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This update is a summary of bilateral, multilateral, regional, and international events affecting the Palestinians and Israel. 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: Regional events figure heavily in developments this quarter as the Saudi Arabian crown prince steps out of the shadows of secret meetings with Israeli and U.S. officials; Lebanese PM Saad Hariri announces his resignation under mysterious circumstances in Riyadh; and Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman summons Palestinian Authority (PA) pres. Mahmoud Abbas to the Saudi capital just 2 days later. These actions come soon after reps. from Hamas and Fatah sign a new reconciliation agreement in Cairo, prompting Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu to threaten to upend U.S. pres. Donald Trump’s peace initiative. Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition continue to quarrel internally over settlement growth and annexation. They also continue their crackdown on the Israeli opposition, Palestinian citizens of Israel, and supporters of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement. Earlier in the quarter, Trump asks the Palestinians to delay unilateral moves at international forums while he puts together a plan for restarting Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

U.S. pres. Donald Trump continued work on a peace initiative this quarter, without any resolution to lingering uncertainties on key issues (e.g., whether the U.S. should move its embassy in Israel to Jerusalem; see JPS 46 [4] and 47 [1]). He and his negotiating team met with Israeli and Palestinian officials, as well as other country and organizational leaders, but they failed to produce anything concrete. Jared Kushner, the president’s son-in-law and his senior advisor, along with Dep. National Security Advisor Dina Powell and Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt, made an unannounced visit to Saudi Arabia on 10/25–28. The White House declined to disclose with whom Kushner met.
but media reports indicate he held talks with Prince Mohammad, who had recently had several Saudi ministers and 11 princes arrested, presumably to consolidate his power, though he claimed to be fighting corruption. Shortly afterward, Lebanon’s PM Hariri visited the kingdom and announced his resignation. Two days later, Prince Mohammad summoned PA pres. Abbas (see “Regional Affairs” below) in what some analysts viewed as efforts to derail the Hamas-Fatah unity deal and to further marginalize Iran.

After Palestinian support for Trump’s efforts began to waver last quarter (see JPS 47 [1]), the Palestinians shifted their focus almost entirely to internal and regional issues (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” and “Regional Affairs” below). Meanwhile, the Israeli govt. dealt with internal issues of its own, including an increasingly acrimonious debate over: a bill that would grant Israeli sovereignty to settlements ringing East Jerusalem, effectively annexing them into Israel, and settlement growth, which put Netanyahu at odds with the ultranationalists in his own ruling coalition.

THE TRUMP INITIATIVE

As the quarter opened, the Trump peace initiative was all but stalled. Trump maintained he was still eager to make “the ultimate deal,” as he referred to the prospect of a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, but he rarely brought the subject up of his own accord. Instead, he focused on confronting North Korea over its nuclear program and overhauling the U.S. health-care and tax systems. The Israelis, led by Netanyahu, still supported Trump’s efforts, but were more concerned with countering the alleged Iranian threat as well as with their own internal issues. The Palestinians were the least enthusiastic of all parties. After the U.S. Middle East negotiating team consistently defended Israel’s installation of cameras and checkpoints under the guise of security at Haram al-Sharif in 7/2017 (see JPS 47 [1]), it was clear that the Trump admin. was going to have to rebuild relationships in Ramallah before moving forward on peace talks.

Their first opportunity to do so was set for 8/24, when Kushner was scheduled to visit Israel and the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). In the lead-up to Kushner’s trip, some PA officials aired their skepticism publicly. Abbas reportedly told a delegation from the Israeli leftist party Meretz that he couldn’t understand the Trump admin.’s conduct (8/20). “I have met with Trump envoys about 20 times since the beginning of his term as pres. of the U.S. [in 1/2017],” he said. “Every time, they repeatedly stressed to me how much they believe and are committed to a 2-state solution and a halt to construction in the settlements. I have pleaded with them to say the same thing to Netanyahu, but they refrained. They said they would consider it but then they didn’t get back to me.” PLO Executive Comm. mbr. Ahmad Majdalani then clarified (8/22) that the Palestinians brought up those 2 key issues during a meeting in 6/2017 (see JPS 47 [1]). “Since then we haven’t heard from them,” he said. “We hope they bring clear answers this time. If not, then the peace process cannot be resumed because we cannot negotiate from scratch.”

The day before Kushner arrived in Israel, a U.S. State Dept. spokesperson responded (8/23) to the Palestinians’ complaints. “We are not going to state what the outcome has to be,” she said, addressing the open question of Trump’s support for a 2-state solution. “It has to be workable to both sides. And I think, really, that’s the best view as to not really bias one side over the other, to make sure that they can
work through it.” Kushner was apparently more reassuring in his meeting with Abbas on 8/24. “We know that this [U.S.] delegation is working for peace, and we are working with it,” Abbas said (8/24). “We know that things are difficult and complicated, but there is nothing impossible with good efforts.” The meeting was “productive,” according to a PA statement (8/24). “Both sides agreed to continue with the U.S.-led conversations as the best way to reach a comprehensive peace deal.”

The Kushner meeting established the dynamic that prevailed through the end of the quarter. Amid a spate of rumors and unconfirmed reports, Israel Hayom reported (8/27) that Kushner pledged the Trump admin. would present its peace plan, including positions on all final status issues, within 3–4 mos. in exchange for the Palestinians indefinitely postponing their pursuit of statehood recognition in the international arena. Abbas, whose deputies were threatening to resume that very strategy, reportedly agreed contingent upon Trump personally backing Kushner’s pledge. According to an unnamed Palestinian official, Kushner and Abbas sealed the deal by agreeing to arrange a meeting between the 2 presidents on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York on 9/2017.

With the Palestinians mollified, the Trump admin. turned back its attention to the Israelis. By the end of 8/2017, U.S. and Israeli officials resumed talks on Trump’s pledge to move the U.S. Embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem (Times of Israel, 8/28; see JPS 46 [4] and 47 [1] for background on Trump’s shifting position on the embassy move). According to a U.S. source, both sides brought up the issue during Kushner’s meeting with Netanyahu on 8/24. Israeli officials confirmed that the subject did come up, but made no comments on the nature of the discussion.

Ahead of the UNGA, Trump and his aids lowered expectations for their peace initiative and directed the focus to the implementation of the 7/14/2015 Iran nuclear deal (see “Iran” below). “Achieving peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians remains one of the president’s highest priorities, but the UN meetings will primarily focus on other issues and serve as check-in opportunities,” a senior U.S. official said (9/16). The Palestinians, apparently content with the promised timeframe and occupied with their own national reconciliation process (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below), refrained from calling for clarity from the Trump admin. on settlements and the 2-state solution. Netanyahu, for his part, was eager to redirect the discussion as well.

In New York, Trump met first with Netanyahu on 9/18. “Most people would say there is no chance whatsoever” to reach a peace agreement, Trump said, at a joint press conference. “I actually think that with the ability of Bibi, and frankly with the other side, I really think we have a chance.” After the meeting, the White House released (9/18) a statement saying that the pair discussed their “continuing efforts to achieve an enduring Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement, the optimism in the region about peace, and expanding economic opportunities to improve conditions for peace.” No further details were disclosed.

Trump’s meeting with Abbas was potentially more critical, since Abbas was reportedly hoping for the U.S. president’s personal commitment to the pledge Kushner had made on 8/24. A PA spokesperson said (9/18) that Abbas planned to reassess his dedication to the U.S. initiative after the meeting. On 9/20, hours after Abbas addressed the UNGA...
reaffirming his support for a 2-state solution and reasserting the Palestinians’ right to pursue justice through international arenas such as the International Criminal Court, he met with Trump. The U.S. pres. told (9/20) Abbas that this was their “best shot ever” to make the “toughest deal of all” and reportedly repeated Kushner’s request for more time. According to senior PA officials, Abbas acquiesced *(Haaretz, 9/24)*.

In the aftermath of the UNGA, the Palestinians, U.S., and Israelis all displayed some optimism in their public comments and actions. The Trump admin. was presumed to be working on its plan; Netanyahu took apparent steps to limit settlement growth, despite pressure from his ultranationalist coalition partners (see “Settlement Growth in the Trump Era” below); and the Palestinians proceeded to reach a major national reconciliation agreement (10/12), in hope of presenting a unified front ahead of peace talks.

At the same time, there was one indication that Trump was starting to feel the same kind of frustration with Netanyahu that his predecessor, Barack Obama, experienced. According to a Western diplomat on 10/4, Trump had told (9/19) UN secy.-gen. António Guterres that both Netanyahu and Abbas were “problematic,” but that between the two, “Netanyahu is the bigger problem.” A senior White House official later challenged (10/4) that narrative, saying, “The pres. said that he feels both sides want to make peace and he remains optimistic about an enduring peace deal. We are focusing on our productive conversations and not on the noise created by spoilers.”

Although there were some early signs that the Palestinian reconciliation agreement of 10/12 would be a game changer, the Israeli security cabinet quickly imposed strict conditions on Hamas before Israel would agree to work with the consensus govt. (10/17). According to a statement from Netanyahu’s office, the conditions included Hamas recognizing Israel, ceasing all so-called terrorist activity, disarming and dismantling its military infrastructure in the West Bank, severing ties with Iran, returning to Israel the remains of the 2 Israel Defense Forces (IDF) soldiers and the Israeli civilians being held in Gaza (see “Prisoner Swap” below), and giving up security control of Gaza to the PA. A senior Israeli official said (10/17) that the cabinet had also authorized Netanyahu to impose punitive sanctions on the PA, including deductions from the tax revenues Israel collects on the Palestinians’ behalf and transfers to the PA on a monthly basis. “Any other cabinet decision would have given legitimacy to the terror organization Hamas, which strives to destroy Israel,” Education Minister Naftali Bennett said (10/17). Later that same day, a PA spokesperson said that the Israeli govt. would not be allowed to stand in the way of reconciliation, indicating that Abbas would prioritize reconciliation with Hamas given the choice between that and the possibility of another round of talks with Israel. Another senior Palestinian official accused the Israeli cabinet of falsely assuming that Hamas would join the PA, and putting forth a “new excuse” to back out of the process.

Two days later, Greenblatt offered (10/19) the first official U.S. response to the reconciliation deal. “All parties agree that it is essential that the PA be able to assume full, genuine, and unhindered civil and security responsibilities in Gaza and that we work together to improve the humanitarian situation for Palestinians living there,” he said in a statement. “The U.S. reiterates the importance of adherence to the Quartet principles: any Palestinian govt. must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognize
the State of Israel, accept previous agreements and obligations between the parties—including to disarm terrorists—and commit to peaceful negotiations. If Hamas is to play any role in a Palestinian govt., it must accept these basic requirements.” Another senior Trump admin. official offered some context on Greenblatt’s statement on 10/22, saying that the U.S. expected Hamas to disarm, but didn’t necessarily expect it to happen soon. “Egypt has helped us crack open a door to Gaza that didn’t exist a few weeks ago, and we see it as a possible opportunity,” the official said (10/22).

Then two days later, Kushner, Powell, and Greenblatt made a surprise, unannounced trip to Saudi Arabia (10/25–28). The White House would not disclose with whom they met but media reports indicate Kushner met with Prince Mohammad, who in November worked to consolidate his power by arresting dozens of ministers, and 11 princes. While Kushner returned to the U.S. on 11/28, Greenblatt continued on to Amman, Cairo, Ramallah, and Jerusalem (Politico, 10/29/2017). Within days, Prince Mohammad summoned Hariri, who suddenly announced his resignation from Riyadh, as well as Abbas. These events had analysts indicating that Saudi Arabia, supported by Trump through Kushner, was working to marginalize Iran’s growing power in the region and force Abbas to accept Israel’s conditions on the unity govt.

As the initial surprise of the reconciliation deal wore off, both the Israelis and Palestinians continued meeting to discuss the Trump peace initiative. On 10/29, Israeli minister of finance Moshe Kahlon met with PA PM Rami Hamdallah for the 2d time in 6 mos., reportedly following U.S. pressure to make progress on measures that could strengthen the Palestinian economy. The meeting resulted in no new agreements, but the 2 men made “important progress . . . on key issues,” according to Greenblatt (10/29). Then, after mos. of unconfirmed reports that PA Security Forces (PASF) had resumed some coordination with the IDF, the chief of the Palestinian police, Maj. Gen. Hazem Atallah, confirmed the news on 11/8. “Everyone is coordinating now. That means things returned to what they were before,” Atallah said, referring to Abbas’s 7/21 announcement of an indefinite suspension of PASF-IDF coordination in response to new Israeli security measures at Haram al-Sharif. The suspension had been extremely popular among the Palestinian public (see “Palestinian Opinion” below). Atallah also said that security coordination had never ceased completely, as many Israeli politicians pointed out at the time. “The only thing we stopped is we didn’t meet them in the field,” he said, explaining that approximately 95% of coordination activities continued.

As the quarter came to a close, the New York Times unearthed a few more details about the Trump plans on 11/11. According to White House officials, the plan was set to be ready in early 2018, considerably later than the 3–4 month window Kushner had promised Abbas on 8/24. The officials also said that Trump’s core team—Kushner, Greenblatt, amb. to Israel David Friedman, and Powell—had put together a series of “non-papers” covering various issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including settlements and the status of Jerusalem, over the course of Trump’s first 10 mos. in office. “We have spent a lot of time listening to and engaging with the Israelis, Palestinians and key regional leaders over the past few months to help reach an enduring peace deal,” Greenblatt said (11/11). “We are not going to put an artificial timeline on the development or presentation of any specific ideas and will also never impose a deal.”
SETTLEMENT GROWTH IN THE TRUMP ERA

With the Palestinians demanding that the U.S. take a firmer position on Israeli settlement growth and Trump steadfastly refusing to do so, the most contentious debates this quarter took place within the ranks of the Israeli govt. They played out similarly to other conversations in the Knesset that had become even more heated ever since Trump assumed office in 1/2017. Netanyahu, wary of a notoriously mercurial Trump blaming him for any possible breakdown in the peace process, made enough concessions to his ultranationalist coalition partners to maintain power, but not so many as to draw anything more than tepid criticism from the international community, including the U.S. Yet, in view of trends that transpired in both the Knesset and the Jerusalem Municipality during this quarter, it is evident that Netanyahu and his far-right coalition govt. were intent on sealing Jerusalem off from the rest of the West Bank, further enclosing Palestinians in isolated bantustans. While there was much settlement news this quarter, five specific settlement-related developments stood out for their magnitude and implications.

The first concerned the imminent issuance of tenders for the new settlement of Givat Hamatos, which, once built, would create an impassable barrier between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, effectively dividing the West Bank. Next, two settlement projects were announced, one establishing a strong Jewish presence inside the Palestinian neighborhood of Jabal Mukabir in East Jerusalem and the other in the city of Hebron. And, lastly, the Knesset debated two pieces of legislation that would forever change the demographic makeup of Jerusalem, in contravention of international law, including Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention. The five developments constituted further evidence of continued Israeli efforts to augment Palestinian displacement, expropriating ever more Palestinian land and dividing the West Bank in such a way as to make a contiguous Palestinian state a physical impossibility.

On (10/2), Netanyahu spoke at a Likud Party meeting in Ma’ale Adumim—a major settlement under the ambit of the aforementioned Greater Jerusalem bill calling for the de facto annexation of several West Bank settlements. The PM openly supported the proposed legislation, saying, “This place will forever remain part of Israel.” The location of Netanyahu’s remarks was important because of the ties between Ma’ale Adumim and the proposed E1 settlement bloc. Together, the two settlements carve out a significant portion of the West Bank, making it more viable for full annexation. The following day (10/3), Netanyahu indicated that he would move ahead with construction of Givat Hamatos between Gilo and Har Homa, effectively cutting off Bethlehem from Jerusalem. Strategically, Givat Hamatos has far-reaching implications, according to Terrestrial Jerusalem. “Givat Hamatos is a game-changer, if not a game-ender. It is not as devastating as E1 in dismembering the West Bank, but it is equally or more devastating than E1 in its impact on a political division of the city,” Peace Now wrote in 2012 when construction plans were first approved. The Israeli settlement watch NGO described the latest move as follows:

The preparation for a tender in Givat Hamatos, together with Netanyahu’s statements last week regarding the construction of thousands of housing units in Ma’ale Adumim with heavy hints towards E1, are all a part of the govt.’s effort to create a de facto annexation and prevent the possibility for two states on the ground. Netanyahu is taking far-reaching steps, which he has thus far avoided, and by doing so he risks
the two-state solution and the future of Israel (Peace Now, 10/16).

Although the original plans for Givat Hamatos had been approved in 2014, they were shelved under pressure from the admin. of then U.S. pres. Obama, but the policy chaos and pro-settlement stance of the incoming Trump admin. only emboldened the Netanyahu govt.

Under pressure from Israel’s pro-settlement politicians who had been discussing annexation as recently as 1/2017 (see JPS 46 [3])—and with Netanyahu’s blessing—the Knesset planned to vote on the Greater Jerusalem bill on 10/29. Four days after informing the Knesset that the vote on the bill would go ahead, Netanyahu requested a delay. “The current version of the . . . bill invites international pressure and involves difficult legal issues,” explained (10/29) a senior mbr. of the ruling coalition, adding that Netanyahu could “not allow himself to advance this version at this time.” During a cabinet meeting that evening, the PM indicated that the Trump admin. had intervened. “The Americans turned to us and inquired what the bill was about. As we have been coordinating with them until now, it is worth talking and coordinating with them,” he said. Later, a senior U.S. official commented (10/29), “It’s fair to say that the U.S. is discouraging actions that it believes will unduly distract the principals from focusing on the advancement of peace negotiations. The [Greater Jerusalem bill] was considered by the admin. to be one of those actions.”

The Knesset’s second proposed bill called for excising from Jerusalem Palestinian neighborhoods such as Kafir ‘Aqab, and the Shu’fat r.c., which are inside the city’s boundaries but on the West Bank side of the separation wall. At least 100,000 Palestinian Jerusalemites live in these areas.

The above-referenced plans to transfer Israeli Jews into settlements inside Palestinian neighborhoods in Hebron and East Jerusalem would not only greatly disrupt Palestinians’ freedom of movement but irreversibly fracture the contiguity necessary for a Palestinian state. On 10/25, the Jerusalem Municipality and District Council issued (10/25) building permits for 176 new residences in Nof Zion, a settlement inside the Palestinian neighborhood of Jabal Mukabir. “This is not a matter of real estate but a matter of politics and sovereignty, as the Israelis moving to homes inside Palestinian neighborhoods are motivated solely by ideology, and are trying to prevent a future compromise in Jerusalem,” Peace Now wrote on 9/6/2017. Likewise, the Civil Admin.’s Licensing Subcomm. on 10/16 approved 31 building permits for new housing units in c. Hebron on Shuhada Street, once the main thoroughfare through the Old City. For years, the Israeli military has prohibited Palestinians from using or crossing Shuhada Street because of nearby settlements. The new construction will be the first development in Hebron in 15 years and the first within the city itself.

The announcement came a few weeks after Israeli DM Avigdor Lieberman announced the creation of a new Israeli municipal center for settlers in Hebron, a move that will further disenfranchise Palestinians there. “The settlement in Hebron represents the occupation in its most ugly [form]. In order to protect a small group of settlers, tens of thousands of Palestinians had been forced to move from their homes, and roads and shops ha[ve] been closed. The permits approved today would increase the number of settlers in Hebron by 20%. . . . While doing everything in his power to please a small group of settlers, Netanyahu is . . . crushing basic values of human rights and dignity,” Peace Now wrote
in a statement (10/16). Netanyahu had made clear his intention to fast-forward settlement plans early on, and received little or no pushback from the Trump admin. until the Greater Jerusalem bill came up for a vote.

In late 8/2017, after mos. of pressure from far-right religious nationalists in his coalition, at an event commemorating the 50th anniversary of Israel’s occupation of the West Bank, Netanyahu proclaimed (8/28), “We are here to stay, forever. There will be no more uprooting of settlements in the land of Israel. It has been proven that it does not help peace. We’ve uprooted settlements. What did we get? We received missiles. It will not happen anymore.” A senior U.S. official responded (8/29) by saying that Netanyahu’s pledge would not derail Trump’s peace initiative. “It is no secret what each side’s position is on this issue,” the official said. “Our focus is on continuing our conversations with both parties and regional leaders to work toward facilitating a deal that factors in all substantive issues.” The Trump admin. likewise proffered no criticism when the Israeli cabinet approved (9/3) a budget for Amichai, the new settlement due to replace the illegal Amona outpost (see JPS 46 [3, 4]), which was forcibly evacuated months earlier. The new budget, allotting NIS 55 m. (approx. $15.3 m.) to the project, allowed construction to resume 2 mos. after it was suspended due to a shortfall in funds.

Notwithstanding the PM’s aggressive statements, the pro-settlement factions within the coalition govt. remained unsatisfied. In 9/2017 and 10/2017, simmering tensions escalated after Netanyahu postponed a scheduled meeting of the Civil Admin.’s High Planning Comm. to accommodate Trump’s meetings with various heads of Middle East states at the UNGA (Haaretz, 9/24). The delay enraged the settler umbrella group Yesha Council and its allies in the govt. In a closed-door meeting with Netanyahu on 9/26, they told the PM that he was not meeting their expectations, “especially after the change in the [U.S.] admin.,” one of the participants said. He also reported Netanyahu as promising that the High Planning Comm. would approve thousands of new settler homes at its next meeting and that he had managed to convince the Trump admin. to drop its distinction between the so-called settlement blocs, which were seen as possible targets for land swaps under any final agreement with the Palestinians, and more isolated settlements. It is worth noting that Yesha Council leaders had met with Greenblatt, in the spring. The meeting, the first official encounter between settlers and the representatives of any U.S. pres., raised concerns among the international community about the continued perception of the U.S. as an “honest broker” in peace negotiations.

When the High Planning Comm. finally published (10/10) its agenda, which included plans to advance 3,800 new settler residences, Haaretz reported that the number of housing units was greatly inflated. Knesset mbr. (MK) Bezalel Smotrich (Jewish Home) and Samaria Regional Council head Yossi Dagan dismissed (10/11) the agenda as “spin,” and the Yesha Council released a statement expressing disappointment: “We are aware of the pressures being exerted on the PM, but nevertheless, as settlement leaders it is our obligation to state the facts accurately.” On 10/24, Dagan set up a protest tent outside the PM’s residence in Jerusalem, and after meeting with him and a group of settler leaders the following day, Netanyahu promised (10/25) investments of NIS 800 m. (approx. $228 m.) in road construction and other infrastructure development in the West Bank, starting in 2018. The reaction was mixed: Yesha Council head Avi Roeh said it was a “significant message” to
the settler community; others, including Dagan, were dubious. “We are fed up with promises and spin,” Dagan said, returning to his tent.

On 10/29, with the Greater Jerusalem bill on hold, Dagan escalated his protest. On 11/4, he and his allies announced that they would be going on hunger strike until Netanyahu upheld his promise of NIS 800 m. for settlement infrastructure. “It should not have come to this,” Dagan said. “Mr. PM, do the right thing… Give a real source of funding for the paving of the bypass roads and the means of security.”

According to an 11/5 report in the Times of Israel, Netanyahu’s efforts to appease the settlers succeeded in deflating the Dagan protest effort. Only 2 of the 24 local and regional council chairs representing settlements in the West Bank had joined Dagan in his tent by 11/5. Roeh, for his part, said that Yesha Council would not be participating because he believed Netanyahu would honor his pledge.

Also of note: Israeli settlement debates were not restricted to the Far Right. On 10/16, the leader of Israel’s Labor Party, Avi Gabbay, said that settlements would not necessarily need to be evacuated under a final peace agreement with the Palestinians, breaking from his party’s traditional stance on the issue. Gabbay “made a deliberate decision to take the risk that his base would flee in order to wink at centrist and soft-right voters,” according to one source close to the Labor leader (Haaretz, 10/16). Along those lines, there was some speculation in the Israeli press that Gabbay was attempting to woo former DM Moshe Ya’alon to defect from Likud. No high-ranking Labor officials challenged Gabbay.
on the record, but several expressed reservations about his comments in private.

PERSECUTING ISRAEL’S PALESTINIAN MINORITY AND OTHER OPPONENTS

As they squabbled over settlement growth, Netanyahu and his right-wing govt. advanced their years-long campaign to consolidate power, with a renewed push to pass the so-called nation-state bill and efforts to undermine opposition to it.

As with the Greater Jerusalem bill (see above), right-wing MKs had been debating competing drafts of the nation-state bill for years. Each one held to the same basic idea that Israel’s role as the nation-state of the Jewish people should be codified in the country’s Basic Law, which serves as a de facto constitution since Israel lacks one. In 5/2017, the Knesset approved a preliminary amendment in one draft of the bill, canceling the status of Arabic as an “official language.” Members also excluded a controversial provision from previous drafts that would have required “that courts rule ‘in light of the principles of Jewish law’ in the absence of clear legislation or legal precedent” (Haaretz, 10/31). There were concerns that the bill did not contain the word “democracy,” amid fears that Jewish religious law could replace a democratic judiciary as well as discriminate against minority populations, most notably Palestinians. Throughout the summer, the Knesset debated various amendments and competing drafts. MKs from the ruling coalition insisted upon focusing solely on the “Jewish character” of the state, while left-wing and non-Zionist parties argued that doing so would unjustly discriminate against Palestinian citizens of Israel. By the end of the quarter, the govt. coalition drafting the bill conceded and amended wording so that “all legislation in Israel will be interpreted according to both democratic values and the country’s Jewish nature—without giving one priority over the other” (Haaretz, 11/9).

Although the new draft was still controversial, primarily due to lingering discrimination concerns, it was widely expected to pass its first reading on 12/12.

Also in the Knesset, the Ministerial Comm. for Legislation approved (11/5) an amendment to the so-called anti-boycott law, which passed in 7/2011 and allowed any Israeli to sue activists calling for boycott campaigns against Israel or its settlements. A version of the amendment had passed as a provision of the 2011 law, but the High Court of Justice struck it down in 2015 because of concerns that there was no limit on compensatory damages from lawsuits that did not demonstrate actual harm. Under the new proposal, judgements against those who repeatedly call for boycotts would be capped at NIS 100,000 (approx. $28,000), while the maximum financial judgement against people who organize systematic boycotts would be held at NIS 500,000 (approx. $143,000).

Outside the Knesset, Netanyahu and his right-wing allies continued cracking down on activists, journalists, and politicians who opposed their treatment of the Palestinians. On 8/16, Israel’s Govt. Press Office (GPO) revoked the credentials of an Al Jazeera reporter for allegedly acting as an “active partner in Palestinian resistance.” The reporter, a Palestinian citizen of Israel called Elias Karram, had said in a 2016 interview that “journalistic work is an integral part of the resistance.” After Karram publicly disavowed terrorism, the GPO reversed (8/30) its decision. “In the months to come, the GPO will keep track of the network’s reports in Israel, in Arabic and in English, and will not hesitate to reach the necessary conclusions after consulting with legal and security officials,” GPO dir.
Nitzan Chen said at Karram’s 8/30 hearing (Haaretz, 8/30).

On 9/12, the Israeli press reported that the Israeli govt. was planning to cancel the special tax status of Amnesty International (AI) in response to its summer campaign, titled “Israel’s Occupation: 50 Years of Dispossession.” Had the govt. persevered, the measure would have marked a rare implementation of the 2011 anti-boycott law. In response, AI released (9/12) a statement condemning the reported plans: “While we have not been officially informed of any such action by the authorities, if true, this would be a serious setback to freedom of expression and an ominous sign for the ability of human rights–focused nongovernmental organizations in Israel to operate freely and without arbitrary interference.”

Although authorities abandoned plans to revoke AI’s tax status, Israeli authorities did deny Raed Jarrar, the Amnesty International USA advocacy dir. for the Middle East and North Africa, entry into Israel on 10/30. An Israeli spokesperson later confirmed that Public Security and Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan, who was leading Israel’s efforts to counter the growing BDS movement, had requested Jarrar’s denial. Jarrar was reportedly attempting to visit his family in Israel after the death of his father.

Finally, the population, immigration, and border authority office of Israel’s interior minister announced (11/13) plans to deny entry to 7 of the 20 mbrs. of a European delegation set to arrive in Israel the following week because of their support for BDS. Erdan explained (11/13), “We will not permit entry to those who actively call to harm the State of Israel, especially in light of their request to meet and offer support to the arch-terrorist [and imprisoned Fatah leader] Marwan Barghouti.” By conflating support for Barghouti with calls for boycotts, the announcement marked a new, expanded interpretation of Israel’s anti-boycott laws. According to a document produced by a senior official in the Strategic Affairs Ministry, “The issue of prisoner visits was not the responsibility of the Strategic Affair Ministry. Still, the issue of Palestinian prisoners and efforts to delegitimize Israel are intertwined. The ministry’s position is to not allow any delegation mbr. to visit Marwan Barghouti, as a visit is liable to give him a tailwind.”

HAMAS CRACKS DOWN ON ISLAMIST GROUPS

Hamas’s agreement with the Egyptian govt. last quarter to increase security along Gaza’s border with Sinai led to renewed violence between Hamas and the various small Islamist groups in Gaza in 8–10/2017, which in turn produced multiple exchanges of cross-border violence with Israel. Tensions between Hamas and these groups had broken out into similar intermittent episodes in recent years (see JPS 45 [1]), with the Islamists both directly attacking Hamas personnel and baiting the IDF into attacking Hamas with rocket fire. This quarter was no different, and it threatened to undermine both Hamas’s rapprochement with Cairo and the 10/12 Palestinian national reconciliation deal.

The violence began on 8/17. Hamas forces were responding to a report of militants infiltrating Gaza from Sinai when they encountered 2 men carrying light arms at the mouth of a small tunnel. As the Hamas troops approached, 1 of the men detonated a bomb belt, killing himself and 1 of the Hamas fighters, and injuring 5 others. The assailant was later identified as a supporter of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS). The day after the attack, Hamas shut down the offices of the Islamic State of Gaza and the Army of Islam, and
arrested dozens of their mbrs. in raids throughout Rafah and Khan Yunis. The crackdown continued into 10/2017, with Hamas announcing (10/7) the arrests of several Islamist leaders in an overnight raid in Rafah, possibly related to continuing reconciliation talks in Cairo, some analysts said. Then on Sunday (10/8), militants, thought to be possibly ISIS sympathizers retaliating for the arrests, fired a rocket toward Israel, which landed in an open area short of the border fence. Though there were no casualties, an IDF tank targeted (10/8) a Hamas observation post e. of al-Maghazi and Israeli artillery shelled a site nr. Gaza City. (Neither attack led to any serious injuries.)

A few days after the rocket attack, Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS) fighters launched (10/15) 2 rockets from n. Sinai into Israel. These also landed in open areas, causing no damage or injuries. The rockets’ targets remained unclear as it could not be ascertained if Israel alone, Israel and Hamas, or Egyptian security forces had been the intended target. The attack followed a day of violence in al-Arish, Rafah, and Shaykh Zuwayd, in which Egyptian forces killed at least 24 armed fighters after SPIS mbns. assaulted an Egyptian soldier at a vacant church in al-Arish (see Chronology). Regardless, the Egyptian authorities decided (10/15) to cancel a planned opening of the Rafah border crossing on 10/16. (The promise of more frequent openings of the crossing was among Hamas’s key victories in its agreement with the Egyptian govt. last quarter.)

The violence in Gaza continued through the end of the quarter, with no further spillover into Israel or Egypt. On 10/27, Dep. Minister of Interior and Internal Security Tawfiq Abu Naim was slightly injured in an alleged assassination attempt. His jeep exploded as he was leaving Friday prayer at the Abu al-Hassan Mosque in c. Gaza. Hamas officials initially blamed Israel for the attack, but later said they suspected local Islamists. The next day, Abu Naim alleged that it was a politically motivated attempt to undermine the reconciliation process. “The objectives of those who committed this despicable act will not be achieved,” he said, affirming that Hamas was still on track to meet its 11/1 deadline to hand over control of Gaza’s border crossings to the PA (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below).

OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS

After the flare-up of violence surrounding new Israeli security measures at Haram al-Sharif last quarter, Israeli-Palestinian violence returned to pre-crisis levels. As a result, the number of Palestinians killed by Israeli actions this quarter fell to 21, down from 38. The number of Israelis killed by Palestinian actions was 4, down from 6 last quarter. Therefore, the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 9/2000 reached 10,978 Palestinians (including 64 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 cross-border “infiltrators”); 1,270 Israelis (including at least 250 settlers and 440 IDF soldiers and other security personnel); and 73 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 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 the Palestinian killed in the Swedish town of Limmared on 8/20, despite the
accusation made by various Palestinians that Israel’s Mossad agency was responsible. Also excluded is the Palestinian killed in a firefight with PASF troops on 9/13 (see Chronology).

Overview of the Violence

The number of Palestinians killed because of Israeli actions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem decreased significantly this quarter. Although tensions across the oPt over longstanding issues like settlements and demolitions of Palestinian property remained high, there were fewer protests, clashes, and individual or so-called random attacks. Overall, only 5 Palestinians were killed in this context (down from 29 last quarter): 2 died (on 8/26, a car driven by Israeli settlers ran over 8-year-old Aseel Abu Oun, who died from her injuries on 8/27, and on 10/31, Israeli soldiers fired into a car near a checkpoint, killing the driver); 1 succumbed (9/3) to injuries sustained in clashes with the IDF on 8/9; 1 was killed (8/19) after allegedly attempting to stab Israeli border security guards; and 1 was killed (9/26) after shooting and killing 3 Israeli security forces. There were far fewer Palestinian injuries as well. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 275 Palestinians were injured between 8/15 and 11/6 (down from 1,794 last quarter).

Apart from the 1 major incident of cross-border violence, the number of Palestinian killed in the Gaza Strip because of Israeli actions was comparable to totals in recent quarters. Overall, 16 Palestinians were killed in this context; 2 Hamas fighters died during a tunnel collapse on 9/15; 1 Hamas fighter died in an unspecified “training accident” on 9/19; 1 Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) fighter died in an “accident” during an unspecified mission on 8/28; and the remaining 12 were all Hamas and PIJ fighters killed when Israeli forces detonated a tunnel leading from Khan Yunis into Israeli territory on 10/30 (see “Prisoner Swap” and Chronology). The number of Gazans injured because of Israeli actions this quarter decreased substantially. According to OCHA, 52 Palestinians were injured between 8/15 and 11/6 (down from 162).

The IDF strictly enforced the unilaterally defined buffer zone, or so-called Access Restricted Areas, along Israel’s border with Gaza, as in previous quarters. Israeli troops violently dispersed Palestinian protesters gathering along the border fence on 9 different occasions (down from 16 last quarter); shot at Palestinian shepherds, farmers, and bird hunters on 2 occasions (8/18 and 10/10); and fired on Palestinian land or other property 12 times (9/9, 9/16, 9/17, 10/13, 10/15, 10/22, 10/25, 11/2, 11/6 [2], 11/9, and 11/13). Israeli forces also conducted 11 limited incursions to level land and “clear sightlines” into Gaza (8/21, 8/28, 9/5, 9/11, 9/12, 9/24, 10/10, 10/16, 10/24, 10/27, and 11/5), and arrested 9 Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel (8/16 [2], 8/19, 9/16 [2], 10/10 [2], and 10/14 [2]).

Also of note: Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, the IDF’s Coordinator of Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT), said (10/11) that Hamas fighters had started using lasers to blind IDF troops operating along the border in recent weeks. “The continuation of the provocative blinding operations . . . could lead to an escalation at a sensitive moment for developments in the Palestinian theater,” he said. “You’ve been warned.”

Although the Israeli authorities again decided to temporarily expand (10/18) the fishing zone off Gaza’s s. coast (see “Movement and Access” below), Israeli naval forces violently harassed Gazan fishermen throughout the quarter. They opened fire on or otherwise confronted the fishermen on at least 62 separate occasions,
up from 52 last quarter. Over the course of these incidents, 1 Palestinian was slightly injured (11/8), 8 were arrested (9/18 [2], 10/15 [4], and 11/6 [2]), and 4 boats were confiscated (9/18, 10/15 [2], and 11/6). In a related incident, Israeli naval forces shot and injured a Palestinian sailing off the coast on 10/19.

**Movement and Access**

The Israeli authorities again changed their procedures for processing applications by Palestinians trying to exit the Gaza Strip this quarter, imposing yet another hurdle for merchants conducting their business, students pursuing education opportunities abroad, and those in need of specialized medical care not available at home, among others (see figure 1). Just 5 mos. after Israel’s Liaison Office informed the authorities in Gaza that they were planning to extend the expected processing time for exit-permit applications from 24 working days, COGAT put the new rules in place in 10/2017. The maximum processing time was set at 23 working days for non-urgent medical care cases; 50 days for applications to visit sick relatives or attend weddings, work meetings, or conferences in the West Bank or Israel; and 70 days for other commercial trips to Israel and higher education abroad. It’s important to note that these new maximums had no impact on the results of individual applications. They went into effect as the Liaison Office was dealing with a massive backlog of permit applications—approximately 16,466, according to COGAT (9/6). “The situation assessment among the relevant security agencies requires adjusting the security check process in accordance with developing threats,” a COGAT spokesperson explained (9/6). "In recent months, we have engaged in staff work together with the relevant

![Figure 1](http://gisha.org/graph/2392)

**Figure 1.** Palestinians exiting Gaza via the Erez border crossing. Since April 2016, the number of Palestinians (merchants, medical patients, and others) able to exit Gaza via Erez, the principle means of departing Gaza apart from the frequently closed Rafah border crossing, has steadily decreased.

security agencies, and as part of this work, we set a timetable for completing the processing of applications to enter Israel in a way that permits a professional examination process.”

Palestinians in Gaza also had infrequent opportunities to leave via the Rafah border crossing with Egypt. The Egyptian authorities opened the crossing in both directions on only 3 days (8/16–17 and 8/28), up 1 from last quarter. On 6 other days, they opened the crossing partially to allow Muslim pilgrims returning from Mecca to enter. Overall, 6,535 Palestinians were able to enter Gaza and 5,203 were able to leave.

It’s also worth noting that the 10/12 intra-Palestinian reconciliation deal had little effect on Egypt’s administration of the Rafah crossing. The day after Hamas formally relinquished control of the crossing, the PA announced (11/2) that the Egyptian authorities would open it permanently, starting on 11/15, but that did not happen. “We don’t have any information about when the Rafah border [crossing] will reopen again,” said the PA’s dir. of border crossings, Nazmi Muhanna, at the quarter’s close (AFP, 11/15).

As mentioned above (see “Overview of the Violence”), COGAT announced (10/15) that, starting on 10/18, the fishing zone off Gaza’s s. coast would be expanded from 6 naut. mi. to 9 naut. mi. for a period of 6 weeks. A similar, temporary expansion in 5/2017 reportedly allowed Gaza’s fishermen to increase their collective revenues by more than NIS 500,000 (approx. $175,000), and comparable increases were expected by the end of 11/2017.

The IDF’s near-daily raids, house searches, and mobile checkpoints again served as the principal obstructions to Palestinian movement and access in the West Bank and East Jerusalem this quarter. According to OCHA, the IDF conducted 893 search and arrest operations in the West Bank between 8/15 and 11/6, or almost 10 raids per day. There were fewer alleged stabbings, vehicular assaults, and other attacks this quarter, but the IDF cracked down on each one disproportionally, to the degree that was common at the height of the habba, the surge of Palestinian resistance, random attacks, and protests that began in Jerusalem in 9/2015 (see JPS 45 [2, 3]). After a Palestinian shot and killed 3 Israeli security guards outside the Har Adar settlement nr. Jerusalem on 9/26, the IDF imposed (9/26) a lockdown on Bayt Surik, the attacker’s hometown. Over the following 2 days, Israeli soldiers arrested tens of Palestinians, confiscated dozens of cars, and issued stop-work orders to various construction sites in the village. They also imposed a general closure on 8 other Jerusalem-area villages (9/26–10/1).

As in previous quarters, the Israeli authorities imposed additional restrictions on Palestinian movement during Jewish holidays. They suspended border crossings in and out of the West Bank and Gaza for Rosh Hashanah (9/19–23), suspended crossings and barred Palestinian laborers from entering Israeli settlement on Yom Kippur (9/29–30), and suspended crossings again around Sukkot (10/4–11). DM Lieberman pointed (10/1) to the Har Adar incident on 9/26 to justify the exceptionally long closure for Yom Kippur. Later, Lieberman and IDF Chief of Staff Gadi Eisenkot decided (10/5) to downgrade the 11-day closure and allow West Bank Palestinians “employed in required sectors of the economy” to enter Israel.

Gaza Electricity Crisis

The crippling power shortages plaguing Gaza since its sole power plant was forced out of
commission in 4/2017 continued throughout the quarter. As a result, Gaza’s approximately 2 m. residents were forced to get by on 4–6 hours of electricity per day and suffered deteriorating basic services, such as access to potable water (see figure 2).

International humanitarian aid helped improve the situation marginally in 9/2017, but relief efforts from Israeli and Palestinian authorities were scant. According to a Times of Israel report on 9/14, COGAT Mordechai sent a letter to PA minister of civil affairs Hussein al-Sheikh informing him that Israeli authorities would begin deducting money from monthly tax revenue transfers to the PA in order to fund increased electricity supply to Gaza. The move was explicitly intended to alleviate the humanitarian crisis and reverse, at least in part, the Israeli authorities’ earlier decision to acquiesce to the PA’s 4/27 request to decrease the amount of electricity supplied to Gaza by 40% (see JPS 46 [4] and 47 [1]). Through the end of the quarter, however, there were no reports of any increases to the supply of electricity to Gaza.

The Palestinian national reconciliation process offered the greatest hope for relief. The day before Hamas and Fatah officials announced that they had signed a national reconciliation deal (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below), the acting dir. of the Palestinian Energy Authority (PEA), Zafer Milhem, said (10/11) that the PEA had already created a plan to ease the crisis, which would be implemented once the PA took control of Gaza. Specifically, he indicated that Gaza was operating with only 147 of the 400–500 MW of power it needed, and that the PEA’s plan would increase the supply to between 200 and 230 MW quickly.

![Figure 2. Gaza water supply for domestic consumption. The water Palestinians in Gaza consume at home comes primarily from municipal networks supplied by underground wells. Recent power shortages reduced the water pumped from these wells, causing individuals to have access to far less than the 100 L per capita/day World Health Organization minimum.](source: OCHA’s Humanitarian Bulletin - 10/2017. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), “The Humanitarian Bulletin,” 17 November 2017, https://www.ochaopt.org/reports/humanitarian-bulletin.)
The strategy reportedly included efforts to rehabilitate Gaza’s power grid and reform local bill collection systems. More importantly, it also called for the PA to rescind its 4/27 request, which PA pres. Abbas had used to pressure Hamas into negotiating the reconciliation deal in the first place. Although unresolved issues threatened to undermine that deal as the quarter ended, it was widely assumed that the PA intended to implement the PEA plan and bring relief to Gaza.

**Judaization of Jerusalem**

Following the Palestinians’ victory on the issue of Haram al-Sharif, resulting from peaceful protests that made the Israeli authorities remove newly installed checkpoints and cameras at the sanctuary, new Israeli efforts to dominate East Jerusalem and the Old City kept tensions high. On 8/29, Israeli authorities temporarily lifted the ban on MKs and ministers visiting Haram al-Sharif. PM Netanyahu had imposed the ban in 10/2015 to de-escalate growing unrest across the oPt. The PM agreed to a 1-day exception following mos. of pressure from leader of the messianic Temple Mount movement, Orthodox rabbi and Likud MK Yehuda Glick, as well as other ultranationalist leaders. On 8/29, Glick and fellow MK Shuli Moalem-Refaeli (Jewish Home) were the only previously banned Israeli officials to visit the sanctuary. A small group of activists protested their tour, but it proceeded without incident.

The constant presence of Israeli forces in Palestinian neighborhoods led to another controversy later in the quarter. In mid-10/2017, the parents of approximately 4,300 Palestinian students in Issawiyya kept their children home from school in protest at the Israeli police’s practice of patrolling the neighborhood every afternoon just as children made their way home from school at the end of the day. The parents reported that the police presence provoked disturbances and led to arrests and clashes on 10/16, during which 1 Palestinian youth was seriously injured. As a parents’ comm. was set to meet with the city’s Education Office reps. and the police on 10/18, Jerusalem mayor Nir Barkat canceled the meeting at the last minute. “A group of parents from the neighborhood chose to declare a general strike in the schools, and instead of instructing their children to refrain from violence the parents decided to inflame passions,” a statement from Barkat’s office read. “This extreme group, which was never elected to represent the neighborhood parents, decided to impose the strike on the parents and enforce it through intimidation and threats.” Included in the statement was a warning from the Jerusalem police commander saying, “The police won’t speak to the strike leaders until there is quiet in the neighborhood and the repeated stone-throwing stops.” Over the next week, the police cracked down on the neighborhood, arresting at least 50 residents, including 23 youths (see Chronology).

Also of note: Israel’s High Court of Justice ruled (9/13) against the Israeli authorities in a 10-year-old case over their attempt to revoke the residency status of 4 East Jerusalem Palestinians elected to the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on a Hamas-affiliated slate in 2006. The 4 men were expelled from Jerusalem in 2011, following years of protests and demonstrations against a reported ultimatum from the Israeli authorities: either resign from the PLC or give up residency status. While the court rejected the expulsions, it put a 6-mo. stay on reversing them, allowing Israel’s Ministry of Interior to push for a new law that would retroactively justify the deportations.
**Palestinian Prisoners**

In the wake of the Dignity Strike, the mass prisoner hunger strike last quarter, the number of Palestinians being held in Israeli prisons remained relatively stable. According to Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, there were 6,200 Palestinians in Israeli prisons in 5/2017, when the hunger strike ended, and 6,198 in 11/2017. The number of Palestinian administrative detainees declined slightly over the same period, from 490 in 5/2017 to 463 in 11/2017.

Meanwhile, fallout from the strike continued. On 9/4, Fadwa Barghouti, wife of imprisoned Fatah leader and strike organizer Marwan Barghouti, said she had been denied entry permits to visit her husband until 2019. A spokesperson for the Israel Prison Service then confirmed (9/4) that she was barred for “security reasons” in connection with the strike. Later, Haaretz reported (9/10) that the PA had suspended its funding for the Palestinian Prisoners Club (PPC), an NGO that advocates on behalf of Palestinians in Israeli prisons. PPC sources said that the decision had resulted from pressure by both Israel and the U.S. over the PA’s support for the prisoners and the PPC’s support for the strike. While the PPC receives small donations and support from other institutions as well as the PA, the loss of PA support led to speculation that the organization would disband. The PPC insisted (9/13) that it had no plans to do so; however, further reports showed that there was a power struggle taking place within the organization, and its future was far from certain.

**Prisoner Swap**

With the Israeli govt. under increasing pressure from its constituents to secure the return of the 2 Israeli civilians and the remains of the 2 IDF soldiers allegedly being held in Gaza, Israeli and Hamas officials resumed their intermittent indirect talks on a possible prisoner swap this quarter. However, personnel changes on the Israeli side and the ongoing Palestinian reconciliation process complicated the affair, and there was no apparent progress made by the end of the quarter.

The Israeli official tasked with leading the indirect talks, Lior Lotan, resigned after 3 years in the role on 8/24. Sources familiar with Lotan’s work said (8/24) that he quit because his most recent initiative hit a dead end and because Netanyahu gave his office too little leeway (see JPS 47 [1]). His resignation sparked a fresh wave of criticism from the family of Hadar Goldin, 1 of the 2 IDF soldiers killed during the Israeli assault on Gaza in the summer of 2014. “Following Lior’s resignation, we feel we have been abandoned by the govt.,” the family said (8/24), in a statement. In response, Lieberman reaffirmed (8/27) the govt.’s desire to bring Goldin’s remains home. “Nevertheless, we must not repeat the mistake of the Shalit deal,” he said, referring to the 2011 prisoner swap that exchanged 1,027 Palestinian prisoners for IDF soldier Gilad Shalit, captured in Gaza in 2006 (see JPS 41 [2]).

An 8/28 report on Israel’s Army Radio illuminated the internal Israeli conflict over a possible prisoner swap. The report featured recordings of Lotan, allegedly made mos. earlier: “I want [to play with] a full hand on the issue of prisoners,” Lotan could be heard saying. “If we have 1 captured [soldier], [the war] needs to end with 200 to 1. If it’s 2 [captured soldiers] then 400 to 2, if 3 then 600.” His comments were widely interpreted as an argument for the IDF to adopt a policy of kidnapping Hamas fighters as bargaining chips, but it was unclear at the time if his superiors found the argument persuasive.
After a few more weeks of rumors, speculation, and some confirmed reports of ongoing talks, al-Quds reported (9/14) that Egyptian mediators had presented a new framework for a possible exchange. It would reportedly see Israel transferring the bodies of 39 deceased Palestinians to their families in exchange for definitive information on the remains of the 2 IDF soldiers and the 2 Israeli civilians. After that initial exchange, designed to be a confidence-building measure, the framework reportedly stipulated that Israel would free 54 Hamas-affiliated prisoners who had been rearrested after being freed in the Shalit deal, and Egyptian intelligence officers would mediate a new round of talks on a more comprehensive swap. Two weeks after the al-Quds report, the leader of Hamas in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, said (9/28) that Hamas agreed to the new Egyptian framework. “The ball is now in Israel’s court,” he was reported as saying.

Deflecting, the Israelis adopted a new strategy. First, Netanyahu appointed (10/21) Yaron Blum to replace Lotan. Blum, who had been on the team that negotiated the Shalit deal, was known for the hard-line stance he had taken on the prisoner swap issue, arguing that Israel should offer fewer Palestinian prisoners for captured Israelis and that the responsibility for negotiating such swaps should be moved from the PM’s office to the Defense Ministry. Second, in a move that was not immediately linked to the prisoner swap issue, the IDF staged (10/30) a “controlled detonation” of an underground tunnel leading from Khan Yunis into Israeli territory, immediately killing 7 Palestinians, all mbrs. of either Hamas or PIJ, and injuring at least 18 more (see Chronology and “Overview of the Violence” above). In the immediate aftermath of the operation, which took place inside Israeli territory, Hamas accused (10/30) Israel of a “desperate attempt to sabotage efforts to restore Palestinian unity,” and the Egyptian govt. mobilized its diplomats to prevent an escalation, according to a senior Hamas official. PIJ mbrs. stated (10/30) they were “weighing their options,” alluding to the possibility of a counterattack.

It took days for the link between the tunnel operation and the prisoner swap talks to materialize. On 11/2, COGAT released a statement, saying, “Israel will not allow search operations in the area of the security barrier in the Gaza Strip without progress on the issue of Israelis kidnapped and MIAs.” Hamas had reportedly appealed to the International Comm. of the Red Cross (ICRC) to pressure Israel into allowing recovery efforts, and Mordechai’s statement was in direct response to an ICRC request. PIJ (11/2) and Hamas (11/3) both rejected Mordechai’s position, stating that they considered the 5 Palestinians missing after the tunnel explosion to be dead. An IDF spokesperson then confirmed (11/5) that the bodies of the 5 PIJ mbrs. had been recovered.

The incident significantly escalated tensions surrounding the prisoner swap and neither side appeared eager to make concessions as the quarter came to a close.

**Settler-Related Violence**

Settler-related violence increased slightly this quarter. There were 35 instances of settlers attacking Palestinians or their property in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between 8/15 and 11/6, according to OCHA. Settlers also harvested and stole the produce from more than 3,000 olive trees. During the olive harvest season from mid-9/2017 to mid-11/2017, settlers damaged 5,582 olive trees, more than triple the 2016 figure of 1,652, the UN agency reported. Between 80,000 and 100,000 Palestinian families rely on
olives for income, an activity described as a “key economic, social and cultural event for Palestinians,” OCHA said. In addition, settlers dismantled about 100 m (about 330 ft.) of irrigation water pipes and threw them in the Jordan River, according to OCHA.

Ten of these attacks led to Palestinian injuries, down from 18 last quarter, and the remaining 25 resulted in damage to Palestinian property, up from 15 (see figure 3 and Chronology). A settler also ran over and killed 8-year-old Aseel Abu Oun near Nablus on 10/26 (see “Overview of the Violence” above). Agencies report that vehicular targeting of Palestinian children is quite common but rarely investigated by Israeli authorities. Just before the quarter began, a settler ran his car into and injured a group of four 6-year-old boys. Also of note: a 70-year-old Israeli settler was found dead of apparent stab wounds in an industrial area nr. Kafr Kassim in c. Israel. Israeli security sources said that the man was killed for “nationalistic reasons,” and Israeli forces later arrested 2 Palestinians from Qabatiya village nr. Jenin in connection with the killing.

Demolitions and Displacement

For the first time in a year, Israeli forces demolished more Palestinian buildings in the West Bank and East Jerusalem than they had in the previous quarter. Between 8/15 and 11/6, they demolished 69 structures, according to OCHA, up from 55 last quarter. This included 55 in the West Bank (up from 29) and 14 in East Jerusalem (down from 26). Two of the demolitions were carried out purportedly as collective punishment: on 8/17, Israeli forces demolished the Dayr Abu Mash’al home of 1 of the Palestinians killed during an alleged


Figure 3. Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian farmers, drivers, and other civilians, as well as Palestinian property, over time.
attack in Jerusalem on 6/16; and on 11/15, they destroyed the Bayt Surik home (11/15) of the Palestinian killed after shooting 3 Israeli security forces on 9/26. Overall, this quarter’s demolitions resulted in the displacement of 160 Palestinians (up from 56 last quarter).

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

“HISTORIC COMPROMISE”

After a year of increasingly acrimonious relations (see JPS 46 [3]–47 [1]), Hamas and Fatah signed a major reconciliation agreement in 10/2017. The deal elided several key issues (e.g., the role of Hamas’s military wing), but both parties made significant concessions and by the end of the quarter, the process appeared to have the potential to end the decade-old rift between the govs. in Gaza and the West Bank.

In the opening weeks of the quarter, tension between Hamas and Fatah was escalating. At a meeting with Knesset leaders of the left-wing Meretz party in Ramallah, PA pres. Abbas reportedly threatened (8/20) to cut off all financial support to Gaza, including the funds used to buy electricity from Israel, unless Hamas dismantled the new administrative comm. it established at the beginning of the year. “We transfer $1.5 b. a year [to Gaza], but after Hamas declared its own govt., we discontinued 25% of our support,” Abbas reportedly said (8/20). “We fear that if there is no change soon that will gradually reach 100%.” A complete suspension of PA support would have increased the pressure on Hamas, and exacerbated the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, resulting from the 10-year-long siege of Gaza by Israel and Egypt, and other punitive restrictions Abbas imposed earlier in 2017 (see JPS 46 [4] and 47 [1]).

Abbas’s threat only led to more tension. Four days later, several news outlets reported Hamas released (8/24) a statement accusing the PA of carrying out politically motivated arrests of 9 of its mbrs. in the West Bank. In a separate statement, the PIJ echoed (8/24) Hamas’s claim, arguing that the arrests “signaled” the “PA’s insistence on shutting doors” to any reconciliation efforts.

The first sign that those doors were still open came on 8/26, when PA PM Hamdallah spoke at an opening ceremony of new wards at a Palestinian hospital in Hebron. He announced that the PA would be rehiring the 6,145 Gaza-based civil servants it had forced into early retirement on 7/4 (see JPS 47 [1]). Although Hamdallah did not offer any justification or reasoning for the PA’s position, the 7/4 decision was framed by PA officials as an effort to intensify the pressure on Hamas. The rollback was therefore seen in that context as well.

Two weeks after Hamdallah’s announcement, Hamas took the next step forward. The movement’s leader, Ismail Haniyeh, led a delegation of high-ranking officials to Cairo on 9/9 for talks with Egyptian intelligence officials on bilateral relations and the prospects for Palestinian national reconciliation. In pursuit of a more stable relationship with the Palestinians and border security, the Egyptians reportedly urged Hamas to make concessions for the sake of unity, and the Hamas officials, hoping to see the blockade on Gaza eased, relented. On 9/11, Haniyeh said Hamas was willing to dismantle its new administrative comm. and embark on a new round of reconciliation talks, without preconditions (Hamas had previously demanded that Abbas roll back the measures he had imposed earlier in the year before sitting down for talks). A week after Hamas’s announcement, senior
Hamas officials met with their counterparts in Fatah for 2 days of talks in Cairo. Afterward, Hamas leaders released (9/17) another statement reaffirming their willingness to dismantle the administrative comm. and to carry on further reconciliation talks, as well as their openness to hold a new round of elections. The next day, Abbas called Haniyeh and told him he was “satisfied with the atmosphere” Hamas had created. Abbas then pledged to follow up on the process after he returned from the UNGA in New York.

Momentum built through the end of 9/2017. Haniyeh invited (9/19) Abbas to send PA officials to take control of Gaza “without obstacles,” and Hamdallah said (9/26) that the PA was planning to establish new committees to administer the transfer of power. Even the Middle East Quartet, which includes the U.S., as well as the UN, European Union (EU), and Russia, lauded (9/28) the process: “[W]e urge the parties to take concrete steps to reunite Gaza and the West Bank under the legitimate PA. This will facilitate lifting the closures of the crossings, while addressing Israel’s legitimate security concerns, and unlock international support for Gaza’s growth, stability and prosperity, which is critical for efforts to reach lasting peace.”

As Hamdallah prepared to hold a PA cabinet meeting in Gaza, there were signs the process was not going as smoothly as it appeared. On 9/28, senior Hamas official Musa Abu Marzuq said that Hamas was not ready to discuss the proposed disbanding of its military wing, the Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades, in the context of the reconciliation talks. According to a report in al-Hayat on 9/30, the measure was 1 of the 3 conditions Abbas required, along with a ban on foreign involvement in the administration of Gaza and the demand that all reconstruction-designated funds flow through the PA.

According to analysts, these conditions were designed to block exiled Fatah leader and longtime Abbas rival Mohammad Dahlan from reentering Palestinian politics. Dahlan has lived in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2011, amassing great personal wealth since fleeing Ramallah under charges of corruption and allegations he participated in targeted assassination attempts against Hamas officials. On 9/13, the New York Times reported that Dahlan had secured a $50 m. pledge to fund a program that would distribute $50,000 payments to the victims of Fatah-Hamas violence that followed Hamas’s electoral victory in Gaza in 2006. Because Dahlan has been in exile and is seen to have “burned bridges,” this new program was perceived, in part, as an effort to rehabilitate his reputation and a way to return to Palestinian leadership.

Neither Dahlan’s apparent ambition nor Hamas’s military wing proved to be insurmountable hurdles. On 10/2, Hamas held a formal welcome ceremony for Hamdallah in Bayt Hanun. “We return to Gaza again to end the division and achieve unity,” Hamdallah told a crowd of at least 2,000. The next day, he convened the PA cabinet in Gaza for the first time since 11/2014 and said he was ready to take responsibility for the administration of Gaza “in full cooperation and partnership with all the Palestinian factions and forces.” He also said that reconciliation would put pressure on international donors to make good on their pledges of reconstruction support, and that all administrative issues would be resolved “within the [framework of] available resources.” The head of Egypt’s General Intelligence Directorate, Khaled Fawzy, who was in Gaza on 10/3 to help mediate the process, said (10/3) that the Egyptian govt. planned to invite Hamas and...
Fatah officials back to Cairo soon for further talks and was planning to use as a framework the reconciliation deal the 2 sides had signed in Cairo on 5/4/2011 (see update and Doc. B4 in JPS 40 [4]).

While the PA cabinet was in Gaza for further talks, Israel and the international community weighed in with their views. In Israel, PM Netanyahu condemned (10/3) the entire affair, saying that Israel would not accept “imaginary appeasement where the Palestinian side is reconciling at the expense of our existence.” Education Minister Bennett went further, calling (10/3) for Netanyahu to suspend the monthly transfers of tax revenues to the PA. In response, PLO secy.-gen. Saeb Erakat called (10/4) on Israel to fulfill its obligations under past agreements now that the Palestinians had made a “historic compromise.” UN special coordinator Nickolay Mladenov, on the other hand, expressed cautious optimism (10/3) about the process. And U.S. special rep. for international negotiations Greenblatt released a statement timidly welcoming the process: “We will be watching these developments closely, while pressing forward with the PA, Israel, and international donors to try to improve the humanitarian situation in Gaza.”

What the U.S. and the rest of the world saw was more progress. On 10/5, after 4 days of talks between Hamas and PA officials, Hamas announced that the PA had officially taken over as the administrative authority in Gaza. In an interview on Egyptian television, Abbas reiterated (10/3) his demand for Hamas to dismantle its military arm before the PA lifted any of its new sanctions on Gaza, insisting that he didn’t want to reproduce Lebanon’s “Hezbollah model.” Fawzy then reportedly informed (10/5) Abbas that Hamas would refuse to consider dismantling the 27,000-strong force until a peace deal with Israel was reached and new elections were held (Raialyoum, 10/5).

As the disagreement over Hamas’s military wing persisted, Abbas downplayed the reconciliation process. According to a readout of a meeting of the Fatah Revolutionary Council on 10/8, he said that national unity would take more time, and that the PA would not be able to assume all its responsibilities in Gaza absent consensus on the agenda of the PLO agenda and the PA’s sole authority over security.

Despite Abbas’s reservations, Hamas and Fatah officials returned to Cairo the following week and in a joint press conference on 10/12 they announced a new reconciliation agreement. They didn’t immediately reveal any details, but information leaked to the media outlined the following specific provisions: the PA would lift all sanctions imposed earlier in 2017, Hamas would give up control of Gaza to the PA by 12/1, Hamas and the PA would form a joint police force to patrol Gaza, and Egypt would host the 11/21 round of reconciliation talks aimed at forming a unity govt. While Netanyahu and other Israeli officials decried the deal and uncertainty about its specifics lingered, the international community and the Palestinian public greeted the announcement with fanfare. On the evening of 10/12, thousands of Palestinians gathered in the streets of Gaza City to celebrate.

After 4 days of unbroken positivity on both sides, a Hamas spokesperson criticized (10/16) the PA for not prioritizing the rollback of sanctions on Gaza. “It is not justified to continue the sanctions on Gaza, while the [PA] govt. is content with talking about gaining control of border crossings and exploration for [natural] gas in Gaza,” he said. His comments came 1 day after the Fatah Central Comm. met to discuss the reconciliation deal,
neglecting to debate the specific issue of sanctions, as had been expected. Another senior Hamas official commented (10/16) that “the failure of Abbas to respond to popular and national demands to cancel his arbitrary measures against our people in Gaza is unjustifiable.”

In addition to Egypt, the 10/12 deal won the Palestinians support from other allies in the region. The Jordanian press reported (10/19) that King Abdullah planned to allow Hamas to reopen its office in Amman (although other news reports refuted this), and the chair of Qatar’s Comm. to Rebuild Gaza, Mohammed al-Emadi, announced (10/24) that Doha would fund the construction of a new presidential residence and “the headquarters of the Palestinian govt. in Gaza after the consensus govt. assumes its duties fully.”

Even Netanyahu reportedly saw potential in the deal. According to 3 Israeli sources, despite not recognizing the agreement, the Israeli PM told (10/16) his security cabinet that Israel should cooperate with PA officials, should they take control of Gaza, because averting a humanitarian crisis would serve Israel’s interest. The same sources said that Netanyahu had already informed both the Egyptian and U.S. govs. that the deal would not facilitate a resumption of peace talks with the Palestinians. The next day, however, Netanyahu was apparently overruled. The security cabinet imposed (10/17) conditions on any Israeli participation in talks related to Palestinian national reconciliation (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above).

The Palestinians were undeterred. A little more than 2 weeks after Hamas and Fatah officials stood together at the Egyptian General Intelligence Directorate’s office in Cairo, they came together again to take the first big step toward implementing the deal. At a ceremony at the Rafah border crossing on 11/1, Hamas formally handed over control of Gaza’s border crossings to the PA. Hamas forces departed (11/1) from their posts on the Palestinian side of the crossing and dismantled (11/1) their checkpoints at the Erez and Kerem Shalom crossings, allowing PASF to take control. Mladenov called (11/1) it a “landmark development,” and both the EU (11/1) and the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem (11/3) welcomed the move.

### PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data come from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) between 9/14–16/2017. The results are based on a survey of 1,270 Palestinians from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The complete poll, the 65th in a series, can be found at www.pcpsr.org.

1. **When thinking about the confrontations that erupted after the Israeli installation of metal detectors or electronic gates at the entrance of [Haram al-Sharif] in Jerusalem, do you see or do not see in such confrontations an effective means of resisting occupation on other issues and areas [of contention] in the occupied Palestinian territories?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Effective</td>
<td>63%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Ineffective</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Don’t know/Not applicable</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Various parties played a role in insuring the success of efforts to remove the electronic gates or metal detectors. From among the following list of parties, which one played the greatest role?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Jordan's King Abdullah</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) [PA pres.] Abbas</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) King Salman bin Abdulaziz of Saudi Arabia</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Jerusalem residents who took part in the confrontations</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Religious personalities representing Haram al-Sharif and the Islamic Waqf</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Others</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. In light of the confrontations around [Haram al-Sharif], [Abbas] announced the suspension of contacts with the Israelis, including the suspension of security coordination. Do you support or oppose this decision?

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Opinion</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Support</td>
<td>73%</td>
<td>74%</td>
<td>71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Oppose</td>
<td>23%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>4%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. In your view, in light of the [Abbas] decision to suspend contacts and security coordination with the Israeli side, did the PA actually implement the decision and stop security coordination?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
<th>Gaza Strip</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Yes</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) No</td>
<td>66%</td>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Don't know/Not applicable</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

The Egyptian govt., particularly its intelligence apparatus, was instrumental in brokering the new Palestinian reconciliation agreement. Dir. of Egypt’s General Intelligence Directorate Fawzy mediated the Hamas-Fatah talks in Cairo that led to the 10/12 deal, and he was expected to broker follow-up talks planned for late 11/2017 as well. Egyptian pres. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi frequently framed Palestinian reconciliation as a prelude to a broader Palestinian-Israeli and Arab-Israeli peace. On the sidelines of the UNGA in New York, he reportedly told (9/17) Israeli PM Netanyahu and a group of U.S. Jewish leaders that he was eager to build on the Palestinian deal. “When the world sees the Palestinian sides united, this helps achieve comprehensive peace that fulfills the ambitions of our nations,” he reportedly said in a recording obtained by al-Quds on 10/3. “We have no time to waste.”

Meanwhile, the Israeli govt. took a major step toward rebuilding relations with Egypt. On 8/23, Israel’s amb. to Egypt David Govrin led a delegation to Cairo, marking his first visit since the Israeli Embassy in Cairo was evacuated over unspecified “security concerns” in 12/2016 (see JPS 46 [3]). The following week, Govrin and 8 staffers returned to Cairo, where they resumed their diplomatic duties out of his suburban home.
JORDAN

Neither the Israeli nor the Jordanian govt. made any effort to restore diplomatic relations after an Israeli security guard killed 2 Jordanians on 7/23 and the Israeli govt.’s subsequent recall of its embassy staff from Amman. In the wake of the incident, Netanyahu had welcomed the guard back to Israel, embracing him publicly, and the Jordanian authorities vetoed the return of embassy staff to Amman until Israel carried out a full investigation into the killing, as required under the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties (see JPS 47 [1]). After mos. of stagnant backchannel talks, Israeli authorities reportedly threatened to suspend the 12/9/2013 bilateral water-sharing agreement, which provided for joint construction of a water desalination plant on the Gulf of Aqaba and a pipeline from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea (see JPS 43 [3] and 44 [4]), unless the Jordanian govt. allowed Amb. Einat Schlein and her staff to return (Channel 10 [Israel], 11/13). “The position of the Foreign Ministry and the PM’s office is that we cannot have a situation where on the one hand the Jordanians do not allow us to reopen the embassy and on the other hand we continue to advance projects that are important to them as if nothing had happened,” said an unnamed Israeli official (11/13). In response, Jordan reportedly threatened to proceed on the project alone or to bring Saudi Arabia on as a substitute partner.

SYRIA

The Israeli govt.’s discontent with last quarter’s U.S.- and Russia-backed cease-fire in southwestern Syria, which went into effect on 7/9 (see JPS 47 [1]), persisted throughout the quarter. It manifested in repeated IDF strikes on Hezbollah targets and other sites affiliated with the Syrian govt. and in an increasingly energetic diplomatic campaign against Iran’s influence in Syria.

The IDF carried out a handful of high-profile strikes on Hezbollah forces and Syrian govt.-controlled sites in the opening weeks of the quarter. On 9/7, the Israeli Air Force bombarded a chemical weapons plant nr. Masyaf, killing 2 people and damaging at least 5 major buildings, according to the international press. The attack, which was much more destructive than earlier Israeli operations, prompted a response from both Hezbollah and the Lebanese govt. On 9/9, Lebanon’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced plans to file an “urgent complaint” against Israel at the UN Security Council (UNSC), contending that Israeli planes violated Lebanese air space. Hezbollah, for its part, reportedly sent backchannel messages to Israel expressing a desire not to escalate hostilities in the wake of the strikes. However, Israeli forces launched another assault on 9/22, this time targeting a site outside Damascus International Airport. Later in the quarter, a Syrian antiaircraft battery fired on Israeli jets flying in Lebanese air space (10/16), according to the Lebanese and international news reports. Israeli forces then targeted the battery with an air strike, causing a disputed amount of damage (the IDF said the battery was destroyed, while the Syrian army said it only suffered minor damage). After the exchange, the Syrian army warned (10/16) Israel of “dangerous consequences” should Israeli forces continue their forays into Syria.

Amid the escalating tension over Israel’s intervention in the Syrian civil war, there were numerous reports of increasing Iranian involvement in s. Syria. These reports, which
detailed alleged Iranian plans to build an airfield nr. Damascus where its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) could establish a more formal presence, played to Israeli govt. fears about Iran’s intentions in the region and lent credence to complaints about the 7/9 cease-fire (see JPS 47 [1]), with Iranian statements underscoring the tension. On a visit to Damascus on 10/18, Iranian gen. Mohammad Baqeri said, “We are in Damascus to assert and coordinate and cooperate to confront our common enemies, the Zionists and terrorists.” Furthermore, the Associated Press reported (9/23) that the Iranian govt. and Hezbollah were working together to broker a rapprochement between Hamas and the Syrian govt., its former patron (Hamas was based in Syria until the outbreak of war in 2011).

Two bouts of cross-border violence ratcheted up tensions even more. On 10/19, a mortar fired from inside Syria landed in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, causing no damage or injuries. Israeli tanks then fired (10/19) on a Syrian army position nr. the Israeli-occupied town of Qunaytra. Two days later, 5 projectiles fired from s. Syria landed in an open area in n. Israel, again causing no damage or injuries. The IDF then shelled 3 Syrian army targets nr. the border area. “Even if this is just spillover, this is an exceptional incident and the continuance of such events will be met with a more fierce Israeli response,” the IDF said (10/21). The Syrian govt. filed a complaint with the UN, accusing the Israelis of coordinating with local “terror groups.” In an unusual escalation, Israeli DM Lieberman accused (10/23) Hezbollah of perpetrating the 10/21 attack. Later, Israeli defense sources said (10/23) that they could not certify Lieberman’s claim. “The remarks reflect the minister’s best judgment,” one official said.

Meanwhile, the Israelis were appealing to both the U.S. and Russia to alter the terms of the 7/9 cease-fire so as to marginalize Iran and its allies, to little avail. On 11/11, meeting on the sidelines of an economic conference in Da Nang, Vietnam, U.S. pres. Trump and Russian pres. Vladimir Putin issued a joint statement. They reaffirmed the 7/7 agreement that had resulted in the 7/9 cease-fire, decided to “maintain open military channels of communication,” agreed to continue their efforts “until the final defeat of ISIS is achieved,” and, in the closest provision to a concession to the Israeli position, they called for “the reduction, and ultimate elimination, of foreign forces and foreign fighters” in Syria.

With conflicting reports and wide-ranging speculation surrounding the statement, it was unclear exactly what such a reduction would entail. Some reports stated it applied to Iranian-backed groups. Others suggested those groups would have to shift positions. One Israeli official said what had been agreed was that the groups in question would be permitted to maintain positions as close as 5–7 km from the border with Israel. “Even though we view favorably the agreement on the need to eliminate the foreign forces—namely, the Iranian forces, Hezbollah and the [Shi’ite] militias from the area, the test will be on the ground, not in words but in deeds,” Israel’s intelligence minister Yisrael Katz commented (11/13). That same day, Netanyahu said that the IDF would continue operating in Syria “in accordance with our security needs” and with “the right combination of firmness and responsibility.” As a U.S. delegation arrived (11/14) in Israel for talks on the Trump-Putin statement and the future of Iran-backed groups in Syria, Russian FM Sergey Lavrov responded to Netanyahu. Iran had a “legitimate” presence in Syria, he said, and
Russia would not commit to the removal of Iranian forces or Iran-backed groups.

LEBANON

Internal Lebanese politics became the focal point of longstanding regional tensions at the end of the quarter (see “Regional Affairs” below). But before PM Hariri’s unexpected resignation in Riyadh on 11/4, tensions in ‘Ayn al-Hilweh, the largest Palestinian refugee camp in the country, again broke out into full-fledged violence.

Earlier in the year, UNRWA had been forced to temporarily suspend (2/25) services in the camp amid weeks of deadly clashes between Fatah security forces and armed Islamists led by Bilal Badr (see JPS 46 [4]). For 4 mos., an uneasy calm held in the camp. Then, on 8/17, armed fighters affiliated with Badr opened fire on a force of joint Lebanese-Palestinian security troops that was established after the previous round of clashes. Six Palestinians were killed and at least 17 were injured in 1 week of fighting (8/17–23), prompting Hamas and Fatah officials to hold an emergency meeting on 8/22. According to Lebanon’s National News Agency (NNA), there were more talks on a potential cease-fire on 8/23. By the end of that day, however, a “cautious calm” had returned to the camp, with only a few breaches from occasional shelling and bursts of gunfire (NNA, 8/23).

There were no further reports of violence in the camp through the end of the quarter, but there was 1 more noteworthy development: on 11/13, Badr’s brother, Kamal Badr, turned himself into Lebanese armed forces at the s. entrance of the camp. It was unclear why he did so or if his incarceration would have any effect on the unrest in ‘Ayn al-Hilweh.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The growing rift between Iran and its growing sphere of influence, on the one hand, and the Saudi-led so-called Sunni axis, on the other, escalated further this quarter, with unresolved tensions over the previous quarter’s Saudi-led boycott of Qatar, which had repercussions as far away as Lebanon. As in previous quarters, the Saudi-Qatari conflict marginalized and divided the Palestinians and even threatened to upend the faltering U.S. peace initiative and the Palestinian reconciliation process.

Despite continued mediation efforts, the boycott persisted throughout the quarter. In mid-8/2017, after a mbr. of the Qatari ruling family, Sheikh Abdullah al-Thani, met with Saudi crown prince Mohammad, the Saudi govt. announced it would make a partial exception to the boycott and allow Qatari citizens to make the annual pilgrimage to Mecca. However, as al-Thani was part of a branch of the ruling family that had been ousted in a 1972 coup attempt, the Qatari establishment appeared to interpret the concession as a threat. Days later, Qatar’s Foreign Ministry announced (8/24) that the emirate was reestablishing full diplomatic relations with Iran. The Qatari amb. returned to Tehran soon after the announcement, ending the diplomatic impasse that had resulted from Saudi Arabia’s execution of a prominent Shi’ite religious figure in 1/2016 (see JPS 45 [3]).

By mid-9/2017, there were signs that the Qataris were interested in rolling back the tension. Two days after U.S. pres. Trump offered (9/7) to mediate in the crisis, Qatari emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani called (9/9) Prince Mohammad and expressed the desire to see the dispute between the 2 countries resolved, in a gesture that marked the first
high-level direct contact between the 2 sides since the boycott went into effect on 6/5. However, any gains made by the call were lost by the end of the day. The Saudi Press Agency initially reported that Mohammad “welcomed” the emir’s sentiment. But after the state-run Qatar News Agency reported that the 2 men stressed the need to resolve the crisis by way of a face-to-face “dialogue to ensure the unity and stability” of the Gulf states, the Saudi position changed. An official at the Saudi Foreign Ministry accused (9/9) the Qatars of misrepresenting Prince Mohammad’s position. “This proves that the authority in Qatar is not serious . . . and continues its previous policies,” the official said. “The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia declares that any dialogue or communication with the authority in Qatar shall be suspended until a clear statement explaining its position is made in public.”

As the boycott entered its fifth mo., 3 developments on 11/4 significantly ratcheted up tensions across the region. First, Crown Prince Mohammad was appointed by his father, Saudi monarch King Salman bin Abdulaziz, to lead a new Supreme Anti-Corruption Comm., which resulted in the detention of more than 200 mbrs. of the royal family, top officials, leading business figures, and other potential rivals in a campaign that commentators described as a major effort to consolidate the crown prince’s own power base. Second, Houthi fighters in Yemen fired a missile at Riyadh’s international airport, and although Saudi forces intercepted the missile before it could cause any damage or injuries, they launched a series of air strikes on Sanaa, causing unverified damage and injuries. “We see the [missile] as an act of war,” Saudi FM Adel al-Jubeir explained (11/6), accusing both Iran and Hezbollah of supporting the attack. “Iran cannot lob missiles at Saudi cities and towns and expect us not to take steps.” Third, in a surprise move, Lebanese PM Hariri announced his resignation from Riyadh, saying he was afraid for his life and accusing Iran of meddling in Lebanon. “When I took office, I promised you that I would seek to unite the Lebanese and end political division . . . but I have been unable to do so. Despite my efforts, Iran continues to abuse Lebanon,” Hariri said, pointing to the growing influence of Hezbollah.

Hariri’s resignation sent shockwaves across the region. As the announcement was made in the Saudi capital and it aired on a Saudi television network, it sparked a wave of speculation about the possibility of Saudi coercion. After Lebanon’s pres. Michel Aoun initially requested (11/4) that Hariri stay on until a replacement could be found, his aides said (11/5) that the pres. would not accept Hariri’s resignation until he returned to Beirut to explain his reasons in person. Hezbollah secy.-gen. Hasan Nasrallah went further, describing (11/4) the speculation over Saudi coercion as “legitimate” and suggesting that Hariri, a dual Lebanese-Saudi citizen, might have been caught up in the so-called anti-corruption crackdown. One Iranian spokesperson denied (11/4) Hariri’s accusations as “unreal and baseless” and another echoed (11/4) Nasrallah: “Hariri’s resignation was done in coordination with Trump and Mohammad bin Salman to foment tension in Lebanon and the region.”

Both the Palestinians and Israelis were quickly embroiled in the evolving crisis. Israeli PM Netanyahu, a de facto Saudi ally against Iran, said (11/4) that Hariri’s resignation was a “wake-up call” to the international community to take action against Iran, “which is turning Syria into a second Lebanon.” According to a report on Israel’s Channel 10, Israel’s Foreign Ministry instructed (11/5) its ambassadors...
around the world to lobby their host govs. in favor of the Saudi position. “[Recent events] should cause [the world] to increase the pressure on Iran and Hezbollah on a range of issues, from ballistic missile production to its efforts at regional subversion,” the memo reportedly stated.

The Palestinian leadership in Ramallah also toed the Saudi line. Days after Hariri’s resignation, PA pres. Abbas flew to Riyadh and met with both King Salman (11/7) and Prince Mohammad (11/8). “The Palestinian leadership, as well as the Palestinian people, stand alongside the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the face of attacks,” he said (11/8). King Salman reaffirmed (11/7) his support for the Palestinian cause and his commitment to do “all that is required to bring about the establishment of an independent Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as its capital.” However, Abbas’s trip to Riyadh drew comparisons to Hariri’s predicament, prompting speculation about Saudi intentions for the aging Palestinian leader. A senior White House official lent credence to the rumors, saying that Abbas was told to either “accept Trump’s peace plan or quit,” according to an 11/12 report on Israel’s Channel 10. PLO Executive Comm. mbr. Majdalani rejected the report, calling the alleged ultimatum “fabricated, false, and untrue,” but his denial did nothing to quash the speculation that Abbas would be the next Arab leader pushed aside in the Saudi campaign for regional dominance.

Through the end of the quarter, Hariri’s predicament, and with it the future of Lebanon and the broader conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran, was in flux. “Everyone, I am just fine,” Hariri tweeted (11/14). “Inshallah, I will return in 2 days.” It was still unclear, however, what the Saudi intentions were for Lebanon, how Hezbollah and Iran might respond, or whether Hariri would follow through on his resignation. By the end of the quarter on 11/15, Hariri had still not returned to Lebanon and was invited by the French pres., Emmanuel Macron, to come to France.

IRAN

After mos. of prevarication on the fate of the 7/14/2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), Trump took his first major step to abandon the Iran nuclear deal this quarter. The Iranian govt., for its part, continued to fulfill its obligations under the JCPOA while exploring new strategies to counter Trump’s saber rattling.

Under U.S. law passed during the negotiations to the JCPOA, the president was required to certify to Congress every 3 mos. that Iran was upholding its commitments. Not doing so would trigger a 60-day congressional review period, during which lawmakers would have to decide whether or not to reimpose sanctions on Iran, a move with the potential to significantly increase tensions in the Middle East and internationally. (Despite Trump’s frequent promises on the campaign trail in 2016 to dismantle the deal, U.S. secy. of state Rex Tillerson made the required certifications to Congress on 4/18 and 7/17—see JPS 46 [4] and 47 [1]). As the quarter opened, however, Trump was increasingly dissatisfied with his admin.’s approach and it remained unclear how he would play his hand ahead of the next certification deadline on 10/15.

In the opening weeks of the quarter, Trump and his deputies tested out some new lines of attack to undermine the JCPOA. Ahead of a meeting with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) officials on 8/23, U.S. amb. to the UN Nikki Haley said (8/22) that the Trump admin. was interested in inspections being carried out at specific Iranian military sites. “There were already issues in those locations, so

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are they including that in what they look at to make sure that those issues no longer remain?” she said. No details of the 8/23 meeting were made public, but an Iranian spokesperson dismissed U.S. “dreams” of increased inspections on 8/29: “We will not accept anything outside [the JCPOA] from the Americans—especially visits to military sites.”

A few weeks later, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano again verified (9/11) that Iran was adhering to the JCPOA, and Reuters reported (9/12) that Trump was considering a new, more aggressive strategy for dealing with Iran. Defense Secy. James Mattis, Tillerson, and National Security Advisor H. R. McMaster reportedly formulated a package of measures, including plans to counter alleged Iranian cyberattacks, as well as Iran’s support for so-called terrorist groups, and purported nuclear proliferation, and presented it to the pres. on 9/8. Trump deflected and revisited the “waive and slap” approach he had used several times earlier in 2017. On 9/14, his admin. extended the suspension of nuclear-related sanctions on Iran in compliance with the JCPOA, and had the Treasury Dept. announce (9/14) new sanctions on 11 individuals and other entities alleged to be supporting the IRGC, or cyberattacks against the U.S.

While Trump deliberated, Netanyahu reportedly presented a different proposal during a meeting with the U.S. pres. on the sidelines of the UNGA on 9/18. While details were not made public, Netanyahu had said in Buenos Aires on 9/12, “Our position is straightforward. This is a bad deal. Either fix it or cancel it.” Netanyahu found particularly problematic the JCPOA’s sunset clause, which he said (9/17) would “soon” allow Tehran access to “uranium enrichment on an industrial scale for an arsenal of atom bombs.” Three days after the Netanyahu-Trump meeting, Tillerson said (9/20) that the U.S. pres. had come to a decision about the 10/15 certification deadline.

With the U.S. on a certain, yet undisclosed, path, the Iranians opted for a show of force. In his address to the UNGA, Pres. Hassan Rouhani called (9/20) Trump’s rhetoric “ignorant, absurd, and hateful” and said it would be a “great pity” if the JCPOA was “destroyed by rogue newcomers to the world of politics.” Two days later, in a speech at a military parade, Rouhani pledged to strengthen Iran’s ballistic missile program. “We will increase our military power as a deterrent,” he said, as Iranian forces were showing off (9/22) a new ballistic missile with a purported range of 2,000 km, far enough to reach Israel. The next day, the Iranian press reported that Iranian forces had conducted a successful test firing of the missile. In response, Israeli DM Lieberman called (9/23) the test a “provocation and a slap in the face for the U.S. and its allies,” and Trump tweeted (9/23), “Iran just test-fired a Ballistic Missile capable of reaching Israel. They are also working with North Korea. Not much of an agreement we have!”

After the Washington Post reported (10/5) that Trump was finally planning to “decertify” the deal, there were signs that Tehran was interested in de-escalating the situation. According to Western and Iranian officials, the Iranian govt. was open to talks on its ballistic missile program (Reuters, 10/6). “During their meeting on the sidelines of the UNGA last month, Iran told members of the [international community] that it could discuss the missile program to remove concerns,” an Iranian official said. A former U.S. Defense Dept. official said, “Iran has put feelers out saying it is willing to discuss its ballistic missile program and is using contacts . . .
officials who were 'holdovers' from the Obama admin.” Later, an Iranian spokesperson dismissed (10/6) the story and insisted the missile program was “nonnegotiable.”

The following week, after the IAEA’s Amano again confirmed (10/9) that Iran was complying with the JCPOA and UK PM Theresa May implored (10/9) Trump to defend it, Trump announced (10/13) that he would not certify the deal by 10/15, triggering the abovementioned congressional review period. “I am directing my admin. to work closely with Congress and our allies to address the deal’s many serious flaws so that the Iranian regime can never threaten the world with nuclear weapons,” he said. Trump also announced (10/13) “tough” new sanctions on the IRGC and urged U.S. allies to “join us in taking strong actions against Iran’s dangerous behavior, including sanctions outside the JCPOA that target their ballistic missile program.”

Congress was largely occupied by other issues through the end of the quarter, but a high-profile debate over the future of the JCPOA was expected before the end of the 60-day review period. Meanwhile, Rouhani threatened (10/13) to expand Iran’s ballistic missile program. Netanyahu said (10/15) that Trump’s decision presented an opportunity to “fix” the JCPOA. May, Macron, and German chancellor Angela Merkel issued a statement saying that they “stand committed” to the JCPOA (10/13). And finally, the IAEA published (11/13) its quarterly assessment of Iranian adherence to the JCPOA, finding again that Tehran remained in compliance.

Rebuilding Relations with Hamas

Following talks on a potential rapprochement last quarter, leader of Hamas in Gaza Sinwar announced (8/23) that the group had restored relations with Iran. “The relationship today is developing and returning to what it was in the old days,” he said, referring to Iran’s patronage of Hamas before differences over the civil war in Syria caused their estrangement in 2011. Neither Sinwar nor Iranian officials offered any details on the nature of Iranian support for Hamas. Later in the quarter, after Israel conditioned its participation in any new negotiations with the Palestinians on Hamas giving up its ties with Iran (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above), a Hamas delegation arrived (10/20) in Iran. One Hamas delegate said (10/20) that the group hoped to increase cooperation with Tehran and to “secure Iranian financial and logistical support.”

TURKEY

The Turkish-Israeli rapprochement, which was sealed with the 2 countries’ 6/27/2016 agreement to normalize relations (see JPS 46 [1]), suffered a setback this quarter because of the 9/25 Kurdish independence referendum. After 92% of Kurds voted in favor of independence, photos of Israeli flags being waved at events celebrating the vote proliferated in the media. Turkish pres. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who called the referendum a “threat to national security” for its potential to embolden the Kurds in Turkey, threatened to suspend (9/26) relations with Israel if Netanyahu did not abandon his support for an independent Kurdish state. He also alleged (9/30) that the presence of the Israeli flags showed “one thing, that [the Kurdish leadership] has a history with Mossad, they are hand-in-hand together.” Netanyahu denied (10/1) the accusation: “Israel played no part in the Turkish referendum, aside from the natural, deep and long-standing sympathy the Jewish people have for the Kurdish people.
and their aspirations.” Erdoğan repeated the claim a few times, but took no further action against Israel this quarter, opting instead to work with Iran and the Iraqi govt. to confront Kurdish separatists directly.

BAHRAIN

Amid the shifting regional dynamics, there were signs that Bahrain was ready to normalize its relationship with Israel. On 9/13, after Rabbi Marvin Hier had visited Bahrain, Prince Nasser bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the son of Bahrain’s monarch, visited the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC) in Los Angeles. The center was holding an event, titled “This Is Bahrain,” celebrating religious freedom and coexistence. There, SWC leaders Hier and Rabbi Abraham Cooper recounted a meeting they had held with King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa earlier in 2017. They stated that Al Khalifa had denounced the Arab boycott of Israel and decided to allow Bahraini citizens to visit Israel, despite the absence of Israeli-Bahraini diplomatic ties.

Of particular interest is the fact that Hier and SWC helped build the Museum of Tolerance in Jerusalem, amid years-long protests and court cases: it was built atop the Mamilla Cemetery, a Muslim site so old some contemporaries of the Prophet Muhammad had reportedly been buried there before their tombs were moved to make way for the museum.

On 9/23, Bahraini and Western officials said that Israel and Bahrain were on the verge of normalizing their relationship, in part, due to their shared antipathy toward Iran.

This was not the first time King Hamad signaled a desire for better relations with Israel. According to cables published by WikiLeaks in 2011, Hamad reportedly told the U.S. amb. to Bahrain in 2005 that he would be willing to move beyond the then secret “intelligence/security” coordination with Israel, but that he opposed the prospect of commercial relations with Israel until the establishment of an independent Palestinian state (Haaretz, 4/8/11).

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Trump’s Ambassador on Settlements

U.S. amb. to Israel Friedman and his explicit pro-settlement views threatened to undermine Pres. Trump’s relationship with the Palestinians and his broader peace initiative in 9/2017. When Friedman described Israel’s occupation of Palestinian land as “alleged” in an interview with the Jerusalem Post on 9/1, it threw into question the Trump admin.’s position on a key aspect of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and drew harsh criticism from the Palestinians. The controversy grew until a State Dept. spokesperson clarified (9/7) that Friedman’s comments “do not represent a shift in U.S. policy.” Later in the mo., however, Friedman made (9/28) another egregious assertion about the “alleged” occupation in an interview with the Israeli television channel, Walla. “I think the settlements are part of Israel,” he said. “The existing borders, the 1967 borders, were viewed by everybody as not secure, so Israel would retain a meaningful portion of the West Bank, and it would return that which it didn’t need for peace and security. So, there was always supposed to be some notion of expansion into the West Bank, but not necessarily expansion into the entire West Bank.” Hours later, a State Dept. spokesperson disavowed Friedman again. “His comments—and I want to be crystal clear about this—should not be read as a way to prejudice the outcome of any
negotiations that the U.S. would have with the Israelis and the Palestinians.” By the end of the quarter, however, it was reported that Trump had appointed Friedman to the small group in charge of drafting his plan for peace between the Palestinians and Israelis (see “The Trump Initiative” above).

**Legislative Backlash against BDS**

The highest-profile battles over the growing BDS movement primarily played out at state and municipal levels this quarter. In Maryland, where activists defeated anti-BDS proposals in the state legislature in 2015, 2016, and earlier this year, Gov. Larry Hogan signed (10/23) an executive order barring the state from entering into contracts with companies unless they certified in writing that they were not engaged in a boycott of Israel. He also called on the trustees of the Maryland State Retirement and Pension System to divest from any companies with holdings in entities that participate in BDS.

“*The goals of [the BDS] movement run counter to the strong economic relationship that Maryland has sustained with our friends and partners in Israel,*” Hogan said (10/23). The next week, Wisconsin gov. Scott Walker followed suit (10/27), signing an executive order barring state agencies from contracting with companies that boycott Israel. With Walker’s order, Wisconsin became the 24th state with an anti-BDS law or executive order on the books.

Since the legislative crackdown on BDS began in 2014, activists have argued that the measures being used against individuals and entities participating in BDS infringe on the First Amendment right to free speech (e.g., the American Civil Liberties Union [ACLU] filed a lawsuit challenging the new anti-BDS law in Kansas on 10/11). However, broader public conversations over how these measures actually work were relatively infrequent until this quarter, when controversy broke out in Texas in the wake of Hurricane Harvey, a massive storm that devastated Houston in late 8/2017.

Starting on 10/20, dozens of U.S. media outlets picked up on the story that the city of Dickinson, a suburb of Houston, required hurricane victims applying for emergency relief grants to sign a waiver stating that they do not support boycotts of Israel. City officials explained that the following provision was added to the application forms to accommodate Texas’s new anti-BDS law, which passed on 5/2/2017 (see *IPS* 47 [4]): “*By executing this Agreement below, the Applicant verifies that the Applicant: (1) does not boycott Israel; and (2) will not boycott Israel during the term of this Agreement.*”

The ACLU was quick to condemn the move. “*The First Amendment protects Americans’ right to boycott, and the govt. cannot condition hurricane relief or any other public benefit on a commitment to refrain from protected political expression,*” said the organization’s Texas Legal Dir. Andre Segura (10/20). Phil King, the Texas state legislator who spearheaded the anti-BDS legislation, said (10/21) that Dickinson officials were likely misreading the law, which barred state *entities* from contracting with businesses that boycott Israel. After 4 days of outcry and debate over the rights of BDS activists, the Dickinson City Council voted (10/24) to remove the anti-BDS requirement from the application.

Likewise, a development in the race for the governorship of Illinois threw the debate over BDS into the spotlight once again. On 9/6, Democratic candidate and State Sen. Daniel Biss announced that he had made the “difficult” decision to drop Chicago alderman Carlos Ramirez-Rosa from his ticket over his support...
for BDS. “While I was honored to be chosen as Sen. Daniel Biss’s gubernatorial running mate, it became clear over the past few days that while we share a total commitment to peace, security, and statehood for the Israeli and Palestinian people, and both oppose pursuing BDS at the state level, the difference of opinion we have on the role the BDS movement plays at the federal level would make it impossible to continue moving forward as a ticket,” Ramirez-Rosa wrote (9/6) on Facebook. Biss had chosen Ramirez-Rosa, a Bernie Sanders delegate in 2016 and a mbr. of the Democratic Socialists of America, as his running mate only a week earlier, and the selection galvanized progressives in Chicago. Over the course of that week, however, pro-Israel and anti-BDS forces rallied against Ramirez-Rosa. On 9/3, for example, Illinois congressman Brad Schneider withdrew his support from the Biss campaign over Ramirez-Rosa’s support for the BDS movement.

**Aid to Egypt**

Since the ouster of Egyptian pres. Hosni Mubarak in 2011, U.S. aid to Egypt has been in flux. This quarter, as Congress was deliberating 2018 humanitarian and economic aid to Cairo, the Trump admin. took its first step toward establishing its position on the issue. On 8/22, 2 U.S. sources said the Trump admin. had decided to withhold approximately $290 m. in aid because the Egyptian govt. had failed to make adequate progress on democratic reforms ($195 m. was reportedly suspended, while $95.7 m. was cut altogether). The decision was partly a response to Egyptian pres. al-Sisi’s decision to approve a law imposing additional restrictions on NGOs on 5/30/2017, they said.

The decision led to a brief period of tension between Egypt and the U.S. On 8/23, the Egyptian FM Sameh Shoukry and Kushner, Trump’s senior advisor and son-in-law, who was in Cairo for talks on the Trump peace initiative. “Egypt sees [the aid reduction] as reflecting poor judgment of the strategic relationship that ties the 2 countries over long decades and as adopting a view that lacks an accurate understanding of the importance of supporting Egypt’s stability,” the Foreign Ministry in Cairo stated (8/23). However, Kushner still met with al-Sisi later that day, and Trump personally called al-Sisi the next day to reaffirm “the strength and friendship between Egypt and the U.S.,” according to a statement from al-Sisi’s office.

The next mo., the tension was all but gone. On the sidelines of the UNGA in New York, Trump had a friendly meeting with al-Sisi on 9/20 and said he would “consider” unfreezing the $195 m. At the same time, a White House official said (9/20) that $20 m. of withheld payment to Egypt was redirected to the PA for wastewater projects.

**UNITED NATIONS**

**UNHRC**

As the quarter opened, it had been more than a year since the UN Human Rights Council approved a resolution calling for the creation of a database, or “blacklist,” of companies that operate in Israel’s settlements (see JPS 45 [4]). UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein had already delayed publication of the so-called blacklist once in 2017, in part due to U.S. pressure, according to Western diplomats (Washington Post, 8/21), but he was reportedly intent on publishing it by the end of the year. In preparation, Al Hussein sent out a draft list to the govs. of countries where listed companies were based in 8/2017,
seeking their comments by 9/1. According to a report in *Haaretz* on 9/28, Al Hussein sent similar letters to the listed companies themselves in mid-9/2017. Senior Israeli officials and Western diplomats said (9/28) that 150 companies were contacted, including approximately 30 based in the U.S. and 75 in Israel, including global firms such as Caterpillar, Priceline.com, TripAdvisor, and Airbnb.

As the end-of-year publication deadline approached, both the U.S. and Israel ramped up their efforts to scuttle the project. They were likely motivated by the fact that the blacklist was already having an effect. Senior Israeli officials said (9/28) that the Office of Strategic Affairs at Israel’s Ministry for Economic Affairs had learned that several of the companies included on the draft list had already informed Al Hussein of their intentions not to renew contracts or sign new ones in Israel. “Foreign companies will not invest in something that reeks of political problems,” one Israeli official said (9/28). “This could snowball.”

**UNRWA**

At the end of the previous quarter, on 8/14, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) announced an indefinite suspension of intakes of new patients for ear, nose, and throat treatments, cold ailments, and childbirths at its hospital in Qalqilya, pending an investigation into the recent death of a Palestinian child at the facility. “Intense efforts to reform the Qalqilya hospital have not been successful in the past years and the Agency is no longer able to ensure that medical services provided in the hospital meet the required health care standards,” an 8/14 statement from UNRWA read. The PA Ministry of Health strongly condemned the suspension of services, calling (8/14) on UNRWA to keep the hospital open “as required by international laws and resolutions.” The suspension also sparked a wave of protests from the Palestinian public. For weeks after it went into effect on 8/21, Palestinians gathered outside the hospital for sit-ins and other demonstrations. Although UNRWA had not reversed its decision by quarter’s end, the agency repeatedly reaffirmed (8/21) its commitment to “delivering health and other services to Palestine refugees . . . including those residing in Qalqilya.”

**UNIFIL**

The Israeli effort to undermine Hezbollah in the diplomatic arena took on a new dimension this quarter. Israeli officials were already calling for international attention to Hezbollah’s alleged arms stockpiling and its construction of a new weapons production facility in s. Lebanon, allegedly with Iranian support. In 8/2017, Israeli and U.S. leaders cited these issues in a campaign to alter the mandate of the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), giving the 10,500-strong peacekeeping force more authority to police Hezbollah.

As the 8/31 UNSC deadline to renew UNIFIL’s annual mandate approached, UNIFIL commander Maj. Gen. Michael Beary rejected (8/23) the allegations that Hezbollah was stockpiling weapons, explaining that his troops had not come across any evidence to support the claims. In response, U.S. amb. to the UN Haley accused (8/25) Beary of ignoring the problem, and Israeli PM Netanyahu raised the issue of Hezbollah with UN secy.-gen. Guterres during a meeting on 8/28.

The UNSC ultimately renewed (8/30) UNIFIL’s mandate for another year with new language authorizing more joint border patrols.
with Lebanese armed forces and requiring UNIFIL to file “prompt and detailed” reports whenever its troops encounter Hezbollah roadblocks. Israel’s amb. to the UN Danny Danon welcomed (8/30) the decision, and Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs thanked the Trump admin. for its “leadership” in pushing for the change. It was later reported (9/5) that Russian diplomats were instrumental in countering the U.S. and Israeli efforts. They reportedly secured the removal of large portions of Israel- and U.S.-proposed text that would have expanded UNIFIL’s mission further.

**UNESCO**

On 10/12, a State Dept. spokesperson announced that the U.S. was withdrawing from the UN Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The announcement came 6 years after U.S. pres. Obama had presided over an indefinite suspension in U.S. support for the organization, triggered by a U.S. law barring support for UN agencies and bodies that admit Palestine as a mbr. (UNESCO voted to admit Palestine in 10/2011; see *JPS* 41 [2]). Explaining the withdrawal, the spokesperson cited (10/12) the $550 m. that the U.S. owed in unpaid dues and UNESCO’s alleged anti-Israel bias. Shortly after the announcement, Netanyahu praised (10/12) the move as “brave and moral” and pledged to withdraw Israel from UNESCO as well.

**World Tourism Organization**

The UN’s World Tourism Organization (WTO) announced (9/13) that a vote on the Palestinian bid for membership, which was submitted in 9/2016 and on the agenda for the WTO’s 9/2017 general assembly in Chengdu, was being delayed until the next WTO meeting due to be held in 2019. According to senior Israeli and U.S. officials on 9/13, the Palestinians decided to suspend their bid after U.S. officials insisted that it violated PA pres. Abbas’s pledge to refrain from unilateral moves at international forums (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above).

**INTERNATIONAL SOCCER**

International soccer’s governing body, the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), delivered its final ruling on the Palestinian attempt to get Israel suspended from international competition this quarter. For years, the Palestinians had pushed for FIFA to enforce its own rules that bar one national association from holding matches on the territory of another without permission, citing the presence of 6 Israel Football Association (IFA)-sanctioned teams in Israel’s West Bank settlements. On 10/27, however, the FIFA Council decided that any “interference” might “aggravate” the situation. “Given that the final status of the West Bank territories is the concern of the competent international public law authorities, the FIFA Council agrees that FIFA, in line with the general principle established in its Statutes, must remain neutral with regard to political matters,” the Council ruled, according to a 10/27 statement.

At the same time, the Council decided (10/27) that its monitoring comm., which was established as a compromise measure in 2015 (see *JPS* 45 [1]), would continue working to “facilitate the movement of players, officials, and football equipment in, out of, and within Palestine.”

IFA pres. Ofer Eini, who orchestrated the Israeli efforts to undermine the Palestinian campaign, celebrated (10/27) the decision as a “significant achievement.” The Palestinian Football Association (PFA) criticized the
decision, but had already escalated the dispute to the relevant international court. After FIFA yielded to Israeli pressure and removed a debate on the Palestinian complaints from the FIFA Congress’s agenda in 5/2017 (see JPS 46 [4]), the PFA filed an appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS). On 11/6, the CAS announced that its panel would hear the case on 11/27, and a final ruling was expected in early 12/2017.

INTERPOL

Despite Israeli and U.S. pressure to delay or suspend the vote, Interpol’s general assembly approved Palestine’s petition for full membership on 9/27, with 75 mbr. states in favor, 24 against, and 34 abstaining. PA PM Hamdallah lauded the decision as a “victory for the Palestinian people,” and the PA put out a statement saying, “The State of Palestine considers this membership and the responsibilities that it entails as an integral part of its responsibility towards the Palestinian people and a moral commitment to the citizens of the world.”

However, there were indications that the U.S., Israel, and their allies in the international community would still be able to obstruct Palestinian participation in the international police organization. U.S. sen. Ben Cardin (D-MD), the top-ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Comm., said (9/27) that he was concerned that the Palestinians would be able to issue Interpol “red notices,” which function similarly to international arrest warrants. The U.S., Israel, and many other countries would not recognize the Palestinian red notices, according to Cardin. In a statement responding to Cardin, Interpol pointed out key differences between red notices and arrest warrants. The notices are merely meant as alerts to other countries, the statement said. They are nonbinding, and each mbr. has the authority to decide how to respond to them.

EUROPE

Following persistent reports of Israeli forces confiscating EU-funded construction materials and demolishing EU-supported infrastructure projects in the West Bank, 8 European govt. signed onto a letter demanding that the Israeli govt. pay them more than €30,000 (approx. $35,400) in compensation, according to Palestinian and EU officials (10/19). The Belgian govt. reportedly orchestrated the effort, with France, Spain, Sweden, Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland, and Denmark participating. European diplomats coordinated the measure after their Israeli counterparts rejected an informal request for compensation during a meeting in 9/2017. The Israelis reportedly argued that the Europeans were facilitating illegal development in Area C of the West Bank, and that their support did not constitute humanitarian aid (Haaretz, 10/19).

AFRICA

Netanyahu’s outreach efforts on the African continent suffered a setback this quarter. On 9/11, the Jerusalem Post reported that the Africa-Israel Summit, which in many ways was the culmination of Netanyahu’s diplomatic campaign, had been indefinitely postponed. The summit’s organizers expected the heads of state from more than 24 countries and representatives from approximately 150 Israeli companies to come together in Lomé, the capital of Togo, on 10/23–27. While Israeli news outlets and some Israeli officials pointed to political unrest in Togo, the postponement came amid a growing pushback on the Israeli outreach efforts. Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia,
Mauritania, Sudan, and South Africa had announced they would be boycotting the summit in solidarity with the Palestinians. Although the summit was a failure, the Israelis were undeterred from pursuing their broader goals. In an interview with the Times of Israel on 9/14, the dir.-gen. of Israel’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Yuval Rotem, said that postponement actually showed that the Israeli efforts were working. “This is actually a paradox: if [our journey] wasn’t so successful, [the opposition] wouldn’t be so significant” (see JPS 46 [1] and 47 [1] for more on Israel’s outreach to Africa).

DONORS

The Ad Hoc Liaison Comm., the main policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinians, convened on the sidelines of the UNGA in New York on 9/18. Hosted by UN undersecy.-gen. Jeffrey Feltman, the attendees included representatives from the PA, Israel, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and the Middle East Quartet, as well as UN Special Coordinator Mladenov. In conclusion, the meeting’s chair and Norwegian FM Børge Brende called for “concerted action” in 3 key areas: fiscal sustainability, economic development, and reconstruction and recovery efforts in Gaza. He also specifically welcomed the Egyptian govt.’s efforts to facilitate the return of the PA to Gaza (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” above).

There were announcements of new international aid allocations to the Palestinians throughout the quarter, but no major increase in associated dollar amounts. The biggest came on 8/17, when a Palestinian official said that the UAE and a number of other donor countries had agreed to provide $15 m. per mo. to fund projects improving humanitarian conditions in Gaza. He said that the money would be administered by a new body, known as the Palestinian Joint Liability Comm., under Egyptian supervision, and that the comm. was established in the wake of the agreement between Hamas and exiled Fatah leader Dahlan in 6/2017 (see JPS 47 [1]). Separately, Saudi Arabia transferred (8/21) $30.8 m. to the PA to cover its monthly aid obligations from 4/2017 to 7/2017. The EU made its quarterly payment of €20 m. (approx. $23.4 m.) to the PA to impoverished families in the oPt. UN secy.-gen. Guterres released (8/30) $4 m. from the UN’s Central Emergency Response Fund to support ongoing UN operations in Gaza. Japan agreed to give $3.2 m. (10/9) to the World Food Program projects in Gaza and $1 m. (10/5) for the construction of 2 waste disposal stations in the West Bank.

As in previous quarters, many announcements of new aid for the Palestinians came via UNRWA. The U.S. made (8/18) its annual pledge of $2 m. to the agency. The Kuwaiti amb. to Jordan handed over (8/18) a check worth $200,000, fulfilling a pledge made on 5/21/2017. The development arm of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (Fund for International Development) committed (9/13) $1 m. to UNRWA’s education system in East Jerusalem. The EU agreed to provide (10/10) €9.5 m. (approx. $11.1 m.) as an emergency supplement to its €82 m. (approx. $99 m.) pledge for the agency’s core programs earlier this year. Austria contributed (9/22) €1.5 m. (approx. $1.8 m.) to support the agency’s health programs in the oPt. Japan gave approx. $10.2 m. (9/27) to a variety of programs across the oPt and $3 m. (9/8) to the agency’s humanitarian response efforts following the clashes in Lebanon’s...
Ayn al-Hilweh r.c. (see “Lebanon” above). Finally, the UK-based Al-Khair Foundation donated (11/13) $40,000 to fund psychosocial activities for individuals traumatized by the 3 Israeli assaults on Gaza since 2008.

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

Canada was a hotbed of boycott-related activity this quarter. Unifor National, the country’s largest private-sector trade union, endorsed BDS at its annual convention in Winnipeg on 8/18–20. The organization specifically called for BDS actions with regard to “sectors of Israel’s economy and society [that] profit from the ongoing occupation of the occupied Palestinian territories.” Then, on 11/5, the Canadian BDS Coalition announced that Air Canada’s “five-year, multi-million-dollar contract with Israel Aerospace Industries Bedek Aviation Group for heavy maintenance on Air Canada Boeing 767 jets was terminated in ‘early 2017,’ with 2 years remaining.” According to a report at the Electronic Intifada, the contract was worth tens of millions of dollars, and the #AirCanadaComplicity campaign won the support of trade unions and Palestinian solidarity groups across Canada. Air Canada, the country’s largest airline, reportedly told the activists that the work was being transferred to another contractor, but didn’t offer an explanation.

There were a handful of boycott-related developments elsewhere in the world as well. On World Photography Day (8/19), a group of more than 40 Portuguese photographers as well as photography teachers and students took a pledge not to accept professional invitations or financing from Israel and to refuse partnerships with Israeli cultural institutions complicit in the occupation. On 9/25, the Palestine Support Network Australia (PSNA) announced that the Royal Flying Doctor Service South Eastern Section, which delivers health care in the Australian outback, canceled a planned partnership with Elbit Systems, an Israeli arms maker, following an 18-mo. PSNA-led boycott campaign. Leading up to the Round Tables culinary festival (11/5–10), which features internationally renowned chefs cooking in Tel Aviv restaurants, Irish chef JP McMahon and Peruvian chef Mitsuharu Tsumura withdrew from the event following appeals from BDS activists not to participate in “culinary propaganda.” Finally, Jordan BDS reported (10/3) that the local branch of UN Women was dropping its contracts with G4S, making it the 5th UN agency based in Jordan to cut ties with the UK security contractor.

DIVESTMENT

The University of Michigan’s (UM) central student govt. passed (11/15) a resolution calling on the Board of Regents to assemble a comm. to investigate the university’s investments in 3 companies complicit in Israel’s occupation of Palestinian lands—Boeing, Hewlett Packard Enterprise, and United Technologies. BDS activists at UM have been pushing for a divestment resolution since at least 2014. Each previous attempt failed, in part, because of intervention from pro-Israel groups outside the school.