

Middle East Notes

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

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[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes contains reports on efforts to restart peace negotiations, continued settlement activity, U.S. military aid to Israel, a highly recommended book by Pamela Olson, water restrictions on the West Bank, the connection between the independence of the Palestinian people and the possibility of long lasting independence for the Israelis, and other issues.

- The April 12 and April 21 CMEP Bulletins give background on Secretary of State Kerry's efforts to restart the Israeli Palestinian peace process, the Abbas Fayyad feud, the continuing possibility of a two-state solution and other issues.
- The Jews for Justice for Palestinians newsletter reprints two articles observing that dissatisfaction with a two-state approach to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict is tempered by the fact that the difficulties with a one-state approach appear at least as great, with neither Israelis nor Palestinians willing to give up their legitimate claims to self-determination
- Noam Sheizaf in +972 reflects on "occupation denial," noting that an Israeli decision to continue the occupation is illegitimate, even if it was reached through a democratic process.
- Jerry Merriman reviews *Fast Times in Palestine: A Love Affair with a Homeless Homeland* by Pamela Olson. [Middle East Notes highly recommend Olson's book for readers who wish to feel more the anguish and hope of the Palestinians and Israelis striving for justice and peace.]
- Pamela Olson comments in "If Americans Knew" that Israel, with a population of approximately 7.8 million, or a million fewer than the state of New Jersey, is among the world's most affluent nations, yet it receives approximately 10 percent of the U.S.'s foreign aid budget every year.
- In the spring issue of Tikkun, Michael Lerner gives his views on the outrageous decision of the Netanyahu government to build more settler housing in Area E1.
- In Ha'aretz, Lauren Gelfond Feldinger anticipates that the Palestinians are bracing for another dry summer. On average, West Bank Palestinians have access to about 70 liters of water a day per person; inside the Green Line, Israeli communities use about 300 liters per person.
- Paul Findley in the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs believes that President Obama, acting alone, can extricate Palestine, Israel and the United States from the seemingly inescapable quagmire in which all three are sinking.
- "Occupied Childhoods," a newly released report compiled by internationals working in the West Bank city of Hebron, documents an alarming rate of abuse of the rights of children by the IDF and military courts.
- The Israel Hayom newsletter notes that under 2014 budget proposal submitted by President Obama to Congress in April, Israel would receive \$3.4 billion in total military aid, including \$220 million for the Iron Dome anti-rocket system.
- Ori Nir writes in the New Jersey Jewish News that most Israelis today realize that holding on to the West Bank in perpetuity means perpetuating the occupation, the rule over another people, and that for Israelis to achieve long-term independence, real independence, they must secure independence for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.
- In his article, "In praise of emotion," Uri Avnery describes a recent gathering of Israelis and Palestinians to mourn those killed in the ongoing struggle, a unique spiritual event that can give hope to even the most cynical.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 12, 2012

Kerry persists in restarting peace process: For the third time in two months, United States Secretary of State John Kerry visited Israel and the West Bank in hopes of restarting negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians. According to Foreign Policy sources, "America's top diplomat is just beginning what will be a long push to restart the peace process."

While Kerry told press, "Nobody is entering this with any sense of naiveté," he later told staff at the U.S. consulate in Jerusalem, "I believe that if we can get on a track where people are working in good faith to address the bottom-line concerns, it is possible to be able to make progress and make peace."

In his second meeting with Kerry in two days, Netanyahu stood next to him and said, "I'm determined not only to resume the peace process with the Palestinians, but to make a serious effort to end this conflict once and for all." However, recent reports have raised doubt on that statement.

Shortly after Kerry left town, a senior Israeli official voiced opposition to Kerry's approach for resuscitating peace negotiations that focuses initially on just borders and security. Ha'aretz reports "a senior Israeli official...expressed considerable skepticism regarding Kerry's steps, and made cynical, slightly scornful comments regarding his attitude." The Israeli paper quoted the source as saying, "Kerry believes that he can bring about the solution, the treaty and the salvation...He thinks that the conflict is primarily over territory...and that is wrong."

Instead of discussions beginning with territory, the unnamed source said that Israel's demands for negotiations: addressing of all the core issues of the final settlement, including recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, and a solution to the refugee problem. The source did not mention Jerusalem.

In Ramallah, Kerry offered Palestinian President Abbas incentives for agreeing to restart talks. Palestinian officials told Ma'an News that Kerry offered to release all U.S. funds to the Palestinians and to ensure Israel does not withhold Palestinian tax revenue in the future as well as allowing Palestinians to build more freely in Area C of the West Bank.

Abbas's political adviser told the AFP that before agreeing to enter negotiations, the Palestinian president "wants to know, through a map to be presented by Benjamin Netanyahu to Kerry, what the prime minister's view of a two-state solution would be, especially the borders."

Former congressman and president of the S. Daniel Abraham Center Robert Wexler interprets the reluctance by both sides as determining the Obama administration's seriousness in restarting talks. He says, "Both parties are now seeking to ascertain is how persistent is the administration going to be? How much skin are Kerry and Obama prepared to put in the game? If both sides perceive that both Kerry and Obama are willing to bleed some, then the parties will become more accommodating."

It seems that Kerry intends to continue his efforts for the foreseeable future. Wexler added, "For the time being, [the Israeli and Palestinian] strategy will be not to agree with what Secretary Kerry is promoting... Kerry's team is developing a 2, 3, 4 year strategy, because they understand all the obstacles that will be presented. This is the only reasonable course that has any likelihood of success and that's a reflection of the dire situation that we're in." ...

[Read the entire April 12 Bulletin here.](#)

Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 21, 2013

Kerry: Two-state solution has two years left: On [April 17], Secretary of State John Kerry stressed the urgency of the two-state solution giving it a two year expiration date: “I can guarantee you that I am committed to this because I believe the window for a two-state solution is shutting [...] I think we have some period of time — a year to year-and-a-half to two years, or it’s over.” Kerry explained that the main message he has taken from his recent meetings with Israeli and Palestinian political leaders is the seriousness of the conflict demands quick action.

Founder and director of Terrestrial Jerusalem Daniel Seidemann praised the statement on Twitter, writing, “Kerry has pierced the state of soft denial that has long dominated DC, restoring stark empirical realities to the Israel Palestine calculus.” He went on to share his own view reflected in a Terrestrial Jerusalem map publication: “There are those who say: ‘the two-state solution is already dead;’ others assert: ‘nothing is irreversible, and the two-state solution cannot be destroyed.’ We believe that neither of these claims are correct.” Seidemann’s belief, in the same vein as Kerry, states that a two-state solution is possible, but will not remain so for much longer.

Sigal Samuel of the Daily Beast connects Kerry’s statement to an announcement from Israeli Housing Minister Uri Ariel less than 24 hours earlier. Ariel declared “in another year and a half apartments will be built in E1,” which references the controversial E1 area of the West Bank. Israeli construction in E1 is seen by many as the absolute termination of the two-state solution, as it cuts off East Jerusalem from the West Bank. Seidemann calls construction in E1 the “fatal heart attack of the two-state solution,” and argues that settlements there completely undermine the possibility of a contiguous Palestinian state. Netanyahu ordered construction to begin in the E1 settlement area in January, shortly before Israeli elections on January 22. This was a popular move with settler groups but it has serious implications. Constructing Israeli settlements in the E1 area will effectively separate the northern West Bank area from the southern areas of the West Bank, making a Palestinian state difficult, if not impossible.

In his piece, Samuel stresses not only the significance of Secretary Kerry’s words, but what actions the U.S. government might take in the coming months to show the situation is urgent.

Could Fayyad resignation open or close doors? After much speculation, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas accepted Prime Minister Salam Fayyad’s resignation ... causing United States Secretary of State John Kerry one more headache as he tries to revive the peace process.

Fayyad can claim many accomplishments during his time as prime minister. The Economist reports, “He dismantled the PA’s militant bands and rolled out eight new battalions of Jordanian-trained forces. He restored law and order to cities which had crackled with gunfire since the onset of an armed intifada in 2000. Thanks to the dissolution of parliament, he ruled by decree.”

Fayyad’s U.S. education and International Monetary Fund background have made him popular among international donors who often are weary about the corruption in the PA. International donors have bought into his state building programs and high level of transparency, making him the preferred politician to deal with. Now that financial support could be in jeopardy. Last week, European sources told Ha’aretz “removing Fayyad from his position could have a negative effect on donations and funding to the Palestinian Authority.”

According to some sources, this quagmire is one that Secretary Kerry partially hastened. During his most recent trip to the region, Kerry made multiple efforts to convince the prime minister to stay and implored both Fayyad and Abbas to put aside their differences and continue to work together. Kerry also placed a phone call to Abbas urging him to reject Fayyad’s resignation. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

2) Which way forward? What kind of state(s)? **Jews for Justice for Palestinians, April 16, 2013**

Dissatisfaction with a two-state approach to resolving the Israel-Palestine conflict is tempered by the fact that the difficulties with a one-state approach appear at least as great, with neither Israelis nor Palestinians willing to give up their legitimate claims to self-determination. And in international diplomacy the two-state approach is the only game in town. Many discussions are currently taking place in Israel-Palestine about this dilemma and a search for other approaches: 1. Oren Yiftachel, author of *Ethnocracy: Land and Identity Politics in Israel/Palestine*, elaborates on his idea for a confederation as a possible solution to the colonial deadlock he diagnoses; and 2. Jeff Halper of Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) reflects on the deafening silence which greeted ICAHD's move to endorsing one state last year, provides an overview of who holds what position, and rethinks the options.

Colonial deadlock or confederation for Israel/Palestine? **Oren Yiftachel, published by the Middle East Institute**

At the beginning of 2013 the Israeli-Palestinian scene is once again confusing. On the one hand, Israeli leaders, including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and former Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, have announced in recent times their agreement to the principle of "two states for two peoples." Even the hardline Hamas has occasionally expressed support for the Arab Peace Initiative, implying a two state future. The UN General Assembly's overwhelming support in November 2012 of the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders was another encouraging sign for peace and the end of Israeli colonial rule of Palestine.

On the other hand, concrete and political factors have been working precisely in the opposite direction. Israel has continued its suffocating siege of Hamas' Gaza, and in response to Palestinian shelling of Israel's southern regions, Israel recently (again) caused widespread destruction during Operation "Column of Defense." This was answered with renewed hardening of Hamas statements, with leader Khaled Mash'al during his December 2012 visit to Gaza calling again to destroy the state of Israel and "liberate the entire Palestine, from River to Sea." ...

[Read Yiftachel's entire piece on the Middle East Institute website.](#)

Towards an end-game in Palestine/Israel – while imagining the future **Jeff Halper, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)** **April 9, 2013**

Last September ICAHD, which had long argued that the two-state solution was dead, decided to bite the bullet and endorse a one-state solution. We first circulated a draft among our Palestinian partners for comment. The reaction was deafening in its silence. Either fewer of our counterparts than we thought were willing to abandon the two-state solution, the goal of their national liberation struggle these past 25 years, for one state, or they objected to our framing it within a framework of bi-nationalism. In the end we pulled back, putting out instead a position paper in which we tried to insert a critical Israeli voice into the one-state formulation. It is clear that despite the fact that most Palestinians realize that the two-state solution is gone, they have as yet to shift to a one-state solution in meaningful numbers.

While I understand the dilemma of moving from a solution that, in principle at least, is acceptable to the international community to one that has little chance of being accepted, a nagging feeling of frustration and fear has dogged me ever since. How could we be in the midst of a political struggle without a political end-game? What do we say to political decision-makers, the general public or our own activists when they ask: What is it exactly that you want? ...

[Read Halper's entire piece on the ICAHD website.](#)

3) On “occupation denial” and the case for international pressure on Israel

Noam Sheizaf, +972, April 9, 2013

“Occupation denial” is the latest trend in the Israeli (and American) conversation regarding the conflict. Conservative scholars are presenting a revisionist reading of the Fourth Geneva Convention, claiming that it never applied to the West Bank and Gaza, while politicians are claiming that the term “occupation” is biased.

Yet all those verbal and legal gymnastics won’t change reality: the term occupation does not relate to land alone, but also to the people living on it (and the ones who used to live on it). The undeniable truth is that under Israeli sovereignty, there are currently two distinct populations: one which enjoys all legal rights and privileges, and one which is held under a military dictatorship for 45 years (even if the in the last two decades some elements of the military control are being executed through a Ramallah-based proxy, and with European and American funding).

Those who think that the political problem at our doorstep will simply disappear if they call the Palestinians “Arabs” and the occupied West Bank “Eretz Yisrael” (“Land of Israel”), are deluding themselves. I also believe that Hebron and Bethlehem are part of our historic land just as Tel Aviv and Netanya are, but there are currently millions of people with no rights living there, and this fact is way more important. There are Israelis who get that – even on the right – but the majority of the public and the political system prefers to live in fantasy land.

Peace activist Gershon Baskin reminded us ... that no Knesset nor any Israeli government has ever formally adopted the two-state solution. There were several prime ministers who made some real steps in this direction – while others did all they could to avoid it. At the same time, Israel has [to] strengthen its hold on “the territories.” Even during the era of the disengagement and the settlement freeze, the area slated for construction projects for Jews has grown, as did the number of settlers. The injustice on the ground increased, but every election the Israeli public has granted this policy its stamp of approval.

This should be clear: an Israeli decision to continue the occupation is illegitimate, even if it was reached through a democratic procedure. Democracy has no meaning when the population at hand is not allowed to take part in it. Israelis cannot “democratically” decide to keep Palestinians as their prisoners; to prevent them from traveling freely; to try them in military courts; to hold them under a military regime which views them as an enemy rather than a civilian authority which seeks to serve them. They are not objects, but human beings, and they have rights.

Many nations have not gained independence, but even the people of Tibet or the Kurds – let alone the Basques or the Catalans – are citizens of a country. Israel won’t give the Palestinian citizenship nor independence. All it offers is endless negotiations that will either lead or not lead to a point in which millions of people will receive those very rights that weren’t ours to deny.

For these reasons, international intervention in favor of the Palestinians is not only legitimate but desirable. Needless to say, human rights campaigns and struggles over rights of minorities – and especially native minorities like the Palestinians – always have an international dimension in them, because the ethnic group in power is almost never happy or willing to hand over those rights. This much was true in South Africa, China and even the segregated American South. In all those cases, embarrassing the authorities and exposing their immoral policies was considered a legitimate and even desirable strategy among political activists.

The prolonged Israeli occupation, the Jewish public’s indifference to the status quo and the self-perception of Israelis as part of the democratic West create added justification in the attempt to mobilize international public opinion and institutions for the cause of ending the occupation, despite all the rage that such actions might create among the Israeli public.

4) [Book review: Fast Times in Palestine](#)

Jerry Merriman, Mondoweiss, April 23, 2013

Pamela J. Olson's recently-published book, *Fast Times in Palestine*, is an important and welcome addition to the books written from personal experience living in the occupied Palestinian territories. Part travelogue, part unflinching witness to the brutality of the Israeli occupation and colonization of the West Bank, and part "love affair with a homeless homeland" (the book's subtitle), it was originally self-published in 2011 and has now been published by Seal Press. Olson began a U.S. book tour in March, and she hopes (according to the website for her book, www.pamolson.org) to eventually tour in Canada, Europe and the Middle East.

The purpose of her book, as Olson writes on her website, is to give the reader "a sophisticated understanding of the Israel/Palestine conflict in a way that is enjoyable and accessible to all." She accomplishes this by combining the engaging story of her experiences living in the West Bank with a well-documented account of the grim reality of life under occupation. While acknowledging that terrorism from both sides has caused unimaginable suffering, Olson does what relatively few in the West have been willing to do, and that is to also acknowledge the conflict's staggering imbalance of power. Israel's armed forces, used to dominate, impede and assault Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza, are among the strongest in the world. Backed by enormous U.S. financial support, to the tune of billions of dollars year after year, and the protective shield of the U.S. veto of any UN resolution critical of Israel, the illegal colonization in the West Bank as well as Israel's flagrant human rights violations are essentially given a seal of approval.

The arc of Olson's experiences in the West Bank ranges from harvesting olives to working as writer and editor for the Palestine Monitor, from socializing with new friends to volunteering as foreign press coordinator for Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi's presidential campaign, from the absurd and often cruel reality of checkpoints to learning that a close Palestinian friend has been taken away by Israeli soldiers, from the beginning of the Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) movement to being hit by a stun grenade during a peaceful protest against the land grab of Israel's invasive separation barrier, the Wall. For two years, Olson lived with and processed an overload of sensory and emotional input. What she has distilled into her book is her love and admiration for a people who have not only endured, but who have preserved their warmth and generosity in spite of the decades of oppressive occupation.

Read *Fast Times in Palestine* for the pleasure of sharing the company of Olson and the many people who welcome her into their lives, and for the sense the book gives of what has been, what is, and what could be.

5) [The staggering cost of Israel to Americans](#)

Pamela Olson, Information Clearing House – If Americans Knew, April 2, 2013

Israel has a population of approximately 7.8 million, or a million fewer than New Jersey. It is among the world's most affluent nations, with a per capita income similar to that of the European Union. Israel's unemployment rate of 5.6 percent is much better than [the U.S.'s] 9.1 percent, and Israel's net trade, earnings, and payments is ranked 48th in the world while the U.S. sits at a dismal 198th.

Yet Israel receives approximately 10 percent of [the U.S.'s] foreign aid budget every year. The U.S. has, in fact, given more aid to Israel than it has to all the countries of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean combined—which have a total population of over a billion people. And foreign aid is just one component of the staggering cost of our alliance with Israel.

Given the tremendous costs, it is critical to examine why we lavish so much aid on Israel, and whether it is worth Americans' hard-earned tax dollars. But first, let's take a look at what our alliance with Israel truly costs.

Before the Iraq war in 2003

Direct foreign aid: According to the Congressional Research Service, the amount of official U.S. aid to Israel since its founding in 1948 tops \$112 billion, and in the past few decades it has been on the order of \$3 billion per year. (In 2011, for example, this amounted to over \$8.2 million every single day.)

But this ... is only part of the story. For one thing, Israel gets its ... money at the start of each year, unlike other nations. This is significant: It means Israel can start earning interest on the money right away. And it costs the U.S. more than the typical year-end disbursements because the U.S. government operates at a deficit, so it must borrow this money to pay Israel and then pay interest on the amount all year.

Israel is also the only recipient of U.S. military aid that is allowed to use a significant portion annually to purchase products made by Israeli companies instead of U.S. companies. ...

In addition, the U.S. gives roughly \$2 billion per year to Egypt and Jordan in aid packages arranged largely in exchange for peace treaties with Israel. The treaties don't include justice for Palestinians, and are therefore deeply unpopular with the local populations.

On top of this, the U.S. gives roughly half a billion to the Palestinian Authority each year, much of it used to rebuild infrastructure destroyed by Israel and to bolster an economy stifled by the Israeli occupation. This would be unnecessary if Israel were to end the occupation and allow the Palestinians to build a functioning and self-sustaining economy.

Yet there's still much more to the story, because parts of U.S. aid to Israel are buried in the budgets of various U.S. agencies, mostly the Department of Defense. For example, since at least 2006, the American defense budget has included between \$130 and \$235 million per year for missile defense programs in Israel.

In all, direct U.S. disbursements to Israel amount to approximately 10 percent of all U.S. aid abroad, even though Israelis only make up 0.001 percent of the world's population. In other words, on average, Israelis receive 10,000 times more U.S. foreign aid per capita than other people throughout the world, despite the fact that Israel is one of the world's more affluent nations. And that number rises significantly when one considers disbursements to Egypt, Jordan, and the Palestinian Authority and Defense spending on behalf of Israel. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) More wars for the Middle East?

Rabbi Michael Lerner, Tikkun

“This means war,” proclaimed one of my friends. She was referring to the outrageous decision of the Netanyahu government to build more settler housing in Area E1, the area that would create the Jewish settler circle around Jerusalem and thereby make it impossible for Jerusalem to be the capital, not only of the Israeli state but also of the proposed Palestinian state that was supposed to emerge from negotiations. She feared that West Bank Palestinians would resort to war in response to Netanyahu’s decision.

What my friend seemed to have forgotten is that the Palestinians have no army, no air force, no navy, and no long-range missiles capable of accurately striking targets inside Israel. Yes, they can once again resort to the kind of assaults that come periodically from Gaza or the intifada-style acts of terror against Israeli civilians. But these responses of the powerless inevitably provide the justification for the mass slaughter of innocents that we witnessed once again when Israel bombed Gaza in November 2012. More children were killed in that latest Israeli assault on Gaza than in the horrible and outrageous murder of children in Newtown, Connecticut, a few weeks later, but there was barely a peep about the death of the innocents in Gaza in either Israeli or U.S. newspapers.

“Still, Israel must be crazy to do this,” argued my friend. “Don’t they understand that the Palestinian Authority might collapse, or that the Palestinian Parliament might eventually be taken over by Hamas as more and more Palestinians despair of any two state solution?”

But that, it appears, is perfect from the standpoint of the extreme rightists who continue to set the agenda for Israel, despite the strong showing for moderates in the January 2013 election. The Right wants Hamas to appear to be the voice of the Palestinian people, because to the extent that it is, the internal pressure for compromise and accommodation of the needs of Palestinians diminishes almost to zero. As it is, a large majority of Israelis fear that Palestinians want a state for the sole reason of preparing for a future war to push the Jews into the Mediterranean sea!

In the most moderate circles I have heard intelligent and otherwise quite decent people tell me that “deep in their hearts, the Palestinians wish there were no Jews in the Middle East.” I know that such feelings toward a group that is exercising unfair power over another are common among oppressed minorities. Yet I also know that the perception of such feelings is often rooted not in reality but in the projections of the oppressors, who attribute to those over whom they hold power (to kill, to limit travel, to withhold taxes, to harass) the same ethical insensitivity that they themselves exhibit. And the more Hamas speaks for the Palestinian people, the more Jews’ fears get confirmed, as they were in early December 2012, when the Hamas political bureau chief, exiled after Israel unsuccessfully tried several times to kill him, reasserted that “Palestine is ours from the river to the sea and from the south to the north . . . there will be no concession on an inch of the land.” Many Jews’ fears grew as the bureau chief then went on to denounce the strategy of negotiations with Israel (the strategy followed by the Palestinian Authority) and to praise armed struggle as the only path that could win.

The role of Hamas: I deplore Hamas’s commitment to armed struggle. Even though I understand why people who have little protection from Israeli expansionism in the West Bank and its blockade of Gaza feel attracted to reliance on violence, I think it a moral and strategic error. I can also understand why Israelis, drenched by their media with an endless repetition of these kinds of statements from Hamas, can feel terrified. All the more so when rockets like the ones launched last November fly toward Tel Aviv and Jerusalem (however poorly aimed and easily shot down by Israel’s “Iron Dome”), restimulating the terror that underlies the Israeli psyche and manifests as post-traumatic stress disorder. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) The politics of water: Palestinians bracing for another dry summer

Lauren Gelfond Feldinger, Ha'aretz, April 13, 2013

Deep beneath the Israeli coastline and the West Bank mountains, groundwater flows back and forth in ancient, natural stone basins, without impediment from the borders, barriers or checkpoints that separate Israelis from Palestinians. Above ground, transboundary water, primarily controlled by Israel, streams into Israeli faucets year-round, but into West Bank Palestinian faucets only sometimes. Water shortages in Palestinian towns and villages are expected to begin in the next weeks, as the weather warms up.

Who owns and can benefit from the shared waters of the three sub-basins of the Mountain Aquifer system and the upper Jordan River basin? Is it the entry or exit point, or direction of the flow of the water, or is it the precedent of pre-1967 use that determines ownership? Since Israeli-Palestinian final-status negotiations to resolve such questions have still not taken place, the Emergency Water, Sanitation and Hygiene group – a coalition of 28 international NGOs working locally on Palestinian water- and sanitation-related projects – launched several campaigns to raise awareness of West Bank water shortages. EWASH's summer challenge, kicked off last year, wasn't as theatrical as Hollywood actor Matt Damon's recent call to boycott toilets until global water scarcity ends, but participants were asked to make sacrifices.

With the help of partner organizations, particularly the Middle East Children's Alliance in San Francisco, EWASH signed-on 130 volunteers from the United States, Canada, and seven European countries to restrict themselves to 24 liters of water during one 24-hour period. On average, West Bank Palestinians have access to about 70 liters a day per person, although in some areas availability is as low as 15 liters, depending on the season. In contrast, Israeli citizens inside the Green Line or in West Bank communities utilize around 280-300 liters per person a day year-round, according to rights organizations, water NGOs and the Palestinian Water Authority. (The Israel Water Authority did not respond to repeated requests from Ha'aretz to confirm the figures and comment on West Bank water shortages.)

Those who volunteered to limit their water usage ranged from college students to retirees, and included Christian clerics, and Jewish, environmental and social-justice activists, recruited by the participating water organizations, via mailings, word of mouth, and social media. Semi-retired factory worker Jenefer Israel, 52, of California, said 25 liters was the bare minimum she could use, even though she gave up her shower and asked a family member to tend to her animals and vegetable garden. She used 14 liters to flush the toilet twice, nine liters to disinfect her goats' milking equipment, and two liters for drinking, washing hands, preparing food and brushing her teeth.

Eleanor Roffman, 69, a professor of psychology and counseling at Lesley University in Massachusetts, had to give up her daily shower, laundry and dish-washing she said. Roffman and Israel said it was manageable – but only because it was for one day. Insurance company employee Franceso Penzo, 39, of Venice, Italy said the experience made him decide to limit his water usage every day and to work to help raise awareness about West Bank suffering. "In Italy I can choose to reduce the water I use [but] the Palestinians have no choice," Penzo told Ha'aretz.

Indeed, in the West Bank village of Beit Jala, situated in the Bethlehem district near Jerusalem, Juliet Bannoura, 34, a mother of 2-year-old twins, is dreading the long days when it gets hot and her tap goes dry. "Every year it is worse than the year before. Sometimes the water goes off for 10 or 15 or 20 days, and sometimes for two months," Bannoura said. "You never know." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) Tough love can bring a just peace - Special Report

Paul Findley, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, April 2013

President Barack Obama, acting alone, can extricate Palestine, Israel and the United States from the seemingly inescapable quagmire in which all three are sinking. Neither Congress, Palestine, nor Israel is able and willing to act. To make peace possible, Obama must issue an executive order suspending all types of U.S. aid to Israel and Palestine until a two-state solution is effected.

This powerful act of tough love will promptly bring Israel unprecedented peace and security at home and abroad. It will also right a terrible wrong by rescuing Palestinians from nearly a half-century of oppression. But Obama must act promptly, as his power may soon dwindle.

Years ago I heard a congressional colleague challenge the famous Israeli Gen. Moshe Dayan: "General, our government gives Israel money, arms and advice. Your government accepts the money and arms but rejects the advice. If our government offered money and arms only if Israel accepted the advice, what would your government do?" Without hesitation, Dayan responded, "We would accept your advice."

Would Israel's answer today be the same as Dayan predicted? The answer is yes. These days, Israelis feel as dependent on U.S. support as in the Dayan era, probably more so. Their near-isolation in world councils was displayed recently by the overwhelming UN General Assembly vote supporting Palestinian statehood. When U.S. aid is suspended, Israelis will suffer near-panic until their government accepts Obama's demands.

To assure prompt success, I recommend the aid suspension be comprehensive and kept in full effect until the following requirements are met:

- Israel must recognize Palestine's sovereignty over all its territory seized in the 1967 war, and all Israeli personnel and settlers must leave, except those who possess valid pre-1967 claims or are approved to remain as foreign nationals.

Obama must issue an executive order suspending all types of U.S. aid to Israel and Palestine until a two-state solution is effected.

- Palestine and Israel must sign a peace treaty prohibiting cross-border violence and permit peaceable access to cross-border religious sites.
- In addition, Palestine must agree to discuss land-swaps mentioned in the Geneva Accord that followed approval of UN Resolution 242. Israel must accept a Palestinian-controlled highway connecting Gaza with the West Bank and reaffirm refugee rights under UN Resolution 194.

Once executive order requirements are met each party will realize great benefit: ISRAEL will be strengthened, because over six million Arabs now under occupation will no longer be within territory it controls. This assures Israel's long-term survival as a Jewish-majority state. And, for the first time in history, Israelis can expect true security at home, a prospect unthinkable today; Arab states long ago agreed to normalize relations with Israel when Palestine becomes truly independent. The Jewish state will also be free from serious domestic demands for territorial expansion and from the economic burden of maintaining the Palestinian occupation.

PALESTINIANS will enjoy full citizenship for the first time since the end of World War II. They will attain peaceful relations with all nations and the dignity of self-government in a truly independent state. Iran, pleased at Palestine's independence, will have less reason—perhaps none—to oppose the Jewish state.

THE UNITED STATES, for the first time in over 40 years, will be liberated from complicity in Israel's unlawful treatment of Arabs. Hostile groups like al-Qaeda will lose much of their power to recruit, as well as their stated reason for being. Any specter of religious war between West and East will fade.

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Occupied childhoods: Impact of the actions of Israeli soldiers on Palestinian children in H2 (Occupied Hebron) during February, March and April 2013

[Full report available here.](#)

From Christian Peacemaker Teams: A newly released report compiled by internationals working in the West Bank city of Hebron documents an alarming rate of abuse of the rights of children. Human rights workers in H2, the portion of the city under Israeli military control, have witnessed 47 detentions or arrests of children age 15 and under by soldiers since the start of February. Other violations documented in the report include conducting war training when children are present, delaying children and teachers as they pass checkpoints to access schools, detaining children in adult facilities, questioning children without the presence of an adult, and blindfolding children in detention.

Occupied childhoods: Impact of the actions of Israeli soldiers on Palestinian children in H2 (Occupied Hebron) during February, March and April 2013 documents the alarming regularity of soldiers violating the rights of children to access education, to play, to have a parent, guardian or lawyer present when detained, and to move freely on their streets.

Documentation in the report was collected by three human rights organizations working in Hebron. Christian Peacemaker Teams, International Solidarity Movement, and Ecumenical Accompaniment Programme in Israel and Palestine all maintain teams in Hebron in order to provide protective presence and documentation in civilian neighborhoods.

The arrest on March 20, 2013 of 27 children outside a Hebron elementary school has drawn attention to the extreme vulnerability of children living in occupied Hebron. Human rights workers in the city point out however that the mass arrest is far from an isolated event. All of the children in the neighborhoods in and around Hebron's Old City must pass through military checkpoints to reach school, clinics and markets.

The report calls upon Duty Bearers to assure the human rights of children are respected. As Occupying Power the State of Israel is responsible for abiding by international law and for protecting the specific rights of children. Rights workers in Hebron call upon relevant UN agencies and NGOs to carry out their mandate by providing protection for children, and to pressure the State of Israel to change its policy vis-à-vis children in the Old City and H2.

10) [Israel aid remains untouched in 2014 U.S. budget proposal](#)

Israel Hayom newsletter, April 11, 2013

Under 2014 budget proposal submitted by U.S. President Barack Obama to Congress on Wednesday, Israel would receive \$3.4 billion in total military aid, including \$220 million for the Iron Dome anti-rocket system. Israel would receive \$3.4 billion in total military aid under the 2014 U.S. budget proposal sent to Congress by President Barack Obama on Wednesday, virtually unchanged from its current level of military aid from the U.S. Obama's proposal includes \$3.1 billion in general military aid for Israel, similar to 2013, plus a separate request for \$220 million to finance the Iron Dome anti-rocket defense system. In 2013, funding for Iron Dome was not included in the president's original budget proposal, but \$210 million was added later on by Congress.

Obama's 2014 proposal also allocates \$96 million for joint U.S.-Israel research and development projects, including the David's Sling and Arrow missile defense systems. The overall budget proposal that Obama submitted to Congress on Wednesday totaled \$3.8 trillion. The proposed budget hopes to tame galloping deficits by raising taxes on the wealthy and trimming benefit programs. The proposal includes \$1.8 trillion in new deficit cuts over the next decade as the U.S. tries to reduce its debt.

**11) [Israel at 65: Restoring a sustainable future](#)
Ori Nir, New Jersey Jewish News, April 15, 2013**

Early Israelis were filled with pride in 1958 when a monumental effort to dry the Houla wetlands was completed. For seven years, under Syrian shelling that claimed the lives of 40 people, Israeli and British engineers dried more than 15,000 acres of marshes, hoping to secure a vast piece of land for agriculture. Drying the Houla wetland was perceived at the time as the purest, boldest manifestation of the Zionist ethos of *kibush ha-shmamah* ("Conquering the Wilderness").

Before long, Israelis recognized that this complex environmental engineering project was a disaster rather than a feat. The acidic soil was unfit for agriculture. The peat kept self-combusting. Nitrogen compounds, sunken in the marshes for thousands of years, were now released into the Sea of the Galilee, contaminating the water, killing fish and increasing the growth of unwanted seaweed. Flora and fauna, some of them unique to the marshes, were demolished, and several species became extinct. An important habitat for migratory birds was destroyed.

The good news is that in the early 1990s, after years of damage and remorse, the Israeli government and the Jewish National Fund, the same entities that led the campaign to dry the Houla, decided to re-flood it. The success was immense. The birds returned, as did some species that were presumed extinct. With them came the tourists. Today the Houla is a birdwatchers' paradise. It boasts more than 200 species of birds. Hundreds of thousands of migratory birds stop here on their way between Europe and Africa. Due to smart engineering and some feeding tricks, tourists can see and photograph huge cranes and storks, in the thousands, from a very short distance, only a couple of hours' drive north of Tel Aviv.

I visited the Houla wetlands during Passover with my family. The migratory birds have already flown northwest, leaving behind fish and large otters. Still, the marshes were packed two weeks ago with Israeli tourists steering bicycles and golf carts. The very Israeli lingual mixture of Arabic, Russian, and Hebrew in various accents, punctuated by a symphony of cellphone ringtones, filled the placid paths and the picnic areas.

It was a celebration of the beautiful Israel. It was also a celebration of the reversibility of folly.

Unbearable albatross: Israel turns 65 this week. There is much to celebrate. For a small country that faces a multitude of complicated challenges, Israel is a success story, in so many ways. But successful countries – like successful people – are not immune to folly.

In 1967, Israelis were filled with pride when they conquered the land of the Bible. The return to the land of the Jewish forefathers was a fulfillment of a Zionist ethos.

But as the conquest of the Houla "wilderness" turned disastrous, so did the conquering of the West Bank. So much so, that today most Israelis realize that for their country to survive as a Jewish state that is also a democracy, it must rid itself of the occupation of the West Bank. Most Israelis today realize that holding on to the West Bank in perpetuity means perpetuating the occupation, the rule over another people, and that for Israelis to achieve long-term independence, real independence, they must secure independence for a Palestinian state in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

Most Israelis recognize that although the West Bank is the land of the Bible, holding on to it in perpetuity is an increasingly unbearable albatross around Israel's neck, on that denies Israel future independence and prosperity.

I was in Israel days after President Obama's visit. Many Israelis were still talking about the historic speech he gave in Jerusalem, in which he reminded Israelis of the toll they are paying for the occupation. President Obama reminded Israelis that despite all their accomplishments, they are not truly independent. "Given the frustration in the international community, Israel must reverse an undertow of isolation," the president said. His words reverberated among Israelis who know that the occupation is unsustainable. Occupying another people, in perpetuity, is not in Israel's true nature. Reversing the folly that originated in Israel's indisputable military success of 1967 will take much more than re-flooding the swamps. But for a country like Israel, with inexhaustible reservoirs of resourcefulness and ingenuity, with its can-do attitude, this too is doable.

12) In praise of emotion
Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, April 20, 2013

IT WAS a moving experience. Moments that spoke not only to the mind, but also – and foremost – to the heart. Last Sunday, on the eve of Israel's Remembrance Day for the fallen in our wars, I was invited to an event organized by the activist group Combatants for Peace and the Forum of Israeli and Palestinian Bereaved Parents.

The first surprise was that it took place at all. In the general atmosphere of discouragement of the Israeli peace camp after the recent elections, when almost no one dared even to mention the word peace, such an event was heartening.

The second surprise was its size. It took place in one of the biggest halls in the country, Hangar 10 in Tel-Aviv's fair grounds. It holds more than 2000 seats. A quarter of an hour before the starting time, attendance was depressingly sparse. Half an hour later, it was choke full. (Whatever the many virtues of the peace camp, punctuality is not among them.)

The third surprise was the composition of the audience. There were quite a lot of white-haired old-timers, including myself, but the great majority was composed of young people, at least half of them young women. Energetic, matter-of-fact youngsters, very Israeli.

I felt as if I was in a relay race. My generation passing the baton on to the next. The race continues.

BUT THE outstanding feature of the event was, of course, its content. Israelis and Palestinians were mourning together for their dead sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, victims of the conflict and wars, occupation and resistance (a.k.a. terror.)

An Arab villager spoke quietly of his daughter, killed by a soldier on her way to school. A Jewish mother spoke of her soldier son, killed in one of the wars. All in a subdued voice. Without pathos. Some spoke Hebrew, some Arabic. They spoke of their first reaction after their loss, the feelings of hatred, the thirst for revenge. And then the slow change of heart. The understanding that the parents on the other side, the Enemy, felt exactly like them, that their loss, their mourning, their bereavement was exactly as their own.

For years now, bereaved parents of both sides have been meeting regularly to find solace in each other's company. Among all the peace groups acting in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are, perhaps, the most heart-lifting.

IT WAS not easy for the Arab partners to get to this meeting. At first, they were denied permission by the army to enter Israel. Gabi Lasky, the indomitable advocate of many peace groups (including Gush Shalom), had to threaten with an application to the Supreme Court, just to obtain a limited concession: 45 Palestinians from the West Bank were allowed to attend.

(It is a routine measure of the occupation: before every Jewish holiday the West Bank is completely cut off from Israel – except for the settlers, of course. This is how most Palestinians become acquainted with Jewish holidays.)

What was so special about the event was that the Israeli-Arab fraternization took place on a purely human level, without political speeches, without the slogans which have become, frankly, a bit stale. For two hours, we were all engulfed by human emotions, by a profound feeling for each other. And it felt good. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)