

Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

The beginning of 2008 sees rockets fired into Israel from the Gaza Strip, leading to the closure of the Egyptian border crossings. Trucks carrying food, humanitarian supplies and fuel are denied entry and living conditions for inhabitants of the strip are considerably worsened as a result.

A year of intense diplomatic activity begins in January with the visit from US President, George W. Bush, to Israel and the Palestinian territories. The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, also travels to the area on several occasions. The diplomatic activity continues in March and April with visits from the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, the US Vice President, Dick Cheney, and former US President, Jimmy Carter, as well as the meeting in Russia between the chief of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, and the Russian President, Vladimir Putin. In July, Barak Obama, US Democratic Senator and candidate for President, meets with Israeli and Palestinian leaders.

Also in 2008 the Israeli government is investigated over its management during the war in the summer of 2006. In January the Winograd commission presents a report that exonerates the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, but which detects "serious failings and shortcomings" in the country's political and military leadership during the conflict.

In May the investigation opened into corruption allegations against Olmert provokes reactions both externally and from within his own party. Olmert is forced to call primary elections, which are won by the Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni. At the end of July, Olmert bows to pressure and announces his resignation from his position as Prime

Minister. In October Tzipi Livni, the new leader of the Kadima party, announces that she has been unable to form a new government coalition and asks the President to call early elections, which will take place on 10 February 2009.

In February the Israeli Deputy Defence Minister, Matan Vilnai, warns that rocket launches from the Gaza Strip may have serious consequences for the Palestinians, and uses the word shoah, a Hebrew term used to refer to the holocaust. Later, government officials try to downplay his words. However, a series of air strikes are carried out on the Gaza Strip, which continue until March with the aim of preventing further rocket launches into Israeli territory.

Following months of negotiations, the ceasefire between Israel and Hamas enters into force in June, having been threatened on several occasions. At the beginning of July, for example, Israel responds to rocket launches from the Gaza Strip by closing the border crossings, worsening living conditions for civilians there. In July five Lebanese soldiers are released and the remains of 200 Lebanese and Egyptian soldiers are returned, in exchange for the bodies of the two Israeli soldiers whose capture provoked the war between Israel and Lebanon in 2006.

At the beginning of November Israeli troops are involved in clashes with Hamas soldiers. The tension mounts until Hamas declares an end to the December ceasefire. The Israeli army responds by launching an offensive against the Gaza Strip in order to force Hamas to stop firing rockets. The attack causes 200 casualties, including civilians. After being condemned by the international community, the offensive is

brought to an end with Israel's unilateral ceasefire declaration in January 2009.

January 2008

Israel

- On 9 January a court in Tel Aviv convicts David Shamir, a major in the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) reserves, with attempted espionage for trying to sell military secrets to countries like Iran and Russia and to groups such as the Islamic Hamas movement.
- On 16 January the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert suffers a serious setback after the extreme right Yisrael Beiteinu party withdraws from the ruling coalition in protest against the government's decision to hold talks with the Palestinians on fundamental issues such as borders, refugees and the status of Jerusalem. Beiteinu's withdrawal leaves Olmert's coalition with a narrow majority in the Knesset (Parliament).
- On 17 January the Israeli Defence Minister confirms that Israel has conducted a missile test near Jerusalem, raising suspicions that this might form part of a long-range missile development programme or improvements to their anti-missile defence system.
- On 30 January the Winograd Commission, set up in September 2006 to analyse the government and Israeli army's management of the war in Lebanon in July and August 2006, presents its final report. Although the commission reports "serious failings and shortcomings" in the country's political and military leadership, Olmert escapes criticism over his management of the war.

Palestine

- On 1 January at least eight Palestinians are killed and around twenty more injured in the Gaza Strip in clashes between Fatah and Hamas between 31 December 2007 and 1 January 2008.
- On 26 January George Habash, founder of the radical Marxist-Leninist party, the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), dies from a heart attack in Amman, Jordan.

Peace Negotiations

- On 8 January the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, and Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, meet in Jerusalem for a round of negotiations before the US President, George W. Bush, visits the region. Abbas and Olmert agree on a framework for the negotiations which covers core issues related with a future Palestinian State: borders, the status of Jerusalem and the future of the families of Palestinian refugees.
- From 9-11 January the US President, George W. Bush, visits Israel and Palestine in his first official visit to the country as president. Bush calls for dialogue between the Israelis and the Palestinians, which has been hindered by Israeli settlement policy following the summit in Annapolis in November 2007. In his first conference in Israel, Bush criticises the illegal settlements for being an obstacle to peace.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 3 January nine Palestinians are killed by Israeli forces operating in Gaza. Several houses belonging to military commanders are bombed. The Palestinians launch a Katyusha rocket from the Gaza Strip.
- On 17 January Hamas and other Palestinian factions resume rocket attacks on Israel. At least 40 rockets are launched, half of which land in Israel. On 18 January 31 more rockets are fired towards Israel.
- On 18 January Israel closes all border crossings with Egypt, blocking trucks with fuel or humanitarian supplies. On 20 January Gaza City is left without electricity when fuel runs out in the city's only power station. On 21 January Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, under

pressure from growing international criticism, lifts certain restrictions and authorises entry into Gaza for enough industrial diesel for a week, as well as 50 trucks with food and medical supplies.

- On 23 January thousands of Gazans cross the border into Egypt after Hamas militants open holes in sections of the Egyptian border. The Egyptian security forces do nothing to oppose the action and allow Palestinians to purchase supplies of food, medicine and petrol from Egyptian shops. Due to the situation, the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, gives the order to allow Gazans to cross the border.

February 2008*Israel*

- On 12 February on a visit to Germany the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, accuses Iran of building nuclear weapons and asks for greater international effort to prevent Iran from achieving its nuclear ambitions.
- On 25 February police arrest 200 Africans who, in recent months, had illegally entered Israel across the Egyptian border. The action comes a day after Prime Minister Olmert orders measures to be taken against illegal immigration.
- On 26 February Israel's Supreme Court accepts a controversial plea bargain signed in June 2007, according to which former President, Moshe Katsav, will not have to serve a prison sentence for alleged sexual offences.
- On 27 February the eldest son of former Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, 43-year-old Omri Sharon, begins a six-month prison sentence. Omri Sharon had been sentenced to nine months in prison for illegal fundraising for his father's campaign in 1999, but his prison term had been delayed on humanitarian grounds after Ariel Sharon fell into a coma following a brain haemorrhage in January 2006.

Palestine

- On 3 February the Egyptian authorities close the openings in the border with the Gaza Strip, made by Hamas on 23 January and reinforce it with

barbed wire fencing and a deployment of troops.

Peace Negotiations

- On 4 February the EU Presidency condemns a suicide bombing in the shopping centre in Dimona in the south of Israel. The Slovenian-held presidency states that "this act of terror for which there can be no justification was aimed at innocent civilians with the goal of undermining the peace process".

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 4 February a Palestinian suicide bomber blows himself up in a shopping centre in Dimona, causing the death of one woman and injuring 11 others. A second suicide bomber fails to detonate the explosives and is shot down by Israeli police. This is the first suicide attack in Israel since 2007. On 5 February, the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, claim responsibility for the attack. If this claim is true it will signal the end of Hamas's self-imposed moratorium on suicide attacks on Israeli territory, in effect since they blew up two buses in August 2004.
- On 7 February Israeli forces carry out an air strike on a police post in Khan Yunis, in the south of the Gaza Strip, killing eight members of Hamas, at least six of whom are security agents. Palestinian militants then fire eight Qassam rockets at Israel, one of which hits a house injuring four people. Israeli ground troops, with tank and air support, enter the north of the Gaza Strip killing seven Palestinians –six Hamas militants and one civilian– according to Hamas and medical sources.
- On 8 February Israel cuts the electricity supply to the Gaza Strip to put pressure on the territory not to fire any more missiles into Israeli territory. Deputy Defence Minister, Matan Vilnai, argues that these cuts are intended to reduce "Gaza's dependence on Israel".
- On 21 February, in a sudden escalation of violence, a civilian is killed by a rocket launched from Gaza and at least seven Palestinians lose their lives in Israeli air strikes.
- On 27 February the Israeli army carries out a series of air strikes on the Gaza Strip in which six Palestinian

militants are killed. A baby dies in the attack on the Ministry of the Interior building.

- On 29 February, Matan Vilnai warns Palestinians that firing rockets from the Gaza Strip will bring the Palestinians a “bigger *shoah*”, the Hebrew word used to refer to the Nazi Holocaust inflicted on the Jews in the Second World War. Israeli officials immediately explain that in the Deputy Defence Minister’s declarations the word *shoah* makes reference to *disaster* and is not an allusion to the Nazi genocide.

March 2008

Israel

- On 16 March the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel, begins a visit to Israel to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the creation of the Jewish State. This is a particularly symbolic visit since she is the first Chancellor to address the Israeli parliament since the Nazi Holocaust. The visit lasts three days, during which important diplomatic meetings take place between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA), at a time of impasse in the Peace Process.
- From 22-24 March the Vice-President of the United States, Dick Cheney, visits Israel and the Palestinian territories as part of a ten-day trip to the Middle East. He also visits Iraq, Oman, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey on the same trip. On 22 March, after meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, Cheney publicly pledges his country’s “enduring and unshakable” commitment to the security of Israel and its right to defend itself against terrorism. On 23 March after meeting with Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in Ramallah, Cheney declares that the creation of a Palestinian State is a “long-term” process and calls Israelis and Palestinians to make “difficult concessions” to end the conflict. On 24 March Cheney accuses Syria and Iran of trying to “torpedo” peace talks between Palestine and Israel.

Palestine

- On 23 March after a week of negotiations in Sana, Yemen, rival factions

Hamas and Fatah sign an agreement to open formal reconciliation talks. The Yemeni initiative envisages new elections, the creation of a Government of national unity and the restructuring of the Palestinian security forces, making them a unifying force for the nation.

Peace Negotiations

- On 4 March Abbas holds talks with the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, in Ramallah. On 5 March Rice announces that Abbas has agreed to resume negotiations, but without commitment to a deadline.
- On 30 March Rice visits Israel and the Palestinian territories. In Jerusalem she meets with the Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, and the Fatah Palestinian Prime Minister, Salam Khalid Abdallah Fayyad. Following these meetings, Israel and Palestine present a new package with 18 measures.

Conflicts between the Parties

- At the beginning of March the Israeli land and air offensive continues, launched on the Gaza Strip on 27 February. Israeli raids are focused north of Jabaliya, with the aim of preventing Hamas and other militant groups from firing rockets at Israeli towns.
- On 1 March according to *The Guardian*, 60 Palestinians are killed. Israel argues that the majority of the victims were armed militants, although Palestinian officials assure that more than half were civilian casualties, including children. On the same day two Israeli soldiers are killed in clashes with armed Palestinian militants.
- On 2 March at least ten Palestinians are killed in Gaza in an Israeli attack, according to local hospital sources. The escalation of violence extends to the West Bank, where thousands of Palestinians protest against the attacks on Gaza. A child is shot dead in Hebron after protesters throw stones at Israeli soldiers. In response to popular pressure, the Palestinian President announces the suspension of peace talks with Israel, constituting a serious setback for the US-backed initiative to reach a peace agreement between Israel and the Fatah-led Abbas administration in the West Bank by the end of 2008.

- On 3 March Israel withdraws troops from the Gaza Strip. However, the Israeli Prime Minister, Olmert, warns of imminent clashes in Gaza and admits that Israel’s primary objective in the Strip is to weaken Hamas. Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri proclaims victory for Hamas announcing that “the enemy has been defeated” and threatening that “Gaza will be a graveyard for the occupying forces”. Hamas fires new missiles at the city of Ashkelon and other Jewish communities surrounding Gaza.

April 2008

Israel

- On 8 April the former Israeli President, Moshe Katsav, reneges on a plea bargain that would have seen the State withdraw charges of rape against him in exchange for pleading guilty to less serious offences of sexual misconduct. Under the terms of the agreement reached in June 2007, Katsav would have avoided a jail sentence, but he tells the court that he is dropping the plea in the hope that the court will find him innocent of all charges. Katsav resigned as President in July 2007 and was replaced by Shimon Peres.
- On 27 April a court in Jerusalem sentences Shlomo Benizri to 18 months in prison after being convicted of bribery, breaching the public trust and obstruction of justice during his time as Minister of Labour and Social Welfare, a position he occupied from March 2001 to May 2002.

Palestine

- On 18 April the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and the Head of the Palestinian Authority (PA), Mahmoud Abbas, meet in Russia to talk about a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, together with the possibility of an international conference in Moscow on the Middle East. During his three-day visit Abbas also meets with the Foreign Affairs Minister, Sergei Lavrov.

Peace Negotiations

- On 7 April the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Prime

Minister, Ehud Olmert, hold talks in Jerusalem in the two leaders' first meeting since mid-February. Both had committed to biweekly meetings in the peace conference held in Annapolis in November 2007, but Abbas suspended the meetings following operations carried out by the Israeli army to halt missile launches, which killed more than 120 Palestinians.

- On 15 April the former US President, Jimmy Carter, visits the city of Ramallah, in the West Bank, where he holds talks with high-ranking members of Hamas. Of special note is his meeting with Nasir al-Din al-Sha'ir, former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Education in the Hamas government, formed in March 2006, who is seen as one of the more moderate prominent Hamas leaders. A spokesman to President George W. Bush describes the meeting as "imprudent" as it grants Hamas a legitimacy it does not deserve. On 17 April Carter travels to Egypt where he meets with Mahmoud al-Zahar, one of the most senior Hamas figures in Gaza and the Hamas government's Foreign Affairs Minister. On 18 April Carter visits Syria, where he meets with Bashar al-Assad and, later, with Khaled Meshal, head of the Political Bureau of Hamas in Damascus.
- On 21 April Carter travels to Jerusalem, where he urges Israel to negotiate directly with Hamas, since, according to Carter, the organisation is willing to accept a Palestinian State in the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and East Jerusalem (if it is approved by Palestinians through referendum) and to live "as a neighbour next door in peace" with Israel. Although he acknowledges that Hamas has repeatedly refused to condemn the violence, to recognise explicitly Israel's right to exist or to recognise previous peace accords, Carter insists that the new conciliatory tone adopted by Hamas is a genuine renunciation of its old doctrine.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 9 April Palestinian militants enter Israel from the Gaza Strip and attack a fuel deposit on the Israeli side of the Nahal Oz border crossing, killing two Israeli civilian workers and injuring two others. Israeli troops shoot down the two assailants, although another two es-

cape back to the Gaza Strip. Israeli troops and soldiers respond by entering the Gaza Strip and killing at least six Palestinians. On the same day an Israeli soldier and a Hamas militant are killed in an Israeli raid in southern Gaza.

- On 11 April Israeli forces enter an area to the east of the Bureij refugee camp in the centre of Gaza, in an operation aimed at "damaging the terrorist infrastructure". At least five Palestinians are killed in this operation, including two children.
- On 16 April 19 Palestinians –among them a Palestinian cameraman who worked for the Reuters news agency– are killed in the Gaza Strip during heavy fighting near the Nahal Oz border crossing.

May 2008

Israel

- On 3 May a new police investigation is opened into the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, over the alleged receipt of campaign donations from a US resident, years before becoming Prime Minister. Olmert is questioned in his official residence over what his team says are donations raised by a US citizen to fund elections for the mayoralty of Jerusalem and primary elections in Likud.
- On 8 May Israel celebrates the 60th anniversary of the creation of its State with various acts throughout the country.
- On 8 May Olmert responds to accusations of irregular donations and admits to having received funds from Long Island resident Morris Talansky during the mayoralty of Jerusalem campaign, in 1993 and 1998, and for primary elections in Likud, in 1999 and 2002. Olmert declares that the donations were used to fund his campaign and not for personal gains. On 28 May, speaking at a conference, Ehud Barak, Defence Minister and leader of the Labour Party, the leading member of the coalition, warns that it is "impossible for Olmert to simultaneously run the government and deal with his personal affairs". On 29 May pressure on Olmert is increased when Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni, warns that it is necessary "to prepare for all eventualities, including new elections."

- From 14-16 May the US President, George W. Bush, visits Israel to participate in the 60th anniversary of the creation of the State of Israel. During a speech in the Knesset (Parliament), Bush expresses his pride of the United States for being the "closest ally and best friend in the world" of a nation that is "the homeland of the chosen people." In reference to the Iranian nuclear programme, Bush argues that permitting "the world's leading sponsor of terror" to possess "the world's deadliest weapon" would be "an unforgivable betrayal of future generations."

Palestine

- On 8 May the primary school teacher for the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Middle East (UNRWA), Wafer Shaker al-Daghma, is killed in a district of Khan Younis after the Israeli army blasts open the front door of her house with explosives. On 12 May *The Independent* reports that the UNRWA has asked for an investigation into the death. A spokesman for the UNRWA says that the Israeli forces had been using al-Daghma's house to monitor "alleged militants".

Peace Negotiations

- On 2 May representatives of the Middle East Quartet (the United States, the European Union, United Nations and Russia) meet in London for the first high level assessment of the peace process between Palestine and Israel since the Annapolis Peace Conference on 27 November 2007. Present at the meeting are: Secretary-General of the UN, Ban Ki-moon, Russian Foreign Affairs Minister, Sergei Lavrov, US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU, Javier Solana, European Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Slovenian Foreign Affairs Minister, Dimitrij Rupel, and the Quartet representative, former British Prime Minister, Tony Blair. The Quartet expresses its total support of the current negotiations between Israel and Palestine and urges the parties to make the efforts necessary for reaching the common objective of an agreement for the creation of a Pales-

tinian State by the end of 2008. The Quartet “strongly encouraged” Israel, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Egypt to work together to formulate “a new approach on Gaza” that would guarantee security to all Gazans and end terrorist attacks.

- On 4 May the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, travels to the Middle East to meet with Israeli and Palestinian leaders. On 5 May the *Financial Times* reports that Rice was more critical towards Israeli policy in the occupied territories of Palestine than on previous occasions. After her meeting with the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, in Ramallah, the West Bank, Rice describes the continual expansion of the Jewish settlements –together with the checkpoints on the roads and other obstacles in the West Bank– as “particularly problematic to the atmosphere of trust that is needed.”

- On 13 May the Quartet representative, Tony Blair, announces a proposal for the Israeli occupation to withdraw from the West Bank and the creation of the foundations for a functional Palestinian State. Blair says that it would be a mistake to think that political negotiations can work without real changes on the ground.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 15 May at least 14 Israelis are injured when a Grad rocket launched from Gaza lands in the Israeli city of Ashkelon. The attack coincides with the meeting between the Israeli Prime Minister, Olmert, and the US President, Bush.

June 2008

Israel

- On 4 June the Israeli Attorney General formally accuses the former Israeli Finance Minister, Abraham Hirschson, of theft, fraud and breach of trust. Hirschson, a member of the ruling party and ally to the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, resigned in 2007 after accusations of embezzlement of funds from the non-profit union group the National Workers’ Organisation. Hirschson, however, has always denied the charges.
- On 6 June the Israeli newspaper *Yediot Aharonot* reports that the Trans-

port Minister, retired lieutenant general Shaul Mofaz, sees an Israeli military attack on Iranian nuclear positions as increasingly unavoidable. Mofaz warns that United Nations sanctions are not effective and declares that they will attack Iran if it continues with its programme for developing nuclear weapons. His declarations reflect the increasing concern in Israel and the United States for the Iranian nuclear programme.

- On 12 June in a new period of pressure on Olmert over a corruption case, the Defence Minister and Labour Party leader, Ehud Barak, expresses his support for a possible motion to dissolve the Knesset (Parliament) and call early elections if the Prime Minister’s Kadima party, does not act quickly to hold new primary elections.

- On 13 June the Interior Minister confirms the approval to build 1,300 more houses in the ultra-Orthodox settlement of Ramat Shlomo, in East Jerusalem.

- On 25 June the Labour Party votes against a motion by the opposition for the dissolution of the Knesset after Olmert agrees to hold primary elections in his party no later than 25 September.

Palestine

- On 12 June at least four Palestinians, including a baby, are killed in an explosion in the home of the leader of the armed wing of Hamas, Ibrahim Hamuda, in Beit Lahya, northern Gaza. Hamas confirms the death of one of its top bomb-makers. However, the cause of the explosion is not clear and while Hamas blames the Israeli army, there are suspicions that it may have been caused by an accident on the part of Hamas while handling the explosives.

- On 19 June at six o’clock in the morning, after nearly three months of indirect negotiations mediated by the Egyptian intelligence service, a ceasefire comes into effect between Israel and Hamas, the force in control of the Gaza Strip. Hamas agrees to end all attacks outside of the Gaza Strip if Israel commits to calling off air strikes and lifting the economic blockade on the Strip. According to the terms of the agreement, the ceasefire will last for six months and will be implemented in phases.

- On 22 June Israel begins to lift the Gaza blockade, permitting entry to 90

trucks with basic food supplies. On 24 June the ceasefire suffers a major setback when militants of the Islamic Jihad launch four rockets and a mortar missile into Israeli territory, causing minor injuries to two people. The group argues that the attack is a reprisal for an earlier Israeli raid on the city of Nablus, in the West Bank, which killed two members of the Islamic Jihad. On 25-26 June Israel responds to the attack by closing border crossings with Gaza, thereby preventing the entry of fuel for Gaza’s power station.

Peace Negotiations

- On 15 June the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visits Israel and the Palestinian territories. Rice accuses the Israelis of endangering the peace process with its approval of the construction of more settlements in East Jerusalem.

- From 22-24 June the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, visits Israel and the Palestinian territories. On 23 June, in a speech in the Knesset, Sarkozy urges Israel to share sovereignty over Jerusalem with the Palestinians and not to build new settlements in the occupied territories. Sarkozy also reiterates his condemnation of the Iranian nuclear programme and pledges his support for Israel against the threat. On 24 June as Sarkozy is leaving Israel, an Israeli police officer commits suicide in the Ben Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, about 200 metres from the plane that was to take the French President back to France.

July 2008

Israel

- On 10 July the website of the Israeli newspaper *The Jerusalem Post* announces the arrest of eight Palestinians from the town of Isawiyeh, near northern Jerusalem, for throwing Molotov cocktails at cars on the Ma’ale Adumim road and close to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. The newspaper also echoes the fragile nature of the truce in Gaza after two Qassam rockets hit northern Negev, in Israel, without causing any casualties or damage.
- On 16 July Israel returns five Lebanese soldiers to Lebanon, together with

the remains of 199 Lebanese and Palestinian soldiers who have been killed in fighting in recent years, in exchange for the bodies of two Israeli soldiers whose capture caused the war between both countries in mid-2006.

- On 30 July Ehud Olmert gives into pressure over the corruption charges held against him and announces his intention to resign as Prime Minister. In a televised speech Olmert says that he will not run in the primary elections of the Kadima party, planned for 17 September, and that he will step down from the position as soon as his party has elected his successor. Olmert protests that as Prime Minister he has been deprived of the "basic right of being innocent until proven guilty."

Palestine

- On 15 July Fatah forces arrest at least 13 Hamas militants in Nablus, an Islamic bastion in the West Bank, amid rising tension between the Islamic Resistance Movement and Fatah.
- On 25 July five Hamas activists and a young girl are killed in a car bomb attack perpetrated in Gaza City, which Hamas blames on Fatah. Between 26-27 July, in the wake of the attack, Hamas arrests some 200 members of Fatah. On 17 July the Palestinian Authority (PA) arrests more than 30 members of Hamas in the West Bank. Fatah denies any involvement in the car bomb attack.

Conflict between the Parties

- On 1 July Israel closes the Gaza border crossings in response to the Qasam rocket launches against Israel. Hamas denies carrying out the launches. On 6 July Israel reopens the border crossings in accordance with the Egyptian-mediated ceasefire agreement.
- On 2 July a 30-year-old Palestinian man kills three Israelis and injures another 45 when he deliberately drives a mechanical digger against the traffic along Jaffa street, in the centre of Jerusalem. Before being shot dead by an off-duty soldier, he is able to crush several cars and overturn a bus. This is the worst civilian attack since March. On 22 July another Palestinian rams a bulldozer into several cars and a bus in the centre of Jerusalem, before being

shot dead. At least 16 people were injured.

- On 29 July a nine-year-old child is killed during a protest against the separation wall in the town of Nilin, near Ramallah. In the same protest an unarmed 27-year-old man is shot at point-blank range by the Israeli army. The army opens an investigation when NGO B'Tselem publicises a video in which an Israeli soldier can be seen shooting a rubber bullet at the unarmed and handcuffed man at a range of a metre and a half and after his arrest.

Peace Negotiations

- On 24 July the US democratic senator, Barack Obama meets with the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, the President, Shimon Peres, and opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas. Obama tells Abbas that he will begin working towards peace from his first day in the White House, although he makes it clear that Israel will be his priority and expresses his firm commitment to this country's security.
- On 30 July talks are held in Washington between Ahmed Qorei, head of the Palestinian delegation, and Tzipi Livni, the Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister and chaired by the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice. No significant advances are made due to the almost irreconcilable positions of the negotiators on the question of borders, for example. A crisis of trust is added to this stalemate, fuelled by Olmert's refusal to discuss the Jerusalem question, the increase in Israeli settlements and the continuation of Israeli military operations in the West Bank.

August 2008

Israel

- On 25 August Israel releases 198 Palestinian prisoners in the West Bank, in a gesture described as "a confidence building move" with the aim of strengthening the position of the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas. Unusually, among those released are two men accused of having "blood on their hands", the two longest-serving inmates. One of

them, Mohammed Abu Ali, was elected as a Fatah MP to the Palestinian Parliament while he was serving sentence.

Palestine

- On 2 August Hamas orders the closure of the radio station Voice of the People, which broadcast from Gaza City for the Marxist-Leninist Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP). The PFLP had been a key member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO).
- On 9 August the poet, Mahmud Darwish, dies in the United States after undergoing open-heart surgery. Darwish was the author of the Palestinian Declaration of Independence in 1988.
- On 28 August the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, travels to Beirut to meet with his Lebanese counterpart, Michel Suleiman, to deal with the issue of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon. Abbas also meets with the Parliament Speaker, Nabih Berri, and the Prime Minister, Fouad Siniora, as well as representatives of the PLO in Lebanon.

Peace Negotiations

- On 6 August the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, and the Palestinian President, Abbas, meet in Jerusalem to discuss the peace talks held between both sides the previous week in Washington.
- On 20 August the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visits Israel and the Palestinian territories again in an attempt to salvage a stagnating peace process. Rice asks Israel not to endanger the process by building more settlements.
- On 21 August the Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni, expresses her doubts of reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians by the end of 2008, as agreed in the Annapolis conference.

September 2008

Israel

- On 7 September police investigators recommend that the State Prosecutor indicts the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, of bribery, fraud, breach of public trust and money laundering.

- On 11 September the Israeli Minister of Pensioner Affairs, Rafi Eitan, says that the President of Iran, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, should appear before the International Criminal Court (ICC), in The Hague, for crimes of genocide. Eitan believes it would even be acceptable to kidnap him and take him before the ICC. In 1960, Eitan was connected with the kidnapping in Argentina of Adolf Eichmann, one of the principal ideologists of the Nazi's 'final solution.'
- On 17 September the Israeli Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni, is elected as leader of the ruling Kadima party after Olmert announced in July that he would step down from his position as Prime Minister and would not run in the party's upcoming primary elections due to accusations of corruption. Livni wins 43% of the votes (16,936 votes), against 42% of her direct rival, the retired lieutenant-general Shaul Mofaz, the Israeli Transport Minister. On 20 September the Defence Minister and Labour party member, Ehud Barak, meets with the leader of Likud and opposition leader, Benjamin Netanyahu in Tel Aviv and expresses his doubts over forming part of the Livni coalition. On 21 September Olmert submits his resignation to the President, Shimon Peres, although he will remain acting Prime Minister until his successor is able to forge a coalition. On 22 September Peres gives Livni a 42-day deadline to form a new government coalition. If she can do this, Livni will be the first woman to lead the country since Golda Meir (1969-1974); if not, elections will be held.

Palestine

- On 1 September the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) representative in Lebanon, Abbas Zali, meets with Saad Hariri, leader of the Lebanese Future Movement. After the meeting, Zali announces that he has delivered a message to Hariri from the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas. The meeting deals with rights of Palestinians in Lebanon, the reconstruction of the Palestinian refugee camp in Nahr al-Bared, in northern Lebanon, as well as the peace process in the Middle East.
- On 4 September a report from the Palestine Strategy Study Group warns

that the Palestinians could strengthen their support for a binational State with Israel if the peace negotiations organised by the United States in Annapolis fail. The report argues that a binational solution would "reopen the question of Israel's existence as it is today" and adds that "even if many Palestinians prefer the two-state solution, failure of the Annapolis initiative would, to a large extent, strengthen those who advocate the binational State solution." The Palestine Strategy Study Group is composed of 27 Palestinian members: intellectuals, academics, former ministers, members of the different political parties and other figures from the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and the diaspora.

- On 15-16 September 11 members of the Dogmush clan, including a baby, are killed when Hamas forces burst into their territory in the al-Sabra district, in the east of Gaza City.

Peace Negotiations

- On 4 September the Middle East Quartet representative, Tony Blair, makes a surprise visit to the city of Nablus, where he promises Palestinian businessmen that he will ask Israel to lift some of the restrictions on the movement of people and goods in the West Bank.
- On 25 September international groups and NGOs that work in the Palestinian territories, including Oxfam International, Care International UK and Christian Aid, publish a report in which they warn that international efforts to advance the peace process are doomed to fail imminently under Tony Blair's leadership. These organisations accuse the Quartet of having lost steam and of "not improving living conditions on the ground." They also report that, despite repeated demands from international organisations that Israel stops its expansion of settlements in the West Bank, there has in fact been, "a clear increase in the constructions and no action taken by the Israeli authorities towards their dismantlement."
- On 29 September the acting Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, announces in an interview for the Israeli newspaper, *Yediot Aharonot*, that Israel should withdraw from almost all the territories that were annexed in the 1967 war, including East Jerusalem and the Golan

Heights, to achieve peace with the Palestinians. On 30 September, *The Financial Times* reports that Olmert's declarations represent "the clearest request until now of an Israeli mandate to abandon territory that is seen by many Israelis as both strategic and vital."

Violence between the Parties

- On 22 September a Palestinian drives his car into a group of Israeli soldiers in Jerusalem, injuring 17 people. The 19-year-old man is shot down immediately by a policeman.

October 2008

Israel

- On 7 October the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, visits Russia for talks with the Russian President, Dmitry Medvedev. On 8 October the *International Herald Tribune* reminds its readers that the visit comes at a complicated time for the relations between both countries. This is partly due to Russia's invasion of Georgia in August, which in recent years had become an ally to Israel. Of even more importance is Israel's concern that Russia may help, or at least not attempt to stop, Iran's nuclear aspirations.
- On 18 October Pope Benedict XVI announces that he will not travel to Israel until the caption beneath the photograph of Pius XII, which accuses him of remaining passive over the extermination of the Jews during the Nazi regime, is removed from the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem.
- On 26 October Tzipi Livni, Israeli Deputy Prime Minister, Foreign Affairs Minister and leader of the Kadima party, officially announces that she has been unable to form a new coalition government and asks the President, Shimon Peres, to call early elections. Although the Labour Party, led by Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, would be part of a Kadima-led government coalition, the smaller parties that are key to governing in the Knesset (Parliament) had presented very high budgetary and political demands. On 24 October the ultra-Orthodox Shas party (Sephardic Torah Guardians), a member of the Olmert coalition, an-

nounces that it will not participate in the Livni government after failing to reach an agreement on two fundamental points: benefit increases for large families and the promise to keep all of Jerusalem under Israeli sovereignty. According to the *Herald Tribune*, the date for the general elections could be 10 February, as announced by the President of the Knesset, Dalia Itzik.

Palestine

- On 9 October the Islamic Hamas movement paralyzes the reconciliation plan presented by Egypt to bring Fatah and Hamas together, which promotes the creation of a technocratic and united government in the Gaza Strip. For Hamas the plan is just a way to gain time and thus consolidate Fatah's dominion over the enclave.
- On 21 October a report published by the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights declares it has found evidence to prove that 68 children had been killed in the Gaza Strip in the 12 months before June 2008 by the Israeli army's "disproportionate use of violence." Many of the deaths were the result of the Israeli raid in Jabaliya, to the east of Gaza, in February and March.
- On 30 October Hamas releases 17 Fatah prisoners including Fatah's Secretary General for the Gaza region, Abu Juda An-Nahhal. This measure is seen as a first step to creating the right atmosphere for the unity talks that will be held in Cairo on 9 November. The Hamas leader, Ismail Haniyeh, asks Fatah to follow its example and release the political prisoners in the West Bank.

Peace Negotiations

- On 19 October the Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, announces the reactivation of the Saudi Arabian "peace in the territories" initiative, proposed in the 14th Ordinary Session of the Arab League held in Beirut, in March 2002. Barak says that after the poor results achieved from negotiations with the Palestinians and Syria, the moment has arrived to apply a policy of peace for the whole region.
- On 22-23 October the Japanese government holds the fourth conference for confidence-building between the Is-

raelis and the Palestinians, in Tokyo. The delegation is led by the Israeli Interior Minister, Meir Sheerit, and the head of the negotiating team of the Palestinian Authority, Saeb Erekat. The debate, among other issues, deals with the Japanese "Corridor for Peace and Prosperity" initiative, which consists in building an agro-industrial park in the West Bank and exporting manufactured products through Jordan to countries in the Gulf.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 9 October clashes erupt between Arab and Israeli citizens in the Israeli city of Acre, in the north of the country, which last for almost a week. The dispute begins when the Arab-Israeli Tawfik Jamal drives his car through a Jewish neighbourhood during the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur. Israeli youths attack the driver, who is forced to flee on foot. In reprisal for the attack, hundreds of Arab-Israelis attack Jewish people following a rumour of Jamal's death.
- On 16 October Israeli troops shoot dead a Palestinian citizen in clashes near the city of Ramallah, in the West Bank, the third incident of this kind in as many days. The Israeli army maintains that the three Palestinians were carrying and about to throw firebombs when they were shot down.

November 2008

Israel

- On 10 November the Knesset (Parliament) is dissolved to celebrate the forthcoming early elections called by the leader of the Kadima party, Tzipi Livni, after failing to constitute a coalition government. The elections are to be held on 10 February 2009. On 16 November the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* announces that the Israeli writer Amos Oz is joining with 30 other intellectuals and public figures to form a new left-wing party with the aim of beating the right-wing Likud, which leads the polls for the forthcoming elections.
- On 11 November elections are held for the Jerusalem mayoralty. With 52% of the votes, 49-year-old businessman Nir Barkat narrowly wins, beating the

ultra-Orthodox candidate after five years in office. Despite the Palestinian boycott of the elections, there was a 41% turnout. After his victory, Barkat commits to being mayor to all people living in Jerusalem, those who have voted for him as much as those who did not.

- On 16 November the British Foreign Secretary, David Miliband, visits Israel at a time of escalating tension between the British and Israeli governments over the British initiative to stop importing products originating in Israeli settlements. On several occasions the British government has expressed its doubts over products from Israeli settlements in the West Bank that arrive in the EU under favourable terms set up for Israeli products, since trade agreements between the EU and Israel do not include vegetable or cosmetic products.
- On 23 November eight members of the neo-Nazi group known as Petah Tikva Gang, are sentenced by the Tel Aviv District Court to prison sentences of between 15 months and seven and a half years for a series of attacks including assaults on Asian workers, orthodox Jews, blacks and homosexuals. The group is composed of young Russian immigrants who had already appeared before the courts in September 2007.
- On 24 November the Israeli authorities open the Gaza border crossings to permit the entry of 40 trucks transporting food and fuel necessary for the production of electricity. NGOs, however, warn that this temporary opening has little effect after repeated restrictions which have caused shortage in basic products like flour or cattle fodder.
- On 24 November the outgoing Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, visits the United States where he bids farewell to the outgoing President, George W. Bush. Talks focus on the relations between Israel and the United States, the Middle East peace process and the Iranian nuclear programme.

Palestine

- On 23 November the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, announces that he will call early legislative and presidential elections in 2009 if unity talks do not begin between Fatah and Hamas. On 9 November Egypt had already proposed talks aimed at ending the conflict

between both parties. Hamas blames Fatah for not agreeing to release Hamas supporters from prison in light of the release of several Fatah prisoners in early November in the Gaza Strip, under Hamas control since June 2007.

Peace Negotiations

- On 7 November the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, visits the Palestinian territories and Israel. In Annapolis (November 2007), the Israeli and Palestinian leaders had committed to reaching a peace agreement by the end of 2008. The *International Herald Tribune* reports that Rice implicitly acknowledges for the first time that the chances of reaching an agreement by the end of 2008 are poor.
- On 9 November, the representatives of the Middle East Quartet (the United States, the European Union, United Nations and Russia) meet in Sharm el-Sheikh, in Egypt, where they once again pledge their support for the Annapolis peace process. Also present at the meeting are the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, and the Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni.
- On 17 November the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, promises Mahmoud Abbas that he will release 250 Fatah prisoners on 8 December, coinciding with the Muslim celebration of the Festival of Sacrifice.

Violence between the Parties

- On 4 November fighting between Israeli troops and Hamas soldiers marks the first clashes since the 19 June ceasefire. At least one Hamas soldier is killed in the operation that, according to the Israeli army, was carried out to prevent the possible kidnapping of Israeli soldiers through a 250-metre tunnel found at the Gaza border, near Deir al-Balah. The fighting led Israel to close the Gaza border crossings, thus paralysing food supplies and humanitarian aid. On 15 November *The Independent* reports that the Israeli blockade of Gaza is contributing to *chronic malnutrition* for a million and a half people living in Gaza, according to a report leaked from the International Committee of the Red Cross.
 - In response to the death of a Hamas soldier, 35 rockets are fired into south-

ern Israel, one of which lands in the Israeli city of Ashkelon, 15 km north of Gaza. The response to these launches is an Israeli air strike that kills another five Hamas soldiers. On 7 November another three rockets are launched at southern Israel, once again threatening the ceasefire agreement reached in June.

- On 12 November, four Hamas militants die in clashes with Israeli soldiers on the Gaza border; according to a report from the Israeli army, the Palestinian fighters were trying to plant an explosive device near the border fence. On 14 November tension rises considerably between Hamas and Israel after Hamas fires a series of rockets into southern Israel, which leaves 18 people in hospital. On 16 November Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, blames Hamas and other terrorist organisations in Gaza for the increased tension. On 18 November Israeli tanks advance 500 metres into Gaza firing mortar shells at Palestinian soldiers.

December 2008

Violence between the Parties

- On 19 December Hamas formally announces the end of the ceasefire with the launch of four rockets into southern Israel. The unwritten, Egyptian-brokered ceasefire had been in effect since June, but had been broken on many occasions. In a note published on the Hamas website, the faction that controls the Gaza Strip declares that Israel has not complied with their part of the agreement by not lifting the economic blockade on the strip and continuing to attack Hamas militants in the West Bank.
 - On 20 December an Israeli air strike in Gaza kills a member of the al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigade, the military wing of Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas's faction, Fatah.
 - On 20-21 December Palestinian militants launch more than 50 rockets into Israel. The Islamic Jihad claims responsibility for most of the attacks. One person is injured in southern Israel from shell shrapnel.
 - On 21 December Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, warns against an imminent large-scale military intervention in the Gaza Strip as a response to the

increase in rocket launches. Olmert, reminds his government that "a government cannot throw itself into battle" and urges members to be "cautious with their declarations." The Israeli Foreign Affairs Minister, Tzipi Livni, announces that the Hamas government "must be beaten" by all means: military, economic and diplomatic.

- On 24 December Palestinian militants launch more than 80 rockets at southern Israel, without causing any deaths.
- On 25 December Livni travels to Egypt to hold talks with the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak. This meeting was originally aimed at renewing the June truce, although after the previous day's rocket attacks Livni rules this out. Mubarak asks Israel to act with moderation, while Livni insists that Israel will do what is necessary to protect its citizens. The Israeli Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, warns Hamas that they will pay a "high price" if they continue to attack Israel. Olmert appeals directly to the million and a half Palestinians living in the Gaza Strip asking them to stop the attacks against Israeli "children and civilians."
 - On 26 December Israel reopens the border with the Gaza Strip to allow entry to 90 trucks loaded with emergency supplies such as medical aid, fuel and other essential provisions.
 - On 27 December an Israeli citizen is killed after Hamas fires at Israeli targets.
 - On 27 December, Israel carries out a massive surprise air strike on the Gaza Strip. It is the largest military offensive in Gaza since the Six-Day War, in 1967. According to Israel, this operation is intended to stop rockets being launched at Israel from bases in the Strip. The targets of the attack are the police headquarters of Gaza City and police stations in the Strip, and the headquarters of the Hamas security forces in the same city and its posts throughout the Strip. 150 Palestinians are killed in the attacks and some 400 are injured.
 - On 28 December in a new air offensive involving 40 Israeli warplanes another 150 citizens are killed in Gaza and 500 more are injured. Dozens of tunnels used to smuggle arms and provisions across the border between Gaza and Egypt are destroyed. Other targets are the Al Aqsa television station, in Gaza City.

- On 28 December Israel deploys tanks near the Gaza border and calls up 6,700 reserves for a possible ground raid, which is seen as a clear threat of a new escalation in the Israeli offensive.
- On 29 December, Barak, announces in the Knesset (Parliament) the implication of Israel in an all out war with Hamas. Signalling a possible raid on Gaza, the surrounding area of the Strip is declared a “closed military zone.”
- On 29 December an air strike is carried out on Gaza City targeting the presidential offices, the Interior Ministry and the Islamic University. The Israeli Navy is also involved in the attack, bombing Hamas boats in the area. In response, Hamas and other Palestinian factions launch 60 rockets into Israeli territory, causing the death of one citizen and injuring several others. Medical sources from Gaza set the figure of deaths over the three days of attacks on the Strip at 335, and the United Nations declares that 62 women and children are among the victims.
- On 30 December a new air offensive targets several governmental buildings while Palestinian militants continue to launch rockets into Israel. According to the Israeli army, one hits the city of Beer-sheba, some 40 km from Gaza, reaching further from the Strip than any other previous rocket launch.

Peace Negotiations

- On 12 December the United Nations Security Council adopts resolution 1848 (2008), which renews the mandate of the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) over Syria and Israel in the Golan Heights for a further six months.
- On 16 December the Security Council adopts resolution 1850 (2008) which states its commitment to bilateral peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians in which it offers support for “efforts to reach a peace agreement.” The resolution is approved by 14 votes to 0, with an abstention from Libya, for whom the resolution is deliberately ambiguous and does not deal with procedures in case of breaches of illegality.
- On 27 December the United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, makes an appeal in which he expresses his concern over the “serious situation of violence and bloodshed taking place in Gaza and the ceaseless violence in southern Israel.” On 28 December the Security Council expresses its “concerns for a possible increase in violence in Gaza and demands an immediate end to the violence.”
- On 27 December a statement issued by the White House on behalf of

George W. Bush describes the launching of Hamas rockets against Israel as “completely unacceptable.” France, which assumes presidency of the European Union for this last semester, condemns the disproportionate use of violence by both sides and asks for an immediate end to the Hamas rocket launches and a lifting of the Israeli blockade on the Gaza Strip. On 28 December Hezbollah’s Secretary General, Sheikh Hassan Nasrallah, urges the Egyptian people to protest against the Egyptian government and demand that they open the Gaza border. According to Nasrallah, by not opening its borders the Egyptian government will be considered accomplices in the Israeli massacre of civilians.

- On 30 December the members of the Quartet (the United States, the European Union, United Nations and Russia) call for “an immediate ceasefire that is fully respected by both sides.” However, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Olmert, states that first Israel must “achieve all its objectives.” In a televised debate the Egyptian President, Hosni Mubarak, accuses the Israeli leader of “barbarian aggression against the Palestinians” and warns that “blood-stained hands provoke feelings of intense anger.”