

Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

2009 begins with Operation Cast Lead fully underway, the largest offensive by Tzahal, the Israeli army, on Gaza since 1967. The attack, which began on 27 December 2008 after Hamas broke the ceasefire in protest at the continuing Israeli embargo on Gaza, continues until 21 January, when Hamas regains control over the Strip. 1,317 people are killed, 45,000 forced to evacuate and damages are estimated at 1.22 billion euros.

In parallel to this in Gaza, hostilities intensify between the Hamas government and members of Fatah. On 26 February both parties announce their intention to end the conflict and initiate several rounds of negotiation. The Gaza conflict has a decisive influence on the results of the Israeli general elections on 10 February; the leader of Kadima and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni narrowly wins, but fails to counter the increase in support for Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu, led by Avigdor Lieberman. Likud, in coalition with Ehud Barak's labour party, gains power and appoints Netanyahu Prime Minister.

The first challenge of the new cabinet is to deal with the appointment of the Goldstone Commission, headed by Richard Goldstone and set up to investigate the possible war crimes against humanity committed by Israel and Hamas during Operation Cast Lead. Meanwhile, talks between Israel and Hamas continue, under Egyptian and German mediation, which include the release of Sergeant Gilad Shalit in exchange for the return of Palestinian prisoners. These negotiations are seriously threatened when it is announced that new settlements are to be built in East Jerusalem. On 2 September the Goldstone report is published, which provokes a fierce Israeli campaign to discredit it, and a new crisis between Fatah and Hamas.

On 28 October following the break in peace talks between the Palestinian factions, Hamas announces its intention to boycott the Palestinian elections called by Fatah in Gaza for January 2010. The continuing tensions lead to Mamoud Abbas' resignation as President of the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), although the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) decides to extend his term in office until the June 2010 elections.

December ends the year with rising tensions caused by the stalemate in the peace process, which is held up by Israel's refusal to change its position on the status of East Jerusalem and its policy on settlements in the West Bank, the continued attacks on Gaza from southern Israel, the limited progress regarding sergeant Shalit's release and Palestine's fierce opposition to recognising a Jewish State in Israel.

January 2009

Israel

- On 8 January Israel launches five rockets into southern Lebanon as a response to three missiles fired from this area against Israel. Although Tel Aviv rules out Hezbollah's involvement in the incident, which takes place during Operation Cast Lead, it increases tensions in the Middle East. On 14 January a new rocket attack is reported from southern Lebanon on the Galilean town of Kiryat Shmona.
- On 28 January the Director General of Israel's Rabbinate, Oded Weiner, informs Pope Benedict XVI of the break in relations with the Vatican and the cancellation of the Jewish-Christian summit in Rome planned for March, due

to the Pope's decision to rehabilitate the Holocaust denier, traditionalist bishop Richard Williamson. On the same day Benedict XVI condemns the Holocaust in a speech. On 29 January another traditionalist, Floriano Abrahamowicz, denies the Holocaust in statements made to the local press, worsening the crisis.

Palestine

- On 1 January, the anniversary of Fatah's foundation, hundreds of supporters take to the streets of Gaza to protest against the Hamas government. Some of Fatah's followers open fire on Hamas militants and try to take control of Gaza's major cities. Clashes erupt between both factions, parallel to the conflict between Hamas and Israel, which continue until the end of the Israeli offensive. Hamas accuses Fatah supporters of being traitors and collaborating with Israel, leading to arrests and executions.

Peace Negotiations

- On 22 January the Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announces the official appointment of George Mitchell as the new US Special Envoy for the Middle East.
- On 31 January the Quartet's Special Envoy for the Middle East, Tony Blair, requests that Hamas be included in the peace process between Palestine and Israel, in the belief that marginalising the force that controls the Gaza Strip would further destabilise the precarious Palestinian political situation.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1 January a bomb attack on Jabalia during Operation Cast Lead kills

Nizar Rayan, one of Hamas' principal leaders. The Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, reiterates in Paris that the Israeli offensive will not end until Hamas stops its attacks.

- On 2 January Israel allows foreigners in the Gaza Strip to evacuate through the Erez border crossing.

- On 3 January Israel begins its land offensive. On 4 January the Israeli army enters Gaza, takes control of all Hamas' supply lines, and divides the Strip in two. On 5 January the Strip is further divided into three parts and Israel continues its artillery attacks.

- On 4 January Egypt launches a proposal, which is backed by France, for a ceasefire between Israel and Hamas.

- On 6 January more than 40 people are killed during an Israeli attack on the UN school in Jabalia. On 8 January the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) cancels all its operations in Gaza after the Israeli army kills the driver of an aid convoy during a new attack. On 7 January a three hour humanitarian ceasefire is declared, after which the fighting resumes.

- On 8 January the UN Security Council approves Resolution 1860, with US abstention, which urges an immediate ceasefire, as proposed by the UK. Israel and Hamas ignore the European-Arab drafted resolution.

- On 13 January Israel begins its approach on Gaza City.

- On 14 January Hamas announces its intention to accept the conditions for a ceasefire proposed by Egypt and France. Israel mobilises its reserves to strengthen the land invasion.

- On 15 January Gaza's Interior Minister Said Siam is killed in an air strike. Israel bombs the International Press Centre and the headquarters of the UNRWA.

- On 16 January Israel stops the boat *Spirit of Humanity*, which began its journey in Cyprus, from arriving in Gaza with humanitarian aid.

- On 17 January an Israeli attack hits another UN school in Gaza.

- On 17 January the Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert announces that Israel is studying a plan to end the hostilities but will not contemplate a withdrawal from Gaza while the rocket launches into Israeli territory continue. The US offers Olmert guarantees to halt the arms traffic into Gaza.

- On 18 January the leaders of the UK, Egypt, France, Germany, Italy Spain, Jordan and Turkey, together with the UN and Arab League Secretary Generals, among others, participate in the International Summit in Sharm el-Sheikh to support the Egyptian peace plan.

- On 18 January Hamas and other Palestinian organisations announce an immediate ceasefire with the aim of forcing the Israeli army's withdrawal from Gaza.

- On 20 January the Israeli army begins its withdrawal from Gaza. On 21 January Hamas regains control over the Strip. Operation Cast Lead has ended with 1,317 deaths (1,300 Palestinians, 13 Israeli soldiers and four Israeli civilians), 45,000 Palestinians evacuated, 4,000 buildings destroyed and damages estimated at 1.22 billion euros.

- On 25 January negotiations between Israel and Hamas begin in Cairo under Egyptian and Turkish mediation.

- On 26 January a bomb attack is carried out on Gaza's northern border against an Israeli patrol. Israel responds by entering Gaza with tanks and helicopters and bombards Deir el-Balah. In the middle of her electoral campaign, the Foreign Minister and Kadima candidate Tzipi Livni warns that any attack will be countered "immediately and forcefully", despite negotiations with Hamas, while election polls show a fall in votes for Kadima in favour of the right-wing parties.

- On 28 January, coinciding with the first visit of the US Special Envoy to Israel George Mitchell, Ehud Olmert declares that Israel will not open the Gaza borders until sergeant Gilad Shalit, kidnapped by Hamas in June 2006, is returned alive and well. Hamas sets the condition that Israel release 1,500 Palestinian prisoners.

- On 28 January the Israeli air force bombs the Rafah supply tunnels and the northern border of the Strip in response to a Hamas attack on southern Israel.

- On 28 January the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades, Fatah's armed wing, launch a rocket from Gaza into the Eshkol region. On 29 January another launch hits Sderot. Israel responds with an aerial attack on Khan Yunis.

- On 29 January at the Davos Forum the UN requests 450 million euros from the international community for the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip. In his

speech, the Israeli President Simon Peres harshly criticises Hamas, generating tensions with Turkey and leading the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan to leave the session. The management of the funds is seen as difficult while Hamas refuses to allow the Fatah-led PNA to take part in the administration.

February 2009

Israel

- On 1 February *Haaretz* reports the plans of the government to build a 14 kilometre corridor for a new settlement, Mevaseret, that will ensure the territorial continuity between Jerusalem and the Maale Adumim settlement, one of the three large settlement blocks in the West Bank.

- On 2 February *Haaretz* publishes the Israeli Defence Minister's report that proves the illegal expropriation of land in the West Bank to expand Israeli settlements. The report, written in 2008, had been kept secret by Olmert's government.

- On 5 February the Israeli army confirms the boarding of the boat Tali, which was travelling from Lebanon to Gaza to deliver humanitarian aid.

- On 7 February the Vatican revokes the rehabilitation of the traditionalist bishop Richard Williamson after he refuses to retract his Holocaust denial. On 15 February Ehud Olmert announces Pope Benedict XVI's visit to Israel in May.

- On 10 February the leader of the Kadima centre party Tzipi Livni is victorious in the Israeli elections with 23% of the votes – 28 seats. Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud is the second most voted party, with 21% of the votes – 27 seats. The narrow difference leads both leaders to meet with Avigdor Lieberman, the leader of the ultra-nationalist party Yisrael Beiteinu, the third most voted party with 12% of the votes and 15 seats, to form a coalition. Livni tries to break the right-wing bloc appealing to the electorate's majority decision and calling for the constitution of a national unity government. On 13 February the possibility of a coalition between Kadima and Likud is ruled out after it is made apparent that neither Livni nor Netanyahu are willing to abandon their ambi-

tions to be Prime Minister. On 21 February after guaranteeing Lieberman's support, Netanyahu is asked by Simon Peres to form a new government.

- On 14 February Turkey condemns the declarations of the Israeli general Avi Mizrahi, who criticized the Turkish policy towards the Kurdish people, the division of Cyprus and the Armenian genocide. The incident steps up tension between Turkey and Israel following the conflict in Gaza.
- On 21 February one of three rockets launched from the Nakura region in southern Lebanon lands in the Galilee region in Israel, killing one woman. Israel responds firing seven missiles into the Tiro region.
- On 23 February Ehud Olmert dismisses Amos Gilad, the man in charge of negotiations for a ceasefire in Gaza, due to disagreements over his management of the kidnapping of sergeant Gilad Shalit.

Palestine

- On 6 February the UNRWA spokesman Christopher Guinness announces the suspension of humanitarian aid consignments to Gaza and accuses Hamas of plundering humanitarian supplies. Guinness warns that the consignments will not resume until Hamas returns the stolen supplies.
- On 22 February five Palestinian smugglers die after inhaling gas introduced by the Egyptian authorities into one of the tunnels that runs between Gaza and Egypt.
- On 26 February Fatah, Hamas and the other Palestinian parties meet in Cairo and declare their intentions to put an end to their divisions and initiate talks to form a national unity government. Hamas and Fatah also agree to release prisoners from both groups and to end all kinds of attack. In the meeting six committees are created to discuss the different existing divisions.

Peace Negotiations

- On 3 February under Egyptian mediation Hamas declares itself willing to offer Israel a year-long ceasefire, negotiable after a year and a half, in exchange for lifting the blockade on Gaza. On 4 February Hamas abandons the Egyptian-mediated talks for a

peace proposal with Israel declaring the conditions demanded by Tel Aviv as unacceptable: the creation of a half-kilometre demilitarised zone between Egypt and the Gaza Strip and the release of sergeant Gilad Shalit.

- On 15 February Ehud Olmert initiates a series of political consultations with the different Israeli political parties ahead of a second round of negotiations with Hamas and forms the Israeli delegation, which includes Tzipi Livni, Olmert's Foreign Minister and Kadima leader, and Benjamin Netanyahu, the Likud leader.
- On 28 February Hamas rejects Hillary Clinton's request that it accept the conditions laid out by the Quartet, which include Palestine's acceptance of Israel's right to exist, in exchange for recognising Hamas as the Palestinian representative in the Peace Negotiations.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 2 February the Israeli air force bomb Rafah, hitting a car transporting members of the armed Palestinian group, Popular Resistance Committees. On 9 February the Israeli air force bombs Hamas positions in Beit Lahia and Khan Yunis.
- On 23 February the Israeli air force attacks a vehicle in the Moazi refugee camp, in the Gaza Strip, in response to two Hezbollah rocket launches into Israeli territory the previous night. None of the attacks cause any casualties.
- On 25 February Israel bombs various smuggling tunnels in the south of the Gaza Strip, in response to two Palestinian rockets that hit southern Israel.
- On 28 February five rockets fired from the Gaza Strip land in southern Israel, one of them on a school in Ashkelon. Ehud Olmert declares that the reprisals will be "painful, strong and uncompromising."

March 2009

Israel

- On 15 March Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu sign an agreement to form a coalition government. On 24 March Benjamin Netanyahu reaches an agreement with the leader of the Labour Party and current Defence Minister Ehud Barak to

include his party in the new government a day after Barak's Labour Party's Central Committee authorises entry into the coalition. On 30 March the Knesset (Parliament) approves Netanyahu's cabinet with 69 votes from the 120 legislators. On 31 March Netanyahu is sworn into office as Prime Minister.

- On 19 March the Israeli police arrest 10 leading Hamas members in the West Bank.

Palestine

- On 1 March five Palestinians are killed when a tunnel in the south of the Gaza Strip collapses due to Israeli bombing.
- On 7 March the Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad submits his resignation to facilitate the creation of a national unity government between Hamas and Fatah. President Abbas refuses to accept the resignation and Fayyad continues at the head of the government.
- On 10 March peace talks are resumed between the different Palestinian factions under Egyptian mediation. On 16 March the date for Palestinian elections is set at 25 January 2010. On 19 March the talks are suspended after the parties fail to reach an agreement over the form that the unity government will take and the acceptance of the agreements signed by the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) and Israel.
- On 18 March Hamas prevents citizens of the Gaza Strip from crossing to Egypt after Cairo decides to open its borders with the Strip. The Gaza Strip's Interior Ministry criticises the Egyptian decision saying that it was made unilaterally and without coordinating with Gaza authorities.

Peace Negotiations

- On 3 March Hillary Clinton travels to Israel for a meeting with Simon Peres, Ehud Olmert, Benjamin Netanyahu, Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak. On 4 March she travels to the Palestinian territories to meet with Mahmoud Abbas and the Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in Ramallah. At both meetings Clinton reiterates the United States' uncompromising commitment to the Jewish State and the peace talks, but criticises the Israeli position with respect to the settlements in

the West Bank. The meeting with Prime Minister Netanyahu ends without any significant progress regarding the Palestinian conflict and focuses more closely on the Iranian issue.

- On 16 March the talks between Israel and Hamas in Cairo to negotiate a deal to exchange Palestinian prisoners for the Tzahal (army) sergeant Gilad Shalit concludes without any agreement. Ehud Olmert warns that this failure puts an end to the possibility of reaching an agreement before Netanyahu's new government, which is less receptive to dialogue with Hamas, takes over.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 2 March the international conference for the reconstruction of Gaza takes place in Sharm el-Sheikh. The two main conditions put forward by Egypt are the constitution of a Palestinian unity government and the opening of Gaza's border crossings. The conference agrees on aid to the value of 4.5 billion dollars. Hillary Clinton reiterates that in order for Hamas to be recognised as part of a Palestinian government, the group must accept the two-State solution and surrender its arms.
- On 5 March three Palestinian militants of the Islamic Jihad are killed in Israeli aerial attacks in the centre and south of Gaza. On 31 March two Palestinian militants are killed in fighting with the Israeli army through the border fence of the Gaza Strip.
- On 14 March two Israeli police officers are killed in a bomb attack on a border road in the Jordan Valley.
- On 21 March Israeli security forces put an end to the celebrations of Jerusalem as the cultural capital of the Arab World in 2009 and arrest around 20 Palestinians attempting to enter the Temple Mount. The commemoration is finally held in Bethlehem, where the President of the PNA Mahmoud Abbas, publicly accuses Israel of "ethnic cleansing" in Jerusalem.

April 2009

Israel

- On 1 April the government of Benjamin Netanyahu comes into power.

Palestine

- On 1 April a third round of negotiations takes place in Cairo between Fatah and Hamas, though it fails to reach a definitive agreement. On 27 and 28 April talks are resumed, marking the beginning of a fourth round whose climate of dialogue, although positive, is unable to bring about a consensus between the parties.
- On 20 April the World Bank publishes a report that shows that Israeli possesses four times the amount of water resources as Palestine and that the PNA's canal system is on the brink of collapse.
- On 28 April a special military court of the PNA sentences a Palestinian to death, accusing him of "high treason" for selling land to Israeli settlers.

Peace Negotiations

- On 1 April the new Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman declares that Israel is not bound by commitments developed in Annapolis in 2007 over the creation of a Palestinian State, which are denied by both Yisrael Beiteinu and Netanyahu's Likud. In response, the Hamas representative in Lebanon Osama Hamdan warns that the rejection of the Annapolis Agreements might provoke a new war in the Middle East.
- On 12 April in a telephone conversation with Mahmoud Abbas, Benjamin Netanyahu offers his cooperation to work towards peace. Abbas had called Netanyahu to congratulate him for the Jewish Easter. Tel Aviv describes the tone of the conversation as "warm and friendly." However, Abbas declares on the same day that he will not meet with Netanyahu until Israel agrees to accept the Annapolis Agreements.
- On 27 April Mahmoud Abbas affirms that he will not recognise Israel as a Jewish State, a condition demanded previously by Netanyahu to move forward in the peace process.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 3 April the UN announces that the South African judge Richard Goldstone will lead the fact-finding mission to investigate the Gaza Strip conflict.
- On 4 April two Palestinian militants are killed in fighting with Israeli soldiers

in Gaza. On the same day a young Palestinian is shot dead by the Israeli police after opening fire on a police station in Arad, in the Negev.

- On 17 April the Israeli army kills a young Palestinian who was participating in a peaceful march in the village of Bilin against the West Bank separation wall.

May 2009

Israel

- On 10 May Benjamin Netanyahu announces that Israel will not withdraw from the Golan Heights, opposing demands made by Syria since its occupation in 1967.
- On 11 May Benedict XVI begins his official visit to Israel as part of a tour of the Middle East, after overcoming the diplomatic incident between Tel Aviv and the Vatican due to the rehabilitation of the traditionalist bishop Richard Williamson. Benedict XVI advocates a two-state solution and the end of the siege of Gaza during a visit for which many members of the Knesset had certain reservations.
- On 18 May Benjamin Netanyahu meets with Barack Obama in Washington to tackle their bilateral positions with respect to the Iranian nuclear programme and the Palestinian conflict. Netanyahu appears willing to initiate immediate peace talks with the Palestinians, but continues to reject the two-state solution approved in Annapolis, as well as the division of Jerusalem.
- On 21 May, in his commemorative speech of the 41st anniversary of the capture and annex of the eastern sector of the city, Netanyahu insists that "a united Jerusalem is the capital of Israel. Jerusalem has always been ours. It will never be divided or separated again."

Palestine

- On 5 May the media reports the deployment of Hamas security forces in the border zones of the Gaza Strip to stop attacks against Israel, after the organisation's political leader Khaled Meshal tells the *New York Times* in Damascus that Hamas would be willing to maintain a ceasefire with Israel for a 10-day period to allow peace talks to advance.

- On 16 May the fifth round of negotiations between Fatah and Hamas is launched. Two days later they are brought to a close without results.
- On 31 May the search by the Palestinian police for Mohammed Yassin and Mohammed Samman, two leading members of Hamas, leads to a gunfight in Qalqilya causing six deaths. Hours later, Hamas television encourages its supporters to demonstrate and attack the Palestinian police. The incident seriously endangers the peace talks between Fatah and Hamas.

Peace Negotiations

- On 11 May Benjamin Netanyahu begins an official visit to Egypt to study formulas for achieving peace in the Middle East. This is his first official visit since coming to power in March.
- On 19 May PLO rules out resuming peace talks until Israel halts the construction of settlements in occupied territories, after the PNA condemns the building of the new Maskiot settlement in the Valley of Jordan. On 28 May Mahmoud Abbas meets with Barack Obama and asks Washington to put pressure on Netanyahu to stop the Israeli settlements in the West Bank and accept the creation of a Palestinian State.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 1-2 May Israel bombs various secret tunnels in Rafah after three missiles are launched into Israel from the Strip.
- On 5 May a UN investigation finds Israel to be responsible for attacks on UN installations in Gaza, in which white phosphorous was used. Israel dismisses the report as "tendentious" and the UN declares that it will claim compensation from Israel.
- On 22 May two militant Palestinians are killed by shots fired by Israeli soldiers as they were attempting to plant an explosive device on the Gaza-Israeli separation barrier.

June 2009

Israel

- On 1 June Abdel Rahman Talalka, a prominent Hamas militant, is arrested in

Israel. In the interrogation Israeli police discover that Talalka has started to link his activities to the Al Jaljalat faction of al-Qaeda.

- On 1 June Israel evacuates the Nahalat Yosef settlement, in the north of the West Bank, after four Palestinians are injured by a group of settlers attempting to stop their eviction and that of other settlements that Israel has ruled illegal.
- On 29 June Israel approves the construction of 50 additional houses in the Adam settlement, close to Jerusalem.

Palestine

- On 28 June Fatah and Hamas begin the sixth round of talks in Cairo between Palestinian factions to reach an agreement for reconciliation.

Peace Negotiations

- On 14 June Benjamin Netanyahu announces his decision to accept a demilitarised Palestinian State that poses no threat for Israel and that recognises this as the home of the Jewish people. Both States will live there, but Palestine would be subject to surveillance by the international community to guarantee that no Palestinian army is formed. The PNA, Syria, Lebanon and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) reject the conditions.
- On 23 June Israel releases Aziz Duweik, President of the PNA Parliament and Hamas Islamist, in a gesture to facilitate the release of sergeant Gilad Shalit. In his initial statements following his release, Duweik urges unity for the Palestinian nation.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 3 June six Palestinians are injured after a raid by the Israeli army in northern Gaza.
- On 3 June Israel declares the area around the West Bank city of Nablus a "closed military zone", to block the entry of left-wing activists who are disrupting checkpoint inspections.
- On 8 June five Palestinian militants are killed and six injured in fighting with Israeli soldiers near the Nahal Oz border crossing, in the northeast of the Gaza Strip. On 14 June four Palestinians are injured during an Israeli bombing of sev-

eral smuggling tunnels in Rafah in response to a rocket launched by Palestinian militants.

July 2009

Israel

- On 5 July Benjamin Netanyahu gives a speech for the first time in public in which he refers to the formula for "two States for two nations", and highlights that the national consensus regarding the matter is the strongest of his first 100 days in government.
- On 26 July incidents break out between a group of Israeli Arabs and extreme right-wing Israeli demonstrators demanding an end to the Bedouin settlements in the city of Rahat, in the south of the country.

Peace Negotiations

- On 27 July, the US Special Envoy for the Middle East Robert Mitchell meets with Mahmoud Abbas on a tour of the region to encourage the peace talks to continue. On 29 July Mitchell visits Netanyahu and achieves advances in the Israeli position.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 2 July a young Palestinian is killed and another three people injured in fighting between Palestinian militants and the Israeli army in the al-Bureij refugee camp in Gaza.
- On 9 July the al-Aqsa mosque's imam, Sheikh Ali Abasi, is expelled from Jerusalem by the Israeli army, who claim that he does not have permission to be in the city.
- On 20-21 July attacks by Israeli settlers are reported on Palestinian-owned olive plantations, after the removal of a small Jewish settlement in the Nablus area.

August 2009

Israel

- On 2 August the Israeli police evict 50 Palestinians in the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood in East Jerusalem, and allow Jewish settlers to move into their

homes, dismissing criticism from Palestinians, the UN and the North American State department.

- On 2 August the Israeli police force recommends that the general state prosecutor tries the Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who is the subject of an investigation for money laundering, tax fraud and abuse of power. Lieberman, who was already interrogated by police in April regarding the matter, announces that he will resign if he is eventually charged.
- On 2 August a man bursts into a gay association in Tel Aviv and shoots two people dead and injures another 15.
- On 30 August after months of investigation the public prosecutor at the Jerusalem District Court formally accuses the former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert of corruption in the Rishon Tours, Cash envelopes and Investment Centre affairs. Olmert's aide and former bureau chief Shula Zaken is also charged for various crimes, including illegal wire tapping.

Palestine

- On 4 August Fatah holds its sixth congress in Bethlehem, the first since 1989. The assembly advocates peace with Israel but without abandoning the "legitimate" resistance or recognising the State of Israel as a Jewish State. For its part, Hamas holds around 400 Fatah delegates in Gaza who follow the meeting on television. During the convention Mahmoud Abbas is reelected as President.
- On 14 August the Sheikh Abelatif Musa, spiritual leader of the pro-al-Qaeda Salafist group Jund Ansar Allah (the Warriors of Allah), proclaims during Friday prayers, the founding of an Islamic emirate in the Gaza Strip and the effective application of Sharia law. This leads to violent clashes between Ansar Jund Allah and Hamas forces. On 15 August the fighting continues, which ends with the death of the sheikh and 19 others in rioting in Rafah, declared under curfew by Hamas.
- On 16 August in Bethlehem the more than 2,000 Fatah delegates elect 18 seats of the Central Committee and 81 seats of the Revolutionary Council, one of which goes to Uri Davis, the first Jew to become a member of the Palestinian movement in its half century of

history. Davis, who considers himself a non-Arab Palestinian and an anti-Zionist, renounced his Israeli citizenship in the eighties and obtained Palestinian citizenship in protest at the occupation of Gaza and the West Bank.

- On 25 August the PNA presents a programme to end the occupation and create an independent Palestinian State in a time period of two years.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 25 August four Palestinians are killed in an Israeli air strike on a smuggling tunnel in Gaza.
- On 30 August the Israeli air force destroys a tunnel running from the north of the Gaza Strip to southern Israel without causing any casualties. According to Israeli army spokesmen, the tunnel had been dug to carry out terrorist attacks in Israel. Tunnels running between northern Gaza and southern Israel are not common.

September 2009

Israel

- On 6 September Netanyahu's government announces the construction in East Jerusalem of 450 houses to add to the 2,500 already under construction. On 14 September Netanyahu notifies the Knesset that the construction of nine houses in the eastern sector of Jerusalem will not be stopped, although a reduction for a limited period will be considered.
- On 11 September two *katyusha* rockets launched from the Klaile region in southern Lebanon, land near the Galilean town of Nahariya. Israel responds with artillery fire and accuses the Lebanese government of adopting a passive role. UNIFIL and the Lebanese army deploy troops to avoid further incidents and open an investigation.

Palestine

- On 14 September Fatah's central committee accepts the proposal presented under Egyptian mediation to resolve the dispute with Hamas. On 28 September Hamas appears in favour of accepting the Egyptian-mediated draft.

Peace Negotiations

- On 2 September Mahmoud Abbas meets in Madrid with Jose Luis Rodriguez Zapatero. The meeting concludes with Spain's offer to collaborate in the organisation of a three-way meeting between Palestine, Israel and the US at the UN General Assembly on the 24-25 September to reactivate the peace negotiations. On 4 September Nicolas Sarkozy receives Mahmoud Abbas in Paris to discuss how to relaunch the peace negotiations. From 13-18 September the US Special Envoy George Mitchell tours the region, but receives no explicit commitment from the parties to resume negotiations. Finally on 22 September Barack Obama meets Netanyahu and Abbas in New York for an initial trilateral meeting.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 15 September Richard Goldstone, head of the UN fact finding mission for the Gaza conflict, presents a report that condemns the war crimes committed by Israel and Hamas and condemns Israel's lack of cooperation with the Mission. On 17 September Israel announces that it will mobilise all its support in the UN, US and EU to prevent the report reaching the Security Council. On 24 September Netanyahu reiterates his rejection of the report before the UN asserting that Operation Cast Lead was carried out in self-defence, a declaration that causes the Palestinian representative to leave the room.
- On 25 September an Israeli air strike on northern Gaza kills three militants of the Islamic Jihad, who were preparing to launch missiles at Israel from near the Jabalia refugee camp.
- On 27 September clashes break out between Palestinians and the Israeli riot police at the Temple Mount, after a group of Jewish tourists enter the Mount sparking rumours that they are threatening the compound. The violence, which ends with 52 people injured and five arrests, leads some Palestinian groups to call for an uprising in Gaza as a protest, and causes the closure of the Mount as a preventative measure ahead of Yom Kippur, which starts at nightfall.
- On 30 September two people are killed and another seven injured in an

Israeli air strike on tunnels that connect Gaza and Egypt. The attacks come in response to rockets fired from the Gaza Strip into the Ashkelon and Eshkol regions in protest at the Temple Mount incidents.

October 2009

Israel

- On 6 October the Israeli deputy Prime Minister Moshe Ya'alon cancels his UK visit for fear of being arrested for his alleged implication in the assassination of a Hamas member in 2002 in Gaza.
- On 7 October the Israeli scientist Ada E. Yonath, from Israel's Weizmann Institute, wins the Nobel prize in chemistry for her discovery of the ribosome structure through X-ray crystallography.
- On 13 October NATO announces that Israel will take part in *Endeavour Force* naval manoeuvres in the Mediterranean.
- On 13 October the Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak expresses concern for the deterioration in ties with Ankara, after Turkey suspends a joint military exercise between Israel and NATO in Turkish air space and waters. On 15 October a high command of the Turkish army announces that the suspension owes to Israel's delay in supplying four planes bought by Turkey in 2005, with a value of 180 million dollars, and not the Israeli offensive against Gaza. The same official announces that his country will sanction Israel if the planes are not supplied before the end of the year. On 14 October the divide between Israel and Turkey is further deepened when Avigdor Lieberman, the Israeli Foreign Minister, summons the Turkish ambassador in Tel Aviv to ask for an explanation regarding the broadcasting on Turkish television of the series *Ayrilik* (Separation), in which Israeli soldiers are shown killing children and maltreating the elderly. On 22 October Turkish television decides to censor certain scenes from the series.
- On 13 October the Israeli ambassador to the UN Gabriela Shalev calls an emergency meeting of the Security Council to examine a possible violation of Resolution 1701, which establishes the demilitarisation of southern Leba-

non, after an explosion the previous day of a secret Hezbollah arsenal.

- On 21 October the largest military exercise in Israeli history takes place, in collaboration with the US, to test the capacity of the Juniper Cobra 10 air defence system, designed to detect and destroy long-distance missiles launched at Israel.
- On 22 October a spokeswoman for the Israel Atomic Energy Commission, Yael Doron, reveals that Israel has participated in a secret conference with representatives from Iran regarding the perspectives of a Middle East without nuclear arms, on 29-30 September 2009 in Cairo. The meeting represents the first official contact between Tel Aviv and Teheran since the Iranian revolution in 1979. Also participating in the meeting were the Arab League, Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Morocco, Tunisia, the United Arab Emirates, several European countries and the US.
- On 22 October the Supreme Court of Israel orders the Israeli army to allow Palestinian citizens passage through a 15 kilometre corridor in the southeast of Hebron.
- On 26 October the inaugural conference is held for J Street, a new US pacifist Jewish lobby. Tel Aviv communicates its distrust before the influential American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) and does not send a representative.
- On 27 October, following the UN's request for Israel to put an end to espionage in Lebanon, the Israeli ambassador to the UN declares that Israel has no intention of ceasing surveillance activities without sufficient guarantees of Lebanon's capacity to control the security of its border with Israel or the terrorist activity in the south of the country.
- On 28 October the deputy Prime Minister Silvan Shalom questions the Syrian offer to resume peace talks, claiming that it is a "move from Damascus to score points among the international community while it continues to help Hezbollah, Hamas and other terrorist groups." In a statement made on Israel Radio, Shalom indicates that "Syria continues to allow the entry of Iranian weapons in southern Lebanon through its territory thus violating UN Resolution 1701."
- On 29 October Italy reassures the Spanish Foreign Minister that at the be-

ginning of 2010 it will hand over its command of UNIFIL to Spain. The statement comes after recent tensions between Madrid, Rome and Tel Aviv sparked by Italy's suggestion, backed by Netanyahu, to extend the Italian management of UNIFIL for a further six months, due to the "sensitive period" Lebanon is undergoing. Beirut does not oppose to Spain assuming command.

Palestine

- On 2 October the Egyptian mediation, which since June 2007, has tried to put an end to the hostilities between Hamas and Fatah, announces for the third time that both groups will sign for peace in Cairo. On the same day the PNA's support of the request to delay the study of the Goldstone report in the UN Council of Human Rights, endangers the process of reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas. The US Special Envoy George Mitchell tells the Egyptian mediation that the US will not support an agreement between Hamas and Fatah that violates the conditions imposed by the Quartet. On 14 October Mahmoud Abbas signs the Egyptian proposal and announces that Fatah is willing to hold presidential and legislative elections in 2010, one of the document's main clauses. On 16 October Hamas tells Egypt it needs an additional time period to study the proposal, but demands the inclusion of a clause that recognises "the right to resist against Israel." Egypt and the PNA accuse Hamas of dynamiting the peace process with Fatah. On 23 October, despite a new failure in the talks between Fatah and Hamas, Abbas calls elections for the 24 January 2010. On 28 October Hamas announces that it will not allow voting in Gaza.
- On 13 October Hamas accuses Egypt of the death of Youssef Abu Zuhri, brother of the organisation's spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri. The Egyptian Interior Minister assures that Abu-Zuhri died in prison of "natural causes."
- On 27 October the EU Foreign Relations Council adopts a common position to extend residency permits by a year for Palestinians living in the EU who were exiled from Bethlehem after the Siege of the Church of the Nativity, carried out by the Israeli army in 2002.

Peace Negotiations

- On 1 October the Egyptian and German mediation achieves advances in the negotiations between Israel and Palestine for the release of Israeli sergeant Gilad Shalit, in exchange for around a thousand Palestinian prisoners. On 2 October Israel releases 19 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for a video that proves that Shalit is alive and well.
- On 28 October the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon declares during the Jerusalem International Forum in Rabat, that Jerusalem should be the capital of two States, Israel and Palestine, with an arrangement for the holy sites acceptable to all, for lasting peace in the Middle East. He also urges Israel to allow the rapid reconstruction of Gaza and the end of its settlement policy in East Jerusalem, reminding it that the international community does not support the occupation of this sector of the city.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 2 October the UN Human Rights Council postpones a decision on the Goldstone report until March 2010. The report, requested by the African and Arab nations having presented a resolution programme for the conflict, accuses Israel and Hamas of war crimes during Operation Cast Lead. The US-backed moratorium has the approval of the PNA. Also, on 7 October the Security Council agrees to discuss the Goldstone report. On 8 October, in light of the criticism over the PNA's decision and the campaign led by the Arab public to discredit the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad al-Malki announces that the PNA supports the notion that the Goldstone report be dealt with in the Human Rights Council without delay despite the US and a large part of the Western delegations considering that it is impartial. On 14 October the monthly Security Council meeting on the conflict is held, moved forward by six days at the request of Lebanon, a non-permanent member of the Council, in which the Goldstone report is assessed. On 15 October the Human Rights Council finally meets at a special session to study the report despite Israel's repeated protests. On 16 October the Human

Rights Council passes a resolution with 25 votes in favour, six against and 11 abstentions, and calls for the Security Council to refer the Goldstone report to the International Court in The Hague if Israel and Hamas refuse to carry out a thorough investigation into its conclusions. Israel assures that it will block any kind of initiative to resume peace negotiations if procedures outlined in the Goldstone report are put into practice. On 26 October sources from the Israeli government tell the BBC that Benjamin Netanyahu may give the green light to a revision of the internal investigation carried out by the Israeli army to uncover the role of the Israeli soldiers in the conflict in Gaza. On 26 October the permanent Arab ambassador to the UN Yahya Mahmassani announces that he will submit the Arab group's request for the Assembly to debate the Goldstone report to the President of the General Assembly Ali Triki.

- On 6 October the Israeli police carry out a large-scale deployment in the Temple Mount to quell the clashes that have been ongoing since the end of September. The PNA calls for a general strike to "halt the jewishisation of Jerusalem." The Sheikh Raed Salah, head of the radical movement in the north of the West Bank, calls for the "defence of al-Aqsa." On 9 October the Israeli police declare a state of alert in response to the general strike. On 25 October, after weeks of fighting, the violence at the Temple Mount worsens and the Israeli authorities begin to fear a possible third intifada. Among the 16 arrested is the Palestinian Minister of Jerusalem Affairs Abdel Qader. On 27 October the Palestinian delegation asks the UN for urgent international condemnation.
- On 14 October the Israeli air force destroys supply tunnels through the Gaza Egyptian border after a Palestinian rocket is fired into southern Israel.
- On 21 October the US ambassador to the UN Susan Rice declares that she is against the "anti-Israeli attitudes of the UN and in favour of the definitive recognition of Israel's right to be recognised and exist in peace." Without specifically mentioning the Goldstone report, Rice reaffirms US support for Israeli security.
- On 27 October the PNA reports that Mahmoud Abbas has told Barack

Obama that he will not run for reelection in the upcoming Palestinian elections, slated for January 2010, if Israel does not suspend its settlement programme in the West Bank.

- On 28 October the EU High Representative for the CFSP Javier Solana condemns Israel's demolition in East Jerusalem of Palestinian homes.

November 2009

Israel

- On 1 November, after lifting the gag order, the Israeli police force reports Yaakov Teitel's arrest in October, a Jewish extremist and settler from Shvut Rachel in the West Bank and originally from Florida. Teitel had settled in Israel under the Law of Return and acted out of revenge for Palestinian suicide attacks. He is found guilty of killing a Palestinian taxi driver in Jerusalem and a shepherd in Yatta, to the south of Hebron, in the nineties, and multiple attacks aimed at the Palestinian community and Israel's homosexual community.
- On 3 November Russian citizen Damian Kerlik is arrested for the murder of the six members of the Oshrenko family in the early hours of the morning on 17 October in Rishon LeZion. The family had emigrated from Uzbekistan and managed various restaurants and entertainment establishments.
- On 4 November the Israeli navy intercepts the cargo ship *Francop* in waters close to Cyprus, declaring that the boat was carrying 300 tons of weapons bound from Iran to Hezbollah through Syria. Damascus, Teheran and Hezbollah deny the accusations. On 11 November Israel publishes documentation that it says confirms the Iranian origin of the seized weapons with photographs of the containers which feature the acronym IRISL (Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines).
- On 4 November the EU and Israel sign a new agreement concerning trade and agriculture that implies considerable advances in the liberalisation of markets between both parties. The accord will enter into force on 1 January 2010.
- On 9 November the launch of the book *The King's Torah*, by Yitzhak Shapiro, head of the Od Yosef Chai Talmudic school, provokes fierce contro-

versy in Israel because of its defence of the murder of non Jews.

- On 10 November Benjamin Netanyahu and Barack Obama meet in Washington. Spokesmen for the White House state the US commitment to give its full support to Israel and the mutual will to increase efforts to advance in the Middle East peace negotiations, emphasising the cessation of settlement construction in the West Bank. On 11 November Netanyahu arrives in Paris to meet Nicolas Sarkozy. The meeting highlights the distance between the Israeli and French positions, particularly regarding the Goldstone report. During his visit Netanyahu announces that Israel accepts Syria's offer to begin negotiations to normalise their relations.
- On 17 November the Israeli government approves the construction of 900 more houses in the Gilo settlement in East Jerusalem, despite warnings the previous day made by the US Special Envoy George Mitchell.
- On 24 November the Defence Minister Ehud Barak announces that Israel will consider the Lebanese government responsible for all attacks from Lebanese territory in an effort to increase pressure against Hezbollah.

Palestine

- On 5 November Mahmoud Abbas warns that he will not run in the 2010 Palestinian elections. His resignation is interpreted as pressure on the US to urge Israel to commit to the success of the peace negotiations. Egypt and Jordan ask Abbas not to resign fearing that it may generate a political void with unforeseeable consequences. On 8 November thousands of Palestinians take to the streets calling Abbas to run in the elections. On 13 November in light of Abbas' resignation and Hamas' call to boycott the elections in Gaza, the Central Electoral Commission of the PNA requests that the elections be postponed. On 19 November Abbas confirms his resolution to postpone the Palestinian elections and reiterates his decision not to run for reelection. He also announces the adoption of special measures to avoid a constitutional void, since his term and that of the National Assembly come to an end on 25 January 2010.
- On 20 November the European Council agrees to extend the mandate

of the Border Assistance Mission at the Rafah crossing (EUBAM) until 24 May 2010.

- On 22 November the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, the military wing of Hamas, announces an agreement made with the other Palestinian factions in Gaza to cease hostilities against Israel, although the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine refute the declaration.
- On 23 November an official from the Egyptian government reports that a van has been seized at the Rafah border crossing, which was carrying a ton of explosives awaiting delivery to Gaza through the secret tunnels. The same source announces that the Egyptian police have found and destroyed four tunnels.
- On 23 November two militants from the military wing of Hamas are killed by an explosion in a Gaza district while they were handling an explosive device. Israel denies any involvement in the incident.
- On 26 November the media publishes Hamas' decision to demand that Palestinian citizens in the Gaza Strip acquire prior authorisation before crossing to Israel via the Erez border crossing.

Peace Negotiations

- On 1 November Benjamin Netanyahu urges Fatah and Hamas to resume peace negotiations without prior conditions. The message comes a day after the visit by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who in separate meetings with Israeli and Palestinian leaders urges the parties to resume peace talks. Mahmoud Abbas reiterates that the PNA will not resume talks while Israel continues with its settlement policy. On 3 November on a visit to Egypt Hillary Clinton states that the quickest way to halt the constructions is for Palestinians and Israelis to resume negotiations. After Clinton's visit, the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmed Aboul Gheit announces that Egypt is withdrawing its support for Palestine, affirming that the Palestinian government should focus on the talks and not waste time imposing conditions. On 25 November Netanyahu announces an initiative to reinstate the peace talks, which contemplates the cessation of new settlements for 10 months, al-

though the constructions underway will continue. This proviso, the temporary nature of the initiative and its exclusion of East Jerusalem lead the PNA to reject the offer and step up its appeal to the UN to put pressure on Israel.

- On 15 November Saeb Erekat, Palestine's chief negotiator with Israel, declares that the PNA will ask the UN Security Council for its support in the unilateral proclamation of an independent Palestinian State with its capital in East Jerusalem and the 1967 borders, given the deadlock in the peace negotiations. Israel warns that any Palestinian move in that direction will end any possibility for peace.
- On 22 November Simon Peres and Hosni Mubarak meet in Cairo to urge parties to continue with the Middle East peace talks after Egypt accuses the government of Netanyahu of undermining the peace process. The meeting fails to bring the respective positions any closer together.
- On 23 November Israeli sources in Egypt, where a Hamas delegation has travelled to negotiate with Israel, announce that sergeant Gilad Shalit may be released soon, in exchange for the Palestinian leader and possible successor to Mahmoud Abbas, Marwan Barghouti, imprisoned in Israel since 2002. On 29 November Israeli radio reports the decision taken by Tel Aviv to release 980 Palestinian prisoners in exchange for Shalit. At the high court of justice, the state prosecutor rules that 450 of the prisoners can be chosen by Hamas.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 5 November the UN General Assembly approves the proposal of the non-binding resolution presented by the Arab States to bring the Goldstone report before the Security Council for a definitive ruling.
- On 19 November the Israeli air force bomb a munitions factory and two secret tunnels in Gaza, in response to the launching of several missiles from the Strip into southern Israel.
- On 22 November the Israeli air force bombs two factories in Gaza that are suspected of manufacturing arms, and a secret tunnel on the Egyptian border, injuring around 10 people. The attack comes in response to a rocket fired from the Strip into southern Is-

rael. This exchange of hostilities appears to confirm the lack of an agreement between the Palestinian factions in Gaza to stop the attacks on Israel, as promised by the Izz ad-Din al-Qasam Brigades. On 24 November three Palestinians are injured in an Israeli air strike in response to a fresh rocket launch from Gaza. On 27 November a new Israeli air strike on Gaza injures four Palestinian militants preparing rocket launches against Israel.

December 2009

Israel

- On 9 December thousands of settlers demonstrate in Jerusalem against the government's decision to set a moratorium on the new Jewish settlements in the West Bank. The settlers fear that the moratorium will be followed by an eviction policy. On 13 December the Council of Ministers approves additional aid for some settlements under construction considered as a "national priority", despite Defence Minister Ehud Barak's opposition. On 18 December the media reports statements made by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman assuring that the settlements in the West Bank will continue after the 10-month moratorium decreed by Netanyahu comes to an end. On the same day, the European Commission announces a statement condemning the Israeli government's settlement policy.
- On 10 December Israeli troops burst into the home of Palestinian activist Abdullah Abu Rahme in Ramallah, prominent leader of the movement against the separation barrier in the West Bank, and arrest him for inciting public disorder.
- On 12 December a London court issues an arrest warrant for the former Foreign Minister and leader of Kadima Tzipi Livni, for "war crimes" during Operation Cast Lead. The Israeli government supports Livni and submits a formal complaint to the UK.
- On 20 December Israel requests that Vatican files on the Second World War be opened as a reaction to Pope

Benedict XVI's attempts to beatify Pius XII, accused by many historians of adopting a passive role during the Holocaust.

- On 24 December Benjamin Netanyahu invites the opposition leader Tzipi Livni to join the ruling coalition and form a national unity government that protects Israel's delicate position in the region, a year after Operation Cast Lead. Livni, who appears receptive to the offer, looks to mitigate Kadima's internal division, with seven members threatening to leave, and strengthen her position in relation to the party's number two, Shaul Mofaz, who asks for early party elections to be called.
- On 29 December Israel announces the construction of 700 homes in the West Bank settlements of Pisgat Zeev, Neve Yaakov and Har Homa, which Tel Aviv considers as districts of Jerusalem and therefore fall outside of the 10-month moratorium decreed by the government on the construction of settlements.

Palestine

- On 16 December the PLO decides to extend Mahmoud Abbas' term as leader of the PNA, until the legislative elections are held, slated for 28 June 2010.
- On 16 December hundreds of Palestinians demonstrate in Gaza against Egypt's decision to build an underground barrier along the length of its common border to avoid traffic through clandestine tunnels.

Peace Negotiations

- On 8 December the European Council urges Israel and the PNA to resume peace talks and agree on Jerusalem as the capital of both States, due to the deadlock in the peace negotiations. The 27-nation bloc warns Tel Aviv that the EU "has never recognised the annex of the eastern sector of Jerusalem."
- On 22 December Israel delivers its response to the exchange deal of sergeant Shalit for 980 Palestinian prisoners, through German mediation. Tel Aviv

appears willing to accept the releases but demands that certain released prisoners be confined in Gaza and not allowed to return to the West Bank.

Conflicts between the Parties

- On 17 December new clashes erupt between Israeli police and Palestinian demonstrators in East Jerusalem on the occasion of the closing celebrations of its status as the Arab World's capital of culture in 2009.
- On 24 December an Israeli settler is shot dead in the north of the West Bank, in an attack claimed by the hitherto unknown group Imad Mughniyah, belonging to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs' Brigades. On 26 December in a raid in Nablus the Israeli army kills three Fatah militants, suspected of the murder of the Israeli settler. Mahmud Abbas warns of the danger of a new outbreak of violence, one year on from the start of Operation Cast Lead.

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