

PALESTINE CHRONOLOGY 2008

JANUARY

Jan. 2: After a seven-year hiatus the Israeli-Palestinian Joint Economic Committee meets.

Jan. 8: Pres. Abbas and Israeli PM Olmert meet and instruct their teams to start negotiations on all final status issues.

- US Sec. of State Rice says there is no difference between settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, both being restricted by the Road Map.

Jan. 9-10: During separate meetings with PM Olmert in Jerusalem and Pres. Abbas in Ramallah, US President Bush outlines his vision of a future peace agreement, saying that "Swiss cheese is not going to work when it comes to the outline of a State and I mean that."

Jan. 10: Pres. Bush appoints Gen. William Fraser to monitor the Road Map implementation.

Jan. 15: During Israeli operations in Gaza City, 19 Palestinians are killed, incl. son of senior Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahhar.

Jan. 23: Thousands of Palestinians from Gaza cross into Egypt through a border wall blown up by militants.

Jan. 24: THE UNCHR adopts a resolution on human rights violations caused by Israeli military incursions in the OPT, particularly in the Gaza Strip.

Jan. 28: The European Commission announces the launching the Palestinian European Aid Management mechanism (PEGASE), a new instrument to channel EU and international assistance as a contribution to the building of a Palestinian State and as a follow-up to the current Temporary International Mechanism (TIM).

FEBRUARY

Feb.4: A suicide bomber blows himself up in the southern Israeli town of Dimona, killing an Israeli woman and wounding 11 others. Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades claim responsibility for the attack

Feb. 12: Hizbullah Dep. Sec.-Gen. Imad Mughniyah is killed in a bomb blast in a residential Damascus neighborhood, in what is widely believed to be an Israel assassination.

Feb.19: PM Fayyad rules out a peace accord with Israel this year, because talks were very slow over the past three months."

Feb. 23-24: At the 35th Session of the Arab Labor Conference held in Sharm El-Sheikh, the Min. of Labor and representatives of workers and employers of the Arab world express their solidarity with Palestine and call for respect of international legitimacy as the foundation for solving the Palestinian Question based on the principles laid down by the Arab summit conferences and out of the Arab countries' determination to continue to work by all means for the establishment of peace based on justice.

Feb. 24: Israeli and Palestinian expert-level negotiating teams meet, led by Israeli FM Tzipi Livni and Palestinian Chief Negotiator Ahmed Qrei'a, to discuss non-core issues.

MARCH

March 2: Pres. Abbas suspends peace talks with Israel following heavy Palestinian casualties in Gaza.

- The UNSC convenes emergency meeting on the Gaza Strip.

March 6: UNHCR calls for a stop to Israeli military attacks in the OPT and the firing of rockets.

March 7: Israeli army commander in the West Bank, Maj.-Gen. Shemny issues, with the full support of the DM Ehud Barak, an order to reclassify the status of Modi'in Illit settlement to that of a municipality.

March 9: PM Olmert approves construction of 1,100 new homes in settlements.

March 14: Israeli and Palestinian officials meet with US Envoy William Fraser to review Road Map obligations.

- The OIC Summit adopts a declaration, a communiqué and resolutions on Palestine, Al-Quds Al-Sharif and the Middle East peace process.

March 17: Israeli and Palestinian negotiators meet at Bet El to resume talks on how to coordinate civilian and security issues between Israel and the PA and plans to establish two new industrial zones.

March 23: After talks in Sana'a, Fateh (Azzam Al-Ahmad) and Hamas (Musa Abu Marzouq) sign a Yemeni-sponsored deal promising to revive direct talks after months of hostilities, but differences remain, with Pres. Abbas saying that Hamas must accept to end its control of the Gaza Strip before any dialogue could take place. The Sana'a Declaration states "We, the representatives of Fatah and Hamas, agree to the Yemeni initiative as a framework to resume dialogue between the two movements to return the Palestinian situation to what it was before the Gaza incidents," and affirms the "unity of the Palestinian people, territory and authority."

March 27: The UNHCR adopts a resolution demanding a halt to Israeli settlements.

March 29-30: At the Arab League Summit in Damascus, the member states declare that the offer of the Arab Peace Initiative extended to Israel in 2002 "is tied to Israel executing its commitments in the framework of international resolutions to achieve peace in the region" and indicate that they would reconsider the peace offer, given that there had been little progress on the Israeli side regarding its commitments. In his speech to the summit, Pres. Abbas expresses his pessimism over the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations launched at Annapolis in Nov. 2007, which, he said, "cannot continue under the Israeli bulldozers swallowing our land and building settlements and under the daily Israeli military operations". He also warns that if "we don't reach a solution by the end of this year, it means the whole region will be on the verge of a new era of tension and loss of confidence in peace"

March 30: During a visit by US Secretary of State Rice, Israel pledges to remove 50 West Bank roadblocks.

APRIL

April 1: The Yesha Settler Council says that it would continue to build in West Bank settlements even without the necessary government authorizations.

April 7: Pres. Abbas and PM Olmert resume face-to-face negotiations, agreeing to meet every two weeks.

April 9: Palestinian activists breach the border near the Nahal Oz terminal in Israel and kill two Israeli contractors; Israel cuts off fuel supplies to Gaza in response and kills at least 13 Gazans in subsequent attacks.

April 13: The Israeli cabinet approves 5,000 additional work permits for West Bank Palestinians.

April 15: Eight UN agencies express concern about critical Gaza fuel situation.

April 16: Three Israeli soldiers are killed in Gaza and at least 17 Gazans, incl. a *Reuters* cameraman, in clashes and Israeli air strikes.

April 18: Israel approves the reopening of 20 PA police stations in the West Bank.

April 21: After meeting former US Pres. Carter, Hamas leadership says it agrees to a Palestinian State within 1967 borders, but no to recognition of Israel, with politburo chief Khaled Masha'al saying "We agree to a [Palestinian] State on pre-1967 borders, with Jerusalem as its capital, with genuine sovereignty, without settlements but without recognizing Israel," and adding "We have offered a truce... of 10 years as a proof of recognition."

April 24: After talks in Cairo with Egypt's intelligence chief Omar Suleiman Hamas proposes a six-month ceasefire with Israel in the Gaza Strip, with an option to extend it afterward to the West Bank after an agreed and specified period of time. Israel dismisses the proposal.

- Pres. Bush meets with Pres. Abbas in Washington, assuring him that a Palestinian State is a high priority for me and my administration, a viable State, a State that doesn't look like Swiss cheese."

- Fuel shortage halts UNRWA food aid distribution for hundreds of thousand Palestinians in Gaza.

April 29: UN International Conference on Palestine Refugees opens in Paris.

MAY

May 2: Representatives of the Quartet, joined by Representative Tony Blair, meet in London to discuss the situation in the Middle East. They call upon Israel and the Palestinians to fulfill their obligations under the Road Map and to refrain from any steps that undermine confidence or could prejudice the outcome of negotiations.

May 3: Some 480 PA police deploy in Jenin as part of the PA's security plan.

May 5: Following her visit to the region, US Sec. of State Rice says the US would send monitors to study whether the removal of Israeli roadblocks was making life easier for Palestinians in the West Bank.

May 13: At a press conference in Jerusalem, Quartet Representative Tony Blair unveils an agreement between Israel and the PA, which includes a package of steps designed to allow greater movement in the West Bank, and help the Palestinian economy grow in a way in which he said would be consistent with protecting Israeli security.

May 15: Palestinians commemorate the 60th anniversary of the *Nakba*.

- US President Bush starts five-day tour of the Middle East.

May 19: French FM Kouchner confirms that France had had informal contacts with Hamas, saying "These are not relations, they are contacts. We must be able to talk if we want to play a role," and confirming a report in the daily *Le Figaro* that quoted a retired French diplomat as saying he had met with Hamas leaders Mahmoud Al-Zahhar and Ismail Haniyeh a month ago.

May 21: The Palestine Investment Conference opens in Bethlehem, bringing together more than 1,000 business persons and government officials from the WBGS, the Arab world and beyond. More than 100 investment projects, worth over \$1.0 billion, are introduced.

May 26: Pres. Abbas receives officials from Hamas in the Muqata'a in Ramallah, who deliver a letter from Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails calling for unity.

May 29: South African Archbishop Tutu leads a UNCHR-mandated fact-finding mission to the Gaza Strip.

- OCHA reports that the number of Israeli roadblocks has risen to 607 at end of April, up from 566 in Sept. 2007.

JUNE

June 3: The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People convenes a two-day United Nations International Meeting on the Question of Palestine in Malta aimed at

fostering greater international support for the creation of a climate conducive to the advancement of the permanent status negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

June 4: In a speech Pres. Abbas calls for national dialogue with Hamas to implement the Yemen initiative "to end the internal division that harms our people, [our] cause.

June 7: Senegal's Pres. Abdoulaye Wade, Chairman of the OIC, mediates reconciliation talks between Fateh and Hamas. asking among other things for an immediate ceasefire.(

June 19: Israel and Hamas reach an Egyptian-brokered cease-fire deal (*tahdi'ah*) to put an end to Qassam rocket fire as well as fuel peace talks, which is welcomed by the international community and accompanied with calls for both sides to fulfill their obligations.

June 24: Berlin Conference in Support of Palestinian Civil Security and the Rule of Law - attended by representatives from over 40 countries - secures funding commitments of \$242 million for various projects. Participants include PM Salam Fayyad, Israeli FM Livni, US Sec. of State Rice, Russian FM Sergey Lavrov and Quartet Representative Tony Blair.

- The Quartet also meets in Berlin to discuss the situation in the Middle East and reaffirm support for ongoing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, stressing the urgent need for tangible progress towards the shared goal of an agreement by the end of 2008.

June 30: *Yediot Ahronot* reports that the Israeli FM has instructed a number of officials not to visit Spain, as an international arrest warrant had been issued against them on suspicion of committing war crimes against Palestinians (A Spanish human rights organization had filed a case against Israeli officials involved in the 2002 assassination of Hamas member Salah Shehadeh, which killed 16 Palestinians in the same building). The list includes former DM Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, former Chief of Staff Moshe Ya'alon, and former PM Ariel Sharon.

- The Knesset approves a bill which mandated a national referendum or a two-thirds Knesset majority vote prior to a withdrawal from any territory under Israeli control.

JULY

July 1: The Knesset approved the government's decision to extend the validity of the Citizenship and Entry into Israel Law for another year until 31 July 2009.

July 7: The Israeli army begins four days of raids in Nablus, closing charities, schools, offices and shops allegedly linked to Hamas.

July 8: A Frequency Allocation Agreement between Israel and the PA enables Wataniya, a second mobile operator, to begin operations in the West Bank.

- Pres. Abbas meets with leaders of Palestinian factions in Syria, calls for an Arab League-sponsored national dialogue.

July 9: The G8 summit in Japan reiterates full support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations.

July 10: OCHA reports that 57% of the construction of the separation barrier has been completed.

July 12: PM Fayyad calls for the establishment of a unity government with Hamas.

July 15: French FM Bernard Kouchner calls for a "European Road Map" to help bring peace to the Middle East, saying: "It's not about making proposals contrary to the Americans, nor contrary to anyone... [The change of US leadership] will be the moment to propose a form of partnership that will take more account of the symbolic, and real, weight of the European Union... We will have to propose this particular Road Map to our American friends... This is about giving European foreign policy its rightful place."

July 22: As part of a world tour aimed at displaying his foreign policy chops, Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama arrives in Israel.

July 23: PA warns of a fiscal crisis due to a shortfall of pledged aid.

July 24: The Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee approves the construction of a new settlement - "Maskiot" settlement in the Jordan Valley - with an initial construction of 20 housing units.

July 28: After a five-year battle, the Israeli defense establishment agrees to dismantle a 2.4-km stretch of the separation barrier north of Qalqilya and move it closer to Green Line, thus returning 2,600 dunums of agricultural land to its Palestinian owners.

- The Knesset enacts Amendment 9 to the Citizenship Law, which permits the revocation of citizenship for "an action that entails a breach of trust vis-à-vis the State of Israel". It provides a very broad definition of "breach of trust", and although it could result in the statelessness of citizens, it does not require that an individual be criminally convicted of this action.

July 30: US Sec. of State Rice meets with Palestinian and Israeli negotiators in Washington.

- PM Olmert announces that he has decided not to contend in the Kadima primary election and would resign as soon as a new party leader was chosen, due to the criminal investigations in which he has been embroiled in recent months.

AUGUST

Aug. 3: Israel's Supreme Court gives the State 45 days to submit a new route for the separation barrier near Bil'in.

Aug. 4: *Ha'aretz* reports that a recent report by the Israeli branch of Physicians for Human Rights revealed that the Shin Bet had been trying to coerce Palestinians patients to provide information in exchange for medical treatment in Israel.

Aug. 9: · Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish dies after undergoing open heart surgery in Houston. The Cabinet holds a special session in Ramallah to honor Darwish, with PM Fayyad saying "With the departure of the homeland's knight who wrote sweet lines, the Palestinian people have lost one of its most prominent founders of the Palestinian cultural and national identity. One who eternalized with his poetry the Palestinian struggle, the suffering of a nation whose culture was doomed to be covered, marginalized and lost ... He told the whole world about Palestine's wounds, hope, insistence and pulse ... about its mountains, valleys and plains ... as well as fragrance of almond blossoms and more."

Aug. 13: Thousands of Palestinians attend the funeral procession of poet Mahmoud Darwish from the Muqataa to the Ramallah Cultural Palace, where he is buried.

Aug. 14: During a meeting with Pres. Abbas, PM Olmert rules out the return of any Palestine refugees as part of a future statehood deal, saying "the establishment of a Palestinian State is meant to provide an answer to the absorption of Palestinian refugees. Those refugees who are not returned to a Palestinian State will be dealt with by an international force."

Aug. 18: The Israeli Government approves the release of some 200 Palestinian prisoners.

Aug. 21: seven Palestinian factions (Palestinian Popular Struggle Front, Fateh, Fida, the Palestinian Arab Front, the Arab Liberation Front, the Palestinian Liberation Front, and the National Initiative and Popular Struggle Front) call for an immediate start of a comprehensive national dialogue to end the internal Palestinian crisis.

Aug. 23: Two boats carrying 44 pro-Palestinian activists from 17 countries arrive in the Gaza Strip from Cyprus after Israel allows them through, determined to draw attention to the blockade of Gaza. The boats are greeted by thousands of people waving Palestinian flags.

Aug. 27: Abie Nathan - Israeli peace pioneer, who flew solo to Egypt seeking reconciliation and founder of the Voice of Peace pirate station, dies in Tel Aviv at the age of 81.

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 5-6: At a two-day informal EU meeting in Avignon, France, EU FMs call for an active EU role in the coming months to support the Annapolis process.

Sept. 6: At an Arab League meeting in Cairo, Arab FMs urge the Arab League to help resolve intra-Palestinian conflict and end the continued violence between Fateh and Hamas.

Sept. 15: The report to the UNCHR by the head of high-level fact-finding mission, Archbishop Tutu, says the Nov. 2006 shelling of Beit Hanoun may have constituted a war crime.

Sept. 17: Israeli FM Tzipi Livni narrowly defeats chief rival Shaul Mofaz in the Kadima leadership race.

Sept. 24: A report published by a coalition of 21 aid agencies and human rights organizations, accuses the Quartet of having "lost its grip" on the Middle East peace process and calls on it to take "decisive action" and to "radically revise its existing approach" in order to avoid a further deterioration of the situation. The group also criticizes Quartet Representative Tony Blair for "not making sufficient progress in improving the lives of Palestinians."

Sept. 26: At the request of Saudi Arabia, the UNSC meets to address Israeli settlement activities.

- At its meeting in New York, the Quartet issues a statement in which it underlines its commitment to the irreversibility of the negotiations; to the creation of an independent, democratic and viable Palestinian State in the West Bank and Gaza, living in peace and security alongside Israel; and to an end to the conflict. The Quartet emphasizes the need for a renewed focus on improvements in the situation on the ground and stated that visible and tangible progress must accompany the negotiations.