

# Chronology of Events in Israel and Palestine

*With the peace talks between the Palestinians and Israel frozen since 2014, the US President Donald Trump announces in January, together with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a Middle East peace plan dubbed by Trump himself as “the deal of the century.” The plan proposes a Palestinian state comprising a myriad of enclaves without territorial continuity and Israel’s annexation of the Jordan Valley, which borders Jordan. The agreement is rejected outright by the Palestinian National Authority (PNA), whose President Mahmoud Abbas calls on the UN Security Council to condemn the US proposal and suspends security cooperation with Israel and the US. This is not resumed until mid-November, thanks to the postponement of the plans to annex the West Bank as a condition for the signing in August of the so-called Abraham Accords, a joint peace deal signed by Israel and the UAE. Similar agreements follow with Bahrain and Sudan and then in the last days of the year with Morocco, in one of the Trump Administration’s last moves. In return, Washington recognizes Morocco’s sovereignty over Western Sahara. This series of agreements demonstrate a realignment of many of the Arab states in their relations with Israel, as well as regarding their stance on the Palestinian question. Despite the freezing of the annexations outlined in the deal of the century, the situation prompts the PNA, as a sign of protest, to refuse the rotating Presidency of the Arab League in September. Notable alongside these advances in Israel’s bilateral relations, is also the beginning of indirect talks with Lebanon to reach an agreement on the maritime border between both states, amid a crisis over*

*territorial waters and gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean.*

*At the end of February, the death of a member of the al-Quds Brigades sparks the year’s first major clash between Islamic Jihad and the Tzahal (Israeli army), which endangers the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip, agreed between Israel and Hamas in December 2019. Three deaths and 48 hours later, on 25 February, the al-Quds Brigades announces the end of its retaliation. Hostilities between Israel and Gaza escalate once again from August onwards, following the signing of the Abraham Accords. Incendiary balloons are launched from the Strip towards southern Israel, which are met with the Israeli army’s systematic response throughout the second half of the year, despite a brief ceasefire agreed in September.*

*In Israel’s internal politics, the announcement of the deal of the century comes at the same time that Benjamin Netanyahu is stripped of his parliamentary immunity so he can face trial on three charges of corruption. This all happens a month ahead of Israeli elections, after Netanyahu’s Likud party’s narrow victory over Benny Gantz’s Blue and White alliance in the September 2019 elections made it impossible to form a government coalition.*

*In addition to all of the above, the rapid spread around the world of the SARS-CoV-2 coronavirus, the cause of the COVID-19 pandemic, as declared by the WHO in March, becomes a crucial factor in all major actions taken throughout the world. In Israel, the health emergency, combined with the close results of the elections on 2 March, won by Likud, obliged once again to reach a deal to form a government, leads to*

*talks with White and Blue to form a national unity government that can prioritize containing the virus. Meanwhile, on 16 March, the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares a state of emergency. These talks, accelerated by the Supreme Court’s ruling to require the outgoing Parliament Speaker of the Knesset (Parliament) Yuli Edelstein to call a plenary session to elect his successor despite the state of emergency, end with a dramatic turnabout. In the voting on 26 March, following Edelstein’s decision to resign rather than comply with the Supreme Court ruling, Benny Gantz is elected Parliament Speaker with Likud’s support, in exchange for taking over from Netanyahu as the head of the government in the second half of the government’s term, in 18 months. The agreement leads to a break-up of the Blue and White alliance and ensures that Netanyahu continues as Prime Minister and maintains control of the Parliament, in exchange for keeping the unity government agreement alive, which is so crucial in the fight against the spread of the pandemic. So, Netanyahu and Gantz, on 20 April, sign a deal for a rotating unity government which will move forward, in July, with one of Netanyahu’s central election promises: the annexation of large parts of the West Bank, effectively putting an end to any prospects of a two-state solution. The agreement will see Gantz serve as the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister until he takes over from Netanyahu at the head of the government in October 2021. The agreement also foresees the appointment of the Supreme Court judges by consensus, thereby guaranteeing Netanyahu vetoing rights ahead of his trial for three*

separate corruption charges, which is delayed until May due to the state of pandemic. With the coalition agreement pending the approval of the Supreme Court, which comes on 7 May, on 3 May the legal text is presented and approved by the Knesset under which large parts of the West Bank will be annexed. On 17 May, the new government, formed by seven parties, takes office. Three days later, on 20 May, the first trial against a sitting Prime Minister begins for cases 1000, 2000 and 4000. The opening of the court proceedings ignites protests against Netanyahu, despite the restrictions imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19 infections. Further restrictions imposed as of July in view of the second wave of infections prompts a sharp increase in protests against the handling of the health and economic crisis caused by the pandemic. In this regard, the high level of social and political polarization adds to the already fragile government coalition, in a state of constant crisis. Finally, in December, the failure to reach an agreement on the state budget before the legal deadline leads to the dissolution of the Parliament, sees the end of the short-lived coalition and sets the stage for the country's fourth elections in two years.

In regard to Palestine, on 13 March, the PNA declares a state of emergency for COVID-19 and days later, Hamas cancels the Great March of Return protests in Gaza. The strict containment measures approved in the Palestinian territories are partially relaxed in July in response to intense social pressure arising from a dramatic decline in the economy, which is severely affected by the extended lockdown and breakdown in cooperation with Israel in May. For its part, Egypt, which moves forward with the construction of its separation wall on the border with the Gaza Strip, in its efforts to prevent smuggling and jihadist infiltration into Sinai, authorizes the opening of the Rafah border crossing on several occasions to alleviate the effects of the pandemic in the Palestinian enclave.

Lastly, mention should be made of the new impetus for reconciliation between the Palestinian factions, promoted on this occasion by Istanbul and not Cairo.

Consequently, in September, Fatah and Hamas reach a Turkish-brokered agreement to hold joint elections within six months, in a move regarded with suspicion by Egypt in view of Turkey's growing presence in the region.

## January 2020

### Israel

- On 1 January the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, under investigation in three cases of corruption, requests the Knesset grant him parliamentary immunity.
- On 3 January the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu submits his resignation from the three ministerial portfolios he still held – as Minister of Agriculture, Welfare and Diaspora Affairs – under pressure over his corruption indictment.
- On 7 January Israeli police raid the home of Adnan Ghaith, the Palestinians' appointed governor of Jerusalem.
- On 7 January Israeli authorities announce the approval of plans to build 1,936 new homes in occupied territory of the West Bank.
- On 12 January schools throughout Israel protest against statements made by the Education Minister Rafi Peretz in which he implied that homosexuality is unnatural.
- On 26 January the Interior Minister Aryeh Deri issues a statement saying Israeli citizens can now travel to Saudi Arabia for religious, business or financial reasons.
- On 28 January the US President Donald Trump presents, along with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, his peace plan known as "the deal of the century," developed by his son-in-law, the magnate and presidential adviser Jared Kushner, to reactivate the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians. The plan includes Jerusalem as the indivisible Israeli capital and East Jerusalem as the capital of the future Palestinian State, which Washington would be ready to recognize, as well as a 50-billion-dollar investment to double the Palestinian GDP and create a million jobs, in exchange for the Palestinian factions abandoning

their armed struggle. It also supports Israel's annexation of the Jordan Valley, – which constitutes 30% of the West Bank – despite the UN's warnings that such a move would violate international law, in addition to other land concessions in favour of Israel and its settlements in occupied territory. All in all Trump's self-proclaimed "unbeatable" plan would turn a future Palestinian State into a territorial archipelago, the viability of which is dubious to say the least. Consequently, two hours later the PNA President Mahmoud Abbas reiterates Palestine's outright rejection of the proposal.

- On 29 January Benjamin Netanyahu withdraws his request for parliamentary immunity shortly before the Parliament approves the committee set up to study said request. The Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit immediately files charges against Netanyahu for corruption in cases 1000 – fraud and breach of trust for receiving gifts from billionaire businessmen, in exchange for favours-, 2000 – fraud and breach of trust for conspiring with the owner of the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper in exchange for favourable media coverage – and 4000 – bribery, fraud and breach of trust for exerting pressure on the news website Walla!, owned by Shaul Elovitch, the controlling shareholder of Bezeq, the Israeli telecommunications giant.

### Palestine

- On 27 January the Egyptian security forces and army begin the first phase – from Karm Abu Salem to Rafah – of the construction works of a second separation wall along the border with the Gaza Strip, due to be completed by the summer of 2020. The project, aimed at shutting down the smuggling tunnels, has received approval from the Hamas government, which has ruled over the narrow Palestinian coastal strip since 2006.

### Conflicts between the Parties

- On 29 January a missile fired from the Gaza Strip lands in southern Israel without causing any damages, hours after Israel steps up its military presence in the West Bank and along

the border with Gaza in response to demonstrations condemning Donald Trump's peace plan, dubbed "the deal of the century."

## February 2020

### *Israel*

- On 12 February the United Nations publishes a black list of 112 companies that do business in Israeli-occupied Palestinian territory. The decision is fiercely criticized by the US and comes a day after the Security Council's examination of Donald Trump's peace plan proposal and before it is put to the vote.
- On 16 February Israeli commercial planes begin overflying Sudan, following a meeting on 3 February with the Sovereignty Council of Sudan to normalize bilateral relations.
- On 20 February a little over 10 days ahead of legislative elections, the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu unveils a plan to build two new neighbourhoods with 5,200 homes in Israeli settlements south of Jerusalem, located in an area occupied in 1967. In parallel, Netanyahu also announces the construction of 1,000 homes for inhabitants of the Palestinian neighbourhood of Beit Safafa.
- On 21 February Israel confirms its first case of COVID-19.

### *Palestine*

- On 22 February Saleh al-Aroui, deputy chairman of Hamas's politburo, announces Egypt's invitation to discuss issues in Cairo such as Palestinian reconciliation, the general elections and the economic crisis affecting Gaza. Relations between Egypt and Hamas are at a delicate moment following the Hamas chief Ismail Haniyeh's visit to Iran to attend the funeral of Qasem Soleimani as part of his overseas tour.

### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 2 February the PNA President Mahmoud Abbas responds to "the deal of the century," unveiled by Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu, with the announcement of the "rupture of

relations and agreements" with the US and Israel, including in the area of security. On 11 February, Abbas asks the UN Security Council for its "complete rejection" of Trump's Middle East peace plan and for talks to be set up mediated by the Quartet – the US, the EU, Russia and the United Nations.

### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 4 February at least 15 soldiers are injured after a vehicle, whose driver flees the scene, rams into a crowd close to the *First Station* entertainment centre in Jerusalem.
- On 7 February the atmosphere of violence, incited by the announcement of "the deal of the century," intensifies with clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli security forces in Azzun, Jericho, Hebron, Bilin, Tulkarm and other places in the West Bank.
- On 10 February the Israeli army reports attacks on various Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a rocket launch during the night into southern Israel.
- On 16 February the Israeli army reveals it has recently thwarted a Hamas cyber attack against Israeli soldiers, who it contacted through social media, seduced using fake profiles of women and made them download an application through which it could control their mobile phones.
- On 24 February the death of the al-Quds Brigades member Mohamed an-Naem, who was shot by Israeli soldiers on 23 February while planting an explosive device on the border between Gaza and Israel, sparks the year's first major fighting between Islamic Jihad and the Israeli army, endangering the ceasefire in the Gaza Strip agreed between Hamas and Israel in December. Missiles are fired shortly after Qatar's monthly delivery of financial aid to the Gaza Strip and Israel's decision to increase the number of permits for Gazans to work in its territory to 7,000. On 25 February, the al-Quds Brigades, the armed wing of Islamic Jihad, announces the end of its "military response" to Israel, after the death of three of its members in 48 hours of fighting.
- On 25 February the Israeli police reports the arrests of 58 Palestinians

suspected of belonging to a network that transforms airsoft guns into assault rifles.

- On 27 February dozens of Israeli settlers attack Palestinian homes and businesses in Huwara, the West Bank.

## March 2020

### *Israel*

- On 2 March Israel holds legislative elections again with a turnout of 71%, the highest since 1999. Likud, the party of the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wins with 36 of the 120 seats in the Knesset (four more than in the last elections). Benny Gantz's Blue and White party come second, repeating their result from September 2019 and winning 33 seats. The Joint List, an alliance of Israel's four main Arab parties, increases its seats from 13 to 15. The elections are a blow for Netanyahu's potential allies (Shas, United Torah Judaism, the Yamina Coalition and Israel Our Home), who all lose seats.
- On 10 March the Jerusalem District Court rejects a request by the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to delay the start of his corruption trial, scheduled for 17 March, amid talks between Likud and its far-right allies to try to form a government.
- On 12 March Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz discuss the possibility of forming a national emergency government to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. The talks take place days after the announcement of an opposition initiative, led by the Blue and White party and the Joint List, to propose two laws that would prevent Netanyahu from forming a government if he is indicted.
- On 15 March the hearings against Benjamin Netanyahu for corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000 are delayed until May due to the containment measures against the pandemic.
- On 16 March the President Reuven Rivlin tasks the leader of the Blue and White alliance Benny Gantz with forming a government, after holding consultations the previous day with the different parliamentary parties.
- On 16 March the acting Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declares a

state of emergency and authorizes the police and Shin Bet, the internal security service, to track suspected COVID-19 carriers.

- On 16 March the Israeli authorities disband an Israeli army cell selling arms and ammunition to Palestinian militias.
- On 18 March Israel closes the border crossings with Gaza and the West Bank to stop the spread of COVID-19 to Palestinian the territories.
- On 18 March the Peace Now NGO reports a 25% increase in settlement construction in the West Bank under the Trump Administration, with respect to construction during Obama's Presidency.
- On 18 March the Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein announces the closure of the plenary for at least a week due to the COVID-19 emergency measures, according to which gatherings are not allowed of more than 10 people, and Likud's and the Blue and White party's failure to reach an agreement on the formation of the parliamentary committees. Blue and White calls on the Supreme Court to stop the suspension of parliamentary activity, with one of the scheduled sessions being to elect a new parliament speaker, for which Gantz is running.
- On 21 March the director of the Religious Affairs Council of Jerusalem Abdul Azim Salhab is fined 1,400 euros for allowing Friday prayers to go ahead at the Temple Mount, despite the containment measures ordered by Israel.
- On 24 March the Israeli Supreme Court orders the Israeli Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein, an ally of Benjamin Netanyahu, to call the parliamentary session for electing his replacement, before 25 March. Edelstein had opposed holding the plenary, in which he may likely lose to his centrist rival the Blue and White party. On 25 March, Edelstein resigns to avoid complying with the Supreme Court's ruling, thereby, in practice, giving Netanyahu's government another week without parliamentary control.
- On 26 March the Blue and White leader Benny Gantz becomes the new Parliament Speaker, with the support of his chief rival, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud. The surprising election of Gantz, instead of the Yesh Atid candidate Meir

Cohen, leads to a break-up of the Blue and White coalition, formed in 2018 to put an end to a decade of Netanyahu's government, and paves the way to the formation of a national unity government between Likud and Gantz's supporters to try to halt the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country and faced with the polarization of the Israeli electorate, which has led to three elections being held without a government being formed. The agreement between Netanyahu and Gantz means the latter takes over as Speaker of the Knesset during the first 18 months of the government's term, after which he will replace Netanyahu as Prime Minister. This means that, in exchange for ensuring the urgent formation of a cabinet that can tackle the COVID-19 health emergency, Netanyahu extends his post for 18 months, and at the same time retains control over the Parliament, enabling him to prevent the approval of the law that bars anyone indicted for corruption from holding office. For his part, Gantz obtains for his supporters the same number of ministerial portfolios as Likud, including those of the Foreign, Defence and Justice Ministries.

#### *Palestine*

- On 5 March Palestine confirms its first two cases of COVID-19 in the West Bank. On 13 March, the PNA declares a state of emergency and the temporary closure of Qarawat Bani Hassan, in the West Bank. On 22 March, the PNA orders a lockdown in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as amnesty for prisoners who have served half of their sentence, as a measure for reducing the spread of infection. On 22 March, Hamas confirms the first two cases in the Gaza Strip.
- On 16 March the PNA sends a report to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in which it restates Palestine's sole sovereignty over the territories occupied by Israel in 1967
- On 18 March Philippe Lazzarini is appointed commissioner-general of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA).
- On 28 March the Hamas authorities call off the Great March of Return pro-

tests in Gaza against the Israeli occupation due to the high risk of COVID-19 infection. A large-scale demonstration was scheduled for 30 March to commemorate the second anniversary of the protests.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 6 March a missile fired at Israel from Gaza lands inside the Palestinian enclave.
- On 7 March Palestinian fishermen report being attacked by Israeli navy ships within Gaza's fishing zone.
- On 11 March a Palestinian man is shot dead by Israeli soldiers during clashes south of Nablus.
- On 27 March the Israeli army bombs Hamas targets in Gaza in response to a missile fired from Palestinian territory.

#### **April 2020**

##### *Israel*

- On 1 April talks stall between Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz to form a national emergency government due to Likud's insistence on implementing Israeli sovereignty over large parts of the occupied West Bank, following the proposal of the US President Donald Trump. At first, the measure is rejected by the Blue and White party, which also demands veto rights in all diplomatic decision-making.
- On 16 April the Israeli President Reuven Rivlin tasks the Parliament with forming a new government to avoid the year's fourth election, after Benny Gantz fails to form a coalition before the deadline.
- On 19 April around 2,000 people called by the Black Flag movement protest in Tel Aviv against Benjamin Netanyahu's government, accusing him of corruption and anti-democratic measures adopted to contain the pandemic.
- On 20 April Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz sign a rotation agreement for a unity government, which will avoid four elections being held in little over a year and will set in motion in July one of Netanyahu's central elections promises: Israel's annexation of the West Bank settlements, the third

following that of East Jerusalem in 1980 and the Golan Heights in 1981. The annexation, sponsored by the US, includes the Jordan Valley, which accounts for 30% of the West Bank's surface area. Gantz will be the Deputy Prime Minister and Defence Minister until taking over from Netanyahu as the head of the government in October 2021. Besides Likud and the part of Blue and White supporting Gantz, the new cabinet will include the two ultra-orthodox parties and the Labor party. Blue and White's Gabi Ashkenazi will take over as Foreign Minister and the Labor leader Amir Peretz will take the helm of the Economy Ministry. As part of the agreement, there will be no appointment of judges to the Supreme Court in the next six months, and after that time they must be chosen by consensus, thereby giving veto rights to Netanyahu, who is facing three trials for corruption that have been delayed until May due to the state of pandemic.

- On 22 April in an unprecedented act, rabbis, sheikhs, imams and patriarchs pray in Jerusalem for the end of the COVID-19 crisis and warn of the rise in racism and xenophobia caused by the pandemic.
- On 24 April Israel announces the reopening of shops on 26 April to boost the economy, which has been damaged by the effects of the pandemic.
- On 25 April thousands gather in Tel Aviv to protest against Benjamin Netanyahu remaining at the head of the government while under indictment in corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000.
- On 27 April the Supreme Court rules against the powers the Parliament granted at the beginning of the month to Shin Bet, Israel's internal security agency, to track Israeli citizens' telephones as part of the campaign against the spread of COVID-19.
- On 27 April at least three civilians and four pro-Iran militiamen are killed in a missile attack in Rif Dimashq, launched from Lebanese airspace by the Israel Defense Forces.
- On 30 April the US Treasury Department announces that Hapoalim Bank, Israel's biggest bank, would agree to paying a 900-million-dollar fine after it admits to conspiring to evade taxes by hiding more than 7.6 billion dollars in over 5,500 secret Swiss and Israeli

bank accounts. The Treasury Department also announces that the same bank and its Swiss subsidiary will pay another fine of 9.3 million dollars for another case in which they have been found guilty for conspiring to launder more than 20 million dollars in bribes to officials from FIFA and other football federations, in the so-called Fifagate scandal.

#### *Palestine*

- On 13 April Egypt opens the Rafah border crossing with the Gaza Strip to allow hundreds of people to return to their homes in the Palestinian territory. They will have to undergo quarantine as decreed by the Hamas authorities within its measures to contain COVID-19.
- On 24 April the PNA warns it will bring a case against Israel before the International Court of Justice if it continues with its plans to annex part of the West Bank.
- On 27 April the media reports the construction works undertaken by Egypt to build a wall equipped with electronic sensors on the border with the Gaza Strip, designed to prevent militants from Palestinian factions from crossing over to join the jihadists the Egyptian army is fighting against in North Sinai.
- On 30 April the Arab League holds an emergency virtual meeting at the request of the PNA to discuss Israel's plans to annex large parts of the West Bank and declares the annexation as a "war crime."

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 21 April there is a ramming attack on an Israeli soldier in Abu Dis, which is subsequently praised by Hamas as an act against the plans to annex parts of the West Bank. The attacker is shot dead by security forces.
- On 22 April Shin Bet reports it has dismantled a cell made up of three Hamas members who were planning attacks against civilians and soldiers, one of them in the Teddy football stadium in Jerusalem.
- On 28 April an Israeli woman is injured in Kfar Sava after being stabbed by a Palestinian man, who is then shot dead by Israeli security forces.

## **May 2020**

### *Israel*

- On 1 May the Israeli Defense Forces launch their second attack on southern Syria from the Golan Heights in less than 24 hours.
- On 3 May Likud presents its draft law for annexing large parts of the West Bank, which include the Jewish settlements in these territories, the Jordan Valley and the northern Dead Sea.
- On 3 May the gradual reopening of education centres begins as part of the strategy for easing restrictions for the COVID-19 pandemic.
- On 5 May the Parliament's Subcommittee for Intelligence authorizes Shin Bet to extend its tracking of mobile phones of citizens who have contracted or are susceptible to contracting COVID-19 until 26 May. In parallel to this, the government prepares amendments to the law on this practice, as requested by the Supreme Court, which banned it in April.
- On 6 May the Supreme Court gives its unanimous approval, although with reservations, for the unity government between Likud and Blue and White, with Netanyahu at the helm of the government for the first half of the term.
- On 7 May the Defence Minister Naftali Bennett announces the approval of the construction of 7,000 homes for the Efrat settlement, near Bethlehem.
- On 12 May the Israeli Defence Minister Naftali Bennett orders the expropriation of part of the Ibrahim mosque –Cave of the Patriarchs – in Hebron, as part of a project to install an elevator to facilitate access to the site and which is framed within the project approved on 3 May to build a Jewish settlement. The head of the PNA's General Authority for Civil Affairs Hussein al-Sheikh says the decision abolishes the Hebron protocol, puts an end to the Oslo Accords and constitutes a continuation of the annexation project in the West Bank and Jerusalem.
- On 13 May the US State Secretary Mike Pompeo travels to Israel to meet with Benjamin Netanyahu on the eve of the formation of the national unity government, which signals the start of the annexation of parts of the West

Bank. Besides this issue, the meeting also looks at coordinating their common stance against Iran.

- On 17 May after days of delay because of internal disputes in Likud over the allocation of ministries, the new Israeli government takes office, backed by 73 of the 120 members of the Knesset and with Benjamin Netanyahu as the Prime Minister. Benny Gantz resigns as Parliament Speaker, replaced by Yariv Levin. Gantz then takes over as Defence Minister until 17 November 2021, when he will relieve Netanyahu as the head of the government. With 35 ministers and 16 deputy ministers, this is the largest cabinet in the country's history, in order to make room for the seven political parties it is formed by –Likud, Blue and White, Shas, United Torah Judaism, the Labor Party, Derech Eretz and Geshet. Naftali Bennett's far-right Yamina does not make it into the government. Among the new ministers, the former army chief Gabi Ashkenazi takes over as Foreign Minister, Yariv Levin as the Parliament Speaker and Tzipi Hotovely will be the Settlements Minister. Pnina Tamano, the Immigration and Absorption Minister, will be the first Ethiopian-born woman in the Knesset, while Omer Yankelevich, at the head of the Diaspora Affairs Ministry, will be the first ultra-orthodox minister.
- On 20 May the trial begins against Benjamin Netanyahu for corruption cases 1000, 2000 and 4000, marking the first time a serving Israeli Prime Minister has sat in the dock.
- On 28 May Benjamin Netanyahu announces that Palestinians residing in the Jordan Valley will not be granted Israeli citizenship once the region is annexed to Israel.

#### *Palestine*

- On 5 May the Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas orders a 30-day extension on the COVID-19 lockdown measures, which came in force on 5 March in the West Bank, Gaza and East Jerusalem.
- On 7 May Amnesty International condemns the "arbitrary" arrests in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip of people who have criticized the authorities.
- On 19 May a young man dies after setting himself alight in the Shati refugee

camp in protest over the effects of the economic crisis affecting the Gaza Strip.

- On 20 May Mahmoud Abbas warns Israel again that the PNA will stop abiding by the Oslo Accords if the government of Benjamin Netanyahu and Benny Gantz goes ahead with its plans to annex territories in the West Bank.
- On 21 May the PNA suspends its security cooperation with Israel and the US.
- On 21 May the Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh calls on the EU to recognize Palestinian statehood and put pressure on Israel to drop its plans to annex parts of the West Bank.
- On 23 May the first COVID-19 death in the Gaza Strip is reported in Rafah, two days after the Hamas authorities announce the closure of all borders.
- On 25 May the PNA announces the end of lockdown measures in place since March in the Palestinian territories.
- On 27 May the ICC asks the PNA to clarify, before 10 June, whether its decision to end cooperation agreements with Israel and the US because of Israel's decision to annex parts of the West Bank includes the annulment of the Oslo Accords.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 4 May the Israeli army announces it has attacked three Hamas military posts in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket launched at Israel.
- On 12 May an Israeli soldier is killed by a rock that was thrown at him during a raid in Yabad, the West Bank, marking the year's first death of an Israeli soldier.
- On 13 May Israeli soldiers kill a Palestinian teenager in the al-Fawar refugee camp, near Hebron, during protests against the plans to annex part of the West Bank.
- On 14 May an Israeli soldier is injured after being the target of a ramming attack in the West Bank settlement of Negohot. The Palestinian attacker is shot dead by Israeli soldiers.
- On 16 May three Palestinians are injured as their attack on an Israeli army base in Abu Dis is thwarted.
- On 18 May the Israeli settler Amiram Ben Uliel is found guilty of racially motivated murder in an arson attack in 2015 that killed a Palestinian couple and their baby in the West Bank.

- On 30 May Israeli police kill a Palestinian man in Jerusalem's Old City they believe was carrying a weapon. He was later identified as an unarmed young man with special needs.

#### **June 2020**

##### *Israel*

- On 4 June the Parliament sessions are suspended after Sami Abu Shehadeh from the Balad party, a member of the Joint Arab List, tests positive for coronavirus.
- On 7 June thousands demonstrate in Tel Aviv against the annexation of part of the West Bank.
- On 12 June the UAE warns Israel that normalizing relations with the Arab countries will not happen if it goes ahead with its plans to annex part of the West Bank.
- On 22 June the government holds an urgent meeting to approve stricter measures to counter a new wave of COVID-19, after fresh outbreaks are detected that also affect the Palestinian territories.

##### *Palestine*

- On 3 June the PNA refuses tax revenues collected on its behalf by Israel as part of its measures to reject the West Bank annexation plans.
- On 3 June the PNA extends the state of emergency for the coronavirus by another month.
- On 6 June Qatar's special envoy to the Gaza Strip Mohammed al-Emadi travels to the Palestinian territory for the first time in four months, after a break imposed by the pandemic, to resume the distribution of Qatari economic aid, agreed in the framework of the 2014 ceasefire with Israel, Egypt and the United Nations.
- On 8 and 22 June thousands of Palestinians protest in Ramallah and Jericho, respectively, against the plans to annex part of the West Bank territory.
- On 9 June the Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh warns that the PNA will declare an independent Palestinian state if Israel annexes parts of the West Bank.
- On 24 June 115 million euros is pledged at the UNRWA Donors Conference, organized by Sweden and Jordan.

- On 28 June the Palestinian factions in the Gaza Strip call for a “day of rage” for the 1 July against Israel’s plans to annex West Bank territories.
- On 30 June the EU Council agrees to extend the mandate for its missions in Libya and Palestine until 30 June 2021.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 24 June the Organization for the Liberation of Palestine (PLO) calls on the ICC to investigate the death of a Palestinian man shot by Israeli soldiers the previous day, who claim he had tried to ram them at a checkpoint near Ramallah.
- On 16 and 27 June Israel attacks Hamas targets in Gaza in response to missiles launched into Israeli territory.

### **July 2020**

#### *Israel*

- On 5 July Israel launches the Ofek-16 spy satellite.
- On 6 July the government introduces tougher restrictions for the pandemic and orders the closure of recreational centres and bars and restaurants.
- On 7 July the head of public health services Siegal Sadetzki resigns over her disagreement with the government’s delay to tighten restrictions in response to the rise in COVID-19 cases.
- On 8 July the Parliament rejects a proposal supported by Likud to create a committee for investigating possible conflicts of interest in the country’s judiciary.
- On 10 July a law passed by Parliament goes into effect to combat prostitution, which includes fines for clients.
- On 12 July a large demonstration takes place in Tel Aviv to protest against Benjamin Netanyahu’s government’s handling of the pandemic.
- On 17 July with the arrival of the second wave of COVID-19 in Israel, the government declares a nationwide weekend lockdown and a new closure of all non-essential establishments. The protests intensify against the handling of the pandemic by the government, which is facing mounting internal divisions.
- On 19 July Israeli security forces arrest the Palestinian governor of Jerusalem Adnan Gheith. Since his ap-

pointment in 2018 by the PNA, Gheith has been arrested by the Israeli police on 17 occasions.

- On 22 July Israel reduces its quarantine period for people diagnosed with coronavirus and records its highest daily number of cases, with almost 2,000 infections.
- On 26 July thousands of protesters gather outside the home of the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu calling for his and the government’s resignation.
- On 27 July the Israeli army opens fire at the border between Israel and Lebanon to thwart what it claims to be an attempt by a Hezbollah commando unit to cross the Blue Line and infiltrate Israel.

#### *Palestine*

- On 6 July the Prime Minister Mohammed Shtayyeh asks Israel to close its border crossings with Palestine and attributes the rise in infections to the lack of controls by the Israeli authorities.
- On 12 July the PNA announces new restrictions to contain the latest rise in COVID-19 infections. The announcement sparks protests from business owners, especially in Ramallah and Hebron, one of the West Bank’s epicentres of the outbreak and where a curfew is in place. The effects of lockdown and the suspension of cooperation with Israel following the announcement of the annexation of part of the West Bank keeps the local economy in decline. In response to social pressure, on 13 July the government allows small shops to stay open.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 9 July a Palestinian man is killed near Kifl Haris, in the West Bank, shot down by Israeli security forces, who claim he had thrown a Molotov cocktail at them.

### **August 2020**

#### *Israel*

- On 1-2 August there are new protests against the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The protests go on throughout the month, amid a new crisis in the coalition government, which

suspends the day’s scheduled cabinet meeting after failing to reach an agreement on a new recovery package within the state budget to alleviate the effects of the pandemic.

- On 10 August the Supreme Court rules against the demolition of the home of a Palestinian man charged with killing an Israeli soldier during a raid in May in Yabed, the West Bank.
- On 13 August Israel freezes plans to annex and declare sovereignty over parts of the West Bank, as part of an agreement to normalize ties with the UAE.
- On 20 August thousands of Israelis protest in the country’s main cities over the rape of a minor by 30 men in a hotel in Eilat.
- On 23 August the cabinet adjourns its weekly meeting for a second time since the formation of the new government, following disagreements over the budget between the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his party Likud, and the Blue and White alliance of Defence Minister Benny Gantz. Israeli law stipulates that the state budget must be approved within 100 days of the government taking office, making 23 August the deadline. On the night of 23 August an agreement is reached concerning the budget that avoids early elections being called, which would have been the fourth in the last year and a half.
- On 26 August the armed forces bomb Hezbollah targets in Lebanon in retaliation for an attack on an Israeli military checkpoint.
- On 30 August around 2,000 public laboratory workers go on strike over the low salaries the government pays them.
- On 30 August the UAE President Khalifa Bin Zayed al-Nahyan issues a decree that abolishes the Israeli boycott law.

#### *Palestine*

- On 10 August Egypt opens the Rafah border crossing with Gaza until 13 August, in the crossing’s first opening since May.
- On 18 August Gaza’s only operational power plant closes down due to a lack of fuel as a result of Israel’s closure of the Kerem Shalom border crossing.
- On 24 August the Gaza authorities detect the first four cases of community-

spread COVID-19 infections, impose a full lockdown and issue a warning about the precarious situation of the Strip's health system.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 3 August Israel attacks Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to a rocket launched at Sderot.
- On 7 August a Palestinian woman is shot dead by Israeli security forces during a raid in Jenin, the West Bank.
- On 9 August the Israel Defense Forces confirm it has bombed a Hamas observation post in northern Gaza in retaliation for the launch of incendiary balloons by the group Waad al-Tahrir (Promise of Liberation) towards southern Israel. Throughout August the Israeli army carries out attacks on targets in the Gaza Strip in response to new launches.
- On 13 August the Israeli army confirms accidentally striking an UNRWA school during an airstrike on the Gaza Strip.
- On 26 August an Israeli man is stabbed to death in Petah Tikva, in an attack police say was carried out by a Palestinian citizen.
- On 30 August the Israeli army launches a new operation in response to the fire balloons launched from Gaza.

### September 2020

#### *Israel*

- On 6 September Malawi, Serbia and Kosovo announce the transfer of their embassies in Israel from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.
- On 7 September Israel announces curfews in 40 towns and neighbourhoods described as hotspots, in response to the increase in COVID-19 infections.
- On 11 September the US President Donald Trump announces that Israel and Bahrain have reached an agreement to normalize their diplomatic relations.
- On 13 September the Housing Minister Yaakov Litzman resigns, in protest against the government's plans to impose a new lockdown due to the spike in COVID-19 cases.

- On 25 September Israel introduces tougher measures against COVID-19, a week after on 18 September the country's second lockdown goes into effect.
- On 30 September the Parliament approves restrictions on demonstrations in the country in the context of the current lockdown.

#### *Palestine*

- On 22 September the PNA security forces arrest dozens of protesters from the faction, Fatah – Democratic Reform Current, led by Mohammed Dahlan, after an Israeli newspaper reports that the US was considering using him to replace the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas.
- On 22 September the PNA announces it is relinquishing its right to hold the Arab League's rotating presidency in protest over the UAE and Bahrain's decision to normalize ties with Israel.
- On 24 September Fatah and Hamas agree to organize a general election in the Palestinian territories in no more than six months, in the context of the reconciliation talks held in Istanbul.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 1 September Israel authorizes the reopening of the only goods crossing with the Gaza Strip, hours after reaching a ceasefire agreement with Hamas.

### October 2020

#### *Israel*

- On 4 October the police arrest around 17 members of the ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in the neighbourhood of Bnei Brak, in Tel Aviv, due to their refusal to follow the containment measures set by the government in response to the pandemic. There are also dozens of arrests in the ongoing protests against Netanyahu's government.
- On 8 October Israel and Jordan agree on the mutual opening of their airspaces.
- On 14 October Lebanon and Israel hold an historic first round of indirect talks to try to reach an agreement on their maritime border.
- On 14 October *Twitter* announces it is updating its policy against hateful con-

duct, with the removal of posts that deny or diminish the Holocaust, days after *Facebook* announces a similar measure.

- On 15 October the Israeli Parliament votes overwhelmingly in favour of the agreement reached with the UAE to normalize bilateral relations.
- On 16 October the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nikolay Mladenov calls on Israel to immediately cease all settlement activities, following the approval of around 5,000 new homes in settlements in the West Bank.
- On 16 October Israel extends lockdown in coronavirus hotspots.
- On 18 October Israel begins relaxing restrictions introduced two weeks ago following the protests against measures designed to curb anti-government demonstrations.
- On 21 October, citing a technicality, the Parliament Speaker nullifies a motion approved shortly before to investigate Case 3000 for an alleged corrupt plan to purchase submarines from the German company Thyssenkrupp, in which the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is implicated.
- On 22 October Israel and Bahrain sign a deal to begin direct flights between the countries.
- On 23 October the peace agreement between Israel and Sudan is sealed in a phone call between the prime ministers of both countries and the US President Donald Trump.

▪ On 24 October thousands demonstrate in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem in the 18th consecutive week of protests against the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

- On 28 October the US and Israel sign an agreement that extends their scientific cooperation to the West Bank settlements.
- On 30 October the US announces that US citizens born in Jerusalem can, from now on, opt to specify Israel as their country of birth on their passports.

#### *Palestine*

- On 2 October Fatah's Central Committee approves the agreements reached on 24 September in Istanbul with Hamas, which include holding parliamentary and presidential elections in 2021. Egypt, the traditional mediator between



the Palestinian factions, is suspicious of the agreement, which it considers an instrument in Turkey's ambition to increase its influence in the region.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 29 October Mahmoud Abbas asks the United Nations to hold urgent consultations to organize an international conference in 2021 to restart peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 5 October at least one Palestinian is shot dead by Israeli soldiers following a Molotov cocktail attack on a checkpoint in Jenin.
- On 6 October Israel launches an offensive against southern Gaza in response to rocket fire launched towards Kerem Shalom.
- On 11 October according to Israel's Channel 12, Israel and Hamas have reached a Qatar-mediated six-month ceasefire agreement, which includes Qatar's promise to deliver economic aid to the value of 100 million dollars to Gaza.
- On 14 October at least two Israeli soldiers are injured when an explosive device is thrown at them during an operation in a refugee camp in Nablus.
- On 20 October the Israeli army attacks Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to a missile launched shortly after Israel announces it has uncovered a tunnel that penetrates into Israeli territory.
- On 25 October Islamic Jihad militants in Gaza begin several days of incendiary balloon launches towards southern Israel to demand the release of the prisoner Maher al-Akhras, who has been on hunger strike for the last three months.
- On 30 October at least three Palestinians are injured by Israeli security forces after they allegedly threw a Molotov cocktail from their vehicle at a military checkpoint.

### **November 2020**

#### *Israel*

- On 1 November teaching centres in Israel reopen after government restric-

tions are relaxed following a slight drop in coronavirus infections.

- On 10 November the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee meets to discuss the US sale of F-35 jets to the UAE. Opposition members slam the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu for approving the sale, suspecting it was a condition set by Abu Dhabi for the normalization of relations, a circumstance they say Netanyahu has deliberately kept in the dark.
- On 11 November the Parliament votes in favour of the peace agreement with Bahrain.
- On 13 November Benjamin Netanyahu announces the signing of a deal with the US pharmaceutical company Pfizer for the purchase of eight million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine.
- On 17 November the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Nickolay Mladenov urges Israel to reverse its plans to build homes in Givat Hamatos, East Jerusalem.
- On 18 November the US State Secretary Mike Pompeo meets with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, as part of his tour of Europe and the Middle East, likely the last before the upcoming administration change in Washington. The PLO condemns Pompeo for being the first US State Secretary to visit an Israeli settlement in the Golan Heights and Washington's plans to recognize products from illegal West Bank settlements as being made in Israel.
- On 22 November the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and director of Mossad Yossi Cohen travel to Saudi Arabia to meet with the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and the US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo in Neom. The meeting is indicative of a possible future peace agreement between Saudi Arabia and Israel that emulates those reached with the UAE, Bahrain and Sudan, with the primary aim of isolating Iran.
- On 23 November the Energy Minister Yuval Steinitz invites the Lebanese President Michel Aoun to begin direct talks on the maritime border between both countries, days after criticizing Beirut for changing its stance on several occasions in the indirect talks. On 30

November, the US-mediated talks are postponed indefinitely.

- On 26 November the Settlement Affairs Minister Tzachi Hanegbi announces that he will go ahead with plans to legalize dozens of Israeli settlements in the West Bank, most built on privately owned Palestinian land, before the Trump Administration is replaced by the Biden Administration.

#### *Palestine*

- On 9 November UNRWA announces that it cannot pay the salaries of thousands of staff members during November and December due to its budget deficit.
- On 10 November Saeb Erekat, the most prominent Palestinian negotiator since the Madrid Peace Conference of 1991 and Secretary-General of the PLO since 2015, falls victim to COVID-19.
- On 17 November the PNA announces it will resume civil and security cooperation with Israel, which it had stopped in May due to Israel's plans to annex parts of the West Bank, which have been put on hold in accordance with Israel's agreement to normalize relations with the UAE.
- On 23 November the PNA announces an overnight curfew during the coming weekends due to the increase in COVID-19 cases.

#### *Peace Negotiations*

- On 10 November the Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz calls on the Palestinian leaders to come back to the negotiating table, saying the Abraham Accords signed with the UAE and Bahrain have changed the paradigms of the past, when the Palestinian question blocked any prospect of normalizing ties with Arab countries.

#### *Conflicts between the Parties*

- On 4 November the Israeli armed forces intercept an attack in south Nablus, fatally shooting the alleged assailant, identified as a member of the Palestinian security forces.
- On 15 and 22 November the Israeli army bombs Hamas positions in the Gaza Strip in response to rockets fired at southern Israel.

## December 2020

### Israel

- On 2 December a no-confidence vote is passed by the Parliament in its first reading, tabled against Benjamin Netanyahu's government by the opposition leader and leader of the centrist party Yesh Atid, Yair Lapid, and backed by lawmakers from the Blue and White alliance and Labor Party, who accuse Netanyahu and Likud of failing to comply with agreements established by the current coalition government.
- On 4 December around a hundred Ethiopian Jews arrive in Israel, as part of Israel's Operation Rock to repatriate 2,000 members of this community.
- On 5 December dozens of arrests are made during the 24th week of protests against Benjamin Netanyahu's government.
- On 7 December the US President-elect Joe Biden asserts that he intends to continue with the Abraham Accords to normalize relations between Israel and the Arab countries.
- On 11 December Mohammed VI announces that diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel will be reestablished as soon as possible following Washington's recognition of Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara.
- On 19 December Israel begins its COVID-19 vaccination campaign, with the Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Health Minister and former Parliament Speaker Yuli Edelstein being the first to receive the Pfizer vaccine in an act broadcast live on television.
- On 22 December the Parliament rejects a bill to delay the deadline for passing the 2020 state budget by almost a week, thereby setting the country on course for new early elections, the fourth in two years.
- On 25 December Israel approves a third nationwide lockdown to try to halt the spread of the pandemic, starting on 27 December and for an initial period of two weeks.
- On 27 December thousands take to the streets again to protest against

the government, leading to unrest and arrests.

- On 27 December right-wing demonstrators protest in Jerusalem over the death on 21 December of a settler in the West Bank who was fleeing police after throwing stones at a group of Palestinians. The protesters are dispersed by police after throwing stones at a vehicle in which several Arab citizens are travelling and injuring 11 officers.
- On 30 December the Israeli spy Jonathan Pollard arrives in Israel after serving a 35-year prison sentence for spying when he was an intelligence analyst in the US military's Center for Counter Terrorism.

### Palestine

- On 2 December Israel transfers more than 1 billion dollars to the PNA in tax revenues collected on behalf of the Palestinian authorities, six months after the PNA decided not to accept the transfers, which account for 60% of the annual Palestinian budget, in protest against the West Bank annexation plans, currently on hold.
- On 7 December the Palestinian government imposes a full week-long lockdown as of 10 December in the governorates of Bethlehem, Nablus, Hebron and Tulkarm, after registering a spike in COVID-19 infections. The lockdown adds to the curfew in force throughout Palestine, which is extended for another two weeks.
- On 11 December the Gaza Strip goes into a full 48-hour lockdown in response to the rising number of COVID-19 infections.
- On 29 December armed Palestinian groups carry out what is described as an unprecedented military drill in the Gaza Strip.

### Conflicts between the Parties

- On 31 December the Israel Defense Forces annual report for 2020 registers attacks on 50 targets in Syrian territory, two thwarted attempts by Hezbollah to attack across the Lebanese border and

at least 176 rockets fired from Gaza into Israel, with some 300 targets in the Gaza Strip hit by the Israeli army in response. The report also counts 60 terrorist attacks in the West Bank, 1,500 stone-throwing incidents and 229 involving Molotov cocktails, 2,277 arrests, 50 closures of suspected arms production facilities, 38 attempts to cross from Gaza into Israeli territory and the discovery of a Hamas-built secret border tunnel.

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