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

Highlights of the Quarter: Shuttle diplomacy by senior U.S. diplomats fails to prevent a serious breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, with both sides blaming the other for failing to make the required concessions; Israeli settlement construction continues, and a scheduled 4th prisoner release is canceled; PA Pres. Mahmud Abbas authorizes Palestinian membership of 15 international agencies; persistent low-intensity violence continues in the West Bank and Gaza Strip; Hamas and Fatah announce an agreement to form a national unity govt.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

PEACE PROCESS BREAKDOWN

The U.S.-led negotiations that began in 7/2013 reached crisis point this quarter, after mos. of shuttle diplomacy and intense discussions with Israeli and Palestinian leaders produced no breakthrough. Secy. of State John Kerry and peace process envoy Martin Indyk ended the quarter openly frustrated with what they characterized as both sides’ unwillingness to make the required concessions to even continue talks. The 4/29 deadline came and went, and the initial objective of securing a final-status agreement was reduced to simply agreeing on a “framework” for further talks, which was also a failure.


After Kerry and Abbas met in Paris in 2/2014, the State Dept. described the
meeting as “constructive” (2/20), while Abbas spokesperson Nabil Abu Rudayna told Palestinian media that there could be no agreement—whether framework or final—which did not include “Palestinian and Arab positions” founded in international resolutions, implying not much progress had been made. A week later, Kerry seemed to have adjusted his expectations, when he admitted (2/26) that he hoped, at best, to get Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a so-called framework deal extending negotiations beyond 4/29, with a final agreement requiring at least another 9 mos.

By late 3/2014, it was clear that the 4th Palestinian prisoner release scheduled for 3/29 would be critical to the negotiation process. On 3/24, Fatah Central Comte. mbr. Mohamed Ashitiya told the media that without a successful completion of the release, the Palestinian Authority (PA) would be turning to UN agencies for recognition. The next day, a Palestinian source cited by AFP said (3/25) that Abbas would not discuss an American framework agreement for the extension of talks unless Israel released the promised 4th batch of Palestinian prisoners. Similarly, a message communicated to Maan News Agency stated that Abbas would extend the talks only if the 26 prisoners were released as planned and if a settlement construction freeze was implemented.

On 3/28, Fatah Central Cmte. mbr. Jibril Rajub revealed to AFP news agency that the Israeli govt. had informed the PA, via the U.S., that it would not be abiding by its commitment to release the 4th batch of Palestinian prisoners. At the weekly Israeli cabinet meeting 48 hours later, PM Netanyahu confirmed that there would indeed be no prisoner release without “receiving something of clear value [in return].” Despite Kerry’s best efforts, and further contact with the 2 leaders on 3/31, both Netanyahu and Abbas took steps to effectively end talks. On 4/1, 708 residential units in Gilo settlement were retendered; meanwhile, Abbas announced he had started the process of seeking Palestine’s membership of 15 UN agencies and organizations, citing Israel’s failure to release the Palestinian prisoners as planned. In light of those developments, Kerry called off another visit to the region.

Although the prisoner release issue was the catalyst for the failure of the talks, settlement construction weighed no less heavily on the negotiations. On 3/13, Israel had approved construction permits for 387 housing units in the Ramat Shlomo settlement in East Jerusalem, part of a 1,500-unit plan the Jerusalem municipality had authorized in 2/2012. On 3/19, the Jerusalem municipality approved construction permits for an additional 184 housing units in settlements across the Green Line, 144 in Har Homa C and 40 in Pisgat Ze’ev. The very next day, Israel’s Interior Ministry published minutes of a meeting revealing that plans for 2,371 new housing units in 6 West Bank settlements were advancing, with the bureaucratic process completed on around 1,000 of those units and construction set to start. The 2,371 figure included 839 units slated for the Ariel settlement.

The period leading up to the 4/29 deadline was marked by signs of resignation on Kerry’s part and seemingly fruitless efforts by Indyk to persuade the sides on a framework for extending the talks. Indyk met repeatedly with the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams headed by Israel’s Justice Minister Tzipi Livi and PLO negotiator Saeb Efrakat respectively (e.g., on 4/2, 4/4, 4/17, 4/20, and 4/22), and Kerry met with Israeli FM Avigdor Lieberman in Washington on 4/9.

“You can facilitate, you can push, you can nudge, but the parties themselves have to make
fundamental decisions to compromise,” Kerry told a press conference in Algeria (4/3) in remarks reported by AFP, adding, a day later in Morocco (4/4), that it was time for a “reality check” and that U.S. efforts were not “open-ended.” Amid some confusion and controversy over Kerry’s words, State Dept. spokesperson Marie Harf clarified (4/4) at her daily press briefing that the secy. of state meant that “there are limits to the amount of time and effort the U.S. can spend if the parties themselves are unwilling to take constructive steps.”

On 4/22, Abbas told Israeli journalists in Ramallah that he had 3 conditions for continuing negotiations beyond the 4/29 deadline: the release of the 4th batch of Palestinian prisoners, including Israeli Arabs; a settlement construction freeze; and a focus on the borders of a future Palestinian state during the 1st 3 mos. of any extended talks. Israel rejected these demands out of hand.

That same day, State Dept. spokesperson Jen Psaki said Kerry had no plans to return to the region for a last-minute effort to salvage negotiations ahead of the 4/29 deadline, which ultimately passed with little fanfare. On a trip to Ethiopia soon afterward, Kerry told reporters (5/1) that he intended to “pause” and “take a hard look” at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, given the impasse. He added that he was “convinced that as each [side] sort of works through the reasons that things began to become more difficult in the final hours, there may be quiet ways within which to begin to work on next steps.” He also maintained his claim that genuine “progress” had been made in the previous 9 mos., although he provided no specific examples. At the end of the quarter, Kerry held informal and separate meetings with Abbas and Livni in London (5/14–15) but there were no details reported.

In the meantime, the Palestinians pursued accession to 15 international treaties/UN agencies, a decision confirmed in a statement by the PA Ministry of Foreign Affairs on 4/2. On the same day, the U.S.’s Amb. to the UN Samantha Power told a House of Representatives panel that a newly formed American-Israeli team met monthly to discuss and coordinate responses to Palestinian “attempts at upgrades in status anywhere.” Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities were reported (4/3) to be considering possible sanctions against the PA, including suspension of a permit allowing wireless provider Wataniya to bring equipment into the Gaza Strip, freezing the transfer of PA taxes, and imposing restrictions on Palestinian activities in Area C of the West Bank. On 4/9, Netanyahu ordered all govt. ministries to cease cooperating with their Palestinian counterparts, exempting only Livni, Israel’s chief negotiator, and security officials. On 5/2, Palestine became a formal party to 5 international conventions: the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD); the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CAT); and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). The International Criminal Court, a major target of many who support unilateral Palestinian action on international treaty accession, was not among the 15 treaties the PA signed on to. Israel did not follow through with its threat of financial sanctions.

The quarter ended with both Israelis and Palestinians hardening their positions and attempting to blame the other side in the court of world opinion, as the U.S. made public its
frustration and Palestinian national unity efforts (see below) complicated matters further. The diplomatic tensions that surfaced between the 2 strong allies were palpable with U.S. and Israeli officials publicly commenting about each other’s behavior and statements. In an interview with Bloomberg on 3/2, Obama criticized Israel’s “aggressive settlement construction,” and warned that without a viable Palestinian state, the U.S.’s “ability to manage the international fallout is going to be limited.” Soon afterward, Kerry told (3/13) the House Foreign Relations Cmte. that Netanyahu’s insistence on Palestinian recognition of Israel as a “Jewish state” was “a mistake” but after talks had completely broken down, he apportioned blame to both sides. Speaking to the same cmte. on 4/8, Kerry stated that Israelis and Palestinians, “whether advertently or inadvertently, wound up in positions where things happened that were unhelpful.” Critical of the Palestinian move to join international treaties and gain UN recognition, the secy. of state said the precipitating event for the breakdown of the talks was Israel’s announcement of 700 new housing units for Jewish settlers in East Jerusalem. That came 3 days after a deadline passed for Israel to release Palestinian prisoners, and it undercut an emerging deal to extend the negotiations. “Poof, that was sort of the moment,” Mr. Kerry said. “We find ourselves where we are.” (NY Times 4/8)

Sources in Netanyahu’s office subsequently told (4/9) the New York Times that Israel was “deeply disappointed” with Kerry’s statement. One mo. later, in remarks before the Washington Institute think tank, Indyk also blamed (5/8) both sides for not being ready to make “gut-wrenching compromises necessary to achieve peace.” A separate spat also erupted over comments Israeli DM Moshe Ya’alon had made at Tel Aviv University (3/17) in which he accused the U.S. of weakness in its dealings with Iran. Although Ya’alon later spoke to U.S. Secy. of Defense Chuck Hagel on the telephone (3/19), following a call between Kerry and Netanyahu and a conversation between him and the Israeli PM, U.S. State Dept. spokesperson Psaki stated (3/21) that to the administration’s disappointment the call had not constituted an apology. Meanwhile, Kerry was the focus of a further diplomatic embarrassment when he warned that Israel risked becoming an “apartheid state” without a negotiated settlement. Kerry made the remarks (4/25) in closed-door discussions at the Trilateral Commission, an organization of experts and officials from the U.S., Western Europe, Russia, and Japan. A recording published by the Daily Beast website (4/27) led Kerry to issue an apology, saying that in retrospect he would have chosen a different word (4/29).

OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS

The death count this quarter was as follows: 16 Palestinians killed as a result of Israeli actions—10 in the West Bank and 6 in the Gaza Strip (the respective figures were 10 and 9 last quarter)—and 1 Israeli killed as a result of Palestinian actions. As at 5/15, this quarter’s count brought the comprehensive death toll since the 2d intifada began in 9/2000 to 8,252 Palestinians (including 51 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,129 Israelis (358 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 228 settlers, and 539 civilians), and 66 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). These numbers include individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel’s occupation and the ongoing conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died while being denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents).
One Palestinian also died as a result of wounds sustained in early 2/2014.

**Overview of the Violence**

In the West Bank, Israeli forces shot and killed 4 Palestinians in 2 separate arrest raids, 1 in Birzeit on 2/27, and 3 others on 3/22 in Jenin. Israeli patrols and arrest raids also gave rise to intense clashes between the IDF and the residents of several localities. Israeli forces also killed (3/10) 1 Palestinian man in response to stone-throwing targeting settlers’ vehicles nr. Ramallah (the victim’s family disputed his involvement) and a teenager (3/19) nr. Hebron after the boy had entered through a gap in the separation wall to forage for plants. On 4/14, a Palestinian died after excess tear gas inhalation during a confrontation in Aida r.c. in Bethlehem. On 5/15, during demonstrations to mark Nakba Day, Israeli forces shot and killed 2 Palestinian teenagers in Beitunia, outside Ofer prison. The pair was targeted when the main confrontations had ended, and subsequent video footage revealed that neither teenager was participating in any kind of violent protest at the time they were shot dead. Settler violence targeting Palestinians and their property was widespread this quarter, particularly nr. Hebron, Bethlehem, Ramallah, and Nablus. The Israeli killed by Palestinian action (4/14) was a civilian heading to the Kiryat Arba settlement nr. Hebron for Passover.

In East Jerusalem, there were frequent clashes at Haram al-Sharif as right-wing Jewish activists visited the site in large numbers and Palestinian worshippers protested and were violently dispersed by Israeli security forces (see details under “Tensions at al-Aqsa” below).

In the Gaza Strip, the relative calm prevailing since the 11/2012 cease-fire after Israel’s Operation Pillar of Defense was shattered this quarter. On 3/12, there was an intense 24-hour confrontation between the IDF and Islamic Jihad’s armed wing after rocket fire on s. Israel on 3/11. Islamic Jihad had begun firing rockets at s. Israel (3/5) following Israeli air strikes on Gaza that started on 2/27 and the shooting death of a Palestinian woman by the IDF at the border fence on 2/28. A total of 5 people were killed in the Israeli air strikes of early 3/2014 (2 on 3/3 and 3 on 3/11), including 3 Islamic Jihad operatives.

**Movement and Access**

The blockade of the Gaza Strip worsened this quarter as the Egyptian authorities closed the Rafah crossing and targeted smuggling tunnels. On 2/18, Egyptian security forces destroyed 21 cross-border tunnels, bringing the total number of tunnels destroyed in the ongoing crackdown to 1,272. In a demonstration endorsed by Hamas officials, Palestinians protested against the closure at the Rafah crossing on 2/28. By 4/18, according to Gaza’s Ministry of Interior, the Egyptian authorities had kept the Rafah crossing closed for 81 out of a total of 108 days in 2014. Meanwhile, the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing was only open for 15 full days out of a potential 26 working days in 4/2014 due to closures for Jewish holidays and in response to projectile fire. According to UN OCHA (5/21), the volume of goods entering Gaza during 4/2014 was the lowest recorded since the beginning of the year. Similarly for fuel coming into territory through Kerem Shalom, with the amount in 4/2014 the lowest recorded since the beginning of the year.

As in previous quarters, Israeli forces frequently attacked Palestinians in the unilaterally-defined “buffer zone” close to the border fence and fired on fishermen working off
the Gaza coast. In 2 serious incidents, naval vessels opened fire on Palestinian fishing boats nr. al-Sudaniyya on 3/10 and close to Rafah on 3/26, causing damage to the boats and injuring 6 fishermen (2 and 4, respectively), with the Israeli military claiming that the boats were involved in a “suspected smuggling attempt.” In addition to these 2 incidents, the Israeli navy fired at Palestinian fishing vessels on 26 separate occasions, causing material damage in 2 of those instances (see Chronology for details).

Israeli forces also repeatedly opened fire at the border fence, shooting civilians who had gathered in protest (e.g., 2/21, 3/27) or simply stayed too close (e.g., the above-mentioned killing of a woman nr. Khan Yunis on 2/28). There were 26 such incidents in Israel’s self-proclaimed buffer zone, causing 15 injuries, as well as 13 incursions by IDF soldiers to level land close to the border fence.

**Regular Protests in the Occupied Territories**

The peaceful protests against the occupation, settlements, and the separation wall that have become a regular feature of West Bank life continued this quarter. Palestinians and Israelis, as well as internationals took part in such protests at localities nr. Ramallah (Bil’in, Nabi Salih, Ni’lin), Bethlehem (al-Ma’sara), and Qalqilya (Kafir Qaddum). IDF soldiers routinely resorted to the use of force (tear gas, rubber-coated bullets, and live ammunition) to disperse the protesters, often causing serious injuries, including on 2/21, 2/28, 3/7, 3/14, 3/21, and 5/2 in Bil’in; 3/7, 3/21, 5/9 in Nabi Salih; and 3/14, 3/21, 5/2 in Kafir Qaddum.

**Settler-Related Violence**

The number of reported settler attacks causing injury to Palestinians and damage to Palestinian-owned property and agricultural assets rose to 97 this quarter, up from 88 in the previous period. They comprised the usual actions, namely uprooting of trees and seedlings (including 650 trees nr. Ramallah on 2/18 and 700 on 2/19; 180 nr. Qalqilya on 3/2; 30 nr. Yatta on 3/14; 50 on 3/16 and 3/27 both nr. Nablus; 300 nr. Bethlehem on 4/4; 100 nr. Ramallah on 4/20; 50 nr. Bethlehem on 5/1; 50 nr. Ramallah on 5/5; and 70 nr. Hebron on 5/11); assaulting civilians, including farmers, shepherds, schoolchildren, and random passersby (in Burin nr. Nablus on 2/19–20; in Hawara nr. Nablus on 2/28; in Tuqu’ nr. Bethlehem on 3/1; in Hebron on 3/29; nr. Nablus on 4/4; in al-Khadir nr. Bethlehem on 4/15; and nr. Ramallah on 5/13); shootings (3/30–31, wounding 1 person each time); stoning of Palestinian vehicles (3/31, 5/1); and acts of vandalism and arson, accompanied by racist price-tag graffiti (on 2/22 and 4/2 nr. Nablus, and on 2/27 nr. Ramallah). There were also 19 reported attacks by Palestinians on settlers, a drop from the previous quarter’s 22. These comprised Molotov cocktail-throwing incidents targeting settler-driven vehicles in the Nablus area (2/20, 3/17, 3/20, 3/23), none of which caused injuries.

**Demolitions and Confiscations**

Some 120 structures, including 17 in East Jerusalem, were demolished this quarter, displacing 246 Palestinians. These figures represent a substantial decline from the previous quarter’s 245 and 442, respectively. Most of the demolitions (91) took place in 4/2014, and a 3d of those were in the Jordan Valley, according to figures released by UN OCHA (5/21). Demolitions in East Jerusalem occurred on 2/17, 3/19, and 5/14, as well as on 3/26 in Jerusalem’s al-Tur neighborhood, where Israeli bulldozers demolished a Palestinian building consisting of 2 apartments, a mosque,
and a medical center. There were also demolitions in the vicinities of Hebron (4/8, 4/30) and Nablus (5/12).

WEST BANK VIOLENCE

Israeli forces shot dead 8 Palestinians as arrest raids and demonstrations sparked violent clashes throughout the West Bank this quarter. (As noted in the Overview section above, another Palestinian died in Aida r.c. on 4/14 from severe tear gas inhalation.) On 2/27, an IDF raid targeting a PFLP mbr. in Birzeit resulted in the wanted man’s death. The attack, which consisted in burning down the man’s home in broad daylight, was widely broadcast on Israeli TV, prompting angry protests across the West Bank and a call from the PFLP for the PA to end its security cooperation with Israel.

A mo. later, Israeli forces killed 3 Palestinians in Jenin (3/22) during an arrest raid targeting a mbr. of the Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades. After the wanted man was killed, Israeli soldiers shot dead 2 men who were attempting to recover the victim’s body. Another 11 Palestinians were wounded in the clashes. A funeral procession for the 3 men attracted more than 10,000 mourners, who chanted slogans calling for revenge, an end to the peace talks, and for Hamas-Fatah reconciliation. A joint statement put out by Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades, the Fatah-linked al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades, and Islamic Jihad’s Saraya al-Quds Brigades threatened a “painful” retaliation, and also accused the PA of complicity in the killings. Israel’s Haaretz newspaper reported (3/22) at the time that the Israeli security establishment had noted residents’ “increasing opposition” in recent mos. when Israeli soldiers entered refugee camps to carry out raids and other operations.

In addition to the fatalities during these arrest raids, the IDF used disproportionate lethal force on Palestinian civilians in a number of incidents. On 3/10, the IDF shot and killed Saji Darwish, a Palestinian in Baytin village nr. Ramallah while responding to a stone-throwing incident targeting settler vehicles. Darwish’s relatives said that the deceased had merely been tending his goats when he was shot. A similarly troubling case occurred days after (3/19) when Israeli forces shot and killed Palestinian teenager Yusef a-Shawamreh by the separation wall nr. Hebron. Family and witnesses reported that the boy had been foraging for plants with friends when killed, while an Israeli military spokesperson claimed that the deceased was spotted damaging the fence and ignored warnings to move away. On the last day of this quarter, the IDF shot and killed 2 Palestinian teenagers, Nadim Nuwara and Muhammad Audah Abu al-Thahir, outside Ofer prison nr. Ramallah during protests marking Nakba Day (5/15). There were conflicting reports about whether they had been shot with live ammunition or rubber-coated metal bullets. It was later confirmed that the youth were killed with live ammunition, creating a media storm and public outrage. (See the next issue of JPS for more on these developments.)
Overall, the hotspots on the West Bank remained unchanged: clashes between Israelis and Palestinians took place at the Aida r.c. and the Rachel’s Tomb area nr. Bethlehem, al-Fawar r.c. and al-‘Arub r.c. nr. Hebron, Hebron itself, al-Jalazun r.c. nr. Ramallah, and Jenin and the Jenin r.c. The UN OCHA report for March (4/29) noted “an increase in violent clashes between Israeli forces and Palestinian schoolchildren nr. and inside schools in the West Bank,” with clashes often “triggered by schoolchildren throwing stones at Israeli settlers parking close to schools or speeding along the roads used by children on their way to and from school.”

As noted earlier, the only Israeli fatality this quarter occurred when Palestinians shot and killed (4/14) Baruch Mizrahi, a driver en route to spend Passover with his family at Kiryat Arba settlement nr. Hebron.

TENSIONS AT AL-AQSA

There were frequent clashes at and around Haram al-Sharif in East Jerusalem this quarter, particularly on 2/21, 3/20, and 4/7. The clashes were sparked by Palestinian protests against far-right Jewish activists visiting the contested site under Israeli police protection, while Muslims’ access to the mosque was restricted by the Israeli authorities. Large groups of anywhere between a dozen to 100 Jewish activists visited the compound on an almost daily basis during the quarter. Israeli forces sometimes numbering in the hundreds clashed with Muslim worshippers on 2/25, 2/28, 3/16, 4/13, 4/16, 4/20, 4/22, and 5/5. Authorities also restricted Palestinian access to the compound based on age, forcing male worshippers below the age of 50 to pray in the street (e.g., 3/14, 4/14, 4/18, 5/5).

Among the visitors was Likud MK Moshe Feiglin who initiated a debate in the Knesset on transferring jurisdiction over the mosque to Israel and visited the compound under Israeli police guard on 2/25—the anniversary of Baruch Goldstein’s rampage at the al-Ibrahimi Mosque in Hebron 20 years earlier. On 4/10, U.S. Congressmen Bill Johnson (R-OH) and David McKinley (R-WV) joined right-wing Jewish activists touring the compound.

THE GAZA STRIP

Overall, this quarter witnessed a slow but steady escalation of violence on the Gaza-Israel border. In total, Palestinians fired some 90 rockets, several mortar shells, and 1 anti-tank missile, causing no Israeli injuries. Israel carried out at least 53 air strikes, killing 5 Palestinian militants, at least 3 of them Islamic Jihad operatives (3/3, 3/11; see Chronology for details). The air strikes also wounded 19, 15 of whom were civilians. A 6th Palestinian from Gaza was shot dead (2/28) by the IDF this quarter when she approached the border fence (see “Movement and Access” above).

Most of the violence took place in 3 separate exchanges lasting 2–3 days, which occurred on 3/11–13, 4/3–5, and 4/21–23. Following the IDF air strike that killed 3 Islamic Jihad mbrs. on 3/11, Islamic Jihad fired (3/12) approx. 70 rockets toward Israel, of which 41 landed inside s. Israel, causing no damage or injuries; 3 others were intercepted by the Iron Dome missile defense system. The Israeli military declared Hamas responsible for any rocket fire emanating from the territory and responded with air strikes on 29 Hamas and Islamic Jihad military targets, causing heavy damage but no injuries. PA Pres. Abbas denounced the “Israeli military escalation.” UN Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon urged “all actors to exercise maximum restraint,” but explicitly condemned only the rocket attacks. The U.S.
condemned the rocket attacks and reaffirmed Israel’s right to defend itself.

The following day (3/13), Egypt brokered a truce between Israel and Islamic Jihad. Hamas leader Ghazi Hamad and an anonymous Egyptian security official confirmed that Egypt deliberately ignored the Hamas govt. in Gaza and communicated directly with Islamic Jihad, an unprecedented step. Following the cease-fire, the Popular Resistance Cmte. (PRC) fired 8 rockets into s. Israel, causing no damage or injuries. In response, the IDF conducted air strikes against 4 sites in Rafah and Jabaliya, damaging a PRC training camp and several Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades sites; 3 civilians were injured in 1 of the Rafah strikes.

The truce generally held until 4/3, when a Palestinian opened fire on IDF troops operating nr. the n. border fence (causing only light damage to vehicles) and Palestinians fired 4 rockets into s. Israel (causing no damage or injuries). Israel replied with 5 air strikes on both civilian and military targets (including a least 2 Hamas/Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades sites) causing damage and wounding 2 Palestinian civilians. When Palestinians next fired 1 rocket into s. Israel on 4/5 (no damage or injuries), Israel carried out another 5 air strikes, hitting Hamas/Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades training sites, agricultural lands, and greenhouses (causing no injuries).

After 2 weeks of relative calm, Palestinians fired (4/21) 7 rockets into s. Israel, causing no injuries but light damage in Sderot. In addition, Palestinians fired an anti-tank missile at Israeli soldiers patrolling the border fence, causing no damage or injuries. Israel responded with 6 air strikes on Hamas training facilities and civilian agricultural and farming facilities, injuring 2 Hamas security officers. On 4/23, the IDF carried out an air strike in the n. Gaza Strip, allegedly targeting 2 mbrs. of an armed group on a motorbike. The targets were unharmed, but 12 civilian bystanders were wounded. In retaliation, Palestinians fired (4/23) 3 rockets into s. Israel, causing no damage or injuries.

In addition to air strikes, the IDF directed cross-border gunfire at Palestinian civilians along the Gaza border fence. The most serious incident took place on 2/28, when the IDF shot and killed a Palestinian woman nr. Khan Yunis. Relatives reported that she was mentally ill and had strayed toward the fence during a wedding party. A subsequent demonstration at the site of her death was met by tear gas and warning shots from Israeli soldiers, but there were no injuries. The IDF also fired on Palestinian protesters demonstrating nr. the border fence several times (e.g., 2/21, 2/28, 3/27, 3/31; see Chronology for details), injuring at least 14.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS
NATIONAL RECONCILIATION

After 7 years of political division, Fatah and Hamas announced a deal on 4/23 that ushered in a breakthrough in the long-running efforts to achieve Palestinian national unity. Following a Fatah delegation’s visit to the territory in 2/2014 (see QU in JPS 171), a PLO delegation from the West Bank arrived in Gaza on 4/22 for reconciliation talks with senior Hamas leaders, including the head of external affairs, Musa Abu Marzuq, who came back to Gaza from Egypt ahead of the delegation’s arrival. According to Fatah’s Azzam al-Ahmad, who headed the PLO delegation, the trip’s purpose (4/21) was to address the formation of a national consensus govt., elections, and the restructuring of the PLO “in order to maintain Palestinian unity so that we can dedicate our efforts to confronting Israeli occupation” (as reported in Haaretz and other media outlets). In his welcome address,
PM Ismail Haniyeh emphasized (4/22) the need to “end the division” and “have one govt., one political national agenda, and one system.”

PLO and Hamas reps. announced the deal the following day at a press conference in Gaza City where Haniyeh and al-Ahmad sat side by side. The agreement authorized Pres. Abbas to set a date for new elections, stressed both parties’ commitment to the principles of the Doha Declaration (2/7/12) and the Cairo Agreement (5/20/12), and mandated a reactivation of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC). In a statement before the press, Pres. Abbas pointed out that the deal was “backed by the Arab states and the international community and [would] boost the position of Palestinian negotiators [trying] to achieve a two-state solution” (as reported by Reuters). Responding to these developments, Israeli PM Netanyahu warned Abbas to choose between peace with Israel and peace with Hamas, and he subsequently canceled negotiations scheduled for later the same day. Meanwhile, U.S. State Dept. spokesperson Psaki said that Washington was “disappointed” by the move whose timing she described as “troubling.” Any Palestinian govt., Psaki added, must “unambiguously and explicitly” commit to nonviolence, recognize Israel, and accept previous agreements between the parties.

One of the 1st concrete measures following the signature of the unity deal was the reactivation (4/30) of a subcmte. on civil liberties responsible for issues such as media freedoms and the lifting of bans on faction-affiliated newspapers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hamas subsequently announced (5/5) the renewed distribution of Al-Quds newspaper in Gaza. In a gesture to aid the reconciliation process, Gaza’s Ministry of the Interior released 6 Fatah-affiliated prisoners (5/5)—with an estimated 20–40 remaining in jail—and Hamas urged Abbas to reciprocate by halting the arrest of its activists in the West Bank. These steps aside, there was pushback from Hamas regarding international demands, specifically the Quartet’s requirement to recognize Israel. On 5/3, FM Marzuq told a press conference that Hamas would not accept Quartet conditions.

On 5/5, Pres. Abbas held talks with Hamas chief Khalid Mish’al in Doha (Qatar) to discuss the details of a unity govt. in anticipation of its formation by month’s end. The following week, Abbas also met (5/12) with a Hamas delegation in Ramallah, including PLC speaker Aziz Dwayk, the 1st such meeting since the signing of the deal. Another meeting in Gaza on 5/13 brought the 2 sides together again to discuss the selection of the 15–16 technocrats expected to make up the unity govt. Haniyeh stressed that the Hamas authorities would “clear the road to reconciliation of all obstacles and landmines,” sentiments that, when considered alongside other concessions, served as an indication of an apparently genuine desire for national unity among Hamas leaders. The quarter ended with discussions continuing on the formation of a national unity govt.

INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

Labor disputes in the West Bank continued this quarter. Public sector employees went on strike for 1 day on 2/20, in protest at the govt.’s alleged failure to deliver on previously agreed cost of living salary increases. The union of West Bank teachers was among those that participated in the strike. On 3/13, doctors in public hospitals across the West Bank walked out in response to a Palestinian Supreme Court ruling (3/12) declaring a previous strike illegal. (The original dispute was due to a PA Ministry of Health decision made on 1/18/13 and implemented 1/1/14 to ban doctors from
working at private clinics.) Meanwhile, in the Gaza Strip, civil servants called on the Hamas govt. (3/3) to pay them their full salaries, claiming that the 46,000 unionized workers had been paid only partial salaries over the previous 4 mos. Union chair Ehab al-Nahal told a press conference that while civil servants understood the difficulties the authorities faced in light of the combined Israeli and Egyptian siege, his mbrs. were “facing hard times in providing the minimum necessities of life.”

The PA continued to attract criticism for the security forces’ targeting of non-Fatah mbrs. On 3/26, the PFLP condemned the detention and interrogation of 3 of its mbrs. from Dahaysha r.c. in Bethlehem and the PA summons issued to other PFLP mbrs. in the Bethlehem area. On 4/3, a Gaza-based Hamas spokesperson said that PA forces had recently arrested 144 of the group’s activists in the West Bank. Two weeks later (4/16), another official report from Gaza alleged that in the 1st quarter of 2014 PA forces had arrested 357 mbrs. of Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian political parties across the West Bank.

In addition to these arrests, PA forces also took into custody 4 youths protesting against normalization in Ramallah (4/13). The 4 young men were arrested and allegedly beaten after protesting a performance by a band that had played in Tel Aviv a few days earlier. Meanwhile, in Gaza, authorities executed (5/7) 2 men accused of collaborating with Israel over a 9-yr. period.

In a high-profile clash with Abbas, former Fatah leader Muhammad Dahlan returned to the headlines this quarter. Following his exit from the Gaza Strip after the Hamas takeover in 2007, Dahlan moved to the West Bank where he built up a considerable following among Fatah mbrs. Increasingly seen as a threat to Abbas’s powerbase, Dahlan was expelled from the West Bank by Fatah’s Central Cmte. in 6/2011, but he retained such widespread support that slates affiliated with him won numerous local council elections in 2012. Since his departure from the West Bank, Dahlan has been closely associated with the United Arab Emirates (from which he is known to receive generous financial support) and with Egypt, where he has lived. On 2/28 this year, Dahlan told the Associated Press that Abbas had seriously damaged the Palestinian national movement. Soon afterward, a senior Fatah official released a statement saying that anyone expressing support for Dahlan would be purged from the party. On 3/6, Fatah revealed that Abbas had halted salary payments to 98 security officials who had worked under Dahlan in Gaza prior to his departure from the territory. Then, on 3/10, in a televised speech before Fatah’s Revolutionary Council, Abbas accused Dahlan of corruption and involvement in half a dozen murders. Dahlan subsequently responded with an interview on Egyptian television (3/19) in which he called Abbas a “catastrophe” for the Palestinian people and said he had “stolen the presidency.”

**PALESTINIAN OPINION**

*The following data was excerpted from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PSR) on March 20–22, 2014. Results are based on a survey of 1,200 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The poll, the 51st in a series, was taken from PSR’s website at www.pcpsr.org.*

Polling this quarter addressed major topics related to the breakdown in negotiations. On the question of a possible American-proposed...
framework, a majority of those polled said it should be rejected if it included recognition of Israel as “the state for the Jewish people,” with the margin against such a proposal rising by 6% since last quarter. Although more evenly divided on the issue, the majority of respondents were similarly opposed to extending the negotiations, with proponents of that view in Gaza outnumbering their West Bank counterparts by a 10% margin. There was, however, a clear show of support for the Palestinian strategy seeking accession to international treaty organizations, including the International Criminal Court—“even if such a step led to the imposition of financial sanctions.”

This quarter’s poll highlights the significant frustration over the status quo felt by Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Interestingly, the lack of progress in the U.S.-led peace process did not translate into an overwhelming rejection of the Ramallah-based leadership’s approach (let alone the leadership itself). Indeed, on the perennial question of presidential elections, Abbas garnered more support this quarter, although his 30.1% showing would still signify a loss in a 3-way contest with Marwan Barghouti (36.2%) and Haniyeh (28.7%). This quarter, the survey included an assessment of public support for ongoing and worsening labor disputes in the territories, and respondents were about evenly split on the appropriateness of such industrial action.

1. The Framework document that the American side might present to the parties might include an acknowledgement of the 1967 lines as the basis for negotiations and East Jerusalem as the capital of the Palestinian state. But it might also ask the Palestinian side to recognize Israel as the state for the Jewish people in return for an Israeli acknowledgement of Palestine as the state for the Palestinian people. Do you think the Palestinian side should accept or reject such a Framework document?

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<tr>
<td>a. Certainly accept</td>
<td>3.8%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
<td>2.5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Accept</td>
<td>28.4%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
<td>33.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Reject</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
<td>49.6%</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly reject</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
<td>12.2%</td>
<td>26.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/No answer</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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2. The current round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations ends in about a month and there is talk about extending them to the end of the year. Do you support or oppose the extension?

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<tr>
<td>a. Certainly support</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>b. Support</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Oppose</td>
<td>44.3%</td>
<td>44.4%</td>
<td>44.0%</td>
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<tr>
<td>d. Certainly oppose</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don’t know/No answer</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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3. After the end of the current round of negotiations in about a month, would support or oppose a decision to have the Palestinian state join more international organizations including going to the International Criminal Court even if such a step led to the imposition of financial sanctions on the PA by Israel and the US?
4. If new presidential elections were to take place today, and the competition was between Marwan Barghouti, Ismail Haniyeh, and Mahmud Abbas, for who would you vote?

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<tr>
<td>a. Marwan Barghouti</td>
<td>36.2%</td>
<td>32.8%</td>
<td>41.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Ismail Haniyeh</td>
<td>28.7%</td>
<td>22.6%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. Mahmud Abbas</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>32.1%</td>
<td>18.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Don't know/No answer</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
<td>7.4%</td>
<td>0.9%</td>
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5. Some believe that the two-state solution, an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel, is no longer viable due to settlement expansion while others believe that it is still viable today as settlements can be dismantled or evacuated when an agreement is reached. What do you think?

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<tr>
<td>a. Certainly no longer viable</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
<td>27.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. The two-state solution is no longer viable</td>
<td>35.8%</td>
<td>36.5%</td>
<td>34.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. The two-state solution remains viable today</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
<td>32.5%</td>
<td>25.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly remains viable today</td>
<td>8.4%</td>
<td>7.6%</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don't know/No answer</td>
<td>4.3%</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>3.4%</td>
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6. Lately there has been an increase in the instances of public sector strikes in the various sectors. In general, do you see these instances as correct behavior that should be acceptable or incorrect and unacceptable?

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<tr>
<td>a. Certainly correct</td>
<td>10.0%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. Correct</td>
<td>37.6%</td>
<td>37.2%</td>
<td>38.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. Incorrect</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
<td>41.3%</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. Certainly incorrect</td>
<td>14.2%</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e. Don't know/No answer</td>
<td>2.0%</td>
<td>1.9%</td>
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FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

The military-led govt. consolidated its grip on power this quarter. Armed forces Commander-in-Chief Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi, who played a key role in the coup that ousted former pres. Mohamed Morsi, took several steps to bring him closer to becoming Egypt’s head of state. These developments occurred against a backdrop of continuing protests and street violence, as well as the repression of Muslim Brotherhood mbrs. and other opposition activists through arrests and politically motivated trials and sentencing.

The relationship between Cairo and Hamas in the Gaza Strip further deteriorated this quarter as Egypt took a number of anti-Hamas measures in the context of the Sisi govt.’s confrontation with the Muslim Brotherhood and other Islamist militant groups, especially in the Sinai Peninsula.

On 3/12, the Egyptian military announced it had destroyed 1,370 smuggling tunnels along its border with the Gaza Strip, a number thought to
represent the vast majority of the underground passages whose systematic destruction has been a goal of the post-coup regime. After the Rafah crossing had been closed to normal passenger traffic for 40 consecutive days, the Gaza authorities’ frustration reached new heights with Hamas describing (3/18) Egypt’s restrictions on movement to and from the territory as a “crime against humanity.” One mo. later the Ministry of Interior (4/18) reported that the Egyptians had kept Rafah closed 81 out of a total of 108 days thus far in 2014 (75% of the time). In a related incident at sea, on 5/6 the Egyptian navy temporarily detained 3 Palestinian fishermen off the coast of s. Gaza.

A further indication of the steep deterioration in relations between the 2 sides came as an Egyptian-brokered truce went into effect on 3/13, completely bypassing the Hamas authorities. The truce, ending a military exchange between Israel and Islamic Jihad, was negotiated directly by Egypt with the Palestinian group.

Meanwhile, and in a much more confrontational gesture, on 3/4 a Cairo court handed down an “emergency” decision banning the organization in Egypt and ordering the seizure of its assets. The ban came in advance of a final ruling on a petition filed by a private citizen to have Hamas designated a terrorist organization. Denouncing the decision as serving the interests of the Israeli occupation, a Hamas official noted that the organization had no properties there for Egypt to seize in the 1st place, and on 3/7, thousands of Hamas supporters rallied in Gaza City to protest the Egyptian measures. Such steps prompted Hamas-affiliated lawmaker Marwan Abu Ras to doubt (3/5) Egypt’s “impartial role in [Palestinian national] reconciliation.” In spite of these tensions, Hamas official Marzuq was permitted to travel from Egypt into Gaza to participate in reconciliation talks with the PLO delegation from the West Bank, and Egyptian FM Nabil Fahmy welcomed the unity deal that emerged from the talks (4/29).

Egypt’s policies toward Gaza and the Rafah crossing were heavily influenced by the unstable security situation in the Sinai Peninsula, where violence continued this quarter. The Egyptian military maintained its offensive against armed groups, while militants struck back with attacks of their own. On 2/16, a bomb placed on a bus killed 2 South Korean tourists and a local driver, wounding another dozen people. The notorious Sinai-based Salafist group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, claimed responsibility for the bomb-attack. The Egyptian military conducted a number of offensive operations of its own, killing 5 militants in Shaykh Zuwayd and Rafah on 2/18, and another 10 in a subsequent raid in n. Sinai targeting Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis operatives (2/20).

JORDAN

Two major issues clouded Jordanian-Israeli relations this quarter: tensions at al-Aqsa mosque, and the killing of a Palestinian-born Jordanian judge by Israeli soldiers at the Allenby Bridge (3/10). The man had been on his way to visit family in Nablus when IDF soldiers opened fire, prompting Jordanian FM Nasser Judeh to summon the head of Israel’s mission in Amman and issue a public condemnation. At a protest outside the Israeli embassy in Amman later that day, demonstrators called for the annulment of the peace treaty between the 2 countries. In their desire to prevent a major rupture with a valuable ally, the Israelis promised a joint investigation with the Jordanian authorities, and the office of PM Netanyahu issued a statement of regret expressing its sympathies to the family. Another protest held nr. the Israeli embassy in Amman.
this time jointly organized by leftist, Islamist, nationalist, and youth parties again demonstrated the sensitivities around the incident, as protesters urged the Jordanian govt. to scrap the peace treaty with Israel and expel its ambassador.

Aside from this incident and its fallout, clashes at Haram al-Sharif between Palestinian worshippers and Israeli security forces, as well as repeat visits by far-right Jewish activists, also prompted protests by the Jordanian authorities. On 2/26, the parliament voted unanimously to expel the Israeli ambassador and recall its own envoy in a vote that was not binding on the cabinet. That move was a response to the debate in the Knesset on a proposal for Israel to take control of Haram al-Sharif, which according to the 1994 treaty between the 2 countries falls under Jordanian jurisdiction. Almost 2 mos. later, on 4/21, Jordan’s Foreign Ministry summoned Israel’s Amb. Daniel Nevo to protest the actions of Israeli forces at the holy site, which he described as a “gross breach of international law and of the peace agreement between the 2 nations.” Jordanian Minister of State for Media Affairs Mohammad al-Momani said that Amman would take the necessary steps to protect Islamic and Christian sites in Jerusalem.

Jordan played a low-key role, however, in terms of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, merely hosting a few rounds of discussions with the various parties. FM Judeh met with his U.S. counterpart in Paris (2/18) and again in Rome, and the 2 traveled together to Jordan where Kerry met with King Abdallah in Aqaba (3/7). Kerry was back in Amman on 3/25 for discussions on the faltering peace process with both the monarch and Pres. Abbas. On 3/31, Abdallah also hosted Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog but no details from that meeting were released.

LEBANON

While Lebanon was largely peripheral to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, tensions rose between Israel and Hizballah. On 2/24, Israeli warplanes struck a target in Lebanese territory nr. the Syrian border that was widely reported by Israeli and local media, as well as by international intelligence experts, to be a weapons convoy. Hizballah described the air strike as “a blatant assault on Lebanon and its sovereignty as well as its territory.” The group vowed to respond to the Israeli strike at “the time and place” of its choosing. This was the 1st such strike on the part of the Israelis in 2014, with 6 similar attacks having taken place in 2013. On 3/5, the Israeli military released a statement saying its forces had opened fire on men it identified as Hizballah fighters attempting to plant a bomb on the fence between the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and Syrian territory. No mention was made of the targeted men’s condition. Less than 2 weeks later, an explosive device directed at an Israeli military vehicle patrolling the border with Lebanon caused damage but no injuries (3/14). In response, the Israeli army shelled a Hizballah position, and Lebanese sources said 5 shells had hit open terrain, causing no injuries. Although the IDF claimed a “Hizballah connection,” the recently formed Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) claimed responsibility for the incident on Twitter. On 4/18, Israeli soldiers crossed the Blue Line at the Lebanese border and seized 5 shepherds in the Shebaa Farms area. They released 3 of them on the spot, and the 2 others shortly afterward.

Separately, clashes (4/8) between rival Palestinian factions in Mieh Mieh r.c. nr. Saida in s. Lebanon left 9 people dead and more than 20 injured. The dispute apparently originated in a personal disagreement between mbrs. of
Ansar Allah and Shuhada al-Awda, both factions that are headed by former Fatah militants.

Overall, Lebanon remained quite unstable as it continued to feel the effects of the spillover from the Syrian conflict, particularly in light of Hizballah’s involvement on the side of the Syrian gov't, and the country continued to suffer from the political vacuum created by the parliamentary gridlock over the election of a new president.

SYRIA

Conditions remained desperate for Palestinian refugees in Yarmuk r.c. this quarter, as Syrian gov’t. forces and their allies continued to besiege the area. Hussam Arafat, a leader of the pro-Asad PFLP-General Command, claimed that the opposition Jabhat al-Nusra front had repositioned itself within the camp in what he described as a “dangerous escalation” (3/2), a statement confirmed by Jabhat al-Nusra. A deal between all the camp’s armed factions and the PFLP-General Command earlier in the year to allow humanitarian aid into the camp had stipulated that non-Palestinian militant factions would vacate the area on 2/11. The London-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) told Agence France-Presse (AFP) on 3/2 that Jabhat al-Nusra and the PFLP-General Command had indeed resumed fighting and broken the truce, and that ISIS fighters had reportedly re-entered the camp shortly after (3/7). PLO Executive Cmte. mbr. Zakariyya al-Agha said (3/8) these developments brought back tension and chaos to Yarmuk and violated the agreement reached between PLO factions. It was not until 3/13 that a new cease-fire agreement was reached by 14 Palestinian factions and reps. of other groups stationed in the camp calling for all non-Palestinian fighters to leave Yarmuk. UNRWA continued efforts to alleviate the plight of residents suffering from starvation and disease, but the siege conditions made the agency’s work difficult. On 4/20, spokesperson Chris Gunness described it as “unprecedented in living memory for a UNRWA-assisted population to be subject to abject desperation in this way.”

The border between Syria and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights remained volatile this quarter. On 2/18, 2 rockets fired from inside Syria landed in Israeli-controlled territory, causing no damage or injuries; and another 2 rockets landed on Mt. Hermon (in n. Israel) on 3/5. Such projectiles are generally attributed by the IDF to stray fire, but sources told the Israeli media that the military knew of at least 3 separate incidents when Syrian soldiers intentionally took aim at Israeli targets. Also on 3/5, the IDF announced it had opened fire on men it claimed were Hizballah fighters attempting to plant a bomb on the fence between the Israeli occupied-Golan Heights and Syrian territory. Meanwhile, the Syrian state news agency, Sana, and the anti-regime SOHR reported that Israeli forces had fired shells into Syrian territory, wounding 7 mbrs. of the security services and 4 civilians. On 3/18, a roadside bomb wounded 4 Israeli soldiers, 1 of them seriously, as they patrolled the border in the occupied Golan Heights. In response, Israeli planes launched air strikes (3/19) on a number of military targets, killing 1 Syrian soldier and wounding another 7. Although no one claimed responsibility for the roadside bombing, Israeli DM Ya’alon told the press that Israel held Pres. Bashar al-Asad responsible for “what happens in [the regime’s] territory.” On 3/28, Israeli soldiers shot and killed 2 men whom they described as “infiltrators” seeking to break through the fence separating Syrian-controlled territory from the occupied Golan Heights.

It is worth noting that the Israeli Knesset passed (3/12) a new Basic Law this quarter that
requires a referendum on any future concessions of “sovereign territory.” This would include the occupied Golan Heights (as well as East Jerusalem). The law stipulates that if a treaty including such a territorial concession has the support of more than 80 MKs, it can be approved without needing a referendum. However, if fewer than 61 MKs support it, it would be rejected without even going to a referendum. (Support from anywhere between 61 and 80 MKs would require a referendum.)

There was no end in sight to the Syrian conflict this quarter. Forces loyal to or allied with Pres. Asad, including the military and Hizballah, regained the initiative in some critical areas of the country (e.g., Homs on 5/7) and the disposal of Syria’s chemical weapons continued under international supervision.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The Arab League was more active on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict this quarter, mainly in response to the crisis in the peace talks. On 3/2, Asst. Secy.-Gen. on Palestinian Affairs Mohammad Sbeih told Palestinian news agency Maan that any extension of negotiations would need to be based on the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. A few days later, Arab League FMs meeting in Cairo released a statement (3/9) endorsing Pres. Abbas’s rejection of Israel’s demand for recognition as a Jewish state. Abbas subsequently addressed the Arab League summit meeting in Kuwait (3/25) that closed with a final declaration expressing support for the Palestinian president’s efforts and again rejecting Israel’s demand for recognition as a Jewish state. As talks neared collapse, the Arab League held an emergency meeting of FMs in Cairo (4/9), where Abbas requested an economic safety net of $100 m. per mo. in case Israel imposed financial sanctions on the PA. Palestinian FM Riyad al-Maliki told reporters after the summit that the Arab League had pledged to provide such support should it be required.

TURKEY

Efforts to normalize relations between Turkey and Israel dragged on this quarter, with officials on both sides accusing the other of slowing down or blocking a deal to resolve the dispute following the Mavi Marmara incident in May 2010. In a telephone call on 2/19, when U.S. Pres. Obama reportedly urged Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan to bring the reconciliation negotiations with Israel to a close, Erdogan is said to have attributed the delay entirely to Israeli PM Netanyahu. A mo. later, Turkish Dep. PM Bülent Arınç told (3/25) local media that a compensation deal would likely be

UNRWA distributed aid to Palestinian refugees in the al-Ameen neighborhood in Damascus as a part of ongoing relief efforts in Syria. A Palestinian refugee is carrying a stack of foam mattresses here leaving a distribution site. (5 May 2014, Youssef Karwashan/AFP/Getty Images)
signed after local elections scheduled for 3/30, and 2 days later, an anonymous Israeli official revealed (3/27) that DM Ya’alon had approved a request for construction materials destined to a Turkish-sponsored hospital to enter Gaza. The same week, a Turkish official told *AFP* (3/26) that Turkey was interested in bringing the 2010 *Mavi Marmara* case to an end.

However, with no breakthrough or obvious signs of progress a mo. later, both Turkish and Israeli officials briefed their respective local media alleging that the fault lay with the other side. Despite the month’s delay and exchange of blame, Erdogan appeared on U.S. television (4/29) and claimed that a deal could be reached within days or weeks, and shortly afterward, FM Lieberman also expressed optimism (5/2) about the chances of relations being “normalized” between the 2 countries. On 5/14, Israeli media reported that Netanyahu was expected to convene a meeting of the relevant officials to approve an agreement with Turkey by the end of the 5/2014. The deal under discussion was said to include the payment by Israel of $21 m. to the victims’ families, to be placed in a fund, as well as legislation by Ankara to end current or future legal proceedings against IDF officers implicated in the *Mavi Marmara* incident.

**IRAN**

**P5+1 and the IAEA**

In the framework of efforts to secure a diplomatic solution to Tehran’s disputed nuclear program, talks between Iran and the P5+1 group resumed on 2/18 in Vienna. The U.S. and Iran also held bilateral talks on the sidelines, conducted by Under Secy. of State for Political Affairs Wendy Sherman, leading the U.S. delegation, and Iranian Dep. FM Abbas Araghchi who headed the Iranian delegation jointly with FM Mohammad Javad Zarif. On the eve of their resumption, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said he doubted the talks would succeed (2/17), but at the end of the 2d day, the U.S. State Dept. described discussions as “constructive and useful.” For his part, Araghchi told Iranian media that Tehran and the P5+1 group had agreed on an agenda for negotiations and would meet again in Vienna in the 2d half of 3/2014. The positive atmosphere received a further boost when the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reported (2/20) that Iran’s enriched uranium stockpile had declined significantly for the 1st time in 4 years and confirmed that Tehran was meeting its commitments under the 11/2013 agreement (see Update in *JPS* 171)—a development underlined 2 weeks later by IAEA Director Gen. Yukiya Amano (3/3) who said that measures approved under the 11/2013 agreement were “being implemented as planned.”

On 3/7, Iranian and P5+1 diplomats met in Vienna to prepare for the next round of talks between chief negotiators later in the mo., a meeting that was described as positive by both the Iranian Foreign Ministry and the office of EU foreign affairs chief Catherine Ashton. Ashton then went (3/9) to Tehran herself for a 2-day visit, that was the 1st of its kind by an EU foreign policy chief since 2008. Appearing at a press conference alongside FM Zarif, Ashton said that reaching a long-term nuclear deal with Iran would be “difficult and challenging,” an assessment that proved accurate. The next round of talks in Vienna, held 3/17–19, broke up without agreement on the thorny issues of uranium enrichment levels and the Arak heavy-water reactor, although the 2 sides agreed to meet again on 4/7–9. Following some lower-level discussions between experts from all sides (4/3), Iran and the P5+1 duly reconvened in Vienna on 4/7 as planned. The aim of the 2-day talks was to hammer out the concrete details of
a comprehensive deal but the meetings broke up with uncertain results.

Iranian FM Zarif claimed that both sides agreed on “50–60%” of issues, adding, “The remainder are ones that are important and diverse.” Zarif also noted that Iranian negotiators had made clear that none of the nuclear facilities “would be dismantled.” Ashton, for her part, said that the next round starting 5/13 would see negotiations “move to the next phase,” and described the talks as “substantive and detailed” with “intensive work” required to “overcome the differences ahead.” On 4/9, Khamenei told nuclear scientists in Tehran that the country’s negotiating team should not yield to conditions “forced upon them.” After the IAEA reported (4/17) that Iran had converted three-quarters of its most sensitive nuclear stockpile (20% enriched uranium) into less volatile forms, State Dept. spokesperson Harf confirmed that Washington was taking steps to release $450 m. in frozen Iranian funds. Two days later, the head of the Iranian Atomic Energy Organization (IAEO), Ali Akbar Salehi, said (4/19) that Tehran and the P5+1 group had “virtually agreed” on a proposal to settle the dispute over the Arak heavy-water nuclear reactor, while the following day, the country’s official news agency revealed (4/20) that Tehran and the P5+1 group would begin drafting a long-term agreement in New York in early 5/2014. Shortly before those discussions took place, an IAEA delegation arrived (5/5) in Iran, as planned, to inspect 2 nuclear sites: Saghand uranium mine and the Ardakan yellow-cake production site, both of which are part of a 7-step plan drawn up in 2/2014 to increase transparency over the country’s nuclear activities. Although described as “useful” by an anonymous EU official (5/7), no details were released on the day of talks in New York but shortly before the resumption of discussions in Vienna, Reuters revealed that a UN Panel of Experts report it had obtained showed (5/11) that Iran’s efforts to illicitly procure materials for its nuclear program had slowed down during the conduct of negotiations. Talks between Iran and the P5+1 resumed as scheduled on 5/13 in Vienna with the stated goal of reaching a final agreement by 7/20.

On 3/5, Israel announced that it had intercepted a ship in the Red Sea carrying Iranian-made rockets bound for Palestinian groups in the Gaza Strip. Both Hamas and Islamic Jihad denied the accusations, with the former dismissing the announcement as a “silly joke.” White House spokesperson Jay Carney said that this would not impact the ongoing diplomatic efforts with Tehran regarding its disputed nuclear program. Iranian FM Zarif called (3/7) the Israeli allegations a “lie,” and senior Islamic Jihad official Khalid al-Baths denied any involvement in the seized missile shipment. Israel, however, maintained (3/9) that the ship with 40 long-range rockets aboard was sent by Iran and was en route to Gaza.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

* Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process

U.S. Secy. of State Kerry continued shuttling to the region during the quarter, in what was an ultimately ill-fated effort to prevent a breakdown in negotiations. Kerry met with Pres. Abbas 3 times within a mo. (Paris on 2/19–20, Amman on 3/7, and Washington on 3/16), before making another trip to the region in late 3/2014 to secure an agreement for an extension of negotiations. An intense series of last-minute meetings, both in person and by
phone—2 of them with Abbas (Amman on 3/26 and Ramallah on 3/31), and 3 with Israeli PM Netanyahu (3/26, 3/28 by phone and in Jerusalem on 3/31)—were designed to save the talks but in response to Israel’s failure to go ahead with the scheduled release of the 4th batch of Palestinian prisoners, on 4/1 Abbas announced that his govt. was seeking membership in 15 UN agencies. White House spokesperson Josh Earnest told (4/2) reporters that even though yet 1 more visit by Kerry slated for 4/1 had been canceled, the senior American official was “in close touch with our negotiating team, which remains on the ground in the region to continue discussions with the parties.”

In Kerry’s absence, Indyk continued to meet with the Israeli and Palestinian negotiating teams (e.g., 4/2, 4/4) with no indication that a breakthrough was likely, however. After a meeting with Israel’s FM in Washington on 4/9, both Kerry and Lieberman reaffirmed their commitment to the talks. But a period of strategic disengagement followed and Kerry only conducted discussions with Abbas (5/14) and Livni (5/15) in London (both of whom were in the city because of previously scheduled trips.)

The breakdown in negotiations and unilateral actions by both Israel and the Palestinians prompted Kerry to express frustration over what it was possible for him to achieve. In a press conference in Algeria (4/3), Kerry said: “You can facilitate, you can push, you can nudge, but the parties themselves have to make fundamental decisions to compromise.” He then told reporters in Morocco (4/4) that it was time for a “reality check” and that the U.S. efforts were not “open-ended,” comments clarified by State Dept. spokesperson Harf as meaning that “there are limits to the amount of time and effort the U.S. can spend if the parties themselves are unwilling to take constructive steps.” Shortly afterward, Kerry told (4/8) the Senate Foreign Relations Cmte. that both Israelis and Palestinians, “whether inadvertently or inadvertently, wound up in positions where things happened that were unhelpful.” This attribution of blame did not go down well with Israel—“deeply disappointed” was the reaction of an unnamed senior official in Netanyahu’s office to the New York Times—but it was not the 1st time Kerry had criticized Israel’s approach to the talks: he had previously told the cmte. (3/13) that Netanyahu’s insistence on a public statement of recognition from the Palestinians of Israel as a “Jewish state” was “a mistake.” As the quarter drew to a close, Kerry told (5/1) reporters during a trip to Ethiopia that he would “pause” and “take a hard look” at the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, given the current impasse, but that “there may be quiet ways within which to begin to work on next steps.” Envoy Indyk, meanwhile, blamed (5/8) both Israelis and Palestinians for not being ready to make “gut-wrenching compromises necessary to achieve peace,” in remarks made at the Washington Institute think tank.

Israel and the U.S. Congress

Israel lobby organization AIPAC held its annual conference in Washington in early 3/2014. While Pres. Obama did not attend, which he had in previous years, both Secy. of State Kerry and Treasury Secy. Jack Lew were there, along with Israeli PM Netanyahu and a slew of other U.S. politicians looking to develop their pro-Israel bona fides in the lead-up to the 2014 U.S. midterm elections. Major conference themes this year included the ongoing negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians and Iran’s nuclear program. Secy. Lew, whose Treasury Dept. has primary responsibility for enforcing American sanctions against Iran, discussed their implementation during the 6-mo. interim period provided by
the deal signed with Iran in 11/2013, and he reiterated the Obama administration’s opposition to new sanctions. For his part, Kerry defended (3/3) the talks with Iran on the grounds that “only strong diplomacy can justify more forceful options if we will have to use them.”

Following another lobbying push by AIPAC simultaneous with its conference, the House of Representatives passed (3/5) the U.S.-Israel Strategic Partnership Act of 2013 by a vote of 410–1. In addition to expanding the delivery of forward-deployed American weapons to Israel, committing Congress to further funding of the Iron Dome missile defense system, and establishing other alliance-strengthening measures, the bill declared Israel a “major strategic partner,” a designation left undefined. (See H.R. 938 of 3/4/13 on CongressionalMonitor.org for more.) This vote came almost a year after the bill was introduced, a delay partly caused by energetic opposition to the bill’s language regarding Israel’s entry into the Visa Waiver Program (see below) from Arab-American groups and some mbrs. of the U.S. intelligence community. AIPAC, and many other pro-Israel and Jewish organizations, hailed the passage of the bill.

At the same time, a bipartisan group of 84 mbrs. of Congress wrote (3/4) the Subcomte. on Energy and Water Development, asking for $2 m. to be released for cooperative energy projects between Israel and the U.S.

During the debate about Israel’s admission into the Visa Waiver Program, which centered on the bill mentioned above, as well as its companion measure in the Senate, a large variety of perspectives were heard. On 3/6, Sen. Chuck Schumer (D-NY) wrote to Secy. Kerry and James Ragsdale, acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, expressing concern about a recent rise in the percentage of Israelis being denied entry visas. Schumer was referring to the spike in visa application denials from 5.4% in 2012 to 9.7% in 2013. (Both exceed the maximum 3% denial rate for the Visa Waiver Program’s mbrs.) Responding to a question from Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL) on 3/13, Kerry told the House Foreign Affairs Cmte. that the denial rate for Israelis aged 21–30 was no different to that for visitors from other countries. A few days later, AIPAC confirmed (3/18) that it was “working with the administration and Congress” to address concerns about the high denial rate. In a response to pressure from AIPAC and a group of congressional lawmakers led by Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), the State Dept.’s Asst. Secy. for Legislative Affairs, Julia Frifield, wrote (4/17) to Lowey explaining that the secy. of state had “directed the dept. to take a range of immediate actions to ensure that, consistent with U.S. immigration law, we make every effort to maximize the number of young Israelis able to travel to the United States.” Earlier, on 3/21, spokesperson Psaki explained that 1 of the State Dept.’s problems with accepting Israel into the Visa Waiver Program was “the unequal treatment that Palestinian Americans and other Americans of Middle Eastern origin experience at Israel’s border and checkpoints.” She added, “Reciprocity is the most basic condition of the Visa Waiver Program.” Psaki’s comments echoed the complaints lodged by Arab-American and Palestinian groups throughout 2013 and early 2014. In a new development this quarter, there were reports of opposition to Israel’s entry into the program among the U.S. intelligence community. An anonymous Foreign Affairs Cmte. aide claimed (4/19) that the chair of the committee had “heard reservations from the intelligence community about allowing Israel into the visa waiver program because of concerns that it would allow in Israeli spies.”
Following Palestinian accession to 15 international treaties at the beginning of April (4/1), several legislators raised questions about the future of U.S. aid to the PA. The Obama administration had requested $440 m. in aid for fiscal 2015, but Rep. Kay Granger (R-TX), the chair of the House Appropriations Subcmte. on State, Foreign Operations and Related Programs said (4/2) that this question should be revisited, since one of the conditions for the disbursement of aid was that Palestinians do not seek membership in UN agencies “outside an agreement negotiated [with] Israel.” Secy. Kerry, however, can, in accordance with existing law, waive the restrictions if “to do so is in the national security interest of the United States.” The Hamas-Fatah reconciliation deal (4/23) also served as justification for many legislators seeking to cut U.S. aid to the Palestinians. Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY), ranking mbr. on the House Appropriations Cmte., alleged (4/23) that the deal “jeopardizes U.S. assistance.” Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), chair of the House Middle East and North Africa Subcmte., said (4/23) that she would organize a hearing on the future of U.S. aid and the implications of Palestinian reconciliation. On 5/7, Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY), ranking mbr. of the House Foreign Affairs Cmte., stated no bill was required to cut aid to the Palestinians, if that were decided to be the right step. Rep. Engel was interpreting an existing law, the Palestinian Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006, which forbids the transfer of any funds to a Palestinian power-sharing govt, in which Hamas is a mbr. or one over which Hamas exercises “undue influence.” (See “S. 2370 of 12/21/06 on CongressionalMonitor.org for more.) Sen. Paul later complained (5/2) that AIPAC had declined to support his legislation. This measure was reportedly motivated in equal parts by recent developments in Palestinian politics as by Sen. Paul’s presidential ambitions. The Zionist Organization for America supported the Stand with Israel Act, including it on a list of talking points for their 4/25 Washington Mission 2014, an annual day of congressional lobbying.

Egypt

The Obama administration resumed delivery of Apache helicopters to the Egyptian military and released half of the annual $1.3 b. in military aid that had been halted in 2013. Defense Secy. Hagel communicated (4/22) the news in a telephone call to his Egyptian counterpart, and also spoke with Egyptian FM Fahmy, with whom he met in Washington on 4/29. Kerry informed Congress that Egypt was abiding by the peace treaty with Israel and combating terrorism, but he did not claim that the country was moving toward democracy. On 5/8, the White House designated Amb. Stephen Beecroft, then serving in Baghdad, as the new U.S. ambassador to Egypt—a post that had been vacant since 8/2013.

Syria

A high-level delegation of the Syrian opposition in exile that also included the new chief of staff of the Free Syrian Army, Brigadier-Gen. Abdelilah al-Bashir, visited Washington (5/7–14) under the leadership of the head of the National Coalition, Ahmed Jarba. Seeking sophisticated weapons for the embattled rebels, the delegation met with Kerry, national security adviser Susan Rice, members of Congress, senators, and the leaders of both the Republican and Democratic parties. During the visit, the
U.S. Treasury Dept. unveiled (5/8) sanctions against 6 Syrian officials and 1 Russian bank for their support of the Asad govt. On the same day, the State Dept. pledged $27 m. in new nonlethal aid, including items such as generators, radios, trucks, and search and rescue kits.

U.S. Secy. of State Kerry announced (3/17) that career diplomat Daniel Rubinstein would be the new special envoy for Syria, succeeding the now retired Robert Ford.

Iran

Israel and Congress maintained pressure on the Obama administration over its Iran policy. An op-ed in the New York Times (2/23) signed by AIPAC Pres. Michael Kassen and board chair Lee Rosenberg urged Congress to outline terms for a comprehensive nuclear deal with Iran, including the dismantling of its nuclear program. A few days later, Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) submitted (2/26) an amendment to a bill on army veteran care adding the entire text of a stalled bill that would have strengthened and expanded sanctions on Iran if the talks failed. However, Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) refused to allow a vote on the amendment and Republicans filibustered the whole of the veteran’s benefits bill in protest. A week later, AIPAC released a letter (3/2) to Pres. Obama urging strict conditions for a deal with Iran, and asking mbrs. of the Senate to add their names to the signatures already gathered from Foreign Relations Cmte. chair Robert Menendez (D-NJ), as well as Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Christopher Coons (D-DE), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), Mark Kirk (R-IL), and Kelly Ayotte (R-NH). By 3/18, the letter had been signed by 83 Republican and Democratic senators.

Tehran’s choice of UN ambassador was an additional source of tension between the U.S. and Iran this quarter. On 4/2, a State Dept. dep. spokesperson called the potential nomination of Hamid Aboutalebi, who was affiliated with the group that took over the U.S. Embassy in Tehran in 1979, “extremely troubling.” On 4/18, Pres. Obama signed a bill into law automatically denying any UN-related applicant’s U.S. visa if the president can certify that the individual in question engaged in terrorism or espionage against the U.S. The bill, initially introduced (4/1) by Sen. Ted Cruz (R-TX), had earlier passed unanimously in both chambers of Congress.

RUSSIA

This quarter, Russia remained largely uninvolved in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and negotiations. On 4/1, Russian Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process Sergey Vershinin met with Pres. Abbas in Ramallah and after being briefed on the state of negotiations, he affirmed Moscow’s support for the establishment of a Palestinian state in line with UN resolutions. Meanwhile, after meeting with Faed Mustafa, Palestinian ambassador to Russia, the following day, Dep. PM Mikhail Bogdanov said Palestine was entitled to join international treaties, especially in light of its status as a UN non-mbr. observer state. Bogdanov also expressed support for Palestinian national reconciliation efforts.

EUROPEAN UNION

After the tension last quarter over the territorial clause in the Horizon 2020 agreement, excluding Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem from eligibility for EU grants, the official EU rhetoric during this quarter emphasized instead the mutual benefits of cooperation. On 2/19 during a visit to Brussels, Israel’s Economy Minister Naftali Bennett held talks with European Parliament Pres. Martin Schulz just 1 week after the minister had slammed the German official
for his Knesset address. On 3/17, foreign affairs chief Ashton affirmed Brussels’s opposition to a blanket boycott of all Israeli goods, and stressed the promise of “unprecedented” support for both Israel and a future state of Palestine in the event of a two-state solution agreement (a reference to the Special Privilege Partnership proposal). Ashton said the EU did not want “to see Israel isolated.” A week later, the EU’s Amb. to Israel Lars Faaborg-Anderson claimed (3/24) that the EU could provide financial compensation for Palestinian refugees and their descendants to assist “the implementation of any final peace agreement.” This was the 1st time a senior EU official had publicly made such an offer.

Despite such diplomatic moves to ease tensions, the EU took issue with Israel on numerous questions. On 3/21, a European Parliament Ad Hoc Delegation to the oPt said the Israeli authorities had refused to cooperate with their mission. The delegation had traveled to Israel to assess the conditions of Palestinian prisoners, but was unable to fulfil its mandate. On 3/22, Ashton expressed disappointment over Israeli settlement expansion, and urged a stop to construction plans. She repeated similar sentiments on 4/18, expressing “great concern” over an Israeli decision to declare an area of the Gush Etzion settlement bloc state land.

Also in 3/2014, a leaked internal report (3/28) by EU diplomats in Ramallah and Jerusalem warned of the possibility of regional instability should clashes at Haram al-Sharif escalate. The report also described how Israeli policies in East Jerusalem such as restrictions on freedom of movement and access to housing are infringing on the rights of its Palestinian residents. After talks broke down, EU FMs issued (5/12) a statement of concern about recent developments in Israel and the oPt, but their meeting in Brussels focused primarily on the Ukrainian crisis. The ministers said that the “extensive efforts deployed in recent mos. must not go to waste,” and also urged “all sides to exercise maximum restraint and to avoid any unilateral action that may further undermine peace efforts and the viability of a two-state solution, such as continued settlement expansion.” This latter reference, it was noted by Israeli commentators, was not accompanied by any parallel warning to the Palestinians about a specific policy deemed to be unhelpful.

UNITED NATIONS

On 3/28, during its 25th session in Geneva, the UN Human Rights Council passed 5 resolutions pertaining to Israeli conduct. Four resolutions condemned Israeli treatment of Palestinians, including a wide range of issues such as settlements, discrimination, and house demolitions, and were passed 46–1 (the single nay cast by the U.S.). One res. condemned abuses against residents of the occupied Golan Heights. The 46 “yes” votes for the resolutions pertaining to the occupied West Bank, East Jerusalem, and Gaza Strip included 9 EU mbr. states.

Israeli policies in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip were also heavily criticized by senior UN officials this quarter. On 3/21, Prof. Richard Falk, Special Rapporteur on Human Rights in the Palestinian territories, told a news conference that Israel was pursuing the “ethnic cleansing” of Palestinians in East Jerusalem, and that settlement expansion and home demolitions were “reducing what prospects [the Palestinians] might have as the outcome of supposed peace negotiations.” On 4/8, the UN’s Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs in the Palestinian Territories James Rowley called for Israel to lift the siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and to reopen closed crossings. In a press conference in Gaza, Rowley noted that although
2013 was a quiet year in terms of military confrontations, Palestinians in the Strip have seen their quality of life only deteriorate. Rowley also urged Egypt to open the Rafah crossing for passengers, goods, and medical supplies. On 4/29, coordinator for the Middle East peace process Robert Serry told the UN Security Council that Secy.-Gen. Ban Ki-moon still believed a 2-state solution was possible, but that the opportunity would slip away if both sides did nothing to find a way out of the current “1-state reality.” During the meeting, Israel’s UN Amb. Ron Prosor and Palestinian UN Observer Riyad Mansour both expressed a commitment to peace and blamed the other side for the failure of negotiations to date.

DONORS

Though there was not an Ad Hoc Liaison Cmte. session this quarter, there were numerous developments regarding donations to the PA and the Palestinian business sector and local communities. On 2/20, Nabil Maroof, Palestinian ambassador to Turkey, announced that Ankara would transfer $5 m. to the PA. The funds will be used to help establish an industrial zone in Jenin. On 3/4, the PA Ministry of Agriculture signed a $4.1 m. deal with the Saudi Waleed Bin-Talal Foundation to support agricultural projects in Palestine. Two days later, the International Islamic Relief Organization – Saudi Arabia (IIROSA) also signed (3/6) an agreement with UNRWA for $1 m. to support the agency’s job creation plans in the Gaza Strip. On the same day, the rep. of Japan to the PA Junya Matsuura signed contracts worth $500,000 with 4 different local authorities in the Ramallah area. The projects include school classroom construction and electricity infrastructure improvements. On 3/20, Palestinian and German officials gathered for the German Palestinian Steering Cmte. in Berlin, a meeting attended by PM Rami Hamdallah. The PM signed 2 agreements worth approx. $74.8 m. (55 m. euros) on projects including wastewater treatment, vocational training, and support for civil society institutions. On 4/15, the World Bank released a statement confirming $13 m. in grants for the implementation of long-term sewage and solid waste treatment solutions and management in the Gaza Strip. On 5/4, Qatar donated $5 m. to the Hamas authorities in the Gaza Strip in support of Palestinian reconciliation: according to Minister of Religious Endowment and Affairs Ismail Radwan, the money was to be used for “community reconciliation” (i.e., the bereaved families who lost relatives in Hamas-Fatah violence). On 5/13, the World Bank transferred $30 m. to the PA from the Palestinian Reform and Development Plan Trust Fund (PRDP-MDTF), a multi-donor budget support mechanism administered by the World Bank. The fund, established in 2008, is made up of Australia, France, Kuwait, Norway, the UK, and Japan.

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

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

BOYCOTT EFFORTS

The BDS campaign received a ringing endorsement this quarter from Prof. Richard Falk, the outgoing UN special rapporteur on
human rights in the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. Falk used the last report he produced in his official capacity to urge (5/8) businesses and civil society “to join the growing global solidarity movement to resist the prolonged Israeli occupation and creeping annexation of Palestine.” Falk, who throughout his tenure drew criticism from Israel and its allies, including the U.S., said it was important to strengthen “the global solidarity movement, which includes the boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) initiative in relation to businesses that profit from the settlements.” Falk also stressed that 3rd-party UN mbr.-states “have an important responsibility to ensure they are not complicit in human rights violations in occupied Palestine.”

In an indication of the BDS movement’s growing momentum outside Europe and North America, authorities in Buenos Aires suspended (3/14) a proposed $170 m. water treatment plant deal with Israeli state water firm Mekorot. That decision followed a campaign by local trade unions and human rights activists, who argued that Mekorot was attempting to export to Argentina the same discriminatory water policies it had developed against the Palestinians. The following mo., Lisbon’s water company EPAL revealed (4/21) that it in 2010, at the height of a public campaign against the contract and 3 years before the official end of the contract, had terminated a technology exchange deal with Mekorot.

In the UK, 2 significant institutions passed pro-boycott motions after sustained campaigns by Palestinian solidarity activists. On 3/19, the Council of the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) passed a motion 23–16 to support the suspension of the Israeli Association of United Architects (IAUA) from the world body of architects, the International Union of Architects (UIA). As the UK’s professional organization for architects, RIBA adopted a text condemning the IAUA for its mbrs.’ complicity in and work with illegal settlements and the infrastructure of occupation. RIBA’s sister organization, the Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland (RIAS), passed a similar res. Then on 4/28, the National Union of Teachers (NUT), which with more than 300,000 mbrs. in England and Wales is the largest teachers’ union in Europe, passed a res. backing a boycott of companies profiting from Israel’s illegal settlements and occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

DIVESTMENT

On 2/25, Luxembourg’s FDC state pension fund, which holds around $18 b. in assets, reportedly dropped from its portfolio 9 major Israeli banks and firms and 1 U.S. company for their involvement in Israeli settlements and human rights violations in the oPt.

There were also a number of student-led divestment campaigns on North American campuses, with 4 university student govts. passing relevant resolutions. On 3/25, following a debate requested by pro-Israel students, Chicago’s Loyola University student govt. passed a divestment bill for the 2d time that was vetoed by the group’s president. On the same night, the student senate at the University of California at Riverside voted to support a res. sponsored by Students for Justice in Palestine (SJP) calling on the university to divest from U.S. companies profiting from Israel’s occupation. On 4/5, student reps. at Wesleyan University in Middletown, CT, voted to support divestment from companies profiting from Israeli occupation. It is important to note that the Wesleyan Student Assembly has its own endowment, and thus the vote is more than symbolic. At most universities, steps to divest cannot proceed without the approval of
university regents, whereas the student assembly endowment at Wesleyan can be immediately affected by this vote. On 4/27, graduate students at the University of New Mexico in Albuquerque passed a similar res., specifically calling for divestment from Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard, G4S, Veolia, Elbit Systems, and SodaStream, which were singled out for their involvement at the U.S.-Mexico border and not only in the o.t.

Meanwhile, in the UK, a referendum endorsing BDS at Scotland’s Dundee University easily passed the student body (3/27). At Kings College London, however, a divestment motion that passed (3/25) was soon undermined by legal threats to the Student Union, which rather than directly overruling the vote, instead removed much of the motion’s substance and practical significance.