

UPDATE ON CONFLICT AND DIPLOMACY

16 FEBRUARY–15 MAY 2012

COMPILED BY MICHELE K. ESPOSITO

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

Highlights of the Quarter: *The stagnated peace process prompts an exchange of letters between Abbas and Netanyahu, internal Hamas disputes prevent progress toward national reconciliation, the International Criminal Court rejects the Palestinian Authority's request to join the Rome Statute, Palestinian prisoners stage a mass hunger strike to protest administrative detention, Kadima joins Netanyahu's coalition, Iran's nuclear program and escalating violence in Syria take center stage, AIPAC and other lobbies hold their annual conferences.*

THE PALESTINIAN-ISRAELI CONFLICT

This quarter, the Israeli-Palestinian track was marked by stagnation. The one significant exchange of letters that took place did little but reiterate the Israeli and Palestinian baseline positions and highlight the wide gaps that kept the sides from resuming talks. There was almost no further effort by either side to communicate or by the international community to spur the process forward.

The virtual suspension of activity on the Israeli-Palestinian peace track only subtly affected Israeli-Palestinian interaction on the ground. The Netanyahu administration accelerated efforts to strengthen settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, as well as Israel's control of West Bank area C (especially in the Jordan Valley). It also maintained tight restrictions on Palestinian movement and access, while allowing a few key easings as token gestures. The Israel Defense Force (IDF) maintained the tight siege on Gaza, closely monitored the West Bank, and generally maintained a show of force to remind Palestinians that it could intervene at

moment's notice (see Chronology for details). The Palestinian Authority (PA) in the West Bank and Hamas authorities in Gaza largely focused on day-to-day governance. Gaza's Islamic Jihad and Popular Resistance Committees (PRCs) took the lead in armed resistance against Israeli occupation by harassing southern Israel with largely ineffective low-grade rocket fire, whereas most Palestinian activists promoted nonviolent popular protests.

Peace Efforts on Hold as Other Global Events Take Precedence

As the quarter opened, talks hosted by Jordan in 1/2012 to explore reviving negotiations had ended without progress. While King Abdullah expressed hope (2/21) that another round of exploratory talks would be held soon in Amman, there was no discernible effort to organize them. Meanwhile, Israel was raising an alarm over Iran's nuclear threat, U.S. attention was focused on the 11/2012 presidential elections, the EU was preoccupied with a cascading economic crisis, and regional attention was on internal political changes brought about by the Arab Spring (especially the violence in Syria and

developments in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, and Yemen). The conditions prompted PA PM Salam Fayyad to comment (3/8) that “the biggest challenge we [Palestinians currently] face—apart from occupation—is marginalization.”

Meanwhile, the Israeli and Palestinian sides bickered over who was to blame for the failure of the exploratory talks and what had actually been offered. On 2/23, Israeli and Palestinian officials presented conflicting interpretations of the content of the written statement outlining Israel’s “guiding principles” on borders that the Israeli team had finally put in writing under stiff Quartet pressure following the 5th round of Amman talks on 1/25 (see Quarterly Update [QU] in *JPS* 163). Israeli officials said the principles “effectively mean a withdrawal from 90% of the West Bank,” similar to Israeli proposals at the 2008 Annapolis conference. Palestinian officials countered that Israel had only spoken in generalities and did not present maps or discuss percentages, stating: “If they wanted to say 90%, they should have said 90%.”

Abbas and Netanyahu Exchange Letters

By mid-3/2012, Abbas was contemplating sending a letter to Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu that he said would “sum up peace efforts, remind Israel of its peace obligations, and lay out the requirements for renewing negotiations” (*Guardian* 3/20). Amid rumors that Abbas was considering giving Israel a deadline to respond, after which he would resume Palestinian statehood efforts at the UN or possibly dissolve the PA, U.S. pres. Barack Obama phoned (3/20) him for the 1st time in 6 months to urge against “provocative actions.”

On 4/3, a senior Palestinian official speaking anonymously said that the two sides planned to meet soon, for the 1st time since the 1/25 session in Amman. That day (4/3), Netanyahu held a rare news conference to say that he still hoped to reach a peace deal based on a 2-state solution, adding: “I don’t want a binational state. . . . For as long as it depends on me, we will ensure the Jewish and democratic character of Israel.”

On 4/4, Israeli and Palestinian officials confirmed that a meeting between Netanyahu and Fayyad was planned after Passover ended on 4/13; the date was soon set for 4/17. Palestinian officials confirmed that Fayyad intended to hand Netanyahu the letter from Abbas, which as of 4/4 included Palestinian conditions for a return to negotiations (including a halt to settlement expansion and acceptance of 1967 lines as the basis for talks) and a list of Israeli actions undermining peace.

Prior to the meeting, Quartet officials met in Washington on 4/11 to discuss the status of the peace process, afterward issuing a bland pro forma statement calling on the two sides to resume talks as soon as possible and to avoid actions counterproductive to peace. Netanyahu responded (4/11) with a public appeal to Abbas to resume direct talks (last held in 9/2010; see QU in *JPS* 158) immediately, without preconditions. Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erakat declared (4/12) that talks would be meaningless without a halt to settlement construction and urged the Quartet to find “a mechanism to compel Israel to stop settlements and to act on the two-state solution.”

On 4/17, Erakat and PA intelligence chief Majid Faraj—not PM Fayyad—delivered the long-anticipated letter from Abbas to Netanyahu and his chief negotiator Yitzhak Molcho at a meeting in Jerusalem. Netanyahu pledged to respond in writing within 2 weeks. Afterward Erakat and Molcho issued a joint statement that “both sides hope that this exchange of letters will help find a way to advance peace.”

While the final version of Abbas’s letter was not made public, a draft (possibly final, but not confirmed) was leaked to the press on 4/15 (see Doc. B). That draft, in addition to reiterating Israel’s obligations and Palestinian baseline demands, stated that Israel’s failure to honor its obligations would lead the Palestinians to “seek the full and complete implementation of international law as it pertains to the powers and responsibilities of Israel as occupying power in all of the occupied Palestinian territory.” It also warned that “the Palestinian Authority—now stripped of all meaningful

authority—cannot continue to honor agreements while Israel refuses to even acknowledge its commitments. The PA is no longer as agreed and this situation cannot continue.” Fayyad’s last-minute decision not to deliver the letter himself gave rise to some speculation (see *Washington Post* [WP] 4/18). Some sources, noting his opposition to earlier drafts explicitly threatening to dissolve the PA in the absence of significant progress toward peace, suggested that it was because the implication remained. Others maintained that he had bowed out simply because he felt it inappropriate to meet with Netanyahu on the annual Prisoners Day commemoration, expressing solidarity with Palestinians in Israeli jails.

On 5/12, Israeli chief negotiator Molcho delivered PM Netanyahu’s formal written response to Abbas in Ramallah, which was not publicly released. Anonymous Israeli officials said it reiterated the call for the immediate resumption of talks without preconditions.

Settlement Expansion and Consolidation

While diplomacy with the Palestinians languished, Netanyahu’s government took several important steps regarding settlements that were clearly intended to solidify Israel’s control over territory that it intends to keep under final status.

As the quarter opened, Jewish settlers in the illegal outpost of Migron, built on private Palestinian land near Ramallah, faced the 3/31/12 deadline for evacuation that was ordered by Israel’s High Court in summer 2011 (see QU in *JPS* 161). On 3/11, all 49 families of Migron (some 300 settlers) signed a deal with the government to move the outpost to a plot of state land 2 miles away near Psagot settlement, where they would be allowed to build permanent homes, effectively creating a new Jewish settlement in Jerusalem’s environs. The government also pledged to use the existing Migron site for a “public service project” benefitting Israelis (there was no suggestion to return it to the Palestinian owners on whose behalf Peace Now had brought the case to the High Court). The government also appealed to the High Court to

delay the Migron evacuation until completion of the new settlement (target date 2015). The court rejected this on 3/25, but delayed the evacuation and dismantlement until 8/1/12. An anonymous Israeli official said (3/25) that the evacuated Migron settlers would likely move to the new site near Psagot immediately to begin building the permanent homes. A settlement supporter joked (3/25) that “people close to Netanyahu teased . . . that we should actually bless [Peace Now] because now we’re going to build another settlement which is not disputed legally, and it’s going to be much, much larger.”

In the wake of the Migron defeat, Israeli PM Netanyahu appointed (4/22) a special ministerial panel (himself, DM Barak, Vice PM Moshe Ya’alon, and Minister-without-Portfolio Benny Begin) “to examine the future” of 3 unauthorized Jewish settlement outposts (Bruchin, Rachelim, and Sansanna) located on what Israel has classified as “state land” in the West Bank. He had previously pledged to bring the issue of the 3 outposts (which had received initial approval from previous governments in the 1980s and 1990s but were never given final approval or construction permits) “to the government for approval.” He said the panel would deal only with these 3 outposts and that it had no relation to a separate committee, headed by Judge Edmund Levy, created earlier in 2012 to “examine the legal issues” of all the unauthorized outposts. However, the wording of the panel’s written mandate was potentially broader, stating its role was to “resolve the issues” of “settlements that are now unauthorized outposts and which were constructed years ago on state land with state funds or with initial agreements from state bodies.” By this definition, two-thirds of the 105 outposts could be retroactively legalized. On 4/24, the panel legalized Bruchin, Rachelim, and Sansanna as expected. UN secy.-gen. Ban Ki-moon called the decision “illegal under international law.” U.S. State Dept. spokeswoman Victoria Nuland stated: “We don’t think this is helpful to the [peace] process, and we don’t accept the legitimacy of continued settlement activity.”

On 4/24, Netanyahu's special ministerial panel also called on the Israeli High Court to put off the 5/1/12 deadline to evacuate 30 settler homes in Ulpana outpost (constructed on private Palestinian land near Ramallah), which the government described as a "neighborhood of Beit El" settlement built without proper permits. On 4/27, Netanyahu's government formally requested that the Israeli High Court postpone the 5/1/12 deadline for the evacuation and demolition of Ulpana outpost for 90 days. By 5/8, the High Court had extended the deadline to 7/1/12 (60 days).

Israel took a harder line with right-wing settlers in the volatile city of Hebron. On 4/2, the IDF issued an eviction order to several Jewish settler families who had occupied a Palestinian house near the al-Ibrahimi Mosque/Tomb of the Patriarchs several days prior, claiming to have purchased it from the Palestinian owner. Though the Palestinian claimed that the settlers' deeds were forged and took preliminary legal steps, the eviction order mentioned only the settlers' failure to secure the proper permits from the Israeli military to reside in the West Bank, and ordered them to vacate the building by 3:00 P.M. local time on 4/3. Netanyahu intervened (4/3), asking the Israeli military to delay the eviction on the grounds that the settlers should be allowed to remain in the house until their case was heard in court. Israeli security forces ignored Netanyahu's request and evicted the settlers on 4/4.

In East Jerusalem, however, Israeli authorities evicted (4/18) 2 Palestinian families from their homes in Bayt Hanina, ending a decade-long legal dispute with Jewish settlers over the ownership of the properties. On 5/1, Israeli authorities seized another Palestinian home in Bayt Hanina and turned it over to a Jewish settler family claiming to own the land on which the house was built. Israel's High Court then issued (5/7) 2 rulings: (1) affirming the legal purchase by Jewish settlers of a Palestinian home in Jerusalem's Old City, ordering the Palestinian family to vacate and (2) ordering a Palestinian to vacate his shop in the Old City, ruling it a historic Jewish property. A lower court in Jerusalem ruled (5/7) that Jewish

settlers legally purchased a house in Shaykh Jarrah, East Jerusalem, ordering a Palestinian family to vacate.

Meanwhile, Israel's Jerusalem municipality submitted (5/1) maps for plans for the massive housing construction (4,010 units, first announced in 10/2011) in Givat Hamatos settlement in s. Jerusalem. The drawings show new plans for construction of 9 hotels (1,100 rooms) in the area, intended to make the area a major tourist center that would compete with Bethlehem by capitalizing on its close proximity to Bethlehem's religious sites.

In addition, Israel's Housing Min. issued (4/4) bids for construction of 800 new settlement housing units in Har Homa settlement in East Jerusalem. Israel approved (2/22) construction of 600 new settlement housing units in Shiloh settlement, deep in the West Bank.

Netanyahu Solidifies His Power Base

This quarter saw 2 developments that combined to strengthen Netanyahu's hold on government. On 4/29, Netanyahu announced plans to meet with his coalition partners soon to discuss calling early elections for fall 2012, a year ahead of schedule. At the annual Likud party convention in Tel Aviv the following week, Netanyahu expressed (5/6) support for the idea of holding early elections in 9/2012, stating that waiting until scheduled elections in 10/2013 could "damage the state." Contrary to widespread expectations, however, he did not force early elections but instead authorized the Knesset to vote on the matter when it met on 5/7. Polls at the time showed that Netanyahu would likely win an early election by a wide margin, thus gaining leeway to form a more supportive and stable ruling coalition. The same polls indicated that the big losers in an early election would be DM Ehud Barak's Independence party (likely to lose its 1 Knesset seat and control of the DM. portfolio) and the opposition party Kadima (likely to lose half of its 28 seats).

Meanwhile, on 3/27, the centrist Kadima party had voted Tzipi Livni, Netanyahu's longtime rival, out as party head, electing former IDF chief of staff Shaul Mofaz in her stead. Hours before the

5/7 Knesset vote, Netanyahu and Mofaz made the surprise announcement that Kadima had agreed to join the governing coalition and that a new unity government would be formed instead of sending the country to early elections. The deal was contingent on meeting 3 Kadima demands: (1) that Mofaz becomes a vice PM and “special minister in charge of the process with the Palestinians” (already agreed by Netanyahu); (2) that the Knesset pass legislation requiring all Israeli citizens, including the ultra-Orthodox, to perform military service in order to receive government benefits (a key Kadima policy goal); and (3) that unspecified election reforms be enacted. With Kadima’s 28 seats, the coalition deal gave Netanyahu control of 94 of 120 seats in parliament and left no single faction in a position to topple the government. The deal also allowed Netanyahu to keep Barak, a strong ally on the Iran issue, as DM. Kadima, meanwhile, was seen (e.g., *New York Times* [NYT] 5/9) as having been “given a life-line.”

Independent Israeli Initiatives

In the absence of movement on the Israeli-Palestinian track, two Israeli groups put forward recommendations for unilateral Israeli steps to decide final status issues.

In late-2/2012, Naftali Bennett—Netanyahu’s former chief of staff and a former head of the YESHA settlers’ council—began circulating his proposed solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict (see Doc. C1) to Israel’s political and military elites, who reportedly (*Jerusalem Post* 2/23) gave it “high praise.” His “Israel Stability Initiative,” which he described as “a practical plan for managing the . . . conflict,” called for (1) Israel’s unilaterally extending sovereignty over West Bank area C (60% of the West Bank); (2) Israel’s granting citizenship to the 50,000 Palestinians in area C (by his estimate; the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] put the figure at 150,000 in 8/2011); (3) full PA “autonomy” in, and freedom of movement between, West Bank areas A and B; (4) no right of return for Palestinian refugees and no access for Palestinian refugees to areas under PA control; (5) a “full Israeli security

umbrella” covering all of the West Bank; (6) the permanent separation of Gaza from the West Bank; and (7) heavy Israeli investment in economic projects in the West Bank that reinforce separation, such as joint industrial zones and separate road networks.

A second proposal, outlined in a *New York Times* op-ed on 4/24 (see Doc. C2), was put forward by former lead Israeli peace negotiator Gilead Sher, former Israeli Security Agency head Ami Ayalon, and Israeli entrepreneur Orni Petruschka (organizers of a new group called Blue White Future). They argued that since serious Israeli-Palestinian peace talks were unlikely to resume soon, Israel should adopt a “radically new unilateral approach” (termed “constructive unilateralism”) that would openly “strive . . . to establish facts on the ground”—a 2-state solution based on 1967 borders, with Israel’s desired land swaps, that would be imposed “regardless of whether Palestinians leaders have agreed.” The proposed borders would be based on Israel’s separation wall. At the same time, Israel would cease settlement expansion in areas that it did not intend to keep and prepare a plan to relocate settlers (they estimate 100,000) from settlements that would fall under permanent Palestinian control. The relocation would not take place (and the IDF would remain deployed in the West Bank) until the Palestinians signed a formal final-status agreement recognizing Israel’s fait accompli. They argued that the plan meshed well with the Palestinians’ own “constructive unilateralism” of late (i.e., Abbas’s mission to gain UN recognition of Palestinian statehood), since it would be easier for Israel to negotiate with the Palestinians state to state.

The Palestinian Prisoner Strike

The political impasse also spurred Palestinian grass-roots actions. Most notably, Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails staged a major protest this quarter, inspired by West Bank Islamic Jihad spokesman Khader Adnan, who had gained international attention for his hunger strike, which began on 12/17/11 to protest his administrative detention without charge. On 2/21, Adnan ended his fast (tying Irish hunger-striker

Bobby Sands's record 66-day fast that ended in his death in 1981) after reaching a deal with the Israeli Justice Min. under which authorities agreed to not renew his detention order and to release him 3 weeks early (on 4/17/12) if no new information on his case came to light. The reason for the deal was clear. As a result, a meeting of Israel's High Court set for later on 2/21 was canceled. That hearing could have ordered a broader review of Israeli military courts and the policy of administrative detention, which the Netanyahu admin. sought to avoid. Israel was currently holding around 320 Palestinian administrative detainees, down from 800 in 1/2008.

Meanwhile, on 2/16, the IDF detained Hana Shalabi, another West Bank Islamic Jihad member, who had been released in 10/2011 after 2 years in administrative detention as part of the Hamas-Israel prisoner swap that freed IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. She immediately began a hunger strike to protest her renewed detention without charge and by 3/15 was hospitalized in serious, deteriorating condition. Israel released her on 4/1, after more than 40 days on hunger strike, but deported her to Gaza. By that time (4/1), the Palestinian Prisoners Society in Ramallah reported that another 8 Palestinians being held in administrative detention in Israel were also on hunger strike, 2 of them (Islamic Jihad's Bilal Diab and Thaer Halahleh) for over a month.

On Prisoners Day (4/17), about 1,200 Palestinian prisoners declared a mass hunger strike to protest their conditions and detentions without trial. On 5/2, Israel's Prison Service announced that more Palestinian prisoners had joined the strike in recent days, bringing the total number of those observing hunger strikes to at least 1,550 (or one-third of the Palestinian prisoner population of 4,700), including Diab and Halahleh, who had now gone 64 days without food. That day (5/2), PA pres. Abbas vowed to bring the issue of Palestinian administrative detainees before the UN (though this did not happen before the end of the quarter).

After Israel's High Court rejected (5/7) appeals for the release of Diab and Halahleh, Israeli and Palestinian

officials confirmed (5/12) that Egyptian mediators were trying to broker understandings between Israel and the Palestinian prisoners to end the hunger strikes. On 5/14, most Palestinian hunger strikers agreed to a deal brokered by Egypt and Jordan to halt their strike in exchange for agreement from Israel to (1) free all 320 administrative detainees at the end of their current 6-mo. sentences, provided no new evidence against them was found; (2) end solitary confinements; (3) allow prisoners from Gaza to receive visits from immediate relatives (family visits from Gaza were suspended in 2006 after the capture of Gilad Shalit); and (4) return the bodies of 100 Palestinians who were killed in fighting in Israel and buried there. At least 8 Palestinian detainees who went on strike before the mass hunger strike was declared on 4/17 planned to continue their fasts until they were released—these included Islamic Jihad's Diab and Halahleh who, at the close of the quarter, had not eaten for 78 days and were hospitalized in critical condition.

Dozens of protests were held in solidarity with the hunger-striking Palestinian prisoners throughout the quarter. These were mostly held outside Israel's Ofer prison, inside the West Bank near Ramallah, and grew in size and frequency as of Prisoners Day on 4/17, when 1,200 prisoners joined the fast. IDF troops routinely fired rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, and percussion grenades and occasionally (particularly outside Ofer) fired live ammunition to disperse protesters, wounding around 50.

Of note: In addition to rearresting Shalabi, the IDF rearrested at least 5 Palestinians who had been freed in the 10/2011 and 12/2011 prisoner swap that freed captured IDF soldier Gilad Shalit. At least 7 were rearrested last quarter.

Other Major Anti-Occupation Events

Several other significant nonviolent demonstrations were organized this quarter.

In early 3/2012, Palestinian activists called for a **Global March to Jerusalem on Land Day** (3/30) to protest Israel's occupation of the city. Organizers hoped that Palestinians inside Israel

and the occupied territories, Palestinians and their supporters in neighboring Arab states, and international activists would conduct "massive marches towards Jerusalem or to the nearest point possible according to the circumstances of each country," with internationals flying in to join marches, participating in land caravans to Israel's borders, and holding mass protests outside Israeli embassies and in main public squares around the world.

In fact, the response was discouraging. Since Land Day fell on a Friday (3/30), the regular weekly protests against settlement expansion and appropriation held after Friday prayers were considerably larger and more widespread than usual. In addition to Bil'in, Kafr Qaddum, Nabi Salih, and Ni'lin, protests were held in at least 5 other West Bank locations (outside Rachel's Tomb in Bethlehem, outside Ofer prison and at 2 points along the separation wall near Ramallah, and at the Qalandia crossing n. of Jerusalem). IDF soldiers fired live ammunition (Ofer and Qalandia only), rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, and stun grenades at these protesters, injuring 19 (including 2 children; at least 7 were hit by live fire and 1 was seriously injured by a tear gas canister to the head). In Gaza, Hamas authorities allowed 1,000s of Palestinians to hold a nonviolent demonstration nearly a mile from the Erez crossing, deploying police to prevent the protesters from marching to the border. IDF troops on the Gaza border fired into the Strip at the demonstration, killing 1 Palestinian and wounding 37 (1 seriously; including 16 children). Inside Israel, some 2,000 Israeli Palestinians demonstrated in the Galilee, with no violence reported. A major protest planned for East Jerusalem did not materialize. In Jordan, some 20,000 Palestinians marched toward the West Bank border but stopped 4 miles away; no violence was reported. In Lebanon, 100s of Palestinians and Lebanese gathered at Beaufort Castle, 9 miles from the Israeli border, where Lebanese military forces deployed to prevent them from approaching closer to Israel. No other regional or international protests were reported.

While Israeli troops went on high alert on 3/29–30 for Land Day, Israel's

greater concern was the upcoming **Nakba Day commemoration** on 5/15. (In 2011, 1,000s of people had answered Palestinian activist calls for Palestinians and their Arab supporters to march to Israel's borders to mark the Nakba 1948 and Naksa 1967 days, commemorating the losses of 1948 and 1967 respectively. Israeli troops had killed at least 36 people trying to cross the Lebanese and Syrian borders into Israel and wounded more than 650; see QUs in *JPS* 160, 161). In anticipation of Nakba Day 2012 protests and marches, the IDF completed (by mid-4/2012) construction of a new fence and had laid a new mine field along the Syrian border to prevent infiltrations. The IDF also gave troops sniper training, instructing them to target protesters' legs to inflict non-fatal injuries. By 4/23, forces were back on high alert. Ultimately, only around 1,000 Palestinians and international activists demonstrated at the Beitunia and Qalandia crossings outside Ramallah, where they clashed with troops, leaving around 30 Palestinians lightly to moderately injured. No protests or marches were reported in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, or Syria.

This quarter (by early 4/2012), Palestinian activists also called on international supporters to take part in a 2d "flytilla" to protest the Israeli occupation (the 1st was in 7/2011; see QU in *JPS* 161). Organizers hoped that Israel would be placed in the embarrassing position of either deporting 100s of protesters in front of the international media as they arrived at Ben-Gurion Airport or of allowing a massive demonstration by Palestinians and foreigners to take place along the separation wall in Bethlehem on 4/15, drawing international attention to the Palestinians' plight. On 4/10, Israel had plans in place (including having sent suggested no-fly lists to various countries) to prevent the entry of activists expected to arrive at Israel's Ben-Gurion Airport over the next few days. Palestinian organizers claimed (4/15) that more than 1,500 foreign supporters booked tickets to Israel, but only 3 made it to Bethlehem for the 4/15 event. Israel said that most activists were stopped at their point of departure thanks to its no-fly lists, whereas a few hundred suspected

protesters were denied entry at Ben-Gurion Airport.

On 4/14, 200 Palestinians and international activists bicycled along the Jordan Valley to draw attention to Israeli restrictions on Palestinian movement. IDF soldiers blocked them at a crossing outside Ouja village on Route 90, beating and injuring at least 5 (2 Palestinians, including 1 woman, and 3 internationals). At least 1 IDF soldier, an officer, was caught on news cameras beating a Danish activist with his M16; he was dismissed from his post and demoted by the Defense Min. "on moral grounds."

Two significant local protests were also held in the West Bank:

- On 2/24, Palestinians and international activists held 3 large nonviolent demonstrations and marches in Hebron to mark the 18th anniversary of the Tomb of the Patriarchs massacre (see Chronology in *JPS* 92). IDF soldiers fired foul-smelling skunk spray, rubber-coated steel bullets, tear gas, and stun grenades at the protesters. In total, 13 Palestinians were moderately injured and hospitalized, 27 were lightly injured and treated by medical crews at the scene, and 2 Palestinians and 1 international were arrested.
- On 3/5, 10s of Palestinians marched to the IDF's Atara checkpoint outside Ramallah to mark the 2d anniversary of the death of a local Palestinian family when an IDF jeep collided with their taxi. IDF troops at checkpoint fired tear gas and stun grenades at the marchers who respond by throwing stones. During the exchange, an IDF soldier fired a tear gas canister at a Palestinian teenager 20 meters away, hitting him in the head and fracturing his skull, critically injuring him.

A Serious Round of Violence in Gaza

While Israeli-Palestinian violence overall remained relatively low, there was one serious exchange this quarter sparked by Israel's assassination of the top military commander of the PRC, Zuhair al-Qaissi, and another senior

PRC member (Mahmoud Hanani) in a drone air strike on Gaza City on 3/9 that also seriously wounded 1 civilian bystander. Israel accused Qaissi of plotting a cross-border attack similar to the 8/2011 Elat attack from Egypt (see QU in *JPS* 162), but gave no evidence. The assassination sparked 4 days (3/9–12) of extreme cross-border exchanges between the IDF and the PRCs and Islamic Jihad. By the time an Egypt-brokered cease-fire went into effect early on 3/13, 24 Palestinians had been killed (20 militants, including Qaissi and Hanani, and 4 civilians, including 1 woman) and at least 68 Palestinians (of whom 56 were civilians, including 14 children and 5 women) and at least 6 Israelis (all civilians) had been injured. The IDF launched at least 41 air strikes during the exchange, while Palestinian fired at least 163 rockets (at least 14 of them manufactured Grads) and mortars. Though the violence eased off significantly as of 3/13, the air strikes and rocket fire continued at a low rate through 3/16 before tapering off.

Intifada Data and Trends

Even though the situation on the ground was relatively calm, at least 36 Palestinians were killed as a result of Israeli actions (up from 17 last quarter); no Israelis were killed this quarter (or last) as a result of Palestinian actions. The Palestinian deaths brought the comprehensive toll as of 5/15 to at least 7,939 Palestinians (including 51 Israeli Arabs and 19 unidentified Arab cross-border infiltrators), 1,113 Israelis (including 354 IDF soldiers and security personnel, 226 settlers, and 533 civilians), and 66 foreign nationals (including 2 British suicide bombers). These numbers include individuals who died in noncombat-related incidents if their death was a direct result of Israel's occupation and the ongoing conflict (e.g., ailing Palestinians who died when denied access to medical care and Palestinians killed in smuggling tunnel accidents).

Overview of the Violence

In the West Bank and Gaza, an unusual number of instances were reported this quarter in which Palestinians, typically children playing in

open areas or Palestinians scavenging for salvageable items in public dumps or demolished sites, accidentally trigger unexploded IDF ordnance (UXO) left from previous IDF operations. In total, 2 persons were killed in Hebron and 15 were injured (including 6 children) in Hebron, Nablus, and Gaza in such incidents.

In the **West Bank**, a total of 5 Palestinians were killed this quarter: besides the 2 UXO deaths mentioned above, 2 were shot during late-night IDF arrest raids (at least 1 of whom was a bystander), and 1 was shot during a botched IDF training mission in which troops entering a Palestinian village were mistaken for burglars, prompting a clash.

Overall, the IDF conducted an average of 89 search operations per week in the West Bank, down slightly from 91 per week last quarter. The IDF continued its pattern of conducting patrols in Palestinian areas during the day, with most arrest raids and house searches conducted late at night.

Several arrest raids targeted specific groups or individuals:

- On 4/2, Israel's Shin Bet carried out a major raid on Am'ari refugee camp (r.c.), arresting 13 Palestinians (including 2 Palestinian Red Crescent employees, the goalkeeper of Palestine's Olympic soccer team, and a senior PA intelligence officer) for allegedly plotting attacks on IDF soldiers near Ramallah, in which, the IDF claimed, the prominence of some group members was intended to serve as cover.
- On 2/27, the IDF made a major raid into Jenin r.c., surrounding the homes of local Islamic Jihad leader Mahmud Sa'adi, 4 other Islamic Jihad members, and 1 Fatah member. All 6 were detained, with the 5 Islamic Jihad members released later that day.
- On 5/7, the IDF raided the al-Bireh offices of the Palestinian People's Party and the Public Comm. against the Annexation Wall, confiscating computers, cameras, files, and photos.
- On 3/16, the IDF raided and searched the home of a PA security

force (PASF) officer in Qalqilya, confiscating several cell phones.

In addition, on 3/8, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) noted that since 1/1/2012, at least 45 Bayt Umar residents (including 20 children) had been arrested by the IDF—an uncommonly high number for a single village in so short a time. PCHR did not suggest a reason for the arrests, but during that time period, Bayt Umar residents had stepped up the number of nonviolent demonstrations held to protest Israel's confiscation of village land for the expansion of nearby Karme Tzur settlement (see *Chronologies in JPS* 163 and 164).

In **Gaza**, a total of 30 Palestinians were killed this quarter: 24 killed in the 3/9–13 cross-border violence surrounding the Qaissi and Hanani assassinations (see “A Serious Round of Violence in Gaza” above); 3 Palestinians (including 1 child) killed in smuggling tunnel accidents on the Rafah border (another 2 Palestinians were injured); a suicidal teenager who walked toward the border fence expecting to be shot dead by IDF troops; a Palestinian taking part in a nonviolent Land Day protest near the border who was hit when Israeli soldiers fired into Gaza at the demonstrators; and an armed Palestinian shot while laying an explosive device along the border fence.

Israel carried out a total of 58 air strikes on Gaza this quarter: 41 during the 3/9–13 exchange and 18 others (typically in response to Palestinian rocket fire or targeting suspicious movement). In addition to the casualties during the 3/9–13 period, 6 Palestinians (at least 3 civilians and 2 militants) were injured in air strikes. The IDF also fired artillery at least 9 times, hitting a home in 1 instance (2/24), injuring 12 civilians (including 8 children).

In addition to the 163 rockets (including at least 14 Grads) and mortars fired during the 3/9–13 period, Palestinians fired at least 46 rockets (including at least 3 manufactured Grads) and 7 mortars, causing no damage or injuries.

As in the past, the IDF routinely fired warning shots at Palestinian civilians (typically nonviolent protesters demonstrating against Israel's imposition

of no-go zones, farmers working their land, shepherds herding flocks, and civilians scavenging for construction materials in former settlement areas or the demolished Erez industrial zone) who strayed too near the border fence. At least 5 Palestinian civilians (including 1 child) were wounded in 24 recorded incidents this quarter. In addition, 37 civilians demonstrating near the border on Land Day (3/30) were wounded when the IDF deliberately fired on them. On 4/2, the IDF dropped leaflets from helicopters over n. Gaza border areas near Bayt Lahiya warning that the IDF would henceforth use deadly force against anyone approaching the border fence. Through 5/15, there was no significant change in IDF cross-border fire as a result, however.

The IDF made at least 13 incursions into Gaza to level land along the border fence and clear lines of sight. In addition, there were at least 7 reported cases in which the IDF entered Gaza to search open areas in pursuit of suspected armed Palestinians; in 1 case (5/6) the IDF arrested 2 unarmed Palestinians trying to sneak into Israel to find work. During some of these raids, the IDF (either the troops themselves, helicopters and drones accompanying them, or artillery providing them cover from inside Israel) would open fire on surrounding areas to keep Palestinians indoors, but no injuries were reported. The IDF also made 1 incursion (3/7) to clear a road in the former Erez industrial zone for use by the IDF should a ground incursion into Gaza be necessary.

As in previous quarters, Israeli naval forces routinely fired warning shots at Palestinian fishing boats off the Gaza coast, forcing them to return to shore. At least 16 such cases were reported, with no injuries. Israeli naval commandos raided (4/22) a Liberian ship suspected of carrying weapons for “anti-Israeli militants” off the Gaza coast, but released it after finding no arms.

In **East Jerusalem**, 1 Palestinian was fatally shot when IDF soldiers and border police opened fire on Palestinians demonstrating at al-Ram checkpoint in response to rumors (claimed by Israel to be false) that Israeli security forces planned to escort right-wing Jews into the al-Aqsa Mosque compound.

Movement and Access Issues

This quarter, Palestinian freedom of movement in the **West Bank** remained relatively good (i.e., it was possible to go almost anywhere, though not necessarily by the most direct route). In general, travel between major population centers continued to be easier than travel to outlying villages. On 4/3, OCHA reported that the IDF had removed 5 barriers, gates, and unmanned checkpoints near Nablus and Tulkarm in place since 2000–2, greatly improving movement between Nablus and Bayt Dajan and Zawata, and between Tulkarm, Izbet Shufa, and Shufa.

Of note: The IDF made predawn raids on 2 private Palestinian TV stations in Ramallah (al-Watan TV and al-Quds Educational TV) on 2/29, seizing transmitters and other equipment. Israel claimed that the raids followed repeated requests to the stations to stop illegally broadcasting on frequencies that interfere with Israeli broadcasters and aircraft communications. Both the PA Communications Min., which licenses the stations, and the stations themselves denied receiving complaints or warnings and said they had been operating in accordance with Israeli-Palestinian agreements.

In **Gaza**, Israel maintained near total control of borders except at the Rafah crossing, where Egypt limited access to prevent a rift with Israel. Egypt opened the crossing 5–6 days per week and on average per day granted entry to 614 Palestinians, turned back 34 Palestinians with permits issued by the Hamas authorities, and allowed 597 Palestinian to return to Gaza via Rafah (last quarter, the daily averages were 648 Palestinians allowed out, 28 denied entry, and 601 allowed in). Israel continued to restrict use of the Erez crossing to urgent medical cases, VIPs, and employees of international organizations on a case-by-case basis. The IDF also continued to enforce the 300-meter (m) no-go zone along the full length of the Gaza border and limited Palestinian fishing off Gaza to 500–1,000 m off Bayt Lahiya and Rafah and 3 naut. mi. elsewhere—restrictions that placed 17% of Gaza’s total landmass, including vast agricultural areas, off limits to Palestinians.

Movement of goods remained restricted to the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing in s. Gaza. On average, 942 truckloads of goods per week entered Gaza (down from 1,047 last quarter, but still only 33% of the weekly average before Hamas's takeover of Gaza in 6/2007), with food items constituting 39% of imports on average (down from 41% last quarter, but still high compared to 20% before the siege, indicating that imports were still providing subsistence rather than economic stimulation).

Israel continued to allow limited exports of cut flowers and tomatoes to the Netherlands under a humanitarian agreement with the Dutch government (approved in 2009) to aid Gaza farmers, but the growing season was over by 5/2012. Israel also permitted (3/5) the 1st 2 truckloads of Palestinian exports from Gaza to the West Bank (date bars for distribution to needy children through the UN's World Food Program) since the beginning of the Gaza siege in mid-2007. The UN noted that this did not mark the resumption of regular trade between Gaza and the West Bank, but was a limited arrangement that resulted from 6 months of hard negotiations with Israel. At the close of the quarter, Israel also permitted (5/15) Gazans to export textiles for the 1st time since mid-2007.

With tight Israeli restrictions on Gaza trade still in place, smuggling goods through the Rafah tunnels, especially construction materials for private projects, remained high overall. Gaza continued to suffer serious fuel shortages as a result of (1) Israeli restrictions (in place in varying degrees since 1/2007) on imports of diesel to run Gaza's power plant, gasoline for vehicles, and cooking fuel and (2) new Egyptian restrictions imposed in 1/2012 on truck traffic to Egyptian Rafah, where fuel had been piped into Gaza through smuggling tunnels. Gazans across the Strip were already experiencing rolling blackouts of 12–18 hours/day as the quarter opened, and electricity was rationed. On 2/28, diesel supplies ran out, forcing Gaza's power plant to shut down completely, leaving the Strip reliant on the limited electricity hookups to Egyptian and Israeli power grids. From 2/28

to 4/4, Israel allowed in only enough diesel fuel for the power plant to run at 25% capacity for 12 days (3/1–10 and 3/24–25), though it allowed the International Comm. of the Red Cross (ICRC) to bring in enough fuel to supply backup generators at Gaza hospitals. When Israel did allow in fuel for the plant, it reduced the amount of cooking fuel and gasoline imports proportionally, aggravating shortages of those supplies. In areas without electricity, water pumps and water treatment facilities could not run. (During most of the quarter, Gazans had running water for at most 6–8 hrs. every 4 days.) After small, steady imports of diesel resumed on 4/5, rolling blackouts fell to 12 hrs./day and access to water and water treatment improved slightly (no exact figures given).

Of note: OCHA reported on 5/1 that in the previous week, Israel granted 60 of 100 applications submitted by Gazan UN staffers for 3-month multiple exit permits (rather than time-bound permits for specific events, valid for up to 1 week only). OCHA said this marked 1st time the UN had received so many long-term permits at one time, representing a significant improvement in access for UN Gaza staff.

Regular Nonviolent Protests in the Territories

This quarter, Palestinians in the West Bank continued their regular weekly protests against the separation wall, land confiscations, and demolitions, often with the participation of Israeli and international activists (see Chronology for details). Most were in Bil'in and Ni'lin near Ramallah, al-Nabi Salih in the north central West Bank, Kafr Qaddum village near Qalqilya, and Bayt Umar outside Karme Tzur settlement near Hebron. Many of these weekly demonstrations also called for solidarity with Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails and an end to the Fatah-Hamas split.

In Gaza, Palestinians and international activists held at least 5 nonviolent marches toward the Gaza border to protest Israel's imposition of a no-go zone stretching the length of the Gaza border, as they have in previous quarters. The IDF routinely fired warning shots at the marchers to keep them away from the fence, causing no injuries.

Of note: Jailed Fatah *tanzim* leader Marwan Barghouti issued (3/26) a statement on the 10th anniversary of his arrest by Israel that was read to a crowd of supporters in Ramallah, stating that “the launch of large-scale popular resistance at this stage serves the cause of our people.” He also called for “stopping all forms of security and economic coordination [with Israel] in all areas immediately.”

Settler Attacks on Palestinians

Reported incidents of settler violence against Palestinians were down slightly this quarter (30 compared to 37 last quarter). The breakdown of incidents by region was as follows (see Chronology for details): Nablus (10), Hebron (8), Bethlehem (4), Qalqilya and Ramallah (3 each), and East Jerusalem and Salfit (1 each). Settler actions included occupying plots of Palestinian land to expand or create new settlement outposts (4/26, 5/12); uprooting trees (nearly 1,000 in total; 3/3, 2 on 3/9, 3/16, 4/13, 4/15, 5/11, 5/13); bulldozing Palestinian land (3/13, 3/26); vandalizing property, including 1 church (2/19, 4/23, 5/13); stealing animals or property (2/27, 3/18); entering Palestinian population centers in shows of force, sometimes under IDF escort (4/17, 4/23, 4/24); beating, stoning, or harassing Palestinians (3/4, 3/18, 3/24, 3/26, 2 on 3/31, 4/12, 4/13, 4/17, 5/13); and obstructing Palestinian traffic (3/4, 4/26). In 2 instances (3/24, 4/15), Jewish settlers also opened fire on Palestinians, wounding 1.

Demolitions and Confiscations

IDF demolitions seemed more frequent this quarter, though most structures demolished were not homes (whereas 25 Palestinian homes were demolished last quarter).

Many IDF demolitions and confiscations were undertaken for the benefit of Jewish settlers, mostly near Hebron. These included

- fencing (2/26) off 21 dunams (d.; 4 d. = 1 acre) of Palestinian land belonging to the Qarawat Bani Hassan village n. of Salfit for expansion of Burkan settlement (confiscation orders for the plot were issued in 2011);
 - issuing (3/25) evacuation orders for several Palestinian homes in Hebron deemed too close to Susia settlement;
 - bulldozing (4/16) 3 wells, a water network, and 2 d. of agricultural land in Dura village near Hebron to expand an IDF post to better protect local Jewish settlers;
 - filling (5/2) in an agricultural pool serving Palestinian agricultural land near Hebron’s Kiryat Arba settlement;
 - demolishing 2 cow pens and 2 other structures outside Hebron (5/1) and a car wash facility in Husan village near Bethlehem (3/14) for being located too near settler-only bypass roads; and
 - uprooting (3/15) olive and almond trees on 30 d. of confiscated Palestinian agricultural land near Hamra settlement, outside Nablus.
- Other demolitions were clearly undertaken to cement Israel’s control of West Bank area C, especially in the Jordan Valley. These included bulldozing
- 4 tents, 3 barnyards, and 3 residential barracks in a Bedouin encampment in al-Maleh in the Jordan Valley (3/16);
 - 9 residential structures, 6 animal pens in al-Khalayli Bedouin community in area C near Jerusalem, displacing 54 Palestinians, including 34 children (4/18); and
 - 2 Palestinian water tanks serving Palestinian agricultural land in area C (4/23).
- Other IDF demolitions included
- uprooting (2/23) 690 trees and bulldozing 22 d. of agricultural land, a well and water tank, and 800 m of fence surrounding the fields in Surif village;
 - demolishing (2/24) a mosque, a school, and 19 residential shelters in Khirbat Janba Bedouin community;
 - demolishing (3/15) a Palestinian home and animal farm in Qalqilya;
 - bulldozing (3/16) 2 barnyards near Tubas;
 - sealing off (4/2) a plot of land in the al-Ja’wana area of Bayt Furik

- village (near Nablus), confiscating 6 tents and 2 water tanks belonging to local Palestinians;
- demolishing (4/16) 4 agricultural storehouses, 6 barnyards, and 3 wells in Rafat village (near Salfit);
 - bulldozing (4/23) 1 d. of agricultural land near Qalandia (n. of Jerusalem) that was previously confiscated for construction of the separation wall;
 - bulldozing (4/24) a Palestinian barnyard near Bethlehem;
 - demolishing (5/1) a Palestinian home under construction without permits near Qalqilya;
 - bulldozing (5/8) a 7-km Palestinian road linking Tubas and agricultural areas of Yazra village, and a similar agricultural road from al-Khadir village (near Bethlehem) to outlying farmlands;
 - demolishing (5/8) a Palestinian restaurant in Bayt Jala (near Bethlehem);
 - cutting down (5/8) and confiscating 350 Palestinian olive trees, and demolishing an irrigation network on a plot of land near Hebron;
 - demolishing (5/9) 2 shops and confiscating items from a 3d in the Husan industrial zone near Bethlehem; and
 - leveling (5/9) 2 structures near Jenin.

INTRA-PALESTINIAN DYNAMICS

National Reconciliation

No appreciable progress toward implementing the 5/2011 Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreement was made this quarter. Implementation talks had been suspended in 8/2011, when Abbas opted to pursue recognition of Palestinian statehood at the UN. They were revived briefly in late 11/2011 (after Abbas in effect shelved statehood efforts), but were put on hold again in 1/2012 while Israeli-Palestinian talks exploring a possible resumption of peace talks were held in Amman (see QU in *JPS* 163). When these failed, Abbas and Mishal resumed their talks on 2/6/12. Under discussion was the formation of a transitional government that would include Hamas and be tasked solely with leading the Palestinians to new elections and overseeing reconstruction of Gaza as called for in the 5/2011 deal.

Two key points were agreed upon: (1) that Abbas would lead the transitional government, serving as both president and PM (intended to eliminate the paralyzing debate over the identity of the transitional PM) and (2) that the interim government would be “a technical one more than a political one” and that diplomacy would continue to rest with the Fatah-dominated PLO, led by Abbas and to which Hamas did not belong (hopefully easing Israeli and international concerns over Hamas participation). A meeting of all Palestinian factions was set for 2/18 to endorse these points.

Divisions within Hamas scuttled the 2/18 meeting, however. Members in Gaza were reportedly (NYT 3/8) angry at Mishal and the external leadership for failing to consult adequately with the Gaza leadership over the idea of Abbas serving as both PM and president. On 2/22, Hamas’s internal and external leadership held a 14-hour meeting in Cairo to discuss their differences, with the Gaza leadership insisting that Mishal declare a number of positions that ran contrary to the 5/2011 agreement and which Abbas would certainly reject (including that Hamas be allowed to control the PA Interior Min. in the transitional government, name an Abbas deputy to oversee Gaza during the transition, and maintain its independent security structure in Gaza). Abbas then traveled to Cairo (2/23), where he held separate meetings with Mishal and Hamas’s acting PM in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh (marking the first Abbas-Haniyeh meeting since 2007). Afterward, Fatah officials stated (*Jerusalem Post* 2/26) that Abbas had agreed to Mishal’s request to suspend implementation talks until Hamas resolved its internal differences.

Through the end of the quarter, no further reconciliation efforts were made, and relations between the factions on the ground in Gaza and the West Bank deteriorated. On 3/23, a Hamas official in Gaza accused Fatah of circulating an internal memo encouraging its members to “incite against the Gaza Strip to deepen its crises.” A Fatah official denounced this but accused Hamas authorities in Gaza of harassing Fatah members and making political arrests.

Intra-Palestinian Violence

On 5/1, unidentified gunmen (presumed Palestinian) fired on the home of Jenin governor Qaddura Musa in an apparent assassination attempt. The shots missed, but within hours Musa died of a heart attack. By 5/9, the PASF had detained 10s of Palestinians in connection to the shooting but had not made a formal arrest. Those detained included a number of PA security officers, raising concerns of infighting within the PASF or gangs attempting to assert local authority. Jenin residents reported (NYT 5/10) that instability in Jenin had been growing since the 4/4/11 murder of Jenin's Freedom Theater director, Juliano Mer-Khamis (see QU in *JPS* 160). The deteriorating situation in Jenin worried Israel and the Quartet, which had considered Jenin a model for transition from Israeli to Palestinian security control. On 5/12, PA officials said that the PASF had arrested a suspect in the attack on Musa, Nizar Ghawadreh, whose motive appeared to be anger over the 4/2012 shooting death of his brother by PA police. The following day (5/13), masked PASF officers ambushed, blindfolded, shackled, and detained former Jenin al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades (AMB) leader Zakariya Zubeidi, accusing him of involvement in the shooting.

PA's West Bank Rule

Abbas faced major public criticism this quarter for censoring his critics. In 4/2012, PA security forces arrested 3 prominent Palestinians for criticizing the PA on Facebook, bringing the total number arrested for such actions in the past year to 7. The new arrests included university prof. and single mother Ismat Abdul-Khaleq, placed in solitary confinement for criticizing Abbas's rule and calling for the PA to be dismantled; blogger Jamal Abu Raihan for posting a satirical column depicting Abbas as a donkey and complaining of PA corruption; and journalist Tareq Khamees, who was arrested (and his laptop seized) for posting a comment in support of others recently arrested for criticizing the PA. By 4/15, PA atty. gen. Ahmad al-Mughni had ordered PA authorities to block several web sites

supportive of Abbas rival, former Gaza security chief Muhammad Dahlan. Others previously arrested included Radio Bethlehem 2000 director George Canawati, arrested in 9/2011 for criticizing the PA Health Min.; al-Quds TV employee Mamdouh Hamara, arrested in fall 2011 for posting an unflattering picture of Abbas; and journalists Rami Samara and Youssef al-Shayeb, arrested in 2/2012 and 3/2013 respectively, for "defaming public officials" by writing news items on PA corruption. Most of the arrests were carried out under a 1960 Jordanian law, rather than the PA press and communications law of 1995. Most were released within 2 weeks.

On 4/26, PA communications min. Mashhour Abudaka resigned, citing unspecified personal reasons, though many insiders believed (see NYT 5/7) that he was strongly opposed to the recent string of arrests of journalists and public commentators who had criticized Abbas's administration and especially wanted to distance himself from the 2/2012 arrest of Samara, who had criticized him personally. Under increased international criticism for the arrests, Abbas ordered (5/5) all PA agencies to take steps to ensure the "sacred right" of freedom of expression, including ordering PA atty. gen. Mughni to lift the block on web sites supporting Dahlan.

Hamas in Gaza

Hamas authorities in Gaza, meanwhile, were facing their own popularity crisis. The *Washington Post* ran (4/19) a special report on Hamas stating that after 5 years in power in Gaza, the movement was "fast losing popularity" because it had not provided promised services (e.g., stipends for rebuilding homes destroyed in Israel's Operation Cast Lead, steady supplies of electricity and water) and was increasingly seen as corrupt (e.g., what benefits were available were seen as going to Hamas cadres, Hamas officials were living better than most and seemed more concerned about keeping their positions of privilege than providing for the people).

The fuel crisis in Gaza (see "Movement and Access" above) also

generated sharp popular criticism against the Hamas government and increased tensions between Hamas and Fatah. Hamas blamed the Israeli reduction in fuel shipments and electricity from its grid largely on the PA's refusal to pay Israel for the deliveries. OCHA reported (3/27) that in mid-3/2012 Hamas police briefly detained some 80 Palestinian political activists and a number of taxi drivers affiliated with Fatah to pressure the PA to make the payments, though most of those detained were released the same day.

Also of note: Hamas authorities in Gaza hanged (4/8) 3 Palestinians, 1 convicted of collaborating with Israel and 2 convicted of murder.

PALESTINIAN OPINION

The following data are excerpted from a poll conducted by al-Najah University's Center for Opinion Polls and Survey Studies between 6 and 8 April 2012. Results are based on a survey of 1,361 men and women from the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and Gaza. The poll, the 44th in a series, was taken from al-Najah's web site at www.najah.edu.

1. In your opinion, who is directly responsible for deferring the implementation of the reconciliation agreement that was signed between Fatah and Hamas?

	West		Total
	Bank	Gaza	
a. Fatah	13.7%	9.8%	12.3%
b. Hamas	27.2%	56.6%	38.0%
c. Others	47.3%	23.6%	38.6%
d. Don't Know/No Answer	11.8%	10.0%	11.2%

2. Do you think the Arab Spring will hinder or speed up the Palestinian reconciliation?

	West		Total
	Bank	Gaza	
a. Speed up reconciliation	37.0%	26.0%	33.0%
b. Hinder reconciliation	25.3%	22.2%	24.2%
c. No effect	34.0%	39.8%	36.1%
d. Don't Know/No Answer	3.6%	12.0%	6.7%

3. The PA is facing a huge financial deficit because some Arab countries did not give the financial support that the Arab summit conferences approved and because aid from some foreign countries was stopped. In your opinion how can the financial deficit be reduced? (Results are West Bank and Gaza combined—Ed.)

	Yes	No	No Opinion/ Don't Know
a. Impose early retirement on some civil servants	38.6%	58.9%	2.4%
b. Increase taxes and impose new ones	9.0%	90.0%	1.0%
c. Revive peace talks so that donors will resume foreign aid	61.2%	36.5%	2.3%
d. Demand that Arab countries fulfill their aid pledges	88.1%	10.0%	1.9%

4. If presidential elections were held today, whom would you vote for?

	West		Total
	Bank	Gaza	
a. An independent candidate	13.2%	7.6%	11.2%
b. A candidate from the Left	3.6%	2.8%	3.3%
c. A candidate from Hamas	7.8%	9.4%	8.4%
d. A candidate from Fatah	26.6%	40.6%	31.7%
e. An independent nationalist	6.2%	5.8%	6.0%
f. An independent Islamist	2.8%	4.4%	3.4%
g. I would not participate in elections	20.1%	20.0%	20.1%
h. Don't Know/No Answer	19.7%	9.4%	15.9%

5. If legislative elections were conducted, whom would you vote for?

	West		Total
	Bank	Gaza	
a. An independent ticket	12.8%	7.4%	10.8%
b. A ticket from the Left	3.6%	3.0%	3.4%
c. A Hamas ticket	9.4%	10.8%	9.9%
d. A Fatah ticket	30.2%	43.2%	35.0%
e. An independent nationalist ticket	6.3%	6.2%	6.2%
f. An independent Islamist ticket	3.9%	5.4%	4.5%
g. I would not participate in elections	17.8%	14.8%	16.7%
h. Don't Know/No Answer	16.0%	9.2%	13.5%

6. If municipality and local council elections are to be held, whom do you vote for?

	West		Total
	Bank	Gaza	
a. A block that represents family or clan	12.2%	2.2%	8.5%
b. An independent ticket	10.2%	9.2%	9.8%
c. A ticket from the Left	2.7%	2.4%	2.6%
d. A Hamas ticket	8.8%	10.6%	9.5%
e. A Fatah ticket	22.6%	41.0%	29.4%
f. An independent nationalist ticket	7.2%	6.0%	6.8%
g. An independent Islamist ticket	3.3%	4.8%	3.8%
h. I would not participate in elections	16.0%	15.2%	15.7%
i. Don't Know/No Answer	17.0%	8.6%	13.9%

FRONTLINE STATES

EGYPT

Egypt was deep in political transformation this quarter (see “Arab Spring Shake-ups Continue” below), with tensions running high between the interim military government (the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces, or SCAF) and the opposition. The Muslim

Brotherhood had just won (1/2012; see QU in *JPS* 163) watershed parliamentary elections and was considering fielding a candidate in the 5/2011 presidential elections. Egyptian officials took time out at various points to mediate between Hamas and Fatah and between the Palestinians and Israel, but given Egypt's shifting political landscape, the messages sent to Israel and the Palestinians were sometimes mixed.

A major issue this quarter was the Gaza fuel crisis, aggravated by Egyptian restrictions imposed (for reasons unclear) in 1/2012 on fuel trucks heading toward the Gaza border area and its smuggling tunnels. Egypt's subsequent brokering of talks in Cairo (ca. 2/21) between Israel and Gaza's Hamas authorities and pressure on Israel resulted in an increase (2/24) in fuel quantities into Gaza to run Gaza's electricity plant. By 2/28, however, diesel supplies had completely run out and the crisis worsened (see “Movement and Access” above). Following Hamas-organized protests in Gaza on 3/23 calling on Egypt to resume fuel transfers through Gaza's smuggling tunnels, Egypt's energy min. Hassan Yunis announced (3/27) that Cairo had offered to supply fuel legitimately, at low cost to Gaza provided that it be transported through the Israeli-controlled Kerem Shalom crossing. Hamas authorities refused, accusing (3/27) Egypt of conspiring with Israel to undermine its rule in Gaza. (Taxes levied on imports through Kerem Shalom are transferred to the West Bank PA, whereas taxes levied at the Rafah crossing go directly to Gaza's Hamas-run government.) Though the offer remained on the table, the fuel crisis remained unresolved at the close of the quarter.

Meanwhile, the state-operated Egyptian Natural Gas Holding Company terminated (4/22) its 2005 contract to ship gas to Israel, stating that Israel had not paid its bill in 4 months and that the decision to suspend shipments immediately “has nothing to do with anything outside of commercial relations.” Israel denied having failed to pay its bills, calling the move politically motivated.

At the height of Hamas-Egypt tensions over fuel, Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood officials said (3/23) that they had begun distancing themselves somewhat from Hamas and had opened new

channels of communication with Fatah in the aim of pressing both to compromise on national unity issues. The officials argued that if the 2 Palestinian factions created a united front with a “newly assertive” Egypt, Cairo would be better positioned to pressure Israel to make concessions on Palestinian statehood. (Earlier in the quarter, as noted above under “Intra-Palestinian Dynamics,” the Egyptian government had hosted national unity consultations between Fatah and Hamas in Cairo.)

Security on the Sinai border with Israel continued to be a major concern for Egypt and Israel. On 4/5, just ahead of the Passover weekend, when 1,000s of tourists flood Israel’s Elat resort, unidentified assailants fired a manufactured Grad rocket from the Egyptian Sinai into an open area near Elat, causing no damage or injuries. No group claimed responsibility. In addition,

Egypt’s natural gas pipeline to Israel was attacked (4/9) and damaged for the 14th time since the Arab Spring uprisings began in 2/2011.

Also of note: Egypt’s Grand Mufti ‘Ali Guma’a visited (4/18) al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem in what he called a personal visit to show solidarity with the Palestinian people and their claim to East Jerusalem. Many Egyptians and Muslims, however, were angry that the mufti broke an unofficial ban by Muslim clerics and Egyptian organizations on visiting areas under Israeli control.

JORDAN

While King Abdallah expressed willingness (2/21) to host another round of Israeli-Palestinian exploratory talks in Amman this quarter (see QU in *JPS* 164 for background), no serious effort was made to revive them. Jordan kept open channels to Israel and the PA, and reportedly had a role in brokering the deal that ended the mass hunger strike by Palestinian prisoners (see “Palestinian Prisoners” above). Otherwise, Jordan did not engage in the Israeli-Palestinian track this quarter.

LEBANON

Lebanon continued to keep a low profile this quarter, particularly in light

of the growing conflict in neighboring Syria. The military went on high alert on 3/30 in response to reports that Palestinians planned a major march to the Israeli border to mark Land Day. Ultimately, only 100s of Palestinian refugees took part in a small demonstration at Beaufort Castle, where the army deployed to prevent them from marching further south. No violence was reported.

SYRIA

Syria was entirely preoccupied with its domestic crisis this quarter (see “Regional Affairs” below) and did not take any steps related to the peace process.

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

There were no regional meetings related to the peace process this quarter. Arab League efforts in particular were fully concentrated on securing a cease-fire in Syria (see below).

ARAB SPRING SHAKE-UPS CONTINUE

As the Arab Spring entered its 2d year, violence, political uncertainty, and popular protests continued in many countries.

Syria, where violence had reached the level of armed civil war, again dominated the quarter. By 2/26, at least 5,400 Syrians had been killed and 1,000s wounded, 1,000s had been jailed, and 10,000s had fled into Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. International sanctions and a voluntary arms embargo against the Syrian regime were in place, with some Arab states (e.g., Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE) calling for military intervention and the arming of the rebels’ Free Syrian Army (FSA). The Syrian National Council (SNC), the transitional government-in-waiting established by the more formal internal and external Syrian opposition groups, pulled back from its initial policy of shunning armed action and began to support FSA operations to topple the government. The international community remained wary of direct foreign military intervention; NATO explicitly stated (and reiterated 3/5) that it would not become

involved. Meanwhile, China and Russia opposed open calls for the overthrow of Pres. Bashar al-Asad and blocked, to the extent possible, any plans for restoring calm that required his exit.

On 2/16, the UNGA approved (137-12, with 17 abstentions; China and Russia voted against) a resolution demanding that Syria halt its crackdown on protesters and endorsing an 11/2/11 Arab League plan for political transition (see QUs in *JPS* 162, 163). Days later (2/21), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) called on the Syrian government and rebels to observe a daily 2-hour truce so it could reach civilians in high conflict areas, particularly Homs, under continuous shelling for 18 days. Plans were also in place for the international community to hold the first "Friends of Syria" meeting in Tunis on 2/24 to explore ways the U.S., EU, and Arab allies could isolate Asad, support the opposition, and promote a united Syrian opposition that would cross sectarian lines.

The day before the Friends of Syria meeting (on 2/23), a UN human rights panel issued a 72-page report, based on 369 interviews with victims, witnesses, defectors, and others with inside information, concluding that "growing human rights violations" had been ordered at the highest levels of the Syrian regime as a matter of policy. Meanwhile, in London, U.S. secy. of state Hillary Clinton stated after a 2/23 meeting with EU and Arab allies that the Syrian opposition would, "from somewhere, somehow, find the means to defend themselves" and "begin offensive measures against Asad"—the first public U.S. statement that seemed to leave the door open to outside military support for the revolt.

The 2/24 Friends of Syria meeting in Tunis was attended by 70 international leaders and SNC representatives; China and Russia boycotted. Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE pressed for stronger international action against the Syrian regime and hinted at military intervention, while the U.S. conceded that "additional measures" might be needed. The meeting ended with agreement to tighten sanctions but no authorization of military assistance. Afterward, the EU expanded (2/27) measures against

the regime, including extending the asset freeze so that it now covered 100 individuals and 38 institutions; banning purchases of gold, precious metals, and diamonds from Syria; and barring Syrian cargo flights to the EU. At an emergency meeting of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva (2/27), UNHRC head Navi Pillay and Secy. of State Clinton discussed the prospects of Asad being tried as a war criminal. Pillay urged the International Criminal Court (ICC) to look into the matter.

International concerns were fueled by reports of atrocities coming out of Syria, one example being the discovery on 2/27 of the bodies of at least 64 men dumped in an open area outside Homs in one of the worst instances of mass killing since the uprising began. Already on 2/24, the UN had appointed former UN secy.-gen. Kofi Annan as UN special envoy to coordinate international humanitarian and political efforts to aid Syrians. After meeting with Arab League officials in Cairo on 3/8, Annan traveled to Damascus to propose a 6-point plan for restoring peace. The plan, endorsed by the UNSC on 3/12, called for (1) Syria to open talks with the opposition under Annan's auspices; (2) an immediate cease-fire by both sides; (3) Syria to facilitate timely humanitarian aid transfers to areas affected by violence; (4) the release of political detainees; (5) guaranteed freedom of movement throughout Syria for the media; and (6) government respect for the people's rights to free association and to protest. Asad rejected the plan, saying that the opposition had to cease fire first before any other elements could be implemented.

Annan then focused on rallying international support by traveling to New York, where he met (3/13) with all UNSC member states except China, to Moscow (3/25), and to Beijing (3/27) to meet with officials. On 3/29, he sought endorsement of his plan at a meeting of the Arab League heads of state, but the Arab leaders were unable to reach a consensus on how to proceed. Their final statement endorsed Annan's plan and urged against foreign military intervention, but otherwise referred the issue to the UN, stating that the UNSC

was “the sole party that has the authority to issue binding decisions.”

During this period, Asad attempted to demonstrate progress toward political reform by going ahead with plans announced last quarter (see QU in *JPS* 163) to hold a national referendum on a new constitution that would technically end the Ba’th’s 1-party rule. The referendum was held on 2/26, with the government claiming that the new constitution had been approved with 89% of the vote, with 57% participation. In follow-up, he announced (3/13) plans to hold parliamentary elections under the terms of the new constitution on 5/7/12. Asad also attempted to show himself as conciliatory by announcing on 3/27—two days before Annan’s scheduled meeting at the Arab League—that he would accept Annan’s proposal. After that meeting, however, Syrian officials backpedaled, stating (3/31) that the army would not agree to a mutual cease-fire and would only pull out of centers of opposition/rebel activity after “normal life” resumed there.

Meanwhile, the second Friends of Syria conference, called at the initiative of the U.S. and Turkey, took place in 4/1 in Istanbul. This meeting was attended by more than 80 countries and international organizations. Arab states pledged \$100 m., to be controlled and paid out by the SNC, to provide, *inter alia*, FSA fighters with a monthly stipend. The U.S. pledged an additional \$12.2 m. in humanitarian aid, on top of \$12.8 m. donated to date; and Secy. of State Clinton publicly confirmed rumors that the U.S. had begun providing the FSA with communication equipment to better “organize and evade attacks by the regime.” Among the top donors to the FSA fund were Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which lobbied for states to arm and train the FSA. While they did not succeed, many expected (see WP 4/2) that the SNC would quietly direct substantial funds to buying black-market weapons. The meeting’s final statement called on Annan to “determine a timeline for next steps . . . if the killing continues” and pledged to form a working group to coordinate sanctions and an “accountability” program to train Syrians to monitor and

collect information on possible Syrian regime war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Immediately after the session, Syria sent (4/2) a letter to Annan pledging to halt use of heavy weapons against opposition targets and to pull the army out of population centers by 4/10. Annan urged (4/2) the FSA to halt its operations within 48 hours of a government cease-fire. On 4/3, the Syrian government said troops were beginning to withdraw to bases. With fighting still reported on 4/5, the UNSC called on Syria to “urgently and visibly” halt attacks on the opposition.

Instead, Syrian forces launched (4/6) a major offensive (including heavy artillery) near Idlib, killing at least 95 and pushing 1,000s of Syrian refugees across the border into Turkey. The following days were marked by Syrian backtracking and demands (4/8), the first spillover of fighting into Lebanon and Turkey (4/9) (1 dead in Lebanon, 2 in Turkey), and another letter (4/11) from Asad to Annan with a qualified announcement of a government cease-fire. On 4/12, reports of violence were down significantly nationwide, with ongoing violations and reports of government firing on civilians. Annan welcomed the “calmer” situation but emphasized the need for implementation of the remaining steps of his 6-point plan.

On 4/14, the UNSC unanimously passed a draft resolution, submitted (4/11) by the U.S., which called for the establishment of an advance team of 8 UN monitors of the cease-fire who were to leave for Syria within 24 hours. From the time the UN advance team landed on 4/15, Syria began posing conditions, including that it could not guarantee the safety of the cease-fire monitors unless the government was involved in “all steps on the ground,” reserving the right to reject observers on the basis of nationality and demanding a formal agreement with the UN on the monitors’ mandate before allowing the team to expand. An emergency meeting called by the Friends of Syria group, held in France on 4/19 (this time attended by only 14 nations, including the U.S but excluding China and Russia) hinted that force would be considered if Syria did not immediately observe a total

cease-fire. In Washington, however, Defense Secy. Leon Panetta and Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) head Gen. Martin Dempsey testified before Congress that there were no plans for U.S. military intervention in Syria.

On 4/21, the UNSC unanimously voted to expand the initial monitoring team into a full-fledged UN Supervision Mission for Syria, with an initial mandate of 90 days for up to 300 observers and additional civilian specialists. Norwegian Maj. Gen. Robert Mood arrived in Damascus on 4/29 to head the mission, and by 5/3, 50 observers were in place. By then, however, there was consensus (see NYT 5/5) that the cease-fire was not holding. Casualty tolls were down, but the government was still aggressively targeting pockets of resistance, including making an unprecedented attack (5/3) on Aleppo University and (5/6) in an oil-producing tribal area east of Dayr al-Zuhr, near the Iraqi border. Meanwhile, experts saw signs (WP 4/23) that "foreign jihadi elements" (e.g., from Iraq and Jordan) were "trying to inject themselves into the Syrian revolution." Though the impact so far had been slight, they warned that if the Annan plan failed, and absent any serious prospect on the horizon for imposing peace, disaffected opposition members might turn to radical Islamists for assistance. A spate of suicide bombings and rocket attacks targeting government installations in Damascus (4/27, 3 on 4/30, 2 on 5/9) led U.S. intelligence officials to say (5/9) that they were convinced that al-Qa'ida elements were seeking to capitalize on the disorder within Syria to take control of border areas from which to train their forces and launch attacks elsewhere.

On 5/7, the Syrian government held parliamentary elections as planned, releasing results on 5/15 that claimed a 51% voter turnout and two-thirds of the seats won by members of the ruling Ba'th party and the official opposition. Most Syrians dismissed the elections as "a farce" (NYT 5/8); activists in Homs noted that no polling places had been set up in Sunni neighborhoods, and that troops were occupying parts of the city during the vote.

At the close of the quarter, 189 UN monitors and 60 civilian human rights workers were on the ground in Syria, but fighting was escalating sharply. The international community was as yet unwilling to declare the Annan initiative dead, but behind the scenes, talks were reportedly (see NYT 5/15) underway on next steps. Meanwhile, an Arab League meeting on Syria planned for 5/15 was postponed at the request of the SNC, citing its inability to rally the various opposition groups under a unified vision.

Sources also reported (WP 5/16) that since the 4/1 Friends of Syria meeting, the FSA had begun receiving more and better arm shipments (including antitank weapons) from Gulf states. The U.S. emphasized (5/15) that it was not arming or funding the rebels, but said it had increased contacts with the FSA to assess its "credibility and command-and-control infrastructure" and was briefing its Gulf allies on its observations.

The most recent estimates of civilian tolls were from 3/2012, when the UN put (3/29) the death toll at 9,000, whereas an independent group estimated (3/14) it to be over 10,000. The UN believed (3/13) that at least 230,000 Syrians had been displaced (200,000 internally and 30,000 seeking refuge abroad). Independent sources (see WT 3/6) estimated that at least 10,000 refugees were in Lebanon, 11,000 in Turkey, and 80,000 in Jordan (where the government completed the construction of a refugee camp on the Syrian border in anticipation of a major exodus). The U.S. allocated (5/10) \$40 m. to Jordan to help it support Syrian refugees. Human Rights Watch accused (3/13) Syrian forces of trying to deter refugees from fleeing abroad by laying landmines along the Lebanese and Turkish borders and along internal routes used by refugees.

While the spillover of Syrian fighting into **Lebanon** was minimal, the Syrian civil unrest did have ripple effects among pro- and anti-Syrian Lebanese factions in the north. On 5/12, an anti-Syrian Sunni faction and a pro-Syrian Alawite group exchanged gunfire in Tripoli, leaving 3 Lebanese (including a teenager) dead and sparking 3 days of

clashes. The incident was precipitated by the Lebanese security forces' arrest of prominent Asad critic Shadi Mawlawi on charges of communicating with a terrorist organization (al-Qa'ida). The arrest sparked angry protests by followers of a Salafist group that had been staging a peaceful sit-in in Tripoli's al-Nur Square since ca. 5/3 to protest the Lebanese government's detention without charge of several local Sunnis and to express solidarity with antigovernment forces in Syria. The Sunnis viewed Mawlawi's arrest as motivated by pro-Syrian elements angry over Sunni attempts to provide aid to Syrian refugees fleeing into the Tripoli area. The ensuing mob violence and clashes with security forces resulted in the shooting death of a Sunni teenager in a predominantly Alawite area, with sectarian clashes devolving from there, leading to 2 more deaths. Skirmishing between the groups escalated on 5/13 and 5/14, now including machine gun and RPG fire, raising concerns that broader sectarian violence in Lebanon could reignite. By the time Lebanese troops deployed in force in Tripoli to halt the fighting, at least 8 Lebanese had been killed and 100 wounded.

Meanwhile, the Lebanese government revealed (ca. 5/14) that it had seized a shipment of heavy weapons in 4/2012 intended for the FSA after receiving requests from Syria for tighter border control.

In **Egypt**, as the quarter opened, the Muslim Brotherhood's (MB) Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) had won parliamentary elections and formed a broad-based national unity coalition with centrist, liberal, leftist, and other Islamist parties. However, the interim military authority, SCAF, had pressured the MB into allowing its PM and cabinet to remain in place until a new constitution was approved and presidential elections were held in late 5/2012, raising concerns that SCAF would resist ceding power despite democratic elections.

By late-3/2012, the 100-member constitutional committee (appointed by parliament) was in disarray, with critics complaining that Islamists were in control and that other religious and liberal groups were merely token members. (The FJP-dominated parliament had

given 50 seats to Islamist MPs and another 10 to Islamists outside the government.) After Coptic representatives quit (4/2) in protest, the Cairo Administrative Court suspended (4/10) the committee until there could be a judicial review of the legality of having parliamentarians serve as members. This decision meant that the presidential elections (now set for 5/23–24) would almost certainly come before a new constitution could be ratified. This would mean that whoever was elected would be given the same broad powers as former pres. Mubarak, making the identity and affiliation of the new president crucial.

Given this new development, the MB announced (3/31) that it would field its own presidential candidate, chief strategist and deputy leader Khayrat al-Shatir, reversing an earlier MB decision not to take part in the election. In response, Mubarak's former military intelligence chief Omar Sulayman put himself forward (4/6) as well, shaking up the presidential race by becoming the first member of the old regime to enter the contest and altering the field of candidates, which was dominated by Islamists. By presenting himself as a stable, experienced candidate who could restore security and prosperity, he was widely seen (see WP 4/7) as forcing voters to pick between the old order they knew and an uncertain future.

In a surprise turn on 4/14, Egypt's High Election Commission ruled that 10 of 23 presidential candidates were ineligible, including the top 2 Islamist candidates (the MB's Shatir, disqualified because he was previously convicted of a crime, albeit political and not criminal, and ultraconservative Salafist Hazim Abu Isma'il, disqualified because his mother was a dual Egyptian-U.S. citizen) and Mubarak's former military intelligence chief Sulayman (disqualified because of the inability to authenticate many of the signatures he had collected to file for candidacy). Those rejected immediately appealed, but the decision was upheld on 4/17. As such, the front-runners became longtime diplomat 'Amr Musa; the MB's backup candidate, Muhammad Mursi; and moderate Islamist, 'Abd al-Muna'im Abu al-Futuh.

During the official campaign period that followed, Israel was a prominent

issue. During a debate (5/14) between front-runners Musa and Abu al-Futuh, the latter called Israel an enemy state and challenged Musa to do the same, but he refused. Another candidate, former PM Ahmad Shafiq, told (5/14) voters that as an air force commander he shot down an Israeli warplane. All candidates pledged to end or renegotiate Egypt's nuclear gas deal with Israel and to review and/or revise the 1979 peace treaty.

Of note: The conflict that erupted last quarter between SCAF and the U.S. over SCAF's move to close 3 U.S. democracy-building organizations in Cairo and bar their foreign employees from leaving the country (see QU in *JPS* 163) ended on 3/1 when the NGOs agreed to pay a \$4-m. bail and SCAF lifted the travel ban on the foreigners. The workers (minus 1 American who refused to leave) were immediately put on a plane to Cyprus. On 3/22, the Obama admin. agreed to resume transfer of \$1.5 b. of (mostly military) aid to Egypt, waiving a congressional requirement that the president certify Egypt's progress toward democratization. Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-VT), who wrote the legislation imposing restrictions on the transfer of aid, expressed (3/22) disappointment, saying the move "sends a contradictory message about favoring democracy but rewarding Egypt as the military harasses and arrests those working for democracy."

In **Libya**, popular frustration grew this quarter, fueled by the lack of substantive change since Col. Mu'ammarr Qaddafi's overthrow in 10/2011 and general distrust in the governing Transitional National Council (TNC). One Libyan summarized (2/17) the problem as "a new minister at the top, but the same old machine behind him." Local militias, called upon by the TNC last quarter (see QU in *JPS* 163) to either lay down arms and return home or join the fledgling Libyan National Army (intended to integrate them), refused to stand down. Amnesty International reported (2/17) that they were acting "with total impunity and are absolutely reluctant to submit to any kind of central authority or to give up their weapons."

On 3/25, militiamen from the town of Zintan stormed and shot up the luxury hotel in Tripoli that served as the

TNC's home base. Days earlier, 2 TNC officials suspected of having had ties to the Qaddafi government were briefly kidnapped. Meanwhile, fighters from Zintan and Misrata controlled the airport, seaport, and several key points in the capital, where observers noted (NYT 3/26) "growing popular resentment of both the councils and the militia fighters."

Instability was not limited to Tripoli. In late 3/2012, clashes erupted near the border with Chad between Arab and Tabu tribesmen (Libyans with ethnic ties to Chad, who have complained of discrimination from Libya's new leaders) over differences in how \$4 m. allocated to the region by the TNC would be distributed. The fighting left at least 50 dead and 150 injured before the TNC dispatched 3,000 troops to the south to restore order.

By 5/2012, U.S. contractors were lining up bids for U.S. government contracts to advise the TNC on consolidating power. The British were preparing similar advisory teams. The U.S. also pledged (mid-2/2012) \$40 m. to helping Libyan authorities recover some 20,000 shoulder-launched surface-to-air missiles once held by the Qaddafi regime but now missing.

Last quarter, **Yemen's** president of 33 years, Ali Abdallah Saleh, bowed to international pressure to step down permanently in favor of his VP 'Abd Rabbuh Mansur al-Hadi in exchange for amnesty for himself and his family, and soon after departed to the U.S. for medical treatment. Hadi planned to lead the country to new presidential elections set for 2/21, for which he was the only candidate. The day before the vote (2/20), the U.S. endorsed Hadi and pledged to boost aid to Yemen provided that (1) the transition deal was fulfilled, (2) counterterrorism cooperation against al-Qa'ida continued, and (3) the new government moved quickly to restructure the military, implement reforms, and combat political corruption.

Hadi won the 2/21 election with overwhelming popular support. (In the "yes/no" voting, there were 6.6 m. yes votes and just under 16,000 no votes.) Observers noted that Yemenis overwhelmingly welcomed the election. Some considered the election "more

of a mechanism to remove Mr. Saleh than an exercise in democracy" (NYT 2/20), but many opposition figures and activists felt (WP 2/21) that so long as Saleh's family remained powerful, nothing changed. Indeed, Saleh quickly returned to Yemen after the vote on 2/25, raising concerns that he would attempt to reassert his authority.

On 4/6, Hadi took his first serious reform step by firing key security officials who were Saleh loyalists (including Saleh's half-brother, air force commander Muhammad Saleh al-Ahmar, and his nephew, presidential guard chief Tariq Saleh al-Ahmar). The next day (4/7), armed tribesmen and uniformed troops loyal to Ahmar attacked the main airport in Sana'a with anti-aircraft fire, forcing it to shut down. The airport reopened on 4/8 after Ahmar's Gulf allies pressured him to back down. No further major challenges to Hadi's government were reported before the end of the quarter.

Meanwhile, a small number of grassroots activists maintained a protest encampment near Sana'a University to denounce the official opposition parties for cutting an amnesty deal with Saleh, vowing to continue protests until all remnants of his regime were gone (particularly from the military). Observers believed (e.g., NYT, WP 2/28) that the protests could revive if Hadi did not quickly usher in new reforms.

Also of note: The Yemeni government issued (3/18) its first official casualty estimates of the previous year of unrest, citing 2,000 killed (including 120 children) and 22,000 injured—much higher than independent rights groups and observers previously estimated. Amnesty International previously put the figure at 200.

Tunisia's new government, elected in 10/2011 and led by a coalition headed by the Islamist Ennahda party, took a pro-Islamist but moderate course in what was perhaps the smoothest of the "Arab Spring" power transfers. Ennahda, which led the committee drafting the new constitution, stated (3/26) that it would identify Islam as Tunisia's official religion and Arabic as its official language, but would not cite Islamic law as a source of legislation. The government also declared (4/1) that it could

not normalize relations with Israel but emphasized that that "Tunisians' problem is with Zionism, not with Judaism." Soon after (on 4/11), Pres. Muncif al-Marzuqi took part with Tunisia's grand rabbi in a ceremony marking the 10th anniversary of an al-Qa'ida bombing of a synagogue in Djerba that killed 21 people. In his address, he stated that "all forms of discrimination against Jews, assaults on their lives, possessions, or religion are forbidden."

Nonetheless, an opposition to Ennahda rule did exist. When the Interior Min. banned rallies in c. Tunis in late 3/2012 after locals complained that repeated antigovernment protests by secular parties and trade unionists were snarling traffic and disrupting business, 100s of opposition supporters deliberately staged a rally on 4/9 to protest the action. Riot police using batons and tear gas violently dispersed the protesters, sparking clashes that left 15 civilians and 8 policemen hurt. In the town of Munastir, 10s of protesters attacked Ennahda party offices in reaction, but did not manage to take over the building. Marzuqi promptly denounced (4/9) the "unacceptable violence" and ordered a government investigation of the use of force by police.

In **Bahrain**, the minority Sunni government had remained uneasily in control since putting down the 3/2011 protests that called for the end of the monarchy (see QU in *JPS* 160) but had never explicitly resolved differences with its underrepresented Shi'i majority. On 3/9, 10,000s of antigovernment demonstrators took to the streets of Manama to mark the 1-year anniversary of their uprising and to reassert their demand for democratic reforms, marking the biggest protest in Bahrain since the Arab Spring protests began. Quiet returned until 4/9, when suspected Shi'i militants bombed a police station. In retaliation, a Sunni mob attacked (4/11) a supermarket owned by a major Shi'i business group. (No serious injuries were reported in either incident.) Pro-democracy demonstrators stepped up protests again beginning on 4/19 in advance of the government-sponsored Formula One Grand Prix (set for 4/22) to draw attention to their demands that the monarchy step down.

They also denounced the Grand Prix as a government PR stunt to cover up the monarchy's failures to address demands for reform. Though 10,000s of protesters took to the streets daily between 4/19 and 4/22, with some clashes with riot police reported (1 protester killed), the Grand Prix went off as planned. Another antigovernment rally was held in Manama on 5/1, but no violence was reported.

In **Jordan**, the reformist PM, 'Awn al-Khasawna, suddenly resigned (4/26) after only 6 months in office in a move seen (e.g., WP 4/27) as reflecting differences with King Abdallah over the pace and extent of government reforms. Abdallah replaced him with veteran politician and close ally Fayiz Tarawna. Abdallah swore in the new cabinet on 5/2, urging members to move quickly to enact reforms, particularly election reforms.

Of note: A *Washington Post* special report on Jordan (5/8) concluded that while proreform protests in the kingdom have been small and irregular, and security forces have generally allowed them to take place without incident, "the civility masks deep and growing tensions that call into question the stability of . . . Israel's last reliable Arab ally." A poor economy, corruption among government officials and the king's inner circle, and frustration that promised reforms were not materializing, according to the report, were causing discontent. One journalist and government critic, 'Ala' Faza, was quoted as saying: "People are very angry, but at the same time, they are very afraid. They don't fear the police, but they fear the future. I don't know when the anger will beat the fear." He believed that even while many Jordanians wanted reforms, most worried about making changes too quickly and preferred the present stability over uncertainty, while at the same time thinking that the status quo (corruption and economic decline without real reform) could not continue for long.

HAMAS, ISLAMIC JIHAD, AND HIZBALLAH FACE REALIGNMENTS

While the Arab Spring fall-out greatly contributed to the stagnation on the Israeli-Palestinian track,

for Damascus-based Palestinian factions (especially Hamas and Islamic Jihad) and Lebanon's Hizballah, the Arab Spring redefined core relationships and arguably the meaning and purpose of resistance.

While Islamic Jihad's leadership remained in Damascus and expressed (e.g., 3/12) support for the Asad regime vis-à-vis external threats, Hamas (which removed its leadership from Damascus last quarter; see QU in *JPS* 163) for the 1st time allowed (2/21) 100s of Palestinians in Gaza to demonstrate against the Asad regime. Days later (on 2/24), speaking at Friday prayers in Cairo's al-Azhar Mosque, Hamas's acting PM in Gaza, Ismail Haniyeh, issued the movement's 1st public call supporting the Syrian opposition, stating: "I salute all people of the Arab Spring . . . and I salute the heroic people of Syria who are striving for freedom, democracy, and reform." Iran responded (early 3/2012) by cutting some funding to Hamas.

Meanwhile, Lebanon-based Hamas officials met (3/9) with Hizballah leaders in Beirut to urge them to back away from supporting the Asad regime, warning that continued support for a regime that kills its own civilians would undermine Hizballah's reputation. Hamas suggested instead reviving Hamas-Hizballah efforts (conducted briefly in 4/2011) to quietly host reconciliation talks between the Syrian government and opposition. Hizballah head Shaykh Hasan Nasrallah, already sensing an erosion in Hizballah's popularity because of its muted support for Asad, reportedly (NYT 4/6) endorsed Hamas's plan to quietly approach opposition figures inside Syria, but did not authorize Hizballah to take part. During the quarter, he also began "carefully recalibrating" his speeches to "gently but firmly signal[] that Mr. Asad could not crush the uprising by force and must lay down arms and seek a political settlement."

After Syrian pres. Asad reiterated (3/15) that opposition forces must first halt their fire before government forces would do so and open talks, Nasrallah issued (3/15) a statement saying that both sides should cease fire simultaneously. The statement was seen (e.g., NYT 4/6) as Hizballah's 1st cautious attempt to tone down its support for

the Asad regime. Days later, Nasrallah called on Asad to undertake “serious and genuine” reform efforts, stating that it was the duty of all “whose hearts are throbbing with sympathy for the Syrian people” to seek a political solution to the problem (a statement seen as a rebuke to Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, which advocated arming the FSA to overthrow Asad).

TURKEY

Turkey, preoccupied with the crisis in Syria, did not play a role in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process this quarter. Of note: A Turkish official said (4/23) that Turkey had blocked NATO from inviting Israel to participate in a NATO summit planned for Chicago in 5/2012 as part of a NATO outreach program to boost ties with nonmember states. NATO officials denied that the issue was ever discussed. Israel did not comment.

Also of note: U.S. military officials said that a new NATO missile defense system in Turkey was now fully operational (see QU in *JPS* 162). The system officially serves as part of NATO’s anti-missile umbrella protecting Europe, but is seen by the U.S. as critical for its capability to intercept missiles fired from Iran toward Israel.

IRAN

As the quarter opened, Iran was feeling the effects of several new rounds of international sanctions targeting its banking sector, petroleum industry, and anyone connected to its nuclear program in the aim of pressuring Iran to drop any intentions of pursuing a nuclear weapons program. The impact of the new sanctions on the Iranian economy (e.g., swift devaluation of the *riyal* and restricted access to the international banking community, limiting foreign trade) had caused public alarm among Iranians and prompted Pres. Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to agree to long-standing requests for a resumption of negotiations with the P5+1 nations (the 5 permanent members of the UNSC plus Germany) and greater cooperation with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors.

Preparing and Testing the Ground for Talks

On 2/17, U.S. secy. of state Clinton and EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton met in Washington to weigh the seriousness of Iran’s 2/15 letter formally welcoming Ashton’s 10/2011 call for a resumption of nuclear talks with the P5+1 (see QU in *JPS* 163). As the P5+1 debated how to respond, IAEA inspectors, who had been less than satisfied with their last visit in 1/2012 (see QU in *JPS* 163), returned to Iran on 2/20 to investigate “the possible military dimensions” of Iran’s nuclear program. Though the team had left open the possibility of extending their visit, they departed on 2/21, stating that Iranian officials had blocked them from viewing key documents and visiting the Parchin military complex, where a nuclear weapon triggering device had allegedly been tested in 2003. Though the IAEA stated that it still had no concrete evidence that Iran was working on a bomb, it reported (2/24) new data showing a 50% increase in Iranian production of higher purity uranium (a step below bomb grade) since fall 2011, noting that most of the highly enriched uranium was produced in the new underground plant at Fordo.

On 3/6, the P5+1 formally accepted Iran’s call for renewed talks, later set for 4/13–14 in Istanbul. (The same day, Iran gave the IAEA permission to visit Parchin. While the IAEA welcomed the prospect, it noted that extensive bulldozing and cleaning up of the site shown in recent satellite imagery suggested that any evidence of a covert nuclear program would be gone.) Over the next several weeks, U.S. pres. Obama publicly warned (3/14) that the window for solving the nuclear issue was shrinking and advised Iran to “meet [its] international obligations or face the consequences.” In his annual message to the Iranian people marking the Iranian new year (3/21), he stated that the U.S. sought dialogue to resolve the nuclear issue, but later warned (3/30) that there was sufficient oil on the world markets to cut global reliance on Iran, indicating he would press for new, harsher sanctions if upcoming P5+1 talks failed to make significant progress. To underscore the warning, the U.S. Navy deployed (ca.

4/9) the aircraft carrier *USS Enterprise* and the *Abram Lincoln* carrier strike group to the Gulf, marking only the 4th time in 10 years that the U.S. had deployed 2 aircraft carriers to the Gulf at once. The U.S. Air Force that same month deployed its “premier penetrating strike fighter,” the F-22 Raptor, to a base in the UAE. (The deployments, besides sending a signal to Iran, were also meant to appease Israel, which had been pressing hard for U.S. action against Iran and, with regard to the P5+1 meeting, had urged [ca. 3/4] the U.S. to demand a complete halt to uranium enrichment and IAEA confirmation of the suspension as a precondition for renewing the talks.) Meanwhile, Turkish PM Recep Tayyip Erdogan made a sudden trip to Iran on 3/28, just after meeting with Obama at a conference in South Korea. Turkish officials later (ca. 4/7) acknowledged that Ankara had encouraged Iran to be serious about the P5+1 talks.

In advance of the Istanbul talks, the P5+1 tried without success to agree on a list of steps Iran should take to prove that its nuclear intentions were peaceful. According to EU sources (4/7), the EU and the U.S. wanted to open by demanding that Iran dismantle its underground facility at Fordo, halt enrichment of uranium to 20% purity, and ship all stores of the 20% pure uranium to another country. They also wanted Iran to “restore credibility” by granting the IAEA access to all suspect sites and all top scientists. No information was made public about the gaps between the EU/U.S. position and China and Russia.

P5+1 Talks Convene in Istanbul

In Istanbul on the eve of the formal talks, the P5+1 representatives met (4/13) to narrow their differences, agree on strategy, and prioritize their aims for talks with Iran’s delegation on 4/14. (No details were released.) That evening (4/13), EU foreign policy chief Ashton and the senior P5+1 delegates held an informal and reportedly pleasant dinner with Iran’s chief negotiator, Saeed Jalili (who in recent correspondence had identified himself as “personal representative of the supreme leader,” taken by some as an indication that Ayatollah Ali Khamenei supported his mission).

Talks on 4/14 lasted 10 hours. The sides reached no agreements, but described talks as “constructive and useful” and set a date of 5/23 for a 2d meeting in Baghdad. Afterward, Ashton and Jalili said the talks had focused broadly on each side’s principles and goals, whereas the next round of talks would focus on the harder task of drafting specific proposals and counterproposals for reaching (in Ashton’s words) “a comprehensive negotiated solution which restores international confidence in the exclusively peaceful nature of the Iranian nuclear program.” The immediate goal, according to Ashton, was “to move to a sustained process of serious dialogue.” She reaffirmed that the basis of future talks would be the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), which permits peaceful nuclear energy but requires strict oversight and monitoring by the IAEA to guarantee there is no military component. The U.S. said it was encouraged but stressed the need for rapid progress. Jalili said Iran was encouraged by the “desire of the other side for dialogue and cooperation” and considered the talks “a step forward.”

Overall, experts viewed (NYT 4/30) temperatures as having cooled significantly as a result of the Istanbul talks and the accommodation shown by both sides. The general consensus was that the talks had significantly reduced the chances of military action and a provided hope that a way forward could be found. Even in Israel, which had been strongly pressing for punitive action, IDF chief of staff Lt.-Gen. Gantz stated (4/25) that sanctions on Iran appeared to be working and that he did not believe Iran would build a nuclear weapon, while former Shin Bet dir. Yuval Diskin publicly accused (4/28) PM Netanyahu and DM Barak of misleading the public on the nuclear threat.

Nonetheless, the U.S. and EU in particular kept up the pressure. At an NPT meeting in Vienna at the close of the quarter, both called (5/7) on Iran, separately, to take actions *before* the talks resumed in Baghdad on 5/23 to prove its sincerity in wanting to resolve the nuclear issue. While the U.S. called for unspecified “urgent, practical steps,” the EU urged Iran to suspend all uranium

enrichment voluntarily. At the same meeting, IAEA and Iranian officials met (5/15) to discuss improving cooperation and planning a date for IAEA inspectors to visit Parchin. The sides described the talks as having made progress and said they planned to meet again on 5/21, but provided no details.

Sanctions

In advance of the Istanbul meeting, several more steps were taken to tighten sanctions on Iran while preventing undue hardship on countries reliant on Iranian oil. Most notably, the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunications (SWIFT), a global financial transaction service used by most oil traders, cut (3/15) ties with Iranian banks that were subject to EU sanctions. Dubai banks also reduced (2/29) ties with Iranian banks likely to be targeted for sanctions. The U.S. further expanded (3/27) its bilateral sanctions, adding an Iranian cargo airline, 3 senior Republican Guard officers, and a Nigerian trade agent to its blacklist.

Iran, for its part, suspended (2/19) oil exports to Britain and France in what was seen (e.g., WP 2/20) as a political move to blunt the impact of the EU's decision last quarter to cut off oil purchases from Iran in 7/2012 (see QU in *JPS* 163). The move was largely symbolic, as Britain received no Iranian exports and France (which made up only 4% of Iran's exports) had already started phasing out its purchases in anticipation of the 7/2012 deadline.

Meanwhile, the U.S. announced (3/20) that it would exempt Japan and 10 EU nations from U.S. bilateral sanctions on Iran because they had shown a solid "commitment to holding Iran accountable" to the extent possible given their dependence on Iranian petroleum. At the time, the U.S. was in the process of negotiating with 12 other nations (including China, India, and South Korea) heavily dependent on Iranian petroleum, offering to exempt them from U.S. sanctions if they agreed to cut back their purchase from Iran significantly.

The Effect of Nuclear Tensions on Iranian Elections

Iran held its first parliamentary elections since 2009 in 2 stages this quarter, on 3/2 and 5/4. The P5+1 had hoped

that the sanctions pressure would sway the outcome in favor of Ahmadinejad's rivals. Indeed, around 72% of the 290 seats up for grabs fell to conservatives allied with Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who had been critical of Ahmadinejad. Some analysts believed (NYT 3/5) that Khamenei might feel his position had been strengthened sufficiently so that when Ahmadinejad's term expired in 6/2013, he could opt to eliminate the position of president entirely in favor of a parliamentary system in which a PM is chosen by the supreme leader from among the MPs.

Iran Linked to Suspected Attacks on Israelis Abroad

Last quarter, attacks on and threats against Israelis in Azerbaijan, Europe, Georgia, India, and Thailand were attributed by Israel and the U.S. to Iran, but law enforcement agencies were less certain (see QU in *JPS* 163). This quarter, Indian police for the 1st time officially linked (3/16) a 2/13/12 bombing in New Delhi that injured an Israeli diplomat's wife with an alleged plot to attack Israelis in Bangkok foiled on 2/14/12. Police arrested an Indian journalist working for Iranian news outlets in India and issued arrest warrants for 3 Iranians who had left India for involvement in the 2/13/12 attack, stating that 1 of the 3 Iranians had contact with an Iranian arrested in Malaysia in connection with the Bangkok plot. On 2/27, Thailand arrested 3 more Iranians in connection with the Bangkok plot.

On 2/21, Azerbaijan said that it had foiled a new plot by Iranian Republican Guard to attack Israeli targets in Baku, but gave no details. Days later (on 2/26), Israel (which had been working hard to build diplomatic alliances with countries on Iran's border) agreed to sell \$1.6 m. of drones and missile defense systems to Azerbaijan, which borders Iran.

Covert Attacks on Iran Continue

Iran announced (4/23) that its Oil Min. and a number of oil facilities were under cyberattack, forcing the government to disconnect several computer systems from the Internet. It accused Israel and/or the U.S. of launching the virus, called Wiper, which erases hard

disks. Anonymous Iranian sources said Wiper was first detected in 3/2012 but was spreading and multiplying. It had not been contained at the end of the quarter.

Spying Cases

On 4/10, Iran announced that it had arrested an Israeli-backed “terrorist team” of 15 people (Iranians and foreigners) planning attacks inside Iran, stating that “heavy bombs, machine guns, handguns, silencers, military and telecommunications equipment, and other terrorist tools” were found on the team. Israel declined to comment.

Iran executed (5/15) alleged spy for Israel Majid Jamali Fashi, convicted of assassinating an Iranian nuclear scientist in 1/2012.

Iran’s Supreme Court overturned (3/5) the verdict against dual U.S.-Iranian citizen Amir Mirzaei Hekmati and ordered a retrial. In 1/2012, Hekmati was convicted and sentenced to death by an Iranian court for spying for the CIA (see QU in *JPS* 163).

INTERNATIONAL

UNITED STATES

U.S. diplomatic efforts in the region this quarter focused mainly on Iran and Syria. No apparent efforts were deployed on the Israeli-Palestinian front beyond urging the sides to resume negotiations.

The 2012 Election Campaign

This quarter, former Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney virtually secured the Republican nomination over the other front-runners: former House speaker Newt Gingrich (GA), U.S. Congressman Ron Paul (TX), and former U.S. sen. Rick Santorum (PA).

While the Republican candidates did not make significant comments about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, they all focused criticism on Obama’s policy toward Iran. This came out especially in the candidates’ addresses to the AIPAC conference (see “Lobbies” below) on 3/6, the morning of Super Tuesday primary voting. Gingrich, Romney, and Santorum addressed the conference via

satellite from the campaign trail, accusing Obama of being weak on Iran and insufficiently supportive of Israel. Romney also noted that Israeli PM Netanyahu gave him a personal briefing by phone on the situation in Iran earlier on 3/6. Obama held a press conference later that day (3/6) to reprimand Republicans and other members of Congress for “beating the drums of war,” stating: “When I see the casualness with which some of these folks talk about war, I’m reminded of the [human] costs. . . . [T]his is not a game.”

The *New York Times* ran (4/8) a special investigative report (see Selections from the Press in this issue) on the decades-long relationship between Romney and Israeli PM Netanyahu that began in 1976 and has continued to the present, with the men routinely engaging in “unusually frank exchange[s] of advice on topics like politics, economics, and the Middle East.” Romney also attacked Obama’s policy on Syria as too weak, stating (2/23) that the U.S. should press its allies Saudi Arabia and Turkey to arm the opposition forces.

U.S.-Israel Relations

The peace process was largely set aside this quarter, being too contentious for Obama to broach in an election year and with the Netanyahu camp content to maintain the status quo.

The dominant issue of the quarter was Iran. In addition to asking the U.S. to set preconditions for renewed P5+1 talks (see “Preparing and Testing the Ground for Talks” above), Israel continued to press for U.S. support in principle for a preemptive military strike on Iran, including at meetings between Obama and Netanyahu at the White House (3/5) and between Israeli and U.S. defense officials as part of the ongoing strategic dialogue. These last included talks between Israeli DM Barak and U.S. defense officials in Washington (ca. 3/5); U.S. National Security Adviser Thomas Donilon, JCS Gen. Dempsey, and Israeli officials in Israel on 2/19; and Dempsey and IDF chief of staff Lt.-Gen. Benny Gantz in Washington on 3/20. Sources reported (NYT 3/4) that the U.S. and Israel fundamentally disagreed both on the usefulness and the possible consequences of a strike.

At the White House meeting on 3/5, Obama reiterated that the U.S. wanted time for diplomacy with Iran to work and for sanctions to have an impact, but left all options, including a U.S. military strike, on the table. He also stated that Israel had the right to act in its own national interests. Observers said (WP 3/6) Obama's statement "could easily be considered a green light for Israeli action. And if Obama is flashing a green light, Israel's advocates in Congress [especially Sen. Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (T-KY)] are waving a starter's flag."

After the Netanyahu and Barak visits, the Israeli daily *Ma'ariv* cited (3/8) unnamed intelligence sources as saying that Israel had warned the U.S. in the meetings that its present military capabilities restricted the window in which Israel could launch a successful preemptive strike against Iran, and that Obama had offered to supply Israel with more sophisticated bunker-busting bombs and better long-range warplanes if Israel promised to delay a strike until after the 11/2012 U.S. presidential elections. Anonymous U.S. officials rejected (Reuters 3/8) the idea that Obama would place such an explicit quid pro quo, without denying that Obama had offered the upgraded materiel.

After the P5+1 talks ended on 4/14, Netanyahu denounced (4/15) the P5+1 for giving Iran "a freebie" by allowing it to enter talks without first halting uranium enrichment. Obama rejected (4/16) the criticism, stating: "The notion that somehow we've given something away or a 'freebie' would indicate that Iran has gotten something. In fact, they've gotten some of the toughest sanctions . . . if they don't take advantage of these talks."

Israeli pres. Shimon Peres sent (4/10) a letter to U.S. pres. Obama requesting clemency for convicted spy for Israel Jonathan Pollard, citing his declining health. Peres also forwarded to Obama 2 petitions he had received urging him to seek Pollard's release: 1 signed by 35,000 Israeli citizens (including former captive IDF soldier Gilad Shalit) and 1 from 80 Israeli MKs.

Judiciary

The U.S. Supreme Court ordered (3/26) a lower court to decide whether Americans born in Jerusalem can claim Israel as their birthplace on their passports. Congress approved legislation in 2002 allowing this, but the executive branch claimed that Congress overstepped its authority by attempting to override the president's right to set foreign policy. The U.S. officially recognizes Jerusalem as occupied Palestinian territory and does not recognize Israel's claim to united Jerusalem as its capital.

Congress

U.S. secy. of state Clinton invoked (4/11) rarely used powers to override a congressional hold on \$152 m. in assistance to the Palestinians. The assistance had been placed on hold by Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-Fla.), chair of the U.S. House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, to punish PA pres. Abbas for seeking statehood recognition at the UN (see QU in *JPS* 163). The State Dept. argued that the funds "provide critical support to the Palestinian people and those leaders seeking to combat extremism within their society and build a more stable future."

U.S. Reps. Howard Berman (D-CA) and Joe Walsh (R-IL), along with 50 co-signers from both parties, sent (3/1) a letter urging U.S. atty. gen. Eric Holder to indict, extradite, and prosecute "Palestinian terrorists" who have killed or wounded American citizens, particularly any Palestinian prisoners released under the 10/2011 and 12/2011 Hamas-Israel prisoner swap that freed Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. The letter stated that since the Koby Mandell Act allowing the U.S. to try foreign terrorists who have harmed U.S. citizens abroad was passed in 2005, not one Palestinian has been tried, though (by their count) as many as 71 Palestinian attacks had left 54 Americans dead and 83 injured since the 1993 signing of the Oslo accords.

On 3/22, a bipartisan group of 34 representatives and 10 senators signed an appropriations request seeking \$2 m. for the U.S.-Israel Energy Cooperation Program for FY 2013. The program, which includes such projects as a solar thermal plant and smart grid designs for commercial and residential use, is seen

as another “vehicle for expanding . . . common interests” between the 2 countries. The Israeli government would match the funding dollar for dollar. The House, which would be the 1st body to consider the initiative, had not acted by the end of the quarter.

This quarter, U.S. Sens. John McCain (R-AZ), Lindsey Graham (R-SC), and Joseph Lieberman (I-CT) made repeated calls for Obama make more aggressive attempts to oust Syrian pres. Assad. McCain and Graham called (2/19) for the U.S. to arm the Syrian opposition, prompting JCS Gen. Dempsey to dismiss (2/19) the possibility, stating: “I would challenge anyone to clearly define for me the opposition movement in Syria at this point.” On 3/5, McCain, Graham, and Lieberman called on Obama to launch air strikes on Syria to “protect key population centers,” safe-havens, and aid corridors, stating that the U.S. should be “prepared to use the full weight of our air power.” Lieberman and McCain also visited (4/10) refugee camps in Turkey to show solidarity with the Syrian refugees.

Members of Congress initiated 2 significant actions regarding Iran. Just after Secy. of State Clinton and EU foreign policy chief Ashton met in Washington to discuss Iran’s offer to revive talks with the P5+1 (see “Iran” above), a bipartisan group of senators sent (2/21) a letter to Obama warning that new talks could provide a “dangerous distraction” allowing Iran more time for nuclear development.

U.S. Reps. Brad Sherman (D-CA) and Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL) introduced (ca. 3/15) a new draft Iran sanctions bill in the House. The “Iran Financial Sanctions Improvement Act” was intended to close loopholes in previous bilateral sanctions packages. The measure had been referred to committee at the close of the quarter. A Senate version reportedly is being drafted by Sen. Mark Kirk (R-IL).

Lobbies

The annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), held in Washington 3/4–7, was the largest to date, with 13,000 attending (including 1,600 students from 500 campuses and more than 200 college

presidents from all 50 states). The aim of the conference and the AIPAC-sponsored lobbying events surrounding it was to put pressure on Obama to take a harder stance against Iran and be more supportive of Israel vis-à-vis Iran, including supporting a military option. Speakers, including Israeli officials and members of Congress, called on the president to stop urging Israeli restraint and to lay out clear red lines that, if crossed by Iran, would result in a U.S. military strike. Responding that “now is not the time for bluster,” Obama told (3/4) the assembly that he was willing to use “all elements of American power” to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons, but that “diplomacy backed by pressure” (i.e., sanctions) must be allowed time to succeed. Obama also reiterated his support for the creation of a Palestinian state and an agreed 2-state solution, but otherwise did not discuss the peace process (see Doc. D1). The next day (3/5), Netanyahu, after his White House meeting with Obama (see “U.S.-Israel Relations” above), told the cheering AIPAC audience that sanctions had done nothing to slow Iran’s progress and warned that time for diplomacy was running out.

The critically pro-Israel lobbying group J Street held its annual conference in Washington 3/26–27 as a counterpoint to AIPAC’s, with the focus on lobbying against a military strike on Iran, supporting a 2-state solution, and halting settlement expansion as undermining peace. This year’s conference drew 2,500 participants, of whom 700 took part in a lobbying day (3/27) on Capitol Hill. Former Israeli PM Ehud Olmert gave the keynote speech at the gala dinner, emphasizing that PA pres. Abbas “wants peace with Israel and he accepts the existence of Israel as Israel declares itself to be.”

Israel’s *Jerusalem Post* newspaper hosted its first-ever gathering in New York on 4/29, where former Israeli PM Ehud Olmert faced a hostile American audience. Olmert strongly criticized PM Netanyahu’s policies toward the Palestinians, the peace process, and Iran. He also characterized Netanyahu’s dismissive stands toward the U.S. and the international community as dangerous and counterproductive. The crowd booed him, shouting “naïve!”

and "Neville Chamberlain!" Olmert dismissed the criticism, telling the crowd: "I love very much the courage of those who live 10,000 miles away from the State of Israel and . . . [encourage] every possible mistake that will cost the lives of Israelis."

The Conference of Presidents of Major American Jewish Organizations (CPMAJO) held its annual conference in Israel ca. 2/19–20, with the focus on combating "Israel-bashing." PM Netanyahu gave the keynote address on 2/19, in which he listed what he perceives as the 4 main threats to Israel: "The first is nuclear, the second is missiles with many thousands aimed at Israel and its cities, the third is cyberattacks, the fourth is border infiltration not only by terrorists but by mainly foreigners [i.e., illegal African immigrants], who threaten the Jewish nature of our small state." On 2/21, a CPMAJO delegation went to Jordan to meet with King Abdallah, who stated that the exploratory Israeli-Palestinian talks that he hosted in 1/2012 were not over and that he expected them to be revived.

A delegation of senior executives of the Jewish Federation of North America, an umbrella group representing a network of Jewish donors across Canada and the U.S., met with Israeli PM Netanyahu in Israel on 2/27 and informed him that they would provide financial and political support to Israel if tension with Iran escalated.

Of note: On 4/23, Obama toured the Holocaust Memorial with Jewish-American Holocaust survivor Elie Weisel, stating in an address afterward that "too often the world has failed to prevent the killing of innocents . . . and we are haunted by the atrocities that we did not stop and the lives we did not save." Weisel followed with comments highly critical of Obama's Syria and Iran policies, asking, "How is it that Asad is still in power? How is it that the Holocaust's no. 1 denier, Ahmadinejad, is still a president?"

RUSSIA

Russia limited its involvement on the Israeli-Palestinian track to the Quartet this quarter, focusing instead on issues related to Syria and Iran.

EUROPEAN UNION

The EU largely limited its involvement on the Israel-Palestine issue to the Quartet this quarter, focusing instead on issues related to Iran and the Arab Spring.

Of note: EU foreign policy adviser Catherine Ashton, speaking (3/20) at a conference on Palestinian refugees in Brussels, expressed condolences for a 3/19 attack on a Jewish school in Toulouse, France, and regret over recent tragedies worldwide that had resulted in child casualties, citing among them recent Israeli air strikes on Gaza (3/9–12) that wounded 14 Palestinian children. Israeli PM Netanyahu denounced (3/20) her for making "the comparison between a deliberate massacre of children and defensive, surgical actions." Ashton's spokesman issued (3/20) a statement saying that her words had been "grossly distorted."

On a bilateral level: Israel and Italy reached (2/16) a \$1-b. agreement for Israel to purchase 30 M-346 training jets to replace the Israeli air force's aging training fleet of U.S. Skyhawks. Italy agreed to reciprocate by purchasing \$1 b. in Israeli defense equipment.

Britain's foreign secy. William Hague met with Israel's vice PM Dan Meridor on a 2-day official visit to Israel. Talks covered Iran but focused on economic cooperation.

In Toulouse, France, a 24-yr.-old French gunman of Algerian descent, Mohammed Merah, opened fire (3/19) on a Jewish school, killing a rabbi and 4 students (all dual French-Israeli citizens) and wounding another 6 students (1 seriously) before escaping. When Merah on 3/21 claimed responsibilities for the school killings as well as those of 2 French soldiers several days before, he said he had acted to protest French intervention in Afghanistan and to avenge the deaths of Palestinian children killed by the IDF in Gaza. Before jumping to his death from an apartment building in a stand-off with police, he claimed to have received al-Qa'ida training, but the French authorities believed he acted alone and had no serious links to al-Qa'ida or other groups.

UNITED NATIONS

The UN-affiliated International Criminal Court (ICC) rejected (4/3) a PA request to sign the ICC's founding treaty (the Rome Statute), reaffirming that only internationally recognized states can join the court. The ruling meant automatic rejection of a PA request for the ICC to form a permanent war crimes tribunal to investigate Israeli actions during its 2008–9 Operation Cast Lead offensive against Gaza. The only recourse left would be for the UNSC to ask for a tribunal, which was unlikely.

The UNHRC on 3/22 approved 5 resolutions critical of Israel, including a resolution (approved 36-1, with 10 abstentions and the U.S. voting against) calling for a UN team to investigate how and to what degree Jewish settlements in the West Bank impinge on Palestinian rights. Israel denounced the resolution, vowing not to cooperate with the mission, severing (3/26) working relations with the UNHRC in protest, and accusing it of taking actions that “harm future chances of reaching an agreement through peaceful means.” The UN team was not dispatched this quarter.

DONORS

The donors' Ad Hoc Liaison Comm. (AHLC), the principal policy-level coordination mechanism for development assistance to the Palestinians, held a regular semiannual meeting in Brussels on 3/21. The AHLC reaffirmed its assessment that the PA had the necessary functioning institutions to run a state, but expressed concern that after 3 years of high-level growth (10% annually) and significant improvement in West Bank security and living conditions, the Palestinian economy had grown at a much slower rate in 2011. The AHLC attributed this to falling donor support, insufficient easing of Israeli restrictions on

Palestinian movement and access, and uncertainty caused by the PA's growing budget deficit. (The IMF's report to the session put the budget deficit at \$200 m., excluding \$1.6 m. in outstanding loans—\$500 m. that the PA owed to government pension funds and private companies, and another \$1.1 m. the PA owed to private banks.) While acknowledging that the PA had made “a concerted effort to strengthen its fiscal position, including taking steps to raise domestic revenues and control expenditures,” the report noted that these efforts could not be successful in stabilizing the Palestinian economy without supportive actions from Israel and the donors. The AHLC stressed the need for Israel to relax its restrictions on Palestinian access to land, water, and raw materials (particularly in West Bank area C), as well as to export markets. Donor states were told that it was “imperative that additional donor funding be identified and transferred immediately to reverse the [budget] crisis before it becomes totally unmanageable.” The Quartet issued a follow-up statement on 4/11 urging the international community to ensure that the Palestinians receive the \$1.1 b. in aid it has requested for 2012.

In addition to the AHLC session, the Local Development Forum (the main donor body dealing with day-to-day affairs in the territories) held a quarterly meeting on 3/14 to discuss the PA's reform and development priorities and budget issues. Of the 4 main donor “strategy groups” (SGs), only the economic SG met (3/12). Various SG subcommittees held routine meetings, including the economic SG's fiscal sector working group (SWG; 3/13) and private sector development and trade SWG (5/14); the infrastructure SG's environmental working group (3/26); and the social development SG's health SWG (3/8) and humanitarian task force (3/7).