Update on Conflict and Diplomacy

16 MAY–15 AUGUST 2017

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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 the* JPS *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: U.S. pres. Donald Trump continues working on a largely undefined peace initiative with little success. Violence in the Old City of Jerusalem interrupts U.S. diplomatic efforts and the Israeli govt. imposes new security measures at Haram al-Sharif. These restrictions spark a wave of unrest across the occupied Palestinian territories and a Muslim boycott of the sanctuary, testing the nascent U.S. initiative. Palestinian Authority pres. Mahmoud Abbas increases pressure on Hamas to relinquish control of Gaza to the PA. The 1,500-plus Palestinian prisoners who declared a mass hunger strike last quarter (the "Dignity Strike") secure key concessions from the Israeli authorities and bring their strike to a close. Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the United Arab Emirates enact a diplomatic and economic boycott of Qatar.

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

U.S. pres. Donald Trump attempted to advance his Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative this quarter, traveling to the region on his first major international trip as president. While both the Israeli govt. and the Palestinian leadership were receptive to Trump's efforts, each faced constraints—growing challenges from the extreme right in PM Benjamin Netanyahu's case, and sharpening internal tensions within Palestinian ranks.

The Trump initiative stalled in 7/2017 after a deadly attack on Israeli forces in the Old City of Jerusalem. The Israeli govt. then imposed new restrictions on Palestinians at Haram al-Sharif, sparking a wave of resistance across the occupied Palestinian territories (oPt). After 2 weeks of boycotts, protests, and violent clashes, the Israeli authorities rolled back the restrictions, and the Palestinians claimed victory. Meanwhile, at the height of the crisis, PA pres. Mahmoud Abbas took the unprecedented and—for the

Journal of Palestine Studies Vol. XLVII, No. 1 (Autumn 2017), p. 132, ISSN: 0377-919X; electronic ISSN: 1533-8614. © 2017 by the Institute for Palestine Studies. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, http://www.ucpress.edu/journals.php?p=reprints. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2017.47.1.132.

Palestinian public—long-awaited step of suspending PA security forces (PASF) coordination with the Israel Defense Forces (IDF).

THE TRUMP INITIATIVE

The unstructured policy-making process in the Trump White House shrouded the admin.'s peace efforts with uncertainty, particularly concerning the possible relocation of the U.S. Embassy in Israel. Ahead of Trump's visit to Israel and the oPt on 5/22–23, a 5/16 report in *Haaretz* brought the issue to the fore. Several senior U.S. officials reported that, although Trump remained committed to moving the embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem, he was in no rush, and intended to make the move at some point during his first term in office. Meanwhile, U.S. amb. to the UN Nikki Haley said (5/16) that she didn't think the status of Jerusalem—which the proposed embassy move would affect—should be subject to Israeli-Palestinian negotiations at all, staking out what would be an entirely unprecedented position for the U.S. in the history of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. "Obviously, I believe that the capital [of Israel] should be Jerusalem and the embassy should be moved to Jerusalem," she said. Over the next 2 days, Trump admin. officials made conflicting comments on the embassy's relocation. Some stated that Trump intended to announce the move during his trip, while others claimed that he had decided against moving the embassy altogether (see "The Ownership of the U.S. Embassy Site in Jerusalem" in *JPS* 29 [4] for more on this issue).

The Palestinians took a proactive stance on the Trump admin.'s vaguely defined diplomatic initiative. During his meeting with his U.S. counterpart on 5/3, Abbas reportedly pushed for a resumption of peace talks based on the offer former Israeli PM Ehud Olmert had made to Abbas in 2008 (see *JPS* 37 [2]). According to a 5/18 report in the *Times of Israel*, the Palestinians were preparing detailed proposals to present during Trump's 5/22–23 visit, focusing primarily on economic growth in the oPt—which would be linked to Palestinian participation in the peace talks—including the construction of an airport in the West Bank, a cement factory in Bethlehem, and new hotels on the Dead Sea. The Palestinians apparently dropped preconditions for resuming direct peace talks with the Israelis. Ever since then-secy. of state John Kerry had failed to mediate a peace deal in late 2013 and early 2014 (see *JPS* 43 [3, 4]), Abbas maintained that he would not resume negotiations, or even meet with Netanyahu, if the Israelis did not commit to a settlement freeze and to the freeing of prisoners who were under a deal with Israel that had been scheduled to take place at the time of the Kerry talks. There had been signs last quarter that Abbas was willing to drop this demand.

Israel's security cabinet approved (5/21) a goodwill package of measures designed to facilitate Palestinian economic growth the day before Trump's arrival. They included expanding a border crossing nr. Tulkarm, extending the operating hours of the Allenby Bridge between the West Bank and Jordan (see "Movement and Access" below), agreeing to the expansion of an industrial zone nr. Hebron into Area C of the West Bank, and green-lighting the construction of thousands of new Palestinian homes in Area C adjacent to major Palestinian cities.

Netanyahu reportedly overcame dissent from some ultranationalist mbrs. of his cabinet in order to show Trump he was serious about the peace effort. Their displeasure with the proposed goodwill package reflected the public's growing frustration with Trump, according to a poll

conducted by Smith Research (*Jerusalem Post*, 5/18). Researchers found that Trump's popularity among the Jewish Israeli public had declined precipitously since his inauguration, with only around 56% deeming him more pro-Israel than pro-Palestinian in 5/2017, down from 79% in 1/2017.

Despite the ultranationalists' growing animosity, the U.S. and Israeli media portrayed the trip positively. Trump pleased Israeli crowds with his visits to Yad Vashem and the Western Wall (the first sitting U.S. president to visit the latter). In his major policy speech during the trip, Trump linked (5/22) the joint U.S.-Israeli struggle against Iran with Israeli-Palestinian peace, saying that the Arab states were willing to work with Israel and normalize relations if Israel ended its occupation of Palestinian lands.

Trump's troubles began on 5/23 when he traveled to the oPt. The Palestinians were not satisfied with the package of economic measures that the Israeli security cabinet had approved on 5/21. Senior PA advisor Ahmad Majdalani called (5/22) it "meaningless" and an "attempt to beautify and market the occupation." Trump's meeting with Abbas in Bethlehem on the morning of 5/23 initially appeared to go well. At a joint press conference afterwards, the U.S. president stated, "[Abbas] assures me he is ready to work toward [peace] in good faith, and [Netanyahu] has promised the same." According to a White House statement that evening, the Palestinian pres. told Trump he was ready to "begin negotiating [with Israel] immediately," without any mention of preconditions. However, neither Trump nor Abbas offered any details on a path forward. Later reports revealed that Trump had brought up the contentious issue of the PA's monthly stipends to Palestinians convicted of serious crimes against Israelis and to the families of "martyrs," that is, those killed in confrontations with Israeli forces. Adopting the Israeli govt.'s position on the issue, Trump reportedly said that "peace can never take root in an environment where violence is tolerated, funded, and even rewarded."

Combined with the absence of a clear U.S. plan, Trump's focus on this issue antagonized the Palestinians. On 6/1, PA officials described Trump as "angry" about the stipends, that he had made allegations about anti-Israel incitement within the PA, and that Abbas had found the meeting "uncomfortable." Blaming the tension on an Israeli campaign to undermine Abbas, PA officials accused Netanyahu of showing Trump a video purporting to prove that Abbas supported incitement.

Although a senior U.S. official said (5/23) that Trump was hoping to build on the trip by putting together a "common set of principles" to restart peace talks, it quickly became apparent that the U.S. had no real strategy for advancing the process. Tensions and disagreements following Trump's visit lingered, and the initiative petered out in 6/2017.

On the Israeli side, internal disagreements over settlement growth and frustrations with Trump's unfulfilled pledge to relocate the U.S. Embassy animated public debates after the visit. The settlement issue was more contentious; Netanyahu's ultranationalist rivals were still chafing at his decision to limit construction (see *JPS* 46 [4] and "Settlement Growth in the Trump Era," below). On 6/1, Trump signed a waiver delaying the embassy relocation for another 6 mos. U.S. law mandates that the embassy be moved, but also affords the president a national security waiver on a biannual basis (see Doc. D6 in *JPS* 24 [4] for the text of the 1995 law in question). According to a White House statement announcing the waiver, "[Trump] made this decision to maximize the chances of successfully

negotiating a deal between Israel and the Palestinians, fulfilling his solemn obligation to defend America's national security interests. But, as he has repeatedly stated his intention to move the embassy, the question is not *if* that move happens, but only *when*." Netanyahu's office offered a temperate reply: "Despite the disappointment over not moving the embassy at this point, Israel appreciates Trump's friendly words and his commitment to moving the embassy later on."

On the Palestinian side, the main sticking point was the PA's stipends to Palestinians convicted of serious crimes against Israelis and their families, which were to cost the PA NIS 552 m. (approximately $153 m.) in 2017. In addition to lobbying the U.S. govt. on the issue, the Israeli govt. had reportedly begun to deduct money from the monthly transfers of tax revenue it collects on behalf of the PA proportional to the amount the PA spent on this program (*Jerusalem Post*, 5/29). Senior Israeli sources said (5/29) that the decision to garnish revenue transfers was taken at the highest levels in the summer of 2016, without appropriate Knesset oversight. The relevant Knesset mbrs. (MKs), however, supported the principle behind the deductions. The Knesset's Ministerial Comm. for Legislation approved a bill that would effectively codify the cuts on 6/11, and the full plenum gave it preliminary approval on 6/14.

The Trump admin. fixated on the issue as well. U.S. secy. of state Rex Tillerson said (6/14) that an "active discussion" between U.S. and Palestinian officials on the question continued, and that Palestinian officials had told him privately that they planned to end stipends to the perpetrators of serious crimes. The Palestinians, for their part, said that the Trump admin. understood the complexity of the issue, adding that they hoped to develop a formula to bar certain people from receiving the monthly payments.

Disagreements over the details of that formula persisted, however, leading to a tense meeting between Trump's son-in-law and senior advisor Jared Kushner and Abbas in Ramallah on 6/21. According to the *Times of Israel* (6/23), Kushner's position on the issue "enraged" Abbas. Even though Kushner reportedly downgraded the U.S. demand from total discontinuation to stipends to just 600 individual Palestinians serving life sentences in Israeli prisons, Abbas was furious that the U.S. was toeing the Israeli line. He argued (6/21) that the payments were a "social responsibility," and complained that Israel was using the issue as a pretext to squirm out of peace negotiations.

Significantly, Democratic and Republican allies of Israel in the U.S. Congress were advancing legislation similar to the bill percolating through the Knesset around the same time. Dubbed the "Taylor Force Act," after a U.S. citizen killed by a Palestinian on 3/8/16 in Tel Aviv, the bill conditions certain forms of U.S. aid to the Palestinians on the termination of these stipends (see Congressional Monitor, *JPS* 46 [4]). The Senate Foreign Relations Comm. approved the bill in a bipartisan vote, 16–5, on 8/3, and observers said it had a good chance of passing into law.

By the end of 6/2017, the momentum behind U.S.-led peace efforts was all but spent, and there was rampant speculation that the Trump admin. was preparing to turn its attention elsewhere. U.S. officials denied the rumors (6/25 and 6/27), although Trump's Special Rep. for International Negotiations Jason Greenblatt returned to Israel for further talks on 7/11, a trip that did not lead to any reported breakthroughs on the major issues. By mid-July, the Trump

admin.'s attention had turned entirely to the situation in Jerusalem, where long-simmering tensions at Haram al-Sharif had again boiled over into violence.

SETTLEMENT GROWTH IN THE TRUMP ERA

While the Palestinians were downplaying their opposition to Israeli settlement growth in the context of U.S.-led peace efforts, a number of settlement-related conflicts kept the issue at the forefront of Israeli govt. debates, with ultranationalists pushing for accelerated growth and Netanyahu, wary of incurring U.S. ire, cautioning restraint (see *JPS* 46 [4]). As Netanyahu's ultranationalist rivals comprise a significant portion of his ruling coalition, they were able to force his hand. Consequently, the Israeli govt. announced numerous new settlement projects throughout the quarter and rolled back a previously unreported plan from 2016 that would see Palestinian towns in the West Bank expanding into Area C.

Following weeks of ultranationalist complaints about a de facto freeze in settlement growth, the Higher Planning Council of Israel's Civil Admin. met on 6/6 and 6/7 to discuss new construction proposals. Over the course of the 2 days, the council advanced plans for at least 2,000 new settler housing units across the West Bank, including 102 in Amichai, the new settlement planned to house the former residents of the illegal Amona outpost (see *JPS* 46 [2, 3, and 4]). It wasn't enough for the settlers, though. The Yesha Council, a settler umbrella group, outraged by what they viewed as an insufficient number of new units, disputed the official numbers proposed and pushed for a face-to-face meeting with Netanyahu on 6/8. In a statement released after the meeting, a Yesha spokesperson said that it was a "positive" conversation, but that the tension was "not over yet." DM Avigdor Lieberman then lashed out (6/11) at settler leaders, arguing that more construction would "stretch the rope beyond its limit, and thus put the entire settlement enterprise at risk," presumably a reference to international condemnation and the possibility of undermining Trump's initiative. Lieberman also said (6/11) that the govt. had approved more homes for construction by mid-2017 than it had in any year since 1992. "There isn't and there hasn't been a better govt. to take care of the Jewish settlements in [the West Bank]," he added.

Just as that conflict was fading from the front pages of Israeli newspapers, Israel's Channel 2 reported that the govt. had approved a plan to expand the municipal boundaries of Qalqilya, allowing for the construction of 14,000 new Palestinian homes in Area C of the West Bank (it was later reported that only 5,000 new homes were to be built). This previously unreported plan had reportedly been approved in 9/2016 as part of Lieberman's "carrot-and-sticks" policy (see *JPS* 46 [2]). After the Israeli govt. confirmed the report, several Likud MKs demanded that Netanyahu cancel the plan, and the Samaria Regional Council (SRC), which provides services to settlements in the n. West Bank, promised (6/14) to challenge it in the courts. "Has this government lost all restraint? Have we gone completely mad?" SRC head Yossi Dagan asked (6/14). "You can't speak in 2 voices: on the one hand claiming you're doing everything for the settlements, and on the other stopping construction in the settlements while advancing Arab construction." Netanyahu said (6/18) he would reconsider. Israel's security cabinet ultimately decided

A man gazes across the distant separation wall at the Israeli settlement of Hashmonaim, west of Ramallah. (19 June, Abbas Momani/AFP/Getty Images)

(7/12) to temporarily suspend the Qalqiliya expansion plan.

Aside from the rare and tepid condemnation from a State Dept. spokesperson, the Trump admin. had little to say about these developments. After Israeli construction crews began (6/20) work on the Amichai settlement, for example, a State Dept. official said, "we see settlements as something that does not help the peace process." The U.S. position remained the same throughout 7/2017. The Jerusalem Municipality announced plans for 800 new settler residences in East Jerusalem on 7/6, and a White House official merely reiterated (7/6) the Trump admin.'s opposition to "unrestrained settlement activity." Despite intermittent reports of a secret Trump-Netanyahu agreement limiting settlement growth (6/23 and 7/11), none were confirmed, and the status of Israel's settlement enterprise remained unchanged by the end of the quarter.

Meanwhile, Palestinian frustration with the new settlement construction, along with the Trump admin.'s bland pronouncements, grew throughout the quarter. When Netanyahu advanced (6/22) a project to expand the Beit El settlement nr. al-Bireh with 300 new housing units, a number of Palestinian officials went beyond their standard calls for international pressure. They specifically called out the Trump admin. and implied that Palestinian participation in the U.S.-led peace efforts would be conditioned on a change in policy. Abbas may not have been insisting on a settlement freeze as a precondition to peace talks anymore, they implied, but some sort of shared understanding would need to be established. As one Palestinian official put it,

"it is impossible to speak about a [peace initiative] that will bring the sides to serious negotiations as long as Israel continues massive construction in the settlements with a green light from the U.S., or thunderous silence in the face of this construction." PLO secy.-gen. Saeb Erakat eventually went on the record (8/1) describing the Trump admin.'s "silence regarding the intensification of Israeli colonial settlement activities," as well as its waffling on the principle of 2 states based on the pre-1967 armistice lines, as a barriers to its own peace efforts (see *JPS* 46 [3, 4]).

VIOLENCE IN JERUSALEM

As the quarter opened, nearly 2 years had passed since persistent tensions at Haram al-Sharif erupted in 9/2015 to become the surge of Palestinian resistance, random attacks, and protests that Palestinians describe as the *habba*. The *habba* later spread to the rest of the oPt (see *JPS* 45 [2, 3]) and while it has gradually subsided in the intervening years, the underlying issues remain unresolved. A significant portion of the Israeli population, including several MKs, openly called for increased Jewish access at Haram al-Sharif. Palestinians feared the Israeli govt. would acquiesce, upending the delicate status quo that has governed the site since Israel annexed East Jerusalem in 1967. This quarter, a number of violent incidents in the Old City gave the Israeli govt. the opportunity to impose new restrictions and security measures, which in turn led to further revolt.

In the waning days of Ramadan, 3 Palestinian youths attacked (6/16) Israeli border police at Damascus Gate with knives and guns at dusk. They fatally injured 1 guard and lightly injured several others before being shot and killed in situ. As has become standard procedure post-*habba*, IDF troops raided the attackers' family homes in Dayr Abu Mash'al nr. Ramallah, threatened punitive demolition, and put the village on lockdown. The Israeli authorities also reinstated policies that had been suspended during Ramadan. "You've destroyed the Ramadan atmosphere in [the West Bank]," Yoav Mordechai, IDF Coordinator of Govt. Activities in the Territories (COGAT), wrote on Facebook (6/16). "Three bastards who undertook this cowardly terror attack received praise from Fatah, who falsely claimed they were innocent. This is incitement to terror. In response to this heinous crime and the incitement by Fatah officials to win popularity, Israel has decided to take action, the first is revoking 250,000 entry permits [for West Bank Palestinians visiting family in Israel] and revoking work permits from the kin of the terrorists." Israeli officials also rescinded permits for West Bank Palestinians to visit Haram al-Sharif on weekdays, except Fridays. Israeli forces then arrested (6/17) 350 West Bank Palestinians in East Jerusalem on 6/17, put them on buses, and sent them home. Israeli police violently dispersed (6/18) Muslim worshippers protesting the crackdown at Haram al-Sharif; 3 Israelis were injured during the ensuing clashes, and over 30 Muslim worshippers were injured, among them Turks, South Africans, British nationals, and Americans in addition to Palestinians. Some injuries were a result of rubber-coated bullets fired by Israeli forces. (Middle East Monitor, 6/19).

In the wake of the 6/16 attack and the Israeli response, Palestinian protests slowly died down and Jerusalem returned to its usual levels of tension. Netanyahu was not satisfied, however. On 6/21, he met with several top defense and security officials, and approved a new "security strategy" for Damascus Gate that reportedly

included new "surveillance points," improved lighting systems, and other measures. Announcing the new strategy on 6/22, Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan claimed that there had been 32 major attacks at the site in the previous 2 1/2 years, and Netanyahu said (6/22) that Damascus Gate had become a "symbol of terror." The following week, he announced a temporary lifting of his ban on Israeli MKs and ministers visiting Haram al-Sharif, following a petition from Likud MK, Temple Mount movement leader, and Orthodox rabbi Yehuda Glick. Netanyahu had imposed the ban in 10/2015 at the height of the *habba* in order to quell Palestinian fears that Israel intended to seize control of the sanctuary. The trial period for lifting the ban was set for 7/23–27, and if it went well, Netanyahu would consider lifting it permanently.

As this trial period loomed, Palestinian social media roiled with suspicions and frustrations. Then, on 7/14, 3 Palestinian citizens of Israel (PCI) launched an attack on Israeli police in the Old City. Armed with guns and knives, the 3 assailants ran out of Haram al-Sharif and attacked 2 Israeli police officers, killing both before fleeing back into the compound. Israeli border police chased the attackers inside, there was an exchange of fire, and the 3 assailants were killed.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack, Israeli police evacuated the site, raided the premises, interrogated at least 60 Islamic Waqf employees and worshippers, and canceled Friday prayers. The grand mufti of Jerusalem, Shaykh Mohammad Hussein, who was detained by Israeli forces as he led Friday prayers, said (7/14) it was the first time Israeli forces had prevented Muslims from participating in Friday worship at the sanctuary since the annexation of the city in1967. Unrest quickly swept through East Jerusalem; clashes and violence led to at least 3 settler injuries and the arrest of 25 Palestinians, including Hussein.

Meanwhile, Abbas phoned Netanyahu—reportedly the first time they spoke directly in mos.—to condemn the morning's attack, denounce violence on both sides, and call for the sanctuary to be reopened. Netanyahu, for his part, argued that Israeli forces needed to maintain security at all costs, and insisted that no change had been made or would be made to the status quo at Haram al-Sharif. The Jordanian govt., which administers the sanctuary through the Waqf, echoed Abbas's call on the Israeli authorities to reopen the sanctuary, to which senior Israeli officials responded, "instead of condemning the terror attack, Jordan chose to blast Israel, which protects the worshippers and maintains the freedom of worship at the site. . . . All the sides, including Jordan, should maintain restraint and avoid inflaming the situation."

The situation, however, was already inflamed, and Netanyahu turned up the heat by announcing (7/15) that Israeli forces would "gradually" reopen Haram al-Sharif on 7/16 with a series of new security measures, including metal detectors. The Islamic Waqf then called (7/16) for a Muslim boycott of the sanctuary, kicking off 2 weeks of protests and clashes in Jerusalem and across the oPt (during which 5 Palestinians were killed and hundreds were injured; see Chronology and Photos from the Quarter for details). The boycott gained strength and Muslim worshippers opted to pray en masse outside on the streets of the Old City instead of passing through the metal detectors.

A variety of Palestinian political factions united behind the boycott, organizing protests and lending their weight to the Waqf's call for the removal of the metal detectors. Netanyahu refused to budge on the metal detectors, despite

Israeli border police in Jerusalem haul away a young boy during demonstrations outside Lion's Gate in the Old City. (17 July, Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images)

reported opposition from Israel's Shin Bet and other security services. According to a Palestinian official (7/19), the U.S., Jordan, and Saudi Arabia also began pressuring Israel to remove the metal detectors.

On the heaviest day of violence, Abbas made (7/21) a major announcement in support of the protest. He ordered the suspension of all PA contacts with the Israeli govt., including PASF coordination with the IDF, until all new security measures at Haram al-Sharif were removed. "This decision is not at all easy," he said. "But the Israelis ought to know that they are going to be the ones who will ultimately lose, because we do a lot to defend their security and ours." Codified in the 1995 Oslo II agreement, PASF-IDF coordination is deeply unpopular among Palestinians and has been so for many years. The Palestinian leadership has maintained the program regardless, and since the demise of the Kerry-led peace effort in 3–4/2014 in particular, security coordination has become so controversial that the PA is being forced to consider suspending the program. After a heated debate in early 2015 (see *JPS* 44 [3]), the PLO Central Council called (3/4/15) for an end to the program, and the PLO Exec. Comm. pledged (3/5/15) to implement their call at the appropriate time (see *JPS* 44 [4]). The installation of new metal detectors at Haram al-Sharif and the enormous public support for the Waqf apparently made 7/21 the appropriate time.

The day after Abbas's announcement, Mordechai said (7/22) that Israel was "willing to examine alternatives to the metal detectors

as long as the . . . alternative ensures the prevention of the next attack," hinting that at least some Israeli leaders were balking at the new security measures. Israel's security cabinet met that night to discuss the situation. While ministers echoed Mordechai's position, Lieberman held the line, claiming that Israel would "manage" without security coordination with the PA. "It's their decision," he said. "It's not that the security coordination is an Israeli need; it's a Palestinian need first and foremost, and therefore if they want it, it will continue. If they don't want it, [it] won't."

After another day of heightened tensions and protests at Haram al-Sharif on 7/24, the security cabinet decided to remove the metal detectors. In a statement, the cabinet said it had "accepted the recommendation of all of the security bodies to incorporate security measures based on advanced technologies and other measures instead of metal detectors in order to ensure the security of visitors and worshippers in the Old City and [at Haram al-Sharif]." According to the Israeli press, the new security measures were set to include "smart cameras" with heat-sensing technology and facial recognition capabilities, and that their installation would be part of a NIS 100 m. (approximately $28 m.) plan that could take up to 6 mos. to implement.

The Islamic Waqf convened on the morning of 7/25 to discuss the new Israeli position. It issued a statement rejecting "any changes [to the status quo], including technological measures," and reiterated an earlier call for the sanctuary to be open to "Muslim worshippers in a completely free manner to ensure freedom of worship." Later in the day, Abbas again backed up the Waqf, reaffirming that he did not plan to resume PA relations with the Israeli govt. until the new security measures "cease[d] to exist."

After yet another day of tension and violence, the Israeli press reported (7/26) that Netanyahu had ordered security checks at Haram al-Sharif to be conducted using only handheld metal detectors, a practice in place prior to the 7/14 attack. Israeli forces removed the last of the metal detectors and infrastructure for the new "smart cameras" that night. The Islamic Waqf then met again on 7/27, when the mufti confirmed that the situation at the sanctuary had returned to normal and called on worshippers to resume prayers there. After meeting with Hussein in Ramallah, Abbas celebrated the victory, saying, "All stood as one, didn't blink, didn't hesitate, and didn't tire." Hundreds of Muslim worshippers gathered at Haram al-Sharif for a "victory party" and the day's jubilation with chanting, loud music, and dancing was marred by only minor clashes with Israeli security forces.

Meanwhile, the Israeli authorities handed over to their families the corpses of the 3 PCI killed on 7/14. Thousands of Palestinians marched through Umm al-Fahm at a joint funeral, celebrating the victory and mourning the loss.

As Palestinians celebrated, the Israeli public expressed disappointment with the govt.'s resolution of the crisis. In a poll taken in the wake of the security cabinet's 7/24 decision to replace the metal detectors with "advanced technologies," Israel's Channel 2 found (7/25) that 77% of respondents thought the govt. "capitulated" by removing the metal detectors, and 67% described Netanyahu's handling of the crisis as "not good."

In response to the backlash, Netanyahu tacked to the right on other issues. Israeli officials said (7/27) that he had proposed, in meetings with U.S. officials, that some Palestinian communities in Israel be transferred to a hypothetical future Palestinian state in

After more than a week of protests and boycotts, Palestinians celebrate the removal of metal detectors and barriers at some of the entrances to Haram al-Sharif. (27 July, Ahmad Gharabli/AFP/Getty Images)

exchange for incorporating key settlement blocs into Israel. Lieberman, who has been advocating such transfers for years, tweeted (7/27), "Mr. PM, welcome to the club." That same day, Netanyahu came out in favor of the death penalty for a Palestinian who killed 3 Israeli settlers at Halamish on 7/21 (see Chronology for details). "He should simply not smile anymore," Netanyahu said. He also defended his handling of the Haram Al-Sharif crisis to his cabinet on 7/30: "I must make decisions coolly and judiciously. I do that out of a view of the big picture, a wide view of the challenges and threats that are facing us. Some of them are not known to the public and as is the nature of things, I can't go into details."

The atmosphere at Haram al-Sharif remained tense through the end of the quarter, but the relative calm largely held. Abbas and the Palestinian leadership opted not to resume security coordination with the Israeli govt.—at least not right away. A senior PA official said (7/29) that as long as Muslim access to the sanctuary remained unrestricted, the plan was to slowly resume coordination at pre-crisis levels.

During the final weeks of the quarter, the PA's plan changed, however. Palestinian officials pointed to the 7/27 closure of the Beit El DCO checkpoint (nr. al-Bireh) and raid of a civil police investigation office on 8/2 as evidence of a new Israeli strategy. Checkpoints run by the District Coordination Liaison Offices (DCO) allow prescreened Palestinian businesspeople, NGO personnel, and VIPs to circumvent the regular IDF checkpoints that are far more arduous and onerous for Palestinians. "We clearly understood [the closure of the checkpoint as] a punitive measure," one official said. "It is likely we will see more of this . . . in the future, [with Israel] claiming it has to do with the lack of

coordination" (*Haaretz*, 8/3). The following week, a senior PA official laid out (8/7) the conditions for resuming security coordination: cessation of all IDF activity in Area A of the West Bank and PA takeover of certain border crossings. "The Palestinian leadership will reject any security coordination Israel requests until Israel halts daily assaults, shootings, undercover raids, abductions of Palestinian lawmakers, officials, and children in Palestinian cities and refugee camps in the PA-controlled territories," an unnamed PA source added (Ma'an News Agency, 8/9).

Throughout the last weeks of the quarter, Israeli officials and the Israeli press continued to allege that security coordination with the PA was, in fact, ongoing. A PA spokesperson confirmed as much on 8/7, admitting that PASF contact with the IDF had continued, but only in "humanitarian" cases.

FINDING A PATH FORWARD

The Haram al-Sharif access crisis was the first major test for the Trump admin.'s nascent peace initiative, forcing the admin. to show its hand and thereby pointing to the possible foundation for future peace efforts.

As the crisis wound down, it became clear that the Trump admin. had lost credibility with the Palestinians. Greenblatt, in particular, was accused of siding with the Israeli side throughout the crisis (see Doc. B3, *JPS* 46 [4], for excerpts of the interview Abbas gave to Doha's *al-Watan*.) On 7/27, a Palestinian official said that Abbas had recently rejected a request for a meeting with the U.S. envoy because "such meetings fail to offer anything new" (*Haaretz*, 7/27). "Abbas is disappointed by the admin.'s conduct," the official elaborated. "As of now, Palestinians have made efforts to meet U.S. demands, but as of yesterday, the Americans have not presented anything new." A few days later, a senior PA source noted (7/31) the Palestinian leadership's frustration with the Trump admin.'s behavior during the crisis. "When the metal detectors were installed, they supported that," the official said. "Then they supported the installation of smart cameras, and then, when there was talk of manual checks, they supported that, too."

Further reinforcing the Palestinians' suspicions, a surreptitious tape recording surfaced on 7/31 in which Kushner spoke candidly with a group of congressional interns about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the leaked recording, Kushner described the Israeli decision to install new metal detectors at Haram al-Sharif as "reasonable," and said that "there may be no solution" to the conflict, adding that the White House was still "thinking about what the right end-state is." PLO Exec. Comm. mbr. Hanan Ashrawi went on the record in response, arguing that Kushner was not equipped to mediate a peace effort: "Kushner isn't aware enough of the details and developments in the region and he tends to conspicuously adopt the Israeli position" (*Haaretz*, 8/7).

From the Israeli side, the success of the Trump admin.'s efforts looked equally dubious. "As of now, Trump's peace initiative looks like it is completely bogged down," a senior Israeli official said on 7/31. "The Palestinians have lost trust in the peace negotiation teams. Greenblatt is rapidly approaching the status of persona non grata, just like [Amb. to Israel David] Friedman and Haley. The president is not involved, and it looks like he has distanced himself considerably from Middle East affairs, particularly given the serious problems he has inside the White House" (Al-Monitor, 7/31).

The Israeli side was running into problems of its own in 8/2017. Ending mos. of speculation, the Israeli police confirmed (8/3) that PM

Netanyahu was under investigation for alleged bribery, fraud, and breach of trust. The Israeli press then revealed that the PM's former chief of staff, Ari Harow, had agreed to testify against Netanyahu in exchange for a reduced sentence in his own case. The police had questioned the PM several times earlier in the year, and the investigation was already undermining his authority, but this revelation seemed to point to the possibility that Netanyahu could be indicted and lose the premiership. To many, the affair was reminiscent of the 2007–8 peace negotiations that failed, in part, because of then PM Ehud Olmert's own scandals and resignation (see *JPS* 38 [1, 2]). To others, such as Nabil Shaath, a senior advisor to Abbas, the comparison was only instructive insofar as it highlighted the foundational differences between the peace process in 2008 and 2017: "We cannot even draw a parallel to Olmert, because unlike Netanyahu, Olmert had a worldview that included a future arrangement and . . . negotiations were making progress. Netanyahu's situation is totally the opposite; the man is just looking for ways to evade any commitment to the 2-state solution, and now with the investigations we have to be prepared for moves that could be devastating to the diplomatic process" (*Haaretz*, 4/7).

Regardless, the Trump admin. carried on. On 8/11, a senior U.S. official said that Kushner, along with Greenblatt and Dep. National Security Advisor for Strategy Dina Powell, would visit Israel, the oPt, and various Arab states in late 8/2017. "Trump has previously noted that achieving an enduring Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement will be difficult, but he remains optimistic that peace is possible," the official said. "To enhance the chances for peace, all parties need to engage in creating an environment conducive to peace-making while affording the negotiators and facilitators the time and space they need to reach a deal" (*Washington Post*, 8/11).

OCCUPATION DATA AND TRENDS

The flare-up of violence in response to the new Israeli security measures at Haram al-Sharif in 7/2017 led to the first significant quarterly increase in the number of Palestinian and Israeli casualties in over a year. Overall, 38 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (up from 21 last quarter), and 6 Israelis were killed as a result of Palestinian actions (up from 1 last quarter). Therefore, the comprehensive death toll since the beginning of the 2d Intifada in 9/2000 reached 10,957 Palestinians (including 64 Palestinian citizens of Israel and 19 cross-border "infiltrators"); 1,266 Israelis (including at least 249 settlers and 437 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). These figures do not include the 3 Palestinians killed this quarter in clashes with Egyptian forces in the n. Sinai Peninsula (5/18 and 6/2 [2]), ailing Gazans who succumbed to medical complications as a result of the PA's refusal to fund their medical transfers (see "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" below), or the 2 Jordanians killed by an Israeli security guard outside the Israeli embassy in Amman on 7/23 (see "Jordan" below).

Overview of the Violence

The number of Palestinians killed as a result of Israeli actions in the **West Bank** and **East Jerusalem** increased this quarter. With

the Palestinian prisoners' mass hunger strike (see Palestine Unbound and Update on Conflict and Diplomacy, *JPS* 46 [4], for more on the "Dignity Strike") concluding in 5/2017 and unrest erupting in Jerusalem in 7/2017, widespread protests, clashes, and individual, random attacks spread across the oPt. Twenty-nine Palestinians were killed (up from 12 last quarter), including 19 in 7/2017 alone; 14 died of wounds sustained in clashes with Israeli forces, 14 were killed after committing or allegedly committing stabbing, shooting, or ramming attacks on Israelis, and 1 was killed after accidentally detonating a piece of unexploded Israeli ordnance. The number of Palestinian injuries also spiked. According to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), 1,794 Palestinians were injured between 5/16 and 8/14 (up from 724 last quarter), of whom 1,516 were injured at the height of the Haram al-Sharif access crisis between 7/18 and 7/31 alone.

Although the West Bank and East Jerusalem remained the epicenter of tension and violence this quarter, there were intermittent border clashes and protests in the **Gaza Strip** over the new Israeli security measures at Haram al-Sharif. However, fewer Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions in Gaza this quarter (6, down from 7 last quarter): 3 died in clashes with the IDF along the border (6/6, 6/9, and 7/28); a senior Hamas military officer was fatally injured in an explosion at a "resistance site" on 6/7; 1 woman died (8/8) of cancer after the Israeli authorities denied her a permit to travel to Jerusalem for treatment; and a child died (7/29) of Ekiri syndrome, a complication of shigellosis infection, which he contracted while swimming in the polluted waters off Gaza's coast (see "Gaza Electricity Crisis" below). On the other hand, the number of Palestinians injured in Gaza as a result of Israeli actions increased considerably this quarter: there were 162 reported injuries between 5/16 and 8/14, according to OCHA, up from 13 last quarter.

Meanwhile, Gaza saw fewer incidents of cross-border violence this quarter. Gazan fighters and the IDF exchanged fire on only 3 days this quarter (6/26, 7/23, and 8/8), down from 9 last quarter. These exchanges followed a familiar pattern: after 1 or 2 rockets were fired into s. Israel, causing minimal damage, if any, the IDF launched air strikes or fired artillery at Hamas military sites across the territory. On 6/26 and 7/23, IDF strikes damaged Hamas sites. IDF air strikes in n. Gaza on 8/8 caused 4 Palestinian injuries (see Chronology for details).

As in previous quarters, the IDF strictly enforced the unilaterally defined buffer zone, so-called Access Restricted Areas, along Israel's border with Gaza. Israeli soldiers violently dispersed Gazan protesters gathering along the border fence on 16 different occasions, up from 3 last quarter; they fired on shepherds, farmers, and bird-hunters 6 times (5/22, 5/29, 6/11, 6/17, 7/10, and 7/13); and fired on Palestinian land or other property 6 times (5/22, 5/24, 6/4, 6/14, 6/28, and 7/26). Israeli forces also conducted 16 limited incursions to level land in Gaza (6/1, 6/4, 6/5 [2], 6/12, 6/19 [2], 6/22, 6/28, 7/3, 7/6, 7/22, 7/25, 7/26, 8/3, and 8/14), and arrested 6 Gazans attempting to cross into Israel for work or for allegedly intending to carry out attacks on Israelis (6/12, 7/1, 7/9 [2], 7/24, and 8/6).

The temporary expansion of the fishing zone off Gaza's s. coast did nothing to reduce Israel's violent enforcement of the zone's boundaries this quarter (see "Movement and Access" below). Matching the total from last quarter, Israeli naval forces opened fire on or

otherwise confronted Palestinian fishermen on 52 separate occasions. Over the course of these incidents, 3 fishermen were injured (5/30 and 7/16 [2]), up from 2 last quarter, and 2 were arrested (8/11 [2]), down from 14 in the previous quarter. On 1 noteworthy occasion, IDF troops stationed at a coastal watchtower nr. Jabaliya r.c. opened fire on Palestinian fishermen working along the water line on the far side of the boundary; 1 fisherman was injured.

Movement and Access

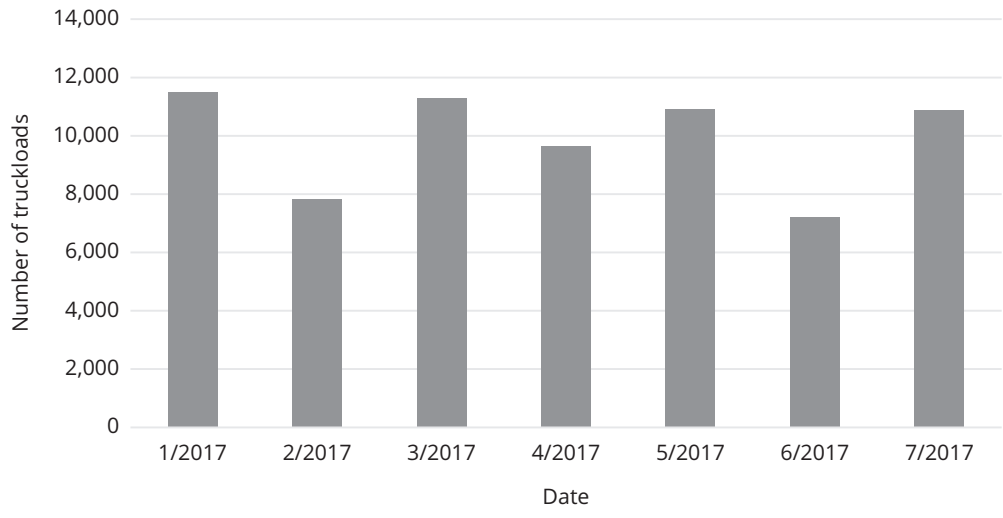
A handful of major Israeli policy changes affected Palestinian movement and access in the **Gaza Strip** this quarter. On 8/1 COGAT imposed a ban on Gazans carrying laptop computers, hard-shell suitcases, shampoo, or toothpaste across the border into Israel, citing security concerns. The following week, COGAT announced (8/7) that "businessmen and [other Palestinians from East Jerusalem] who want to help improve the economy, infrastructure, and humanitarian conditions in the Gaza Strip" would be allowed to visit Gaza. No more than 150 people at a time would be allowed to enter, and the Israeli authorities would evaluate on a case-by-case basis who met the criteria of "want[ing] to help." Finally, as mentioned above (see "Overview of the Violence"), COGAT reduced the fishing zone off Gaza's coast to 6 naut. mi. on 6/27, almost 2 mos. after expanding it to 9 naut. mi. on 5/3. The PA Ministry of Agriculture reported that the expansion had significantly increased both the quality and quantity of the catch in 5–6/2017.

Although the PA slashed its financial support for Gaza in an effort to put pressure on Hamas this quarter (see "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" below), the Ministry of Transportation announced (6/1) that it planned to open, on 6/20, the application process for commercial trucks from the West Bank to enter Gaza in an effort to strengthen the local economy. According to OCHA, the volume of goods entering Gaza did not change significantly after the new rule went into effect. In 7/2017, 10,889 truckloads of goods entered Gaza, marking a 12% increase over the monthly average so far in 2017 (see figure 1).

Also of note: The Israeli press reported (8/10) that the IDF was planning a $1.1-b., 2-year project to build a new underground wall around Gaza in an effort to further stymie Hamas's tunneling strategy. Senior IDF officers said the wall was set to include an aboveground section standing approximately 20 ft. tall, and that the underground section would plunge to 130 ft., and include advanced sensors to detect tunnel activity. A Hamas spokesperson downplayed (8/10) the significance of the project: "Judging from experience, the resistance will find a way to overcome these obstacles."

The Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah border crossing closed for all but 2 days this quarter (8/14–15), down from 8 last quarter (see "Egypt" below). The crossing was open only to Muslims performing Hajj (the pilgrimage to Mecca) leaving only a few hundred Gazans able to exit.

As in previous quarters, nr.-daily IDF raids, house searches, and mobile checkpoints hampered Palestinian movement and access in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. According to OCHA, the number of raids increased as the quarter went on, with more than 390 reported in 7/2017, the mo. that new Israeli security measures went into effect at Haram al-Sharif (the monthly average in 2016 was 190). In addition to the new security measures at the sanctuary and the increased number of raids,



SOURCE: OCHA's monthly update on the operations of Gaza's crossings, 7/2017. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Gaza Crossings' Operations Status: Monthly Update, July 2017," 16 August 2017, https://www.ochaopt.org/reports/gaza-crossings-operations-status-monthly.

Figure 1. Goods entering Gaza.

the Israeli authorities added further restrictions to their arsenal. Following the 7/14 attack in the Old City, they instituted a de facto ban on visits to Haram al-Sharif by residents from the attackers' hometown of Umm al-Fahm. Although the measure was never officially announced, Israeli forces blocked a group of residents from entering on 7/29 and turned 4 busloads of worshippers back to Umm al-Fahm on 8/8.

After the unrest had largely dissipated, the Israeli authorities began a new program to ease restrictions on certain Palestinians. They disseminated (8/14) leaflets in Hebron offering residents who were banned from entering Israel to apply for their bans to be lifted, on the condition that they "behave." The offer was available for 1 day only, 8/15. When reports of the leaflets hit the press, the IDF disclosed that it had already tested out the program the previous week in Idhna, and that 52 bans had been lifted as a result. As an IDF statement explained (8/14), "these campaigns are part of the security forces' efforts to help peaceful Palestinian residents who do not partake in terror attacks." Although the program was a boon for a small number of Palestinians, a PA official in Hebron complained (8/14) that it was "nothing but an Israeli attempt to circumvent [PA pres. Abbas's] decision to halt security coordination with Israel" (see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above). The official also noted that the Oslo Accords "ban Palestinians from dealing with Israel directly."

As in previous years, the Israeli authorities eased restrictions on Palestinian movement during Ramadan (5/26–6/24). COGAT announced (5/21) that it would be: requiring Palestinian males between the ages of 12 and 40 to acquire a permit to pray at Haram al-Sharif; extending hours and expanding facilities at various border crossings to

accommodate the crowds; issuing up to 500 permits for West Bank Palestinians to fly abroad to visit family; permitting up to 200,000 West Bank Palestinians to visit family in Israel (these were among the permits revoked on 6/16; see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above); allowing up to 100 elderly Gazans to visit Haram al-Sharif every Friday during Ramadan; and issuing up to 300 permits for "special groups" of Gazans, including unions and employees of international organizations, to visit the sanctuary throughout the mo.

The only other significant change in access and mobility happened in the context of the U.S.-led peace initiative (see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above). After the Israeli cabinet announced (5/21) plans to open the Allenby border crossing more frequently, COGAT later confirmed (6/10) that, beginning on 6/20, the crossing would be open 24 hours per day, 5 days a week. The extension was scheduled to end on 9/10 and resume at some point in the summer of 2018. "The decision is intended to be permanent and will serve the residents during the summer mos. during which there is a rise in the number of crossings," Mordechai added (6/10).

Maintaining Stability

Under pressure from the U.S., and amid renewed rumors of Abbas's imminent departure from politics (see "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" below), the Israeli govt. continued its efforts to shore up PA institutions and uphold the status quo established by the Oslo Accords.

The Israel Electric Corporation (IEC) and the PA signed (7/10) an agreement setting new parameters for Israel's supply of power to the West Bank at the inauguration of a new electricity substation in Jenin. It built on their previous (9/3/16) agreement (see *JPS* 46 [2]), to administer the repayment of outstanding Palestinian debts and transfer control to the PA of the power lines supplying major West Bank towns. "Israel is interested in improving the Palestinian economy, and here we have a project that is beneficial for both parties," said Israel's energy minister Yuval Steinitz. "It will provide Palestinians with greater electricity at a more consistent rate, and it's good for Israel because it guarantees . . . that the additional electricity to the Palestinians will not fall on the [IEC's] shoulders." PA PM Rami Hamdallah, who cut the ribbon with Steinitz, said (7/10) that the new agreement was "pivotal to enhance our independence so we can meet the growing needs of our people in the electricity sector." According to the IEC, the new substation was capable of transmitting 135 additional MW of electricity purchased from Israel to the n. West Bank. Three more substations are set to open nr. Ramallah, Nablus, and Tarqumiyya by the end of 2017.

Days after the opening ceremony, U.S. special rep. Greenblatt announced (7/13) that the Israeli govt. and the Palestinians had reached an agreement to cooperate on a new water infrastructure project related to the planned Red Sea-Dead Sea pipeline, which they first agreed to in 12/2013 (see *JPS* 43 [3]). Under the new agreement, Israel would sell up to 33 m. m^3 of surplus water per year to the Palestinians at a reduced rate. The Trump admin. was eager to take credit for the deal, given Greenblatt's role in announcing it, and Greenblatt himself said it was a "harbinger of things to come."

Finally, Hamdallah and Israeli finance minister Moshe Kahlon agreed (5/30) to expand the PA's authority in certain Israeli-controlled areas of Area C of the West Bank. According to a PA spokesperson, they agreed on the "cessation of home demolitions under the pretext of not being licensed" and the establishment of an industrial zone nr. Tarqumiyya, and also finalized the details

regarding the Allenby Bridge border crossing (see "Movement and Access" above). A COGAT statement later in the day confirmed only that "Israeli enforcement policies in specific defined areas [of Area C]" would be "adjusted," and that it had been agreed to upgrade facilities and expand hours at certain border crossings in the West Bank.

Gaza's Electricity Crisis

The electricity crisis in Gaza, which began in 1/2017 (see *JPS* 46 [3, 4]), became a full-fledged catastrophe this quarter, with intra-Palestinian tensions exacerbating an already dire situation. As the quarter opened, Gaza's sole power plant had been shut down for 5 weeks due to lack of fuel. Most Palestinians in Gaza were receiving as little as 4 hours of electricity per day, according to OCHA. "These . . . levels of electricity have a grave impact on the supply of safe drinking water, on the treatment and management of sewerage, on the availability of health services, on businesses, on schools, and much more," OCHA reported (5/20).

COGAT recommended (5/25) that Israel acquiesce to the PA's 4/27 request to reduce its supply of electricity to Gaza (see *JPS* 46 [4]). The PA had been paying Israel NIS 40 m. (approximately $11 m.) per mo. in exchange for 120 MW to be transferred to Gaza, and the Palestinian leadership was now requesting a 40% reduction. Despite Mordechai's recommendation, it was unclear whether the Israeli govt. would agree. Further deterioration of conditions in Gaza had the potential of sparking unrest and violence, and at least 1 senior Israeli official, Steinitz, opposed the move on the grounds that it constituted an intervention in intra-Palestinian politics. The security cabinet ultimately approved the requested reduction on 6/11, and the Israeli authorities began implementing it on 6/19. Between these cuts and the power plant shutdown, Gaza was receiving only a tiny fraction of the 450–500 MW needed in mid-6/2017.

Meanwhile, tensions between Hamas and the Fatah-dominated PA in Ramallah impeded efforts to address the electricity crisis. Days after Mordechai recommended the reduction, the dep. chair of the Hamas-run energy authority in Gaza, Fathi Khalil, insisted (5/28) that all of the PA's stipulations for ending the impasse had been met, including more rigorous bill collection and the appointment of a nonpartisan comm. to monitor the energy authority's performance. (These steps were reportedly PA prerequisites for tax exemptions on purchases of fuel for Gaza's power plant.) The Ramallah-based Energy and Natural Resources Authority denied (5/29) making such stipulations and insisted that the only resolution to the crisis would be the PA's assumption of control in Gaza, after which the Gaza Electricity Distribution Company (GEDCO) would begin transferring the revenues collected from Gazans' electricity bills to the PA, allowing "the [Ministry of Finance] to buy the fuel needed to run the only power plant in Gaza and [to restructure] the GEDCO."

Hamas's overtures to the Egyptian govt. further complicated the situation (see "Egypt" below). Shortly after a Hamas delegation returned from Cairo, a source close to the movement said (6/20) that the Egyptians had agreed to sell Hamas enough diesel fuel to enable Gaza's power plant to resume operations for a limited period. Some 1 m. L of fuel were shipped into Gaza from Egypt on 6/21, and another 1 m. on 6/22, providing the plant with enough fuel to run for several days, according to GEDCO. However, clashes that broke out between the Egyptian army and the armed insurrection in the Sinai on 7/7 interrupted the

shipments. By that time, the PA had intervened. According to Gaza's energy authority on 7/8, "[the PA] stopped all the financial transactions through Palestinian banks to Egypt to buy fuel" on 7/6. A PA spokesperson refused (7/8) to comment directly on the allegation, but did say, "The main reason for the worsening situation in Gaza is Hamas" because they "rejected" Abbas's initiative to end the split between Palestinian factions.

The energy authority in Gaza reportedly found alternative means of paying for the Egyptian fuel transfers, and limited transfers resumed on 7/10 allowing the power plant to resume operations intermittently through the end of the quarter. However, the Egyptian fuel supplies were insufficient to meet the overall shortages.

Sewage, in particular, became a dire problem. According to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, 73% of Gaza's beaches were polluted with untreated sewage in 7/2017, partly because the local sewage treatment plants did not have enough power to operate at full capacity. Although Gaza's seawater pollution problem predates the electricity crisis, the water treatment plants' shutdown reportedly caused a 23% increase in pollution at the beaches since 4/2017. The massive pollution problem had wide-ranging effects of its own, not the least of which was the death of a 5-year-old child on 7/29. The boy died of Ekiri syndrome, a complication of shigellosis, an infection commonly contracted through a fecal-oral route, 10 days after swimming at one of Gaza's polluted beaches.* The sewage problem was so severe that Israel's Health Ministry was forced to shut down (7/5) beaches in s. Israel due to excessive bacterial and fecal pollution levels just n. of the boundary with Gaza.

Despite numerous international efforts to mediate the intra-Palestinian impasse, Gaza's electricity crisis continued through the end of the quarter.

PALESTINIAN PRISONERS

The mass hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners, which Fatah leader Marwan Barghouti launched on 4/17, drew to a close less than 2 weeks into this quarter after galvanizing the Palestinian public throughout last quarter (see *JPS* 46 [4]). Following 20 hours of talks, the Israel Prison Service (IPS) reached (5/27) an agreement with the strike leaders, the International Comm. of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the PA to end the strike. No details of the agreement were officially made public, but the press reported that prisoners had secured major concessions, including greater access to telephones, the return of sick prisoners to a newly refurbished prison hospital, improved conditions for imprisoned minors, new sports equipment in prison yards, and more family visits. This last concession, in particular, was a key victory. Family visits had been a point of contention since the ICRC decreased the number of monthly visits it facilitated from 2 to 1 in 5/2016 (see *JPS* 46 [1]). Barghouti celebrated the victory on 5/30 with a statement calling the strike a "turning point" in the prisoners' relationship with the Israeli authorities. The IPS denied even negotiating with the prisoners, let alone making any concessions. Israeli authorities only acknowledged that the ICRC was going to facilitate more visits, adding that the change stemmed from a separate agreement between the ICRC and the PA.

* Dorgham Abusalim, "First Death Caused by Sea Pollution in Gaza," *Palestine Square,* 16 August 2017, https://palestinesquare.com/2017/08/16/first-death-caused-by-sea-pollution-in-gaza/.

In the wake of the strike, Israeli authorities reneged on at least 1 of their reported concessions. According to the Ma'an News Agency and to WAFA, the PA's official news agency, Israeli forces turned back (7/2) 8 Palestinian families from Hebron on their way to visit incarcerated relatives. The prisoners concerned had all taken part in the strike at Nafha Prison, and the Israelis revoked (7/3) all 37 of the families' entry permits. The IPS did not comment, and it was unclear whether the move reflected a new policy, a one-off denial, or if it would affect the families of all prisoners who participated in the strike.

Also of note: Hamas accused (6/29) the Israeli govt. of suspending the family visitation rights of Hamas-affiliated prisoners from Gaza. The IPS didn't comment on the allegation, but an ICRC spokesperson reported (7/10) that only 14 Palestinians had been allowed to visit imprisoned relatives that day, down from 80 the previous week. It was unclear why the Hamas-affiliated prisoners were being targeted, but suspensions were concurrent with reports of indirect Hamas-Israel negotiations on a possible prisoner swap (see "Prisoner Swap" below), leading to speculation that the two were connected.

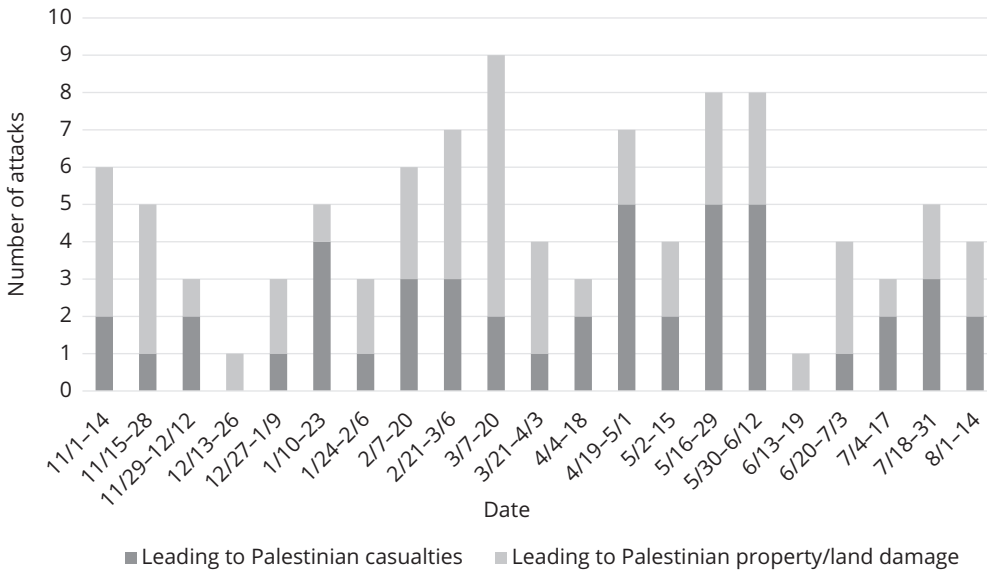
PRISONER SWAP

Ever since Israel's 50-day war on Gaza in the summer of 2014 (see *JPS* 45 [1–3]), there have been periodic reports and rumors of talks between Hamas and Israel about a prisoner swap. As at this writing, Israel seeks the return of the remains of 2 IDF soldiers who died during the fighting and of 2 Israeli civilians who had strayed into Gaza afterwards, while Hamas is intent on the release of the greatest number possible of Palestinians in Israeli custody. In late 6/2017 and early 7/2017, reported talks were apparently inconclusive.

The first reports emerged on 6/26 when Israel's Channel 1 relayed that an unnamed third party, widely assumed to be Egypt, was mediating a new round of talks, and that these had moved forward since Hamas's incoming deputy leader, Yahya Sinwar, led a delegation to Cairo on 6/4–12. A couple of weeks later, the Lebanese newspaper *Al-akhbar* reported (7/8) that the 2 sides were close to a preliminary confidence-building agreement ahead of a broader deal. Prior to the 2011 prisoner swap, when Israel freed 1,027 Palestinians in exchange for the release of IDF soldier Gilad Shalit (see *JPS* 41 [2]), Hamas and Israel had followed a similar process, with Hamas providing a video showing that Shalit was alive in exchange for Israel releasing 25 female Palestinian prisoners. A senior Hamas official downplayed (7/8) the latest reports, however: "In recent times there have been several attempts to mediate between Israel and Hamas about the prisoners. However, we made it clear that we do not intend to start negotiations until the 58 prisoners from the Shalit deal who were freed and rearrested are released." Israel was only willing to discuss the release of 27 of these prisoners, according to 2 Palestinian sources.

The 7/8 report prompted the Israeli govt.'s first official response. DM Lieberman confirmed (7/9) that indirect talks were ongoing and that various parties were involved "such as Egypt and others," but he reaffirmed that the Israeli govt. had "no intention of ever holding direct negotiations with the murderers in Hamas."

After delegations from both sides met in Cairo in mid-7/2017, *Al-akhbar* reported (7/19) that Israel had put forth a new proposal: in exchange for video proof of the condition of Israeli civilians allegedly being



SOURCE: OCHA's biweekly reports from 11/2016 to 8/2017. See UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Protection of Civilians," 17 August 2017, https://www.ochaopt.org/reports/protection-of-civilians.

Figure 2. Israeli settler attacks.

held in Gaza, Israel offered to release a number of Palestinian women, children, and parliamentarians. However, Hamas had reportedly already rejected the offer. Various sources close to the talks said that while they had made progress, it was unclear how close they were to an actual agreement by the end of the quarter.

SETTLER-RELATED VIOLENCE

There were 33 recorded incidents of settler-related violence in the West Bank and East Jerusalem between 5/16 and 8/14, down slightly from 34 last quarter, according to OCHA. Settlers damaged Palestinian homes or other property in 15 instances while the other 18 led to Palestinian injuries (see figure 2 and Chronology for details). There was 1 major incident of Palestinian violence against Israeli settlers. Omar al-Abed, a Palestinian from Kaubar village northwest of Ramallah, slipped (7/21) into the Halamish settlement late at night, stabbed 3 settlers to death, and seriously injured a 4th before an off-duty IDF soldier shot and injured him. Earlier in the day, al-Abed had stated in a Facebook post: "I'm going to die for al-Aqsa," referencing the controversial new Israeli security measures at Haram al-Sharif (see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above).

DEMOLITIONS AND DISPLACEMENT

Israeli forces demolished fewer Palestinian buildings in the West Bank and East Jerusalem this quarter than in the previous period. Continuing a yearlong trend, they destroyed 55 Palestinian structures between 5/16 and 8/14, according to OCHA, down from 73 last quarter

(see Chronology for details), including 29 in the West Bank and 26 in East Jerusalem. Four of these demolitions were by way of collective punishment for Palestinian attacks on Israelis (8/10 [3] and 8/15). As a result of the decreased rate of demolitions, the number of Palestinians displaced also fell from 205 last quarter to 56 in the current quarter.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

DISCORD AND STRIFE

Rather than provide a foundation for future presidential elections, as originally intended, last quarter's scuttled municipal elections further exacerbated the rift between the Palestinian factions. With Hamas refusing to participate and Gaza excluded, the fiasco formed the backdrop of increasingly acrimonious relations between the Ramallah-based leadership and Hamas this quarter, with both sides jockeying for power.

Further to last quarter's electricity rationing and salary cuts to Gaza-based former PA employees (see "Gaza Electricity Crisis" and *JPS* 46 [4]), Pres. Abbas ratcheted up the pressure on Hamas to relinquish control of the territory this quarter. First, the PA suspended its monthly stipends to 277 Hamas-affiliated prisoners in Gaza, according to a Palestinian official on 6/4. Abbas came under pressure from Israel and the U.S. to end the PA's monthly payments to Palestinians convicted of serious crimes against Israelis and to the families of "martyrs," i.e., Palestinians killed in confrontations with Israeli forces (see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above). Second, the PA withheld the 6/2017 salaries of 37 Hamas-affiliated mbrs. of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), a move that PLC dep. speaker Ahmed Bahar called (7/10) a "declaration of war" in a statement to Safa Palestinian Press Agency. The PA provided no official explanation for either decision, and it remained unclear what the new policies entailed or how long they were intended to last.

Meanwhile, Abbas began to crack down on public dissent. PA atty. gen. Ahmad Barrak blocked (6/15) 11 websites affiliated with Hamas and other rivals, alleging that these violated regulations banning defamation and misinformation. Abbas himself then approved (6/24) a new so-called electronic crimes bill, which went into effect in early 7/2017.* According to Social Media Exchange, which monitors digital rights in the Arab world, the new legislation: required internet service providers to cooperate with PA intelligence agencies; empowered PA officials to block any website and record online conversations; allowed violators of "public morality" online to be imprisoned for a year and fined the equivalent of $7,000; and made online acts deemed to undermine "national unity" or "social harmony" punishable by 3–15 years of hard labor. By the end of the quarter, the PA had blocked 30 more websites and arrested at least 5 journalists under the new law, according to the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (8/11).

The PA's next move against Hamas focused on the health sector, and had immediate, and deadly, consequences for ailing Palestinians in Gaza. According to data from Physicians for Human Rights–Israel (PHRI), the PA began blocking or delaying Gazan patients from

* For more, see Dorgham Abusalim, "Palestinian Authority Polices the Internet," *Palestine Square*, 11 August 2017, https://palestinesquare.com/2017/08/11/palestinian-authority-polices-the-internet/.

traveling to Israel or the West Bank for treatment in 4/2017 (*Haaretz*, 6/26). Palestinians needing medical treatment unavailable in Gaza require permits from Israel and referrals from the PA, and the PA cut the funding required by patients needing to travel, after having provided the bulk of such funding alongside a number of humanitarian programs. According to PHRI, the PA was only approving around 10 of the 120 daily requests for referrals in 5–6/2017, and only a few dozen were approved in 5/2017, down from an average of over 2,000 per mo. in 2016.

After the PA Ministry of Health denied (6/26) making any changes to the referrals policy, Hamas got involved. A spokesperson from the parallel Hamas-run ministry in Gaza said (6/27) that 3 infants born with life-threatening conditions had died that week as a result of the PA's conduct. The spokesperson alleged that another 11 Gazans had died for the same reasons since the beginning of 2017. "What is going on is a crime . . . and the international community and human rights organizations must intervene immediately to stop this behavior," a doctor at al-Shifa Hospital declared (6/27).

In the wake of these allegations, Ramallah issued a measured response. Dr. Bassem al-Badri, the PA official responsible for the medical referral program, argued (6/28) that Israel was to blame for the infants' deaths because it had only approved approximately 50% of travel permit requests, adding that it rejects hundreds of such applications every mo. with no explanation. Later in the quarter, the World Health Organization (WHO) confirmed al-Badri's assertion, when it published a study showing that Israeli authorities had approved only 47.2% of the 2,282 requests for permits in 5/2017.

The PA couldn't escape the story of the dead infants, however. After COGAT stated (6/28) that it had received no request from the PA to permit the travel of the 3 infants from Gaza, international pressure ramped up and the PA yielded ground. According to Israeli and Palestinian sources on 6/29, the PA Ministry of Health pledged to lift its restrictions and resume funding medical referrals beginning on 7/2 (*Haaretz*, 6/29).

Once the medical referral controversy had subsided, the PA went back on the offensive and sent into early retirement (7/4) some 6,145 former employees in Gaza as PM Hamdallah called (7/4) on Hamas to allow the PA to take control of Gaza. The same day, a PA spokesperson said that any "previous procedures and any possible future procedures in this regard" were only temporary, and that Abbas would roll them back as soon as Hamas conformed with his reconciliation proposal, first outlined last quarter. Abbas called for Hamas to dissolve the new administrative comm. it formed earlier in 2017 (see *JPS* 46 [3]), allow the PA to take control of the territory, and agree to a new round of elections in both the West Bank and Gaza.

Under pressure from Abbas, and given its increasingly precarious position in the region (see "Regional Affairs" below), Hamas sought to buttress its position by eliciting the support of archrival and exiled Fatah leader Mohammad Dahlan. From his base in Abu Dhabi, Dahlan had in recent years been trying to reenter Palestinian politics, notably by facilitating reconstruction projects in Gaza (see *JPS* 44 [4] and 45 [1]). Since Dahlan had led the Fatah forces that attacked Hamas after the latter's 2006 election sweep in Gaza, his volte-face came as something of a surprise. According to senior Hamas official Khalil al-Hayya (6/18), it was the Egyptian govt. that had facilitated a

deal between Dahlan and his erstwhile rivals during the 6/4–12 visit to Cairo by a Hamas delegation.

Details of the Hamas-Dahlan deal emerged on 6/26 when a document, titled "A National Consensus Document for Trust-Building," leaked to Ma'an News Agency. It included 15 provisions for ameliorating conditions in Gaza, and would see Dahlan appointed to lead a govt. in the territory, with Hamas retaining control of the Ministry of Interior and Internal Security.

Neither side confirmed the veracity of the document, but several related developments in late 6/2017 and 7/2017 pointed to growing Hamas-Dahlan cooperation: Samir Mashrawi, Dahlan's top lieutenant, was set to return to Gaza soon according to a senior Hamas official (7/3); the Associated Press (7/20) reported that Dahlan had opened a Gaza office in 6/2017 to administer $2 m. in new aid he had secured from his United Arab Emirates (UAE) patrons; on 7/20, Hamas allowed more than 2,000 Palestinians to gather in Gaza City for a pro-Dahlan rally; and in a rare interview he gave AP on 7/22, Dahlan stated that his deal with Hamas was designed to revive Palestinian national institutions such as the PLC and to pave the way for a new consensus govt. He reaffirmed that he had no desire to become PA pres., and invited Abbas to lead the new reconciliation efforts but added, "We are not going to wait for him [to make a move] forever." Also of note: Dahlan announced that Egypt would be opening the Rafah border crossing more frequently and that the UAE had pledged to fund a new $100-m. power plant in Gaza in the context of his deal with Hamas.

Dahlan's reemergence spurred Abbas to formulate a new reconciliation offer. On 8/1, the Arab press reported that PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj had conveyed to Hamas officials the broad outline of a potential agreement by telephone on 7/27. The framework envisioned return of the electricity supply in Gaza to pre-crisis levels and allowing Gazan banks to resume trading in foreign currency; in exchange, Hamas would publicly renounce its reported power-sharing agreement with Dahlan and dismantle its civil service bureaucracy in Gaza. Hours before a Hamas delegation was to meet with Abbas in Ramallah, Hamas responded publicly by demanding (8/1) that the PA commit to keeping on all employees of the Hamas-run govt. in Gaza and to allow a new leadership group, including representatives of Hamas and the Islamic Jihad Movement in Palestine (PIJ), to take control on an interim basis until a new round of elections could be held.

Various offers and counteroffers, both official and unofficial, appeared in the press throughout the end of the quarter. Abbas reportedly restored the monthly stipends of more than 50 Hamas-affiliated former prisoners in Gaza but there were no official announcements by the end of the quarter, and the reconciliation process appeared at a standstill.

NEW POLICY AGENDA

At a conference in Ramallah on 5/22, the PA PM launched a new National Policy Agenda (NPA) for 2017–22, with strategies and goals—national reconciliation, economic independence, statehood, etc.—meant to "provide direction and reinforce resilience as we advance along the inevitable path to a free, independent, and prosperous state of Palestine," Hamdallah said. UN Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov hailed the NPA as "an ambitious policy agenda for Palestine that articulates a strong, clear vision for the

Palestinian people." Others, however, viewed the NPA's ambitious goals as a potential liability. Writing for the Middle East Monitor on 5/23, Ramona Wadi noted that many of these were contingent on Israeli concessions. She argued that the NPA conference only served "as another public relations opportunity . . . for yet another façade depicting the illusion of progress."

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data come from a poll conducted by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research (PCPSR) between 6/29–7/1/2017. The results are based on a survey of 1,200 Palestinians from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip. The complete poll, the 64th in a series, can be found at www.pcpsr.org. The text has been edited for clarity.

1. **The PA has stopped making payments to cover the costs of electricity that Israel supplies to the Gaza Strip and has threatened to take additional similar steps in order to coerce Hamas [into a reconciliation deal]. Do you support or oppose the PA stopping payments to cover electricity costs?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Support	10.4%	7.2%	16.7%
2) Oppose	84.2%	86.7%	79.5%
3) Don't know/not applicable	5.3%	6.1%	3.8%

2. **Do you think this step and similar other steps that might be taken by the PA against Hamas will succeed or fail in ending the split?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Will succeed	13.3%	9.1%	21.6%
2) Will fail	78.0%	81.5%	71.2%
3) Don't know/not applicable	8.6%	9.4%	7.2%

3. **Media reports indicate that Hamas and [exiled Fatah leader] Dahlan, with Egyptian sponsorship, have agreed to form a joint admin. or govt. . . . [See "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" above.] If these reports are accurate, do you expect the agreement to lead to the complete separation between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) No	38.1%	34.6%	44.9%
2) Yes	50.4%	50.8%	49.8%
3) Don't know/not applicable	11.4%	14.6%	5.4%

4. **Are you for or against such an agreement?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) For	39.7%	28.5%	61.4%
2) Against	48.3%	56.6%	32.2%
3) Don't know/not applicable	12.0%	14.9%	6.4%

5. **Last month, Hamas released a new document expressing its principles and political positions [see *JPS* 46 (4)]. The document is seen by some as a replacement for the Hamas Charter first released nearly 30 years ago after the eruption of the First Intifada. If you have heard about the new document, tell us what you think of it: Does it maintain the basic and historic positions and principles of Hamas, or does it differ from them?**

	Total	West Bank	Gaza Strip
1) Did not hear about it	52.7%	63.6%	31.5%
2) Maintains the former basic positions and principles	19.5%	11.8%	34.4%
3) Differs from former basic positions and principles	20.5%	16.1%	29.1%
4) Don't know/not applicable	7.3%	8.5%	4.9%

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Cairo was in a unique position this quarter at the nexus of otherwise marginally related trends. On the one hand, Pres. Abdel Fattah al-Sisi was working with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Bahrain to boycott Qatar over its alleged support for so-called terrorist groups, including Hamas (see "Regional Affairs" below). On the other hand, al-Sisi saw an opportunity to advance his regional agenda in a new round of negotiations with the group.

With Hamas under increasing pressure from PA pres. Abbas (see "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" above), the group's new second-in-command, Yahya Sinwar, took over the Egypt portfolio this quarter, leading a delegation to Cairo on 6/4. According to a Hamas spokesperson, the 2 sides would discuss Egypt's role in improving humanitarian conditions in Gaza, specifically the need to open the Rafah border crossing more often. Cairo had kept the crossing largely closed since Islamist fighters in n. Sinai, many of whom later took on the mantle of Sinai Province of the Islamic State (SPIS), launched a major attack on Egyptian forces in 10/2014. Hamas's relations with Cairo were already strained before then with the Egyptian army's overthrow of then pres. Mohamed Morsi in 2013 causing the initial rupture (see *JPS* 43 [1])—but the Islamists' attack and the ensuing counterinsurgency created a raft of new travel restrictions in Sinai and fostered Israeli-bred suspicions of Hamas involvement. After 9 days of talks, the delegation returned to Gaza on 6/12. "All the shared issues have been studied in a serious and deep way with our Egyptian brothers," a Hamas source said (6/12).

Although neither side officially announced a breakthrough or disclosed specific details about the talks, rumors and unconfirmed reports proliferated in the Arab media. On 6/12 *Asharq Al-Awsat* reported that the Egyptian authorities offered to increase the supply of electricity to Gaza and to open the Rafah crossing more frequently in exchange for Hamas releasing 17 men wanted by the Egyptian govt., increasing security along the Gaza-Egypt border, stopping alleged weapons smuggling into Sinai, and supplying information on the movement of armed fighters between Sinai and Gaza.

Hamas's conduct in the wake of the delegation's visit to Cairo indicated that the movement was on board with the rumored deal. On 6/13, the Hamas-run Ministry of Interior and Internal Security recommended a series of procedures to "enhance the state of security at the s. border with Egypt." Two weeks later, Hamas announced (6/28) that it was implementing the recommendations, including the establishment of a 100 m "buffer zone" and the installation of new watchtowers and cameras along the border. Dep. Minister of Interior and Internal Security Tawfiq Abu Naim said (6/28) the new measures had been taken in order to secure "control of the s. border and

to completely prevent infiltration and smuggling" and that they were meant as a "reassuring message" to Egypt. "The national security of Egypt is the national security of Gaza," he added. Around the same time there were other signs of growing cooperation between Egypt and Hamas, including Egyptian shipments of fuel to the Gaza power plant and the reemergence of exiled Fatah leader Dahlan in Cairo (see "Gaza's Electricity Crisis" and "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" above).

After another delegation visited Cairo (7/2) to build on the 6/4–12 talks, a Hamas spokesperson confirmed (7/2) that relations had reached a "positive turning point," and that Hamas was implementing several procedures agreed to in 6/2017. Then, in his first major speech as the movement's new head, Ismail Haniyeh thanked (7/5) Egypt for its efforts to improve conditions in Gaza and announced that Cairo had agreed to more frequent openings of the Rafah crossing. "We have turned a new page in our relationship [with Egypt]," he added.

The budding Egypt-Hamas rapprochement was subsequently jeopardized, however. On 7/7, a suicide bomber detonated a car at an Egyptian checkpoint in Rafah, killing 10 Egyptian soldiers and injuring 16 others. In their search for accomplices, the Egyptian army killed 40 armed fighters, including many affiliated with SPIS, and destroyed 6 vehicles in the area.

In addition to interrupting fuel deliveries to Gaza, the attack also gave Hamas's enemies an opening. The IDF's COGAT Mordechai claimed (7/8) that 4 former mbrs. of Hamas had participated in the clashes against the Egyptian army in Sinai on 7/7. "Hamas and Islamic State are 2 sides of the same coin," he said, referring to the largest Islamist group active in Sinai, SPIS. Mordechai also argued that their participation demonstrated that Hamas was not helping Egypt as much as it was "enabling the free passage of terrorist elements between Gaza and Sinai." Hamas's main rival, the Fatah-dominated PA, also sought to stymie the growing Hamas-Egyptian rapprochement. Abbas met al-Sisi on 7/9 to discuss the U.S.-led initiative (see "The Trump Initiative" above), regional developments, and Hamas. Details of their meeting were not disclosed, but a PA source said (7/9) the meeting was "successful" and that al-Sisi supported the "legitimate Palestinian leadership." After the meeting, senior Fatah official Azzam al-Ahmad contradicted some of the earlier Hamas reports on the agreement with Egypt. "The Rafah border crossing will not be opened in a regular manner without the official and legitimate border authority subordinate to [Abbas]," he said.

There were further reports of Hamas-Egyptian talks through the end of the quarter, but no further announcements. Although they had clearly made progress toward a broader understanding, the Egyptian authorities kept the Rafah crossing closed for all but 2 days this quarter, allowing a limited number of Muslim pilgrims to exit Gaza (8/14–15) on their way to Mecca.

JORDAN

Jordan played a key role in the crisis at Haram al-Sharif in 7/2017. Amman funds the Islamic Waqf, which led the 2-week boycott against the new Israeli security measures, and Jordan's King Abdullah was involved in the regional and international talks on resolving the crisis (see "The Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" above). A fatal shooting at the Israeli embassy compound in Amman further entrenched Jordan in the conflict, resulting in a standoff with the Israeli govt. at the height of the crisis.

In a residential building used by embassy staff on 7/23, an Israeli security guard shot and killed 2 Jordanian civilians. The circumstances of the shooting were contested. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs endorsed the action, saying that the guard was defending himself from a politically motivated stabbing attack. It was later reported that one of those killed, a 17-year-old, was delivering furniture, while the other, a 51-year-old orthopedic surgeon, was the apartment owner. Some witnesses alleged that the incident stemmed from a dispute over payment. Meanwhile, the Israeli govt. refused to allow the Jordanian police to interrogate the guard, citing diplomatic immunity. After hundreds of Jordanians came out to protest the killing, the Israeli cabinet decided (7/23) to evacuate all 30 embassy staffers for fear of anti-Israel riots and reprisals. The Jordanian authorities, however, refused to allow the guard to leave the country without a proper interrogation.

The Israeli govt. deployed Shin Bet chief Nadav Argaman to Amman to negotiate the next day, and he secured the return of the entire embassy staff to Israel that night, including the guard. Abdullah spoke with Netanyahu by phone on 7/24 as well. According to an Israeli official, the Jordanian police took down the guard's statement about the incident before he left the country, but they were not allowed to question him fully.

The resolution did not sit well with the Jordanian govt., particularly after Netanyahu personally welcomed the guard home to Israel on 7/24. Abdullah called (7/27) Netanyahu a "political showoff" and said his embrace of the guard was "provocative and destabilizes security and encourages extremism in the region." Abdullah also said that Israel's response to the crisis would directly affect bilateral relations. Jordan's atty. gen., Akram Masadeh, announced (7/27) that he intended to pursue the case in international courts, while the Jordanian authorities informed (7/26) the Israeli govt. that the Israeli embassy would not be allowed to reopen unless Israel carried out a full investigation, as required under the Vienna Convention.

Under increasing pressure from Jordan, Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced (7/28) an investigation of the incident and promised to brief Jordanian officials on the process. Israel's Ministry of Justice then announced (8/4) a preliminary investigation to be overseen by the state prosecutor's office. A Jordanian spokesperson called (8/4) the investigation a "step in the right direction," and a senior Jordanian official later said (8/11) Amman would wait to see what sort of legal action the Israelis might take before making a final decision on the reopening of the embassy.

SYRIA

The IDF continued to interfere in the Syrian civil war this quarter, particularly during one significantly violent week in late 6/2017. On 6/24, after 10 errant projectiles fired from Syria landed in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, Israeli fighter jets launched air strikes on the purported site of the projectile fire, reportedly killing 2 Syrian soldiers. The IDF attacked sites in Syria in response to errant fire on each of the next 2 days, but there were no reports about injuries or damage. On 6/27, the IDF declared an area along the border a closed military zone, barring most civilians from entering (although farm workers were allowed to remain). They reopened the area on 6/28, and 3 more days of minor cross-border violence followed, with no reports of injuries or damage.

A few weeks later, news broke that Israeli diplomats were in talks with Russian, U.S., and

Jordanian interlocutors about another possible cease-fire in the Syrian conflict. On the sidelines of a meeting of the G20 on 7/7, U.S. pres. Trump and Russian pres. Vladimir Putin announced an agreement that beginning on 7/9, Russian troops, in coordination with U.S. and Jordanian forces, would enforce a cease-fire in 3 regions of southwestern Syria nr. the borders with Israel and Jordan. U.S. secy. of state Tillerson called (7/7) the deal "our first success."

Although Israeli diplomats were involved in the talks leading to the agreement, the Israeli govt. was displeased with the result. Israeli PM Netanyahu criticized (7/16) it for allowing Iranian and Hezbollah forces to continue operating in southwestern Syria. "The agreement as it is now is very bad," another senior Israeli official said. "It doesn't take almost any of Israel's security interests [into account] and it creates a disturbing reality in s. Syria" (*Haaretz*, 7/16). In response to Netanyahu's public criticism, Russian FM Sergey Lavrov said (7/17) that Russia and the U.S. would do what they could to address Israeli concerns. Two weeks later, after further talks, Tillerson updated (8/2) the U.S. position, saying that the U.S. would only cooperate with Russia in Syria if Iranian forces left the country: "They must leave and go home, whether those are [Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)] forces or whether those are paid militias, foreign fighters, that Iran has brought into Syria in this battle." Negotiations between all parties continued through the end of the quarter.

LEBANON

Persistent tensions along the Israel-Lebanon border led to a minor diplomatic conflict in late-6/2017. The dir. of Israel's military intelligence, Maj. Gen. Herzl Halevi, on 6/22, and later other Israeli officials, accused Hezbollah of building new observation posts and establishing new weapons production facilities in s. Lebanon with Iranian funding. "We cannot remain indifferent to this and we don't," Halevi said. He also called on the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), the peacekeeping unit established in 1978 to monitor the Israel-Lebanon border, to take action. A UN spokesperson responded the next day: "UNIFIL has not observed any unauthorized armed persons at the location or found any basis to report a violation." The UN response did nothing to quell Israeli fears about Iranian activities in Lebanon, however. On 6/24, Israeli media reported that the govt. had sent backchannel messages to Tehran, via European diplomats, conveying how seriously Tel Aviv was taking the new alleged weapons production facilities. "[We] won't tolerate it," the messages reportedly said.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

This quarter witnessed a series of machinations that threatened regional stability and escalated the conflict between Iran and its growing sphere of influence, on the one hand, and the Saudi Arabia-led Sunni axis, on the other. While several Gulf States pursued a boycott against Qatar, other key players included Israel, Internet bots, multi-billion-dollar weapons deals and a U.S. presidential Twitter storm that further convoluted the situation. A U.S. pro-Israel organization may also have had a behind-the-scenes hand in instigating the crisis. The resulting polarization marginalized the Palestinians, particularly Hamas, and had wide-ranging effects across the Middle East.

The catalyst came on 5/24 when explosive statements attributed to Qatar's emir Shaykh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani appeared on

Protesters waving Turkish and Palestinian flags attend a solidarity demonstration in Istanbul protesting Israeli measures at Haram al-Sharif in Jerusalem. (30 July, Yasin Akgul/AFP/Getty Images)

Qatari state media that praised Iran, Hamas, and Israel. "Iran represents a regional and Islamic power that cannot be ignored and it is unwise to face [*sic*] up against it," al-Thani was quoted as saying; he then allegedly characterized Qatar's relations with Israel as "good," described Hamas as the official representative of the Palestinian people, and said Doha had "tensions" with the Trump admin. The comments were unusual for al-Thani, who was under renewed pressure from Saudi Arabia and the U.S. to end Qatar's relationships with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood (see "Saudi Arabia" below).

Qatar officials immediately rejected the news reports, saying they were false and that their news agency and social media sites had been hacked. FBI agents sent to the tiny nation to investigate the source behind the alleged intrusion backed up that claim. They posited Russians were responsible, using methods similar to those they utilized during the U.S. presidential elections in 2016. Additionally, the *Washington Post* reported the presence of significant number of "bots," automated social media accounts used to forward a particular agenda, attacking Qatar and its news agencies on Facebook and Twitter (6/7). Bots were used to plant fake news stories during the U.S. presidential election season. However, later U.S. intelligence reports pointed to the UAE as the instigator of the fake news stories, but left open the possibility that it could have contracted out the hacking scheme. The UAE's amb. to the U.S., Yousef al-Otaiba, called (7/16) the report "false" and reiterated the Saudi-led bloc's complaints instead: "What is true is Qatar's behavior. Funding, supporting, and

enabling extremists from the Taliban to Hamas and Qaddafi. Inciting violence, encouraging radicalization, and undermining the stability of its neighbors."

In response to the imbroglio, the UAE blocked several Qatari sites and television channels from broadcasting in its territory. While the Qataris were denying the initial story, the state news agency's Twitter account posted a new story alleging that Qatari FM Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani had recalled Doha's ambassadors from Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE. By the time Doha could deny that report, Saudi Arabia had joined (5/25) the UAE in blocking all Qatari media, including Al Jazeera.

To make matters more confusing, at the same time Qatar ordered some mbrs. of Hamas to leave the country according to Al Mayadeen (6/3), a group called GlobalLeaks released a trove of hacked emails from the account of UAE ambassador to the U.S. Yousef al-Otaiba indicating that the well-connected diplomat was working closely with the neoconservative, pro-Israel think tank Freedom for Defense of Democracies, on the issue of Iran. The think tank is funded by Sheldon Adelson, a major supporter of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (Intercept, 6/3). Qatar has been Hamas's chief patron since the group's former leader Khalid Mishal fled Damascus and the Syrian civil war for Doha in 2011. The Qatari govt. is also a principal supporter of the effort to rebuild Gaza after the Israeli assault in 2014 (see *JPS* 44 [1, 2]), and this move left the reconstruction plans in limbo. Although a Hamas spokesperson denied the reports on 6/4, other Palestinian sources confirmed (6/5) that a number of Hamas officials had dispersed to various countries, including Lebanon, Malaysia, and Turkey.

Hamas's predicament was exacerbated on 6/5 when Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Bahrain, and the UAE severed economic ties with Qatar and withdrew their diplomatic staffs from Doha. They cited the Qatari govt.'s support for militant groups, including Hamas, and its alleged failure to help protect Saudi Arabia from terrorists. Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs called (6/5) these moves "unjustified" and said they were "based on claims and allegations that have no basis in fact."

The conflict heightened long-standing tensions between Qatar and Saudi Arabia, and mirrored a similar incident in 2014 when Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and the UAE recalled their ambassadors from Doha over its ties with the Muslim Brotherhood and alleged Qatar was using its state-funded media to interfere in their internal affairs. They ultimately returned their ambassadors 8 mos. later when the Qatari govt. agreed, under the auspices of the Gulf Cooperation Council, not to undermine their "interests, security, and stability." Given the harsh rhetoric surrounding these developments, coupled with the apparent breakdown of the 2014 agreement, observers speculated that this round of conflict would last longer and have more deleterious effects.

As in 2014, the schism prompted other regional powers to choose sides and form alliances. The Maldives, the internationally recognized govt. in Yemen, and the govt. based in e. Libya all severed ties with Doha on 6/5. Jordan threw its lot in with this growing bloc on 6/6, downgrading ties with Doha and closing down Al Jazeera's office in Amman. A senior Iranian official denounced (6/5) the Saudi strategy, saying "it is not a way to resolve crisis." The Iranian govt. also started sending shipments of food and other aid to Qatar to alleviate reported shortages.

The U.S response appeared contradictory and confusing, given the U.S. military's sizable presence in Qatar, where the Al-Udeid air base houses more than 11,000 U.S. and coalition troops (6/16). And just days after Trump accused the country of terrorism, the U.S. sold Qatar F-15 fighter jets worth $12 b. (6/16). "The $12-b. sale will give Qatar a state-of-the-art capability and increase security cooperation and interoperability between the U.S. and Qatar," the Pentagon indicated in its statement. A few weeks earlier, during Trump's visit to the Middle East, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia had finalized a $110 b. weapons deal. A White House spokesperson insisted (6/6) that the admin. was communicating with all parties in an effort to "resolve issues and restore cooperation," but Trump openly sided with the Saudis, tweeting (6/6) that his recent trip to Saudi Arabia was "already paying off." He toed the Saudi line throughout the conflict, accusing (6/9) Qatar of funding terrorism "at a very high level" and condemning Qatar's "extremist ideology." Meanwhile, other U.S. officials tacked closer to the Qatari position. Secy. of State Tillerson said (6/9) that the Saudi-led boycott was "hindering U.S. military actions in the region and the campaign against [the Islamic State (ISIS)]."

Soon after announcing the boycott, the Saudi-led bloc presented its terms for a resolution. "We want to see Qatar implement the promises it made a few years back with regard to its support of extremist groups, its hostile media, and interference in affairs of other countries," Saudi FM Adel al-Jubeir said (6/6), referencing the 2014 conflict. Qatar, for its part, started working with Kuwait, which had stepped in to mediate a resolution. "We believe such differences between sister countries must be resolved through dialogue," FM Al-Thani said (6/6).

Throughout the crisis, Hamas kept a low profile while also scrambling to maintain a modicum of regional support. On 6/7, the group issued a statement expressing "deep regret and disapproval" regarding al-Jubeir's demand that Qatar end its patronage of Hamas as a precondition for any resolution. Then, on 6/10, senior Hamas official Musa Abu Marzuq pledged that Hamas would not intervene in other Arab states' affairs "regardless of pressures or events." The group also announced (6/10) that its new head Ismail Haniyeh would soon lead a delegation to Iran. Although the trip was not explicitly linked to the boycott crisis, closer ties with Iran were considered as possibly helping replace any lost support from Qatar. At least 1 Qatari official said (7/11) that Doha had no intention of ending its support for reconstruction projects in Gaza, and the Qataris signed (7/11) a new agreement to fund the construction of 8 new residential buildings in the strip.

After 2 weeks of mediation, Kuwaiti diplomats conveyed (6/22) to their Qatari interlocutors a list of 13 demands and a 7/3 deadline to respond. The Saudi-led bloc demanded that Qatar: shut down the Al Jazeera media network and other Qatari-funded news outlets; downgrade ties with Iran; expel mbrs. of the IRGC in Qatar and cut off military ties with Iran; sever ties with Hamas, the Muslim Brotherhood, and all other so-called extremist groups; and align with the Saudi-led bloc in accordance with the 2014 agreement. Qatar rejected the demands on 6/24, and a spokesperson responded, "This list of demands confirms what Qatar has said from the beginning—the illegal blockade has nothing to do with combating terrorism, it is about limiting Qatar's sovereignty, and outsourcing our foreign policy." After the Saudi-led bloc extended their deadline to 7/5, the Qataris

again rejected the demands. The Egyptian, Saudi, UAE, and Bahraini FMs then met (7/5) in Cairo to formulate a new position. They agreed that the boycott would remain, but dropped the 13 demands, instead calling on Qatar to adhere to 6 broad principles, including a commitment to combat terrorism and to end all provocative and inciting acts. Qatar rejected those, too.

With no end in sight, the crisis between Qatar and the Saudi-led bloc continued through the end of the quarter, despite ongoing mediation efforts. Tillerson visited Doha on 7/11 for talks, and signed an agreement to strengthen Qatar's counterterrorism efforts.

As this conflictual regional dynamic played out, Israel exploited the situation by showing solidarity with the Saudi-led bloc. Various Israeli officials welcomed (6/5) the boycott of Qatar, and DM Lieberman said (6/5) that it presented new regional opportunities for Israel. Israeli leaders also have said that siding with the UAE is its best shot at minimizing Iran's influence in the area (6/3). The *Times* reported (6/17) that Israel and Saudi Arabia had begun negotiating the establishment of economic ties, citing unnamed Arab and U.S. sources. Such a rapprochement would mark a significant step toward formalizing the two countries' de facto alliance against Iran; however, sources close to the Saudi royal family said (6/17) that the report stemmed from wishful thinking within the Trump admin.

Also of note: PM Netanyahu met (6/12) with mbrs. of Israel's press office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Shin Bet to discuss the possibility of revoking Al Jazeera's license to operate in Israel. Nothing came of that conversation until the following mo., when Netanyahu posted (7/26) on Facebook that he had "several times appealed to law enforcement agencies demanding" the closure of the network's Jerusalem bureau on the grounds that it "continues to incite violence." He also pledged, "If this does not happen due to legal interpretation, I will work to enact the required legislation to expel Al Jazeera from Israel." At the close of the quarter, Israel's Communications Minister Ayoob Kara announced (8/6) plans to revoke the credentials of every Al Jazeera journalist working in Israel, pointing out that he had already asked cable and satellite networks to block the network's transmission.

SAUDI ARABIA

Kicking off his first international trip as U.S. president, Donald Trump visited Saudi Arabia on 5/20–22. He met with King Salman and the leaders of various other Arab states, called on "Muslim nations" to "take on the burden" of defeating terrorism, and signed an agreement to sell $110 b. in U.S. arms to Saudi Arabia over the next 10 years. According to a U.S. statement, "this package demonstrates, in the clearest terms possible, the U.S.'s commitment to our partnership with Saudi Arabia and our Gulf partners, while also expanding opportunities for American companies in the region, and supporting tens of thousands of new jobs in the U.S. defense industrial base." The arms deal, along with Trump's embrace of Salman, had immediate repercussions across the Middle East (see "Regional Affairs" above), including in Israel, where it stoked renewed fears about the regional balance of power. Despite a 5/23 White House statement pledging to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge in the Middle East, DM Lieberman noted (5/24) that he was "not at peace with" the Saudi arms deal as it accelerated the weapons race across the region. Netanyahu, for his part, touted Trump's

commitment to Israel's security and announced (5/24) that the U.S. had allocated an additional $75 m. to support joint U.S.-Israeli missile defense activities.

IRAN

Iranian pres. Hassan Rouhani was elected to a second term on 5/19, winning 58.6% of the vote in what many saw as a referendum on his reformist platform and Iran's 7/14/2015 nuclear deal with the P5+1 (the U.S., UK, China, Russia, France, and Germany). Before and after the election, however, Trump put the deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), under increasing scrutiny, straining U.S.-Iranian relations and reversing the diplomatic advances made by his predecessor, Barack Obama.

Instead of abandoning the JCPOA, as he promised on many occasions during his 2016 campaign, Trump put forth a new, contradictory posture, imposing new sanctions on Iran while affirming Tehran's compliance with the JCPOA. On 5/17, the Trump admin. formally extended the U.S. sanctions relief provided under the deal and, at the same time, the Treasury Dept. announced new sanctions on 2 senior Iranian defense officials, an Iranian company, a Chinese individual, and 3 Chinese companies for allegedly supporting Iran's ballistic missile program. An Iranian spokesperson denounced (5/17) the new sanctions, argued that they undermined the JCPOA, and said Iran would "continue its missile program with power and authority."

This pattern repeated later in the quarter. A day after Tillerson certified (7/17) to Congress, for a 2d time, that although Iran was "unquestionably in default of the spirit" of the JCPOA, it was abiding by the terms of the deal (see *JPS* 46 [4] for his 1st formal certification), the Treasury Dept. again announced (7/18) new sanctions, this time targeting 18 Iranian individuals and groups allegedly involved in the ballistic missile program. According to the Associated Press (7/17), the Trump admin.'s position reflected internal disagreements. Trump himself was eager to declare Iran in breach of the JCPOA and reimpose sanctions, but his aides reportedly convinced him to stick with the agreement and increase pressure on Iran in other ways. At the same time, senior admin. officials said (7/17) that it was highly unlikely that Trump would recertify Iran's compliance when the next deadline came up in 10/2017. According to senior admin. officials on 7/27, Trump wanted to push for inspections at certain Iranian military sites, which Tehran would likely refuse, thereby giving the U.S. grounds to abandon the deal and blame Iran. U.S. officials reportedly informed their European counterparts that they should prepare to reopen talks with Iran as well (*New York Times*, 7/30).

Meanwhile, hard-liners in both Iran and the U.S. prepared new initiatives that threatened to undermine the deal even before Trump had a chance to abandon it. After the 7/18 announcement of new U.S. sanctions, 211 of the 290 mbrs. of Iran's parliament backed the outline of a bill addressing "adventurist and terrorist" U.S. actions in the Middle East by increasing the funding for the IRGC and the ballistic missile program. In the same vein, Rouhani said (7/19) Tehran would respond to the new sanctions "appropriately," although he did not elaborate. In the U.S., the House of Representatives (7/25) and the Senate (7/27) overwhelmingly passed a bill directing the president to impose new sanctions against Iran's ballistic missile program, the sale of arms or related technical assistance to Iran, and the IRGC (see H.R. 3364 of 7/24/2017 at

congressionalmonitor.org for details). Trump signed the bill into law on 8/2.

The same day the Senate was passing the sanctions bill, Iranian forces conducted (7/27) a test launch of a satellite-carrying rocket. The U.S. Treasury promptly announced (7/28) new sanctions on 6 Iranian entities involved in the launch, all subsidiaries of the Shahid Hemmat Industrial Group, allegedly "central" to Iran's ballistic missile program. A spokesperson for Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded by saying (7/29) that Tehran would continue full-tilt with its missile program despite the sanctions and the "hostile, reprehensible, and unacceptable" U.S. legislative measure. On 8/13 Iran's parliament passed its own bill increasing funding for the IRGC and the ballistic missile program with each program slated to receive approximately $260 m. in new funding.

Rebuilding Relations with Hamas

Iran was a key patron of Hamas until 2011, when the relationship fell apart over the civil war in Syria. Now, with the Saudi-led bloc boycotting Qatar for its support for Hamas, the group renewed efforts courting the support of its former allies in Tehran. According to the Saudi-owned *Asharq Al-Awsat* on 5/30, representatives of Hamas and Iran had agreed to resume diplomatic relations, including Iranian financial support, during talks in Lebanon earlier in the mo. In a key concession, the Iranians reportedly gave up their demand for Hamas to publicly declare its support for Iran against Saudi Arabia. Later in the quarter, Iranian FM Mohammad Javad Zarif welcomed (8/7) a delegation of Hamas officials to Tehran. "[Iran is] ready to put aside all disagreements for the sake of supporting Palestine and the Palestinian people as well as the unity of the Muslim world," he said. In a statement, Hamas said that the visit "opened a new page in bilateral relations with Iran aimed at confronting the common enemy and supporting Palestine." No further details of their meeting were made available.

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

Intelligence Breakdown

Although U.S. pres. Trump was elected in part on his promise to strengthen relations with Israel, his unorthodox leadership style created a diplomatic incident at the very beginning of the quarter that called U.S.-Israeli intelligence sharing into question and undermined Trump's pro-Israel bona fides.

In a 5/10 meeting with Russia's amb. to the UN Sergey Kislyak and FM Lavrov at the White House, Trump boasted about classified intelligence from an ally, disclosing key details that are thought to have enabled the Russians to figure out the source (*Washington Post*, 5/15). Trump's disclosure galvanized the Democratic Party, who favored a more antagonistic stance toward Russia and pointed out that the intelligence-gathering network of the ally in question was likely compromised. The day after the story broke, current and former U.S. officials identified (5/16) said ally as Israel. Trump then tweeted (5/17) that he had the "absolute right" to share any information relevant to the fight against terrorism, while Israel's amb. to the U.S., Ron Dermer, insisted (5/17) that "Israel has full confidence in our intelligence-sharing relationship with the U.S. and looks forward to deepening that relationship in the years ahead under [Trump]."

In private, however, Israeli officials were clearly concerned about Trump's disclosure.

One source said (5/17) that Israel should reassess what information it passes to the U.S., adding, "We can't hand over our crown jewels." According to a U.S. defense official (5/19), Israeli intelligence were furious that Trump may have compromised a "vital source of information on [ISIS] and possibly Iran." Meanwhile, Dermer and other Israeli officials reportedly met with some of their U.S. counterparts on 5/16 to discuss the implications of the leak, with the goal of resolving the issue before Trump's arrival in Israel on 5/22.

Although the outcome of those talks was never made public, Israeli DM Lieberman said (5/24) that Israel made a "spot repair" to its intelligence-sharing systems with the U.S., effectively confirming that Israel was the source of the intelligence in question and that Trump's disclosure had compromised Israeli assets. "Everything we needed to work out with our friends in the U.S., we did," he added. "We looked into it and cleared the air on the entire issue, and there is no need to go on."

Global Terrorism

Conservatives in the U.S. again questioned the Trump admin.'s dedication to Israel when the State Dept. published its annual report on global terrorism on 7/19. The section on Israel and the oPt noted that Israel had been "a committed counterterrorism partner" in 2016 and that it "again faced terrorist threats from Iranian-support [*sic*] groups," as well as Hamas and PIJ. However, critics took issue with the report, citing the Israeli settlements and a "lack of hope" as the motivating factors for Palestinians' so-called acts of terror (the Israeli govt. maintained that PA incitement was a major motivator for such acts). Typifying their complaints, Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL) wrote (7/25) to Secy. of State Tillerson arguing that there were "numerous mischaracterizations" in the report and asked him to amend them. "At the highest level, the PA leadership directly incites, rewards, and, in some cases, carries out terrorist attacks against innocent Israelis," Roskam wrote, unabashedly adopting the Israeli govt. position. The pres. of the Zionist Organization of America, Morton Klein, then called (7/24) on Trump to fire Tillerson. "I don't remember last year's report, but when Obama was in the White House you almost expected the State Dept. to put out anti-Israel reports like this one. I didn't think they would have the chutzpah to do it under Trump."

Legislative Backlash against BDS

The legislative campaign to undermine the growing Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement suffered a setback this quarter in the debate over a bill introduced in Congress last quarter: the Israel Anti-Boycott Act (see S. 720 and H.R. 1697 of 3/23/2017). This bill would amend the 1979 Export Administration Act of 1979 (prohibiting U.S. persons from complying with or supporting a foreign boycott against a U.S. ally) to include boycotts against Israel and Israeli businesses called for by international institutions, such as the EU or UN, and specifically businesses operating in the settlements in the oPt. Furthermore, the bill would block U.S. persons from providing or requesting information on any person's business relationship with Israel, effectively prohibiting them from complying with a "blacklist" of companies doing business in Israel's settlements established by the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). The blacklist had been approved in 3/2016 and was being implemented this quarter (see *JPS* 45 [4]). By 7/2017, the bill's backers had collected a bipartisan group of 45 cosponsors in the Senate and 240 in the House of Representatives, and the bill had a good chance of passing.

That changed on 7/17, however, when the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) sent individual letters to mbrs. of the House of Representatives, urging them to oppose the bill on the grounds that it would "punish individuals for no reason other than their political beliefs." The ACLU letter also pointed out that any violations of the bill would be punishable by civil and criminal penalties of up to $1 m. and 20 years in prison. The liberal Zionist advocacy group J Street followed suit the next day, prompting the Senate version's original sponsors, Ben Cardin (D-MD) and Rob Portman (R-OH), to publish (7/21) an open letter defending the bill. "Nothing in the bill restricts constitutionally protected free speech or limits criticism of Israel and its policies," the letter read. "Instead, it is narrowly targeted at commercial activity and is based on current law that has been constitutionally upheld." Cardin also told (7/25) the Intercept that the ACLU's interpretation of the penalties in the bill was incorrect. "We thought we only dealt with civil penalties, not criminal penalties," he said. "But if that's not clear, we're willing to deal with these issues." Meanwhile, more than a dozen Democrats in the Senate and House were reconsidering their support for the bill, according to 2 congressional staffers on 7/24. "The language in the bill is confusing and doesn't clearly state what Cardin and Portman wrote in their [7/21] letter," one staffer added. "It wouldn't surprise me if a large number of Democrats will ask to amend this, making it much clearer that citizens expressing support for boycotts will not be punished for their political opinion."

In a rare move, Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY), one of the original cosponsors of the Senate version of the bill, did just that. After pro-Palestinian activist groups mobilized and questioned her at several town hall meetings in late 7/2017, she stated (7/31) that she could not support the bill unless changes were made to ensure free speech protections. On 8/1, she formally withdrew her sponsorship. With Gillibrand considered a potential Democratic presidential nominee in 2020, her defection was considered to have dealt a major blow to the bill's chances. (Throughout the affair, Gillibrand reaffirmed her strong opposition to the BDS movement in general, indicating that the broader crackdown was likely to continue unabated.)

The legislative campaign to undermine BDS continued apace outside Washington. On 5/18, the Jewish Telegraphic Agency reported that the governors of all 50 states had signed onto a pledge, organized by the American Jewish Comm., to oppose BDS. In addition, Nevada (6/2), Kansas (6/16), and North Carolina (7/27) became the 20th, 21st, and 22d states to put anti-BDS laws or executive orders on their states' books. Each of the new laws barred state entities from doing business with companies that engage in boycotts of Israel.

UNITED NATIONS

The U.S. and Israel mobilized against 2 Palestinian-backed measures at the annual meeting of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Comm., which took place in Kraków, Poland, on 7/2–12. Despite their efforts, the comm. passed (7/4), by 10–3, with 8 countries abstaining, a resolution retaining the Old City of Jerusalem on the list of World Heritage Sites that are in danger and condemning "the failure of the Israeli occupying authorities to cease the persistent excavations, tunneling, works, projects and other illegal practices in East Jerusalem, particularly in and around the Old City of Jerusalem, which are illegal under international law." Israeli officials roundly

denounced the resolution, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs called (7/4) it "another bizarre and irrelevant decision by UNESCO."

A few days later, the World Heritage Comm. voted on a much more contentious measure. Earlier in 2017, Palestinian diplomats formally requested (1/30) that the Old City of Hebron be placed on the "List of World Heritage in Danger." Registering a site on the list allows the comm. to provide special support from the World Heritage Fund, calls the world's attention to a precarious situation, and triggers annual UNESCO visits to assess any changes. Due to the high number of Israeli violations at the site, the Palestinians requested (3/9) that their 1/30 application be fast-tracked and considered in 7/2017. In the lead-up to the comm. meeting, U.S. amb. to the UN Haley argued (6/30) that placing Hebron on the list would risk undermining the seriousness that such an assessment should have. "The Tomb of the Patriarchs, which is sacred to 3 faiths, is under no immediate threat," she said. The Israelis, for their part, denied UNESCO's request to send a delegation to Hebron to study the situation and secured enough support from the comm. to allow the vote to proceed by secret ballot.

Ultimately, 12 countries voted (7/7) in favor of the measure and only 3 opposed it (6 abstained). "Today, Palestine and the world, through UNESCO, celebrate Hebron as part of world heritage, a value that transcends geography, religion, politics, and ideology," the PA's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced (7/7). Israeli PM Netanyahu called (7/7) it "another delusional UNESCO decision," announced a $1 m. cut to Israel's annual support for the UN, redirecting the money to fund a Jewish heritage museum in Kiryat Arba, a settlement nr. Hebron, and other projects around the city. The World Heritage Comm. vote brought to $9 m. since 12/2016 the sum total of retaliatory cuts to Israel's support for the UN (see *JPS* 46 [3, 4]).

NEW ZEALAND

Israel and New Zealand restored diplomatic relations this quarter, ending their mos.-long conflict over Wellington's support for UN Security Council Resolution 2334 in 12/2016 (see *JPS* 46 [2]). Netanyahu and New Zealand PM Bill English reportedly agreed to the rapprochement over the phone on 6/12. "The resolution expressed long-standing and international policy, and we stand by those positions," English said of the call. "What we do express regret about was the fact that it disrupted our relationship with Israel" (*Haaretz*, 6/14). Israel's amb. returned to Wellington and a delegation of New Zealand govt. officials, businesspeople, and academics visited Tel Aviv for Cyber Week in late 6/2017. Paul Ash, the director of English's cybersecurity office, led the delegation and said it was "great to see how a similarly sized economy has grown a world-leading capability and to be able to build direct connections with counterparts over here in the commercial, policy, and research communities" (Newsroom, 7/10).

CHINA

With Trump's peace initiative stalling, Chinese pres. Xi Jinping signaled a new willingness to enter the Palestinian-Israeli arena. During a joint press conference with PA pres. Abbas in Beijing, Xi pledged (7/18) to "ceaselessly" pursue peace between Israel and the Palestinians and presented a 4-point plan that included a 2-state solution based on the pre-1967 armistice lines and a halt to Israeli settlement growth. During Abbas's visit, Deputy FM Zhang Ming also told reporters that Beijing

planned to host a peace conference for Israel and the Palestinians by the end of 2017.

UNITED KINGDOM

Ahead of the UK's general election on 6/8, Jeremy Corbyn's Labour Party unveiled (5/16) a new manifesto, titled "For the Many, Not the Few," which laid out progressive policies across a wide range of issues, from higher education reform to nationalizing utilities. In a short section on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, the manifesto included a pledge to immediately recognize the state of Palestine should Labour win control of the govt. Labour went on to significantly outperform expectations in the 6/8 election, picking up 30 seats in Parliament.

AFRICA

Israeli PM Netanyahu continued his outreach efforts in Africa this quarter. On the sidelines of an Economic Community of West African States summit in Liberia on 6/4, he met with Senegalese pres. Macky Sall, and they agreed to resume full diplomatic relations. Senegal, like New Zealand, backed UNSCR 2334 in 12/2016, prompting Israel to withdraw its amb. from Dakar. According to Netanyahu's office, Sall promised to back Israel's bid for observer status in the African Union, resume joint projects suspended after the UNSC vote, and expand cooperation on security and agriculture. Israel pledged to send its amb. back to Dakar. While Netanyahu was in Liberia, he met with the leaders of 9 other African countries. "The purpose of this trip is to dissolve this majority, this giant bloc of 54 African countries that is the basis of the automatic majority against Israel in the UN and international bodies," the Israeli PM said (6/4). "Israel is returning to Africa in a big way."

Senegal and Guinea then sent their first-ever ambs. to Israel on 8/8. Talla Fall of Senegal was to work out of Egypt, and Amara Camara of Guinea would be based in Paris. Guinea and Israel had agreed to renew diplomatic relations in 7/2016 (see *JPS* 46 [1]).

Israel's new outreach program wasn't entirely successful, however. South Africa's governing party, the African National Congress (ANC), voted (7/4) to downgrade the country's diplomatic presence in Israel from an embassy to an "interest office" in protest of the Israeli occupation. The ANC's Western Cape branch called (7/5) it the "strongest and clearest position taken by the ANC in our history as a governing party."

DONORS

There were only a handful of announcements of new international aid for the Palestinians this quarter. UNRWA unveiled only 4 new donations: Mercy USA for Aid and Development contributed (6/20) $300,000 to support education programs for vision-impaired students in Gaza; Islamic Relief USA donated (6/9) $1.96 m. for refugee children in Gaza; the EU announced (6/7) an $82 m. (approximately $97 m.) donation to UNRWA's core budget in 2017; and the Kuwait Patients Helping Fund Society contributed (5/21) $200,000 for Gazans with noncommunicable diseases. The same day that the $82 m. donation was announced, the EU and UNRWA also agreed to administer EU support for the agency through 2020. The EU also contributed (8/3) approximately $24 m. to the payment of the PA's civil servants and pensioners in 7/2017, effectively subsidizing the continuing operation of govt. functions. Separately, the World Bank announced (7/28) $43 m. in new grants to improve living conditions and expand opportunities in the oPt, and Danish FM

Anders Samuelsen pledged (5/25) $80 m. to the PA in support of its National Policy Agenda (see "Intra-Palestinian Dynamics" above).

Also of note: During Samuelsen's visit to Israel and the oPt, PM Netanyahu asked (5/17) the Danish minister to stop supporting Palestinian organizations and NGOs that incite violence against Israelis and promote the BDS movement. When Samuelsen returned to Denmark, the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that it had begun a comprehensive review of its support for NGOs in the oPt (*Haaretz*, 5/30). "We must be sure that Danish aid helps to advance human rights in the Palestinian territories in a positive manner," the statement read. "It is possible that in the wake of the examination we will be forced to stop our support of a number of Palestinian organizations. Until this examination is complete we won't sign any new grants for Palestinian organizations." On 6/2, the ministry released another statement, this time announcing the suspension of an $8 m. pledge to support 24 Palestinian NGOs.

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

BOYCOTT, DIVESTMENT, SANCTIONS

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

BOYCOTT

"Those who struggle against oppression and for equality will always have our support," Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) dep. national director David Duhalde said in a press release announcing the DSA's nr.-unanimous 8/5 vote endorsing the BDS movement at its annual conference in Chicago. "Just as we answered the call to boycott South Africa during Apartheid, we stand in solidarity with the Palestinian people," he added. The DSA experienced explosive growth in 2016–17, partly on the strength of Sen. Bernie Sanders's (I-VT) presidential campaign, with membership quadrupling to more than 25,000.

In Spain, where pro-Israel activists were fighting several municipalities' endorsements of BDS in the courts, the lower house of Spain's parliament unanimously adopted (6/27) a resolution calling on the govt. to "recognize and defend the right of human rights activists from Palestine, Israel, and other countries, to engage in legal and peaceful activities, protected by the right to freedom of speech and assembly, such as the right to promote BDS campaigns." The left-wing party Podemos spearheaded the effort.

In Chile, Palestinian solidarity activists and students campaigned against planned events cosponsored by the Israeli Embassy and featuring a speaker from the Israel Antiquities Authority at Alberto Hurtado University and the University of Chile. Both universities ultimately canceled (6/5 and 6/7) the events.

In a blow to the academic boycott of Israel, the Modern Language Association (MLA) approved (6/1) a resolution calling on the professional association's 24,000-some mbrs. to refrain from boycott activities. The resolution stated that a boycott would contradict "the MLA's purpose to promote teaching and research on language and literature."

DIVESTMENT

In a major win for the BDS movement in the UK, Judge Ross Cranston of the High Court in London ruled (7/20) that a Conservative minister acted improperly when he attempted to use aspects of pension law to prevent local councils from divesting from companies complicit in the Israeli occupation. According to one of the claimants' lawyers, Jamie Potter, Cranston reminded "the govt. that it cannot improperly interfere in the exercise of freedom of conscience and protest in order to pursue its own agenda" (Electronic Intifada, 7/22).

The movement to divest was bolstered in the U.S. Christian community as well. With 98% approval, the delegates at the Mennonite Church USA's annual convention voted (7/6) to divest church holdings in companies profiting from the Israeli occupation. The church had failed to pass a similar resolution in 2015. Separately, the World Communion of Reformed Churches (WCRC) urged (7/7) its 225 mbr.-churches around the world to examine their investment relationships with respect to "human rights and the protections of international law" as they pertain to the Palestinian-Israeli relationship.