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: Neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis make any effort to resume peace negotiations this quarter. The Palestinians work with the outgoing U.S. admin. on a new UN Security Council (UNSC) res. condemning Israeli settlements; and the Israelis liaise with incoming U.S. pres. Donald Trump on a new regional peace approach to Middle East peace. Before Trump takes office and begins backpedaling on his pledge to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, U.S. scty. of state John Kerry lays out 6 principles for a Palestinian-Israeli peace deal, and the French govt. hosts what is touted as an international peace conference in Paris. Meanwhile, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu continues his efforts to marginalize the Palestinian minority and his political opponents in Israel, to placate the right-wing elements of his ruling coalition upset about the evacuation of Amona, an illegal settlement outpost. Settler leaders and their allies in the Knesset use their leverage to pass a sweeping new bill retroactively authorizing illegal settlement outposts.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

As protests, random attacks, and resistance activities in the West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza continued to subside, this quarter the world’s attention turned to Washington, where outgoing U.S. pres. Barack Obama handed over to pres.-elect Trump. Ending mos. of speculation about a last-minute, surprise push on the peace process, the Obama admin. allowed the passage of UNSCR 2334 condemning Israel’s illegal settlement-building by abstaining from the vote. Secy. of State Kerry presented his vision for a final peace agreement, and the U.S. also participated in a peace conference in Paris, which failed to attract Israeli support or do anything to alter the status quo. While these moves may have exacerbated tensions in the Obama-Netanyahu relationship, Israel’s govt. appeared content to wait for
Trump’s advent to usher in an era of closer U.S.-Israeli relations, as promised by the then candidate during his campaign.

The Netanyahu govt. continued undermining political opponents, including the Palestinian minority, and cracking down on the waning unrest in the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). The Israeli govt. lifted restraints on settlement growth as soon as Trump took office, and also resumed preliminary efforts to negotiate a prisoner swap with Hamas.

THE END OF THE OBAMA ERA

Trump’s election on 11/8 had little effect on the stream of rumors and leaks alleging that the Obama White House was considering a final policy initiative on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Prior to the U.S. abstention on the UNSC vote in 12/2016, senior admin. officials would not be drawn out on the specifics of the debate inside the White House.

U.S. amb. to Israel Dan Shapiro said (11/23) that the admin. remained committed to a negotiated 2-state solution and reaffirmed Obama’s view that the status quo, with Israeli settlements gradually consuming more and more Palestinian land, was “unsustainable.” Secy. Kerry told (11/29) Women’s Foreign Policy Group conferees that there was no way to “force-feed” Israelis and Palestinians a peace agreement, referencing “other things we can do” to work toward a 2-state solution. Off the record, officials were more forthcoming about developments behind the scenes. On 11/16, a senior White House staff mbr. said that Obama was weighing several options, including a major policy speech and support for a UNSC res. condemning Israel’s settlements. The official also noted that the Palestinian leadership had taken steps to reduce alleged incitement in response to U.S. complaints, while the Israeli govt. had done nothing to curb settlement growth.

Early in 12/2016, an Israel Army Radio host explicitly asked (12/1) U.S. amb. Shapiro what the Obama admin. would do in the event of a UNSC measure such as the one the Palestinians and their allies had been pursuing throughout most of 2016 (see JPS 45 [3] – 46 [2]). Reiterating the admin.’s standard position, Shapiro stated, “We will always oppose unilateral proposals,” prompting speculation about the Obama admin.’s definition of “unilateral.” That same day, unnamed U.S. officials told the Associated Press that internal discussions of a UNSC res. or major policy speech had died down after Trump’s election and that Obama practically ruled out any last-minute effort to avoid another high-profile conflict with Netanyahu.

U.S. Abstention at the UNSC

At the UN, meanwhile, Palestinians and their allies were working on a draft res. condemning Israeli settlement building. The same day that Palestinian Authority (PA) FM Riyad al-Maliki confirmed (11/28) that the Palestinians planned to submit the measure imminently, Netanyahu said he expected Obama to oppose any new UNSC initiative. Res. efforts continued gaining momentum, however, and not just among the Palestinians’ closest allies.

New Zealand began circulating its own draft res. to other mbrs. of the UNSC in early 12/2016, the final mo. of its 2-year term on the council (Jerusalem Post, 12/11). The measure called for a “firm timetable” to return to negotiations, an end to Israel’s settlement enterprise and alleged Palestinian incitement, and for preventing either side from setting “preconditions” on talks. New Zealand’s envoys had raised the possibility of a UNSC res. in 4/2016 and 10/2016 (see JPS 44 [4] and 45 [2]).
to no avail. This quarter’s action followed on a conversation on the subject between FM Murray McCully and Kerry in Wellington on 11/13, after which McCully met with Jordanian, Palestinian, and Israeli leaders on a trip to the region in 11/2016. When news of the New Zealand draft res. broke on 12/11, Israeli amb. to the UN Danny Danon condemned the initiative. “New Zealand is leaving the UNSC and they have a desire to do something,” he said. “I told them that we will remain here with the Palestinians after [12/2016], and that it is important that everything that is done be constructive and not give the Palestinians encouragement to go to the international community rather than talk to us.”

The New Zealand initiative encouraged the Palestinians to make their move. The PA sent a delegation led by Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) secy.-gen. Saeb Erekat to Washington to discuss the possibility of a UNSC res. condemning Israel’s settlement enterprise a week after the Brookings Institution published (12/4) a survey showing that almost half of the U.S. population would support the Obama admin. backing such a res. The delegation sought to draft a res. the Obama admin. could get behind and built on a draft that Washington had vetoed in 2/2011, according to the Jerusalem Post (see Doc. A4 in JPS 40 [3]). Prior to their trip, a Western diplomat had stated (12/10), “If the Palestinians act wisely and rationally they have a chance.” After the Palestinians met with U.S. officials in Washington on 12/12 and 12/13, however, neither party mentioned the UNSC, and a State Dept. spokesperson stated (12/13) that “nothing’s changed about our view on [the subject].”

A week later, Egyptian diplomats formally presented (12/21) the UNSC with a draft res. expressing “grave concern” about Israel’s settlement activities; condemning all measures “aimed at altering the demographic composition, character, and status” of the oPt; and calling for “affirmative steps to be taken immediately to reverse the negative trends,” including settlement growth. The UNSC then scheduled a vote for 12/22, sparking 24 hours of frenzied diplomacy. After the White House and State Dept. chose not to comment on the draft, several diplomatic sources told NBC News that the Obama admin. was planning to abstain. Netanyahu quickly cleared his schedule to lobby the UNSC full-time. He reached out to pres.-elect Trump for help to block the initiative (Trump later issued a statement calling on Obama to oppose the res. and spoke with Egypt’s Pres. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi by phone). Following high-level contacts between Cairo and Tel Aviv, 2 unidentified Western diplomats were quoted as stating that the vote had been indefinitely postponed. One said (12/22) that Egypt “caved” to Israeli pressure. Danon, for his part, indicated that the UNSC affair was “not yet resolved.”

Israel’s seeming victory was short-lived. On 12/23, Reuters reported that 4 UNSC mbrs.—New Zealand, Venezuela, Malaysia, and Senegal—had given Egypt an ultimatum of just a few hours: if they didn’t call for a vote by 12/23, the report quoted them as saying, the 4 countries involved reserved the right to submit the draft themselves. The Palestinians endorsed the move and reportedly sent a message to Egypt expressing a “strong sense of disappointment” with the postponement. Egypt chose not to call for a vote, and the 4 UNSC mbrs. made good on their promise. They submitted the Egyptian draft themselves and called for a vote on 12/23.

The UNSC then passed Res. 2334 with 14 votes in favor and 1 abstention, by the U.S. Erekat declared (12/23) a “day of victory”;
PA pres. Mahmoud Abbas said (12/25) that although the res. did not “solve the Palestinian problem,” it “define[d]” it while Hamas leader Khalid Mishal asserted (12/25) that despite the fact that it was “not enough,” the res. gave the world a true picture of the situation with the settlements; U.S. amb. to the UN Samantha Power explained that the Obama admin. abstained because the draft was consistent with its views on Israel’s settlements. Meanwhile, Trump tweeted (12/23) that “things will be different after 1/20,” i.e., Inauguration Day.

Netanyahu and his govt. were apoplectic. One Israeli official had characterized (12/22) Obama’s rumored decision to abstain as a “diplomatic hit” against Israel, and Netanyahu released (12/23) a statement reiterating his conditional support for a 2-state solution and rejecting the UN res. He also accused Obama of “colluding” with “this gang-up” at the UNSC, and set in motion retaliatory measures against the countries supporting the res. These included ordering (12/23) Israel’s ambs. to New Zealand and Senegal to return to Jerusalem (there were no ambs. in Venezuela and Malaysia to recall); canceling (12/23) the Senegalese FM’s upcoming visit to Israel; and instructing (12/23) the Foreign Ministry to suspend all Israeli aid to Senegal.

As the Netanyahu govt. escalated its response to UNSCR 2334, Israeli officials echoed the PM’s accusations against the Obama admin. On 12/26, Israeli amb. to the U.S. Ron Dermer called it “a sad day and a shameful chapter in U.S.-Israeli relations,” adding that the Israeli govt. had collected evidence to substantiate Netanyahu’s accusations against Obama. “We will present this evidence to the [Trump admin.] through the appropriate channels,” he said, “and if they want to share it with the [U.S.] people, they are welcome to do it.” The next day, a document purporting to offer evidence that the Obama admin. had coordinated with the Palestinians was leaked to the Egyptian press: it described a meeting between Palestinian officials and Secy. Kerry and U.S. national security advisor Susan Rice in Washington in mid-12/2016. Supposedly, the officials told the Palestinians that the U.S. would not veto an anti-settlement res. if the wording was balanced. While confirming (12/27) that the meeting did take place, Erekat and U.S. State Dept. officials said that the leaked minutes were fabricated.

Meanwhile, UK officials all but took responsibility for organizing the anti-settlement res. Undermining Netanyahu’s accusations, on 12/29, a senior UK official said it was “in effect a British resolution.” The Guardian reported (12/28) that the UK “played a key behind-the-scenes role.” Weeks later, Foreign Secy. Boris Johnson confirmed (1/10) that the UK was “closely involved in drafting” the res., and that PM Theresa May’s govt. supported it “only because it contained new language pointing out the infamy of terrorism that Israel suffers every day” (see Chronology for details).

Although UNSCR 2334 provided no enforcement mechanisms and entailed no practical consequences for Israel, Tel Aviv wasted no time ramping up its retaliatory campaign over the following weeks. Netanyahu summoned (12/25) Shapiro for an explanation of the Obama admin.’s position; ordered (12/25) the Foreign Ministry to downgrade Israel’s relations with 12 of the countries that supported the res.; suspended (12/27) all development aid to Angola for its favorable stance; and permanently downgraded relations with Senegal and New Zealand by deciding not to return Israel’s ambs. to Dakar and Wellington (Times of Israel, 2/10). Furthermore, Israel’s UN mission announced (1/6) that the country was cutting $6 m. from its planned
2017 commitment to the UN, a sum claimed to represent the portion of Israel’s annual $40 m. pledge going to “anti-Israel bodies.” Meanwhile, Israeli DM Avigdor Lieberman ordered (12/25) the reduction of civil and diplomatic ties with the PA, a move that could affect West Bank infrastructure projects and measures to increase work permits for West Bank Palestinians.

Israel’s top officials were worried that the Obama admin. had further plans afoot. At the 1st cabinet meeting after the res.’s passage, they discussed (12/25) the possibility that Kerry might use the planned 1/2017 French peace conference as an opportunity to lay out his vision for a peace agreement and expressing concern that participants might codify his vision into another UNSC res. For their part, the Palestinians said they hoped to build on UNSCR 2334: Erekat indicated (12/26) that they were planning additional measures, including lawsuits at the International Criminal Court (ICC) as well as new efforts in other UN agencies and bodies.

The Obama Administration’s Parting Message

Hours after the UNSC passed Res. 2334, Kerry announced plans to “speak further to the vote . . . and share more detailed thoughts, drawn from the experience of the last several years, on the way ahead.” His statement was interpreted as confirming rumors that Obama intended for Kerry to present the conclusions his admin. had drawn from the failed attempt at peace talks in late 2013 and early 2014 (see JPS 43 [3, 4]).

As the date (12/28) of the speech approached, U.S. diplomats worked behind the scenes to make sure Kerry’s presentation would have the desired effect. On 12/27, Russia’s FM Sergey Lavrov reportedly rejected Kerry’s request for the Middle East Quartet (the U.S., EU, UN, and Russia) to adopt the principles he planned to present. Meanwhile, State Dept. officials clarified (12/27) that the Obama admin. was not planning any further action at the UNSC based on Kerry’s speech.

From the State Dept. podium in Washington, Kerry reiterated (12/28) many of the Obama admin.’s positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, criticizing both Israeli settlement growth and alleged Palestinian incitement. Kerry focused on the settlements, citing the so-called Regulations Bill percolating through the Knesset (see “Settlement Fracas,” below) and identifying settlement growth as the main obstacles to a 2-state solution. Kerry concluded by laying out 6 principles for a hypothetical final-status agreement: internationally recognized borders based on the pre-1967 borders; 2 states with mutual recognition and equal rights for all citizens; a “just, agreed, fair, and realistic solution” for Palestinian refugees; Jerusalem as the capital of both states, with freedom of access to holy sites; an end to the Israeli occupation; and a res. for all outstanding claims and normalized relations under the Arab Peace Initiative (see JPS 31 [4]).

The response to Kerry’s speech was expectedly mixed. Netanyahu called (12/28) it a “big disappointment” and reiterated his desire for Israel-U.S. relations to improve under Trump. He also called on the Obama admin. to block any effort at the UN to adopt the Kerry principles. Trump himself tweeted (12/28), “Stay strong, Israel, [1/20] is approaching fast.” Abbas welcomed (12/28) the speech and reiterated his terms for restarting peace talks with the Israelis: freeze settlement growth, release the prisoners that were supposed to be freed in connection with the last round of talks in 3–4/2014, and uphold previous agreements. Finally, U.S. dep. national security advisor Ben Rhodes repeated (12/29) that the Obama admin. had no plans to introduce the Kerry
principles into a new UN measure, allowing the focus to shift to a planned peace conference in Paris in 1/2017.

**Peace Conference in Paris**

A French initiative to gather the international community with a view to resuming Israeli-Palestinian peace talks concluded this quarter. Announced in early 2015 by then-FM Laurent Fabius (see *JPS* 44 [4]–46 [1]), the aims of the conference were scuttled by Netanyahu’s persistent refusal to participate, Washington’s lack of enthusiasm, and the uncertainty introduced by Trump’s election to the U.S. presidency.

On 11/17, Pres. François Hollande stated, “The chances to hold the peace conference in Paris are not good,” and a Western official related that (11/20) Hollande had decided to freeze the initiative. State Dept. officials were “not enthusiastic about the idea,” and “believed nothing would come out of it due to its nature and Israel’s refusal to attend.” Although French officials denied (11/20) the report and the French govt. set 12/21 as a date for the summit, a sense of pessimism shrouded their plans.

Hollande then tried to sidestep the issues plaguing the initiative, inviting Abbas and Netanyahu to a tripartite summit as a follow-on to the conference, according to a senior Israeli official on 12/6. Hollande reportedly hoped to present them with the conclusions of the conference and recommendations from the working groups formed at the previous conference on 6/3/2016 (see *JPS* 46 [1]). Netanyahu rejected Hollande’s invitation (12/7), offering to meet with Abbas only if Hollande canceled the conference, but Hollande demurred. A week later, Palestinian amb. to France Salman al-Herfi said that the French had postponed the conference until at least 1/2017.

French FM Jean-Marc Ayrault then set 1/15 as a new date.

In the wake of UNSCR 2334’s passage and Kerry’s speech delineating his 6 principles, Netanyahu shifted from a passive rejection of French efforts to a more active stance. Fearing another UNSC res. or even formal sanction, he told (1/13) several Israeli ambs. that there were “strong signals” that the 1/15 conference might be followed up by another UNSC res. or a Quartet statement. The following week, he said (1/8) that Israeli diplomats were making “very big efforts” at preventing those outcomes.

Reps. from more than 70 countries, including the U.S., gathered in Paris on 1/15. After reportedly intense negotiations, the conferees unanimously agreed to a joint declaration calling on both the Palestinians and Israelis to officially restate their commitment to a 2-state solution, and to demonstrate this commitment through policies and actions, including welcoming the prospect of closer cooperation between the Quartet and the Arab League, and agreeing to meet again within a year with a view to “advancing the 2-state solution through negotiations.” Kerry called Netanyahu in the middle of the conference to describe his efforts aimed at softening the final statement’s wording. According to sources close to the negotiations, the concluding statement was therefore more timid than some participants would have liked.

The follow-up efforts feared by the Israelis never came to pass. A senior diplomat reportedly approached Kerry before the conference to ask if he would be willing to bring the joint declaration to the UNSC for adoption, but the U.S. diplomat declined, opting instead to build consensus on the principles he presented on 12/28 (*Haaretz*, 1/20).

Furthermore, the UK blocked the EU’s Foreign Affairs Council from adopting the joint
declaration on 1/16. PM May sent only low-level diplomats to the 1/15 conference, reportedly as a gesture of solidarity with Trump, whose inauguration was only 5 days away. A UK spokesperson also explained their decision not to sign onto the joint declaration, saying that London had “particular reservations” since neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis had attended.

**Settlement Fracas**

As the quarter opened, Israeli settlers and their allies in the Knesset were increasingly agitated about the evacuation and demolition of the Amona settlement outpost, which the High Court of Justice had ordered to commence by 12/25. In the interests of strengthening and expanding the overall settlement enterprise, they explored numerous means of delaying or averting the order. But as the Obama admin. ratcheted up anti-settlement rhetoric in its final mos. (see “U.S. Abstention at the UNSC” and “The Obama Administration’s Parting Message” above). Netanyahu persuaded them to delay their efforts until a friendlier U.S. admin. was in place.

At the very end of the previous quarter, on 11/14, Israel’s High Court of Justice had reaffirmed its evacuation and demolition order regarding Amona, on the grounds that the illegal settlement outpost was built on private Palestinian land. In response, key settlement partisans, including Education Min. Naftali Bennett and Justice Min. Ayelet Shaked, had secured the support of Kulanu party chair Moshe Kahlon to compel the Knesset to pass (11/16) the 1st reading of their so-called Regulations Bill. The measure retroactively legalized all 232 West Bank settlement outposts (including Amona)—established with the state’s involvement despite their so-called illegality—and called for compensating Palestinian landowners by paying them 125% of the govt. assessed value of their land.

The settlers’ strength in the Knesset put Netanyahu in a difficult position as Jewish Home Knesset mbrs. (MKs) held 8 of the coalition’s slim 61-seat majority. The PM could neither afford to reject their demands, if it meant replacing Jewish Home party seats, nor could he give in to them without risking a severe backlash from the international community. Further complicating the situation, Israel’s Atty. Gen. Avichai Mandelblit repeatedly pledged not to defend the bill on the govt.’s behalf should it be passed and then challenged at the High Court.

After mos. of deliberations and delays, Netanyahu appeared to settle the issue on 12/4. First, he obtained Mandelblit’s approval for a plan to relocate the 40-odd families living in Amona to a nearby plot of “abandoned” land. Second, he announced that he would petition the High Court of Justice for a 30-day stay of execution on the evacuation order to give the govt. time to prepare alternative housing for Amona’s residents. Third, he brokered a deal between Bennett and Kahlon on the Regulations Bill, removing Clause 7 that specifically addressed Amona (the bill would still retroactively authorize approximately 4,000 settler residences). The new draft passed a preliminary reading in the Knesset on 12/5 and its 1st reading on 12/7.

In decoupling Amona from the bill, Netanyahu was able to gain both time and political cover. On 12/7, Bennett declared that the Knesset would not move on the bill until Trump came into office and an Israeli govt. source confirmed his statement (12/22) by saying that Netanyahu had placed a hold on all “controversial” legislation until Trump took over.

As a result, the political focus in Israel shifted away from the Regulations Bill to the Amona outpost. Opposing the deal and accusing (12/5)
Bennett of “folding,” Amona’s residents refused the govt.’s offer to move them to a nearby plot of vacant land and started stockpiling supplies for a potential conflict with demolition crews. Meanwhile, the Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) Yesh Din was working to avert the govt.’s relocation plan, helping 4 Palestinians who had fled the proposed site in 1967 to advance their ownership claims through the courts on 12/5.

Bennett announced a breakthrough on 12/12. He said that he had reached a new deal with Netanyahu that would allow the residents of Amona to “remain on their hilltop,” despite Yesh Din’s legal moves to block the relocation plan. Some of the settlers would be given temporary permits to live on the new land, with options to renew every 2 years, and all residents would receive compensation equal to the value of their homes if they signed a formal pledge to leave Amona in peace. Although some of Amona’s residents said (12/13) they were tentatively hopeful, the community as a whole voted (12/14) against the deal, fearing that the relocation plan could get bogged down in the courts. After Netanyahu appeased the right-wing mbrs. of his coalition by advancing (12/15) demolition orders for Palestinian homes in East Jerusalem and hundreds of settlers flocked (12/16) to Amona to join protests against the evacuation, Amona’s leaders and govt. officials worked out a new agreement (12/18). In exchange for a 1-mo. stay on the High Court’s demolition order, Amona’s residents accepted a plan (12/18) that would allow 24 of the 40-odd families to relocate to nearby plots of land, up from the 12 provided for under the previous deal.

Yesh Din then filed (12/19) a motion with Israel’s Custodian of Absentee Property insisting on the illegality of the relocation plan, and the Palestinian mayor of Silwad, a village close to Amona, reaffirmed that Palestinian landowners had claimed the land while the Israeli govt. proceeded with the compromise deal worked out with Bennett. The High Court of Justice then approved (12/21) the govt.’s request for a 45-day postponement and called on Amona’s residents to file a formal pledge to evacuate their homes without violence or any other forms of resistance, which they delivered on 12/22. As the 12/25 Amona demolition deadline approached, the govt. explored other options, including moving Amona’s residents to the Ofra settlement, but none materialized.

TRUMP ERA BEGINS

Both during the campaign and in the post-election transition period, Trump made numerous conflicting and hyperbolic statements on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He pledged to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, promised to usher in a new era of friendlier relations with Israel, offered Israel stronger diplomatic cover internationally, and said he would “love to be the one who made peace with Israel and the Palestinians,” calling it a “great achievement.” Although his 1st term in office was not even 1 mo. old by the time this quarter ended, Trump had already started backpedaling on at least 1 of those promises. His admin.’s consistent pro-Israel and prosettlement rhetoric and appointments, however, signaled significant departures from long-standing U.S. policy.

Settlement Growth and the Future of the Two-State Solution

Trump was sworn in as the 45th pres. of the U.S. on 1/20 in front of a crowd of thousands of supporters outside the Capitol Building in Washington, including a number of Israeli settler leaders who flew into the U.S. especially for the occasion.
Two days after the inauguration, Trump and Netanyahu had their 1st official phone call. Trump invited the Israeli PM to come to Washington in early 2/2017 and said that “peace between Israel and the Palestinians can only be negotiated directly between the parties,” echoing his interlocutor’s position vis-à-vis efforts to internationalize the peace negotiations. The PM’s office described the conversation as “very warm,” perhaps a veiled allusion to the starkly contrasting chilly Obama-Netanyahu relationship, and the White House later announced that Trump would welcome Netanyahu in Washington on 2/15.

Ultranationalist Israeli lawmakers were enthusiastic about working with a U.S. pres. who appeared ready to support their efforts. In addition to resuming work on the Regulations Bill (see “The ‘Regulations’ Bill” below), they also began talking about annexing the Ma’ale Adumim settlement bloc. Netanyahu cautioned (1/20) Bennett against pushing for a vote on such a move, reportedly warning the education min. that Trump’s advisors had told him to avoid unilateral steps until after the 2/15 meeting.

Nevertheless, short of formally annexing West Bank settlements, over the following weeks Netanyahu ceded ground to Bennett and his pro-settler cohort. Netanyahu promised (1/22) to lift political restrictions on settlement construction in East Jerusalem if Bennett and his allies agreed to postpone the Ma’ale Adumim vote. The Jerusalem Municipality then advanced (1/22) plans for 566 new settler residences across East Jerusalem and 153 residences (1/26) in the Gilo settlement. On 1/22, a group of Likud MKs pressed him on the question of a 2-state solution. “What I’m willing to give the Palestinians is not exactly a country with all the powers,” he responded, “but a ‘state-minus’ and that’s why the Palestinians don’t agree [to it].” He also warned them that positive relations with a Trump-led U.S. were not guaranteed, despite the new U.S. pres.’s support for Israel. “The diplomatic issue is a very important subject, presenting opportunities that could easily be squandered by thoughtless actions,” he said. “In this reality, it is easily possible to lose the moment and to turn the relationship in a direction that would not serve Israel’s aims.”

Netanyahu then tested his own proposition. He and Lieberman approved (1/24) the planning and construction of 2,500 new residences in West Bank settlements, including 10 in Beit El, located outside major settlement blocs. When the Trump admin. did not join the chorus of criticism and condemnation by the rest of the international community, he and Lieberman approved (1/31) another 3,000 settler residences, including 2,000 to begin immediate construction. The 2d announcement on 1/26 elicited the 1st official statement on the issue of settlements by the Trump White House. Press Secy. Sean Spicer said (2/2), “While we don’t believe the existence of settlements is an impediment to peace, the construction of new settlements or the expansion of existing settlements beyond their current borders may not be helpful in achieving that goal.” He added, “The Trump admin. has not taken an official position on settlement activity and looks forward to continuing discussions, including with PM Netanyahu when he visits with Pres. Trump [on 2/15].”

Although the Israeli govt. made no more major settlement announcements through the end of the quarter, Israeli officials did try to control the narrative leading up to the 2/15 meeting. Danon attempted (2/3) to downplay Spicer’s statement, saying that it was not a “U-turn,” and that what Spicer really meant was simply “wait until the [2/15] meeting.”
A spokesperson for the Yesha Council, a settlement umbrella organization, took a different tack, thanking the White House for “asserting that our communities were never an impediment to peace” and saying, “We look forward to working closely with our friends in the new Trump admin. to build a brighter future for all.” Later, Haaretz reported on a growing movement among right-wing Israeli politicians to push Netanyahu to use Trump’s election to abandon the 2-state solution entirely. Public Security Min. Gilad Erdan (Likud) declared, “We have a historical opportunity to begin a new era” and “no one [in Israel’s cabinet] thinks that in the next few years a Palestinian state is something that, God forbid, might and should happen.” Pres. Reuven Rivlin chimed in, calling for the Israeli govt. to annex all the West Bank and to give its Palestinian residents full Israeli citizenship (see “Neither Two States nor One” by Seth Anziska, also in this issue).

Days before the 2/15 meeting, Trump elaborated on his position in an interview with the pro-Netanyahu Israeli newspaper Israel HaYom. He called on Israel to “act reasonably,” said he did not believe “that advancing settlements is good for peace,” and announced that his team was “examining a number of options.” Days later, a senior U.S. official said that achieving an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement was high on Trump’s list of priorities, but that the 2-state solution was ill-defined and Trump would not limit the parties to it. “We’re looking at the 2 sides to come together to make peace,” the official said. “We’re not going to dictate what the terms of peace will be.”

When Trump met with Netanyahu, though, he shifted the U.S. position closer to Israel’s right wing. Although he reiterated that both sides would need to make concessions to reach a final agreement and said he would like to see Netanyahu “hold back on settlements for a little bit,” Trump stated that he was “looking at 2 states or 1 state” and that he “like[d] the one that both parties like,” but that he could “live with either one.” Netanyahu responded to Trump’s break with long-standing U.S. policy, saying that he preferred to deal with the “substance” of the situation, rather than “labels.” The 2 leaders discussed a “regional” approach to peace that would “take in many, many countries” and be “a terrific thing,” according to Trump.

**THE **“**REGULATIONS**” BILL**

With Trump ensconced in the White House after 1/20, the Knesset’s pro-settler contingent revived the so-called Regulations Bill. Netanyahu, however, was less enthusiastic this time around, apparently harboring 2d thoughts about the bill after the passage of UNSCR 2334, according to senior Israeli officials (1/10). On 1/9, Lieberman said, “It seems the law will not be passed,” and the PM confirmed the speculation at a weekly cabinet meeting on 1/22, arguing that the bill could lead to more international blowback against Israel and that it would be “irresponsible” to pursue it further.

Despite his efforts to amend and delay the bill, the same bloc of Jewish Home and Likud MKs that had forced Netanyahu’s hand earlier again pressed him to advance the bill (see JPS 46 [2]). The Knesset ultimately passed the bill into law on 2/6 by a slim majority: 60 votes in favor and 52 against. The law retroactively authorized settlements built “in good faith or at the state’s instruction” on privately owned Palestinian land, thereby allowing the govt. to deny Palestinian landowners the right to claim or retake possession of land being used for settlements or outposts “until there is a diplomatic resolution to the status of [the West Bank].”
Netanyahu briefed the Trump admin. prior to the vote, and although U.S. officials reportedly pushed for the vote to be delayed until after the 2/15 meeting, the Trump admin. opted not to comment on the bill. The Palestinians, the international community, and human rights groups, however, formally protested and criticized the bill. Erekat said (2/6) that it was “overdue time to stop treating Israel as a state above the law,” and Abbas indicated (2/7) that the Palestinian leadership would challenge the law in international courts. A group of Palestinian municipalities and human rights groups jointly petitioned (2/8) Israel’s High Court of Justice to annul the law. The Israeli NGO Peace Now also promised (2/6) to challenge it at the High Court. Mandelblit was reportedly considering (2/7) arguing against it at the High Court instead of taking the side of the govt. The EU postponed (2/7) a planned 2/28 EU-Israel summit indefinitely after several mbr. states reportedly opposed holding the meeting.

**AMONA EVACUATION**

On 1/22, a little over 2 weeks before the court-ordered demolition of their homes that was delayed to 2/8, the residents of Amona sent a letter to Netanyahu and Bennett informing them that they were retracting their pledge to evacuate peacefully because the govt. had reneged on its side of the 12/18 compromise (see above). The High Court backed the govt.’s decision, ordering (1/23) a temporary suspension of the relocation plan while the Palestinian claims on the relocation site were litigated.

With chances for a peaceful compromise erased, tensions and the possibility of a violent confrontation grew. After mobilizing several battalions for the demolition operation, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) ordered (1/31) Amona’s residents to leave their homes within 48 hours. Hundreds of settler youths gathered at Amona over the next 2 days and clashed with the IDF troops sent to evacuate the outpost overnight on 2/1. Approximately 9 of the 40-odd families left peacefully, but 24 Israeli soldiers and 2 protesters were injured, and 13 settlers were arrested. Meanwhile, Netanyahu announced (2/1) that he had taken preliminary steps to establish an entirely new settlement to house the settlers by the end of 3/2017. The Amona community voted to accept his plan, even though some settlers continued to defy the IDF with violence (8 more IDF soldiers were injured during the takeover of the outpost’s barricaded synagogue on 2/2). Later, the settlers voted (2/8) to move temporarily to the Geulat Tzion settlement outpost in the Shiloh settlement bloc.

**Moving the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem**

By moving its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, the U.S. would effectively convey its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, undermining Palestinian claims to the city, and stoking tensions across the Middle East. Previous presidents, including George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, had also promised to relocate the embassy during their electoral campaigns, but each abandoned the notion upon taking office and gaining a better understanding of the move’s implications. Like his predecessors, Trump demonstrated his pro-Israel bona fides on the campaign trail and during his transition period by pledging to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem but as soon as he took office, talk of relocating the embassy ended (see “The Ownership of the U.S. Embassy Site in Jerusalem” in JPS 29 [4] for more on this issue).

Trump’s change of mind began almost simultaneously with his move into the White House. On 1/22, after Trump’s call with
Netanyahu, Spicer said that the admin. was “at the very beginning stages of even discussing” the move. The next day, he said, “There’s no decision yet.”

Meanwhile, the Palestinians and their allies in the Middle East were frantically working to dissuade Trump from following through on his promise. Pres. Abbas met with Jordan’s King Abdullah in Amman on 1/22, and they agreed to “take a number of measures” if the embassy was relocated, according to the Palestine News Agency. Fatah Central Comm. mbr. Nasser al-Qudwa said (1/23) that the Palestinians might downgrade relations with the U.S. if the relocation took place. “In addition to that,” he added, “there is the issue of the Palestinian political rep.’s office in Washington. It would be necessary to close [it].” According to reports, Abbas (1/25) personally sent Trump a missive on the matter, and the Palestinians pressured Russia, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and the EU into sending Trump similar messages, urging him to hold off. Erekat said (1/26) that the Palestinians had decided on a course of action whereby they would revoke the PLO’s 1993 recognition of Israel; annul previous agreements with Israel—putting the Israeli govt. in the position of administering services in the West Bank and Gaza; and call on the UN to suspend Israel’s membership.

On the Israeli side, talk of a proposed embassy move was equally disruptive. Although many Israeli lawmakers supported the move, the cochair of the Israel branch of [U.S.] Republicans Overseas, Marc Zell, said (1/28) that Trump was “proceeding cautiously because of concerns raised by Israeli officials.” However, Netanyahu rejected (1/29) Zell’s comments and reaffirmed that he wanted to see the U.S. Embassy move to Jerusalem.

Although Trump himself continued to be noncommittal on the subject, concern was palpable on the part of the Palestinians and others. Abdullah flew to Washington for an unscheduled visit in early 2/2017 to meet with Trump and help slow or halt the embassy move. In its coverage of the trip, the New York Times reported (2/9) that senior White House advisor and Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner had been meeting with reps. of various Arab states in 1–2/2017, and that he had come to favor an “outside-in” approach to dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict—a reference to Netanyahu’s preferred strategy of privileging Israeli relations with Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt and sidelining the Palestinians. Since this strategy would require friendly relations between Israel, the U.S., Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries, Abdullah’s plea reportedly carried additional weight with the Trump admin.

By the end of the quarter it was unclear where Trump stood on the issue, but al-Quds reported (2/11) that the incoming admin. had communicated to the PA that he was seriously considering not moving the embassy.

Sideline the Palestinians

The Palestinians were further distressed by Trump’s pledge to move the U.S. Embassy to Jerusalem because of the incoming admin.’s lack of communication with them in the weeks following the inauguration. In an interview with Newsweek on 1/31, Erekat said that the Palestinians sent many messages to Trump admin. officials, including Kushner, whom Trump had appointed to oversee the Middle East peace dossier, but “they don’t even bother to respond to us. . . . I don’t know [Kushner]. I don’t know any of them.” Furthermore, Trump’s rep. for international negotiations, Jason Greenblatt, told (2/3) a group of Palestinian businessmen that the Trump admin. had no intention of engaging with the
Palestinians until after Trump’s meeting with Netanyahu on 2/15.

Despite the lack of official contact, Western and Arab diplomatic sources said (2/1) that the Trump admin. had made clear to the Palestinians that if they filed lawsuits in international courts against Israel in response to settlement growth, the embassy relocation, or any other move, the U.S. would retaliate with measures that could include the closure of the PLO office in Washington and a suspension of aid. The Trump admin. was also preparing an executive order, titled “Auditing and Reducing U.S. Funding of International Organizations,” which would suspend U.S. funding to the UN or any other international organizations that gave full membership to the PA or PLO, as well as programs that funded abortion or circumvented sanctions against Iran and North Korea (New York Times, 1/25). The order also called for at least a 40% reduction in U.S. aid to international bodies such as the ICC, and the establishment of a comm. to implement those cuts.

Following the Abdullah-Trump meeting on 2/2, the tenor of relations changed. PA FM al-Maliki indicated (2/6) that preliminary talks between Trump admin. officials and the PA had taken place in recent days, and that the U.S. reps. intended to initiate a formal dialogue. PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj then led a delegation of Palestinian officials to Washington for face-to-face talks with Trump admin. officials on 2/8 and 2/9. PA sources said (2/10) that it was a “very important 1st step” and a “serious dialogue.” Upon his return, Faraj was reportedly able to relay reassuring messages to Abbas about Trump’s position on the settlements, the 2-state solution, and the embassy move. The PA pres. then met with new CIA dir. Mike Pompeo in Ramallah on 2/14.

As Faraj returned to the PA capital, the Trump admin. made an unexpected and potentially antagonistic move vis-à-vis the Palestinians. U.S. amb. to the UN Nikki Haley released a statement (2/10) saying that the U.S. was “disappointed” by the UN’s proposed appointment of former PA PM Salam Fayyad to lead the UN political mission in Libya. Signaling the Trump admin.’s intention to block the appointment, Haley wrote that the UN had been “unfairly biased in favor of the PA for too long.” Rather than cite specific objections to Fayyad, Haley merely referred to him as a Palestinian national and a rep. of the Palestinian people. Fayyad, who is widely respected in UN circles, was held in high regard by the U.S., UK, and other Western govts. when he served as PM from 2007 to 2013. The UNSC then released (2/11) a statement criticizing Haley and stating that Fayyad’s appointment was “solely based on [his] recognized personal qualities and his competence for that position.” The PLO called (2/11) Haley’s statement a “case of blatant discrimination on the basis of national identity.”

PERSECUTING THE PALESTINIAN MINORITY AND OTHER OPPONENTS

In the final week of the quarter, Netanyahu posted (2/10) a video on his Facebook page proudly defending his record promoting and integrating the Palestinian minority in Israel into Israel’s economy. In the video, the PM claims that his govt. has made “tireless” efforts to ensure that “minorities thrive” in Israel, citing the increasing number of Palestinian judges, and the growing ranks of Palestinian students at Technion, among other statistics and achievements. Throughout the quarter, however, the Netanyahu govt. scapegoated the Palestinian minority in Israel, targeting it with further discriminatory legislation, and worked to undermine organizations and individuals associated with the Israeli Left.
The Ghattas Investigation

On 12/8, after Joint List MK Basel Ghattas left Keziot Prison where he had visited several incarcerated Palestinians, Israeli police searched the prisoners and found 12 mobile phones. The alleged connection between Ghattas and the phones led to a formal investigation that Ghattas and several of his Joint List colleagues deemed politically motivated. On 7/9/2016, the Knesset had enacted a law allowing a majority of MKs to suspend any colleague found to have incited terror or racism, or otherwise undermined Israel as a Jewish and democratic state. The law was passed in direct response to a visit by Ghattas, MK Haneen Zoabi, and MK Jamal Zahalka to a Palestinian family in East Jerusalem whose son had been killed in a confrontation with Israeli forces on 2/2/2016 (see JPS 45 [3, 4] and 46 [1]). Before he was 1st questioned on 12/12, Ghattas said, “Everything’s OK, we are used to this kind of investigation,” and after the new allegations against him surfaced, he indicated (12/18) that he would cooperate but that it was “clear the police are determined to continue the political persecution of the mbrs. and leaders of Balad.” The MK added that the conduct of the police, which he described as representing a “policy of political revenge,” did not frighten him and his colleagues now or in the future.

Ghattas remained defiant throughout the quarter as the police proceeded with their investigation. On 12/20, the Knesset Home Comm. decided that MKs’ visits to prisoners would no longer be protected under their parliamentary immunity, and it empowered Public Security Min. Erdan to select which MKs would be eligible to visit so-called security prisons. The comm. also specifically lifted (12/21) Ghattas’s parliamentary immunity, clearing the way for a full trial. After being held in police custody until 12/27, Ghattas was released to house arrest. Meanwhile, the Knesset Ethics Comm. voted (1/2) to bar him from participating in comm. hearings, making speeches at the plenum, and submitting legislation for 6 mos. while under investigation.

Arson Allegations

A series of large fires broke out across Israel in late 11/2016. At the height of the episode (11/22–24), around 60,000 people had to leave their homes in Haifa, and the Israeli govt. declared a state of emergency in the city. The fires also spread to Palestinian communities and Israeli settlements in the West Bank on 11/24. One fire destroyed a Palestinian chicken farm nr. Hebron, killing at least 4,000 chickens. Another destroyed 400 dunams (approx. 100 acres) of farmland nr. Ramallah. To help combat the growing disaster, Egypt, Jordan, Italy, Cyprus, and the PA all sent firefighters to help contain the blaze. Russia, Turkey, Greece, France, Spain, and the U.S. also contributed aircraft to dump water and fire retardant on various hotspots. Overall, 180 people were lightly to moderately injured in the 2,600 brush fires and 1,800 urban fires reported between 11/19 and 11/28 (Jerusalem Post, 12/9).

Despite the 2 mos. of drought preceding the fires and the high wind speeds in late 11/2016 that created conditions known to produce spontaneous combustion, many Israeli politicians blamed Palestinians for the episode, and began calling it an “arson intifada.” Education Min. Bennett wrote on Facebook on 11/23, “Only he who the country doesn’t belong to him [sic] is capable of burning it.” Culture and Sports Min. Miri Regev said (11/24), “We must catch the terrorists who are burning our forests and endangering lives.” For his part, Netanyahu stated (11/24) that “every fire caused by arson, or by incitement to arson, is terrorism.
Anyone who tries to burn parts of the State of Israel will be punished severely.” Israel’s Fire and Rescue Services then released a statement (12/2) saying that only 40 of the fires were started by arson, and that the arson was not necessarily politically motivated. At least 9 Palestinians were indicted on arson-related charges over the next 2 mos., but by the end of the quarter, the Israeli govt. had not released any conclusive evidence backing up the politicians’ claims.

**Legislative Targeting**

In addition to blaming Palestinians for the 11/2016 fires and bringing charges against Ghattas, Netanyahu’s ultranationalist govt. pursued various legislative initiatives targeting the Palestinian minority in Israel and organizations and individuals associated with the Israeli Left.

After a Knesset comm. advanced (11/13) the so-called Muezzin Bill, barring mosques from broadcasting the call to prayer, a senior legal official said (11/20) that he doubted Mandelblit would defend it at the High Court of Justice, despite supporters’ claims that it was designed to curb “noise pollution.” With international opposition to the proposed bill mounting (from the EU and Turkey in particular), the Knesset postponed (12/7) its final vote. Instead of addressing Turkish pres. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan’s 11/27 complaints about religious discrimination, however, Netanyahu and his allies pulled the bill from the Knesset’s agenda because of complaints from Orthodox parties that, as worded, the bill could impact the sirens that announce Shabbat (Jerusalem Post, 12/7). The Ministerial Comm. for Legislation then approved a draft of the bill (12/12) satisfying these concerns; the new text banned religious use of loudspeakers from 11:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. and was sent to the Knesset for a 1st reading.

Separately, at the very end of the previous quarter, the Knesset passed (11/14) the 1st reading of a bill authorizing the govt. to bar entry into the country of supporters of a boycott against Israel or reps. of NGOs endorsing such a boycott (see JPS 46 [2]). Despite complaints from left-wing and non-Zionist parties that the measure would silence dissent and further alienate Israel in the global community, the Knesset’s Internal Affairs and Environment Comm. approved (1/11) the bill for 2d and 3d readings, set for the 2d half of 2/2017.

Finally, the Knesset’s Ministerial Comm. for Legislation unanimously approved (1/8) a bill banning reps. of Breaking the Silence and other anti-occupation groups from speaking in Israeli schools. Charging these organizations with defaming IDF troops, the bill passed its 1st reading on 1/11.

**PRISONER SWAP TALKS**

In 2015 and early 2016, Hamas and Israel explored the possibility of negotiating a long-term truce, or *hudna*, and a prisoner swap. Their efforts, encouraged by the international community, failed to produce either outcome (see JPS 45 [2–4]). Unconfirmed reports of further efforts cropped up later, but all were equally inconclusive. This quarter, the 2 sides appeared poised for another effort.

The 1st indication came on 1/11 when Kul al-Arab reported that Qatar was mediating indirect Hamas-Israel negotiations on a possible prisoner exchange. Citing a senior Hamas source, the report indicated that the organization had agreed to hand over the remains of 2 IDF soldiers killed during the assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014, as well as 2 captured Israeli civilians still being held in Gaza in exchange for the release of 58 Hamas mbrs. whom Israel had rearrested following their release under the 2011 prisoner swap.
(see JPS 41 [2]). The Israeli govt. reportedly agreed to these terms as long as all the prisoners would be expelled to Qatar, a condition rejected by Hamas. Neither side confirmed the report and 2 days later a conflicting story emerged. Palestinian sources told the *Times of Israel* that the initiative was stalled because Hamas was unwilling to open negotiations unless Israel freed the 58 prisoners (this was Hamas’s position in 2015 and early 2016 as well). According to various sources, Israel was prepared to release the prisoners, but not before negotiating a comprehensive deal. A few weeks later, other Israeli media reported (2/5) that Hamas had refused an entirely new offer to swap 1 Hamas official for 1 of the 2 Israeli civilians. A Hamas official appeared (2/5) to confirm the story, saying that the group was only interested in a “comprehensive deal or nothing.” The next day, a senior Israeli defense official indicated (2/6) that new terms were on the table: Israel would lift some restrictions on Gaza in exchange for the 2 civilians and the remains of the 2 IDF soldiers. A Hamas-affiliated Twitter account shot this down, too, saying (2/8) that what Israel was offering was not close to meeting “our minimum demands.”

**OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS**

Palestinian and Israeli casualty rates decreased slightly this quarter, reflecting a general decline in violence over the course of 2016 (see JPS 46 [1, 2]): 29 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (down from 32 last quarter), and 5 Israelis were killed as a result of Palestinian actions (up from 2 last quarter). Therefore, by mid-February 2017, the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the 2d intifada in 9/2000 had reached 10,898 Palestinians (including 57 Palestinian citizens of Israel [PCI] and 19 unidentified cross-border “infiltrators”); 1,259 Israelis (433 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 246 settlers, and 576 others); and 71 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). These numbers include individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel’s occupation or of the ongoing conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died because they were denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents). They do not include 5 Palestinians who were killed when the Egyptian authorities flooded the smuggling tunnels they were working in (12/3 [4] and 2/13), or the Hamas-affiliated engineer who was killed in Tunisia on 12/15, despite allegations that Israel’s Mossad agency was responsible.

**Overview of the Violence**

The number of protests, clashes, and random attacks that had characterized the habba (surge or revolt) since its eruption in the wake of the Jewish High Holidays in 9/2015 continued falling this quarter (see JPS 45 [2]–46 [2]). Therefore, the number of Palestinians killed in the West Bank and East Jerusalem decreased from 25 last quarter to 14 this quarter. Six Palestinians died of injuries sustained in clashes with the IDF (12/18, 12/22, 12/23, 1/10, 1/16, and 1/29), and 8 died after carrying out alleged ramming or stabbing attacks on Israeli settlers and troops (11/22, 11/25, 12/8, 12/14, 1/8, 1/17, 1/25, and 2/10; see Chronology for details). Another Palestinian was killed in the West Bank (2/8) when an Israeli settler drove into him. Meanwhile, the number of Palestinians injured in the West Bank decreased significantly: at 219 between 11/15 and 2/6, down from 521 over the preceding 12 weeks, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). All 4 Israelis killed by Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem this quarter
were victims of alleged ramming attacks by Palestinian drivers outside the Old City on 1/8.

An Israeli military court in Tel Aviv found (1/4) IDF soldier Elor Azaria guilty of manslaughter for the killing of a prone, defenseless, and injured Palestinian at the height of the habba on 3/24/2016 in c. Hebron. The ruling made Azaria eligible for up to 20 years in prison, although many analysts guessed that the sentence would be much lighter (see JPS 46 [4]). Israeli PM Netanyahu and a slew of other right-wing officials, as well as Zionist Union MK Shelly Yacimovich, said they supported pardoning Azaria. Outside the court, hundreds of Jewish Israelis demonstrated in solidarity with him, sparking minor clashes with the police. Meanwhile, outraged that Azaria was tried on manslaughter chargers, rather than for murder, the family of the victim pledged to take the case to the ICC. The PA’s Foreign Ministry called the case a “show trial.”

In Gaza, 13 Palestinians died as a result of Israeli actions or in connection with complications cause by Israel’s blockade: 1 in clashes with IDF troops along the border fence (11/18); 1 who succumbed to injuries sustained in clashes with the IDF in 2005 (2/15); 1 who succumbed to heart problems after the Israeli authorities denied his exit from Gaza for medical treatment (1/14); 1 fisherman who went missing after a confrontation with Israeli naval forces (1/4); 5 who died in tunnel collapses (12/4, 12/7 [2], 1/20, and 2/13), including 2 Hamas fighters; 2 other Hamas fighters who died during undiscovered military activities (12/15 and 2/4); and 2 who died on 2/8 in an air strike that Palestinian witnesses claimed was carried out by Israeli aircraft, although the IDF denied involvement. Meanwhile, Israelis caused substantially fewer Palestinian injuries in Gaza this quarter: 23 between 11/15 and 2/6, according to OCHA, down from 61 over the preceding 12 weeks.

Sporadic bouts of cross-border violence continued to punctuate the relative calm in Gaza since the cease-fire ending Israel’s 2014 assault on the territory. Down from 7 last quarter, there were 6 such incidents (12/19, 1/15, 1/24, 2/6, 2/8, and 2/12; see Chronology), leading to 2 Palestinian deaths (2/8) and 9 Palestinian injuries (2/6, 2/8, and 2/12).

As in previous quarters, the IDF strictly enforced the unilaterally defined buffer zone along Israel’s boundary with Gaza, aka Access Restricted Areas (ARA). IDF troops violently dispersed Palestinian protesters gathering along the border fence 5 times (11/18, 12/2, 12/23, 12/25, and 2/3), down from 11 last quarter; fired on Palestinian land or property 17 times (12/13, 12/15, 12/17, 1/2, 1/3, 1/7, 1/8 [2], 1/10, 1/17, 1/18, 1/20, 1/21, 2/1, 2/7 [2], and 2/15), up from 11 last quarter; fired on Palestinian shepherds, bird-hunters, and other people 15 times (11/18, 12/20, 12/21, 12/24, 12/26, 12/30, 1/5, 1/14, 1/18, 1/24 [2], 1/29, 1/31, 2/4, and 2/5), down from 16 the previous quarter. Israeli forces conducted 9 limited incursions to level land along the border fence (11/29, 12/13, 12/27, 1/12, 1/15, 1/25, 2/6, and 2/8), down from 15 in each of the previous 3 quarters. Israeli aircraft also sprayed weed killer on Palestinian agricultural fields along the border fence on 1/23. (The IDF said that the operation was designed to clear sightlines for troops in the area.) IDF troops arrested almost twice as many Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel, a total of 11 (11/17 [2], 11/26 [2], 11/27, 12/9, 1/29 [2], and 1/30 [3]) compared to 6 last quarter. The Israeli authorities claimed that the Palestinian arrested on 11/27 was a Hamas operative attempting to sneak into Israel on a military mission. His family, however, denied (12/29) the accusation, saying that he had no
affiliation with Hamas and suffered from mental disabilities.

In a related development, the Israeli press reported (1/9) that DM Lieberman approved a NIS 3.34 b. (approximately $868 m.) project to construct a “smart fence” along Israel’s border with Gaza, including an underground concrete barrier and sensors to detect tunneling activities.

At a rate approaching 1 incident per day, Israeli naval forces continued to harass Palestinian fishermen working off Gaza’s coast and did not carry out the promised extension of the fishing zone from 6 to 9 naut. mi. off the coast, after postponing the measure 3 times last quarter (see JPS 46 [2]); they also opened fire on or otherwise confronted fishermen on 58 occasions (see Chronology for details), up from 50 last quarter. Over the course of these incidents, they capsized 1 fishing boat (1/4), injured 5 fishermen (1/14, 1/17, 1/20, and 1/23 [2]), arrested 9 others (12/6 [4] and 1/16 [5]), and confiscated at least 3 fishing boats (12/6 and 1/17). In the incident on 1/4, 1 fisherman went missing. His family later declared (1/6) him dead and the fishermen’s union in Gaza went on a 2-day strike (1/5–6) to protest the nr.-constant targeting by the Israeli navy.

**Movement and Access**

In the absence of any breakthrough in the Palestinian national reconciliation process or any prospective deal between Hamas and the Israeli govt., Palestinians’ freedom of movement and access in the **Gaza Strip** changed little this quarter; there were only marginal developments. On 12/5, Israeli officials announced the resumption of public postal service to Gaza, 5 mos. after suspending the service in 7/2016 (see JPS 46 [1]). They also revoked (12/6) permission for elderly Gazans to visit Haram al-Sharif on Fridays. According to a Palestinian official, the Israelis cited reports of some worshippers not returning directly to Gaza after their visits. Overall, the number of Palestinians permitted to leave Gaza for the West Bank and Israel remained relatively low this quarter, after plummeting in 10/2016 to levels not seen since the immediate aftermath of the Israeli assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014 (see figure 1).

Evidencing the Egyptian govt.’s attempts to improve relations with Hamas and to ameliorate humanitarian conditions in Gaza (see “Egypt” below), Cairo opened the Rafah border crossing on 17 days this quarter. Although this represented a decrease from 21 days last quarter, it marked a significant uptick over the previous 2 quarters of 2016, when the crossing was open for only 14 days in total. Overall, 9,743 individuals were able to leave Gaza via the Rafah crossing, and 7,391 were able to enter, compared with 8,429 and 8,809 last quarter, respectively.

The Israeli crackdown in response to the **habba** subsided this quarter. Despite fewer village closures and punitive restrictions, the IDF nevertheless maintained nr.-daily raids, house searches, and mobile checkpoints, hampering Palestinian movement and access in the **West Bank** and **East Jerusalem** (see Chronology for details). On 12/7, the IDF’s Coordinator of Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT) announced a temporary easement of restrictions on Christmas Day (12/25). As a result, an unlimited number of Christian Palestinians in the West Bank were permitted to visit their relatives in Israel; some 400 were permitted to fly abroad from Ben Gurion International Airport; 100 were allowed to visit families in Gaza; and 700 Gazan Christians were permitted to visit the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Separately, the Israeli cabinet discussed (12/18) a possible 40%
increase in the number of work permits granted to West Bank Palestinians, a move that would increase the current number of permits from 56,000 to 78,000. The plan, designed in part to relieve the labor shortage in Israel’s construction industry, did not move forward, however. Meanwhile, the Islamic Waqf, which administers Haram al-Sharif, announced (12/31) that 2016 set a new ceiling in terms of the number of right-wing Jewish activists’ entry to the sanctuary, with a total of 14,806 infractions; there were 2,856 such “visits” in 10/2016, alone, the highest monthly figure for all of 2016.

Maintaining Stability
Amid persistent rumors about the weakness of the PA, and ahead of Pres. Abbas’s projected retirement (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below), the Israeli authorities took 2 major steps this quarter to shore up PA institutions and preserve the status quo established by the Oslo Accords.

First, the IDF’s COGAT Yoav Mordechai signed (1/15) an agreement with PA Min. of Civil Affairs Hussein al-Sheikh to restart the Joint Water Comm., which the Oslo Accords established to oversee water and sanitation issues in the oPt. The Palestinians have refused to take part since 2010, arguing that Israel was using the comm. to secure Palestinian approval for projects serving the West Bank’s settler population without approving sufficient projects for Palestinian communities. With the comm. dormant for several years, water scarcity and allocation issues have contributed to increasingly dire humanitarian conditions in the oPt as well as periodic crises (see “Hydro-Apartheid” in...
JPS 46 [1]’s Update). Under the latest 1/15 agreement, the comm. is to consider allocating additional water resources to the West Bank and Gaza and expanding the water supply with new drilling projects, as well as dealing with environmental issues, agricultural water use, and other matters. The agreement also gave the PA limited autonomy to deal with certain projects.

Second, the security cabinet granted (1/15) Israeli banks working with Palestinian banks immunity from terrorist-related lawsuits domestically and indemnity from suits filed abroad. With 2 Israeli banks reportedly threatening to end partnerships with Palestinian banks, fearing the prospect of litigation in the U.S., the cabinet offered them protection, purportedly strengthening the Palestinian commercial banking sector and averting shocks to the Palestinian economy.

**Palestinian Prisoners**

High-profile hunger strikes continued to galvanize the Palestinian public this quarter, but they did not result in Israeli policy changes. As brothers Muhammad and Mahmoud al-Balboul were being released from prison after high-profile strikes last quarter (see *JPS* 46 [2]), 2 other prisoners’ efforts caught the Palestinian public’s attention. Ahmad Abu Fara and Anas Shadid went on hunger strike on 9/25. By 12/11, they were refusing medical treatment at Assaf Harofeh Hospital nr. Tel Aviv. When Israel’s High Court of Justice rejected (12/12) an appeal for their release, Shadid and Abu Fara were “facing death,” according to the Palestinian Prisoners’ Society, and Abu Fara had lost sight in his right eye. “I appeal to human rights organizations in Israel and abroad, to the countries of the free world, to anyone who has a conscience, to help me so I may live,” Abu Fara said, in a statement recorded and transmitted to the media by MK Yousef Jabareen (Joint List), adding, “I’m dying and I don’t want to die.” The 2 prisoners began (12/13) refusing water in response to the court’s decision but reached an agreement with the Israel Prison Service 8 days later (12/21). They would end their strikes immediately (12/22) and go free following the renewal of their respective administrative detentions for 4 mos. A few weeks later, Palestinian journalist Muhammad al-Qiq was rearrested (1/15). Al-Qiq had ended a 94-day hunger strike against his administrative detention on 2/26/2016 (see *JPS* 45 [3, 4]), and after the Israeli authorities placed him under 6-mo. administrative detention, he began (2/6) a new hunger strike, setting the stage for another public campaign against Israeli targeting of Palestinian journalists.

Meanwhile, the total number of Palestinians in Israeli prisons decreased this quarter for the 1st time in a year. From 7,000 between 2/2016 through 12/2016, it dropped to 6,500 in 1/2017, according to the Palestinian prisoners’ rights NGO, Addameer. Likewise, the number of Palestinian administrative detainees dropped below 700 for the 1st time since 2/2016, to 536.

**Settler-Related Violence**

The incidence of settler-related violence decreased again this quarter, with 20 instances of Israeli settler attacks against Palestinians or their property between 11/15 and 2/6, down from 28 last quarter, according to OCHA. Of these, 9 led to Palestinian injuries and 11 resulted in damage to Palestinian property (see figure 2 and Chronology for details). Included in these figures are the 5 reported attacks on Palestinian olive groves (12/11, 1/12, 1/18, 1/20,
and 2/6), which led to the uprooting or destruction of hundreds of trees.

**Gaza’s Electricity Crisis**

On 1/6, the administrators of Gaza’s sole power plant shut down 1 of its 2 operating generators because of a severe fuel shortage. This left most of Gaza’s 2 m. inhabitants with only 3 hours of electricity per day, exacerbating Gaza’s longstanding shortages and precipitating a crisis. According to the Gaza Electricity Distribution Corp. (GDEC), recent problems with power lines in the n. Sinai Peninsula were to blame for fluctuations in the number of megawatts Gaza received. But even prior to this, Israel and Egypt were providing only some 140 of the 600 megawatts needed to fully power Gaza. GDEC also indicated that because some of its customers were unable to keep up with their bills, the utility company was experiencing difficulties in securing sufficient fuel for the power plant. Unofficial sources were more candid about the true reasons for the crisis. The Palestinian Center for Human Rights charged (1/10) the “parties administrating [sic] the Gaza electricity sector” with lacking in any “real solutions.” Others blamed Hamas officials for allegedly funneling fuel to their cronies, and some blamed the PA for imposing high taxes. Observers on all sides agreed that the power plant had not been able to operate at full capacity for years because of the difficulty involved in acquiring sufficient resources under the Israeli blockade.

As the blackouts continued, the crisis took on an increasingly political turn. Thousands of
Palestinians gathered (1/12) in protest across Gaza, blaming the blackouts on Hamas. Local police fired into the air to stop protesters in Jabaliya refugee camp (r.c.) from reaching GDEC offices, allegedly assaulted a number of journalists attempting to cover the event, and carried out violent raids in which they arrested at least 30 people reportedly responsible for organizing the demonstrations. The next day, Hamas released a statement blaming Abbas and the PA for “conspiring to cut electricity” in Gaza and organized a counterprotest in Jabaliya r.c. A Fatah spokesperson denied the accusation (1/13), saying that Hamas could not “escape the crisis it had caused.”

Before the crisis could spiral further out of control, Turkey and Qatar stepped in. On 1/14, a GDEC spokesperson announced (1/14) that Turkish pres. Erdoğan had offered to ship fuel directly to Gaza, and senior Hamas official Ismail Haniyeh confirmed (1/14) that the amount would be sufficient to run the power plant for 3 mos. The next day, PA PM Rami Hamdallah announced that Qatar had pledged $12 m. to cover fuel costs at the plant for an additional 3 mos. The 1st $4 m. tranche from Qatar arrived on 1/16, allowing the plant to turn on 3 of its 4 generators. Gaza then returned to its pre-crisis schedule of on/off power at 8-hour intervals.

But tensions over the precarious electricity situation lingered. On 2/12, the head of Qatar’s Comm. to Rebuild Gaza, Mohammed al-Amadi, outlined a 3-stage plan for resolving the problem. He called for: 1) settling the PA-Hamas dispute over payment of taxes on fuel for the plant; 2) reaching an
agreement with Israel for the construction of a power line from Israel to Gaza; and 3) securing a long-term supply of gas for the plant. He also alluded to efforts to resolve the underlying issues, saying, “We proposed the establishment of a technical comm., free of politicians, that would be responsible for handling Gaza’s energy problem,” and blamed the PA for holding up such efforts. Fatah, for its part, rejected (2/12) al-Amadi’s accusations.

**Demolitions and Displacement**

For the 2d quarter in a row, Israeli forces demolished fewer Palestinian structures in the West Bank and East Jerusalem than they had in the preceding quarter. According to OCHA, between 11/15 and 2/6, the IDF destroyed 155 residences and other buildings—108 of them in Area C of the West Bank, 3 in Areas B and C, and 44 in East Jerusalem—down from a total of 267 the previous quarter. These demolitions displaced 161 Palestinians, a significant drop from the 382 displaced in the earlier period.

Israeli forces carried out only 1 punitive demolition of a Palestinian home this quarter. On 12/22, Israeli forces entered Kafr ‘Aqab, East Jerusalem, and destroyed the family home of the Palestinian man summarily executed on 10/9 for his alleged killing of an Israeli civilian and a police officer in East Jerusalem (see Chronology for details). The demolition sparked clashes in the village; 1 Palestinian youth was killed and several were injured.

While demolitions of Palestinian property may have been on the wane in the oPt, several high-profile demolitions of Palestinian property within Israel’s borders garnered significant attention. Home demolitions in the bedouin community of Umm al-Hiran and the Jerusalem-area village of Qalanswa elicited an international outcry that the Israeli govt. was discriminating against and targeting its Palestinian minority.

The demolitions exposed a festering source of tension between Israel’s Palestinian and Jewish communities stemming from the govt.'s infrequent approval of new zoning codes or permits for new housing to accommodate population growth in Palestinian communities. After Israeli forces demolished 11 homes built without the proper permits in Qalanswa on 1/10, the mayor of the town resigned in protest, explaining that he didn’t “have the power to change anything” and that people in the village had been trying for years to get the proper permits, to no avail. “People are forced to build illegally,” he said, and “now they are left without money, without life.” Adding insult to injury, the Qalanswa home demolitions reportedly stemmed from Netanyahu’s order to demolish unlicensed Palestinian structures in the context of his battle with right-wing coalition mbrs. over the illegal Amona settlement outpost (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). In response, the Higher Follow-Up Comm. for Arab Citizens of Israel (a representative body for PCI) called a general strike for 1/11.

In 2016, the High Court of Justice had rejected (1/17/2016) Umm al-Hiran’s appeal to avert Israeli govt. plans to demolish the village, pay the residents to move to a nearby municipality, and build a new Jewish settlement, dubbed Hiran, at the site. When the Israel Land Authority announced (11/21) that 2 homes and 8 other structures in the 60-year-old village were to be demolished within 24 hours, protesters descended on Umm al-Hiran from across the country, including Joint List MKs Ayman Odeh and Ghattas. An Israeli court postponed, but did not annul, the demolition (11/22), and Israeli demolition crews arrived
2 mos. later, early on 1/18, sparking clashes with protesters and residents. One bedouin and 1 Israeli police officer were killed and Odeh was injured (see Chronology and Photos from the Quarter for more). The Higher Follow-Up Comm. called (1/19) another general strike and Palestinian civil society groups donated (1/28) mobile residences to the families whose homes had been destroyed.

The demolitions gained international attention when Odeh published an op-ed in the New York Times on 2/11 highlighting Israel’s discriminatory policies, and pointing out the similarities between the “race-baiting tactics” of PM Netanyahu and U.S. pres. Trump. He argued that by enforcing “unjust land use and housing policies,” the Israeli govt., like Trump, was “bulldozing” democracy.

Ostensibly in response to the blowback, Israel’s cabinet approved (2/12) a NIS 3-b. (approximately $800 m.) plan increasing services to bedouin communities in the Negev, including the creation of 10 new industrial zones; strengthening enforcement of existing zoning regulations; and calling for the construction of 25,000 new housing units over 5 years. Sana Ibn Bari, a lawyer with the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, argued (2/12) that the plan was just an extension of Israel’s discriminatory policies. Rather than involving the community in future plans, she argued, the govt. “are trying to force a strategy of concentrating the population in the existing townships.” Ibn Bari elaborated further, saying, “It’s clear the intention is to invest in the recognized settlements . . . to prepare infrastructure that . . . will absorb [bedouin] from the unrecognized villages. The 25,000 units . . . are almost certainly intended for the residents of the unrecognized villages [and] this means massive destruction [of homes] to force residents to relocate against their will to the townships.” (See Ahmad Amara’s article, “The Negev Land Question: Between Denial and Recognition” in JPS 42 [4] for more on the issue of so-called unrecognized villages in the Negev.)

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

It was a relatively uneventful quarter for internal Palestinian politics. Pres. Abbas continued to consolidate power ahead of his expected retirement. The PA resumed its attempt to organize municipal elections, which had collapsed the previous quarter amid more Hamas-Fatah wrangling. Finally, having restarted talks late last quarter, various Palestinian factions continued with efforts to achieve Palestinian national unity (see JPS 46 [2]).

THE 7TH FATAH CONGRESS

In his effort to manage an eventual transfer of power, and to better position his chosen successors against rivals like exiled Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan, Abbas announced last quarter that his Fatah party would hold its 7th General Congress on 11/29 (see JPS 46 [2]). A Fatah spokesperson said (11/21) that preparations were going well, and that more than 1,400 mbrs. were expected to attend and participate in elections for a new Fatah Central Comm. and Revolutionary Council.

When the congress opened in Ramallah on 11/29, rumor and speculation about Abbas’s retirement dominated press coverage. Attendees reelected him as party leader for a new 5-year term, however, resulting in a 3-hour address (11/30) in which Abbas highlighted the party’s dedication to the Palestinian people and reaffirmed the PA’s goal of joining more international institutions. He also proposed the
creation of a temporary unity govt. with Hamas and invited the organization to yet another round of reconciliation talks. The congress concluded on 12/4, with the election of 18 mbrs. to the Central Comm., including 6 new additions (Ismail Jabr, Ahmad Hillis, Sabri Saidam, Samir Refaee, Rawhi Fattouh, and Dalal Salameh), and 80 mbrs. to the Revolutionary Council. The new composition of both bodies was taken to signal endorsement of Abbas’s political program (see “Palestinian Opinion” below).

Abbas continued to consolidate his control over Fatah in the aftermath of the congress. On 12/12, he revoked the immunity of 5 Fatah parliamentarians whom the public prosecutor reportedly wanted to investigate on charges related to money laundering and weapons trafficking, but because the 5 were deemed Dahlan supporters, the move was widely interpreted as being politically motivated. Later in the quarter, the new Central Comm. elected (2/15) Abbas loyalist Mahmoud al-Aloul to serve as vice-chair of Fatah. According to a senior official, the position had not yet been clearly defined but al-Aloul was expected to share duties with Abbas.

UNITY EFFORTS CONTINUE

A little over 2 mos. after Abbas met with Hamas leader Mishal and former PM in Gaza Haniyeh in Doha (see JPS 46 [2]), Hamas and Fatah officials met to resume national reconciliation talks (1/5) in the Qatari capital once again. The 2 sides agreed to continue discussions in Beirut on 1/10, but few other details emerged. In Beirut, Hamas, PLO, and Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ) officials discussed the possibility of convening the Palestinian National Council (PNC), which had not met since 2009, and concluded that it was necessary for all sides to implement existing reconciliation agreements before the legislative body met. The Beirut meeting was described as “positive and constructive” by PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Mustafa Barghouti (1/10). After 3 more days of talks in Moscow (1/15–17), the factions involved agreed on the election of a new PNC, which would then elect a new PLO Exec. Comm. Hamas and PIJ also agreed to join the PLO. Hamas official Musa Abu Marzuq said that the proposed unity govt. would be responsible for finding solutions to issues that had plagued previous reconciliation efforts, “including the holding of free and democratic elections in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.”

Although the various factions appeared favorable to the Moscow platform, several key disputes reemerged in the final weeks of the quarter. On 1/25, a Gaza court doled out punishments to 8 Fatah affiliates on charges related to information gathering on behalf of the PLO, including 3 life sentences. A Fatah military leader commented (1/25) that some in Hamas might not be so interested in reconciliation after all. A few days later, the PA cabinet announced (1/31) that it would go ahead with municipal elections in the West Bank and Gaza on 5/13. The elections had originally been scheduled for 10/8/2016 and were postponed after Fatah-Hamas disputes threatened to undermine their legitimacy. Furthermore, a PA official said (1/31) that if the PA could not arrange for a ballot in certain regions then it should be postponed in those specific places (the last round of municipal elections in 2012 excluded Gaza, for example). The official added that Abbas had authorized a new elections commission to address the issues that had hindered attempts to organize a vote on 10/8. A Hamas spokesperson rejected (1/31) the
announcement as well as the new commission, arguing that “elections should take place after disagreements are ended, reconciliation is achieved, and Palestinian institutions in Gaza and the West Bank are united.”

TRANSITIONING HAMAS LEADERSHIP

Mishal had announced last quarter that he would not be running for reelection as the head of Hamas (see JPS 46 [2]). While Haniyeh did not openly state that he would be replacing Mishal, he also opted not to stand for reelection as head of the organization in Gaza. Senior military official Yahya Sinwar was then elected (2/13) to fill Haniyeh’s position, causing some consternation in Israel and the international community because of his role in the gradual takeover of Hamas’s military wing from the ailing Mohammed Deif (Al-Monitor, 2/14). Amid the upheaval, Abu Marzuq emphasized (2/13) Hamas’s institutional character and asserted that “a change in leadership is not something that will bring about radical change in [the organization’s] policies.”

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data come from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) on 8–10 December 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 62d in a series, can be found at www.pcpsr.org.

1. If new presidential elections were to take place today, and [PA pres.] Abbas was nominated by Fatah and Ismail Haniyeh was nominated by Hamas, whom would you vote for?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Mahmoud Abbas</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Ismail Haniyeh</td>
<td>48.6%</td>
<td>46.8%</td>
<td>51.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>6.4%</td>
<td>8.0%</td>
<td>4.2%</td>
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2. And what if the competition were between Marwan Barghouti, Ismail Haniyeh, and Mahmoud Abbas, for whom would you vote?

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Marwan Barghouti</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Ismail Haniyeh</td>
<td>33.2%</td>
<td>29.1%</td>
<td>39.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Mahmoud Abbas</td>
<td>24.3%</td>
<td>22.4%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>1.7%</td>
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3. Fatah has held its Seventh [General Congress] and elected a new leadership. Do you have faith in the ability of the new leadership to achieve the goals entrusted to it?

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<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Yes</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>33.4%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No</td>
<td>53.8%</td>
<td>51.1%</td>
<td>58.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>15.5%</td>
<td>9.6%</td>
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4. What do you expect the new U.S. pres., Donald Trump and his admin., to do about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?
FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Aside from working with the Palestinians to submit an anti-settlement res. to the UNSC on 12/21 (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above), the Egyptian govt. was largely absent from the Israeli-Palestinian arena this quarter.

A new threat challenged Pres. al-Sisi’s ongoing efforts to improve relations with Israel, and Cairo continued working with Hamas to improve relations and ameliorate humanitarian conditions in Gaza.

While the Egyptian govt. was less enthusiastic than its Israeli counterpart about trumpeting it as a burgeoning Egypt-Israel rapprochement, Israeli-Egyptian security coordination continued apace, drawing increased blowback from mutual adversaries in n. Sinai. On 12/13, Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS) attempted to fire 2 rockets into Israel. Although the missiles fell in an open area short of the border, SPIS claimed (12/14) the attack, describing it as retaliation for alleged recent Israeli air strikes in n. Sinai. Later in the quarter, Israel reported that its Iron Dome missile defense batteries intercepted (2/8) a barrage of rockets, presumably launched by armed groups in n. Sinai.

Alongside the crackdown on insurgent groups in n. Sinai, the Egyptian authorities began easing restrictions on Gaza and improving their relationship with Hamas. Egypt opened the Rafah border crossing for 17 days this quarter (see "Movement and

<table>
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<tr>
<th>1) Do nothing</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>30.4%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
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<tr>
<th>2) Renew peace negotiations</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10.1%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
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<tr>
<th>3) Impose a solution on both sides</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
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<tr>
<th>4) Stand with the Israeli side against the other</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>53.5%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
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<tr>
<th>5) Don't know/ Not applicable</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.8%</td>
<td>4.9%</td>
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5. And what do you want Pres. Trump to do? Do you want him to play a stronger role, or do you want the U.S. not to interfere in the peace process?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) I want a stronger Trump role in the peace process</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>29.6%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
<td>32.0%</td>
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<tr>
<th>2) I want Trump to play the role the U.S. currently plays in the peace process</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>7.1%</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
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<tr>
<th>3) I want Trump not to interfere in the peace process</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53.4%</td>
<td>59.0%</td>
<td>44.1%</td>
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<tr>
<th>4) Don't know/ Not applicable</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.3%</td>
<td>5.7%</td>
<td>9.9%</td>
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Access” above) to “lessen the siege on the Gaza Strip,” according to Egyptian security sources on 12/15. While this constituted a drop from last quarter’s 21, it was a welcome increase from the total of 14 days in the 6 mos. between 2/16/2016 when the crossing was open. Furthermore, 40 cars were allowed (12/18) into Gaza via the Rafah crossing, marking the 1st time vehicles were allowed through since 2013. After bilateral talks in Cairo later in the quarter (1/22), an Egyptian security source said that relations between Hamas and Egypt were improving as a result of better security cooperation along Gaza’s s. border (see JPS 46 [2]). The official also said that al-Sisi had given the “green light” for improving relations with the various Palestinian factions to facilitate Palestinian national reconciliation (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” above).

Also of note: Egyptian forces killed 5 Palestinians this quarter when they flooded smuggling tunnels with seawater (12/3 [4] and 2/13). They also shot and injured a Palestinian fisherman working nr. the Egyptian coast on 12/21.

LEBANON

Following mos. of interfactional tension and violence in ‘Ayn al-Hilweh r.c. (see JPS 45 [2]), the Lebanese army began constructing a new wall around the camp on 11/20. A military spokesman said (11/22) this was a “security measure” to stop “the infiltration of terrorists” into the camp, and a Fatah security official confirmed (11/22) that the various Palestinian factions had met with the Lebanese military and decided that this was “the best decision” for the camp’s protection. ‘Ayn al-Hilweh, with its 60,000 residents, is already encircled by metal fences and Lebanese army checkpoints.

Construction of the wall quickly met with opposition, including from some Palestinian factions that had reportedly approved the plan. Hamas issued a statement (11/22) saying that it was an “unacceptable step that threatens the future of Palestinian refugees and compounds their suffering.” Other critics in the camp compared it to Israel’s separation wall. After the Lebanese army “paused” construction, according to a spokesperson (11/23), the work came to a complete halt following another meeting between army officials and reps. of the Palestinian factions on 11/24. The Palestinians reportedly agreed to put in place procedures to improve the “security situation” throughout Lebanon’s Palestinian refugee camps, according to a statement released after the meeting. It was unclear what procedures would be implemented in place of the wall.

Shortly after the wall issue was resolved, another outbreak of violence shook the camp. Lebanese media reported that a Palestinian named Samer Hamid was “assassinated” on 12/21. Residents of the camp then exchanged fire, leading to the death of 2 more Palestinians and resulting in 4 injuries. At least 1 more Palestinian was injured as tensions remained high over the next 24 hours, leading the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) to suspend services “until further notice” on 12/22. UNRWA spokesperson Chris Gunness wrote (12/22) that “violent incidents . . . continue to shock and frighten camp residents, they prevent children going to school and patients going to clinics; and they threaten the safety and security of civilians and their ability to access a range of services.” The Daily Star reported “cautious calm” in the camp on 12/24, but sporadic bouts of violence continued throughout the rest of the quarter, including
1 on 1/15 resulting in the injury of an UNRWA staffer.

Also of note: Lebanese emigré businessman Amine Bakri was killed by 3 unidentified gunmen outside his furniture factory in Angola on 1/2. Lebanese pres. Michel Aoun said (1/4) that Israeli Mossad agents may have been responsible, but no evidence backing his claim came to light.

REGIONAL

TURKEY

The Israeli and Turkish govts. continued building on their 6/27/2016 reconciliation agreement this quarter. On 12/9, a Turkish court dropped a 3-year-old criminal case against 4 IDF officers in connection with the Israeli assault on activists aboard the Mavi Marmara in 5/2010 (see JPS 40 [1]). The court’s ruling stemmed from a key provision of the 6/27/2016 deal, in which Turkey pledged to drop all legal claims related to the 5/2010 incident. Later in the quarter, the Turkish army’s chief of staff, Hulusi Akar, met (1/17) with IDF dep. chief of staff Yair Golan on the sidelines of a NATO meeting in Brussels, marking the 1st high-level contact between Israeli and Turkish military officials since 2010. On 1/31, an Israeli delegation flew to Ankara for the 1st strategic dialogue between Turks and Israelis in 6 years. (The 2 sides began their strategic dialogue in 1987 and had held 15 rounds of talks before relations broke down in 2010.) Turkey and Israel agreed to strengthen bilateral relations via business, academic, and cultural delegations.
IRAN

Even before U.S. pres. Trump took office on 1/20, his allies in Israel and the U.S. Congress were preparing for a major shift in U.S. policy on Iran, threatening to upend the fragile rapprochement established as a result of the P5+1’s (China, France, Russia, the UK, U.S., and Germany) 7/14/2015 nuclear deal with Iran (see JPS 45 [1]).

The U.S. Senate voted (12/1) unanimously to extend the Iran Sanctions Act for 10 years, sending the legislation to then Pres. Obama for his approval. Supporters of the move argued that this preserved U.S. ability to restore sanctions should Iran violate the 7/14 deal, although the Obama admin. found (12/1) that it was “not necessary.” Iranian pres. Hassan Rouhani forced the issue, however, saying Iran would (12/4) “firmly respond” if Obama did not veto the bill. In a procedural protest, Obama opted not to sign the bill, allowing it to become law (12/15). According to Russian and Iranian officials, Iran backed down after meeting (1/10) with reps. of the P5+1.

As Obama defended his signature foreign policy achievement, uncertainties grew over his successor’s position on Iran. On the campaign trail, Trump repeatedly pledged to cancel the 7/14 deal in favor of a more aggressive posture toward Iran, but it was unclear if his allies concurred. The week after the election, a senior Israeli official said (11/17) that Israeli PM Netanyahu was working on a plan to expand U.S. sanctions against Iran. Netanyahu did not intend to push for the 7/14 deal to be scrapped, the official said, explaining that “the PM will argue, first and foremost, that the U.S. should work to diminish the partnership between Russia and Iran in the [Middle East].” Netanyahu himself told (12/11) 60 Minutes that he planned to suggest “various ways” that Trump could undo the agreement.

It was also unclear whether the incoming pres. could actually undo the deal. As Iran’s FM Mohammad Javad Zarif noted on 1/19, “It’s an international agreement,” meaning that the U.S. alone could not cancel it. Zarif also said, “We believe it’s in the interest of everybody to stick to the deal.” EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini concurred (1/16), saying that the EU planned to stand by the deal regardless of Trump’s actions.

Trump gave supporters of the deal a boost when he asked Treasury Undersecy. Adam Szubin to stay on in his admin. to “ensure the continuity of the govt.,” according to incoming press secy. Spicer (1/19). Szubin was among high-ranking officials involved in the negotiations that led to the deal, and his continued tenure was interpreted as signaling that Trump intended to build his Iran policy around the deal instead of in place of it. The incoming pres. reinforced the impression when he pledged to “rigorously” enforce the deal in a phone call with Saudi Arabia’s King Salman bin Abdulaziz on 1/29.

Meanwhile, the Iranian govt. conducted (1/29) an unsuccessful medium-range missile test. Although it had conducted several similar tests since the 7/14 deal, the Western press speculated that Iran was perhaps testing the waters of the new Trump era. In an attempt to halt the speculation, Iranian DM Hossein Dehghan declared (2/1) that the 1/29 operation “was in line with our ongoing [missile testing] program,” adding that Iran would continue carrying out planned production of “defense items meant for our national interests and objectives.” However, incoming National Security Advisor Michael Flynn said (2/1) that the U.S. would take “appropriate action” against Iranian efforts to “threaten U.S. friends and
allies,” and Trump himself tweeted (2/2): “Iran has been formally PUT ON NOTICE for firing a ballistic missile. Should have been thankful for the terrible deal the U.S. made with them!” The Treasury Dept. then imposed (2/3) sanctions on 13 Iranian individuals and 12 entities allegedly involved in Iran’s missile program, and a Trump admin. official said (2/3) that more steps were to come. In response, Iran’s Foreign Ministry threatened (2/3) reciprocal actions in the form of “legal limitations for some American individuals and companies that have had a role in the creation and support of extreme terrorist groups in the region.”

As the quarter came to a close, the Trump admin.’s Iran plans remained unclear. Some admin. officials as well as congressional Republicans said the 7/14 deal would be upheld, but tensions ratcheted up when Iran test-fired (2/8) another a short-range Mersad missile. White House officials issued a statement indicating (2/8) that Trump was considering placing Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps on the list of designated foreign terror organizations, but there was nothing more on the matter by 2/15 at the quarter’s close.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Trump Shapes the Post-Obama Paradigm

In the aftermath of the U.S. election on 11/8, Israeli officials reached out to pres.-elect Trump to forge ties and suggest plans for his admin. Trump’s transition team didn’t embrace them as tightly as they expected, however, and Israeli PM Netanyahu eventually reined them in. On 11/18, Israeli DM Lieberman said that Israel would encourage Trump to recognize certain settlement blocs in exchange for a freeze on construction in other areas of the West Bank. The following week, Lieberman retracted (11/21) those comments, saying that Trump’s team had sent him messages afterward asking for “a bit more humility.” After Israel’s Agriculture Min. Uri Ariel sent (11/18) senior Trump advisor Steve Bannon a letter thanking him for his opposition to the 7/14/2015 Iran nuclear deal and Education Min. Bennett met (11/20) with 3 Trump advisors in New York, Netanyahu reportedly issued (11/21) an order forbidding all ministers and dep. ministers from making contact with Trump’s team, other than through the PM’s office or the Israeli Embassy.

Meanwhile, the pres.-elect slowly formed his team to oversee the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On 1/15, he confirmed (1/15) that he was putting his son-in-law and senior advisor, Kushner, in charge of the peace process, saying (1/19), “If [Kushner] can’t produce peace in the Middle East, nobody can.” Kushner is noted for having no experience in foreign policy nor any connection to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict outside his family’s personal attachment to Israel (Kushner’s grandparents were Holocaust survivors and staunch supporters of Zionism after World War II). Kushner’s parents have donated millions to Israeli hospitals and schools, including some in settlements, thereby earning considerable clout in some U.S. Jewish circles. As pointed out by several media outlets, Netanyahu stayed at the Kushner family home in New Jersey while on a state visit to the U.S. in the 1990s (New York Times, 2/11).

As his nominee for amb. to Israel, Trump chose (12/15) bankruptcy lawyer David Friedman whom he described as “a long-time friend and trusted advisor to me.” The pres.-elect further clarified that “[Friedman’s] strong relationships in Israel will form the foundation
of his diplomatic mission and be a tremendous asset to our country as we strengthen the ties with our allies and strive for peace in the Middle East.” Like Kushner, Friedman also had no foreign policy experience at the time of his appointment. He is known as a committed supporter of the Israeli settlement enterprise, an opponent of the 2-state solution, and a columnist for the Jerusalem Post and Arutz Sheva, both right-of-center publications. Friedman also headed an organization called American Friends of Beit El, which raises approximately $2 m. per year to strengthen institutions in the eponymous West Bank settlement (this included a $10,000 donation from Trump in 2003). In accepting the nomination, Friedman aligned (12/15) himself with Netanyahu’s right-wing govt., saying that the Trump admin. would not “put [its] finger on the scale or tell Israel what policies they should adopt.” Netanyahu was pleased with the nomination, senior Israeli sources confirmed on 12/17.

Trump’s appointments to other positions related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were a mixed bag. On 12/26, the pres.-elect appointed as his rep. for international negotiations campaign advisor Greenblatt, nominally a 2-state supporter who has said he did not believe Israel’s settlements were an obstacle to peace; for secy. of state, Trump selected ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson who spoke (1/11) of the U.S. need to “recommit” to Israel during his confirmation hearing; for his part, defense secy. nominee Ret. Gen. James Mattis told senators at his own confirmation hearing that he would “stick with the [current] U.S. policy” on the question of moving the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem; finally, South Carolina governor Haley, Trump’s nominee for UN amb., told legislators at her hearing (1/18) that she supported the embassy move, favored a 2-state solution, and thought that Israel’s settlements “can hinder peace.”

The Democrats Regroup and Rethink Israel-Palestine

In addition to the Republican presidential victory, major defeats in the House and Senate on 11/8 left the Democrats a weakened minority in Congress. Sen. Bernie Sanders’s (I-VT) presidential campaign in 2015 and 2016 had revealed deep fissures between the party’s progressive wing and the establishment wing aligned with his rival, Hillary Clinton. After the resignation of Debbie Wasserman Schultz as head of the party’s main organizing body, the Democratic National Comm. (DNC), the election for her replacement was set to test the party’s Trump-era dynamics. Rep. Keith Ellison (D-MN), an early supporter of Sanders’s campaign and cochair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, emerged as 1 of 2 main contenders early on in the quarter. However, his critical stance on Israel, and the backlash it drew from key donors, threatened to scupper his campaign.

When Ellison announced (11/14) his candidacy, it galvanized Palestinian solidarity activists and opponents of the current U.S. relationship with Israel. Besides his criticism of the Israeli occupation, Ellison was the 1st Muslim to be elected to Congress, and pro-Palestinian activists therefore viewed his candidacy as having the potential to shift the Democratic Party’s staunchly pro-Israel stance (see congressionalmonitor.org for Ellison’s record on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and related issues). Their enthusiasm was tempered a week later, however, when in response to allegations of anti-Semitism, Ellison disavowed (11/22) the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. “I have long supported a 2-state solution and a democratic and secure
state for the Jewish people, with a democratic and viable Palestinian state side-by-side [sic] in peace and dignity,” Ellison indicated in an e-mail statement to the StarTribune.

Opposition to Ellison mounted on 11/29 after a video surfaced of him making critical comments about the U.S.-Israel relationship in 2010. “U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East is governed by what is good or bad through [sic] a country of 7 m. people,” Ellison said in the video. “A region of 350 m. all turns on a country of 7 m., does that make sense?” Haim Saban, a major Democratic Party donor and backer of Hillary Clinton, called (12/3) Ellison an “anti-Semitic and anti-Israel person” who would be a “disaster for Israel and the Democratic party.” Both Senate minority leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY) and the liberal Zionist group J Street defended Ellison (11/29 and 12/3, respectively).

Once the controversy subsided, former Labor Secy. Tom Perez jumped (12/15) into the DNC race, presenting a formidable challenge to Ellison from the party’s establishment wing. He won endorsements from then-VP Joe Biden and former atty. gen Eric Holder, but Pres. Obama withheld his opinion on the matter, leaving it a close race as the 2/25 vote approached.

**Aid to the Palestinians**

The Obama admin. released $221 m. in earmarked aid to the PA hours before Trump took office on 1/20. At least 2 Republican lawmakers, Ed Royce (R-CA) and Kay Granger (R-TX), had put a hold on the aid in response to the Palestinians’ admission to various international organizations, which the Obama admin. respected. When news of the last-minute release of the funds broke on 1/24, a State Dept. spokesperson announced that the dept. was looking into the situation and would ensure that the disbursement aligned with Pres. Trump’s priorities. The next day, a senior Palestinian source said that the Trump admin. had frozen the transfer. Trump admin. officials reportedly told PA PM Hamdallah on 1/24 that the funds should not be expected in PA coffers any time soon.

**Legislative Crackdowns on BDS**

State and local legislators across the U.S. undermined the BDS movement with new measures this quarter, advancing a years-long campaign against Palestine solidarity activists and critics of U.S. support for Israel. Ohio gov. John Kasich signed a bill into law on 12/19 and Michigan gov. Rick Snyder signed 2 on 12/31 that prohibited their states from contracting with businesses that engage in boycotts of Israel. Thus, Kasich and Snyder made Ohio and Michigan the 13th and 14th states to put anti-BDS laws on the books since the inception of a nationwide effort in early 2015 (see JPS 44 [4] and every subsequent Update). Furthermore, as new legislative sessions began around the country, lawmakers introduced or started planning for similar legislation in 13 other states (AR, CT, KS, MN, MS, MT, NV, NY, NC, OK, VA, WA, and WY).

The new Republican majority in the U.S. Congress also began work on several new specifically anti-BDS measures (various other measures introduced early in the 115th Congress carried provisions only tangentially related to BDS; see congressionalmonitor.org for details). On 1/17, Sen. Marco Rubio (R-FL) and Joe Manchin (D-WV) introduced the Combating BDS Act of 2017. A reformulation of a bill that had died in the previous congressional session, the measure would affirm the states’ authority to pass anti-BDS bills, like those mentioned above. At the end of
the previous session, Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL) and Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC) had introduced the Anti-Semitism Awareness Act of 2016, which broadly defined opposition to Israel as anti-Semitism, eligible for investigations into discrimination in educational programs receiving federal assistance. The bill’s definition of anti-Semitism included “judg[ing] Israel by a double standard,” which Palestine solidarity activists interpreted as condoning smears of the movement. Civil rights groups said the act would have a chilling effect on activism. The bill passed in the Senate (12/1) and stalled in the House, but supporters were expected to retool and reintroduce the bill in the 115th Congress.

EUROPE

In 1/2017, Netanyahu proposed to his cabinet that Israel join “Creative Europe,” an EU cultural and media initiative and grant-making organization, according to a Haaretz report on 1/29. Finance Min. Kahlon, Economy Min. Eli Cohen, and Culture and Sports Min. Regev were all in favor of the move, which would require Israel spending €1 m. (around $1.069 m.) to participate. Hours later, Regev issued a statement withdrawing her support as it transpired that the program excluded West Bank settlements. The proposal was then removed from the cabinet’s meeting agenda for that night.

United Kingdom

Three mos. after UK secy. of state for international development Priti Patel froze around a 3d of the UK’s annual aid to the Palestinians and ordered a review of funding procedures (see JPS 46 [2]), the Dept. for International Development (DID) announced (12/16) the results of the review. DID pledged to provide the PA with up to £25 m. (approximately $31 m.) in the 2017 fiscal year, saying the aid would “focus solely on vital health and education services, to meet the immediate needs of the Palestinian people and maximize value for money.” The DID statement added that aid money would only go toward the salaries of health and education officials who had been vetted. No funds would be used to pay the salaries of PA employees in Gaza who have been out of work since Hamas took over a decade ago. DID also pledged to undertake an assessment of the PA’s fiscal and public financial management reforms.

Also of note: The Mail on Sunday published video footage on 1/8 depicting a “senior political officer” from Israel’s embassy in London plotting to “take down” senior UK officials for criticizing Israel and calling Foreign Secy. Johnson an “idiot.” Israel’s amb. to the UK, Mark Regev, offered (1/7) the British govt. a formal apology and the Israeli Embassy said (1/7) that the employee, Shai Masot, would soon be leaving his job.

France

In addition to organizing and hosting a peace conference in Paris on 1/15 (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above), the French govt. published (11/24) new regulations calling for the accurate labeling of goods imported from the oPt. In line with the European Commission’s 11/2015 guidelines (see JPS 45 [2]), the purpose of the regulations was to alert customers that they were purchasing goods from a settlement, rather than Palestinian-made goods. Israel’s Foreign Ministry condemned the decision, and a spokesperson said (11/24), “We regret that France, where there’s a law against boycotts,
is advancing steps that could be seen as giving a tailwind to radicals and the boycott movement against Israel.”

Ireland

On 2/7, Israel’s amb. to Ireland, Zeev Boker, sent a message to Jerusalem warning that Dublin planned to recognize Palestinian statehood. Irish recognition had been on the table for a long time, according to an official in Jerusalem, and the Knesset’s approval of the so-called Regulations Bill on 2/6 mobilized the Irish govt. Irish FM Charles Flanagan then denied (2/9) the rumors: “I am actively keeping under consideration, on a continuous basis, the question of whether recognition by Ireland in the near future of a State of Palestine might be a helpful step in relation to the Middle East peace process.”

Germany

German chancellor Angela Merkel postponed indefinitely the Israeli-German summit scheduled for 5/10/2017, according to a report in Haaretz on 2/13. Berlin’s official explanation was that the summit might interfere with the upcoming German elections, but German and Israeli sources alleged (2/13) that Merkel was displeased with Israel’s new so-called Regulations Bill (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above).

RUSSIA

After Russian pres. Vladimir Putin’s proposal to host peace talks between PA pres. Abbas and Israeli PM Netanyahu in Moscow fell through last quarter (see JPS 46 [2]), the Russian govt. backed away from the Israeli-Palestinian arena. PLO secy.-gen. Erekat said (1/7) that Abbas was still willing to go to Moscow, and Russian FM Lavrov confirmed (2/1) that the invitation was still on the table, but nothing came of the proposal this quarter.

MEXICO

In his alacrity to build a positive relationship with the new U.S. pres., Netanyahu sparked a minor diplomatic crisis with Mexico. In reference to Trump’s loudly proclaimed intention to build a wall along the border with Mexico, on 1/28, the Israeli PM tweeted, “Pres. Trump is right. I built a wall along Israel’s s. border. It stopped all illegal immigration. Great success. Great idea.” The Foreign Ministry in Mexico City then summoned (1/30) the Israeli amb. for questioning, and Secy. of Foreign Affairs Luis Videgaray Caso called (1/30) on Netanyahu to retract his tweet. Netanyahu clarified (1/31) his comments the next day, saying, “I did point out the remarkable success of Israel’s security fence. But I did not comment about U.S.-Mexico relations.” Later, after Israeli pres. Rivlin spoke with Pres. Peña Nieto by telephone, a Mexican official said (1/31) that Mexico considered the crisis over.

Also of note: Israel’s Magal Security Systems sent a delegation to Washington in late 1/2017 to lobby for the contract to build Trump’s proposed wall along the U.S.-Mexico border. The company’s share price had increased by nearly 50% since Trump’s election, in part because of Magal’s role in building Israel’s barrier around the Gaza Strip.

BRAZIL

Brasilia accepted the appointment of Yossi Shelli as Israeli amb. on 1/17, ending the diplomatic crisis set off by PM Netanyahu’s nomination of settler leader Dani Dayan to the post (see JPS 45 [2–4]). A former Likud activist,
Shelli previously served as dir.-gen. of the Beersheba Municipality and on the Israel Postal Authority’s board of directors.

UNITED NATIONS

UNRWA’s Financial Crisis

The union of UNRWA employees in Gaza staged another high-profile strike this quarter to protest job cuts, unfilled positions, unpaid salaries, and declining services. UNRWA officials maintained that there had been no reduction of services in Gaza, despite the agency’s ongoing budget struggles (see JPS 45 [1, 2]). On 11/21, after mos. of inconclusive talks between union officials and UNRWA reps., around 1,000 union mbrs. went on strike in Gaza City. Negotiators met again on 11/25, and the union announced (11/27) that it would suspend the strikes for 10 days and form a comm. to resolve persistent disagreements. UNRWA reportedly hired 200 new teachers and pledged to hire 200 more in 1/2017, according to union officials (11/27), but it was too little, too late, they said. On 12/15, they announced that the talks had failed yet again and that protests would escalate although there were no further reports of mass action in Gaza this quarter.

DONORS

There was no meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Comm. this quarter. However, there was a steady stream of international aid pledged to the PA and the Palestinian people.

In a major reversal of policy on UNRWA, Canada’s Min. of International Development Marie-Claude Bibeau announced (11/16) that Ottawa would provide the agency $20 m. for general budget needs and $5 m. for its emergency appeal on Syria. “With this funding, Canada joins all other G-7 countries in supporting UNRWA’s efforts to meet the ever-increasing needs of Palestinian refugees, assists in providing basic services for vulnerable people, and contributes to stability in the region,” the official govt. statement read. In addition, UNRWA received contributions from China (11/24), Saudi Arabia (11/28), the Netherlands (11/28), India (12/12), Germany (12/14), the EU (12/26), Italy (1/5 and 2/7), South Korea (1/25), Switzerland (2/2), and Denmark (2/8), totaling $119.627 m. (The agency was pledged $56.68 m. last quarter.) Switzerland also promised (2/2) to contribute $73.7 m. in 2017–20, and the Japanese fast-fashion company UNIQLO donated (2/13) nearly $500,000 worth of winter clothes to Palestinian refugees in Burj al-Barajneh r.c. in Lebanon.

Also of note: U.S. actor and former Obama admin. staffer Kal Penn donated (1/2) $25,000 to UNRWA, which he won on a cooking-themed reality show. Addressing the 2.92 m. people who tuned in to ABC’s MasterChef Celebrity Showdown, Penn said, “I’m thrilled to be helping UNRWA do its critical work in Gaza and Syria. They’re a lifeline for so many families that have been struggling for decades to meet their basic needs and achieve their rights.”

While aid flows to UNRWA were slowly growing, the PA faced a massive budget crisis. PA PM Hamdallah said (1/3) that he expected a $1.06-b. deficit in 2017, meaning that deep budget cuts would be forthcoming. The shortfall was, in part, a result of the U.S. and EU redirecting aid dollars away from the PA, and Saudi Arabia putting a hold on its monthly disbursals (see “United States” above and JPS 46 [2]). The PA received only 1 new aid contribution this quarter, some €18.98 m. (approximately $20 m.) from the EU on 12/5.
The international community continued to support the Palestinian people in other ways. The World Bank board approved (12/2) a $5-m. grant to increase employment opportunities for Palestinian university graduates. The EU and Spain announced (12/17) a €21 m. (approximately $22 m.) donation for Palestinian families in need in Gaza and the West Bank. Japan pledged $47 m. (2/13) in new assistance to be disbursed through various international agencies, and also agreed (12/21) to pay $80,498 for the replacement of a water pipeline nr. Ramallah. In an address to the Arab League, Chinese pres. Xi Jinping announced (1/19) that Beijing would provide CNY 50 m. (approximately $8 m.) in aid to the Palestinians. Finally, senior Hamas official Haniyeh said (2/11) that Qatar had agreed to disburse $100 m. of $1 b. in reconstruction aid pledged at the 10/2014 international conference in Cairo for reconstruction in Gaza following Israel’s 2014 assault on the Strip (see JPS 44 [1, 2]).

GAZA AID SCANDAL

The Israeli authorities released (1/12) UN Development Programme (UNDP) employee Wahid Abdullah al-Bursh approximately 6 mos. after arresting him on charges of diverting international aid supplies to Hamas (see JPS 46 [1, 2]). When his release date was publicized, the organization issued (1/4) a statement saying that the outcome of his case “confirms that there was no wrongdoing by UNDP.” Separately, the Beersheba District Court accepted the Israeli prosecutor’s proposal to add charges to the govt.’s case against Mohammad El Halabi, a Gazan employee of the Christian aid group World Vision, who was arrested on 8/4 and accused of channeling $43 m. to Hamas’s military wing. El Halabi argued that the additional charges were illegitimate and only intended as punishment for his refusal to accept a plea deal. He later pled (2/2) not guilty to all the charges, setting the stage for a full trial to begin on 2/23.

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.”

BOYCOTT

In the biggest BDS-related development of the quarter, the UK security company G4S announced (12/2) that it had sold off most of its business in Israel, 9 mos. after announcing plans to do so and several years after BDS activists began targeting the company (see JPS 45 [4]). Although G4S never admitted to pulling out in response to the BDS campaign, BDS activist Rafeef Ziadeh said (12/2) that the announcement represented a major victory. “We have succeeded [in pushing] one of the world’s largest corporations into selling its key business in Israel,” she said. “Our globally coordinated campaign has had a real impact.” Activists kept up the pressure on G4S in the wake of the announcement. The UN World Food Programme in Jordan (12/6) and Lebanon’s UN International Children’s Emergency Fund branch (UNICEF, 12/24) both stated that they would no longer work with the company, joining a handful of other UN agencies dropping G4S (see JPS 46 [1, 2]).

U.S. sports stars got in on the BDS action this quarter, too. Seattle Seahawks defensive end
Michael Bennett, one of professional football’s politically active players, was set to participate in a National Football League delegation to Israel in mid-2016. But a week before the trip, he posted a statement to Twitter explaining his decision to stay home. He said that after reading an article about the Israeli gov’t.’s efforts to undermine the BDS movement, he decided to follow in the path of his idol Muhammad Ali and be a “voice for the voiceless.” He expanded on the statement as follows: “Like 1968 Olympian John Carlos always says, ‘There is no partial commitment to justice. You are either in or you’re out.’ Well, I’m in.” Bennett’s stance caused a minor media sensation in the U.S., and 5 of his colleagues ultimately joined the protest, leaving only 5 of the 11 originally invited participants to go ahead with the trip.

Various municipalities around the world threw their weight behind BDS as well. On 11/17, the City Council of Trondheim, Norway’s 3d-largest city, voted to boycott goods and services from Israel’s settlements, amplifying the citizen-led BDS movement in Norway. The city council of Portland, Oregon, voted (12/21) unanimously to suspend investments in all corporate securities, including Caterpillar and Wells Fargo, in response to demands from BDS activists, environmentalist groups, and prison divestment groups. Finally, the Provincial Council of Valencia, representing a region of 2.5 m. people in Spain, adopted (12/29) a general policy to boycott Israel. A rep. of the left-wing party València en Comú, which submitted the motion, said (12/29) that the vote was “a grand success for the Palestinian cause.” Despite BDS’s gathering strength in Spain, the Spanish courts pushed back, striking down at least 10 BDS res. in municipalities across the country in late 2016 and early 2017 (Jewish Telegraphic Agency, 2/24).

Boycott campaigns in the U.S. and UK academies were also active this quarter. On 12/8, the University of Manchester’s student union senate approved a res. backing BDS and demanding divestment from companies deemed complicit in Israel’s oppression of the Palestinians. The res. was explicitly designed in response to the university’s 2013 partnership with Israel’s Technion. Later, the student govt. at the University of California at Riverside approved (2/1) a ban on Sabra hummus, citing the Sabra parent company’s financial sponsorship of the IDF’s Golani Brigade. However, university administrators said (2/2) they had no plans to comply with the students’ wishes.

Meanwhile, the movement for BDS suffered 3 major setbacks in U.S. academia. On 1/7, the Modern Language Association (MLA) voted against endorsing an academic boycott of Israel at its annual meeting in Philadelphia. The MLA’s delegate council instead approved a res. calling on the MLA to “refrain from endorsing the boycott” on the grounds that it undermined the group’s mission to promote scholarly exchange, teaching, and research. At the American Historical Association’s annual meeting in Denver, the association’s governing council rejected a petition calling for an investigation into “the charges that academic freedom is widely violated in Israel and the oPt.” In late 12/2016, Fordham University’s dean, Keith Eldredge, informed students who had applied to form a chapter of Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) in 2015 that he was denying their request. “[I] cannot support an organization whose sole purpose is advocating political goals of a specific group and against a specific country,” Eldredge wrote. SJP is one of the main campus groups responsible for the
wave of BDS support across the U.S. in recent years.

In the religious realm, the Peace United Church of Christ in Santa Cruz, California, voted (12/6) to stop purchasing Hewlett-Packard products, making it the 1st U.S. church to heed the call for BDS action against companies deemed complicit in Israel’s occupation. (For more on BDS, see Palestine Unbound.)