



Update on Conflict and Diplomacy

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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: Nearly every major action within Palestine and Israel this quarter is predicated on U.S. president Donald Trump's pledges to move the U.S. embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem and to formally recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, reversing decades of U.S. policy. The decision provokes an international backlash, sparks a wave of protests and clashes in the occupied Palestinian territories, compromises U.S. diplomatic efforts, and encourages Israel to further advance settlement and annexation plans. While the Israelis celebrate Trump's decision, the Palestinians argue that it illustrates Washington's pro-Israel bias and refuse to accept the United States as the sole mediator in any future peace talks. Outraged, Trump orders punitive cuts to U.S. humanitarian aid dedicated to Palestinian refugees, further undercutting any peace initiative, which advisors insist is still underway. The Palestinians begin pursuing a new, multilateral framework to continue the peace process. Amid these developments, the Palestinian national reconciliation process stalls once again. Lastly, the arrest of teenage activist Ahed Tamimi causes an outpouring of support and casts the plight of Palestinian children detained in Israeli prisons into the spotlight worldwide.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

With his peace initiative struggling to gain traction, U.S. president Donald Trump fulfilled his campaign promise and recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital this quarter. The move enraged the Palestinians and pushed the Palestinian Authority (PA) to seek diplomatic

support elsewhere. Israel's right-wing government lauded Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem, seizing the opportunity to further alter the borders of the municipality of Jerusalem, strengthen the settlement enterprise, and implement new measures against the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement.

THE TRUMP INITIATIVE

As the quarter opened, the Palestinians were increasingly frustrated with Trump, his peace envoys, and their biased approach to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Ever since entering office in 1/2017, the U.S. administration had tacitly approved of Israeli government moves to hasten settlement construction in the West Bank, offering only a promise to work on a plan to restart final-status negotiations between the Palestinians and Israelis.

The Trump administration promised to deliver the plan in early 2018, but the president was angered by the comments PA president Mahmoud Abbas made at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) meeting in 9/2017: In his UN speech, Abbas stated, “[We] have called on the International Criminal Court [ICC] to open an investigation and to prosecute Israeli officials for their involvement in settlement activities and aggressions against our people.” Two months later, the Associated Press reported that the State Department had informed the PA that the Washington office of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) delegation to the United States would be closed *unless* the Palestinians resumed peace talks with the Israelis. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson alleged that Abbas’s comments triggered a provision in the 2016 Consolidated Appropriations Act barring the operation of such an office if the Palestinians supported or took “any action to influence” an ICC investigation into Israeli war crimes. The Palestinians had been pursuing ICC action against Israel for years without any U.S. invocation of the purported provision, and the State Department’s new interpretation of the law in question appeared to signal a new phase in U.S.-Palestinian relations. As though to dispel any such impression, a State

Department official told Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* (11/17) that the move should not be interpreted as meaning the United States was backing off its work with the Palestinians.

The Palestinians interpreted the message differently. A PA spokesperson described (11/18) the move as “dangerous” and “unprecedented in the relationship between Washington and the Arab world.” It was evidence that the United States was losing its status as a fair mediator in the peace process, and, he claimed, it delivered “a prize for Israel, which is trying to thwart American efforts by continuing to build in the settlements and opposing the two-state solution.” Abbas warned the Trump administration that if the PLO’s Washington office were shuttered, he would indefinitely suspend all Palestinian contacts with U.S. officials. Or, as PA foreign minister Riyad al-Maliki put it on 11/18, the Palestinians would not give into “extortion.” He added, “The ball is now in the American court.”

On 11/21, a State Department spokesperson said that U.S. officials were still discussing with their Palestinian counterparts the status of the PLO office in Washington as well as the larger issue of the “comprehensive peace process.” A PA official later confirmed that low-level contacts were ongoing, but al-Maliki refuted the broader claim. On 11/22, the Arab press reported that Abbas had refused to take a phone call from Trump’s senior advisor and son-in-law, Jared Kushner. Abbas reportedly referred Kushner to the PLO office in Washington.

A week after the Associated Press report kicked off the controversy, the United States began to walk back its position. On 11/24, a State Department official announced that the PLO office would be allowed to remain open for at least ninety more days. “The relevant statute provides that if, after ninety days, the President determines the Palestinians are engaged in

direct and meaningful negotiations with Israel, restrictions on the PLO and its Washington office may be lifted,” the official stated. “We have advised the PLO office to limit its activities to those related to achieving a lasting, comprehensive peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.”

Recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's Capital

As December approached, Trump was again faced with the issue of the location of the U.S. embassy and whether he would sign a six-month waiver that would circumvent a 1995 law requiring that it be relocated from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Though Trump campaigned on a promise that he would implement the Jerusalem Embassy Act of 1995 and move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem—thereby gaining the support of numerous wealthy donors and the backing of key pro-Israel and evangelical groups—he had initially acquiesced to his advisors upon taking office and signed the waiver in 6/2017 (see *JPS* 47 [1]).

Now, based upon comments by administration officials, there was much speculation in the media and among analysts that Trump would not sign the waiver and that he would recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.

At a UN event marking the seventy-year anniversary of the UN’s vote to partition Palestine, U.S. vice president Mike Pence said (11/28) Trump was still “actively considering” moving the embassy. Two days later, the U.S. press reported (11/30) that Trump was planning to sign the waiver, but that he wanted to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital at the same time. With rumors and speculation proliferating in the U.S. and international press, a PA spokesperson warned (12/1) that recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital would be as “dangerous” as moving the embassy and

would “take the region into [. . .] instability.” A Hamas spokesperson threatened (12/2) an “escalation of the Jerusalem intifada” should the U.S. embassy be moved, referencing the *habba*, the surge of Palestinian resistance, random attacks, and protests that began in Jerusalem in 9/2015 (see *JPS* 45 [2]). Abbas personally called (12/2) the leaders of eight Arab states to ask for their help in pressuring Trump to delay or cancel the proposed embassy move. According to a PA spokesperson, Abbas “warned categorically that taking such a step would lead to the destruction of the peace process” and propel the region into turmoil.

The Palestinian outcry did little to dissuade Trump. According to a report in the *Washington Post*, the U.S. president appeared “agitated and exasperated” during a meeting with his top advisors on the subject of Jerusalem on 11/27. “Trump seemed frustrated with pushback about the potential backlash among Palestinians and their supporters,” the report stated.

On 12/5, Trump called Abbas, Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Saudi king Salman bin Abdulaziz, and Egyptian president Abdel Fattah al-Sisi to let them know that he planned on making his announcement the following day.

“After more than two decades of waivers, we are no closer to a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians,” Trump said (12/6), in comments broadcast live from the White House’s Diplomatic Reception Room. “It would be folly to assume that repeating the exact same formula would now produce a different or better result. Therefore, I have determined that it is time to officially recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.” He also refrained from explicitly endorsing a two-state solution, as some of the reports leading up to his speech said he might, and

announced that he was “directing the State Department to begin preparation to move the U.S. Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.” Finally, Trump stressed that his decision was not intended to express a U.S. position on any final-status issues. “Those questions are up to the parties involved.” In the aftermath of the announcement, administration officials offered conflicting explanations of the rationale behind it. Some said Trump was eager to satisfy key donors and backers while others asserted that the announcement was based on a strategic choice. Israel had lost faith in the United States during the Obama administration, they said, and Netanyahu would be more willing to make the concessions necessary for a peace agreement if Jerusalem were taken off the table.

As expected, the Israelis, who had long called for the United States to recognize Jerusalem as their capital and move the embassy there, were jubilant. “There are major moments in the history of Zionism: the Balfour Declaration, the founding of the state, the liberation of Jerusalem, and Trump’s announcement yesterday,” Netanyahu said, in a Facebook video posted on 12/7. “This is a festive and unifying moment, for the Right, the Left, religious, (and) secular. We are making Jerusalem our chief joy.”

Backlash

The response to Trump’s announcement was swift and fierce. The international community was nearly unanimous in its criticism. Arab states condemned it and called an emergency meeting of the Arab League on 12/9 to coordinate a response. The various Palestinian factions overcame the tensions inherent to the national reconciliation process and cosponsored protests against it (see “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics” below). The Palestinian people mobilized, with tens of thousands attending

daily protests across the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt) from 12/7 to 12/17 and rockets being fired into Israel almost every day for a week after the announcement (see “Overview of the Violence” below).

While Trump administration officials insisted that they were still committed to their peace initiative, the Palestinian leadership had a different perspective. “President Trump has delivered a message to the Palestinian people,” said PLO secretary-general Saeb Erekat (12/6). “The two-state solution is over. Now is the time to transform the struggle to one of one state with equal rights for everyone living in historic Palestine, from the river to the sea.” Abbas was only slightly less definitive. “This is a historical moment and we must act,” he said (12/6). “The U.S. can no longer function as a diplomatic sponsor and mediator.”

Once the shock of the announcement had passed, the Palestinian leadership was faced with a dilemma: How best to respond to the Trump administration’s so-called peace plan, while balancing the Palestinian public’s outrage at Trump’s Jerusalem declaration? They did not have to wait long for an answer. When Pence addressed the UN on 11/28, he announced plans to visit Israel and the oPt in 12/2017. Two days after Israel’s Foreign Ministry announced (12/5) that Pence was set to arrive in the region on 12/17, senior PA official Jibril Rajoub said that the U.S. vice president would not be welcome in the oPt. Erekat then explained (12/8) that the Palestinians had decided to suspend high-level contacts with the Trump administration because of the Jerusalem declaration. “We think Mr. Trump has acted in a way that makes it impossible for the U.S. to act as an honest broker,” said senior PA official Nabil Shaath on 12/10. “We are just expressing that.” A few days later, at an emergency meeting of the

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in Istanbul, Abbas argued that Israel's violations of international law freed the Palestinians from past agreements; he threatened to end the PA's security coordination with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) and announced that the Palestinians planned to reapply for full membership at the UN. On the sidelines of the OIC meeting, another Palestinian official said that Palestinian diplomats had begun working with their Egyptian counterparts to draft a UN resolution censuring the United States.

Apart from sending Special Representative for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt to Israel for some meetings, the Trump administration did not engage much with the issue in mid-12/2017. A spokesperson for Pence blamed the Palestinians for "walking away again from an opportunity to discuss the region" (12/10), adding that the administration was "undeterred in its efforts to help achieve peace between Israelis and Palestinians and our peace team remains hard at work putting together a plan." Four days later, the trip was postponed on the grounds that Pence might be needed to cast a tie-breaking vote in Congress on a tax-reform bill, but it was clear that the Palestinians' outrage was a factor. Responding to a question about the status of the U.S. peace initiative in light of the news, a senior U.S. official said (12/14) that a "temporary cooling off period" might be needed. "We think it's appropriate for the Palestinians to digest what has happened. And once they review the president's remarks clearly, they will realize that nothing has changed in terms of being able to reach an historic peace agreement," another official remarked on 12/15.

The focus then shifted to the UN, where Egyptian diplomats circulated (12/16) a Palestinian-backed draft resolution to the Security Council (UNSC). Without mentioning

the United States specifically, the draft affirmed "that any decisions and actions which purport to have altered the character, status or demographic composition of the Holy City of Jerusalem have no legal effect, are null and void and must be rescinded"; it also called "upon all States to refrain from the establishment of diplomatic missions in the Holy City of Jerusalem." On 12/18, the fifteen-member UNSC voted in favor of the measure except for the United States, which exercised its veto. "The discussions that took place [. . .], as well as the statements and activities that we have seen around the globe, confirm that the U.S. has completely isolated itself by its decision," al-Maliki said in a prepared statement after the vote. That same night, Abbas took a further step to strengthen the standing of the Palestinians internationally by signing onto twenty-two international agreements and treaties, including the UN Convention to Combat Desertification and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention (Wafa, 12/18). "We have to take legal, political and diplomatic countermeasures," he said. After a similar Palestinian-backed resolution was voted down at the UN in 12/2014 (see *JPS* 44 [3]), the PA signed onto fifteen international treaties and conventions, paving the way for the Palestinians to submit formal complaints to the ICC, inter alia. The Palestinians also made plans to submit a tweaked version of the failed UNSC resolution to the UNGA the following week.

Despite Trump's 12/20 threat to cut U.S. aid to any country that voted in favor, the resolution overwhelmingly passed in the UNGA on 12/21 (with 128 countries in favor, 35 abstaining, and 5 island nations plus Honduras and Guatemala joining Israel and the United States in opposition). Abbas called the vote a "victory for Palestine," and a PA spokesperson thanked the countries that supported the

measure “despite all the pressure exerted on them.” U.S. ambassador to the UN Nikki Haley reportedly invited representatives of the countries that didn’t vote in favor of the measure to a formal reception to thank them for their “friendship to the U.S.” (Fox News, 12/21). In a similar move, Netanyahu reportedly created a new \$50-million fund to aid countries that support Israel in international forums (*Times of Israel*, 12/28).

Over the course of these two contentious UN votes, the rift between the United States and the Palestinians grew. According to 12/24 Israeli press reports, Abbas told his deputies that the Trump administration was a “lost cause” and instructed them to sever all contacts with U.S. officials, expanding the high-level diplomatic break he ordered in the wake of Trump’s 12/6 announcement. The Palestinians were considering further action at the UNSC, UNGA, and ICC, according to Fatah Central Committee member Azzam al-Ahmad (12/24). “We are facing a continuous, cumulative and long political, diplomatic and popular battle,” he said.

Throughout this period, the Palestinians quietly explored a new framework for a possible resumption of the peace process. On 12/19, Abbas sent diplomatic delegations to Moscow and Beijing following signals from both Russia and China that they were willing to step up. “We are ready to become an honest mediator here,” Russia’s Deputy Ambassador to the UN Vladimir Safronkov said on 12/18, offering to host a Palestinian-Israeli summit in Moscow. Chinese president Xi Jinping extended a similar offer to Abbas when the PA president visited China in 7/2017.

While most of the international community opposed Trump’s 12/6 announcement, a few countries endorsed the notion of recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. Czech Republic

president Miloš Zeman, for one, said (12/8) Trump’s announcement had made him “very happy.” A couple of weeks later, Guatemala’s President Jimmy Morales announced (12/24) that he intended to follow the U.S. lead and move the Guatemalan embassy to Jerusalem. According to Israel’s Deputy Foreign Minister Tzipi Hotovely on 21/24, Israeli diplomats were in talks with representatives from ten other countries about the prospect of moving their embassies as well. Honduras was widely speculated to be among them, as well as Togo, Paraguay, Romania, and Slovakia.

Backlash to the Backlash

The conflict between the Trump administration and the Palestinian leadership escalated in 1/2018.

On 12/29, the *Jerusalem Post* published an interview with U.S. ambassador to Israel David Friedman (see “United States” below) in which the U.S. official said that Trump was “disappointed” with the “ugly, needlessly provocative, and anti-Semitic” rhetoric coming from the Palestinians. Four days later, the notoriously mercurial Trump vented (1/2) his frustration on Twitter: “We pay the Palestinians HUNDRED OF MILLIONS OF DOLLARS a year and get no appreciation or respect,” he wrote. “They don’t even want to negotiate a long overdue peace treaty with Israel. We have taken Jerusalem, the toughest part of the negotiation, off the table, but Israel, for that, would have had to pay more. But with the Palestinians no longer willing to talk peace, why should we make any of these massive future payments to them?” Trump’s tweets overshadowed comments Haley had made hours earlier in response to a question about U.S. aid to the Palestinians and to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) in

particular. She said that the president wanted no funding to go to the Palestinians until they were “ready to come back to the negotiating table.” Haley added, “What we saw with the [UNGA] resolution was not helpful to the situation. We’re trying to move forward a peace process but if that doesn’t happen, the president’s not going to continue to fund that situation.”

Between 2014 and 2016, the United States contributed \$350–\$400 million per year to UNRWA, making it the agency’s single largest state donor. Because that aid comprised roughly a third of UNRWA’s annual budget and because millions of Palestinian refugees across the Middle East rely on food, shelter, health care, and education provided by UNRWA, the threat of a reduction exacerbated anti-U.S. protests across the oPt, which had broken out at the time of Trump’s 12/6 announcement (see Chronology) and subsequently subsided. “The U.S. administration is embarking on a new path, which includes dictating solutions to the Palestinian people and dropping the Jerusalem and refugee issues,” Erekat told (1/4) Voice of Palestine radio station. “This is something our people, who will remain steadfast in their country, will never accept.”

The threat to cut UNRWA’s funding also became an issue in Israel. While Israeli news reports on 1/4 disclosed that the Foreign Ministry privately urged the Trump administration not to cut aid to UNRWA because the agency’s services benefited Israel indirectly, the following day, Education Minister Naftali Bennett (Jewish Home) said he would support such a cut. As rumors of cuts of up to \$125 million were circulating, Bennett stated, “UNRWA is a terror-supporting organization. Its very existence perpetuates the dire situation of Gaza’s population, who suffer under the rule of Hamas.” Netanyahu weighed in publicly for the first time on 1/7, arguing for

the elimination of the agency. “UNRWA is an organization that perpetuates the problem of the Palestinian refugees,” he said. “It also perpetuates the narrative of the so-called right of return with the aim of eliminating the State of Israel, and therefore UNRWA must disappear.”

On 1/16, the State Department announced that the Trump administration would be withholding \$65 million from a planned \$125 million transfer to UNRWA. “There is a need to undertake a fundamental reexamination of UNRWA, both in the way it operates and the way it is funded,” a spokesperson said, explaining that the frozen funds may be transferred after “future consideration.” Two days later, the department announced (1/18) another cut, this time an indefinite freeze on the \$45 million the Trump administration had pledged in 12/2017 in response to an UNRWA emergency appeal. State Department officials talked about restructuring UNRWA and complained of bureaucratic issues within the agency. Trump’s statements, however, made clear what motivated the cuts. In comments to the press ahead of a meeting with Netanyahu in Davos on 1/25, Trump lambasted the Palestinians for their alleged disrespect of the United States. “We give them hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and support—tremendous numbers, numbers that nobody understands. That money is on the table. That money is not going to them unless they sit down and negotiate peace [with Israel],” Trump said.

Meanwhile, UNRWA described (1/16) the first U.S. funding cut as having created the “worst financial crisis in UNRWA’s history.” The agency quickly announced (1/17) an emergency fundraising campaign to maintain core agency services in 2018. Although the agency was unable to raise enough money to

make up for the U.S. portion of its budget, a number of new funding pledges were made. On 1/17, the Belgian government announced a small increase in its annual support for UNRWA in the form of a new three-year, €19 million (approximately \$23 million) aid plan, as well as the immediate disbursement of its entire 2018 pledge. (Early reports erroneously stated that the entire €19 million was being made available immediately.) By 1/30, UNRWA's Commissioner-General Pierre Krähenbühl said that eleven countries, including Russia and Kuwait, had agreed to speed up their contributions to UNRWA in order to alleviate the shortfall.

A New Path Forward

A little over a month after Trump recognized Jerusalem as Israel's capital, the PLO's broad-based consultative institution, known as the Central Council, convened in Ramallah on 1/14 in an attempt to come up with a new Palestinian strategy. Abbas delivered an impassioned two-hour speech, in which he recapitulated the history of the conflict, lambasted the Israeli occupation, and derided Trump's actions. Abbas said the PA would not allow the United States to be the "sole mediator" between the Palestinians and Israelis, rejecting the hitherto undisclosed U.S. peace initiative. "Israel has terminated [the] Oslo [Accords]. . . . Now we are an authority without any authority, and under an occupation without cost," Abbas said, alluding to Israel's impunity. In addition to Trump, Abbas singled out two other U.S. officials by name: Haley, who pushed for the cuts to UNRWA, and Friedman, for his recent statements saying there was no such thing as an "occupation" of Palestinian land (see "United States" below). The following day, the Central Council issued a closing statement recommending that the Executive Committee

revoke the PLO's 1993 recognition of Israel until the Israeli government "recognizes the State of Palestine" and reaffirming its approval of a suspension in PA security coordination with the IDF.

Over the subsequent weeks, the Palestinians embarked on a diplomatic strategy centered on multilateralism. Although Abbas rejected the United States as a "sole" mediator, he appeared open to the Trump administration participating in peace talks in the context of a larger group. According to a senior Palestinian official on 2/1, the PA was focused on developing a multilateral mechanism to reengage peace negotiations, and ultimately achieve a two-state solution. Specifically, the PA was looking for greater involvement by the Middle East Quartet (the United States, European Union, UN, and Russia) and the UNSC. The Arab League Council met in Cairo on 2/1 and agreed to support this new approach.

Simultaneously, the PA started working on other initiatives as well. In a speech at the Middle East Institute in Washington, Chief PLO representative to the U.S. Husam Zomlot said (1/25) that the Palestinians intended to bypass the Trump administration and the Netanyahu government and to appeal directly to potentially sympathetic members of the U.S. Congress, the U.S. public, and the Israeli Left. "Things are changing in this country," he said, referring to mounting opposition to the Israeli occupation in the United States. The Israeli prime minister can address Congress but it is unlikely he would be welcome to address students at universities in California or Wisconsin, Zomlot said. "He knows that and he wanted to insert anxiety, poison, suspicion in the body of that growing relationship between us and America." For his part, al-Maliki revealed (1/29) that the PA intended to place a formal request before the UNSC to reconsider

Palestine's application for full UN membership in 2/2018.

While the Palestinians were staking out a new path forward, the Trump administration carried on as if nothing had changed. "Maybe on a personal level they are angry with us," a senior White House official told the *Jerusalem Post* on 1/7. "They're trying to make it look like we've lost credibility. But a peace process and a credible conclusion to that process can't happen without the U.S.—they know that. And once the plan is revealed, it will speak for itself."

The "plan" remained undisclosed by the end of the quarter, but a number of leaks pointed to ideas under consideration. On 11/18, Israel Television News reported that the "plan" was based on a two-state solution, but not necessarily the pre-1967 armistice lines, and that it would not provide for the removal of any Israeli settlers from the West Bank. According to the *New York Times* on 12/3, Saudi crown prince Mohammed bin Salman shared some of the basic ideas being considered during a meeting with Abbas on 11/6, including provisions for a Palestinian state without territorial contiguity and without Jerusalem as its capital, and another abrogating the Palestinian refugees' right of return. According to Palestinian, Arab, and European officials who reportedly heard about the meeting from Abbas, the plan was more aligned with the Israeli position than any previously put forward by the United States. Finally, Israel's Channel 10 reported (1/19) that Erekat presented Abbas with a ninety-two-page working outline of the U.S. plan ahead of his 1/14 PLO Central Council speech. According to that draft, Israel would retain security control over the West Bank and the Palestinian state would have its capital in the East Jerusalem suburb of Abu Dis, which an indignant Abbas referenced in his speech (see above).

After a monthlong delay, Pence finally made his trip to the region in mid-1/2018. Following meetings with al-Sisi in Cairo (1/20) and Jordan's King Abdullah in Amman (1/21), he addressed a special session of Israel's Knesset on 1/22. There, he reiterated that the United States was committed to bringing about "a lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians," criticized the 7/14/2015 Iran nuclear deal (see "Iran" below), thanked the Israeli government for its "declared willingness" to resume peace talks, and called on the Palestinians to "return to the table." He also announced that the Trump administration planned to open the U.S. embassy in Jerusalem by the end of 2019. Some Palestinian members of Knesset (MKs), who disrupted Pence's speech to protest the Jerusalem decision, were forcibly removed from the chamber after an altercation erupted with their Jewish Israeli counterparts. Cheering Israeli settler leaders, who had been invited by the U.S. embassy to attend the Pence address, added to the chaos. Rounding out his visit, Pence met with Netanyahu privately on 1/22 and toured Yad Vashem and the Western Wall on 1/23. The Palestinians held to their boycott and refused to meet with Pence while he was in the region, keeping the U.S. vice president out of the religiously significant city of Bethlehem and other West Bank areas. In fact, Pence, who identifies as an evangelical Christian, said earlier he hoped to meet "in solidarity" with Arab Christians on his trip to the Middle East, but after Trump's 12/6 Jerusalem declaration, no Christian leader in Egypt, Israel, or the oPt would agree to see him (*Newsweek*, 12/18). Near the end of the quarter, Trump and Netanyahu met (1/25) on the sidelines of the World Economic Forum in Davos, where Trump summed up the state of affairs as follows: "[The Palestinians] disrespected us a week ago by not allowing our great vice president to

see them, and we give them hundreds of millions of dollars in aid and support, tremendous numbers, numbers that nobody understands—that money is on the table and that money is not going to them unless they sit down and negotiate peace [with Israel].”

Settlement Growth in the Trump Era

Now that the Trump administration—with its recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital—had dropped any pretense to being an “honest broker” between Palestinians and Israelis, settlers and far-right religious nationalists became more forceful in demanding an increase in settlement expansion. While the Israelis tried to obfuscate the growth in settler units by releasing statistics on secondary matters such as tenders, bids, and housing starts, the truth is that the settlement industry has increased exponentially in the last twenty years. “Although the numbers of the units and the different process may be confusing, the bottom line is very clear,” said the Israeli nongovernmental organization (NGO) Peace Now (1/11). “The government is attempting to destroy the possibility of a two-state solution and the prospects of peace by building more and more in the settlements.” Hadashot News reported (12/7) that some Israeli officials were emboldened by Trump’s 12/6 announcement. Housing and Construction Minister Yoav Galant, for one, started advancing a new plan to build 14,000 housing units across Jerusalem, including 6,000 in Palestinian East Jerusalem. “Following President Trump’s historic declaration, I intend to advance and strengthen building in Jerusalem,” Galant said. Put another way by Erekat on 1/11, “Trump’s decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel’s capital did not only disqualify the U.S. from playing any constructive role toward achieving peace, but it provided the extremist Israeli government

with an opportunity and a green light to speed up their plans of the disposition of the Palestinian people.”

Also concerning this quarter was the fact the Jewish National Fund, which resumed what Peace Now calls “fraudulent” land purchases in the West Bank, and Israel’s Housing Ministry on 12/19 published a plan for developing an area of the Jordan Valley, including a proposal to expand existing settlements to accommodate 10,000 new residents. (The twenty current settlements in the area were occupied by approximately 4,500 settlers.) On 12/27, the day after a group of settler rabbis met with Netanyahu, Israel’s cabinet approved the transfer of NIS 40 million (approximately \$11 million) for health care and various other services. Finally, on 1/10, the Higher Planning Committee of Israel’s Civil Administration advanced plans for the construction of 1,122 new homes in twenty West Bank settlements and published (1/11) tenders for the construction of 651 of those units. (For reference, the committee advanced plans for 2,615 units at its previous meeting, in 10/2017; see *JPS* 47 [2].)

In addition to the above, the Israeli authorities used a Palestinian attack on an Israeli settler to justify further settlement growth. For years, residents from Havat Gilad, an illegal settlement outpost near Nablus, had been calling on the government to authorize their outpost so as to gain full access to basic services. Two days after armed Palestinians shot and killed (1/9) an Israeli settler from that outpost, Netanyahu instructed the Defense Ministry to connect it to the West Bank’s electricity grid, a significant step toward formalizing the sixteen-year-old colony. Some settler leaders dismissed the move as “spin” and continued pushing for Netanyahu to fully authorize Havat Gilad. Defense Minister

Avigdor Lieberman, one of the leaders of Israel's settler movement, answered their calls, submitting a resolution to that effect on 1/14. Two weeks later, the Israeli cabinet unanimously approved (2/4) the proposal. According to cabinet secretary Tzachi Braverman on 2/4, "There is no intention to expand and to annex privately owned Palestinian lands but only to legalize the existing settlement after the murder and to connect it to water and electricity as well as make it accessible for humanitarian reasons."

Israel Pushing for Annexation

Proposals to annex parts or all of the West Bank had circulated on the margins of Israeli politics for years. This quarter, new momentum built around a proposal that would extend Israeli sovereignty to West Bank settlements.

The first sign annexation was reaching the realm of policy came on 12/31 when the Likud Central Committee unanimously approved a resolution calling on party leaders to apply Israeli law and sovereignty to Jewish settlements in the West Bank. Although Netanyahu did not attend the meeting, and Likud MKs can disregard political proposals coming up through the party ranks, it was clear that pressure was growing for the party leadership to adopt even more expansionist settlement policies. Netanyahu was particularly vulnerable to pressure as a result of the progress being made in the corruption investigations against him. On 2/12, the police recommended that Netanyahu be charged with bribery, fraud, and breach of trust, casting doubt over the future of his public life.

The same day as the Likud party vote, *Haaretz* reported Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit had circulated new guidelines to his deputies, directing them to adjust all government-sponsored legislation in

anticipation of its possible future application to Israelis in the oPt. The move followed conversations between Mandelblit and Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked (Jewish Home). In a letter to the Israeli cabinet explaining the new guidelines, Shaked wrote, "It is no longer possible to accept a situation in which the government provides a normative solution to residents in certain areas of the country, while other residents are neglected and not treated the same—either by direct application or by appropriate security legislation in parallel timetables."

By 2/2018, a slate of annexation-related bills was percolating through the Knesset. The most ambitious, which was based on the Likud Central Committee resolution and drafted by MK Yoav Kisch (Likud) and MK Bezalel Smotrich (Jewish Home), called for the application of Israeli "law, jurisdiction, administration, and sovereignty" to "all areas of settlement" in the West Bank. Hours after 18 settler leaders published an open letter on 2/8 urging Netanyahu to support the proposal, the prime minister postponed the Ministerial Committee for Legislation debate scheduled for later that day. According to a senior committee members, the postponement was to allow Netanyahu to coordinate with the Trump administration. Then, on 2/11, Netanyahu postponed another debate on the bill, this one among the heads of the various parties in his ruling coalition. While the downing of an Israeli jet in Syria (see "Syria" below) was the official reason invoked, analysts speculated that Netanyahu's primary objection was to avoid tension with the Trump administration. On 2/12, Netanyahu confirmed that he was "maintaining a dialogue with the Americans" on the issue of "expanding Israeli sovereignty" to the West Bank. He said that his actions were guided by two principles: "Communicating to

the Americans that our connection with them is a strategic asset not only for Israel, but also for the settlements. [Second], that this needs to be a government initiative and not a private one, as this is a historic move.”

A White House official denied (2/12) that there were any official talks on the issue of annexation. Meanwhile, some of the most hard-line members of Netanyahu’s coalition were so eager to pass the bill that they were willing to do so over any potential protests from the Trump administration. “The prime minister asked me not to raise the Sovereignty Bill [at the Ministerial Committee for Legislation on 2/11] because of the security incident in the north and because of the discussions with the Americans until further notice,” Bennett said in an interview with KAN Public Radio on 2/12. “I agreed to hold off because of the security situation, but wanted to hear more about the situation with Washington. [. . .] I am determined to advance the issue of sovereignty [over settlements]. It is a plan six years in the making and I really think that the rare constellation of a right-wing government in Israel, a favorable administration in DC, and an international situation that enables it should allow us to proceed after fifty years.”

With the Kisch-Smotrich bill on hold, the Knesset passed (2/12) into law a related measure to have Israeli law extend to academic institutions in the West Bank. “Alongside the academic importance of the law, there is a clear element here of applying sovereignty and I’m proud of both of these things,” said MK Shuli Moalem-Refaeli (Jewish Home), who proposed the bill in 1/2018. All these incremental measures, notwithstanding the stalled Kisch-Smotrich bill, prompted the Israeli opposition to describe the process as one of “creeping annexation.”

PERSECUTING THE PALESTINIAN MINORITY AND OTHER OPPONENTS

While in previous quarters, the right-wing coalition government targeted equally its rivals in the Israeli Left, the Palestinian minority in Israel, and the BDS movement, this quarter it focused on BDS activism in particular; to this end, it went ahead with three major initiatives.

First, after an amendment to the so-called Anti-Boycott Law of 2011 passed in committee late last quarter, a preliminary reading of the measure took place in the Knesset (11/21). The Anti-Boycott Law allows Israelis to sue activists calling for or leading boycott campaigns against Israel or its settlements. In 2015, the High Court of Justice repealed a clause of the bill that allowed courts to assess unlimited fines as compensation for plaintiffs without requiring proof of damages. MK Kisch argued that the court’s ruling rendered the law “ineffective,” and proposed said amendment as a “finger in the eye” of BDS activists (*Times of Israel*, 11/22). Under his proposal, courts would be allowed to assess fines of up to NIS 100,000 (approximately \$28,000) in cases without demonstrated damages and fines of up to NIS 500,000 (approximately \$141,000) in cases where the plaintiffs could demonstrate damages. Strategic Affairs Minister Gilad Erdan, who backed the proposal, said it sent a “clear message” to BDS activists that anything they did could “be turned back against them.” There was no further action on the amendment this quarter.

Second, on 12/29, the Israeli government approved a new \$72-million plan for combatting BDS (*Yedioth Ahronoth*, 12/29). The plan included the establishment of a new NGO with a board comprising government officials and foreign donors that would administer “civil-society infrastructure servicing the State of Israel and the pro-Israel community

in the fight against the de-legitimization of Israel,” according to a notice explaining the plan that was sent to government officials. The idea was to shift some anti-BDS activities from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the nongovernmental sector to allow for greater flexibility in addressing the growing movement.

Third, Israel’s Strategic Affairs Ministry published its BDS “blacklist” on 1/7, revealing for the first time which international activist groups were being barred from Israel over their support for the BDS movement. (An anti-boycott law from 3/2017 provided for the creation of the list; see *JPS* 46 [4].) “We have shifted from defense to offense,” Erdan explained (1/7). “The boycott organizations need to know that the State of Israel will act against them and not allow [them] to enter its territory to harm its citizens.” Twenty groups were listed, including eleven European organizations and six from the United States, as well as BDS Chile, BDS South Africa, and the BDS National Committee.

HAMAS CRACKDOWN ON ISLAMISTS IN GAZA

In an effort to alleviate the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, Hamas made a deal with the Egyptian government in 6/2017, trading the promise of increased border security and pressure on armed Islamist groups in Gaza for an Egyptian pledge to open the Rafah border crossing more frequently (see *JPS* 47 [1]). In the months that followed, Hamas established a one hundred meter buffer zone along the Gaza-Egypt border, installed new watchtowers and cameras along the border, made a series of arrests, and increased border patrols. These measures exacerbated the already uneasy relationship between Hamas and the armed Islamist groups in Gaza and the Sinai Peninsula and eventually sparked a wave of violence,

which continued through the end of 2017 (see *JPS* 47 [2]). As in all the previous bouts of violence between the two groups in recent years, the Islamists retaliated against the crackdown by attacking Hamas officials directly and by baiting the IDF into striking Hamas sites.

Trump’s 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital appeared to exacerbate the violence. In the two weeks following Trump’s announcement, there were some thirty, mostly unidentified, rockets fired toward Israel. The vast majority fell short of the border, but two landed in populated areas, leading the IDF to retaliate against Hamas sites in Gaza (see “Overview of the Violence” below and Chronology for details). Rocket fire of that intensity had not been seen since Israel’s 2014 fifty-day war on Gaza. Apparently fearing a similar escalation, Hamas sent back-channel messages to the Israeli government calling for calm and conducted a sweeping arrest campaign to stymie the Islamist groups allegedly responsible (*Haaretz*, 12/19). According to an officer of Hamas’s internal security service, at least 550 Islamists had been imprisoned in Gaza by mid-12/2017 (*Electronic Intifada*, 12/21).

While the post-Trump announcement flare-up cooled after a few weeks, tensions between Hamas and the Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS), in particular, remained high. On 1/3, SPIS published a twenty-two-minute video online calling for resistance to Hamas, decrying Hamas’s failure to prevent Trump’s 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, and criticizing the organization for accepting support from Iran. The video culminates in the apparent execution of an SPIS fighter accused of smuggling weapons to Hamas. “Never surrender to them. Use explosives, silenced pistols, and sticky bombs. Bomb their courts and their security locations, for these are

the pillars of tyranny that prop up its throne,” says one SPIS representative in the video. “[Hamas] uses its smuggled weapons to empower that which was not revealed by God. It also fights supporters of the Islamic State in Gaza and Sinai and prevents the migration of these supporters from Gaza to Sinai.” While it continued through the end of the quarter, violence in Sinai did not escalate further.

OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS

Following U.S. president Trump’s 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital, a wave of protests, clashes, and violent incidents swept the oPt. Consequently, more Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions this quarter—29, up from 21 last quarter. The number of Israelis killed as a result of Palestinian actions, 4 in total, remained low matching the figure from last quarter. Therefore, the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the Second Intifada in 9/2000 reached 11,007 Palestinians (including 64 Palestinian citizens of Israel); 1,274 Israelis (including at least 252 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 by Egyptian naval forces on 1/13 (see Chronology).

OVERVIEW OF THE VIOLENCE

The number of Palestinians killed as a result of Israeli actions in the **West Bank** and

East Jerusalem nearly tripled this quarter while the number of those injured increased almost twenty-fold, concurring with the widespread unrest across the oPt in the wake of the 12/6 Trump announcement regarding Jerusalem. Overall, 13 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (up from 5 last quarter): 7 were killed in clashes sparked by IDF raids or road closures (12/15 [2], 1/3, 1/11, 1/15, 1/30, and 2/6), 3 were killed during clashes and firefights stemming from the IDF’s search for the alleged killer of an Israeli settler on 1/9 (1/17, 2/3, and 2/6), 1 was killed by Israeli settlers during a dispute over land (11/30), 1 died of a heart attack brought on by an IDF raid (12/12), and 1 was killed after he stabbed and lightly injured an Israeli security guard (2/7). According to the UN’s Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of Palestinians injured also increased dramatically this quarter. Between 11/7/2017 and 2/12/2018, a total of 4,704 Palestinians were injured as a result of Israeli actions in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, up from 275 last quarter. Furthermore, OCHA reported (1/5) that the number of Palestinian injuries resulting from protests and clashes with Israeli troops following Trump’s 12/6 announcement accounted for more than half of all Palestinian injuries in the oPt in 2017 (see figure 1).

In the **Gaza Strip**, all but three of the 13 Palestinians killed by Israeli actions sustained their fatal injuries protesting in the borderlands against the Trump Jerusalem announcement. Specifically, 10 Gazans died from injuries sustained at the border (12/8 [2], 12/15 [2], 12/22 [2], 12/23, 12/24, 12/30, and 1/11), 2 were killed in Israeli air strikes (12/8 [2]), and 1 Palestinian child succumbed to injuries sustained during Operation Protective Edge, Israel’s fifty-day war on Gaza in 2014 (12/6).

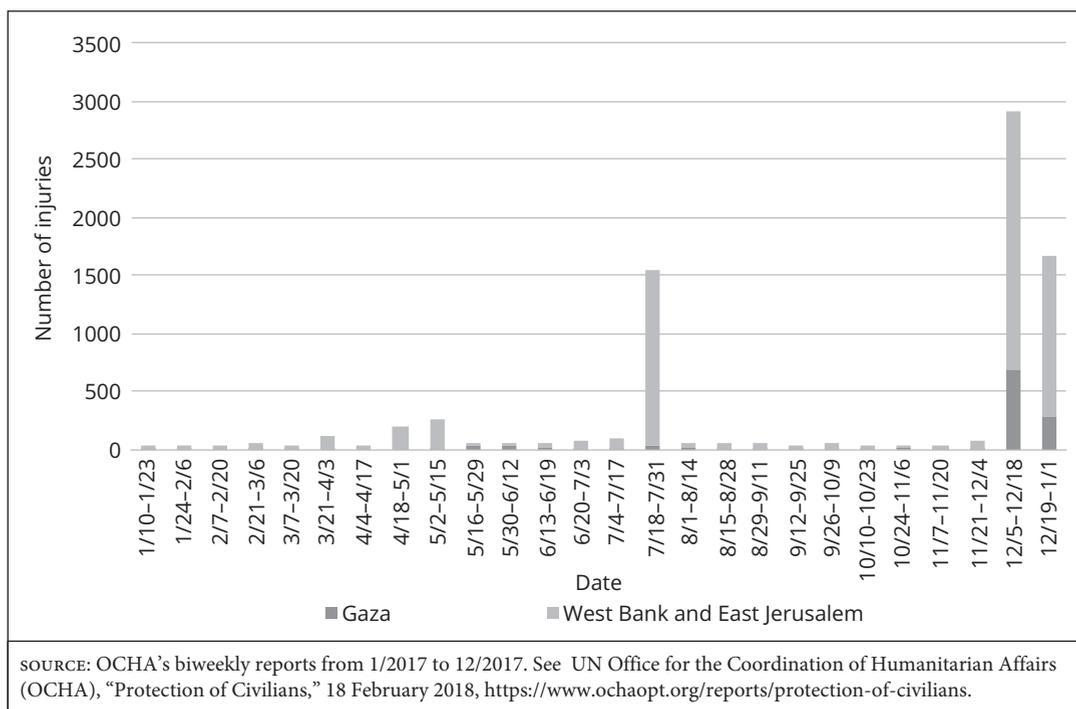


Figure 1. Palestinian injuries as a result of Israeli actions in 2017. U.S. president Trump's 12/6/2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital sparked a wave of unrest across the oPt, leading to a spike in Palestinian injuries in 12/2017. The smaller spike in 7/2017 stemmed from unrest surrounding the Israeli authorities' decision to implement new security measures at Haram al-Sharif (see *JPS* 47 [1]).

In addition, statements from Izzeddin al-Qassam Brigades said a Hamas fighter was killed in an "accidental explosion" (1/7) and 1 was killed in a "training accident" (1/13), according to *Times of Israel*. As in the West Bank, OCHA reported that the number of Palestinians injured in the context of the post-Trump announcement rose some twenty-fold, from 52 last quarter to 1,143 between 11/7/2017 and 2/12/2018.

There was an explosion of cross-border violence in Gaza this quarter. Most came in the wake of Trump's 12/6 Jerusalem announcement—Gazans fired rockets into Israel almost every day between 12/7 and 12/17, drawing numerous and deadly Israeli air strikes on Hamas and Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ) sites

(see Chronology). In addition, Islamist groups chafing against Hamas's rule in Gaza fired rockets into Israel in an effort to bait the IDF into retaliating against Hamas (see "Hamas Cracks Down on Islamists in Gaza" above), and the IDF's ongoing anti-tunnel operations drew retaliatory rocket fire from PIJ on at least one occasion (11/30). Israeli forces demolished two tunnels leading from Gaza into Israel this quarter (12/10 and 1/13), bringing the total number of tunnels demolished since the IDF embarked on this new campaign to four (see *JPS* 47 [1] and [2]).

As in previous quarters, the IDF strictly enforced the unilaterally defined buffer zone, or Access Restricted Areas (ARA), along Israel's border with Gaza. IDF troops violently dispersed thousands of Palestinian protesters

gathering along the border fence on twenty-seven separate days, up from nine last quarter; opened fire on Palestinian shepherds, farmers, bird-hunters, and other civilians on seven occasions, leading to two reported injuries; and fired on Palestinian land or other property at least twenty-six times, up from twelve last quarter (see Chronology for details). Israeli forces also conducted at least eight limited incursions to level land and clear sightlines in the ARAs, down from eleven (11/20, 12/18, 12/26 [2], 1/1, 1/8, 1/17, and 2/8); and arrested six Palestinians attempting to cross into Israel, down from nine (11/22 [2] and 2/1 [4]).

After the Israeli authorities briefly extended the fishing zone off Gaza's coast last quarter, they restricted it to the usual six nautical miles. Israeli naval forces continued harassing Palestinian fishermen, opening fire on Palestinian fishing boats on sixty-six separate occasions, up from sixty-two last quarter. Over the course of these incidents, Israeli naval forces injured four Palestinian fishermen (1/8, 1/9, and 2/11 [2]), arrested nineteen fishermen (12/3 [5], 12/21 [2], 12/28 [2], 1/8 [2], 1/9 [6], and 2/11 [2]), and confiscated three fishing boats (12/3 and 1/9 [2]).

MOVEMENT AND ACCESS

There were no major developments relating to Palestinian movement and access in Gaza this quarter. The Israeli authorities temporarily closed the Erez (12/13) and Kerem Shalom (12/13 and 1/14) border crossings in the wake of the Trump Jerusalem announcement and the consequent escalation of Palestinian protest (see Chronology). Starting on 1/29, a small number of farmers in Gaza were permitted to resume working their lands along the border, following an agreement with the Israeli authorities that was brokered by the International Committee of the Red Cross

(ICRC). Israel had blocked approximately 280 farmers from their land since its 2005 disengagement from Gaza. The ICRC reportedly hoped to mediate a broader deal that would allow all 280 to return. At least one of the farmers, Anwar Adbari, was dubious that the Israeli authorities would allow him to work his land permanently. "We are sowing [the fields] with the help of the ICRC, but [. . .] we don't know if we will be able to harvest them." Finally, the Israeli authorities launched a shuttle service on 11/29 for Palestinians in Gaza requiring transportation to the U.S. Consulate in Jerusalem. The shuttle program was designed to help the Israeli authorities keep track of all travelers.

The Israeli authorities' decision last quarter to extend the processing time for exit permit applications did not lead to any significant changes in the number of Palestinians exiting Gaza (see figure 2). Therefore, the plight of gravely ill Palestinians struggling with long, sometimes indefinite delays to their permit applications remained in the news. On 2/7, for example, the World Health Organization (WHO) reported that in 2017, 54 Palestinians in Gaza had died while waiting for permits to travel abroad for appropriate medical attention. Only 54 percent of such applications were approved in 2017, according to the WHO. "There has been a continuous decline in approval rates since 2012, when approximately 93 percent of patient applications were successful," the report stated.

Despite ongoing efforts by Hamas leaders, the Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah border crossing closed most of the quarter (see "Egypt" below), opening it for passage in both directions only ten days (11/18–20, 12/16–19, and 2/7–9), allowing 3,950 Palestinians to return to Gaza and 3,247 to exit. Last quarter,

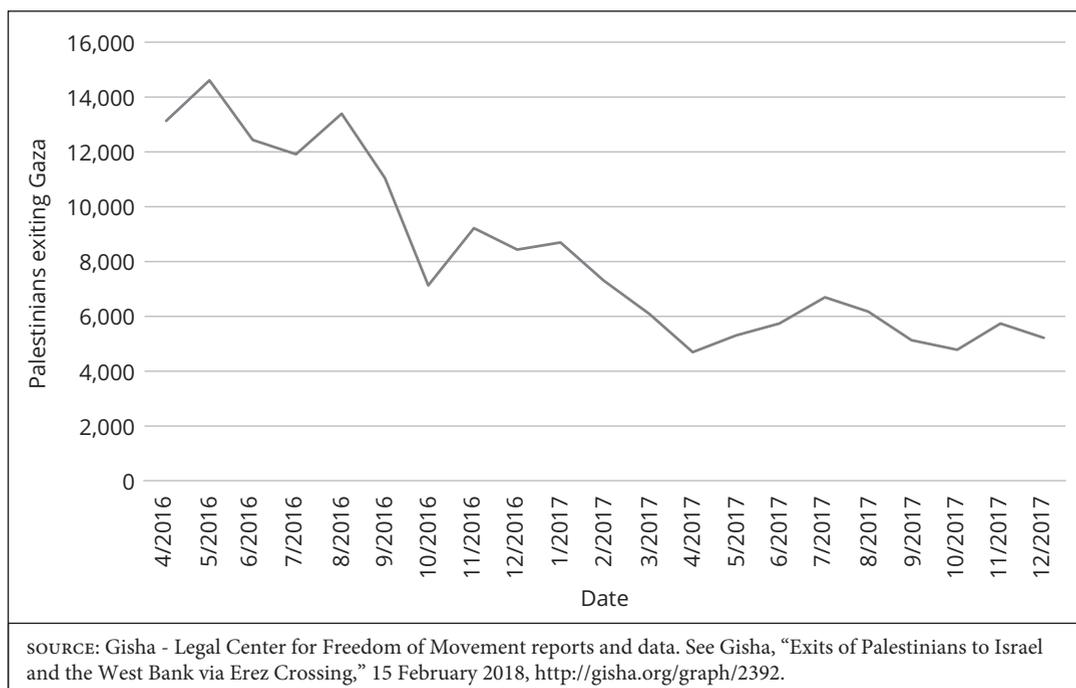


Figure 2. Palestinians exiting Gaza from 4/2016 to 12/2017. After dropping below a thousand per month during Israel's 2014 assault on Gaza and peaking in the summer of 2015, the number of Palestinians—merchants, patients and their traveling companions, and others—exiting Gaza via the Erez border crossing has been steadily declining. In addition to Israel's slow permitting process, Gaza's deteriorating economy was often cited as a reason for the decline.

the crossing was open in some capacity for nine days, allowing 6,535 Palestinians to enter Gaza and 5,203 to leave.

In an attempt to quell the widespread protests against Trump's 12/6 Jerusalem announcement, Israeli forces cracked down on Palestinian movement and access in the **West Bank** and **East Jerusalem**. In that context, there was a marked increase in the number of arrest raids, house searches, and mobile checkpoints (see Chronology). According to OCHA, the IDF conducted 1,126 search and arrest operations in the West Bank between 11/7/2017 and 2/12/2018, up from 893 last quarter; and they arrested 400 Palestinians during raids on 12/12 and 12/13 alone in a sweep dubbed Operation Green Candles (Electronic Intifada, 12/16).

GAZA ELECTRICITY CRISIS

As the Palestinian reconciliation process slowly fell apart, the best hope for a speedy resolution to Gaza's electricity crisis vanished. Although there were a number of significant efforts to alleviate the crisis throughout the quarter, including one by the PA, the humanitarian situation facing Gaza's 2 million residents remained dire.

The most significant effort came in early 1/2018 when PA president Abbas reversed his 4/27/2017 request to the Israeli authorities to decrease the amount of electricity being supplied to Gaza from 120 megawatts to 70 megawatts (see *JPS* 46 [4] and 47 [1]). Abbas made the initial request in an effort to pressure Hamas into a new round of reconciliation talks, and reversing that decision was a

stipulation of the 10/12 reconciliation deal. “Israel discussed the request and after much indecision and misgivings, it accepted the [PA’s] appeal only out of humanitarian considerations and in light of the deep suffering of the residents,” Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai wrote on Facebook on 1/7. The Israel Electric Corporation then implemented the decision on 1/8, bringing up the total power supply to 208 megawatts, still far short of 400–500 megawatts needed to fully power the region, according to the Israeli NGO Gisha. As a result, Gaza residents started receiving up to twelve hours of electricity per day.

In no sector was the power deficit felt more acutely than in the health sector. Gaza’s hospitals and medical centers struggled throughout the crisis to maintain basic services and by mid-1/2018, they were reaching a breaking point. As fuel to power the medical facilities’ emergency backup generators grew increasingly scarce, on 1/23 the PA Ministry of Health allocated almost \$300,000 to hospitals to enable them to buy more fuel—only a ten-day supply according to the Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq. By 1/31, seven of Gaza’s medical centers, and one hospital in Bayt Hanun, had been forced to shut down due to lack of power (Agence France-Presse, 1/31). At an emergency meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLC) in Brussels that same day (see “Donors” below), Israeli officials presented a new “humanitarian rehabilitation” plan and pledged to ship new power generators into Gaza. The plan, which they did not offer to fund, promised little by way of immediate relief, and on 2/6 the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza announced that generators at three of Gaza’s thirteen major hospitals, and at fourteen of the region’s fifty-four medical centers, had been shut off for lack of fuel. Staff remained on

site to provide patients with care but their efforts were stymied. “Without funding, more service providers will be forced to suspend operations over the coming weeks, and the situation will deteriorate dramatically, with potential impacts on the entire population,” said Roberto Valent (2/6), the UN’s acting humanitarian coordinator for the oPt. “We cannot allow this to happen.”

At the peak of the crisis on 2/6, Gaza had a ten-day emergency fuel supply, barring donor intervention. OCHA noted that donors would need to provide \$6.5 million to supply a “bare minimum” of 7.7 million liters of fuel for emergency generators in 2018, while functioning at full capacity, critical facilities would require \$10 million. The next day, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar answered the call. Emirati officials announced a \$2 million donation to purchase fuel, and the chair of Qatar’s National Committee for the Reconstruction of Gaza, Mohammed al-Emadi, announced a \$9 million pledge for fuel, medicine, and emergency food aid.

No sooner had one aspect of the crisis subsided than another emerged. On 2/15, Gaza’s sole power plant ceased operations due to the fuel shortage. The plant, which had shut down in similar circumstances in 4/2017, supplies up to 60 megawatts of power to the local grid. Losing that power source led to a further reduction in the amount of electricity residents received and increased pressure on Gaza’s already severely compromised water desalination and sewage treatment facilities.

JUDAIZATION OF JERUSALEM

Late at night on 1/1/2018, the Knesset passed an amendment to Israel’s Basic Laws that further tightened Israeli control of Jerusalem. Specifically, the amendment made more stringent the legislative conditions required for

the government to cede “sovereignty” over municipal areas of the city to a “foreign party,” the presumptive requirement of any final peace agreement with the Palestinians. Hitherto, a simple majority of 61 MKs had been sufficient to approve a proposed cession, but under the new legislation that number was increased to 80 MKs. Furthermore, the new measure annulled existing laws prohibiting changes to Jerusalem’s boundaries. As a result, the municipal authorities will be able to create a new administrative district in what are currently Palestinian neighborhoods, thereby displacing almost 150,000 Palestinians from residency in the city and altering its demographic make-up. Jerusalem Affairs Minister Zeev Elkin, one of the main sponsors of the measure, described (1/1) the move as protecting against the “Left, who are liable to try in future to hurt Israeli sovereignty in united Jerusalem.” A PA spokesperson responded by saying (1/2), “This vote clearly indicates that Israel has officially declared the end of the so-called political process and has already begun to impose dictating and de facto policies.”

There were two other noteworthy developments in this arena. On 12/27, the minister of transportation, Yisrael Katz, announced plans to name a new train station after the U.S. president. Later, Agence France-Presse reported (2/2) on a leaked document outlining a plan to end the tax exemptions enjoyed by church-owned properties. The document reportedly cited Jerusalem Municipality director general Amnon Merhav as arguing that ending these exemptions were justified under international law, since the properties concerned were not directly used for worship, leaving the owners of some 887 properties liable for more than NIS 657 million (approximately \$185 million) in taxes. Municipality officials started implementing the

plan on 2/4, issuing “fines” to various churches that ran into the millions of dollars (NIS 12 million [\$3.4 million] for the Roman Catholic Church and NIS 7 million [\$2 million] for the Anglican Church). A PA spokesperson condemned (2/4) the move as “designed to further strangulate our people” in anticipation of “displacing them.”

PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

While the overall number of Palestinians in Israeli prisons hovered at 6,100–6,200 throughout the quarter, the number of Palestinian children in Israeli custody rose dramatically after the Israeli crackdown on protests against Trump’s Jerusalem announcement in 12/2017. According to Addameer Prisoner Support and Human Rights Association, there were 350 Palestinian minors in Israeli prisons in 12/2017, up from around 300 for most of the rest of 2017 (see figure 3).

The plight of one Palestinian minor in particular drew international attention. Ahed Tamimi, the sixteen-year-old daughter of well-known Nabi Salih organizer and activist Bassem Tamimi, was recorded slapping and kicking two IDF soldiers during clashes in her home village on 12/15, approximately one hour after one of the soldiers had shot her cousin Mohammed in the head with a rubber-coated metal bullet. Mohammed survived the injury, but only after doctors removed a section of his skull. As the video went viral on Palestinian social media, the IDF raided (12/19) the Tamimi family home and arrested Ahed. In the weeks between her arrest and her 2/13 trial on twelve charges ranging from aggravated assault to incitement, Ahed became an international sensation. Palestinian solidarity activists around the world put her face on posters and internet memes, and used her

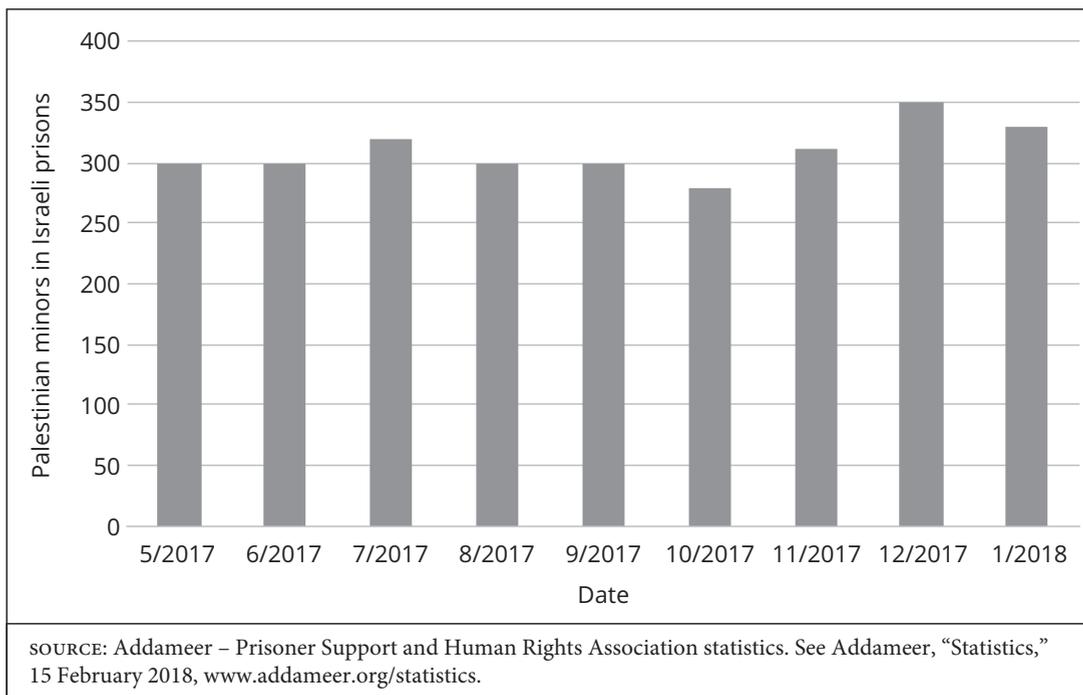


Figure 3. Palestinian minors in Israeli prisons from 5/2017 through 1/2018. Ahed Tamimi was one of at least 40 Palestinian minors imprisoned in the context of the IDF crackdown on Palestinian protests against U.S. president Trump’s 12/6/2017 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. By the end of January, 330 minors were detained in Israeli prisons.

case to highlight Israel’s carceral policies toward minors, which international human rights organizations have found to be in violation of international law. Amnesty International, UN special rapporteur Michael Lynk, and more than 1.5 million signatories to an online petition called for her release. Ahed’s case was ultimately adjourned to an unspecified date in 3/2018.

PRISONER SWAP

There were no reports of progress in back-channel talks over a possible prisoner exchange between Israel and Hamas this quarter. However, the family of Lt. Hadar Goldin—an IDF soldier whose remains were allegedly being held in Gaza—advanced its campaign to have the Israeli government keep the pressure on

Hamas. In response to a petition the family filed in 11/2017, the Israeli government informed (1/15) the High Court of Justice that members of Hamas in Gaza and their immediate relatives would no longer be permitted to visit imprisoned relatives in Israel or seek medical treatment there. The cabinet ordered the ban in the context of a broader plan to increase pressure on Hamas in 1/2017, but the plan had never been fully implemented. “This is a small step in the great task of bringing back Hadar, who was a hero of Israel and who fell during the Protective Edge campaign,” the family said in a statement (*Times of Israel*, 1/15). A lawyer for the government later informed (2/15) the High Court that the ban on visits to imprisoned relatives applied to all Hamas-affiliated persons, not just those from Gaza.

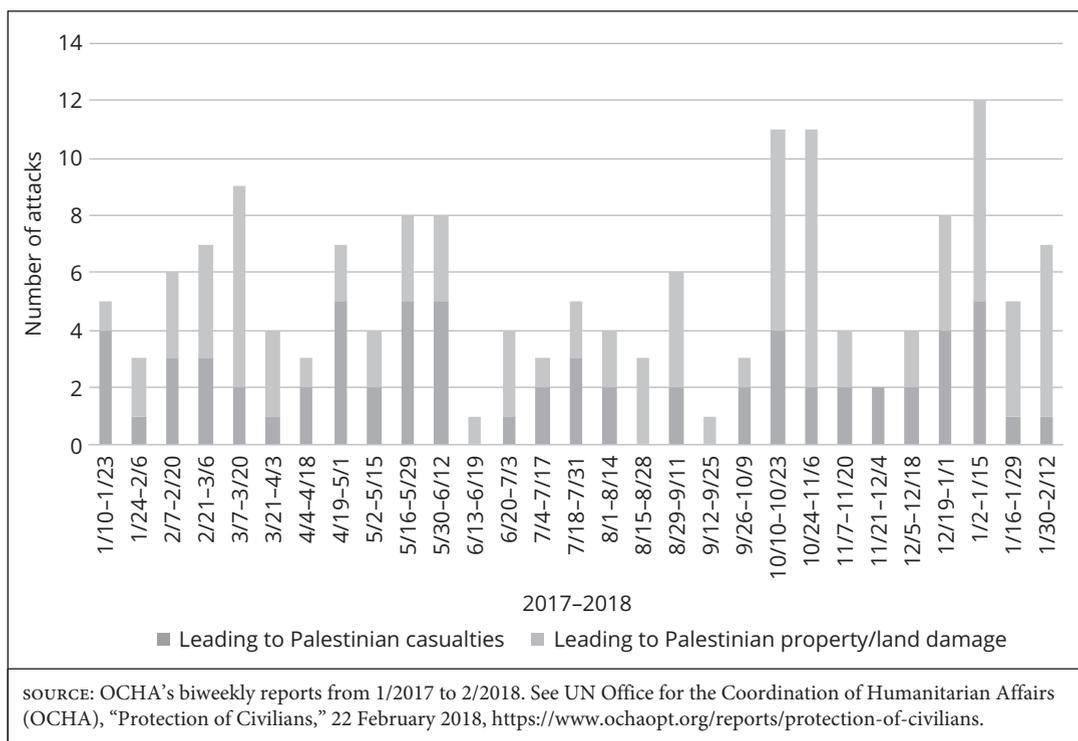


Figure 4. Israeli settler attacks from 1/10/2017 to 2/12/2018. This figure charts the results of Israeli settler attacks on Palestinian farmers, drivers, and other civilians, as well as Palestinian homes and other property, over time.

SETTLER-RELATED VIOLENCE

Settler-related violence increased slightly this quarter. There were forty-two instances of settlers attacking Palestinians or their property in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between 11/7/2017 and 2/12/2018, according to OCHA, up from thirty-five last quarter. These included seventeen attacks that led to Palestinian injuries (up from ten), and twenty-five that resulted in damage to Palestinian property (see figure 2 and Chronology).

Also of note: Palestinians killed 2 Israeli settlers this quarter, on 1/9 and 2/5. Both killings drew reprisals from other Israeli settlers and the IDF, including collective punishments and widespread search and seizure operations. These IDF operations sparked a series of deadly firefights and clashes, during which 4

Palestinians were killed and at least 13 were injured. The 1/9 killing in particular led to a wave of price-tag attacks by settlers, as illustrated in figure 2 by the spike corresponding with the period 1/2–1/15.

DEMOLITIONS AND DISPLACEMENT

Israeli forces demolished 97 Palestinian buildings in the West Bank (44) and East Jerusalem (53) between 11/7/2017 and 2/12/2018, according to OCHA. Down from 160 last quarter, these demolitions led to the displacement of 147 Palestinians: 92 in the West Bank and 55 in East Jerusalem.

Also of note: Israeli forces carried out (12/1) the punitive demolition of the Jenin-area home of a Palestinian imprisoned in connection with the killing of an Israeli

settler on 10/4/2017 (see *JPS* 47 [2]). They also sealed (11/16) the family home of a Palestinian imprisoned on charges related to the 6/8/2016 killing of 4 Israeli civilians in Tel Aviv (see *JPS* 46 [1]).

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

RECONCILIATION EFFORT FAILS ONCE MORE

Celebrated as an historic achievement when it was announced on 10/12, the latest Hamas-Fatah reconciliation agreement effectively fell apart this quarter, with each side retreating to the antagonistic postures they held through much of 2017. Lingering issues left unresolved during the talks that led to the 10/12 deal, including the future of Hamas's military wing, proved insurmountable, especially when the Egyptian mediators who facilitated the deal increasingly focused on their own domestic issues in a context of highly unstable regional politics.

As the quarter opened, there were only two weeks left to facilitate the PA's assumption of administrative control of Gaza, as mandated by the 10/12 agreement. Hamas had handed over control of Gaza's border crossings to the PA in a formal ceremony on 11/1 (see *JPS* 47 [2]), and at the time it was widely expected that the 12/1 transition would go just as smoothly.

The first complications arose during two days of talks in Cairo on 11/21–22. Mandated by the 10/12 agreement, the talks were intended as a first step toward the formation of a new unity government. In line with that goal, all the Palestinian factions concerned signed onto a statement calling on the Palestinian Central Elections Commission to prepare for elections to choose a new PA president, as well as representatives to the Palestinian Legislative

Council (the PA's legislative body representing Palestinians from the occupied territories) and the Palestinian National Council (the PLO's own parliament with representatives from both the territories and the diaspora) before the end of 2018. They also authorized President Abbas to choose an election date and reaffirmed the terms of the 10/12 deal. Fatah Central Committee member al-Ahmad indicated (11/22) that the statement also stressed the need for "the national consensus government to manage the affairs of the Gaza Strip in accordance with . . . Palestinian law" similarly to its management of the West Bank. At the same time, al-Ahmad admitted that the issue of Hamas's military wing remained unresolved—Abbas wanted it dismantled as a precondition to lifting any of the PA sanctions on Gaza, while Hamas leaders insisted it would remain in place. Senior Hamas official Salah Bardawil offered (11/22) a few more details, claiming U.S. pressure had caused the PA to "retreat from reconciliation issues," thereby arriving at a "lackluster result" in its renewed administration of the Gaza Strip.

Although a PA spokesperson denied (11/22) the allegation of U.S. pressure, two days later a State Department spokesperson announced (11/24) that the PLO office in Washington would be allowed to stay open, reversing U.S. secretary of state Tillerson's earlier threat to shutter the premise (see "The Trump Initiative" above). "[The threat] was not intended to create 'leverage' with or impose pressure on the Palestinians, with whom we have been having constructive discussions about the path to a lasting, comprehensive peace," the spokesperson said.

As the 12/1 deadline for the full implementation of the reconciliation agreement approached, additional problems arose. On 11/26, PA minister of civil affairs

Hussein al-Sheikh said that the PA had been able to take up only a small portion of its responsibilities in Gaza. “The government until this moment, financially, administratively and security-wise, has not been set up [in Gaza] more than 5 percent,” he indicated. Hamas had blocked the PA from setting up a new tax collection system, leaving government officials to collect “crumbs” at the Kerem Shalom border crossing, according to al-Sheikh. The minister also highlighted the fact that none of the approximately twenty thousand former PA civil servants who stopped working when Hamas took over Gaza in 2007 had been allowed to return to their jobs; the most recent agreement stipulated that a resolution to the issue of the former employees would be reached by 2/1/2018, with the PA set to pay the salaries of the Hamas-run government’s current employees in the interim. Additionally, Hamas’s military wing remained a sticking point. “Weapons are not a factional or an organizational issue,” al-Sheikh added. “We will not allow anything but one gun and one law [in Gaza].” A Hamas spokesperson called (11/26) the PA’s goal of dismantling Hamas’s military wing a “pipe dream” and senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya said (11/27) it was “not up for debate.”

Two days before the deadline, the PA cabinet forced the issue on the question of the former government employees, calling (11/28) on them to return to their posts. The cabinet pointed out that “ten years of division has created a complicated and intricate administrative, financial, legal, legislative, security, and political situation that cannot be untangled with one decision or one session.” Hamas, which wanted the issue to be resolved with some consideration for the rights of its own civil servants, called the move a “violation” of previous agreements.

With disagreements piling up and tension increasing, former PA employees attempted to return to work at the Hamas-run Ministry of Finance in Gaza City on 11/29. They were blocked from doing so, sparking a round of mutual recrimination by senior Hamas and Fatah officials. The incident ultimately led to the two sides agreeing to delay the handover of administrative control from 12/1 to 12/10. They made no major progress in that time, and by 12/10 both the Palestinian leadership and public were focused on U.S. president Trump’s Jerusalem announcement (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). The 12/10 deadline came and went and no new deadline was set.

Through the end of the year, both sides remained publicly committed to the process, but neither took any steps to move forward. Put more simply by Hamas’s leader in Gaza, Yahya Sinwar, on 12/21: “The reconciliation project is falling apart. Only a sightless person wouldn’t see that.”

Tensions increased in 1/2018, further reducing the prospect of reconciliation. Hamas and the PIJ rejected invitations to a 1/14 PLO Central Council meeting to coordinate a long-term strategy in response to the new U.S. policy on Jerusalem. Hamas officials said that by perpetuating the electricity crisis, the PA was guilty of indifference toward the sick in Gaza; the PA retorted, saying (1/29) that although Hamas was collecting taxes it was not supporting public welfare institutions like hospitals; the statement also pointed to a recent \$4 million shipment of medical supplies that the PA had sent to Gaza. Finally, on 1/18, Egypt’s president al-Sisi fired the official in charge of the negotiations that led to the 10/12 deal: the departure of the head of General Intelligence Directorate, Khaled Fawzy, was seen as a major setback for the reconciliation process.

With Egypt increasingly focused on its own presidential election set for 3/2018, Hamas and Fatah missed the 2/1 deadline to resolve the rival civil service employees question. Senior Hamas official Basem Naim accused the PA of walking away from the 10/12 agreement “without clear reasons,” and senior Fatah official in Gaza Fayez Abu Eita accused Hamas of disrespecting the deal (Agence France-Presse, 2/2). As the quarter came to a close, it was unclear if either side had the appetite for another push toward reconciliation or if the 10/12 agreement would be added to the list of failed attempts at reunifying the West Bank and Gaza (e.g., 5/2011 Cairo agreement [JPS 40 (4)]; 4/2014 Gaza agreement [JPS 43 (4)], etc.).

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data come from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) between 12/7–10/2017. 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 66th in a series, can be found at www.pcpsr.org.

1. Do you think that there is corruption in institutions of the PA?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Yes	76.6%	78.2%	73.8%
2) No	14.3%	9.6%	22.0%
3) Don't know/not applicable	9.1%	12.1%	4.2%

2. In your view, can people in the West Bank today criticize the [Palestinian] Authority without fear?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Yes	34.4%	35.0%	33.4%
2) No	61.2%	60.4%	62.4%
3) Don't know/not applicable	4.5%	4.6%	4.1%

3. Do you think the reconciliation government should be responsible for paying the salaries of the civil public sector that used previously to work for the Hamas government?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Certainly yes	28.3%	29.2%	26.9%
2) Yes	52.8%	52.5%	53.3%
3) No	11.9%	9.7%	15.4%
4) Certainly no	1.7%	1.7%	1.7%
5) Don't know/not applicable	5.3%	6.9%	2.7%

4. And what about the police and the security personnel that used to work previously for the Hamas government? Should the reconciliation government be responsible for paying their salary?

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Certainly yes	27.4%	29.1%	24.7%
2) Yes	53.7%	53.4%	54.2%
3) No	11.0%	8.7%	14.9%
4) Certainly no	2.5%	1.7%	3.7%
5) Don't know/not applicable	5.4%	7.2%	2.5%

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

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Certainly succeed	5.9%	2.6%	11.3%
2) Succeed	43.9%	44.1%	43.7%
3) Fail	36.7%	37.7%	35.0%
4) Certainly fail	7.8%	8.7%	6.3%
5) Don't know/not applicable	5.7%	6.9%	3.7%

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

With presidential elections approaching in 3/2018, Egypt was increasingly focused on domestic politics this quarter. Egyptian involvement in the Palestinian reconciliation process and the U.S.-led effort to restart Palestinian-Israeli peace talks consequently diminished.

Along with the rest of the Arab world, Egyptian officials publicly denounced U.S. president Trump's 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital (see "The Palestinian-Israel Conflict" above). However, a series of recordings obtained by the *New York Times* revealed (1/6) a more complicated dynamic unfolding outside the public eye in Cairo. According to the paper's report, an Egyptian intelligence officer made a series of phone calls to the hosts of influential local talk shows in the wake of Trump's announcement, in which he can be heard telling them that increased tension with Israel would not be in Egypt's interest and that instead of condemning the decision, they should encourage their audiences to accept it. "How is Jerusalem different from Ramallah, really?" he is reportedly heard asking. "We have enough on our plate as you know." Although at least one of the hosts confirmed the veracity of the tapes,

the Egyptian government issued a blanket denial, and Prosecutor General Nabil Sadek ordered (1/11) a criminal investigation into the story, saying that the U.S. newspaper's article "undermines Egypt's security and public peace, and harms the country's public interest."

Despite the protestations from Cairo, the al-Sisi government has been increasingly friendly with Israel in recent years, especially in light of the expanded military cooperation between the two countries in the struggle against armed groups in Sinai. According to a number of U.S. officials on 2/3, Israeli air support was instrumental in the Egyptian army's counterinsurgency efforts. The same sources said that Israeli drones, helicopters, and jets had stealthily conducted more than one hundred air strikes on the armed groups since the insurgency intensified in the wake of then president Mohamed Morsi's ouster on 7/3/2013 (see *JPS* 43 [1]). While intermittent rumors and unconfirmed reports of Israeli air strikes in Sinai have circulated over the years, both countries have kept the extent of their cooperation secret because of a feared backlash from the Egyptian public. In that vein, an Egyptian military spokesperson denied the *Times* report on 2/4: "Only the Egyptian army is authorized to and does conduct military operations in specific areas in northern Sinai, in cooperation with the civilian police."

As in previous quarters, the ongoing conflict in Sinai and specifically the Egyptian efforts to restrict the movement of armed groups in the region had a direct impact on the Palestinians in Gaza (see "Gaza Electricity Crisis" above). Egypt had kept the Rafah border crossing largely closed ever since a major attack on Egyptian troops in 10/2014 (see *JPS* 44 [2]), blocking or delaying tens of thousands of Palestinian patients from traveling abroad for medical services. In 6/2017, Hamas reached an

agreement with the Egyptian government, in which it pledged to crack down on Islamists in Gaza and step up border security in exchange for more frequent openings of Rafah (see *JPS* 47 [1]). Hamas appeared to be holding up its side of the deal (see “*Hamas Cracks Down on Islamists in Gaza*” above), but the Egyptian authorities did not keep the border open consistently (see “*Movement and Access*” above).

After SPIS fighters armed with guns and bombs killed (11/24) at least 235 people (the figure rose to 305 within the next twenty-four hours) at a crowded mosque near al-Arish, Egypt stepped up its counterinsurgency. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the Egyptian army killed approximately 30 SPIS fighters in a series of strikes on known hideouts around al-Arish. The Egyptian authorities also canceled what had been a planned reopening of the Rafah border crossing on 11/25–27. Amid heightened tensions, al-Sisi gave the Egyptian army three months to restore “security and stability,” authorizing them to use “brute force.” It was unclear exactly what tactics al-Sisi was referring to, but the Rafah crossing remained closed for all but seven days from that incident through the end of the quarter.

Also of note: Egyptian naval forces shot and killed a Palestinian fisherman working off Gaza’s coast on 1/13. The Egyptian navy later claimed that the man was fishing in Egyptian territorial waters; Palestinian fishermen frequently fish these waters to circumvent the navigational restrictions put in place by Israel’s blockade.

JORDAN

After months of tension and uncertainty following the 7/23 killing of two Jordanians at the hands of an Israeli Embassy security guard and the subsequent recall of the Israeli Embassy

staff from Amman (see *JPS* 47 [1] and [2]), the Israeli government took steps this quarter to repair some of the damage in its relationship with Jordan.

Last quarter, the Israeli government had threatened to suspend its 12/9/2013 water-sharing agreement with Jordan, providing 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]), if the Jordanian government did not allow the embassy staff to return. The Jordanian government, which insisted from the beginning that the embassy staff would not be allowed to return until Israel carried out a full investigation into the 7/23 incident, reportedly held to its position, expressing a willingness to proceed on the project alone or to bring on Saudi Arabia as a replacement partner (see *JPS* 47 [2]). In mid-11/2017, Water and Irrigation Minister Hazem al-Naser sent a letter to the Israeli authorities requesting an official answer regarding Israel’s commitment to the project (*AlGhad*, 11/27). There were no reports of an official Israeli response, and tensions persisted until mid-1/2018 when a Jordanian spokesperson announced (1/18) that Israel had formally apologized for both the killing of the two Jordanian citizens and that of a Jordanian judge on 3/10/2014 (see *JPS* 43 [4]). He added that Israel had pledged to take legal measures with respect to the 7/23 incident, and to provide compensation for the families of the victims. Hours after the Jordanian statement, Israeli prime minister Netanyahu’s office announced (1/18) that the Israeli Embassy in Amman would reopen.

By the end of the quarter, some Israeli diplomats had returned to the embassy in Amman, and Israel’s Foreign Ministry appointed a senior ministry official, Amir Weisbrod, as the new ambassador to Jordan

(*Times of Israel*, 1/30; *Haaretz*, 2/8). However, Israeli sources said (1/21) that the Israeli government had no plans to actually prosecute the security guard responsible for the 7/23 killings. They indicated that the Foreign Ministry and Shin Bet intended to merely review protocols surrounding the guard's behavior and share the results with their Jordanian counterparts. It was therefore unclear whether the Red Sea–Dead Sea partnership or the broader Israeli-Jordanian relationship was fully back on track.

SYRIA

Ongoing Iranian involvement in the Syrian civil war stoked tensions with Israel, testing the uneasy cease-fire in southern Syria that the United States and Russia brokered in the summer of 2017 (see *JPS* 47 [1] and [2]). Israeli jets flew into Syrian air space to conduct air strikes on Syrian government, Hezbollah, or Iranian military sites at a rate of approximately one per week (see Chronology). Occasionally these sorties were regarded as retaliation for rocket fire into northern Israel (e.g., 12/3–4), but more frequently they were unprovoked attacks. After one such strike on 1/9, Netanyahu explained, “We have a longstanding policy to prevent the transfer of game-changing weapons to Hezbollah in Syrian territory. This policy has not changed. We back it up, if necessary, with action.”

The Israeli destabilization campaign climaxed this quarter in a dramatic exchange of violence on 2/10. In the morning, an IDF helicopter destroyed a drone that had allegedly flown into the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights (Iranian officials denied any connection to the drone, and the Syrian government said the drone never crossed the border). The Israeli Air Force (IAF) carried out a number of air strikes on a Syrian air base near Palmyra, where the drone allegedly

originated, causing unspecified damage and injuries. During the attack, Syrian air defense systems shot down an Israeli F-16, seriously injuring the pilot. The IAF then carried out the “biggest and most significant attack . . . against Syrian air defenses” since 1982, according to a senior IAF official. Israeli jets struck twelve Syrian and Iranian targets in southern Syria, killing at least 6 people and causing extensive damage. “We are willing, prepared and capable to exact a heavy price from anyone that attacks us,” said an IDF spokesperson later in the day. “However we are not looking to escalate the situation.”

Following the exchange, Israel's UN ambassador Danny Danon called for the UNSC to “put an end to Iranian provocations,” and UN secretary-general António Guterres called for an immediate de-escalation. There was no further escalation of violence through the end of the quarter, and Israeli concerns shifted west to southern Lebanon (see “Lebanon” below).

LEBANON

Tensions were on the rise along the Israeli-Lebanese border this quarter, with the Israeli government increasingly concerned about alleged Iranian influence in Lebanon and the Lebanese government highlighting Israel's encroachment on its territory.

The first major incident came on 1/14 when Hamas official Mohammed Hamdan was seriously injured in a car bombing in the southern Lebanese city of Sidon. In the immediate aftermath, Hamas both denied Hamdan's affiliation with the organization and accused Israel of perpetrating the assassination attempt. “Israel is the only one that could benefit from harming Lebanon's security,” the organization said in a statement on the same day. While Israel did not take responsibility for the attack, Defense Minister Lieberman

argued a few days later (1/19) that Hamas was “finding it difficult to launch operations from the Gaza Strip” and was therefore “trying to open new fronts [. . .] first and foremost in southern Lebanon.” Lebanese intelligence services later identified four people allegedly responsible for the 1/14 assassination attempt, according to news reports from Beirut on 1/29. Two were Lebanese nationals and two were Israeli “agents.”

As the investigation proceeded, an IDF spokesperson confirmed (1/27) that Israeli forces were actively conducting psychological warfare against Hezbollah via social media. The contentious climate cast a pall over a 2/5 meeting between Maj. Gen. Michael Beary, head of mission and force commander of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), and senior IDF and Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) officials. “Discussions centered on the liaison and coordination arrangements provided by UNIFIL to ensure that there is no misunderstanding or miscalculation along the Blue Line in order to ensure a continued climate of calm and stability,” a UNIFIL statement read, referring to the UN-designated border between Israel and Lebanon. “There has been a great deal of activity along the Blue Line,” Beary said (2/5), praising “both parties” for their restraint.

Despite Beary’s assurances, two key issues proved particularly thorny in the ensuing weeks: the proposed route of a new Israeli border fence and Lebanon’s planned exploration of offshore oil and gas reserves. In 12/2017, the Lebanese government approved a bid from a French, Italian, and Russian consortium to explore a disputed area off the coast for energy resources. In a statement released after the meeting, the LAF reasserted Lebanese sovereignty over the disputed area and rejected the proposed route of an Israeli border wall, arguing that it violated Lebanese

sovereignty. Lebanon’s President Michel Aoun, Prime Minister Saad Hariri and Speaker Nabih Berri then agreed (2/6) to take steps at “various regional and international levels to prevent Israel from building the cement wall [. . .] and from the possibility of infringing on Lebanon’s oil and gas wealth and its waters.” Israel’s energy minister, Yuval Steinitz, said (2/7) that Israel hoped for a diplomatic solution, but insisted that it would have to be on Israeli terms. “They should not make any threats, though, and definitely not infiltrate our economic waters,” he added. “If, heaven forbid, we are attacked, the response would be a lot more severe, quick and unequivocal than in the past.” Hours after Steinitz’s comments appeared, Lebanon’s Supreme Defense Council ordered the LAF to prevent Israel from erecting a wall on Lebanese territory. In a statement, the council said that the Lebanese army had been granted the necessary “political backing to deter any Israeli aggression on the border,” both on land and at sea. There were reports (2/8) of the United States and other international parties intervening to mediate but it remained unclear what the terms of a compromise on either issue might look like by the end of the quarter.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

The controversy over Lebanese prime minister Hariri’s mysterious resignation on 11/4, and its subsequent withdrawal, came to an uneventful conclusion this quarter. Although it had been linked to emergent regional dynamics, specifically efforts by Gulf Arab states, led by Saudi Arabia, on the one hand, and Israel, on the other, to contain Iran’s growing sphere of influence across the region, there were few notable developments in Lebanon or any other contested arena.

Two weeks after announcing his resignation in a televised statement from Saudi Arabia, Hariri ended the speculation about being held in Riyadh against his will by flying to Paris for talks with French president Emmanuel Macron. Following his meeting with Macron, Hariri said (11/18) he would be returning to Beirut in “the coming days” and make his “position” known after meeting with Lebanese president Aoun, who had refused to accept Hariri’s resignation until it could be delivered in person. (Like many others in the Middle East and elsewhere, Aoun feared undue Saudi pressure on Hariri and the possibility that his resignation was not voluntary.) On his trip home to Beirut on 11/21, Hariri stopped off for talks with Cypriot president Nicos Anastasiades in Nicosia and with Egyptian president al-Sisi in Cairo.

On his first full day in Lebanon, Hariri postponed (11/22) his resignation indefinitely. He told hundreds of supporters gathered outside his central Beirut home that he had tendered his resignation but had been asked by Aoun to hold off until the two had a chance to discuss the reasons and the “political background” to the decision. Less than two weeks later, Hariri formally rescinded (12/5) his resignation in a meeting of the Lebanese cabinet, during which the assembled officials signed on to a statement reaffirming Lebanon’s policy of “dissociation” from regional conflicts. First articulated in 2012, in relation to the war raging in neighboring Syria, the policy to distance Lebanon from several regional conflicts, including that in Yemen, was an attempt to defuse tensions inside the country between rival political factions favoring different sides in regional conflicts. “Developments in the region suggest a new wave of conflict. [. . .] We have to address this issue, and take a decision announcing our disassociation, in words and deeds,” Hariri

said (12/5). He also warned against outside interference in Lebanese affairs and reaffirmed his determination not to allow any interference in other states’ affairs by “any Lebanese party”—a phrase widely viewed as a veiled reference to Hezbollah, an important member of Lebanon’s governing coalition whose military wing is active in Syria and is known to receive backing from Iran (Reuters, 12/5).

IRAN

Fueled by pent-up economic and political dissatisfaction, a wave of popular protests swept Iran at the end of 2017. After a few days of peaceful demonstrations, Iranian forces cracked down, leading to deadly clashes in several cities and providing a new source of tension between the Iranian government and the United States.

The first mass protests began on 12/28 in Mashhad, a city of 2 million and a strong base of support for presidential candidate Ebrahim Raisi in the 5/2017 election won by current incumbent Hassan Rouhani. While defending the predominantly young protesters’ rights to demonstrate peacefully, Rouhani called on them to avoid violence, and argued that the unrest was about aging elites and their hold on power as much as it was about the sluggish economy. “It would be a misrepresentation and also an insult to the Iranian people to say they only had economic demands,” Rouhani was reported as saying (Reuters, 1/8), adding that people also had “political and social demands.” At the same time, he oversaw an expansive crackdown. By 1/1, some 450 protesters had been arrested in Tehran alone. Within a week, Iranian forces had violently dispersed demonstrations in more than eighty cities, leading to the deaths of at least 22 people.

The protests were immediately used by both U.S. president Trump and Israeli prime minister Netanyahu to skewer Iran. In a tweet

on 12/31, Trump thundered, “Iran, the Number One State of Sponsored Terror with numerous violations of Human Rights occurring on an hourly basis, has now closed down the Internet so that peaceful demonstrators cannot communicate. Not good!” Netanyahu, for his part, praised the “heroic” protesters. “Iran’s cruel regime wastes tens of billions of dollars spreading hate,” he said in a YouTube video uploaded on 1/1. “This money could have built schools and hospitals. No wonder mothers and fathers are marching in the streets.”

Days later, as the protests were winding down, U.S. ambassador to the UN Haley called a meeting of the UNSC to discuss the protests. Russian diplomats opposed the effort, but allowed the meeting to proceed. The Chinese and several nonpermanent members of the UNSC expressed similar anti-interventionist reservations, and the UNSC ultimately took no action. “Majority [of the UNSC] emphasized the need to fully implement the JCPOA [Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action of 7/14/2015 known as the Iran nuclear deal] and to refrain from interfering in internal affairs of others. Another F[oreign] P[olicy] blunder for the Trump administration,” tweeted Iran’s Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif (1/6).

JCPOA under Threat

After announcing (10/13) that he would no longer certify that Iran was upholding its commitments under the JCPOA (see *JPS* 47 [2]), Trump took another step to undermine the agreement this quarter. His efforts exacerbated tensions between the United States and Iran and drove a wedge between the United States and its allies, except for Israel.

On 1/4, the U.S. Department of the Treasury imposed sanctions on five entities allegedly involved in Iran’s ballistic missile program, and eight days later Trump announced (1/12) that

he was extending the JCPOA-mandated waivers on nuclear-related sanctions against Iran one last time. This final waiver, he said, would give the United States time to negotiate with its European allies a “follow-on” agreement before the next deadline for extending sanctions relief, in 120 days. “In the absence of such an agreement, the U.S. will not again waive sanctions in order to stay in the Iran nuclear deal,” he said. “And if at any time I judge that such an agreement is not within reach, I will withdraw from the deal immediately.” Trump reportedly wanted the new agreement to address his long-standing complaints about Iran’s ballistic missile program and human rights record, and make permanent the deal’s limitations on Iranian uranium enrichment. At the same time, the Treasury announced (1/12) more new sanctions, targeting fourteen Iranian individuals, including Iran’s chief justice, Sadeq Larijani.

The Iranian government, which international regulators have consistently found to be in compliance with the JCPOA, was predictably upset. Zarif accused (1/12) the U.S. president of making a “desperate attempt” to undermine a “solid” deal, and the Foreign Ministry stated (1/13) that Tehran would not accept any amendments to the JCPOA “now or in the future” or allow any other issues, such as the ballistic missile program, to be built into the deal. A senior Iranian official confirmed (1/13) that Tehran intended to continue work on its ballistic missile program, despite Trump’s threats and sanctions.

The reaction from the three European states needed for Trump’s “follow-on” strategy to work—Germany, France, and the United Kingdom—was mixed. The three, along with Russia, China, and the United States, comprise the so-called P5+1, the international group that negotiated the JCPOA with Iran in the first

place. Their consent to a follow-on deal and their willingness to reimpose sanctions were deemed necessary leverage for Trump to get Iran back to the negotiating table. Prior to Trump's 1/12 announcement, UK prime minister Theresa May had urged the U.S. president to stick to the deal. A German spokesperson said (1/12) that Berlin would "continue to campaign for the full implementation of the nuclear agreement" and consult with Paris and London on a "common way forward." Macron called Trump reportedly hours after the U.S. president's announcement, and urged "the strict application of the deal and the importance of all the signatories to respect it" (BBC, 1/13).

By the end of the quarter, however, it appeared that the three European allies were at least engaging on the issue. Following a week-long stay in Warsaw, U.S. secretary of state Tillerson stated (1/27) that working groups comprising diplomats from all four countries had begun to meet to discuss "the scope of what we attempt to address and also how much we engage Iran on discussions to address these issues." He also said that the working groups would identify "areas of greater cooperation [with] Europe to push back on Iran's malign behavior" (Reuters, 1/27).

SAUDI ARABIA

There was one notable development in the Israeli-Saudi relationship this quarter. Sources in Israel's aviation industry told *Haaretz* on 2/7 that the Saudi government had granted an Air India request to operate direct flights from New Delhi to Tel Aviv on a new route through Saudi airspace. Such a move would cut more than two hours from the previous route's travel time and, more importantly, end the Saudi government's

seventy-year ban on any aircraft flying to or from Israel in its airspace. It also would offer a further tangible demonstration of a warming of ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia, something Israel has pursued for years. However, a spokesperson for Saudi Arabia's Civil Aviation General Authority denied the report (Reuters, 2/7).

QATAR

Qatar, still subject to a Saudi-United Arab Emirates boycott (see *JPS* 47 [1] and [2]), made inroads with the U.S. pro-Israel community this quarter. Following visits from prominent U.S. commentators Alan Dershowitz and Mike Huckabee, Zionist Organization of America president Morton Klein visited Doha in 1/2018. "At first I refused, because of their support for Hamas and the anti-Semitism being broadcast on Al Jazeera," Klein said. "But over time, I saw that more and more Jewish leaders were going there, and I realized that at this point, they won't be able to use me for propaganda, because everyone is already going, but I might use the visit to push them on these issues" (*Haaretz*, 1/30).

On 2/7, *Haaretz* reported the leaders of several prominent U.S. Zionist organizations as saying that Qatari officials had promised them to block an Al Jazeera documentary titled *The Israel Lobby*. A day later, Qatar's Foreign Ministry denied the report, with a spokesman calling it "false news." Nonetheless, a number of pro-Israel groups in Washington received letters from Al Jazeera in early 2/2018 informing them that their employees would appear in an upcoming documentary and requesting comment. It was unclear at the end of the quarter whether or not the documentary would be broadcast.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

David Friedman, Ambassador to Israel

In addition to reportedly being a driving force behind Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, Friedman further exacerbated the strained U.S.-Palestinian relationship by airing his explicitly prosettlement views this quarter and denying that there was any such thing as an occupation of Palestinian territory. On 12/26, almost three weeks since Trump's Jerusalem announcement, the Israeli press reported that Friedman had requested that the State Department stop using the term "occupied" in reference to the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem. The State Department reportedly refused, but pressure "from above" delayed a clear resolution of the issue. Two days later, a State Department official called the news reports "misleading" and "twisted," and said that Trump was focused on "facilitating a comprehensive peace agreement that will benefit both the Israelis and Palestinians." A State Department spokesperson then reiterated (1/2) that the department had "not changed" its policy regarding the term "occupied territory."

Friedman and the State Department had clashed before over the issue, with the former bankruptcy lawyer arguing in an interview published in late 9/2017 that Israel was "only occupying 2 percent of the West Bank" and that it was "always the expectation" that Israel would expand further (see *JPS* 47 [2]). Partly as a result of these public spats, Friedman drew fire from the Palestinian leadership. "The ambassador's recommendations and advice, which do not aim to achieve a just peace on the basis of international legitimacy, is what led to this crisis in American-Palestinian relations,"

a PA spokesperson said (2/7). "Is he representing America or Israel?" he added.

The Palestinian Issue in Congress

While the steady stream of pro-Israel legislation in Congress continued throughout the quarter, there were signs that some lawmakers in the Democratic caucus were interested in breaking with bipartisan consensus. On 11/14, amid a lobbying push on Capitol Hill by Palestinian solidarity activists, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) introduced a bill titled Promoting Human Rights by Ending Israeli Military Detention of Palestinian Children Act. Reportedly the first bill in congressional history designed to require accountability for and transparency about U.S. aid to Israel, the measure would require the State Department to certify to Congress annually that none of the money transferred to Israel in the previous year had gone to support the military detention, interrogation, or ill-treatment of Palestinian children in violation of international humanitarian law. If the State Department could not produce such certification, it would be required to report in detail the specific activities and amounts of U.S. aid involved. Although the bill was seen as having very little chance of passing into law, twenty-one lawmakers signed on as cosponsors by the end of the quarter, prompting one Palestinian solidarity activist to pose the question, "Is an intifada starting in the U.S. Congress?" (*Electronic Intifada*, 12/21).

Many of these same lawmakers also pushed back against the Trump administration's policy on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Led by Reps. Peter Welch (D-VT) and David Price (D-NC), 102 Democrats in the House of Representatives signed (2/8) onto a letter calling on Trump to release the \$65 million in aid to UNRWA that he froze on 1/16 (see "The Trump Initiative"

above). Unlike the signatories of the McCollum bill, these legislators were motivated less by Palestinian human rights concerns and more by their dedication to a two-state solution.

“Deliberately exacerbating the hardship of the Palestinian people and reducing the ability of their government to function would only contribute to the benefit of those who reject engagement,” the letter read. “Accordingly, we urge you to continue providing aid to UNRWA and bilateral assistance to the Palestinians to promote U.S. interests, Israeli and Palestinian security, and the stability of regional U.S. allies.”

Targeting Hamas

On 1/31, the State Department announced that Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was being classified as a specially designated global terrorist, freezing his U.S.-based assets and barring any U.S. entity from doing business with him. “Haniyeh has close links with Hamas’s military wing and has been a proponent of armed struggle, including against civilians,” the department said in a statement. A State Department spokesperson placed the move in the context of Hamas’s new charter: “The U.S. is not fooled by any attempt by Hamas to re-brand itself. We know it for what it is, a terror organization committed to the destruction of the State of Israel” (see “A Newer Hamas? The Revised Charter” by Khaled Hroub in *JPS* 46 [4] for details). “This decision will not deter us from continuing [with] the resistance option to oust the occupation,” Hamas responded in a 1/31 statement.

Legislative Backlash on BDS

After a couple of high-profile controversies stemming from new state-level anti-BDS laws last quarter, no new anti-BDS measures were put on the books either in state legislatures or the federal government. The legislative backlash

instead faced mounting challenges from civil rights defenders as well as Palestinian solidarity activists.

On 12/7, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) filed a lawsuit challenging Arizona’s 3/17/2016 law requiring contractors to certify that they do not boycott Israeli firms, products, or services. “The Supreme Court ruled decades ago that political boycotts are protected by the First Amendment, and other decisions have established that the government may not require individuals to sign a certification regarding their political expression in order to obtain employment, contracts, or other benefits,” the ACLU argued in a statement announcing the suit. Later in the quarter, a federal judge in Kansas was swayed by similar arguments, blocking (1/30) enforcement of Kansas’s anti-BDS law passed on 6/17/2017 and mandating the creation of a “blacklist” of entities that boycott Israel. District Judge Daniel Crabtree’s decision came in response to an ACLU lawsuit filed in 10/2017. Finally, following pressure from the ACLU and more than one hundred grassroots organizations, a key committee in Massachusetts’s state legislature opted not to advance a new anti-BDS bill on 2/8.

UNITED NATIONS

After more than a year of lobbying by U.S. and Israeli diplomats, the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) delayed publication of its blacklist of companies operating in Israel’s settlements in the oPt this quarter. The UNHRC had approved a resolution calling for the creation of such a database on 3/24/2016 (see *JPS* 45 [4]), and the head of UNHRC, Zeid Ra’ad Al Hussein, repeatedly vowed to publish the list by the end of 2017. But pressure from the United States and Israel was apparently too great and the Office of the High Commissioner

for Human Rights refrained from disclosing the names, merely saying that the list included 206 companies domiciled in twenty-one countries. On 1/26, Al Hussein's office explained to the UNHRC that the committee compiling the database had not yet contacted everyone on the list and for that reason they were withholding company identification, but they would release the information once all 206 companies were notified of their inclusion.

Also of note: the UNGA approved six resolutions condemning various aspects of the Israeli occupation on 11/29, the International Day of Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The UNGA has passed similar resolutions in previous years. New this year, the United Kingdom broke with its earlier practice and voted against a resolution calling on Israel to return control of the Golan Heights to Syria. "It is unnecessary and disproportionate," a UK representative said, arguing that the measure did "little to advance peace or mutual understanding."

EUROPE

Days after Trump's 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, Netanyahu left Israel for Europe where he was scheduled to meet with Macron and EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini. "I will not accept a double standard from them," he told reporters. "I hear voices condemning Trump [over Jerusalem] but not for rocket fire [from Gaza into Israel]. I will not accept this hypocrisy." Netanyahu met with the French president (12/10) and the high representative of the EU for foreign affairs and security policy (12/11) before returning home. Later in December, the Knesset voted to join the EU's Cross-Border Cooperation in the Mediterranean (ENI CBC MED), which provides tens of millions of euros to public-private economic development projects in

Mediterranean Basin countries not in the EU (Turkey, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, and Palestine, as well as certain Syrian "nonstate" actors). However, as the multilateral agreement contains a provision that excludes Israeli settlements in the West Bank, in effect Israel had agreed to a boycott of settlements, *Haaretz* reported on 12/31/2017. Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev (Likud) later claimed that she was misled and that she would have blocked the measure had she known.

In a related development, the Danish parliament voted (1/26) in favor of a resolution strengthening government guidelines for public-private investment in projects in the oPt and excluding Israel's settlements from any future bilateral agreements. The thirteen extant Danish-Israeli agreements were also subject to renegotiation to bring them in line with this new policy. The vote, which overwhelmingly passed with the support of all parties except the far-right Danish People's Party, came a month after Foreign Minister Anders Samuelsen announced new, tougher restrictions on Danish support for Palestinian NGOs, following a months-long Israeli diplomatic campaign against Danish funding for Palestinian NGOs.

AFRICA

Although it suffered a setback last quarter with the indefinite postponement of the Africa-Israel Summit (see *JPS* 47 [2]), Netanyahu's diplomatic outreach campaign on the continent proceeded apace. The Israeli prime minister flew (11/28) to Nairobi for the inauguration of Uhuru Kenyatta as Kenya's president, and he met with the leaders of ten other African countries on the sidelines of the ceremony. After meeting with Rwandan president Paul Kagame, Netanyahu announced the opening of a new Israeli embassy in Kigali, Rwanda's capital. "[This is] part of the expanding Israeli

presence in Africa and the deepening of cooperation between Israel and African countries,” he said. A week earlier, the first reports had emerged in Israel of an agreement by Tel Aviv to pay the Rwandan government \$5,000 for each asylum seeker of African origin that was expelled from Israel and accepted by Rwanda. On 1/22, a Rwandan minister of state at the Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Olivier Nduhungirehe, issued a sharply worded denial on Twitter, saying, “In reference to the rumors that have been recently spread in the media, the Government of Rwanda wishes to inform that it has never signed any secret deal with Israel regarding the relocation of African migrants.” (*Jerusalem Post*, 2/4)

Also of note: South Africa’s ruling party, the African National Congress, voted (12/20) to downgrade the South African embassy in Israel to a “liaison office” in response to Trump’s 12/6 recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

DONORS

The AHLC, the main policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinians, convened in Brussels on 1/31 for an emergency session to discuss “measures to speed up efforts that can underpin a negotiated two-state solution” and the need to “enable the PA to execute full control over Gaza,” according to an EU press release announcing the meeting on 1/10. EU foreign policy chief Mogherini and Norwegian foreign minister Ine Eriksen Søreide reportedly called the meeting specifically in response to U.S. president Trump’s decision to slash aid to the Palestinians (see “The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” above). At the meeting, Mogherini called for a multilateral approach to the peace process. “Nothing without the U.S., nothing

with the U.S. alone,” she said. The Israeli representatives at the meeting presented a plan worth \$1 billion, including the construction of a desalination plant, a natural gas pipeline, and a variety of other infrastructure projects, purportedly to help ease the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. They offered to provide technology and expertise for these projects, but not funding. The Israelis also offered to be more flexible about permitting the import of so-called dual-use construction materials into Gaza (they typically bar the entrance of such materials, claiming that Hamas diverts them for military purposes). Also at the meeting, Mogherini announced a new €42.5 million (approximately \$52.2 million) aid package, including money for projects that “preserve the Palestinian character of [Jerusalem].”

Both before and after the AHLC meeting, there was a steady trickle of new aid announcements. Turkey was particularly active this quarter, donating \$10 million (12/14) to Palestinian social and economic development projects and another \$10 million (1/31) directly to the PA. The EU pledged (1/24) €11.28 million (approximately \$13.8 million) to help with the PA’s quarterly payments to impoverished families in the West Bank and Gaza; and announced (2/2) another €317,000 (approximately \$389,500) in PA agricultural aid to farmers and farming businesses. The Irish government pledged (11/28) €15 million (approximately \$18.4 million) to support education in the oPt, and Denmark provided €2 million (approximately \$2.45 million) to fund nine social infrastructure projects in Area C of the West Bank. In partnership with the EU, the Japanese government earmarked (12/18) more than €154,000 (approximately \$189,000) to support the Palestinian House of Soap Company, operating in Jericho’s agro-industrial park. According to a UN press release,

Robert Piper, the UN coordinator for humanitarian aid and development activities, released (12/9) \$2.2 million to cover “urgent needs” in Gaza.

There were also a number of new pledges of support for Palestinian refugees via UNRWA. Kuwait contributed \$5.9 million (11/27 and 2/5) to support the agency’s programs in Syria. South Korea transferred (11/27) \$500,000 for programs helping Palestinian refugees from Syria that had recently fled to Jordan. Austria contributed (12/15) €1 million (approximately \$1.2 million) to help UNRWA cover emergency needs in Gaza. Spain disbursed (12/18) €2 million (approximately \$2.4 million) to support the agency’s human development programs across the Middle East. Germany signed two new agreements (12/8 and 12/13) pledging €23.15 million (approximately \$28.4 million) to support reconstruction efforts and the construction of two new schools in Gaza. The EU announced two new contributions: €10.5 million (12/22; approximately \$12.9 million) to support general agency programs and €3 million (2/8; approximately \$3.7 million) in response to the agency’s 2017 Syria emergency appeal. Finally, Iceland made a new multiyear commitment to support UNRWA through 2021. Under the deal, announced 2/7, Iceland’s annual contribution was set to increase to approximately \$250,000, up from approximately \$200,000.

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

Following in the footsteps of Roger Waters, Elvis Costello, Thurston Moore, Lauryn Hill, and others, New Zealand pop star Lorde joined the cultural boycott of Israel this quarter. An open letter published at *The Spinoff* initially called (12/20) on the Grammy-nominated singer-songwriter to consider canceling the Tel Aviv stop on her 2018 world tour. Boycott activists all over the world echoed the letter’s sentiments, and a few days later, Lorde made her announcement. “I’ve received an overwhelming number of messages and letters and have had a lot of discussions with people holding many views, and I think the right decision at this time is to cancel the show,” she wrote, without specifically mentioning the BDS movement. “I pride myself on being an informed young citizen, and I had done a lot of reading and sought a lot of opinions before deciding to book a show in Tel Aviv, but I’m not too proud to admit I didn’t make the right call on this one.”

Apart from high-profile moves like Lorde’s, there was evidence that the cultural boycott was growing in quiet ways. On 1/21, *Haaretz* reported that Israeli theaters had been struggling in recent years to secure rights to perform plays by international playwrights. “Only in a few cases are hints offered as to the reason for the refusal,” the report stated. “But the Israeli recipients have no doubts: It’s not only touring musicians who decide to skip Israel after receiving a polite request from Roger Waters, or academics who choose to avoid mingling with Israeli colleagues at professional conferences.”

This quarter also saw the BDS debate resume within the ranks of the UK Labour Party.

Following comments opposing BDS by shadow foreign secretary Emily Thornberry in 11/2017, shadow international development secretary Kate Osamor quote-tweeted (12/9) an explanation of the BDS movement from the Institute for Middle East Understanding using the hashtags “#freedom,” “#justice,” and “#equality.” Boycott activists in the United Kingdom lauded her comments, prompting the press to ask Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn to reconcile the divide within his shadow cabinet. “Jeremy is not in favor of a comprehensive or blanket boycott. He doesn’t support BDS,” a spokesperson told *The Guardian* on 12/13. “He does support targeted action aimed at illegal settlements and occupied territories.”

Also of note: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven (KU Leuven), a research university in Flanders, Belgium, announced (12/6) that it would not be renewing its participation in a project, dubbed LAW-TRAIN, which involved researchers from Bar-Ilan University and Israel’s Public Security Ministry. According to a report in the *Electronic Intifada*, LAW-TRAIN began in 5/2015 with the goal of “harmonizing and sharing interrogation techniques between the countries involved, in order to face the new challenges in transnational criminality.” Explaining the decision not to renew KU Leuven’s participation, university rector Luc Sels wrote, “The participation of the Israeli

Public Security Ministry indeed poses an ethical problem taking into account the role which the strong arm of the Israeli government plays in enforcing an unlawful occupation of the Palestinian territories and the associated repression of the Palestinian population.” In a similar move, the Tshwane University of Technology’s governing council decided (11/24) that the South African university would not be entering into any scientific partnerships with any Israeli organization until Israel ends its occupation of Palestinian territory (*Electronic Intifada*, 12/13).

DIVEST

In an unusual development, the New Orleans City Council unanimously approved (1/11) a nonbinding resolution “encouraging the creation of a process” to help the city divest from contractors that profit from human rights abuses. Palestinian solidarity activists, some of whom helped draft the resolution, celebrated the vote as a victory for the BDS movement. Following pressure from pro-Israel groups, however, City Council president Jason Williams said (1/17) he was not aware of the resolution’s connection to the BDS movement and that the council would be reconsidering the measure. “Let me be very clear to citizens of New Orleans and citizens of the world—this City Council is not anti-Israel,” he said. On 1/25, the council unanimously voted to rescind the measure.



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