

Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

The Arab-Israeli conflict escalates in 2011 in the shadow of the revolts across the Arab world. The beginning of the year is marked by a concerning rise in hostilities in Gaza and the West Bank and Israel's gradual tightening of its security measures. The peace talks, in sharp contrast, remain frozen, as they have been since September 2010 after Israel resumed construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Once again, the announcement of new settlements in March and April, coinciding with heightened pressure on Benjamin Netanyahu's government from Jewish settlers following March's events in Itamar, has a crippling effect on the talks. This comes at a delicate time for international relations following the fall of Hosni Mubarak in January in Egypt, a country that was leading the mediation between the parties, and the crisis caused by the damaging leaked documents concerning the peace talks. In February the so-called Palestine Papers force the Fatah Government and Palestine's chief negotiator Saeb Erekat to step down, in a move aimed at improving the image of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) and facilitating the difficult reconciliation with Hamas, particularly with regard to reaching an election agreement. On 4 May the long-awaited reconciliation agreement comes to fruition, in a month that represents the first of two important turning points for the development of the Arab-Israeli conflict in 2011. Following George Mitchell's resignation as special US Envoy for the Middle East and before an alarming outbreak of violence during the commemoration of the Nakba, the US announces a new proposal to reactivate negotiations based on the 1967 borders, which is considered unsatisfactory by both parties. In June, tensions

flare for the commemoration of the Naksa, particularly around Israel's borders with the Palestine Territories, Lebanon and Syria, where an uprising is fully underway. The year's second turning point takes place on 23 September when the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas presents his unilateral request for full-membership status before the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. The request comes weeks after the diplomatic crisis opens between Egypt and Israel following the assault on the Israeli embassy in Cairo. The attack is spurred by the death of six Egyptian security officers at the end of August during the clashes in Gaza, which mark the end of the unilateral truce of the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades. October seems to hail some progress with the International Quartet's announcement of a new road map and the historic agreement between Israel and Hamas for the exchange of Gilad Shalit, kidnapped five years ago, for 1,027 Palestinian prisoners. However UNESCO's recognition of Palestine as a full member, which was rejected by Israel and the US, ignites fresh tensions in a year that concludes with mounting tension in Gaza in December while Palestine awaits a response to its request for full UN membership.

January 2011

Israel

- On 9 January the Israeli authorities go ahead with the demolition of the historic Hotel Shepherd, in East Jerusalem, to make way for new settlers. The hotel's location, in the Arab neighbourhoods of Sheikh Jarrah and Wadi al-Joz gives rise to Palestinian protests.

- On 17 January three Labour cabinet ministers walk out of the coalition government due to the lack of progress in the peace talks. The move coincides with the Labour Party (LP, social-democratic) leader Ehud Barak's announcement of the creation of Independence, a new, breakaway centrist political faction of the LP, which will be loyal to the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.
- On 23 January the Israeli commission investigating the attack on the "Freedom Flotilla" on 31 May 2010, concludes that the assault was "legal" given that the flotilla was attempting to violate the Israeli embargo on Gaza. The commission also claims that the flotilla organisers, the Turkish group IHH, "is an extremist group that has been outlawed in Germany and is openly connected with Hamas."

Palestine

- On 21 January the car carrying French Foreign Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie is attacked by families of Palestinian prisoners in Israel while on a visit to Gaza over statements made by the Minister in Jerusalem calling for the release of the Israeli sergeant Gilad Shalit, who has been held by Hamas since 25 June 2006. She described his kidnapping as a "war crime."

Peace Negotiations

- On 23 January *al-Jazeera* and *The Guardian* begin the publication of 1,684 secret documents from the peace talks held in Annapolis from December 2007 to December 2008. The action puts Jerusalem and Ramallah in an awkward situation as the documents reveal embarrassing information, such as: the offer from the former Foreign Minister Tzipi

Livni to surrender Arab-Israeli communities close to the pre-1967 borders in exchange for peace; the PNA President Mahmoud Abbas' declaration that "it would not be reasonable to expect Israel to absorb even a million Palestinian refugees as this would mean the end of the State of Israel", instead proposing that Israel absorb a total of 10,000 over ten years; or that the Palestinian negotiators would have considered conceding East Jerusalem, the Jewish Quarter and part of the Armenian Quarter of the Old City. Hundreds of Fatah supporters attack al-Jazeera's headquarters in Ramallah, while the PNA Government claims that the information has been "distorted by the Israeli media." On 26 January thousands of Hamas supporters demonstrate in Gaza burning images of Mahmoud Abbas and calling him "traitor."

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1 January a woman dies after participating the previous day in a demonstration against the Israeli separation wall. Palestinian sources blame the tear gas used by Israel, an extreme measure that is denied by the Israel Defence Force (IDF).
- On 2 January Israeli soldiers shoot and kill a Palestinian man when he approaches the West Bank checkpoint holding a bottle and ignoring orders to halt.
- On 6 January the Israeli Air Force bombs a secret tunnel in the Rafah area.
- On 7 January a Palestinian is killed by gunfire in Hebron when Israeli soldiers burst into his house in search of his nephew, Wael Bitar, one of the six Hamas militants on hunger strike released by the PNA the previous day. Bitar was imprisoned for his involvement in a terrorist attack in Dimona in 2008. Another four of the released militants are arrested on the same day. The incident intensifies tensions between Hamas and the Fatah-governed PNA, accused by Hamas of collaborating with Israel.
- On 7 January an Israeli soldier is killed and four others injured in friendly fire during a clash on the Gaza border.
- On 8 January mortar shells fired from Gaza by the Islamic Jihad injure three Thai agricultural workers on an Israeli farm.
- On 10 January Palestinian militants fire three rockets at the Israeli coast where it borders Gaza.

- On 10 January Israeli planes attack a Hamas training camp close to Khan Younis and a security post in the north-east of the Gaza Strip.
- On 11 January the Palestinians accuse Israel of shooting dead a farmer close to Beit Hanoun in Gaza, by the Israeli border.
- On 12 January the Israeli air force kills Mohammed Najjar, a high-ranking member of the Islamic Jihad, in southern Gaza.

February 2011

Israel

- On 5 February the journalist Anat Kamm is found guilty of espionage. Kamm is accused of leaking thousands of classified documents to *Haaretz* during her military service, which are potentially damaging for the government and the IDF. Kamm was arrested in December 2009 by the *Shabak* (the internal security service) and her trial began in May 2010.
- On 11 February Israel announces its decision to accelerate the construction of the security fence on the Egyptian border. The move aims to prevent Hezbollah and Hamas terrorists who have escaped from Egyptian prisons and illegal immigrants from entering the country during the revolt underway in Egypt. The Israeli cabinet fears that the changes in the Egyptian government may lead to a deterioration of the peace currently existing between the two countries. On 14 February Benjamin Netanyahu warns the new army Chief of Staff Benny Gantz to be prepared for any eventuality.
- On 18 February the US vetoes a resolution of the United Nations Security Council to condemn the construction of Israeli settlements on occupied territory. The US Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice claims that it is a matter that must be resolved within the framework of the peace negotiations and not through international sanctions.

Palestine

- On 8 February the PNA announces that local elections will be held on 9 July in the West Bank only, thereby complying with the court decision that urges elections to go ahead, which were ini-

tially scheduled for July 2010 and have been delayed ever since.

- On 14 February the PNA government presents its full resignation to the President Mahmoud Abbas, although Salam Fayyad will continue as Prime Minister, in a decision interpreted as an attempt to improve the image of the cabinet following the publication of the so-called "Palestine Papers" and to facilitate the path towards calling elections. Abbas asks Fayyad to form a new government that includes members of other groups and not just Fatah.
- On 17 February Mahmoud Abbas announces that the presidential and legislative elections will not be held in the end if Hamas refuses to hold elections in Gaza. Hamas has said it will not do so until the national reconciliation process has reached its conclusion.

Peace Negotiations

- On 12 February the chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat announces his resignation over the leaks of the "Palestine Papers", which according to sources from the PNA itself, came from inside his own cabinet.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 17 February three Palestinian fishermen are shot dead by Israeli soldiers on the border between Israel and Gaza, close to Beit Lahia. The IDF maintains that the dead fishermen were attempting to plant explosives on the fence that separates Israel from Gaza.
- On 25 February nine people are killed in Hebron in riots with the Israeli police after a large-scale commemorative demonstration over the killing of 29 Palestinians in the Tomb of the Patriarchs at the hands of a Jewish extremist in 1994. The demonstrations called for the reopening of the central Shuhada Street (of the Martyrs), closed by Israel for security reasons. The neighbourhoods around Shuhada Street and the Tomb of the Patriarchs are home to 600 ultra-orthodox settlers, who still live in the city after an agreement reached in 1997 between Israel and the PNA led to the evacuation of 80% of the settlers. In 2003 the Supreme Court of Israel ordered the eviction of the remaining settlers and the reopening of Shuhada

Street, a decision that has not been enforced by the Israeli authorities.

- On 23 February the Israeli air force launches their biggest offensive on the Gaza Strip since Operation Cast Lead, in response to a rocket fired hours before from the Strip into Beersheba.
- On 26 February Israel launches two more air strikes on the Gaza Strip in response to rockets fired into southern Israel.

March 2011

Israel

- On 13 March the office of the Israeli Prime Minister announces the construction of between 300 and 500 new settler homes in the West Bank settlements of Gush Etzion, Maale Adumim, Ariel and Modiin Ilit. The announcement, condemned by the PNA, comes in response to the murder of a settler family in Itamar, near Nablus, the previous day, by a Palestinian man. The incident leads settlers to demand the construction of more settlements.
- On 15 March the Israeli army intercepts a Liberian-flagged ship on its way from the Syrian port of Latakia to Alexandria and confiscates a cargo of arms thought to be heading for Gaza. Israel suspects there is a connection between the two Iranian warships that crossed the Suez Canal and docked in Latakia in February and the cargo onboard the intercepted ship.
- On 22 March Moshe Katsav, the Israeli President between 2000 and 2007, is sentenced by the Court of Tel-Aviv to seven years' imprisonment for rape and sexual harassment during his time as Minister of Tourism from 1996 to 1999. This is the heaviest sentence to date given to an Israeli Head of State.
- On 27 March Israel announces the launch of its "Iron Dome" defence system, specially designed to intercept attacks launched from Gaza into Israeli territory.
- On 28 March the Court of Petah Tikva partially lifted a gag order to confirm that the engineer Dirar Abu Sisi, kidnapped in February from Ukraine, has been arrested in Israel. Sisi is suspected of designing missiles launched from Gaza into Israeli territory between 2002 and 2008 and setting up a military academy in Gaza at the request of Hamas.

- On 31 March the Israeli army releases a map of Lebanon that shows nearly a thousand underground bunkers, weapons storage facilities and surveillance sites allegedly belonging to Hezbollah. Most of the facilities are located south of the Litani River in an area that was demilitarised as part of the UN-sponsored truce which put an end to the 2006 armed conflict.

Palestine

- On 3 March banks in Gaza close in protest against raids carried out on 1 and 2 March by Hamas security forces on two branches of the Palestine Investment Bank and the seizure of 350,000 dollars from the Palestine Investment Fund. Hamas accuses the bank of illegally transferring capital outside of Gaza. The Palestine Monetary Authority, which is controlled by the PNA and oversees the banks in both Gaza and the West Bank, accuses Hamas of armed robbery.
- On 15 March 25,000 people in Gaza and 8,000 in Ramallah take to the streets to show their support for unity between the two Palestinian territories, demanding an end to the division between Fatah and Hamas. On 16 March Mahmoud Abbas announces that he is willing to go to Gaza to resume Palestinian reconciliation talks with Hamas.
- On 30 March a Hamas delegation meets at the Wafd Party headquarters in Cairo with representatives of Egypt's ruling interim government and military junta. The Hamas delegates express their solidarity with the Egyptian revolution in talks dominated by the opening of the Rafah border crossing, the situation of the Palestinian prisoners in Egypt and the Palestinian reconciliation process.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 7 March at least seven Palestinians are injured in clashes with the Israeli army and Jewish settlers in the north of the West Bank. The incident erupts after a group of Palestinians throw stones at the settlers who they accuse of uprooting olive trees in the area.
- On 16 March two Palestinians are killed in an Israeli air strike on a Hamas security post in Gaza in response to the launch of a missile from the Strip into southern Israel.

- On 21 March 19 people are injured in an attack on Gaza and Beit Lahia by the Israeli air force.

- On 22 March Israel launches an air strike against six targets in Gaza killing nine people – five of whom were members of the Islamic Jihad. The attack comes after the launch of 54 projectiles into southern Israel two days before and the launch of a Qassam rocket into Eshkol on the same day. Hamas claims responsibility for the attacks. The heightened tension in the area together with internal fractures within Hamas, arising from the Strip's Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh's invitation to Mahmoud Abbas to visit Gaza and resume the Palestinian reconciliation process, stokes fears of a new armed conflict in the area similar to Operation Cast Lead. On 23 March fresh attacks are launched on Beersheba for which the Islamic Jihad claims responsibility. Israel responds on the night of 23 March and the morning of 24 March with air strikes on the north of the Strip and the Rafah smuggling tunnels. On 23 March a bomb explodes in the Central Bus Station of West Jerusalem killing one person and injuring a further 30. No one claims responsibility for the attack, although it is praised by the Islamic Jihad. On 24 March missiles are launched from Gaza into Ashdod. On 25 March Benjamin Netanyahu assures that Israel is willing to react "with great force" to put an end to attacks launched from Gaza.
- On 30 March an Israeli strike in the south of the Gaza Strip leaves one person dead and another injured in response to rocket launches into southern Israel carried out the previous day. Both victims are members of the al-Quds Brigades of the Islamic Jihad. In another attack on the same day, the Israeli air force destroys a smuggling tunnel in Rafah.

April 2011

Israel

- On 1 April the South African judge Richard Goldstone publishes the article *Reconsidering the Goldstone Report on Israel and war crimes* in the *Washington Post*, in which he states that the conclusions of the investigation into Operation Cast Lead, which he headed for the United Nations, would be very different had they known then, what they know

now. On 5 April, in response to the article, in which Goldstone describes Israel's parallel investigation as thorough, the Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai announces that Goldstone has accepted his invitation to visit areas in southern Israel threatened by rocket launches from Gaza.

- On 4 April the Council of Jerusalem announces plans for the construction of 1,000 homes in an area of Gilo, earmarked for construction for the last ten years, according to the consistory. Israel considers Gilo to be an integral part of Jerusalem since it was conquered from Jordan in 1967, but for the Palestinians it is a settlement in occupied territory. The announcement of new constructions sparks suspicion in the PNA forcing the Mayor of Jerusalem Nir Barkat to deny that it has any connection with President Simon Peres' concurrent visit to Washington.

- On 8 April the Israeli army launches a raid in the early hours of the morning in Awarta, in the north of the West Bank, in its hunt for the perpetrators of the Fogel Family murder in March in the Itamar settlement. Around a hundred women are arrested in the raid, 80 of whom are released after testifying. These arrests take the total in connection with this event in Itamar to 300 made during the course of Awarta's frequent raids. On 17 April the army announces the arrest in Awarta of two Palestinian teenagers in connection with the murder of the Fogels.

- On 8 April the army demolishes homes in the Palestinian town of al-Aqabah, near to Tubas, in the West Bank and destroys the town's road connections.

- On 13 April the Attorney General of Israel Yehuda Weinstein warns the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman that he will take legal action against him for crimes of fraud, bribery, money laundering and witness harassment, in the investigation into the illegal financing of Yisrael Beiteinu through a network of ghost companies.

- On 21 April *Haaretz* reports the establishment of a new unauthorised settlement named Regev next to Nablus, to accommodate the arrival of 500 Jewish settlers from Itamar.

Palestine

- El 6 April *Human Rights Watch*, publishes the report *No News Is Good*

News which underlines the lack of freedom of the press in the Palestinian Territories and the arrests and threats to journalists made both by the PNA in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

- On 7 April the IMF provides support for the PNA's efforts towards the recognition of a Palestinian state, with the publication of a report in which it describes the Palestinian government as capable of sustaining its own economy as an independent state, despite the high dependence on international aid and the restrictions imposed by Israel. This report supports statements made by the World Bank in the autumn of 2010.

- On 15 April Hamas security forces find the body of an Italian pro-Palestinian activist in an abandoned house in Gaza. Vittorio Arrigoni was kidnapped the previous day by the Salafist group al-Jihad al-Tawhid with links to al-Qaeda. Two suspects were arrested during the raid. Fatah and Hamas condemn the execution of Arrigoni, who was popular among Palestinians in Gaza, where he was considered "one of them." On 19 April Hamas forces launch an assault on a house in the Nuseirat refugee camp where Arrigoni's alleged assassins were hiding. In the attack the group's leader, the Jordanian Abdelrahman Breizat, and the Palestinian Bilal al-Omari blow themselves up.

- On 27 April Fatah and Hamas sign a draft agreement in Cairo that lays down the foundations for reaching national reconciliation after more than four years of violence. Both delegations agree on the formation of a transitional government until elections are called and the coordination of their security forces.

Peace Negotiations

- On 6 April concern over the frozen peace talks prompts 53 prominent Israeli figures, including former heads of the Military, *Mossad* and *Shabak*, rabbis and leading businesspeople, to present the "Israeli Peace Initiative" in Tel-Aviv, a plan for the creation of a Palestinian state defined by the June 1967 borders before the Six-Day War and with East Jerusalem as its capital.

- On 20 April the International Quartet (the US, EU, Russia and the UN) give Benjamin Netanyahu an ultimatum, warning him that unless he presents a new initiative

to end the conflict with the Palestinians, it will recognise a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem in the next United Nations General Assembly, and without veto guarantees from Washington.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 2 April an Israeli rocket lands on a car close to the city of Gaza killing three Hamas militants. According to Israel, the deceased were planning to kidnap Israeli citizens during the Jewish Passover in Egypt and Israel.

- On 5 April the Israeli army opens fire on a group of Palestinians approaching the separation fence in the north of Gaza who ignore the soldiers' orders to halt. One man is killed and two are injured. Following this event, three missiles are launched into Israel from Gaza.

- On 7 April a rocket launched from Gaza lands on an Israeli school bus injuring a teenager. Hamas declares a unilateral ceasefire to put an end to the recent escalation of violence, in an attempt to avoid Israeli reprisals. On the same day, Israel launches an attack on Gaza in which five Palestinians are killed. On 8 April an attack on Khan Younis kills another five people, two of them members of the armed wing of Hamas, the *Ez-Zeiden al-Qassam Brigades*. At the same time a total of 45 missiles are launched from Gaza into the outskirts of Eshkol and other areas of southern Israel. Israel activates its new "Iron Dome" defence system, neutralising two of the rockets.

- On 24 April an Israeli visiting Joseph's Tomb in the PNA-controlled Nablus is shot dead by a Palestinian police officer. The victim was a member of an excursion organised by the ultra-orthodox Hasidic group *Breslov*, which was not coordinated with the Israeli security forces. Benjamin Netanyahu demands that the PNA take "tough measures," which in turn announces the opening of an investigation. After the incident, clashes erupt between Palestinians and soldiers from the Israeli army, and a group of Palestinians set fire to Joseph's Tomb.

May 2011

Israel

- On 1 May Israel announces that it will delay the transfer to the PNA of 60

million euros in tax and customs revenue, withheld from Palestinian workers and goods under the economic protocol of the 1995 Oslo Accords. Jerusalem demands that the PNA produce evidence that guarantees that Hamas will not benefit from this money. On 16 May the Israeli Finance Minister Yuval Steinitz orders the transfer of the money claiming to have received the corresponding guarantees.

- On 19 May coinciding with Barack Obama's announcement of a new strategy to reactivate the dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians, Jerusalem announces the construction of 1,500 new homes in the settlements of Pisgat Zeev, in East Jerusalem, and Har Homa, in Bethlehem. The news comes hours before Benjamin Netanyahu travels to Washington to meet with the US President.

Palestine

- On 4 May the reconciliation agreement between the Palestinian factions is officially signed in Cairo.
- On 17 May the PNA announces its decision to postpone the Palestinian elections scheduled for July until October, to allow time to organise the voting in Gaza.
- On 27 May Egypt permanently opens the Rafah border crossing.

Peace Negotiations

- On 13 May the US Special Envoy for the Middle East George Mitchell steps down from the post, in a decision seen as a sign of frustration regarding the lack of progress in the peace process in the last two years.
- On 17 May after meeting in Washington, Barack Obama and Abdullah II of Jordan urge Israel and the PNA to reactivate peace talks fearing the growing risk of a third Intifada following the bloody incidents on *Nakba* day. On 18 May in light of the wave of political and social change in the Arab world, Barack Obama announces a new proposal for dialogue between the Israelis and Palestinians based on recognising a Palestinian state with the 1967 borders, prior to the Six-Day War. The new proposal considers delaying the status of East Jerusalem and the return of Palestinian refugees for a second round of talks and

demands that the Palestinians recognise the State of Israel's right to exist, as well as rejecting Palestine's unilateral proposal to be recognised as a member of the UN. In response, the Israeli government asks Washington to reaffirm the commitments made to Israel in 2004 in which Israel would not have to withdraw to the 1967 borders – which would leave major Israeli population centres in Samaria and Judea beyond Israeli borders – and returned Palestinian refugees would have to settle in the future Palestinian state rather than in Israel. On 25 May in a speech made before the US Congress, Benjamin Netanyahu stresses that Israel does not oppose the creation of a Palestinian state, but that it will never accept a return to the 1967 borders nor the partition of Jerusalem. He agrees that “painful concessions” may be necessary to reach peace, which include surrendering certain territories. For its part, the Palestinian position continues to demand an agreement based on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. In this respect, the PNA and the Fatah leadership, meeting in Ramallah, reiterate their intentions to seek recognition of Palestinian statehood in the United Nations General Assembly in September.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 15 May violent clashes erupt on the borders between Israel and the Palestinian territories, Syria and Lebanon, during the *Nakba* (catastrophe) Day demonstrations, which commemorate the creation of the State of Israel in 1948 and the start of the Palestinian exodus. On the Syrian border, 2,500 Palestinian refugees in Syria call for the start of a third Intifada and try to destroy the separation fence. Five refugees are shot dead by the Israeli army in the Druze town of Majdal Shams, on the Shouting Hill in the Golan Heights. Israel accuses the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad of allowing this situation to develop for the first time in years to steer the international spotlight away from Syria's internal problems. Hours after the incident, around 200 Palestinians who have illegally crossed the border into Israel are captured and returned to Syria. Meanwhile Palestinian refugees in Lebanon attempt to cross the border into Israel by destroying the border fence in the Lebanese village of Ma-

roun al-Ras. 15 of them are killed. Israel fears these events – added to the frozen peace talks and influenced by the Arab Spring – will lead to mass marches from refugee camps and raises the alert level, deploying more than 10,000 troops. Demonstrations on the Gaza border also end in attempts to cross into Israel. In the West Bank, more than 20,000 people demonstrate in Ramallah's Menara Square and clashes erupt at the Kalandia checkpoint. Violent clashes also break out in Palestinian neighbourhoods in Jerusalem.

June 2011

Israel

- On 19 June the Interior Minister announces the expansion of the Ramat Shlomo neighbourhood in East Jerusalem with 2,000 new homes. Ramat Shlomo, captured by Israel in 1967, is located in an area not recognised by the PNA and the international community as belonging to Israel.
- On 25 June the ship *Dignité* leaves Corsica on its way to Gaza. This is the first of the vessels belonging to the second “Freedom Flotilla” to take to the sea despite warnings from Israel, the UN and various governments from Mediterranean states.
- On 26 June Israel begins dismantling the 2.7-kilometre stretch of separation wall in the West Bank, which isolates the Palestinian village of Bilin, four years after the Israeli Supreme Court's ruling that it be rectified. The new 3.7-kilometre stretch will return 70 hectares of territory to the village.
- On 14 June young Israelis camp in Habima Square in Tel-Aviv and in Jerusalem's Zion Square to protest against low salaries and rising house prices, in response to a Facebook invite created by the young evictee Daphne Leef.

Palestine

- On 14 June representatives of Fatah and Hamas meet in Cairo, eight days after the scheduled date, to begin talks to determine the nature and composition of the future national unity government. Progress is hindered by Hamas' refusal to accept Salam Fayyad, the candidate backed by Mahmoud Abbas

for Prime Minister, considering him to be an “American puppet.” On 19 June the Egyptian mediation fails to bring Fatah and Hamas to an agreement on the formation of the future unity government, forcing it to cancel the next meeting between the parties scheduled for 21 June. On the same day, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas makes a three-day visit to Turkey to meet with the Turkish President, Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister. Meanwhile, on 22 June the Hamas leader Khaled Meshal meets in Ankara with the Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Although neither visit produces any results, they demonstrate Turkey’s increasingly important role as mediator in Palestinian reconciliation.

Peace Negotiations

- On 17 June the Israeli Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman meets with the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton, who is in the region to reactivate the peace talks. Lieberman warns that a unilateral Palestinian initiative to request recognition of the Palestinian State before the United Nations General Assembly would imply an end to the Oslo Accords and consequently to any agreement subsequently signed between the parties. Lieberman demands negotiations without preconditions imposed by the PNA and recognises that the possibilities of advancing are “close to nil.”

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 5 June, the date of the *Naksa*, a commemoration of the Arab defeat against Israel in the Six-Day War, violent clashes erupt on the border between Israel and Syria when over a thousand Palestinian refugees demonstrate on the Shouting Hill and try to force their way into the Golan Heights, provoking an armed response from the Israeli army. Yoav Mordechai, spokesperson for the Israeli army, accuses Syria of doing nothing to stop the Palestinians arriving at its border. The Lebanese army closes its border with Israel to avoid incidents. Unrest is reported in the West Bank at the Kalandia border crossing.
- On 7 June Israeli settlers attempt to set fire to a mosque in al-Mughayer, in the West Bank, and paint messages on its

wall including, “Price tag, Aley Ayin,” in reference to the recent dismantling of the illegal Aley Ayin settlement, which ended in clashes with the Israeli police. This is one of many cases of a new tactic employed by extremist settlers known as “price tag,” which consists in attacking Palestinian targets in reaction to measures taken against the settlement process.

July 2011

Israel

- On 1 July Greece follows Cyprus and Turkey’s decision not to allow ships from the second “Freedom Flotilla” to leave their ports, to avoid clashes with the Israeli army should the ships enter Gaza waters, where there is an Israeli naval blockade.
- On 4 July the Defence Minister Ehud Barak suspends talks to hand over 84 Palestinian bodies to the PNA, a move authorised by Benjamin Netanyahu for the start of Ramadan, over concerns that the release may undermine negotiations for Gilad Shalit, the soldier captured by Hamas five years ago. The decision also follows fierce criticism from families of Israeli victims in response to the measure.
- On 8 July the Israeli press reports the expropriation of 19 hectares of land in Karyut, to legalise the Israeli settlement outpost of Hayovel, in the final phase of construction.
- On 10 July the Israeli government approves the proposal for the demarcation of the maritime border with Lebanon and Cyprus. Avigdor Lieberman announces that this will be the proposal presented by Israel to the United Nations, in reaction to the one presented by Lebanon in August 2010 that, according to Jerusalem, violates Israeli waters as well as the 2007 Lebanon-Cyprus demarcation agreement. The waters in question contain gas reserves which are either recently discovered or already being exploited by Israel.
- On 11 July the parliament passes a bill that imposes fines and an exclusion from government subsidies for all those who support an economic, cultural or academic boycott of the “State of Israel, its institutions or the area under its control.”
- On 19 July the Israeli navy boards the French ship *Dignité*, the only vessel

from the second “Freedom Flotilla” able to travel to Gaza to violate the Israeli naval blockade on the Strip.

- On 23 and 24 July two mass demonstrations take place in Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem led by Israeli protestors outraged by the inflation increase. On 26 July the government announces an action plan comprising the creation of 50,000 new homes, half of which will be rented at 30% of their current value. On 30 July tens of thousands of Israelis demonstrate in 10 cities across the country demanding the resignation of the government, a decrease in taxes and the lowering of housing prices.
- On 25 July the army intercepts an arms and ammunition cargo being transported across the Dead Sea between Jordan and the West Bank.

Palestine

- On 26 July the Hamas government executes two Palestinians accused of spying for Israel.
- On 27 July the Palestinian Electoral Commission announces that the local elections scheduled for October will take place in the West Bank but not in Gaza.

Peace Negotiations

- On 11 July the International Quartet meeting in Washington at the request of the EU High Representative Catherine Ashton is unable to reach a consensus for unblocking the peace talks before September, when the PNA is planning to submit its request for full membership before the UN General Assembly.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 5 July an Israeli missile lands in the al-Bureij refugee camp in Gaza, killing two members of the Islamic Jihad who were attempting to launch a missile at Israel.
- On 7 July an Israeli soldier is injured when a bomb explodes in the south of the Gaza border.
- On 12 July the Israeli air force carries out two air strikes in the north of Gaza against two suspected arms factories, after three missiles launched from the Strip land in Israeli territory.

- On 13 July a Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli security forces in the al-Farah refugee camp close to Nablus during a search mission for a fugitive from the Islamic Jihad. Five arrests are also made during the raid.
- On 15 July the Israeli air force bomb Gaza, Khan Younis and Rafah killing six people and destroying several smuggling tunnels. The Israeli army reports that the attack is in response to the previous day's launch of five rockets into Israeli territory.

August 2011

Israel

- On 4 August the Lebanese parliament approves the cabinet's proposal for a law that delineates the Lebanese maritime borders and contradicts Israel's demarcation plan presented in July.
- On 11 August the Interior Minister authorises the construction of 1,600 new homes in Ramat Shlomo, East Jerusalem and announces the approval of a further 2,700, allegedly to tackle the country's housing crisis and satisfy the demands of the Israeli people. The announcement gives rise to harsh criticism from the PNA and concern in Washington, which has recently rebuked Israel on 9 August over its announcement of a further 930 homes in East Jerusalem.
- On 13 August around 75,000 people demonstrate in sixteen different Israeli towns against the increase in the cost of housing and basic consumer goods.
- On 16 August the Israeli parliament holds an emergency session to discuss the unprecedented social protests which have swept the country since July due to the rise in living costs.

Palestine

- On 13 August the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Maliki declares that the PNA will submit their application for full membership at the United Nations General Assembly on 20 September.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 16 August a young Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli soldiers when he approaches the border between Gaza and Israel close to the Maghazi refugee camp.

- On 18 August several cars and buses are attacked in different coordinated actions close to Eilat, in Negev, by numerous members of the Popular Resistance Committees, who had infiltrated from Egypt, killing eight Israelis and injuring a further thirty. Seven of the attackers are also killed, as well as five Egyptian police officers during the ensuing fighting. The Israeli government accuses Hamas of the attack and responds by bombing Gaza, causing six deaths.
- On 19 August militants from Hamas and the Popular Resistance Committees fire 20 missiles into southern Israel. Israel responds firing ten rockets into Gaza which kill two people.
- On 20 August Egypt attempts to mediate between Israel and Palestine to reach a ceasefire agreement that will halt the worrying escalation in violence. The Egyptian government summons the Israeli Ambassador and decides to recall its Ambassador in Israel Yasser Reda in protest of the death of five Egyptian police officers at the hands of Israeli soldiers in the gunfight on the 18 August, and following statements made by Israel accusing Cairo of failing to control the terrorist movement in Sinai. On the same day, a missile launched into Ashdod from Gaza seriously injures three Palestinian workers coinciding with the announcement made by Hamas' military wing the Ezzedeen al-Qassam Brigades to break the "truce," in effect since Operation Cast Lead. A total of 40 rockets land in Ashdod, Beersheba and Ashkelon.
- On 21 August, in the early hours of the morning, dozens of Hamas militants and supporters are arrested in Hebron and other towns in the West Bank during a massive security operation. Clashes erupt between the Israeli army and young Palestinians. Meanwhile, several rockets, aimed at the Israeli border checkpoint land on Egyptian soil close to Rafah without causing any damages.
- On 24 and 25 August at least six Palestinians are killed during Israeli air strikes on Gaza.

September 2011

Israel

- On 2 September the group of experts commissioned to investigate the Israeli attack on the "Freedom Flotilla"

at the request of the UN, concludes in its report that the action was "excessive and disproportionate," but that the naval blockade imposed by Israel on Gaza is "legal and appropriate" and that Israel had no option but to use force on finding a "violent and organised resistance" from the crew of the flotilla. The report also describes the measures taken by Turkey to dissuade the activists from breaking the blockade as insufficient. After the appearance of the report, Turkey demands that Israel apologise for the death of the nine Turkish activists in the attack. Benjamin Netanyahu refuses to apologise to Ankara. On 3 September Turkey expels the Israeli Ambassador in Ankara Gabby Levy and breaks military ties.

- On 3 September the Kikar Hamedina (State Square) in Tel-Aviv is the gathering place for the "March of the Million," the largest demonstration in Israel's history. 400,000 people protest against the rise in the cost of living and the lack of welfare benefits. Another 50,000 demonstrate in Jerusalem and around 35,000 in Haifa.

- On 9 September a group of demonstrators storm the Israeli embassy in Cairo in protest over the death of six Egyptian police officers during the heightened tensions in Gaza at the end of August. The ensuing violence leaves three dead and more than a thousand injured, forcing Egypt to declare a state of alert and deploy large numbers of police to control the demonstrators, who are calling for the cancellation of the Camp David Accords, an end to gas exports to Israel and the closure of the diplomatic delegation. The Israeli Ambassador leaves Egypt.

- On 15 September Israel temporarily evacuates its staff from its embassy in Jordan. The move comes on the same day as calls for a "Million man march" against Israel and a day after some 70 people protest outside the US embassy demanding its closure. Jerusalem fears that there may be similar acts of violence to those that erupted earlier in the month in the Israeli embassy in Cairo.

- On 21 September the Labour Party holds the second round of its primary elections in which the winning candidates from the first round on 13 September face one another. After beating the former Minister of Defence Amir Peretz, MP Shelley Yachimovich be-

comes the first woman to lead the Labour Party since Golda Meir.

Palestine

- On 21 September around 1,500 Palestinians demonstrate in Ramallah to support the request before the UN General Assembly for Palestine to become the 194th state of the UN. On 23 September Mahmoud Abbas submits the document outlining the request to Ban Ki-moon, while security measures are stepped up in Israel and the West Bank. On 26 September the United Nations Security Council begins the closed-door meeting to analyse the application.
- On 28 September security forces from Egypt and Gaza destroy three smuggling tunnels in Rafah.

Peace Negotiations

- On 14 September the High Representative of the EU Catherine Ashton meets with Benjamin Netanyahu and the Defence and Foreign Ministers Ehud Barak and Avigdor Lieberman, to try to reactivate the peace process before the PNA submits its membership application to the UN General Assembly. On the same day, the International Quartet representative Tony Blair also meets with Ehud Barak.
- On 18 September the International Quartet holds an emergency meeting in New York to agree on a position in the negotiations before the PNA presents its application for full membership of the United Nations and to try to restart direct talks with Israel and the PNA. On 24 September the International Quartet proposes a timetable for direct talks that would start within a month to reach a definitive agreement in 2012, parallel to the deliberations of the Security Council over the recognition of Palestinian statehood and to try to find a solution that overcomes the US veto. The Palestinian Foreign Minister considers the new road map as inadequate as it makes no mention of the 1967 borders or the ongoing construction of Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 6 September a raid led by the Israeli army in Khan Younis leads to clashes with militants from the Popular

Resistance Committees leaving one of the militants dead.

- On 23 September a demonstrator in favour of Palestine's UN bid for statehood is shot dead in the village of Kusra, near to Nablus.

October 2011

Israel

- On 9 October Benjamin Netanyahu asks the Justice Minister Yaakov Neeman to set up a taskforce to look at ways of legalising houses in Israeli settlements built on private Palestinian land, which are illegal both in the eyes of the international community and under Israeli law. According to *Haaretz* the decision responds to pressure from settlers and the ultra-orthodox sectors, despite the Ministerial Committee and Attorney General reaching an agreement in February for the gradual dismantling of the illegal settlements.
- On 30 October the soldier Anat Kamm is sentenced to four and a half years' imprisonment for stealing around 2,000 confidential documents revealing IDF crimes in the West Bank which she then leaked to the *Haaretz* reporter Uri Blau.

Palestine

- On 4 October the Council of Europe grants the Palestinian National Council "Partner for democracy" status, which allows representatives to participate in parliamentary assembly proceedings without voting rights. This new statute does not imply recognition of a Palestinian state.
- On 31 October the General Conference of UNESCO approves the PNA's entry as a full member. In protest the US suspends its contributions to the United Nations body.

Peace Negotiations

- On 2 October Benjamin Netanyahu officially announces the International Quartet's proposal to resume peace talks with the Palestinians in accordance with the new road map aimed at reaching a definitive agreement before the end of 2012. Mahmoud Abbas says that the PNA will accept the proposal

on the condition that settlement construction is definitively brought to a halt.

- On 11 October Israel and Hamas reach a historic agreement under German and Egyptian mediation to exchange 1,027 Palestinian prisoners for the soldier Gilad Shalit, abducted by Hamas and held in Gaza since 25 June 2006. The agreement does not include the release of the main Hamas leaders in Israeli hands and 203 of the released will be left in Gaza, Jordan, Turkey or Europe. On 18 October the exchange of Shalit for the first 477 Palestinian prisoners takes place. The released Palestinians are received by crowds in Gaza to cheers of "We want another Shalit." In the course of the negotiations the Egyptian Prime Minister Essam Sharaf asks Israel for a similar exchange of 80 Egyptian prisoners for Ilan Grapel and Oda Tarabin, two Israelis held in Egypt under charges of espionage. On 24 October Israel reports the release of 25 Egyptian prisoners in exchange for the freedom of US-Israeli citizen Ilan Grapel, arrested in Egypt on 12 June for "spying and inciting sectarian violence." The exchange takes place on 27 October.
- On 21 October *Haaretz* publishes information that reveals Benjamin Netanyahu's willingness to halt the construction of public and governmental buildings in the settlements in order to resume peace talks with the Palestinians. The proposal was conveyed to Mahmoud Abbas by the Columbian Foreign Affairs Minister Maria Angela Holguin, who is on an official visit to the region.
- On 26 October the International Quartet meets separately with Israel and the PNA. This is the first official meeting of the Quartet with both parties in the same city, Jerusalem.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 3 October clashes break out between Arab demonstrators and the police in Rosh Pinna, in the north of the West Bank, after a mosque is set on fire in the neighbourhood of Tuba Zangariyye by Israeli settlers. The incident follows the death in September of a settler and his son when their car was stoned by a group of Palestinians.
- On 9 October Israel heightens its state of alert in the south of Tel-Aviv

after graves are desecrated in two Arab cemeteries in Jaffa and a Molotov cocktail is thrown at a nearby synagogue.

- On 27 October Israel launches an air strike against four targets in Gaza in response to a rocket fired at Ashdod from the Strip the previous night by the al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of the Islamic Jihad. This is the first show of hostilities since the exchange of Gilad Shalit for 477 Palestinian prisoners. On 29 October an Israeli offensive provokes Palestinian retaliation in southern Israel. 12 militants of the Islamic Jihad and an Israeli citizen are killed in the attacks. On 30 October the Egyptian mediation reaches a compromise with the Islamic Jihad to uphold the truce with Israel.

November 2011

Israel

- On 1 November following an emergency Ministerial Committee meeting, Israel announces its approval for 2,000 new homes in Jerusalem, Gush Etzion and Maale Adumim in response to the PNA's entry into UNESCO.
- On 1 November the Israeli army arrests one of Hamas' principal leaders in the West Bank Hassan Yousef together with 11 other people in Bethany. Yousef had been released from prison in August after serving a six-year sentence.
- On 2 November the IDF spokesperson Avital Leibovitz states that Israel is prepared to stop the Irish boat *Saoirse* and another Canadian boat, the *Tahrir*, from arriving in Gaza. Both boats left port at Fethiye in Turkey carrying 27 activists from nine countries in a campaign known as "Freedom Waves to Gaza." On 4 November Israel intercepts and arrests the crews of both boats.
- On 10 November the Israeli Supreme Court rejects the appeal lodged by Israel's former President Moshe Katsav against the seven-year prison sentence handed down in March for two cases of rape and another of sexual harassment.
- On 29 November for the first time since 2009, two rockets are launched into Galilee from Lebanon. The attack provokes retaliation from the Israeli army, which launches attacks on the area between Aita Shaab and Rmeish. Israel warns of escalating tension on its northern border.

- On 30 November, despite opposition from the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli government unblocks funds amounting to 100 million dollars which are awaiting transfer to the PNA. The money was frozen in October in reaction to Palestine's unilateral request before the United Nations.

Palestine

- On 11 November the UN Security Council debates the Palestinian request to be recognised as a full member state.
- On 24 November, following a meeting held in Cairo to discuss Palestinian reconciliation, the leaders of Fatah and Hamas, Mahmoud Abbas and Khaled Mashal, announce the end of the parties' differences, thereby paving the way towards a Palestinian unity government and the long-awaited national elections, which could be scheduled for May 2012. The meeting also produces an agreement on the mutual release of political prisoners and on holding talks in December with all the Palestinian factions. Both Israel and the US issue immediate warnings that they will not negotiate with Hamas as long as it refuses to recognise the state of Israel, abandon arms and accept the agreements signed between the PNA and Israel.

Peace Negotiations

- On 10 November the Special US Envoy for the Middle East Dennis Ross resigns from the post for personal reasons. The resignation comes at a delicate moment in which the peace talks show no signs of progress and with the PNA's application to be a full member of the UN on the table.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 5 November a member of the al-Quds Brigades is killed in an Israeli air strike on a group of militants that were trying to launch a rocket into Israel from southern Gaza.
- On 11 November a Palestinian truck drives into a checkpoint to the south of Hebron, injuring a soldier.
- On 11 November a Palestinian truck drives into a checkpoint to the south of Hebron, injuring a soldier. A settler driving the other way is shot dead by soldiers who wrongly identify him as an attacker.
- On 14 November a Palestinian police officer is killed in attacks carried out by

the Israeli air force on a Palestinian naval police post in Gaza. The Israeli incursion comes in response to a previous attack launched from Gaza into Ashkelon.

December 2011

Israel

- On 12 December the Jerusalem City Council goes ahead with the closure of the access ramp to the Temple Mount, ordered on 8 December for security reasons.
- On 20 December the UN Security Council is unable to achieve unanimous support for a resolution condemning Israel for the continuing settlement construction.

Palestine

- On 29 December Hamas leaders in Gaza meet with the Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir during the Jerusalem Forum, held this year in Khartoum. Hamas asks for the political and financial support needed to make Jerusalem the Palestinian capital and receives Sudan's commitment to financially supporting the people of Gaza to improve their situation.

Peace Negotiations

- On 11 December Israel accuses the PNA of boycotting the International Quartet's attempts to restart negotiations by refusing to participate in the visit of the Quartet envoys on 13 December, unless Israel halts settlement construction in the West Bank immediately.
- On 18 December Israel releases the 550 Palestinians that form the second group of prisoners to be freed in exchange for Gilad Shalit.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 7 December a terrorist is killed in clashes that erupt between Israeli soldiers and members of the Islamic Jihad.
- On 8 December an Israeli air strike on Gaza kills a member of the al-Aqsa Martyrs, Issam Batch, when he was discovered preparing an attack into southern Israel. In response, during the course of the following days, a spurt of

violence erupts with crossfire between Gaza and southern Israel.

- On 11 December Mustafa Tamimi, a member of the Popular Resistance Committees, is killed during a demonstration in Nabi Salah, close to Ramallah after being hit by a teargas canister fired by Israeli soldiers.
- On 13 December 50 ultra-orthodox settlers attack an Israeli military base in Ephraim in protest against the imminent dismantling of a series of illegal settlements in the West Bank, particularly the Mitzpe Yitzhar settlement. Meanwhile, young settlers in Qalqilya throw stones at Palestinian-owned cars for the same reason. Benjamin Netanyahu calls an emergency meeting with military chiefs.
- On 14 December a village mosque in Jaffa Road in Jerusalem is set on fire and offensive comments painted on its walls which make reference to the “price tag.”
- On 20 December the PNA accuses the Israeli government of doing nothing

to stop “settlement terrorism,” following the so-called “price tag” attacks over the last seven days. Settlers have attacked the Okasha mosque in Jerusalem and the al-Nur and Asahaba mosques in the West Bank, occupied the Saint John the Baptist church in the Jordan Valley, carried out several attacks on Palestinian vehicles and olive groves and a child was run over by a settler bus.

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