

# Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

2016 begins with new attacks in the West Bank and East Jerusalem carried out by Palestinian citizens on Israelis and members of Israel's security forces. Known as the Stabbing Intifada, the attacks began in October 2015 as a protest against Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories, but more specifically as a rejection of the pressures from ultra-Orthodox sectors of the Israeli government to change the status of the Temple Mount / Noble Sanctuary of Jerusalem. In October, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopts a resolution submitted by Palestine, which denies any relation between Judaism and the Temple Mount or the Western Wall and describes Israel as an "occupying power," prompting Israel to suspend collaboration with the international organization.

Violence in the context of the Stabbing Intifada, mostly knife attacks, but also vehicle rammings and shootings, continue throughout the year, despite the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) declaring it is doing all it can to stop them. In November, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is re-elected as leader of Fatah amid increasing controversy over his policies and internal divisions in the Palestinian party, the most significant of which arises from supporters of Mohammed Dahlan, who lives in exile in the United Arab Emirates. Dahlan, who was thrown out of the party in 2011 but maintains a powerful influence over the Revolutionary Council and its Central Committee, is sentenced in December by Ramallah's anti-corruption court to three years in prison for misuse of public funds.

In reaction to the rise in violence and the demonstrations and clashes with

Israeli security forces, Israel repeatedly evacuates and closes the Old City and steps up security measures in East Jerusalem and in the West Bank. Construction of the separation wall is also accelerated and, in July, the Knesset (Parliament) approves a law authorizing the indefinite suspension of deputies that act against the interests and security of the State of Israel, after a parliamentary majority approves the temporary suspension of four Arab Joint List MPs after they visited families of Palestinians who took part in the Stabbing Intifada. Added to this is June's approval of the new anti-terror law with a generalized agreement among deputies from the coalition government and the opposition to toughen penalties, not only for those carrying out attacks, but also for their accomplices, for whom the same sentences are established as those given to the perpetrators. The harsher sentences also apply to minors, with the law passed in July allowing prison sentences to be served from 14 years of age.

Other noteworthy events in the area of security are a number of gunfights in the area of the Golan Heights and in the south of Syria between the Tsahal (Israeli army) and the Syrian army, in connection with the Syrian Civil War. Likewise, the end of the year sees the first fighting between Israeli troops and Islamic State (Daesh) members in the area. Furthermore, at the beginning of May, Israel and Hamas exchange gunfire for the first time since the Gaza War in 2014. Subsequently, in September, Israel begins construction of an underground barrier along the border with the Gaza Strip to block the smuggling tunnels and hinder possible infiltrations.

With respect to Palestine's internal af-

fairs, in February, Qatar hosts a new round of talks between Fatah and Hamas in the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process, which make no significant progress. In September, the High Court of Ramallah suspends the municipal elections scheduled for 8 October 2016 after courts in Gaza, which are not recognized by the PNA, cancel electoral lists close to Fatah, and in view of the inability to hold elections in East Jerusalem. In May, in the Gaza Strip, Hamas gains parliamentary approval to reintroduce the death penalty, despite opposition from the PNA. In the same month, the first three death sentences since 2007 are carried out.

With regard to Israel's internal political panorama, the year is marked by the jailing of a former Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, after being found guilty in the Holyland corruption case; the death in September of the former President and former Prime Minister Shimon Peres; the reconciliation agreement with Turkey, thus putting an end to the crisis started in 2010 with the sinking of the Freedom Flotilla, as it tried to break the maritime blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip; and, in May, the reincorporation into the coalition government of Avigdor Lieberman's ultra-nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu (Israel Our Home), which leads to the departure of the Environment Minister Avi Gabbay, from the centrist Kulanu party (All of Us) and Moshe Yaalon, from Likud, as Defence Minister, a post taken over by Lieberman.

This represents a shift even further to the right for the government led by Benjamin Netanyahu's conservative Likud (Consolidation), which does not show promise for the peace talks that have been frozen since 2014, when the last

attempt to reactivate them was made by the US State Secretary John Kerry. The Israeli authorities' approval of new settlements or the expansion of already existing ones in Palestinian territory continues to be both one of the non-negotiable priorities of Yisrael Beiteinu and one of the main stumbling blocks for reactivating the peace process, despite demands by the Middle East Quartet -the UN, US, EU and Russia- that they be stopped, or the draft resolution written by Egypt and the PNA, which condemns the construction of Israeli settlements on Palestinian territory, submitted to the United Nations Security Council in December. The resolution is approved thanks to a US abstention, in the Obama Administration's last decision in the region, despite pressure from Israel and the future Trump Administration.

In 2016, thousands of new constructions are authorized in the 100 temporary settlements and 150 permanent settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In addition, a law is passed by the Parliament allowing the retroactive legalization of temporary settlements (known as outposts), which precede permanent settlements, in occupied territories of the West Bank. Until now, an absence of permits has meant that such settlements have been illegal under Israeli legislation. The law, approved in December, excludes the case of Amona, an outpost in the West Bank awaiting a definitive ruling from the Supreme Court, which is finally pronounced on 22 December when the court orders its eviction and demolition before 8 February 2017, after accepting a 45-day delay requested by the government.

In 2016, several states launch initiatives to try to reactivate the peace process in a context of regional destabilization and competition for influence in the region. The most visible of these is the Paris Conference on 3 June, led by France and attended by representatives of more than thirty countries, although with the notable absence of both Palestine and Israel, the latter opposing the initiative because of its multilateral nature. The Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi reiterates his country's traditional role as mediator

inviting the parties to resume the talks, in a gesture praised by the Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman and which comes weeks before the first official visit in nine years by an Egyptian Foreign Minister, Sameh Shoukry, to Israel, where he is received by Benjamin Netanyahu. However, a third initiative from Russia is perhaps the most significant in view of the country's quick and strong positioning as a rising power in the Middle East. In this regard, in early September, the Kremlin confirms its readiness to organize a meeting in Moscow, between the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which would be the first such meeting in six years. Two contexts form the backdrop to Russia's offer. The first is the Russian President Vladimir Putin's moves to improve relations with both parties; in Israel's case through the materialization of both countries' wishes to increase incorporation in Defence and create a free trade area between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Israel. The second is the decline of Washington's hitherto clear leadership in the peace process and the end of the Obama era, two months before the Republican candidate Donald Trump's election victory confirms a change in the US administration. Trump's pro-Israeli stance augurs a complicated role for the US as a mediating power, one of his first, controversial decisions being to announce his intention to move the United States embassy in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

### January 2016

#### Israel

- On 4 January Israel launches scores of missiles into the Lebanese border area of Rweiset el-Alam, in Shebaa Farms. The attack may have been in response to an explosion near an Israeli border patrol in the area.
- On 22 January the Israeli army evicts around 80 settlers who had illegally occupied two buildings in the centre of Hebron, close to the Cave of the Patriarchs / Ibrahimi Mosque.

#### Peace Negotiations

- On 31 January the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin rejects the French initiative to hold an international conference to negotiate a two-state solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, saying that dialogue among "allied countries" on issues that affect the security of Israel and its citizens should be undertaken directly. France's Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius declares that if the initiative fails, Paris will consider officially recognizing a Palestinian state.

#### Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1 January two people are killed and another seven injured in a shooting in a bar on Dizengoff Street in central Tel Aviv, carried out by a Palestinian citizen from the town of Arara.
- On 9 January Israeli soldiers shoot dead two Palestinians who tried to stab them at the Bekaot checkpoint in the West Bank.
- On 9 January Israeli troops demolish the house of the Palestinian Muhannad Halabi in Surda, near Ramallah. Halabi helped to spark the current wave of violence known as the Stabbing Intifada when he murdered two Rabbis on 3 October 2015 in Jerusalem's Old City, after which he was shot dead by Israeli security forces.
- On 17 January a resident from the settlement of Otniel, south of Hebron, is stabbed to death in her home. Her assailant, presumed to be Palestinian, then flees the scene.
- On 17 January the Shin Bet (Shabak), Israel's intelligence and internal security service, arrests around thirty Palestinians suspected of participating in terrorist activities and violent unrest.
- On 18 January an Israeli woman is seriously injured when she is stabbed by a Palestinian in the Israeli settlement of Tekoa, in the south of the West Bank.
- On 23 January an Israeli security guard shoots dead a 13-year-old Palestinian girl, who, according to police sources, was attempting a stabbing attack outside the Israeli settlement of Anatot, in the West Bank.

## February 2016

### Israel

- On 7 February after four months of a rise in Palestinian attacks, which have already left around 200 dead, the Labour Party endorses its leader Isaac Herzog's plan to accelerate the completion of the separation wall around the West Bank and 28 Palestinian districts of East Jerusalem, and which leaves the large Jewish settlements on the Israeli side. The plan, which aligns with the ideas of the governing, conservative Likud, also gives the PNA greater authority, on the condition that the Israeli army remains in control of security on the Palestinian side.
- On 8 February the Ethics Committee of the Knesset (Israeli Parliament) bans the deputies Haneen Zoabi, Basel Ghattas and Jamal Zahalka, from the Balad party (Democratic National Election), a member of the Joint List, from entering the plenum and parliamentary committee sessions for four months, for meeting with families of Palestinians from Jerusalem who were killed by security forces after carrying out attacks on Israelis.
- On 14 February Israel resumes its ties with the EU following a three-month dispute over Europe's November 2015 ruling that special labels be used for products imported from Jewish settlements in occupied territories, a measure deemed by Israel to be a "boycott."
- On 15 February Ehud Olmert becomes the first former Prime Minister to be jailed in Israeli history after entering the Maasiyahyu prison, in Tel Aviv, convicted of bribery and obstruction of justice when he was mayor of Jerusalem, in the Holyland housing development scandal.
- On 18 February three Israeli rockets land in Jabal al-Manaa, a position held by forces loyal to the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad to the south of Damascus.

### Palestine

- On 7 and 8 February a new round of talks between Fatah and Hamas is held in Qatar in the inter-Palestinian reconciliation process, which fails to make any

significant progress. Fatah warns it will resume unilateral control of the Gaza Strip, which has been under Hamas rule since 2007 after bloody armed clashes with Fatah supporters.

- On 25 February the Iranian ambassador to Lebanon Mohammad Fathali announces that Iran will make payments to the value of 7,000 dollars to the families of Palestinians killed in protests against Israel or by the Israeli army.
- On 26 February Omar Nayef Zayed, a member of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and wanted for 25 years after being sentenced to death by Israel, is found dying in the Palestinian embassy in Bulgaria. Zayed had sought refuge in the embassy after, in December 2015, the Israeli Ministry of Justice sent a letter to the Bulgarian government requesting his extradition. The PFLP and Hamas accuse Mossad, Israel's foreign intelligence agency, of Zayed's death, although the Bulgarian public prosecutor says that his death, apparently from defenestration, was not the result of murder.

### Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1 February Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian who tried to attack them with a knife in the settlement of Salit, in the West Bank.
- On 3 February one Israeli police officer is killed and another injured in an attack carried out by three Palestinians from Jenin, at one of the main entrances to Jerusalem's Old City. The three assailants are shot dead by border guards at the Damascus Gate.
- On 4 February a court in Jerusalem sentences two Israeli teenagers to life and 21 years in prison respectively for the kidnapping and murder, on 2 July 2014, of a Palestinian minor. Abu Khdeir, from Shuafat, East Jerusalem, was burnt to death by the two Israelis as an act of revenge for the recent murder of three Israeli teenagers in Hebron.
- On 7 February the Israeli police shoots dead a Sudanese citizen after he stabs a soldier and attempts to flee.
- On 14 February the Israeli police announces it killed five Palestinians at the Damascus Gate in the Old City of Jerusalem in three separate actions

that took place during the protests in the area.

- On 18 February two Palestinian minors stab an Israeli soldier to death and seriously injure another at a supermarket in the south of the West Bank.
- On 19 February a Palestinian citizen stabs two Israeli police officers before being shot down by police at one of the entrances to Jerusalem's Old City. Hours later, another Palestinian attempts to drive a vehicle into a group of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank, after which he is shot dead by the soldiers. A third incident also takes place in the West Bank when a Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli soldiers during clashes between Palestinian demonstrators and security forces.
- On 23 February the Israeli army demolishes the houses of two Palestinians, al-Haroub and Raed Masalmeh, who killed five people in November 2015 in the West Bank and Tel Aviv respectively, in the so-called Stabbing Intifada.

## March 2016

### Israel

- On 8 March the US Vice-President Joe Biden travels to Israel to push forward the negotiations of the strategic cooperation agreement between the US and Israel. The visit comes a day after the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancels an official visit to the US, scheduled mid-month and during which he was to meet with the US President Barack Obama and attend the annual conference of the pro-Israel lobby at the US Congress AIPAC. The cancellation is greeted with surprise at the White House, whose spokesperson says it "found out through the media," while Israeli sources cite difficulties in scheduling the meeting with Obama as it coincided with the dates for the President's official visit to Cuba. However, the Israeli newspaper Haaretz reports that the cancellation may have been caused by the failure to advance in the negotiations of the strategic cooperation agreement regarding Israel's request to receive greater military aid from the US, currently set at around 3 billion dollars a year.

- On 20 March around 1,500 *falashas* -Israeli citizens of Ethiopian origin- protest during the meeting of the Council of Ministers in Jerusalem, against the Israeli government's announcement at the beginning of the month to limit the number of Ethiopians entering the country in 2016, despite having previously committed to bringing over thousands of members of the Falash Mura community as quickly as possible, who are living in transit camps in Gondar and Addis Ababa.
- On 22 March 19 Yemeni Jews arrive from the city of Raida after being evacuated from the country in a secret Israeli army operation and thus concluding a 67-year-long repatriation process of Yemen's Jewish community to Israel, which began with the arrival of 50,000 Yemeni Jews between 1949 and 1950 in the so-called Operation Magic Carpet. Since then, arrivals have been much more isolated, but in recent months Israel and the US have cooperated to accelerate the evacuation of all Jews from Yemen because of the country's ongoing conflict.

#### *Palestine*

- On 4 March Hamas announces the execution on 7 February of Mahmoud Ishtawi, head of one of the battalions of the Izzedine al-Qassam Brigades. Ishtawi was sentenced to death by a religious and military court for "moral turpitude" after being held for a year without charge. According to *The New York Times*, Ishtawi was the victim of a purge after being accused of embezzling funds from his unit and of having homosexual relationships.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 1 March Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian citizen during an operation to rescue two soldiers who were attacked after entering the Kalandia refugee camp, according to the Israeli army.
- On 8 March an American tourist is killed and 11 Israelis injured by a Palestinian armed with a knife close to the headquarters of the Peres Centre for Peace in south Tel Aviv, where the US Vice-President is meeting the former Israeli President Shimon Peres. The assailant is shot down by police.

- On 12 March two Palestinian children are killed in an Israeli airstrike in the north of the Gaza Strip, in retaliation for missiles launched into southern Israel.
- On 14 March three Palestinians are shot down by Israeli soldiers after attacking Israeli settlers in Kiryat Arba, in the West Bank.
- On 17 March two Palestinians stab an Israeli soldier on the outskirts of the Ariel settlement in the West Bank, after which they are shot dead by the Israeli army.
- On 24 March two Palestinians are shot dead by the Israeli army after stabbing an Israeli soldier.

#### **April 2016**

##### *Israel*

- On 7 April a study by Israel's Macro Center for Political Economics reveals that the country spends more money on Israeli settlers living in the West Bank than on its other residents, and that it has increased its budget for the settlements by 28.4% in 2015, with respect to the previous year.

##### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 18 April an explosion on a bus at the Patt junction, in southeast Jerusalem, claimed by Hamas, leaves at least 21 injured. The act of terrorism comes hours after Israel announced the discovery of an underground tunnel on the border with Gaza, and is praised by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, Fatah and the PFLP, which describe the attack as a "natural" response to the occupation of Palestine and the al-Aqsa Mosque.
- On 24 April the Israeli authorities evacuate the Temple Mount / Noble Sanctuary and arrest two Palestinians in yet another episode of tension in the Old City of Jerusalem, this time coinciding with the celebration of Jewish Passover.
- On 24 April Israel releases a 12-year-old Palestinian girl, after she served two and a half months in an Israeli jail. The minor, arrested on 9 February in Karmeit Zur, near Hebron, was charged with planning a knife attack on Israelis.
- On 27 April the Israeli border police shoot and kill two Palestinian brothers

after they attempted to stab officers at the Kalandia checkpoint.

#### **May 2016**

##### *Israel*

- On 20 May Benjamin Netanyahu re-incorporates the ultra-nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu into the coalition, led by Avigdor Lieberman, a minister under Netanyahu between 2009 and 2015. Thanks to this agreement, the coalition government gains six more seats in the Parliament giving it a strong parliamentary position ahead of France's plans to reactivate the peace process. On the same day, claiming that the country is being taken over by "extremist and dangerous elements" –in reference to the agreement with Yisrael Beiteinu-, Moshe Yaalon resigns as Defence Minister, a post Netanyahu hands over to Lieberman.
- On 25 May the Environment Minister Avi Gabbay, from the centrist Kulanu party, resigns, citing a shift to the right in Benjamin Netanyahu's government coalition with the inclusion of Yisrael Beiteinu, a move which gives the government 66 of the 120 parliamentary seats.

##### *Palestine*

- On 6 May the Palestinian Finance Minister announces an agreement reached with Jordan and supported by the International Quartet that will allow, for the first time, exports of Palestinian products to the Hashemite Kingdom, after their prior inspection by Israel.
- On 12 May Egypt opens the Rafah crossing, on the border with the Gaza Strip, which has been closed for 85 days.
- On 25 May Hamas announces that the Parliament in Gaza has approved the death penalty, despite opposition from the PNA and human rights groups. In a statement, the Islamist movement that controls the Gaza Strip declares that the law was passed by the Islamist lawmakers in the Palestinian Legislative Council, a body that has failed to bring together its 132 deputies since Hamas took control of the Strip in 2007.

- On 31 May three Palestinians from Khan Yunis serving sentence for murder are executed by firing squad in Gaza, in the first act of capital punishment since 2007.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 19 May the French Foreign Affairs Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault announces that the international conference, promoted by France, aimed at relaunching the peace talks will be held on 3 June.
- On 30 May Avigdor Lieberman is sworn in as Defence Minister. His first act in his new post is to voice his support for negotiations with the Palestinians based on a two-state formula and he repeatedly praises the initiative of the Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi for resuming the peace process.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 3 May the Jerusalem District Court hands down a life sentence to 30-year-old Yosef Haim Ben David for the murder in 2014 of a Palestinian minor, who he and two Israeli minors, also sentenced in February, burnt alive.
- On 4 May in response to Palestinian militants shelling Israeli troops undertaking search and destroy missions on underground tunnels on the border, the Israeli air force attacks several Hamas targets in Rafah. Against the backdrop of this exchange of fire, the first since the Gaza War in 2014, on 5 May a Palestinian woman dies from injuries suffered by shots from an Israeli tank in Khan Younis.
- On 10 May the trial begins against the Israeli soldier Elor Azaria accused of shooting in the head and killing a badly injured attacker on 24 March in Hebron. This is the first such trial of an Israeli soldier in more than a decade.

### **June 2016**

#### *Israel*

- On 7 June, in Moscow, the Russian President Vladimir Putin and the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announce their intention to increase de-

fence cooperation and create a free trade area between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Israel. The announcement comes against the backdrop of a bilateral rapprochement, which is also intended to give both countries a stronger position in the Middle East.

- On 13 June the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon is elected to chair the UN General Assembly's Legal Committee, charged with sensitive issues, including the fight against international terrorism. This is the first time an Israeli representative will head a permanent committee of the UN.
- On 15 June the Parliament approves the new anti-terror law with 57 deputies in favour -including a large part of the opposition- and 16 against, which toughens sentences not only for those who carry out attacks, but also for their accomplices, who will receive the same sentences as those given to the perpetrators.
- On 20 June at least 65 Palestinian prisoners, mostly from the PFLP, declare an open-ended hunger strike in the Israeli prisons of Megiddo and Gilboa in solidarity with the PFLP member Bilal Kayed, who was put on administrative detention after serving a 14-year prison sentence.
- On 26 June a court in Israel hands down a life sentence to Yishai Schlissel, the ultra-Orthodox Jew who carried out an attack on several people taking part in the 2015 Gay Pride parade in Jerusalem, leaving one person dead and six injured.
- On 27 June Israel announces it has reached a reconciliation agreement with Turkey to put an end to the bilateral crisis that began in 2010 and under which the victims of the Freedom Flotilla will receive compensation amounting to 20 million dollars.
- On 28 June the Israeli police announce a three-day closure of the Temple Mount / Noble Sanctuary in Jerusalem after dozens of young Palestinians barricade themselves into the al-Aqsa Mosque in protest against the area's Israeli occupation.

#### *Palestine*

- On 2 June for the first time in three weeks the Egyptian authorities reopen

the country's border with the Gaza Strip for four days to allow students, the sick and dual-nationality citizens to leave or enter Gaza.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 3 June France hosts a meeting aimed at relaunching talks between Israelis and Palestinians based on the creation of two states in the region. Around 30 ministers and representatives of Arab and Western countries, the UN and EU take part in the meeting, to which neither representatives from Israel nor Palestine are invited, who have not held direct negotiations since 2014. Although the secretary general of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) Saab Erekat describes the initiative as hopeful, Israel opposes it because of its multilateral approach.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 8 June at least four people are killed and another six injured in an attack carried out with automatic weapons in the Sarona shopping centre, near the Ministry of Defence and Army HQ in Tel Aviv. After the attack, which Hezbollah describes as a "heroic operation," Israel freezes the 83,000 special permits it had granted Palestinian citizens from the West Bank and Gaza to travel through its territory during the month of Ramadan.
- On 21 June Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian citizen when responding to a rocket and incendiary bomb attack on Israeli vehicles on the road that joins Jerusalem and Tel Aviv where it crosses through the West Bank.
- On 29 June Hallel Yafa Ariel, a 13-year-old Israeli girl is stabbed to death in her bed at home in the settlement of Kiryat Arba, by a Palestinian citizen from Hebron, who is shot down by police after the attack.

### **July 2016**

#### *Israel*

- On 1 July the Quartet on the Middle East -the UN, US, EU and Russia- urges Israel to stop its policy of construc-

tion and expansion of illegal settlements in Palestinian territory.

- On 4 July Tzipi Livni, the former Foreign Minister and currently deputy in the Knesset returns from a trip to the United Kingdom where she avoided questioning by the British police over war crimes committed in the war in the Gaza Strip. Livni was summoned to appear voluntarily in the investigation into the Israeli military's Operation Cast Lead in 2008-2009, in which 1,391 Palestinians were killed -including 759 civilians- and 5,300 injured.
- On 5 July General Gadi Eisenkot, the Israeli chief of general staff, revokes the so-called Hannibal Directive, the controversial military code name in use since the Israeli intervention in Lebanon between 1982 and 1985 and which authorizes indiscriminate attacks to prevent the capture of Israeli soldiers by enemy militias, even at the cost of hostages' lives.
- On 20 July more than 200 French Jews arrive in Israel. Since the attacks in France in 2015 it is estimated that more than 12,000 French Jews have made Aliyah, the return to the Land of Israel. According to the director of the Jewish Agency for Israel in France, Daniel Benhaim, 5,000 people are expected to make the journey from France in 2016, 30% fewer than in 2015. With 600,000 members, the Jewish community in France is the largest in Europe and third largest in the world, behind Israel itself and the US.
- On 21 July the Parliament's plenum approves, with 62 votes in favour and 45 against, the law that allows lawmakers suspected of having supported enemies of the State of Israel to be indefinitely suspended from their parliamentary duties, if said suspension enjoys the support of 90 of the 120 members of the house. The text received approval in a first reading from the parliamentary Justice Committee on 29 March with 59 votes in favour and 52 against.
- On 22 July dozens of Palestinians held prisoner in Israeli jails go on hunger strike in solidarity with the prisoner Bilal Kayed, hospitalized because of the serious deterioration in his health. Kayed has been fasting since 15 June in protest against the decision to put him in administrative detention, taken a day before his release and after he had

served a 14-year prison sentence for belonging to the PFLP.

- On 26 July the Israeli Parliament passes a law allowing minors involved in murder or attempted murder who are between 12 and 14 years of age when they are convicted to serve sentence when they turn 14.
- On 27 July Israel reopens the border with Syria for the first time since the beginning of the war to allow the entry of humanitarian aid.

#### *Palestine*

- On 4 July, a week after the normalization of Turkish-Israeli relations, the Panama-flagged ship Lady Leyla, which set out from Turkey, arrives at the Israeli port of Ashdod with 11,000 tonnes of supplies, food and toys for people living in the Gaza Strip, following inspection by the Israeli authorities.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 10 July the Egyptian Foreign Affairs Minister Sameh Shoukry urges Israelis and Palestinians to resume peace talks during his official visit to Israel, the first undertaken by an Egyptian head of diplomacy in the last decade.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 5 July a young Palestinian from az-Zawiya is injured when she tries to stab two Israeli soldiers at a bus stop at the Gitai Avisar junction, close to Ariel in the north of the West Bank.
- On 27 July during a raid in Surif, near Hebron, Israeli soldiers kill a fighter from Hamas' military wing the al-Qassam Brigades, who was responsible for the attack that killed Rabbi Michael Mark on 1 July in the West Bank. Another three Hamas members are arrested.

### **August 2016**

#### *Israel*

- On 8 August the Interior and Public Security Ministries announce the creation of a joint taskforce to gather information on foreign activists in Israel or the West Bank looking to delegitimize

the State of Israel, with the aim of deporting them.

- On 10 August the Public Security Minister Gilad Erdan announces the creation of five new Israeli police stations in East Jerusalem, where there is currently just one police station, in the historic Old City. The new stations will be located in the neighbourhoods of Ras al-Amud, Jabal Mukaber, Silwan, Issawiya and Shur Baher.
- On 25 August after 71 days of fasting, lawyers of Bilal Kayed, a member of the PFLP, announce that he is suspending his hunger strike after reaching an agreement with the Israeli authorities to end his administrative detention in December, after serving six months in jail. In exchange, Kayed agrees to a four-year exile from Israel and the Palestinian Territories.
- On 31 August the government body in charge of managing the occupied territories authorizes the construction of 466 new homes in different parts of the West Bank, 179 of which have retroactively received legal authorization after being built illegally. According to the Israeli NGO Shalom Ajshav (Peace Now), 2,623 new homes in the settlements have been approved in the last year, 756 of them retroactively.

#### *Palestine*

- On 24 August Egyptian security sources reveal that Abu Suleiman, one of the main Daesh commanders in the Sinai Peninsula, was admitted mid-June to a European-funded Gaza hospital, after being injured in fighting with the Egyptian army.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 24 August unrest erupts in the vicinity of the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem when Israeli security forces forcibly dispel a demonstration in solidarity with the prisoner Bilal Kayed.

### **September 2016**

#### *Israel*

- On 4 September Israel shells a Syrian armed forces position in response

to mortar hitting Israeli-controlled territory in the Golan Heights.

- On 8 September Israel begins construction of an underground barrier along the border with the Gaza Strip to block the smuggling tunnels and prevent infiltrations.
- On 8 September an Israeli court hands prison sentences down to five Arab-Israelis for attempting to join the ranks of Daesh.
- On 8 September the Labour and Social Affairs Minister Haim Katz (Likud) authorizes permits for carrying out essential work on the railways in Tel Aviv for 10 September, coinciding with the Jewish Shabbat. However, on 9 September the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu suspends the order giving in to pressure from the coalition government's two ultra-Orthodox members who are against the "violation of the sanctity of Shabbat." Netanyahu's decision, which causes chaos in the Israeli financial capital's circulation system, ignites a debate on the excessive influence of the 12 *haredi* (ultra-Orthodox) deputies in government decisions with respect to the percentage of the population -around 10%- at a time when Likud is losing support in the polls to the centrist Yesh Atid (There is a Future) party of Yair Lapid. Consequently, the Prime Minister's decision is nullified by the Supreme Court, which reminds Netanyahu that the power to authorize such permits corresponds to the Labour Minister.
- On 10 September the Christian charity World Vision cancels around 120 contracts in Gaza after Israel accuses its director in the Strip Mohamed el-Halabi of diverting millions of dollars to Hamas.
- On 11 September the Israeli Supreme Court denies a petition against force feeding prisoners on hunger strike, arguing that the measure is constitutional.
- On 13 September the Syrian military command says it has used surface-to-air missiles to shoot down an Israeli fighter jet and drone in its airspace. The Israeli army denies the disappearance of any of its aircraft which were participating in reprisal missions after missiles were launched from Syria into the Golan Heights.

- On 28 September Israel's former President and Prime Minister and Nobel peace prize laureate Shimon Peres dies aged 93, two weeks after suffering a stroke.

#### *Palestine*

- On 8 September the High Court in Ramallah suspends the Palestinian municipal elections scheduled for 8 October in view of the inability to hold elections in East Jerusalem, territory controlled by Israel since 1967 and where 250,000 Palestinians live, who would be excluded from the elections, and after courts in Gaza, which are not recognized by the PNA, disqualify Fatah electoral lists.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 8 September the Russian Foreign Ministry confirms its readiness to organize a meeting in Moscow between the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Should this offer be accepted, just a few weeks ahead of an official visit by the Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev to the region, it would be the first meeting between the two leaders in six years. Moscow also points out that both the Israelis and Palestinians have requested Russian mediation -also backed by Egypt- for an eventual reactivation of the peace process, which has made no advances since Washington's failure in April 2014 to bring Abbas and Netanyahu to the negotiating table.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 4 September the Israeli army attacks two Hamas targets in Beit Lahia, in the north of the Gaza Strip.
- On 13 September Hamas rejects Israel's offer to exchange 19 of the movement's fighters captured in 2014 and the bodies of another 14 of its members for the bodies of the Israeli soldiers Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul, who were killed during Israel's Protective Edge offensive in the summer of 2014.
- On 20 September Israel significantly steps up its police and military pres-

ence in Jerusalem and the West Bank in view of the eight attacks carried out by Palestinian citizens in the last five days, in a reactivation of the so-called Stabbing Intifada.

#### **October 2016**

##### *Israel*

- On 5 October the Israeli army intercepts the sailing boat Zaytouna-Oliva in international waters on its way to the Gaza Strip in an attempt to break the blockade in place since 2007.
- On 14 October Israel announces that it is suspending cooperation with UNESCO after the executive board of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization adopts a resolution drafted by Palestine and backed by Egypt, Algeria, Morocco, Lebanon, Oman, Qatar and Sudan, which is critical of Israeli actions against Muslims' freedom of worship and access to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem and which denies the Jewish connection with the Temple Mount and Western Wall, describing Israel as an "occupying power." In reaction to the resolution, criticized by the Director-General of UNESCO herself Irina Bokova, the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares that "To say that Israel has no connection to the Temple Mount and the Western Wall is like saying that China has no connection to the Great Wall of China and that Egypt has no connection to the Pyramids."

##### *Palestine*

- On 6 October a demonstration is staged against the government of Mahmoud Abbas by hundreds of supporters of Mohamed Dahlan, the former leader of a Fatah faction critical of Yasser Arafat and Mahmoud Abbas' leadership of Palestine and the PNA, who, in 2011, was expelled from the movement accused of corruption - awaiting a court ruling- and of being behind Arafat's death in France in November 2004. Dahlan, however, now has a strong influence among members of the Revolutionary Council and Central Committee. The demonstrators call

for Dahlan's return to Palestine from his exile in the United Arab Emirates and for greater efforts to be made in the reconciliation process between Fatah's factions ahead of the party's 7th congress, scheduled for the end of the year and in which Dahlan's supporters fear changes may emerge in Fatah's party line that will leave them on the sidelines.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 5 October a delegation of the International Criminal Court (ICC) travels to Israel and Palestine for the first time since the Gaza war in 2014 with the aim of promoting a better understanding of its work and thus dispelling any mistrust regarding its investigations into the perpetration of crimes of war and against humanity in the Palestinian territories, with Palestine officially accepted as an ICC member on 1 April 2015.
- On 10 October the Israeli security forces and emergency services are deployed around the Ammunition Hill light rail stop, close to Israel's police headquarters, after an armed Palestinian opens fire from his vehicle and drives away still shooting, killing two Israelis.

#### **November 2016**

##### *Israel*

- On 14 November the Israeli government unanimously approves a draft bill to retroactively legalize temporary settlements (outposts), which precede permanent settlements in occupied territories in the West Bank, which until now have been illegal under Israeli law as they lack permits. The vote takes place despite the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's request to postpone it until the Supreme Court rules on the seven-month extension requested by the public prosecutor on 1 November to carry out the court-ordered eviction of the Amona *outpost*, which is to be carried out before 25 December.
- On 24 November more than 80,000 people are evacuated from Haifa and various nearby towns because of a massive wave of fires in different parts of the country, mostly in the north and sur-

roundings of Jerusalem. The causes of the fires are being investigated by the secret services, as the government suggests terrorists may be responsible.

- On 27 November Israeli defence forces sees its first clashes with a Daesh-linked group, Jaysh Khalid Bin al-Waleed (Khalid Bin al-Waleed Army) on the border between the Golan Heights and the Yarmouk basin in the Syrian province of Dera.

##### *Palestine*

- On 29 November the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, is re-elected leader of Fatah at the party's 7th congress in Ramallah, the first held by the movement since 2009. Abbas was the only candidate, despite growing doubts among the population over his politics and the internal rifts inside the Palestinian group.

#### **December 2016**

##### *Israel*

- On 7 December the first reading of a draft bill that will allow the legalization of 4,000 settlers' homes built on privately-owned Palestinian land in the West Bank receives the support of a parliamentary majority. A decision which, for the Education Minister and leader of the ultra-Orthodox party HaBayit HaYehudi (Jewish Home), Naftali Benett, means "the future imposition of Israeli sovereignty on Judea and Samaria," or, effectively, the end of the two-state solution defended by the international community as a way of resolving the conflict. The approved text excludes the West Bank settlement of Amona which is under a Supreme Court order to be evacuated before 25 December, against which an appeal has been filed.
- On 15 December the US President-elect Donald Trump announces the appointment of David Friedman as the US ambassador to Israel.
- On 23 December the United Nations Security Council approves a draft resolution presented by Egypt and the PNA condemning the construction of Israeli settlements in Palestinian territory, thanks to a US abstention and despite

opposition from Israel and the future US Trump administration.

- On 27 December an Israeli court orders the 10-day house arrest of the Arab-Israeli MP Basel Ghattas accused of illegally supplying mobile telephones to Palestinian prisoners convicted of terrorism.

##### *Palestine*

- On 3 and 4 December, during the 7th Fatah Congress, Jibril Rajoub -president of the Palestinian Football Federation and former head of Preventive Security in the West Bank- and Marwan Barghouti -in prison in Israel since 2002 charged with murder during the Second Intifada- are the two major victors of the internal elections to renew the members of the Palestinian nationalist movement's Central Committee (executive body), gaining 930 and 878 of the nearly 1,300 votes respectively. Only 1,400 members of the party are invited to the controversial congress, something that the factions critical of the direction of the recently re-elected leader of the party and Palestinian President, as well as PLO leader, Mahmoud Abbas consider a move to rid the party of political rivals. Mohamed Dahlan is one of the foremost critics, the former Preventive Security chief in Gaza and staunch opponent of Abbas from his exile in the Persian Gulf, who has the backing of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates and is one of the main candidates to succeed 81-year-old Abbas, along with Rajoub, Barghouti and al-Qidwa, Yasser Arafat's nephew and former Palestinian UN representative. The other candidates to the Central Committee in order of the votes they won are: Mohammad Ishtayeh (798 votes), Hussain al-Sheikh (791), Mahmoud al-Aloul (745), Tawfiq Tirawi (745), Saeb Erekat (672) and Nasser al-Kidwa (647).
- On 14 December the Ramallah anti-corruption court sentences Mohamed Dahlan, one of the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' main political rivals, to three years in prison and fines him 16 million dollars for embezzling funds.
- On 15 December the former pilot of Tunisian airlines and aviation engineer specialized in drones, Mohammed al-



Zoari, a Hamas member, is murdered in Sfax. The Tunisian Interior Minister Hedi Majdub says that the role of foreign intelligence agencies in the assassination cannot be ruled out. The Israeli Defence Minister Avigdor Lieberman refuses to comment on the assassination.

- On 17 December Egypt announces the reopening of the Rafah border crossing for a six-day period.
- On 22 December the Israeli Supreme Court approves the 45-day moratorium requested by the government to evacuate the West Bank settlement of Amona, which was to be demolished by court order before 25 December for being built illegally on privately-owned Palestinian land. The definitive date for the settlement's eviction and demolition is moved to 8 February 2017, which is "the last extension, whether an alternative arrangement is reached or not."
- On 28 December Egypt destroys a 1,700-metre-long underground tunnel in the Rafah area.
- On 28 December the Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh hands the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas an invitation to attend the next annual Arab League summit in March 2017 in Amman, where the Palestinian issue will top the meeting's agenda.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 28 December the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says he would resume peace talks under the condition that Israel puts an immediate

end to the construction and expansion of settlements in Palestinian territory.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 19 December an Israeli man is shot and wounded in the West Bank town of Halamish, hours after a Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli forces during clashes in Beit Rima, near Ramallah. The perpetrator of the shooting flees the scene,
- On 21 December a Palestinian citizen is shot dead by Israeli soldiers during clashes in Kafr Aqab, East Jerusalem. The unrest was sparked by soldiers initiating the demolition of the home of Misbah Abu Sbeih, who was killed by the Israeli security forces after, on 10 October, he carried out an attack on a police station in East Jerusalem, which left one woman injured.
- On 22 December Shabak agents arrest more than twenty Hamas members in Nablus accused of planning suicide attacks in different Israeli cities.
- On 26 December a young Palestinian is injured by shots fired by Israeli forces during clashes close to Joseph's Tomb, in Nablus –in Area A of the Oslo Accords-, which began with the arrival of Israeli pilgrims escorted by the army.

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