen. in Jerusalem, Donald Blome, described the exercise as underscoring “our commitment to fostering a robust, sustainable, and export-oriented Palestinian economy, which will be the backbone of a future Palestinian state.”

**A Word from Congress about Palestinian Children**

At the initiative of Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN), 20 mbrs. of Congress signed (6/20) onto a letter urging Obama to appoint a special envoy for Palestinian youth and to elevate the status of Palestinian children’s rights in U.S. relations with Israel and the PA. Citing reports by Human Rights Watch and UNICEF, the letter highlighted the ongoing abuses of Palestinian children under the Israeli occupation and argued that “ignoring the trauma being inflicted on millions of Palestinian children undermines our American values.” McCollum spearheaded a similar letter to Secy. of State Kerry in 6/2015, which was signed by 18 of her colleagues.

**The Ongoing Case of Convicted Israeli Spy Jonathan Pollard**

After Jonathan Pollard was released from prison in 11/2015, he and his lawyers appealed the terms of his parole (see JPS 45 [3, 4]), arguing that the requirements that he wear an electronic tracker and have his work computer regularly monitored were arbitrary; his defense lawyers pleaded that there was no risk of him fleeing the U.S. since any state secrets he might possess would be over 30 years old and likely useless. U.S. District Judge Katherine Forrest
rejected Pollard’s challenge on 8/11, ruling on the basis of Pollard’s explicitly stated desire to leave the U.S. for Israel. She also noted that Director of National Intelligence James Clapper had informed her that some documents Pollard compromised in the early 1980s were still classified as “top secret.”

**Legislative Crackdown on BDS**

As the quarter opened, legislative sessions in most state capitals had either wrapped up or were about to do so; therefore, fewer anti-BDS measures were passed into law by the end of this quarter compared to the previous 2 quarters (see JPS 45 [3, 4]). New Jersey was an exception, however. On 8/15, Gov. Chris Christie signed into law a measure barring the state govt. from investing pension and annuity funds in companies that boycott Israel or Israeli businesses. The measure had passed (6/27) in the state’s General Assembly with only 3 votes against. In a related development, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo signed (6/5) an executive order requiring the state govt. to divest from companies and organizations that support BDS against Israel, describing his new policy succinctly: “If you boycott against Israel, New York will boycott you.” Cuomo ordered the New York Office of General Services to compile a list of companies and groups that directly or indirectly through their subsidiaries participate in the BDS movement, pledging to divest all executive branch agencies and depts. from any listed organization.

In many states where lawmakers introduced anti-BDS measures, Palestinian solidarity activists launched opposition campaigns. One of these led Massachusetts state senator Cynthia Creem to withdraw an anti-BDS amendment from an unrelated economic bill on 7/14. Her amendment would have barred the state from doing business with people and commercial enterprises that engage in BDS against Israel.

**AFRICA**

The Israeli govt. launched a major diplomatic offensive in Africa this quarter that contrasted starkly with its relative isolation in the international community. In early 7/2016, Netanyahu led a delegation to several sub-Saharan countries—Uganda, Kenya, Rwanda, and Ethiopia—aimed at improving diplomatic and commercial ties. At the same time, Israel initiated a $13 m. aid package to strengthen economic ties and cooperation with African countries, providing them with training in “domestic security” and health, according to Netanyahu’s office (Al Jazeera, 7/4). Later, Guinea and Israel reestablished (7/20) diplomatic relations, and reports surfaced that Chad was planning to do the same.

**MIDDLE EAST QUARTET**

The Middle East Quartet published its long-awaited report on obstacles to the 2-state solution and recommendations for restarting peace negotiations this quarter. Although rumored to include unprecedentedly harsh language about Israel, the final draft drew criticism from both Israeli and Palestinian officials, but led to no major advances in the diplomatic process.

As the quarter opened, the Quartet’s report was being delayed indefinitely by Israeli pressure to soften its allegedly harsh language. On 6/21, senior Israeli and Western diplomats said that Netanyahu was undertaking last-minute efforts to further soften the language. Other Israeli officials were reportedly worried (6/21) that the Quartet intended to use the report as the basis for a UN Security Council (UNSC) res. targeting Israel.
The final draft of the report was published on 7/1 after 2 days of pronounced violence in the oPt (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). The draft highlighted various steps that have obstructed a 2-state solution, including, but not limited to, so-called Palestinian incitement and Israeli settlement growth. Netanyahu’s office rejected (7/1) the report and any notion that Palestinian violence and Israeli settlement growth might be related. “We regret the failure of the Quartet to address the real core of the conflict: the persistent Palestinian refusal to recognize Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people in any boundaries,” the statement read. The Palestinian response was similarly negative: the PA suspended cooperation with the Quartet, according to a report in al-Hayat on 7/5, and Abbas encouraged (7/6) the UNSC to reject the report, arguing that it was “unfit for the task of peace.”

GREAT BRITAIN

The Palestinian leadership embarked on a new effort this quarter to achieve justice in the international legal system. At an Arab League summit on 7/20, FM Riyad al-Maliki announced that the PA intended to file a lawsuit against Great Britain over the 11/1917 Balfour Declaration, which signaled Britain’s support for a Jewish “homeland” in Palestine and eventually led to the Nakba. Abbas later called (7/24) for Arab states to back the effort. By the end of the quarter, however, it was unclear what sort of damages the Palestinians were seeking, and there were no further updates.

UNITED NATIONS

Leading up to the 40th session of the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization’s World Heritage Comm. in Istanbul on 7/10–20, the Palestinians and Jordanians put forward a res. concerning Israeli violations at Haram al-Sharif (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above for more on the violations). The draft accused Israel of “misconduct,” including “deliberate vandalism” at Muslim holy sites, and as it did not include any mention of Jewish ties to the site, the Israeli govt. mobilized against it. According to the Jerusalem Post (7/12), Israeli diplomats began pressuring France, the UK, and Germany in particular to oppose the res. Before the vote could take place, the comm. decided (7/17) to cut short the session in light of the failed Turkish coup on 7/15, pushing back a slew of World Heritage Comm. business to an ad hoc session on 10/24–26.

Also of note: Israeli amb. to the UN Danny Danon was elected to the Sixth Comm. of the UNGA in a secret ballot on 6/13, marking the 1st time an Israeli diplomat has ever taken charge of a permanent comm. at the UNGA. Because the Sixth Comm. focuses on legal questions, its program for the 10–11/2016 UNGA session was set to include work on “measures to eliminate international terrorism” and “the law of transboundary aquifers.”

DONORS

Scandals erupted in the realm of international aid this quarter. In 6/2016, Israeli forces had arrested Mohammad El Halabi, the Gaza director of the Christian charity World Vision. El Halabi was interrogated for over 50 days, and after they extracted confessions from him, the Israeli authorities accused (8/4) him of diverting $43 m. to Hamas’s military wing. World Vision CEO Kevin Jenkins responded with a statement (8/8) that his organization’s Gaza budget had been around $22.5 m. over the course of the previous 10 years, so it was very unlikely El
Halabi had committed the alleged crimes. As the international community criticized Israel for cracking down on an aid group, Israel’s Shin Bet announced (8/9) that a UN Development Programme (UNDP) employee in Gaza, Wahid Abdullah, had been arrested (7/3) for transporting 300 tons of rubble from a UNDP site to a Hamas site on orders from a Hamas official. The UNDP mounted a less aggressive defense of its employee, stating (8/9) that it had “robust measures in place to ensure that the rubble . . . goes to its intended purpose,” and that it would “cooperate fully with the authorities in this matter.”

Meanwhile, international pledges of support for the Palestinians continued to come in. The EU announced (6/5) a €15.0 m. (approx. $17 m.) contribution to the PA for the payment of 5/2016 salaries and pensions, and provided (6/23) €154,000 (approx. $173,725) to support farmers and agriculture in the West Bank. At a ceremony on 6/14, an EU delegation marked the end of the 1st stage of construction on an EU-funded water desalination plant in Dayr al-Balah (Gaza), where work began in 3/2014. The EU officials also pledged an additional €10 m. (approximately $13.7 m.) for the 2d phase of construction, allowing the plant to double the amount of water processed daily from 6,000 to 12,000 m³. Meanwhile, the World Bank announced transfers of $55 m. (6/28) and $30 m. (7/12) for Palestinian development in the oPt and for the PA’s budget needs, including macroeconomic and public financial management reforms.

Further support came through UNRWA. In particular, the U.S. pledged $51.6 m. (6/30), $68 m. (7/15), and $25 m. (7/26) to the agency’s 2016 oPt and Syria emergency appeals, and for schools in Jordan, respectively. UNRWA also announced major pledges from Austria (€1 m. or approximately $1.1 m.) and Denmark (DKK 30 m. or approximately $4.46 m.) on 7/28 and 7/1.

There was no meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Comm. this quarter.

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

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

Two major organizations lent their support to the BDS movement this quarter. On 8/1, the Black Lives Matter movement, a coalition of over 50 antiracism activist groups across the U.S., published its 1st-ever platform of policy positions, including several on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The platform described Israel as an “apartheid state” and endorsed BDS. The following week, Canada’s Green Party endorsed (8/8) BDS at its convention in Ottawa. In a related development, Dutch FM Bert Koenders asserted (5/26) that the Dutch people had a right to deploy BDS in line with their rights to freedom of speech and assembly.

BOYCOTT

The push for an academic boycott of Israel suffered a significant setback this quarter when the largest academic organization yet to propose boycotting Israeli academic institutions failed to garner enough votes to do so. In 11/2015, at their annual business meeting in Denver, mbrs. of the American Anthropological Association decided to hold an organization-wide referendum on a boycott of Israeli academic
institutions. At the business meeting, those in favor of the referendum had outnumbered those against (1040–136). The results of the vote came in this quarter: with an unprecedented participation rate of almost 51%, the AAA rejected (6/7) the proposed boycott by a 39-vote margin—2,423 votes against and 2,384 in favor.

DIVESTMENT

The campaign to divest from companies deemed complicit in the Israeli occupation advanced among North American Christian communities. The Mennonite Church Canada Assembly, representing more than 225 congregations across Canada, overwhelmingly approved (7/9–10) a res. calling on the church’s general board, regional churches, and 31,000 mbrs. to avoid investing in companies that “do business with Israeli settlements and the IDF.” Later, the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved (8/13–14) resolutions calling on the U.S. govt. to end all financial and military aid to Israel until Israel “compl[ies] with internationally recognized human rights standards” and freezes settlement construction on occupied Palestinian land. The res. further requested that the church adopt an investment screen to avoid profiting from Israel’s occupation.

Two mos. after New York University’s graduate student union approved (4/22) a res. calling on the school and its United Automobile Workers (UAW) affiliate to divest from all Israeli state institutions (see JPS 45 [4]), the UAW parent union repealed the decision during the week of 6/20. Reportedly, some mbrs. of the graduate student union had appealed the initial res. on the grounds that it violated their bylaws, specifically the pledge “to maintain free relations with other organizations,” and they had allies in the national office (Jerusalem Post, 6/23).