

Chronology of Events: Israel-Palestine

The following is a chronological record of events which have had an impact in Israel and Palestine in 2005.

The year 2005 will be remembered in the history of the Middle-East for the unilateral withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip in August, after 38 years of occupation. The election of Mahmoud Abbas as Palestinian President in January allows the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) to emerge from its isolation. During the historic February meeting between Abbas and Sharon at Sharm-el-Sheik, the two sides announce the cessation of hostilities and the resumption of peace negotiations between Israel and the PNA, which among other effects will lead to the freeing of nearly 900 Palestinian prisoners in February and June, and the transfer of security responsibilities for certain localities in the West Bank. There is also a warming of relations between the PNA and the United States, and Abbas is received several times by President Bush. Despite Abbas's efforts to restructure the Palestinian security apparatus and the conditional "truce" announced by Palestinian Islamic factions in March, Palestinian terrorist attacks and Israeli attacks against selected targets intensify during the course of the year, endangering and sometimes bringing to a standstill the fragile progress of the peace process. Other important events take place during the year, including the marked increase in the influence of Hamas on the Palestinian political scene following on from the various municipal elections which are held throughout the year, the announcement of the bringing forward of the Israeli elections, the creation by Sharon of a new political party, Kadima,

in November, and the reopening of the border-post at Rafah under the control of Palestinians and Egyptians, supervised by a mission-party representing the European Union.

January 2005

Israel

- On January 3rd settlers are involved in a violent confrontation with Police and Army reinforcements sent to dismantle two outposts of the Yizhar settlement at Shalhevet on the West Bank. On January 5th Sharon warns settlers not to attempt to mount armed resistance against his plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from a small number of settlements on the West Bank.
- On January 10th the Knesset (the single-chamber legislative assembly) approves by 58 votes to 56, with six absentions, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's formation of a new coalition government, which will enable him to carry out his plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The new coalition is made up of Sharon's Likud party, Shimon Peres's Labour party, and the ultra-orthodox Unified Torah Judaism party. Thirteen members of the Likud voted against the coalition. Peres becomes deputy Prime Minister with his own ministry. On the day the vote takes place, thousands of Jewish settlers demonstrate outside the Knesset against the dismantling of the settlements.

Palestine

- On January 9th Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen), the chairman of the

Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and candidate representing Fatah, is elected President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). He replaces the President of the Palestinian Legislative Council, Ruhi Fattuh, who had occupied the post on an interim basis since the death of Yasser Arafat in November 2004. Mustafa Barghuthi, a human rights campaigner highly critical of the PNA, wins 20% of the vote. According to the Cental Election Commission, 73% of voters take part in the elections. Abbas, who has always been opposed to the use of violence against the Israeli occupation and is in favour of reforming Palestinian institutions, is much appreciated on the international scene, and on January 10th the United States, which had ruled out all contact with Yasser Arafat, announces that it agrees to meet Abbas. On the same day, the High Representative for Foreign Policy and Common Security (FPCS), Javier Solana, is the first foreign representative to visit Abbas. On January 11th, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, telephones Abbas both to congratulate him and to resume top-level bilateral relations, which had been suspended for nearly four years. On January 15th Abbas assumes his functions and asks the current Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie to form a new government.

- On January 27th, after their success in the municipal elections in the West Bank in December, the candidates supported by Hamas win the municipal by-elections in the Gaza Strip.

Peace negotiations

- On January 19th President Abbas, after an initial meeting with leaders of

the Islamic group Hamas from whom he is unable to obtain a commitment to a ceasefire, begins to deploy the Palestinian security forces in border areas of the Gaza Strip to prevent rockets and mortar-shells being fired into Israel. In response, Sharon decides to resume the coordination of security questions with the Palestinians. On January 21st the Palestinian security forces set up checkpoints at strategic intersections in the north of the Gaza Strip on the frontier with Israel. The Israeli chief of staff, General Moshe Yaalon, welcomes this move. On January 23rd Abbas announces that he is about to agree a ceasefire with the leaders of Hamas. On January 26th high-ranking Palestinian and Israeli representatives publicly meet again. On January 28th the Palestinian security forces complete their deployment in the Gaza Strip. In response, General Moshe Yaalon orders his troops to end all offensive operations in the Gaza Strip, to reduce the number of attacks in the West Bank, to bring to an end targeted killings and arrests of wanted Palestinian militants – unless they constitute a direct threat to the security of the Israeli population –, to suspend a certain number of roadblocks in the Gaza Strip and to reopen the three border-crossings between Israel and the Gaza Strip.

Violence between the two sides

- On January 2nd Israel carries out a raid into the Gaza Strip in retaliation for the repeated firing of rockets and mortar-shells onto Jewish settlements. On January 4th an Israeli tank, while firing at Palestinian militants in the town of Beit Lahiya in retaliation for the launching of rockets against the border-post of Bayt Hanun, kills at least seven Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, including an 11-year-old child. In retaliation, a Palestinian militant opens fire on Israeli soldiers at a checkpoint at Erez, and later in the day a rocket is launched against the same checkpoint. Responsibility for the first attack is claimed jointly by Hamas and by the Brigade of Martyrs of al-Aqsa. On January 12th an Israeli civilian is killed and three Israeli soldiers are wounded after being ambushed by the Islamic

Jihad in the south of the Gaza Strip. Shortly afterwards three militants are shot dead. On January 14th six Israelis die in an attack jointly orchestrated by Hamas, the Brigades of the Martyrs of al-Aqsa, and the People's Resistance Committees at the Karni terminal, the main point of commercial interchange between Israel and the Gaza Strip. In retaliation, the Israeli army kills three militants, and Israel closes off the Gaza Strip and cuts off all contacts with the PNA. Abbas condemns the attack, while at the same time also condemning the Israeli military actions taken against the Palestinians. On January 16th Sharon announces to his cabinet that the army has been given the order to take "all necessary action" against militants in the Gaza Strip. On January 18th a Palestinian kamikaze kills one Israeli soldier and leaves six others wounded at Abu Houli in the south of the Gaza Strip.

February 2005

Israel

- On February 1st Attorney General Menachem Mazuz announces that, contrary to the decision of a government committee in mid-2004, the Israeli law concerning the Possessions of Absent Owners (1950) cannot be applied to the agricultural land in East Jerusalem from which its owners (resident in the West Bank) have been separated by the Security Wall.
- On February 16th the Knesset approves the allocation of \$900 million for compensation payments to Jewish settlers affected by the plan for unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from some of the settlements in the West Bank. On the same day the Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz, with the support of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, decides not to extend the term of office of the Israeli chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Moshe Yallon, who had planned the military aspects of the Israeli withdrawal. On February 20th the cabinet vote, by a majority of 17 for to five against (including the Minister of Finance Benjamin Netanyahu, who wants the question to be subjected to a referendum), in favour

of the evacuation of all settlements in the Gaza Strip and of four settlements in the West Bank. It is declared illegal for settlers to stay in these settlements after July 20th.

- On February 17th Attorney General Mazuz announces that proceedings will not be brought against Ariel Sharon in relation to the financing of the electoral campaign which made him leader of the Likud in 1999. Proceedings are brought however against his son, Omri Sharon, for fraud, perjury and breach of trust in connection with the same affair.
- On February 20th the cabinet approves, by a majority of 20 for to one against, the definitive course of the southern section of the security wall. The course adopted is closer to the Green Line (the 1967 frontier between Israel and the West Bank) than previous proposals, and goes some limited way towards meeting the objections raised by the International Penal Court and the Israeli Supreme Court.

Palestine

- On February 10th Abbas dismisses the head of national security in the south of the Gaza Strip, Omar Ashour, the chief of police in Gaza, Saeb al-Ajez, and the head of national security in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, Abdel Razek al-Majaida. He also orders the security forces to maintain the ceasefire with Israel by arresting the Palestinian militants who launched 50 mortar-shells and rockets against the Jewish settlement at Neve Dekalim, in south-west Gaza.
- On February 12th Abbas meets the leaders of Hamas and of Islamic Jihad, who both agree to implement an informal truce period.
- On February 21st, in his State of the Union speech, the U.S. President, G.W. Bush, announces an additional package of direct aid to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) worth \$350 million.
- On February 27th the Palestinian Legislative Council (or legislative body) approves the new cabinet of ministers, which, under pressure from reformist elements in Fatah, has been purged of loyalists of the late President Yasser Arafat, except in the case of the Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Nabil Shaath.

Negotiations between the two sides

- On February 3rd the Israeli government agrees to release 900 Palestinian prisoners and gradually to withdraw its troops from the towns of the West Bank. On February 21st 500 prisoners are released. On February 9th Israel unveils measures intended to reduce restrictions on Palestinians' freedom of movement and which would enable 1,000 workers and several hundred businessmen of Palestinian origin to enter Israel from Gaza every day.
- On February 6th and 7th U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice meets separately Sharon and Abbas, who accept separate invitations to the White House. She also announces the nomination of Lieutenant-General William E. Ward as the new U.S. "security coordinator", who will help the PNA to consolidate and pursue its recent efforts in terms of security and will have the role of encouraging the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli cooperation in security matters.
- On February 8th Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Sharon meet, at the invitation of the Egyptian government, at Sharm-el-Sheikh in the south of the Sinai peninsula, and in the presence of Egyptian President Mubarak and of King Abdullah II of Jordan. At the end of the meeting Abbas and Sharon solemnly declare an end to more than four years of violence. In Beirut a spokesman for Hamas, Osama Hamdaneh, declares that the ceasefire is not binding on the Palestinian resistance movement, since it has not been negotiated with Hamas and all Palestinian prisoners have not yet been released.
- On February 15th Sharon announces that he has ordered his government to begin to coordinate with the Palestinian authorities for the planned withdrawal from Gaza.
- On February 17th the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* reports that the Israeli army has decided to put an end to the practice of demolishing the homes of Palestinian militants, in view of the conclusions reached by a panel of military experts that the hostility engendered by such demolitions outstrips the benefits obtained.

Violence between the two sides

- On February 25th a Palestinian kamikaze blows himself up in a Tel-Aviv discotheque, causing five deaths and over 20 wounded. Responsibility for the attack is claimed by the Islamic Jihad, but according to Sharon, the attack was ordered by the group's office in Damascus. The Syrian government denies any involvement in the attacks. On February 27th Sharon warns the Palestinians that he will resume military operations if they do not take strong measures against terrorism.

March 2005

Israel

- On March 3rd the central committee of the Likud supports by a majority vote a non-binding resolution asking the Likud members of the Knesset (legislative assembly) to seek a national referendum on Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's plan for a unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and certain settlements in the West Bank. Sharon, leader of the Likud, rejects this request and declares that he will not let an extremist wing dictate party policy. On March 11th the Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz, approves a new timetable for implementing plans for the withdrawal, which would start in July and last for three to four weeks. A shorter duration of operations is envisaged compared to the previous timetable so as to reduce the possibility of confrontations between soldiers and settlers putting up resistance. On March 18th the government prohibits Israeli citizens from going to the settlements in the Gaza Strip so as to avoid an influx of activists during the period of the withdrawal. On March 28th the Knesset rejects the call for a referendum by a majority of 72 to 39. The reaction of the Council of Jewish Localities (Yesha) is to warn the government that the rejection of a referendum could lead to violent confrontations and civil war.
- On March 10th the Prime Minister's office publishes a report made by the former attorney general Talia Sasson on the government's role in the setting

up of settlement outposts. It concludes that at least 105 outposts, and probably more, had been constructed illegally since the mid-1990's. The report adds that the illegal outposts had been constructed with the connivance of different departments of state, in contradiction with the Sharon government's requests to dismantle them. Sasson calls for an end to the undercover financing of these outposts by certain ministries, and recommends that Attorney General Menachem Mazuz bring proceedings against those involved in the illegal constructions, among them the adviser for settlement questions at the ministry of defence, Ron Shechner. The Israeli government subsequently decides on March 13th to dismantle 24 illegal outposts in the West Bank, and to appoint a committee to make recommendations concerning the supervision of budgets, and the planning and construction of settlements.

- On March 29th the Knesset approves the budget for 2005, avoiding a vote of censure against the new Sharon government, formed in January. Sharon thus avoids holding early general elections, which would have endangered his plan for unilateral withdrawal.

Peace negotiations

- On March 1st the British Prime Minister Tony Blair organizes an international conference to support the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) with a view to constructing a viable Palestinian state. More than 30 countries and organizations take part. A large part of the conference is taken up by security questions. The Palestinian delegation agrees to reinforce the security sector, but declares that its success will depend on the establishment of a worthwhile political dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis. The participants at the conference agree to give the PNA advice and assistance in this domain. The security coordination group set up in February by the U.S. under the leadership of General William E. Ward is to help the PNA to meet all the security commitments envisaged in the first phase of the Road Map. With regard to questions of government practice, the PNA undertakes to adopt a new electoral law, and to reinforce

the legitimacy of its institutions of state by holding legislative elections during the summer, and local elections before the end of the year. The members of the Quartet meet on the sidelines of the conference and, in a joint declaration, ask the PNA to arrest and put on trial those responsible for the murderous attack in Tel Aviv on February 25th. The Quartet also criticize Israel, and reminds the Israelis that the Palestinian State can only be a viable state if its territory is continuous, and not fragmented by the presence of Jewish settlements. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice, in a separate meeting with Abbas, also criticizes Israeli settlement policy, and warns that a state fragmented into different territories will not work.

- On March 16th Israeli troops pass control of the security of Jericho to the Palestinians, in accordance with the Israeli promise made at Sharm-el-Sheikh in February. It is the first area to be returned to the PNA since the reoccupation of the West Bank in 2002. On March 22nd it is the turn of Tulkarm to be transferred to the PNA, and negotiations are undertaken for the return of Qalqiliya. The Israeli army is also said to have proposed transferring control of the security of the towns of Nablus and Jenin, fiefs of the Palestinian militants since the second Intifada, but the PNA is reported to have refused to assume this responsibility.

- On March 17th, after three days of discussions in Cairo between Abbas and 13 Palestinian factions including Hamas and Islamic Jihad, the latter announce a conditional period of "calm", which will terminate at the end of the year if their demands for military withdrawal and release of prisoners are not met. The Israeli Prime Minister describes this decision as positive, but adds that progress in the peace process will depend upon the disarming of the terrorist organizations. On March 22nd, in an attempt to disarm militants, the ministry of the interior establishes a policy of arms-control in the Gaza Strip.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On March 20th, near Tulkram, Israeli troops kill Mohamed Abi-Hazneh, a mili-

tant of Islamic Jihad who is a key suspect in the case of the Tel Aviv attack on February 25th.

- On March 27th the Israeli Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz, declares in an interview with the *New York Times*, that Palestinian militants had introduced into the Gaza Strip *Strela* anti-aircraft missiles with the help of high-placed officers in the Palestinian military intelligence service.

April 2005

Israel

- On April 4th Prime Minister Ariel Sharon announces to the foreign affairs and defence committee of the Knesset (legislative assembly) that it is necessary to extend the settlement of Maale Adumin up to the frontier of East Jerusalem (Corridor E-1). Sharon gives no date for this work to start. The main Palestinian negotiator, Saeb Erekat, calls on the U.S. to prevent completion of this project, which will destroy the peace process by separating the Palestinian territory from East Jerusalem.

- On April 5th divisions appear for the first time between Jewish settlers over Sharon's plan for unilateral withdrawal, during a meeting with him to discuss how to dismantle the settlements in the Gaza Strip. While representatives from Gush Katif, the largest block of settlements in the Gaza Strip, agree to leave the settlements provided that their families are allowed to reconstruct their homes near Askelon, a place which resembles Gush Katif, other leaders of the settlers denounce such talks as treason.

- April 12th sees the opening of the trial of Mordechai Vanunu, arrested in November 2004 for violating the conditions of his release by speaking to foreign journalists and by trying to travel to the Gaza Strip. Vanunu had been released in April 2004 after an 18-year prison sentence for divulging Israeli nuclear secrets. On April 19th Minister of the Interior Ophir Pines-Paz prolongs Vanunu's prohibition to travel by one year.

- On April 14th, a military court acquits the officer who had killed English journalist James Miller in May 2003.

- On April 27th and 28th Russian President Vladimir Putin visits Israel, where he meets both Sharon and President Moshe Katsav. He confirms to the latter that, despite Israeli pressure, Russia intends to sell to Syria "SA-18" surface-to-air missiles, but on the other hand had refused a contract to sell "Iskander E" missiles, arguing that Israel would be hard-pressed to intercept them. With regard to Israeli fears that the "SA-18" could fall into the hands of Hezbollah, Putin explains that the missiles cannot operate without the structure on which they are installed.

Palestine

On April 5th *The Independent* reports that President Mahmoud Abbas's attempts to take strong measures against Islamic militants have been made impossible due to a conflict with the young war-lords of the Brigades of Martyrs of al-Aqsa, linked to his faction of Fatah. On March 31st 15 members of al-Aqsa had fired on the Mukata (the President's residence) and ransacked four restaurants frequented by high-ranking Palestinians and their families. As a consequence Abbas dismisses Ismael Jaber, the head of the armed forces in the Gaza Strip, and Yunis al-Has, the commandant in the district of Ramallah, since the security apparatus had failed to prevent these attacks. On April 24th, Abbas appoints Suleiman Helles as head of the national security forces, Ahmad Abdelkarim as head of military intelligence, Tarek Abu Rajab as head of the general intelligence service, and Alaa Hosni as chief of police. Abbas also orders the retirement of ten officers, including Major-General Moussa Arafat, cousin of the late Yasser Arafat and head of military intelligence. In order to placate the old guard of the "Arafat era", Abbas appoints both Major-General Arafat and Major-General Amin al-Hindi, the former head of the general intelligence service, as presidential advisers with ministerial rank.

Peace negotiations

- On April 11th Sharon has talks with U.S. President G.W. Bush in Texas. At the end of the meeting, Bush makes a

speech that is amazingly harsh towards the Israelis, asking them to respect their obligations assumed in the Road Map, to dismantle all illegal outposts in the West Bank, and warning Israel that it should drop its plans to extend Jewish settlements in the West Bank. In private, Bush indicates his opposition to the Israeli plan to extend the Maale Adumin settlement in the West Bank, which would consolidate the illegal annexation of East Jerusalem by Israel, and would make the emergence of a Palestinian state even more difficult. On the other hand, the U.S. reaffirms its April 2004 commitment that Israel will not be forced to abandon all its settlements in the West Bank and return to the frontiers of 1967. On April 22nd, in an interview in *The Jerusalem Post*, Sharon declares that he will continue the expansion of Jewish settlements in the West Bank, despite American opposition.

- On April 14th U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, acting in the name of the Quartet, appoints James Wolfensohn to the post of special envoy with responsibility for coordinating the Israeli withdrawal and for improving the Palestinian economy.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On April 9th the Israeli army kills three 15-year-old boys in the Rafah refugee camp in the Gaza Strip. According to the army, they were trying to cross the frontier with Egypt to smuggle arms, while according to their friend, who survived the attack, they were playing football. In retaliation, Palestinian militants fire mortar-shells at the Gush Katif block of settlements, without causing any wounded. In addition, Hamas and Islamic Jihad announce that they are reconsidering their commitment to a ceasefire. Abbas describes the killings as violations of the truce.

May 2005

Israel

- On May 1st Stanley Fisher, former first deputy-director general of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), becomes eighth governor of the Bank of Israel.

- On May 2nd, the leader of the Yisrael Ba'aliya party, Natan Sharansky, resigns as Minister without portfolio responsible for Jerusalem, social affairs and the diaspora, in protest at the plan to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and from some of the West Bank settlements, which he describes as "a strategic error which will exacerbate the conflict with the Palestinians and will increase terrorism". He also criticizes the fact that Sharon plans to withdraw from Gaza without insisting in return that security reforms should be carried out by the Palestinians.

- On May 2nd the family of British journalist James Miller, killed by an Israeli soldier who was acquitted in April of all charges brought against him, launch a civil action against the Israeli government to ask that the killer of their son be prosecuted.

- On May 4th, a State Department analyst, Lawrence Franklin, is arrested in the U.S. after being suspected of transmitting information about Iran to the "American Israel Public Affairs Committee" (AIPAC), the most important pro-Israeli pressure group in the U.S. In August 2004, Sharon had denied any Israeli involvement in this spy scandal.

- On May 9th, Sharon postpones until mid-August the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip, initially planned for early July, so as to respect the traditional Jewish period of mourning from July 20th to 14th August, commemorating the destruction of two ancient temples in Jerusalem. On May 11th, the Minister of Defence, Lieutenant-General Shaul Mofaz, declares on the *Israel* radio station that, unlike Sharon, he is not in favour of demolishing Jewish settlers' homes after the withdrawal because of the time required to do so and the additional risks for Israeli soldiers. On May 20th, the EU trade commissioner, Peter Mandelson, asks Israel not to dismantle free trade agreements with the Gaza Strip, as originally foreseen in the withdrawal plan, since this would weaken even further the Palestinian economy.

- On May 15th, the Israeli cabinet reconfirms a law which prohibits the granting of citizenship to Palestinians who marry Israeli Arabs, leaving thousands of spouses with no legal status.

Palestine

- On May 5th, municipal elections are held in the Gaza Strip and on the West Bank. Fatah, the party of President Mahmoud Abbas, wins 56% of the vote, as against 33% for the Islamic group Hamas. Hamas wins control in 23 of the 84 district councils, including key towns such as Qalqilya in the West Bank and Rafah and Beit Lahia in the Gaza Strip. Fatah wins a majority in 45 electoral districts.

- On May 22nd, after a series of meetings with the leaders of different factions, the Palestinian Minister of the Interior, Nasser Yousef, announces that the latter reaffirm their commitment to the ceasefire, despite recent events.

Peace negotiations

- From May 26th to 28th, the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visits the U.S. to meet the American President, G.W. Bush. Bush promises direct aid to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) totalling \$50 million in order to develop the Gaza Strip after the Israeli withdrawal. The U.S. Congress would have preferred to provide aid through third parties. During the press conference at the end of the meeting, Bush reaffirms his support for an independent Palestinian state and declares his confidence in Abbas. He reiterates the comments he had made in April when Sharon was visiting the White House, calling on Israel to withdraw from all its illegal settlements in the Gaza Strip, to put an end to any further expansion of the settlements and to ensure that the Security Wall does not become a "political Wall". Bush calls on the Israelis to withdraw to the positions held in September 2000 and adds that any changes to the 1949 ceasefire settlement must be made by mutual agreement and must guarantee territorial continuity for the future Palestinian state.

Conflicts between the two sides

- Despite the ceasefire agreement announced between the two sides, several violent incidents occur in May. On May 2nd, Israeli forces carry out a

raid on a village near Tulkarm, in the West Bank, leading to the death of one Israeli soldier and of Shafiq Abdel Ghani, a member of Islamic Jihad accused of helping to plan the suicide attack of February 25th in Tel-Aviv. Later the same day, two rockets are launched from the Gaza Strip against the Israeli town of Sderot. On May 18th, Israeli forces launch an aerial attack in the Gaza Strip against Hamas forces who had made bomb attacks against the Jewish settlement of Gush Katif. In a statement addressed to Sharon, Hamas warns that the ceasefire will not last long if the attacks against the Palestinian people continue, to which Sharon replies that he will use "all means necessary" to put an end to the mortar-shell and rocket attacks on Israeli towns and settlements. On May 20th, Hamas, the Brigade of the Martyrs of al-Aqsa, and the People's Resistance Committees launch a joint attack on the Kfar Darom settlement. In its retaliatory action Israel kills one of the three authors of the attack.

June 2005

Israel

- On June 9th the Israeli Supreme Court declares that the planned withdrawal from the Gaza Strip and from a tiny part of the West Bank settlements is constitutional. The Court acknowledges that it has repercussions for the "human dignity" of the settlers, but adds that it has been approved by the Knesset and that "appropriate compensation" has been proposed.
- On June 11th Lieutenant-General Dan Halutz is named chief of staff of the Israeli armed forces.
- On June 13th *The Guardian* reports that the U.S. has suspended bilateral cooperation on different development projects and has interrupted delivery of equipment to Israel, following a dispute concerning a contract between Israel and China to modernize "Happy Killer"-type military drones previously sold to China.
- On June 17th the Israeli army announces that the navy is planning to construct a maritime barrier to the north of Gaza, so as to prevent the infiltration of

activists and to prepare for the withdrawal from the Gaza Strip. The system will be equipped with electronic sensors and radar to compensate for the loss of surveillance posts in Gaza.

- On June 17th the Security Council adopts Resolution 1605 (2005), which prolongs for a further six months the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) located on the Golan heights.
- On June 26th, the Israeli government approves the construction of a new community for settlers from Gaza at Nitzanim on the Mediterranean coast. On June 30th the Israeli army designates the Gaza Strip as a "closed military zone", prohibiting access to any Israelis who do not live in Gaza. Shortly afterwards, the Israeli army evacuates 150 anti-withdrawal activists from the Palm Beach hotel, which had become their headquarters.
- On June 27th a military court convicts the Israeli soldier Idier Wahid Taysir for the killing in April 2003 of a British activist, Tom Hurdall, while he was trying to protect children in the south of the Gaza Strip.

Palestine

- On June 12th the Minister of the Interior announces that four Palestinians found guilty of murder have been executed at Saraya prison in the Gaza Strip. Under international pressure, Yasser Arafat had suspended all executions from 2002 onwards.

Peace negotiations

- On June 2nd, Israel releases 398 of the 900 Palestinian prisoners it had agreed to release during the Sharon-Abbas meeting at Sharm-el-Sheikh in February. Two prisoners refuse to be released.
- On June 7th and 8th, the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, visits Israel and the Palestinian occupied territories. After a meeting with his Israeli opposite number, Silvan Shalom, he announces that the British government, which had had diplomatic contacts with the leaders of Hamas due to the increasing political power of Hamas in the Palestinian territories after the municipal elections in December 2004 and

May 2005, will – as Israel requests – have no further contact with the leaders of Hamas until they renounce violence and the destruction of Israel.

- On June 9th the Palestinian Minister for Civilian Affairs and chief negotiator for the disengagement from Gaza, Saeb Erekat, accuses Israel of not divulging information that is crucial for the successful transfer of control of the Gaza Strip, so as to be able to blame later the Palestinians for the failure of the operation. He calls on the Israelis not to create the conditions for a "third Intifada". On June 15th the *Financial Times* reports that Egypt has stationed 40 police and intelligence service officers in the Palestinian territories in order to give its support to the disengagement plan, and proposes the deployment of 750 border guards on its frontier with the Gaza Strip so as to prevent arms smuggling after the Israeli withdrawal. On June 19th the U.S. Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice announces, during a visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories, that Israel will destroy the settlers' homes so as to allow the Palestinians to construct high-rise buildings and thus alleviate Palestinian overpopulation in Gaza (1.3 million inhabitants).

- On June 21st Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas hold their second meeting in Jerusalem, at Sharon's official residence. The meeting does not lead to any advances on subjects crucial for a smooth Israeli withdrawal or for the continuation of the peace process.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On June 6th confrontations break out at Haram-al-Sharif (the Temple Mount) in Jerusalem, leaving several Palestinians wounded. On June 7th the Israeli army kills Mrawah Kalim, the military commander of Islamic Jihad in Jenin, as well as two other Palestinians. In retaliation, also on June 7th, Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants launch a series of rockets against Jewish settlements and against the Israeli town of Sderot. Rockets launched against the Israeli settlement of Gamei Tal, in the Gaza Strip, kill two Palestinian workers and one Chinese, and wound seven Palestinians. In a counter-attack on June 8th, Israel launches missiles

against Hamas militants in the Gaza Strip. On June 19th Islamic Jihad militants kill an Israeli sergeant-major on the frontier between Gaza and Egypt, and the following day they kill a civilian in Gaza. In retaliation, on June 21st, a few hours before the Sharon-Abbas meeting, the Israeli army arrests 52 Jihad Islamic militants in several towns in the Gaza Strip, and declares that the Palestinian Authority is inefficient. On June 24th, a Palestinian opens fire on a group of Israeli settlers, killing a ten-year-old child and wounding four people.

July 2005

Palestine

- On July 14th confrontations break out between Hamas militants and Palestinian security forces in the suburbs of Zeitun, leaving two dead and 30 wounded. This violence follows the Palestinian Minister of the Interior Nasser Yousef's decision – taken in the middle of an Israeli attack – to establish a state of emergency in Gaza and to authorize the security forces to prevent militants from launching mortar-shells and rockets against Israeli targets.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On July 12th a young Palestinian from a village near Tulkram blows himself up in the town of Natanyaha, killing two women and two adolescent girls, and wounding about thirty other people. The Kamikaze declares on video that the Islamic Jihad still abides by the ceasefire announced in March, but that he is avenging Israeli violations of it. Mahmoud Abbas condemns the attack as going against the interests of the Palestinian cause. In reply, Sharon orders on August 13th “a severe retaliation” against the leadership of the Islamic Jihad, and Israeli troops retake control of Tulkram, which Israel had transferred to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) in March. On July 14th, in retaliation for a rocket launched by Hamas from the Gaza Strip against the settlement of Nativ Haasara, killing a woman, Israel launches four aerial attacks against a charity organization

linked to Hamas, a refugee camp and a cemetery used to launch rockets against Israel. On July 15th Israel continues its attacks and kills seven Hamas militants. On July 17th hundreds of Israeli troops are concentrated near the frontier with the Gaza Strip, and threaten to invade if the PNA does not prevent missiles being fired against Israel. Abbas declares that he is doing everything in his power and calls on the U.S. and other countries to prevent an Israeli invasion. On July 22nd and 23rd the U.S. Secretary of State makes an emergency visit to Israel and the Palestinian territories in order to restore calm. On July 24th Israeli security forces disarm and arrest a Palestinian who was about to commit a suicide attack in Tel-Aviv. Shortly afterwards two Palestinians kill two Israelis and wound four others while they were passing through a narrow corridor controlled by the Israeli army linking the settlement of Gush Katif to Jerusalem. The two Palestinians are shot dead.

August 2005

Israel

- On August 7th the Minister of Finance, Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon's main opponent, resigns, a few minutes after the government approves the evacuation of the first settlements in the Gaza Strip. He declares that Sharon's withdrawal plan will weaken Israel's security, and criticizes the fact that the Palestinians have not been asked to take any security measures in return. Sharon appoints his ally Ehud Olmert, the deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Industry, Commerce and Labour, to the post. On August 30th Netanyahu announces that he will stand against Sharon as candidate to become president of the Likud, accusing Sharon of leaning too far to the Left.
- On August 28th Omri Sharon, son of Ariel Sharon, is convicted for illegally financing his father's campaigns for the leadership of the Likud in 1999, and to be elected as Prime Minister in 2001.

Palestine

- On August 10th the *Financial Times* reports that, following the kidnapping of three workers from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the International Red Cross Committee (IRCC) is to close its office in the south of the Gaza Strip and suspend its field operations throughout the Strip because of the deterioration of the internal security situation. Palestinian security forces rapidly release the three hostages.

Peace negotiations

- On August 2nd and 3rd 25,000 Israeli ultra-nationalists gather in the Israeli town of Sderot, near the frontier with the Gaza Strip, to protest against the withdrawal plan. Although the Gaza Strip had been designated as a “closed military zone”, in the previous few weeks several activists have succeeded in reaching the settlements in Gaza. In Israel the tension mounts when Eden Natan-Zada, a religious activist who had deserted the Israeli army in protest because of the withdrawal plan, and who lived in one of the settlements in Gaza, is battered to death by a crowd of Israeli Arabs, after killing four people in a bus in the Israeli Arab town of Shfaram. On August 15th Israel begins the evacuation of the 21 settlements in the Gaza Strip (with 8,518 settlers) and four settlements (with 674 settlers) out of the total of 120 settlements in the West Bank. On August 15th the settlers are offered a period of grace of 48 hours to evacuate Gaza, after which (from August 17th) Israeli soldiers will start to evacuate them by force. On August 16th and 17th, at Neve Dekalim, the largest of the Gaza settlements, hundreds of young religious nationalists interpose themselves as the army arrives to transport the belongings of those settlers who are prepared to leave Gaza. Four people are wounded, and 98 protesters are arrested. While there are few violent scenes in the Gaza Strip, in the West Bank a settler opens fire on a group of Palestinians, killing four of them. On August 18th the security forces expel thousands of settlers occupying two

synagogues, one at Kfar Darom and the other at Neve Dekalim, the two most militant Jewish settlements in Gaza. On August 21st bulldozers start to destroy the 2,000 settlers' homes in the Gaza Strip, and on August 22nd Netzarim, the last remaining settlement in Gaza, is evacuated. On August 23rd the two remaining settlements in the West Bank are evacuated. The Israeli army needed just nine days to complete the withdrawal, while up to three weeks had been envisaged in the original plans. The Palestinian National Authority welcomes the withdrawal, but declares that Gaza will continue to be occupied as long as the Israelis control both the frontiers and the circulation of people and goods. On August 31st the Knesset approves the Egyptian proposal to deploy 750 border guards along its frontier with the Gaza Strip, so as to prevent arms smuggling after the Israeli withdrawal.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On August 25th Israeli troops kill five Palestinians suspected of being involved in a suicide attack, during a raid on a refugee camp near Tulkram. According to witnesses, there are three adolescents among the dead. In retaliation, the People's Resistance Committees launch a rocket attack near the Israeli town of Sderot. On August 28th the Islamic Jihad claims responsibility for a suicide attack at a bus-stop in Beersheba, which wounds two security agents who were trying to get the kamikaze as far away as possible.

September 2005

Israel

- On September 1st the Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs, Silvan Shalom, meets his Pakistani opposite number, Mian Kurshid Mahmood Kasuri, in Turkey, one of the few Muslim countries to have recognized Israel. On September 17th the Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf addresses the Congress of American Jews, and states that he will not recognize Israel until a Palestinian state has been established.
- On September 2nd the deputy Prime

Minister and Minister for Industry, Commerce and Labour, Ehud Olmert, announces that, under U.S. pressure, Israel has suspended a plan to build 3,500 new homes in the zone designated as "E1", which had been intended to join up the settlement of Maale Adumin in the West Bank with the Arab section of Jerusalem.

- On September 6th Israeli military prosecutors open 17 criminal inquiries dealing with allegations made by Israeli soldiers that they received orders to fire on unarmed Palestinians. These inquiries come after interviews given by soldiers to "*Breaking the Silence*", an organization of former Israeli soldiers which aims to bring to light abuses perpetrated by the Israeli army.

- On September 10th a British court issues a warrant to arrest Doron Almong, a former major in the Israeli army accused of ordering the destruction of hundreds of Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip in violation of the fourth Geneva Convention, which designates as a crime any act of excessive destruction and any appropriation of property not justified by military considerations. On September 11th, when Almong is travelling to the U.K., Israeli diplomats warn him not to leave his plane so as not to be arrested. In mid-September, the former chief of staff, Lieutenant-General Moshe Yallon, cancels a visit to London, for fear of also being prosecuted for war crimes, and the Israeli government warns his successor, Lieutenant-General Dan Halutz, to avoid travelling to the U.K.

- On September 15th the Israeli Supreme Court, while at the same time declaring as legal the construction of the Security Wall inside Palestinian territory so as to protect Jewish settlements in the West Bank, takes into account the economic and social consequences of the construction of the Wall for five Palestinian villages, and orders the government to consider alternative trajectories so as not to separate these five villages from the main towns of Qalqiliya and Habala.

- On September 23rd Bahrein announces that it is ending its economic boycott against Israel, so as to conform to the conditions of the free-trade agreement signed with the U.S. in September 2004. Bahrein thus becomes the first

member of the Gulf Cooperation Council to suspend the boycott.

Palestine

- On September 7th the People's Resistance Committees (PRC) assassinate Mussa Arafat, the former head of military intelligence, warning the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) that all those guilty of corruption shall be punished, and that what has been stolen from the Palestinian people must be returned. On September 9th the son of Mussa Arafat is released by the PRC thanks to Egyptian mediation.
- On September 29th municipal elections are held in 82 towns, constituting the final round of the elections which have been held since December 2004. Fatah wins 54% of the votes, as opposed to 26% for Hamas.

Peace negotiations

- On September 7th 750 Egyptian soldiers take up their positions along the frontier between Egypt and Gaza. On the same day Israel announces, after months of negotiations, the closure for six months of Rafah, the border-crossing between Egypt and Palestinian territory, adding that from September 25th onwards both goods and Palestinian citizens will have to pass through Kerem Shalom, where Israeli, Egyptian and Palestinian territory converge. Israel accepts in principle that controls may be carried out by third parties at Rafah after the end of the six-month period. On September 12th the Israeli army completes the withdrawal of all remaining Jewish settlers and Israeli soldiers from the Gaza Strip, and returns control of the territory to the PNA, so ending 38 years of occupation. As soon as the Israelis have left, thousands of Palestinians take possession of the former Jewish settlements and destroy the synagogues.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On September 23rd a truck transporting rockets explodes during a Hamas parade held at the Jabaliya refugee-camp in the Gaza Strip to celebrate the Israeli withdrawal, killing 21 people and wounding 80, principally civilians. Hamas

accuses Israel of firing a missile against the truck, an accusation which is denied by both the Israeli authorities and by the PNA. In retaliation, Hamas launches several mortar-shells from the Gaza Strip against the Israeli town of Sderot, wounding five Israelis. The same day the Israeli army kills three militants of the Islamic Jihad, which launches a mortar-shell attack against Israel in retaliation. On September 24th the Israeli government gives a free hand to the army to act against the Palestinian factions. As a result the army positions tanks and artillery equipment on the northern and eastern frontier of Gaza, undertakes wide scale arrests of Hamas and Islami Jihad militants in the West Bank, and resumes its policy of targeted killings. The same day four helicopters kill four Hamas militants in Gaza and destroy arms caches. The following day an aerial attack on the city of Gaza leads to the death of Mohammed Khalil, a leader of Islamic Jihad, and of another militant. On September 25th Abbas condemns the Israeli aggression, which he describes as unjustified. On September 27th the Israeli aerial attacks continue, targeting roads, bridges and empty buildings. On September 29th Israeli troops kill two Islamic Jihad militants at Burqin, in addition to a militant from the Brigades of the Martyrs of al-Aqsa in Jenin.

October 2005

Israel

- On October 6th the Supreme Court declares illegal under international law the use of Palestinian civilians as "human shields" during conflicts. The affair had been brought before the Court by human rights organizations in October 2002.
- On October 10th Bahrein, which has lifted its boycott against Israel, makes it clear that this does not imply any normalization of its relations with Israel.
- On October 11th, for the first time in the history of Israel, an Arab state, Qatar, makes a donation: \$6 million to help the Israeli town of Sakhim, where Jews and Arabs cohabit, to construct a football stadium for its mixed team, Bnei Sakhnin.

Palestine

- On October 1st Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, under pressure from Israel and the U.S. to contain the militants, prohibits armed demonstrations in public. On October 2nd Hamas militants attack a Palestinian police-station in the city of Gaza, and fighting spreads rapidly to the nearby refugee-camp of Shati. A policeman and two civilians die. Hamas declares that fighting broke out after the police tried to arrest the son of Abdel Aziz al-Rantisi, a leader of Hamas killed by Israel in April 2004. On October 3rd dozens of Palestinian policemen invade the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) building to protest against the lack of military equipment with which they have been faced in the recent confrontation with Hamas. An hour later the PLC approves a motion asking Abbas to form a new government within two weeks.
- On October 13th the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) publishes statistics which reveal that the number of Palestinians who have died as a result of internal violence is equivalent to the number who have been killed by the Israelis.

Peace negotiations

- On October 20th Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visits the U.S. to meet President G.W. Bush. Bush congratulates the Israelis and the Palestinians for their cooperation over the Israeli withdrawal. He calls on the Israelis not to expand their settlements, and asks the Palestinians to bring to an end the threat posed by armed groups. Abbas pleads for a resumption of negotiations with Israel. Bush announces that he will ask the Quartet's special envoy for disengagement from Gaza, James Wolfensohn, to prolong his mission until 2006, so that he can continue with his task of improving the Palestinian economy.

Conflicts between the two sides

- On October 12th Israel announces the arrest of six Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, including Ibrahim Ghneimat, a high-ranking member of Hamas, who had been on the "wanted" list for eight

years in relation to, amongst other offences, a suicide attack in Tel-Aviv in March 1997 which had cost three Israelis their lives. On October 16th a militant from the Brigade of the Martyrs of al-Aqsa kills three Israelis near the Israeli settlements of Gush Etzion and Eli in the West Bank. In retaliation Israel imposes new restrictions on Palestinians' movements in the West Bank and suspends all contacts with the PNA. The same day the Israelis kills Nihad Abu Ghanin, a commandant of the Islamic Jihad in Jenin. On October 24th, in Tulkarm, Israeli soldiers kill Louay Sa'adi, one of the most wanted military commanders of the Islamic Jihad, together with his lieutenant Majed Ashkar, and arrest five members of the Tulkarm cell, suspected of organizing a new attack in Israel. Israel accuses this cell of being responsible for the attacks on February 25th in Tel-Aviv and on July 12th in Netanya. Later in the day of October 24th rockets are fired against Israel from the Gaza Strip. On October 26th the Islamic Jihad avenges the death of Sa'adi by committing a suicide attack in a market in the Israeli town of Hadera, causing the death of five Israelis and wounding 28. The spokesman for the Islamic Jihad, Khader Habib, describes the attack as an act of vengeance, and declares that the group still abides by the ceasefire proclaimed in March, but adds that they will not tolerate a unilateral truce. On October 27th Sharon warns the Palestinians that they will not gain their independence without putting a stop to the actions of the armed Islamic factions, and announces an uninterrupted Israeli offensive against these factions. The same day the Israeli army kills nine Palestinians, principally civilians, in an aerial attack on the Jabaliya refugee-camp targeting a truck transporting important activists of the Islamic Jihad. On October 28th Israel launches an aerial attack against the north of Gaza, and kills a member of the Brigade of the Martyrs of al-Aqsa.

November 2005

Israel

- On November 2nd "*Physicians for Human Rights-Israel*" and the "*Gaza*

Community Mental Health Programme” apply to the Israeli Supreme Court to force the government to put an end to low-altitude supersonic flights over the Gaza Strip, which they qualify as a “collective punishment against the Palestinian population” which violates international law.

- On November 7th a political crisis breaks out when the Knesset (unicameral legislative assembly) rejects by 60 votes to 54 the nomination of Likud loyalists for two out of four ministerial appointments. Eight Likud rebels vote against these appointments. The cabinet finally decides to appoint only Ehud Olmert, whose mandate terminates on November 9th, as permanent Minister of Finance and Matan Vilnai as Minister for Science.

- On November 9th Amir Peretz beats Shimon Peres in the election to become president of the Labour Party, with 42,3% of votes against 40,0%. Peretz had promised to withdraw from the coalition government. On November 17th, after a discussion with Peres, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon agrees to call early general elections in February or March 2006. On November 21st Sharon announces his resignation from the Likud (which he had co-founded in 1973), and his intention to form a new centre party to be called Kadima. The same day 14 Likud members of the Knesset, together with the Ministers of Finance, of Immigration and Justice, of Tourism, and of Public Security, announce their support for Kadima. On November 30th Shimon Peres announces that he is leaving the Labour Party to join Kadima.

- On November 16th a military court acquits an army captain who had fired 17 times against Iman al-Hams, a 13-year-old Palestinian girl who had approached too closely to an Israeli army post near the Rafah refugee-camp.

- On November 18th Mordechai Vanunu, released in April after completing an 18-year prison sentence for revealing Israeli nuclear secrets, is arrested for violating the conditions of his release by travelling to the Gaza Strip.

- On November 15th *The Independent* publishes a report drawn up by European diplomats in Jerusalem, which calls on the European Union to

intervene against the illegal Israeli policy aiming to annex East-Jerusalem (occupied since 1967). This would be achieved by expanding Jewish settlements in and around East-Jerusalem, and by the construction of the Security Wall, the consequences of which would be to cut off East-Jerusalem from the Palestinian territory in the West Bank. European Foreign Ministers refuse to make this report public because it could “radicalize the Palestinian population of Jerusalem, which has up to the present remained relatively calm.”

Peace negotiations

- On November 1st Israel agrees to re-open the border-crossing at Rafah, between the Gaza Strip and Egypt, which is to be controlled by the Palestinians and the Egyptians under EU supervision. The Palestinians accept the European mission, but oppose the conditions imposed by Israel, which demands that no goods should leave via Rafah, and that the frontier should be controlled via a system of cameras. On November 7th the EU Foreign Ministers, meeting in Brussels, approve a mission to control the border-crossing at Rafah, in addition to the launching on January 1st, 2006 of a three-year mission to train the Palestinian police. On November 13th the Quartet’s special envoy for disengagement from Gaza, James Wolfensohn, is not able to reach an agreement with all parties over new border regulations for Gaza. On November 15th the U.S. Secretary of State, Condoleeza Rice, finally manages to achieve an agreement between the two parties, under which it is envisaged that individuals will be able to cross the frontier at Rafah from November 25th onwards and that cameras will transmit images of the frontier to a control centre manned by Palestinians, Israelis and Europeans. Israel also agrees to increase the number of trucks allowed to pass every day through the border-crossing at Karni to 150 by the end of 2005 and to 400 by the end of 2006. Movements of Palestinians between Gaza and the West Bank will be simplified by the use of buses escorted by the Israelis,

from December 15th onwards. On November 25th Abbas formally opens the frontier between Gaza and Egypt, in the presence of European and Arab delegations.

December 2005

Israel

- On December 11th Minister of Defence Shaul Mofaz resigns from the Likud, to join the new party of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, Kadima.

- On December 19th the Likud elects Benyamin Netanyahu as new president with 47 votes against 32 for Israel Katz, the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Development.

Palestine

- On December 14th the young militants of Fatah announce their own list, al-Mustaqbal, for the legislative elections of January 25th, 2006, including among other figures Marwan Barghuthi, currently serving a prison sentence, Mohammed Dahlan, former head of preventive security in the Gaza Strip and currently Minister of Civilian Affairs, and Jibril Rajoud, former head of preventive security in the West Bank. The same day Hamas proposes a list of 62 candidates, headed by Ismail Haniyeh, considered as a moderate. When on December 15th Prime Minister Ahmed Qurie resigns in order to present himself as a candidate for the January elections, on December 24th he reverses his decision and resumes his functions as Prime Minister. On December 25th Israel announces that Palestinians will not be authorized to vote in East-Jerusalem if Hamas presents candidates there.

- On December 21st a Dutch professor and his Australian assistant are kidnapped in the north of Gaza by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), which demands the release of its secretary-general Ahmed Saadat, imprisoned in Jericho since 2002. They are released a few hours later. On December 28th a British human rights activist is kidnapped with her parents at Rafah, and is released two days later.

Conflicts between the two sides

▪ On December 5th a suicide attack perpetrated by the Islamic Jihad at the Hasharan commercial centre in Netanya kills four Israelis and injures 40 others. In retaliation, on December 5th and 6th the Israeli army arrests 15 Palestinians in the West Bank, including the father and the brother of the kamikaze, who came from a village to the north of Tulkarm. On December 7th, in a targeted attack, the Israelis kill Mahmoud al-Arquan, the head of the sniper unit of the People's Resistance Committees in Gaza. On December 8th the Israelis launch missiles against a home in Jabaliya, in the north of Gaza,

killing two members of the Brigade of Martyrs of al-Aqsa, including Iyad Qaddas, accused of responsibility for the firing of numerous rockets against Israel from Gaza. On December 9th Israel suspends negotiations concerning the transport of Palestinian passengers between Gaza and the West Bank, which were due to start on December 15th. On December 14th an Israeli aerial attack to the east of Gaza kills four Palestinian militants, who the Israelis say were about to carry out an attack. On December 22nd the Israeli army kills three Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In retaliation, four Israeli soldiers are wounded when a Qassam rocket touches their base near the Gaza Strip.

On December 27th the Israelis destroy two offices of the Brigades of Martyrs of al-Aqsa and a bridge which they say was used by militants. On December 29th Israel announces the creation of a "buffer zone" in the north of Gaza for an unspecified time period, and declares that anybody venturing into this area will be killed. On December 29th a kamikaze blows himself up while being pursued by Israeli troops, killing an Israeli soldier and two Palestinians. According to the Israeli deputy Minister of Defence, he was acting under the orders of the headquarters of the Islamic Jihad in Damascus.