

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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This week's Middle East Notes presents articles from Ha'aretz and other sources concerning the continuing peace negotiations, settlement activity, the growing boycott movement of Israeli goods produced on the West Bank, Mahmoud Abbas' Christmas message, and other issues of hope and conflict for the New Year.

- The December 20 and January 3 CMEP Bulletins highlight concerns about the possible framework for the Israeli Palestinian peace negotiations, continuing Israeli settlement activity, and various readings from the world press pertaining to the Israel/Palestine conflict. Also featured is CMEP Executive Director Warren Clark's reflection on a recent visit to Israel/Palestine.
- Lev Grinberg writes in Ha'aretz that it is necessary to understand that the absence of a peace process is not about the Palestinians not having a Mandela to lead them; Israeli prisons hold a number of nationally recognized and respected Palestinian leaders. Rather, Israel has no de Klerk to liberate them, and to negotiate towards putting an end to a regime of Jewish privileges.
- Geoffrey Aronson of the Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP) states that state-building measures will achieve nothing while Palestine is a colony; this piece is taken from the November/December 2013 Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories.
- Nimrod Goren writes in Ha'aretz that few in Israel see Hamas as a natural peace partner. But without reconciliation between the Palestinians that would bring Hamas into the peace process, there will be no two-state solution.
- Ari Shavit also in Ha'aretz notes that the process Washington is imposing on Jerusalem and Ramallah can lead to real peace even as it takes its toll in lives.
- The Palestinian Authority's official news agency presents the full text of President Mahmoud Abbas' Christmas message, delivered on Christmas Eve.
- A December 29 Ha'aretz editorial states that rejection of the Palestinian partner is a deception aimed to delude the public into thinking the Israeli government's hands are clean.
- The Israel News reports that Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni says policy on Palestinians trumps all internal issues, that the international boycott on West Bank products is bound to be felt in rest of country and that the Palestinian conflict is glass ceiling of Israel's economy.
- Zeev Smilansky writes in Ha'aretz that Israel has become Zionism's worst enemy in that the occupation is emptying Judaism's toolbox of all wealth and is turning Zionism and its manifestation into another fleeting, sad episode in the gloomy history of the Jewish people.
- Peter Beinart in Ha'aretz writes that he believes Washington's failure to clinch two-state deal would shift Palestinian focus to international groups and college campuses where organized Jewry holds little sway.
- Check out The State of Two States from the Israel Policy Forum for the week of December 29.
- Larry Derfner in +972 states that the American Studies Association may be singling out Israel for boycott, but if you look at the serious, painful punishments the world metes out to oppressor nations, Israel is not being singled out; it's being let off the hook.

1a) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, December 20, 2013

More details are emerging about what Secretary of State John Kerry hopes to accomplish between Israeli and Palestinian leaders by the end of April. This week Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters in Beit Jala that a framework agreement that provided a “detailed skeleton” for further negotiations would keep Palestinians at the negotiating table past April 29, the nine-month date of these negotiations.

According to Reuters, Secretary Kerry spent his ninth visit to the region since February pushing a framework for a deal. In his address at the annual Saban Forum, Secretary Kerry laid out what the important issues. He said, “A basic framework will have to address all the core issues – borders, security, refugees, Jerusalem, mutual recognition, and an end of claims. And it will have to establish agreed guidelines for subsequent negotiations that will fill out the details in a full-on peace treaty.”

Erekat confirmed that Secretary Kerry is aiming for a framework agreement by April 29 and that the Palestinians would stay at the table longer if one is reached. According to Reuters, “Erekat said this deal would need to contain specific details, such as the borders of any future Palestinian state, the percentage of land swaps to compensate for Jewish settlements built on occupied territory and the final status of Jerusalem, which both sides want as their capital.”

When asked about why he is optimistic a deal could be reached, he said “The difference this time is John Kerry. This man made a difference in terms of his relentless efforts and unwavering commitment. I can tell you that John Kerry is not pushing the Israeli positions.”

However, in the absence of a framework by April 29, Erekat warned that the Palestinian Authority would return to the UN to promote statehood. When restarting negotiations, Palestinian leaders agreed to halt such moves for the duration of the talks.

Some have pointed out that Secretary Kerry included recognition of Israel as a Jewish state in his Saban Forum speech for the first time. Aaron Zucker of J Street writes, “John Kerry has visited Israel nine times this year in his drive for Middle East peace, but it was only [at the Saban Forum] that the secretary of state first called explicitly for ‘a peace that recognizes Israel as a Jewish state.’” In recent years, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has made this recognition a new obstacle and reports indicate Israelis want it as part of the framework agreement.

Many believe that Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state before a final deal would effectively eliminate any right of return for refugees and condone discrimination against Arab-Israelis who make up 20 percent of Israel’s population. In addition, they also believe that giving up the right of most Palestinian refugees to return to pre-1967 Israel is the main card that Palestinians have to play in a quid-pro-quo for obtaining an agreement on East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state. Including this recognition in a framework and not a final agreement will be difficult for the PA to accept.

The next immediate test for the negotiations is looming. On December 29, the third wave of Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails since before the Oslo Accords in 1993 will be released as part of the agreement to restart negotiations. Hours after the second wave was released, Israel announced 5,000 units of settlement construction that derailed the talks for two weeks amid Palestinian threats to pull out. Israeli Yossi Beilin, who helped negotiate Oslo says Prime Minister Netanyahu told Secretary Kerry he intends to announce 2,000 after the next release. Secretary Kerry has asked that the announcement not coincide with the release so closely. It’s unclear whether this compromise would even mollify the Palestinian leadership, still reeling from the last announcement. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

1b) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, January 3, 2014

As expected, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is in Jerusalem presenting a framework agreement to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, possibly bringing negotiations to a crossroads. Complicating matters, the Palestinian prisoner release at the end of December and a possible subsequent Israeli settlement construction announcement could have significant fallout. Will Secretary Kerry be able to prevent a costly stumbling block and instead keep the parties focused on accepting his framework?

Secretary Kerry is coming to Jerusalem armed with a framework agreement, hoping to get both parties on board. According to the Associated Press, State Department deputy spokeswoman Marie Harf said [that] "Kerry will discuss with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas a proposed framework to serve as a guideline for addressing all core issues in the decades-long dispute. The core issues include the borders between Israel and a future Palestine, security arrangements, the fate of Palestinian refugees and conflicting claims to the holy city of Jerusalem."

The New York Times reports that American officials say the document could be fewer than a dozen pages and would not be signed by Israeli and Palestinian leaders. It would likely note both sides' reservations about some elements.

In order for the framework to be accepted, British-Israeli pundit Daniel Levy says it must have a "significant degree of clarity" because we are "We're well past the time for constructive ambiguity." Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat agrees, telling reporters, "If we reach a framework agreement that specifies the borders, the percentage of swaps, the security arrangements, the Jerusalem status, refugees — then that is the skeleton."

Prime Minister Netanyahu is trying to play down the specifics with his right-wing coalition partners. Barak Ravid reports, "A Likud minister said Netanyahu told him the document would merely be an American position paper: Israel would have no obligation to sign it, and the cabinet therefore wouldn't have to vote on it. The minister said he also understood from Netanyahu that both Israel and the Palestinians would be able to say they accepted the American proposal as a basis for negotiations while simultaneously stressing that they had some reservations, which they wouldn't be required to detail."

Ravid notes that it's unclear whether Netanyahu was playing down the framework's significance or underestimating it.

Before a meeting on Thursday with Netanyahu, Secretary Kerry told the press, "In the weeks and months ahead, both sides are going to need to make tough choices to ensure that peace is not just a possibility but is a reality for Israelis and Palestinians for now and for future generations... It is hard work, but with a determined effort, I'm convinced that we can get there."

Can Kerry prevent the next settlement rift?

As scheduled, early Tuesday December 31, Israel released 26 prisoners that had been jailed since before the 1993 Oslo Accords. Israel agreed to release over a hundred prisoners total, many of them convicted murderers, in four waves as a goodwill gesture to restart negotiations. In this third wave, 18 of the men were released to the West Bank, where they were met by jubilant Palestinians and Mahmoud Abbas. This was the first group that released prisoners to East Jerusalem, furthering angering the Israeli public. One Israeli told The New York Times, "These people will be neighbors of the families of the victims they murdered." ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

1c) From the Desk of Warren Clark, Churches for Middle East Peace Executive Director

I recently return from trips to the Holy Land with members of CMEP's Board, Leadership Council, CMEP Field Director Rev. Doris Warrell, and others. We were updating ourselves on the humanitarian situation and prospects for resolving this seemingly endless conflict, while looking for ways to advance CMEP's mission of education and political advocacy.

Close up, primordial fears and concerns have not changed much. An eloquent rabbi working for conflict reduction and reconciliation confides he is still terrified of a nuclear holocaust coming from Iran. The outlook for reconciliation seems little changed. Four months of negotiations brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry have yielded few visible results. We were told that Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas does not engage much in "retail politics." There is no sign the time is ripe for the kind of bold conciliatory gesture made by Sadat that led to the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel.

The injustice imposed by the occupation continues in its many manifestations as does sporadic violence. We met a Palestinian family who were evicted from their home of over 50 years in East Jerusalem as part of a proclaimed program to unilaterally change the character of their neighborhood from Palestinian to Jewish. We spoke with a Jerusalem resident whose husband from the West Bank could not live with her legally in Jerusalem. Residents of Gaza are routinely denied permits to visit family members in the West Bank for unspecified "security reasons." Demolitions and demolition orders continue for Palestinian homes, animal pens and schools in the West Bank for lack of building permits that are seldom granted, while the pace of building Israeli settlement housing steadily increases. Plans remain in force to build the security barrier across a the Cremisan Valley near Bethlehem that would separate a Catholic Convent and school from a Catholic Monastery and would cut normal access of indigenous farmers, including Christians, from their fields. Forces in Gaza still plan violence against Israel and occasionally fire off rockets.

While the need to end occupation and resolve the conflict is self-evident, details can be complex. We visited the large settlement of Ariel. When negotiators speak of the need for a contiguous Palestinian state, they are referring to Ariel, located deep in the midst of the West Bank, extending 13 miles from the Green Line. We visited one of its several Israeli-owned industries; about half of its workforce is Palestinian. If Ariel remains part of Israel it could effectively block easy road access to much of the northern part of the Palestinian West Bank. If it becomes part of a Palestinian state, could it retain its Israeli residents and its Palestinian jobs?

The Middle East is now in the midst of tectonic political shifts that are changing the political landscape created by Britain and France after the First World War. I believe U.S. diplomacy over the past year has taken advantage of these shifts to lay the groundwork for progress in managing the conflict between Israel its neighbors. This change is due in part to the new government in Tehran that now may be willing to negotiate a deal that would satisfy western demands to convincingly forego nuclear weapons in return for a limited nuclear capacity and reduced sanctions. Israel's concern about the security threat from Iran has taken precedence over negotiations with Palestinians. If there is a security deal between the Great Powers (U.S., UK, France, Germany, Russia, and China) and Iran, it will now be harder for Israel to not to consider serious negotiations with the Palestinians.

The Palestinian and Iranian negotiating tracks each are scheduled to come to a head around April. Negotiation deadlines are often missed, but by next summer the pressure on Israel to agree to some elements of a deal is likely to be intense. If there is no real progress by the opening of the UN General Assembly in late September, Palestinians are almost sure to press for sanctions against Israel in UN bodies such as the International Criminal Court. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

2) The “peace process” delusion is worse than apartheid

Lev Grinberg, Ha'aretz, December 15, 2013

This article was published as an op-ed in Hebrew and translated by Orit Friedland; its English translation is found on Tikkun's website.

The death of Nelson Mandela, a major hero of the struggle for freedom and equality in the 20th century, has generated a host of strange and curious comparisons and interpretations. Strangest of all is the one crowning Mandela as the leader of the non-violent struggle. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu may not have been alone in upholding this distorted notion, but in his case, the political intention is unmistakable: to wit, the reason why the Palestinians are unable to achieve their coveted liberty and equality is that they do not have their own Mandela to lead a non-violent struggle. Such interpretation reflects not ignorance, but a deliberate deception. Mandela's struggle should be reviewed and compared to the Palestinian struggle in order to understand both the similarities and the differences between them. It is thus worthwhile to consider briefly the link between violence and liberation.

Mandela won his senior position when he decided to lead an armed struggle in South Africa, and established the military branch of the African National Congress. Going underground, he then led terror and sabotage operations against the apartheid regime, for which he was sentenced to life in prison. Twenty-seven years later he was released to conduct negotiations with South Africa's State President Frederik William de Klerk, designed to put an end to the apartheid regime. De Klerk managed to bring the Whites around to concede a regime of White supremacy and privilege, do away with inter-racial segregation, and accept the principle of equal voting rights for Blacks and Whites. Such concessions were the result of not only the armed struggle, but of the apartheid regime's mounting unpopularity and of the economic and political boycott imposed on South Africa. In other words, it was only when the White elites of South Africa felt the direct impact of these sanctions that de Klerk was able to convince them that they should renounce apartheid and their privileges. It is important to realize that without violent struggle, the Blacks of South Africa would never have won recognition. But armed struggle alone is not enough, because the powers ruling the State are always more powerful, organized and better equipped. International pressure is therefore necessary. The more international pressure, the less violence is required.

Could an analysis of Black struggle in South Africa teach us something about the Palestinian struggle? I believe that it can, despite the differences between the two regimes in terms of the nature of segregation and types of privileges. Palestinian violence did engender international pressure during 1988-1992, which resulted in Israel's recognition of the PLO in 1993. Following this recognition, Yasser Arafat committed to a peaceful resolution of the conflict, and got Mandela's blessing for it.

Unfortunately, mutual recognition has led matters in the opposite direction - to an upgraded version of Israel's military and economic control and oppression. The reason for this is that Israelis, along with the rest of the world, imagined that the sheer act of recognition was the end of the process, rather than its beginning. The world stopped putting pressure on Israel, the Arab boycott was lifted, and every country in the world, including Russia, eastern Europe, China, and the Asian and African continents, have opened their gates for commerce with Israel. Israelis, too, have bought into the peace delusion, turning their attention to internal struggles over Israel's "civic" agenda, choosing to close their eyes to the doubling and later tripling of the Jewish population in the Occupied Territories. And when the Palestinians resorted to violence once again as diplomacy failed in 2000, Israelis were surprised and disappointed, and supported escalating oppressive violence. Simply put, when the world does not put pressure on the oppressive regime, the privileged group has no motivation to make any concessions. A cyclic routine of violence was thus created, erupting from time to time but never achieving anything beyond mutual bloodshed and destruction. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) State-building measures will achieve nothing while Palestine is a colony **Geoffrey Aronson, Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP), November-December 2013**

This is taken from the November/December 2013 Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories, now available [online](#) or in [PDF format](#).

In a series of reports during the last decade, international institutions led by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) have highlighted the vital contribution of strong institutions to state building in the Palestinian territories.

This interest and extraordinary support offered to the Palestinian Authority (PA) has a broader political context. In the era when the international community, led by the United States, was content with Yasser Arafat's leadership and focused on implementation of the "further redeployments" called for in the Oslo II agreement, international concern was all but absent for the coherence, transparency, and governance of Palestinian institutions created as a consequence of agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).

The change in this policy was initially the product of a political decision by the administration of President George W. Bush to "empower" Mahmoud Abbas in the newly created position of PA prime minister at the expense of PA chairman Arafat, who had run afoul of the United States and Israel in the wake of the failed talks at Camp David in mid-2002 and the subsequent second intifada.

In what has become known as the "vision speech," Bush, two months after Israel's Operation Defensive Shield had resulted in the reoccupation of Area A by the Israeli military in April 2002, declared, "And when the Palestinian people have new leaders, new institutions and new security arrangements with their neighbors, the United States of America will support the creation of a Palestinian state whose borders and certain aspects of its sovereignty will be provisional until resolved as part of a final settlement in the Middle East."

Under the leadership of Abbas, as Arafat's successor as head of the PA and PLO chairman, and with critical support and credibility lent by former IMF official Salaam Fayyad as prime minister, the PA set about implementing the reform agenda demanded by the international community.

"Palestine—Ending the Occupation, Establishing the State," a two-year plan for setting up the administrative infrastructure of a Palestinian state, was unveiled by Fayyad in August 2009. In April 2011, the IMF reported that the Palestinian Authority "is now able to conduct the sound economic policies expected of a future well-functioning Palestinian state, given its solid track record in reforms and institution-building in the public finance and financial areas."

Strong, transparent, and well-run institutions are certainly desirable, but such institutions and practices, while vital to effective policy making and execution, have never been a prerequisite for sovereignty or statehood. Sovereign and autonomous control of territory remain the time-tested sine qua nons for national liberation, and it is precisely at this critical point—the ability to control their own territory—where Palestinians are at a woeful and deliberate disadvantage.

More than three decades ago, long before the Oslo era, Israeli planners and politicians mapped out a territorial division of the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, that reflected two related Israeli objectives: to establish the administrative and political basis for Israel's widespread colonization of the West Bank, and in so doing, deny Palestinians the territorial base upon which they could build a truly sovereign national existence. At the time, Prime Minister Menachem Begin described this zero-sum objective as "autonomy for the people, not the land." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) Israel should support Palestinian reconciliation

Nimrod Goren, Ha'aretz, Dec. 24, 2013

Hamas has notified Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas that it wants to join a national unity government with Fatah, marking a breakthrough in reconciliation talks, according to the Palestinian news agency Ma'an. Earlier this month, senior representatives of Fatah and Hamas said at a conference in Qatar that not only is Palestinian unity a mutually desired objective but it is closer than ever before.

There has previously been dramatic news about Palestinian reconciliation that has not amounted to much, and the road toward a unity government may be a long one. But for supporters of the two-state solution, this recent development should be regarded as an opportunity rather than a threat.

The split between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip is one of the largest obstacles to the two-state solution. Even the Israeli peace camp cannot provide a convincing explanation of how a final-status agreement can be implemented with only the West Bank on board.

This obstacle was evident during the Annapolis peace process in 2007-2008. At the time, the parties acknowledged that given the Palestinian split, the most realistic goal was merely to reach a "shelf agreement" that would not be implemented until a later stage in the process.

The situation looks similar this time around. The current Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were launched with the ambitious goal of reaching a two-state solution. Alas, recent statements from Washington are introducing a much more modest goal: either a framework for a final-status agreement or an agreement to be implemented in phases.

At this year's Saban Forum, U.S. President Barack Obama was asked whether peace is possible when the Palestinian people are not united. His response was that if "we can create a pathway to peace, even if initially it's restricted to the West Bank," then the Palestinians in Gaza will also want to enjoy its benefits.

But this predicted aspiration will not be enough to compel Israel to make the necessary concessions for peace. When Israel does eventually agree to make historic compromises on core issues such as Jerusalem, Palestinian refugees and settlements, it will want to make sure that its Palestinian partner can make a commitment on behalf of Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip alike. It will want to make sure the entire Palestinian leadership agrees that the conflict is over and that the Palestinians will not make any more claims.

Until it becomes clear that an Israeli agreement with the Palestinians obligates the entire Palestinian leadership, right-wing politicians in Israel will continue to make use of the Palestinian split to mock the peace process. Earlier this month, hawkish Habayit Hayehudi leader Naftali Bennett said peace talks that did not include the leaders of Gaza were a joke. "Imagine you're negotiating over a car with someone who only owns half the car, and the owner of the other half says he won't recognize any agreement you reach," said Bennett. "You give him all the money but only get half the car."

This does not mean the current Israeli government sees a Fatah-Hamas deal as a necessary step toward peace. In the past, whenever progress on this issue was reported, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu would attack Abbas and call on him to pick a side. It's either Israel or Hamas, was the message from Jerusalem. A Fatah-Hamas deal is likely to be used by Netanyahu in an effort to convince the international community that it is the Palestinians who are failing the peace process. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) [The price of Israeli-Palestinian peace](#)

Ari Shavit, Ha'aretz, December 26, 2013

No, it's not an intifada. The current wave of violence is still only a small wave. But the data published by the Shin Bet security service leaves little doubt that a change is underway. The quiet that's prevailed in Judea and Samaria in recent years and over year also along the Gaza border has been replaced by disquiet. While in July 2013 there were 82 attacks of which 50 were linked to the West Bank, in November there were 167 attacks and 107 were West Bank-related.

After a long period during which the Israeli-Palestinian conflict did not claim any Israeli lives, the past three months have seen a soldier killed near Qalqilyah, a soldier killed at the Tomb of the Patriarchs, a settler killed in the Jordan Valley, a soldier killed on a bus in Afula and a Defense Ministry contract worker shot to death at Nahal Oz near Gaza. In the past week alone, a bomb was planted on a Bat Yam bus, a policeman was stabbed and wounded at Adam Junction, stones were thrown in Samaria, and there were more incidents along the Gaza border fence. While this isn't exactly a storm, something has definitely transpired in the time between mid-summer and early winter. The climate of the conflict has changed.

So what happened? Kerry happened. On July 30, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry succeeded in restarting the negotiations between the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority. His ten visits here since assuming office, and the steamroller approach to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and PA President Mahmoud Abbas were successful: peace is in again. The diplomatic game is once again real, and it's possible that during the coming month it will even bear fruit. Whether they wanted it or not, the Israeli and Palestinian peoples must meet half way please their American master.

Contrary to all expectations, something's brewing. With Kerry's determination and ambition even the hardest tomatoes soften and turn into ketchup. Will we see peace by the end of 2014? It's doubtful. But the process that Washington is imposing on Jerusalem and Ramallah has turned into a serious process that is seriously influencing the reality on the ground. Although at this point it's just a dream on the horizon, the pax Americana is starting to alter the consciousness and behavior of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Unfortunately, the first change has been the resumption of violence. This is a familiar pattern: When there's a chance that the moderates on both sides might reach a reality-altering arrangement, the extremists of both sides strike. If the process succeeds, it results in an Israeli withdrawal, which leads to violence. If the process fails, the dashed expectations also lead to violence. In short, whatever happens, the path to peace is a path strewn with killings. The first and second Oslo Accords and the Camp David summit all generated waves of violence.

Peace is an ideal, but it undermines stability. It leads to bloodshed in the short and medium terms. The events of recent months are only a prologue. As Kerry persists, progresses and approaches the target, the violence will increase. Extremists among both Muslim Arabs and Israeli Jews will try to bury the renewed hopes of peace under the same rivers of blood with which they drowned their predecessors.

Does this mean giving up? No. Just as we must not surrender to terror that threatens the state, we must not surrender to terror that endangers peace. Just as we must be prepared to pay a high price during war, we must be prepared to pay a high price for peace. In this conflicted country there's no chance that peace will be brought to the table on a silver platter. But the fact that pursuing peace costs lives must sharpen the minds of those pursuing it. Peace that must be paid for in blood must end up being a true peace. Peace that forces us to walk through a corridor of violence has to be a solid peace. Kerry and his people must make very sure that the new diplomatic process they are about to launch brings us real peace.

6) Full text: President Mahmoud Abbas Christmas address

Ma'an, December 28, 2013

... In Bethlehem, more than 2,000 years ago, Jesus Christ was born; a Palestinian messenger who would become a guiding light for millions around the world. As we Palestinians strive for our freedom two millennia later, we do our best to follow his example. We work with hope, seeking justice, in order to achieve a lasting peace. We celebrate Christmas in Bethlehem under occupation. Decades of attempts may have changed Palestine's landscape, but not its identity. We remain steadfast on our land, our cultural and national identity as strong as ever. This Christmas Eve, our hearts and prayers will be with the millions who are being denied their right to worship in their homeland.

We are thinking of our people in Gaza, trapped under siege, and of those who are prevented from worshipping in Bethlehem. Our hearts and prayers are with the people of al-Dbayeh Refugee Camp in Beirut, along with all of our Palestinian refugees - Christians and Muslims - uprooted from their hometowns in 1948 and who, since that time, have suffered the vicissitudes of a forced exile.

Our prayers are with the churches and mosques of Jerusalem, which remind the world of the Arab identity of our occupied capital. We pray for the people of Beit Jala and particularly we pray that the 58 Palestinian Christian families of Cremisan have strength in their peaceful struggle against the annexation Wall, which is stealing their land and dooming their future. We reassure them that their struggle goes beyond the borders of Palestine: their prayers and actions have prompted many world leaders to raise the Cremisan issue in our meetings. Israel has been pressured on this issue and many other issues raised through civil society campaigns, a very good example of the merits of non-violent resistance.

On this occasion, we are reminded of the sad fact that more Bethlehemites will be lighting their candles in Santiago de Chile, Chicago, San Pedro de Sula, Melbourne and Toronto than those in Bethlehem. To them we say that Bethlehem is their town and Palestine is their country. We will continue working tirelessly to give them the freedom to decide where to spend Christmas.

Christians are not a minority here: they are an integral part of the Palestinian people. Orthodox, Catholics, Armenians, Assyrians, Lutherans, Anglicans, Copts, Melkites, Protestants and others are all part of the rich mosaic of this free, sovereign, democratic and pluralistic Palestine we aspire to have and as established in our declaration of independence and draft constitution.

As we begin preparations for the visit of Pope Francis next year, we call upon pilgrims from all over the world to come and experience Palestine and our holy sites. We hope the visit of Pope Francis will be a good opportunity for Christians from all over the world to become closer to their sisters and brothers in Palestine, and for His Holiness to spread the message of justice and peace for the Palestinians, as for all peoples of the world.

We are in the middle of a negotiations process with Israel, and we are committed to bring a just peace to the region, including ending the occupation of the Holy Land with the establishment of a fully independent and sovereign Palestinian State on the 1967 border with East Jerusalem as its capital. This year we celebrate Christmas with the Nativity Church inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, being renovated under my auspices and with work coordinated by a presidential committee working closely with heads of churches on the matter. ...

On behalf of a people struggling for justice that will lead to peace, we remember the birth of Jesus Christ in a humble grotto in Bethlehem. His message, for us, as for millions around the world remains as pertinent as ever. "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill." This is a message of hope for our people's daily struggle, from the child that was born here over 2,000 years ago.

7) [No partner for peace in Israel](#)

Ha'aretz editorial, December 29, 2013

"Don't delude yourselves. We don't have a partner on the Palestinian side for a two-state solution." That was how Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon summarized his take on the peace negotiations and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a group of business leaders taking part in an initiative to promote a peace agreement. There was nothing new in Ya'alon's declaration. It was in keeping with statements by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his right-wing colleagues, for whom any Palestinian who does not adopt their policies precisely as given is clearly anti-peace.

There is "no partner" because of incitement by the Palestinians, say those who engage in incitement against the Palestinian Authority (PA). "No partner" because the PA has been unable to prevent the so-called atmosphere attacks, say the people who have failed to apprehend the "price tag" gangs. And "no partner" say those who are slated this week to publish tenders for the construction of 1,400 homes over the Green Line, in response to the release of some 20 Palestinian prisoners.

In their view, the only appropriate partner is one who will accept continued Israeli control of the Jordan Valley, who does not call for a boycott of Israeli factories in the settlements and is willing to recognize Israel as the "Jewish national state" despite the fact that some 20 percent of its citizens are Arabs. The problem is that such a partner is almost impossible to find, not only among the Palestinians. Even Israel's friends have given up on defending its positions, and some are already supporting sanctions against Israel.

Ya'alon elected to convince business people of his doctrine, the very people who understand full well the connection between the occupation and the economic threat, and from there the existential threat. People who know that the storm that will follow from the paralysis in the talks will harm their factories and workers. From their perspective, the continuation of the occupation — as they warned Netanyahu in a meeting six months ago — is not only an ethical, historical or messianic issue, it is a clear danger: The Land of Israel could well lead the State of Israel to catastrophe.

Rejection of the Palestinian partner is a deception aimed to delude the public into thinking the Israeli government's hands are clean. It is amazing how Israeli politicians who are steadfast in their mantra of "no partner" fail to comprehend a basic fact about negotiations between adversaries: Partners do not grow on trees, they are created through hard work; that building process is their job.

When a senior minister in a government that is conducting peace talks calls them a futile trick that we must recognize and put aside, it is not an exaggeration to say that it is the Israeli side that is not a partner for peace.

8) [Livni: We're living in bubble, disconnected from world](#)

Israel News, December 30, 2013

Justice Minister Tzipi Livni said Israel was burying its head in the sand in regards to the consequences of the dispute with the Palestinians. "I want to talk about 'the bubble,'" she said. "Not the financial bubble and not the real estate bubble, but the bubble that we're living in. An entire country that is disconnected from the international reality." ... The minister said that despite being in financial conferences and poverty committees, those issues "have no significance if they ignore the conflict. The Palestinian conflict is the glass ceiling of Israel's economy."

She warned that the international financial and economic boycott started with the West Bank, but over time it will flow in to the rest of the country. "It won't end there. The boycott is moving and advancing uniformly and exponentially," Livni said. "Those who don't want to see it, will end up feeling it." The justice minister said the world doesn't understand Israel's policy of seemingly supporting a two-state solution while continuing to build in the West Bank.

"If there's no Palestinian partner, then we need to make an agreement with the world. The negotiations are not only with the Palestinians," Livni said. "Or we could try ignoring the world, wrap ourselves in the justice of our cause, and support ridiculous and radical laws that damage the peace process and democracy." Livni called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu policies the "dark side of democracy." ...

Livni concluded by saying that those declaring Israel needs to annex the West Bank are turning Israel into a lone settlement in the world.

9) When Jews use force it ends in catastrophe: Israel has become Zionism's worst enemy

Zeev Smilansky, Ha'aretz, December 26, 2013

I boycott the Jewish settlements in the West Bank. I will not cross the Green Line and I do not buy products from the West Bank settlement of Elkana. I will not collaborate with scientists attached to Ariel University.

And I am not talking just about myself. The people in my immediate circle all live within the Green Line and regard everything that is happening beyond it as a terminal illness.

It was not always like this. We loved to visit the West Bank in the past, but no more. Today, this land is one of moral turpitude, a blot on the family's record, a historic disgrace. In the West Bank, the State of Israel has become an apartheid state, where our children carry out war crimes on our behalf; where the concept of population transfer has become a reality; where (in a sickening twist of history) the Jews have become a master race that is on a lofty and well-protected pedestal while the Other – the Palestinian – has no rights, no identity, and can be trampled upon by any soldier, any member of the Shin Bet security service – in fact, by anyone with a blue identity card.

Whenever the Jews have turned to the path of physical force, it has invariably ended in unforgettable catastrophe. One of the most prominent of those catastrophes was the Bar-Kokhba revolt, which was encouraged and supported by Rabbi Akiva and which led to the almost complete destruction of our people. In other eras, we Jews developed many different and sophisticated tools that enabled us to survive as weaklings among the powerful: study, enlightenment, patience, an understanding of the mighty forces surrounding us and the development of the ability to maneuver and survive in the midst of those forces. In the era of the Enlightenment, the Jews were able to build on these foundations and to excel in science, medicine, literature, music, political science, economics, law and commerce. There were many tools in the Jewish toolbox, but the use of force was not one of them.

Today, the situation is different. The toolbox has emptied; gone are the wisdom, the patience, the moderation and the shrewdness. What has, however, remained is crude, brute force, seeking an outlet. The Six Day War of June 1967 was the greatest disaster that has ever befallen on the State of Israel, because it led Israelis to believe that physical force is the only lens through which the world should be viewed. The combination of being a bully and a victim at the same time has become Israel's trademark and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is its spearhead.

For the government and, apparently, for the majority of the Israeli population, which supports it passively, people and human kindness are not part of the Jewish toolbox. Similarly, the famous aphorism stated by the great Jewish sage, Hillel, who lived 2,000 years ago, "What is hateful to you do not do unto others," is not part of the conceptual infrastructure of the State of Israel. What should you do when you realize that your country, your homeland, your beloved land has become a frightening, sickening monster, has become one of those states that caused you to thank your lucky stars that you were not one of their citizens – the Bosnias, Somalias, Burmas and Rwandas, with all their war crimes, ethnic cleansings and racial segregation?

Over the years, I have been weaned from a total identification with the State of Israel. When my eldest son reached the age of 18, I realized (painfully) that he would have to be drafted into the Israel Defense Forces. A few years later, when my youngest son reached induction age, I tried very hard not to decide for him. Today, I am not sure what advice I would give to an 18-year-old Israeli who is on the threshold of being drafted.

10) In 2014, American Jewish leaders might lose control of the Israel debate **Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, January 1, 2014**

In the spirit of the season, let me hazard a prediction: 2014 will be the year that America's Israel debate begins to pass the organized American Jewish community by.

The first reason is the end of the American-dominated peace process. Despite John Kerry's best efforts, the most likely scenario is that 2014 will be the year he fails. Even if Kerry manages to convince Israeli and Palestinian leaders to accept a "framework agreement," which lays out guidelines for a final deal, it's unlikely he can get it implemented. At the end of the day, Benjamin Netanyahu still leads a party dominated by people opposed to a Palestinian state. Indeed, the man he's just appointed as his top foreign policy advisor publicly opposes a Palestinian state. For Netanyahu to embrace a territorially viable Palestinian state with a capital in East Jerusalem would mean losing his political base, something that throughout his political career he has adamantly refused to do. In Dennis Ross' memoir, he recalls Netanyahu explaining that a leader can never abandon "his tribe" of core supporters.

For almost four years, nothing the Obama administration has done has changed that. And now, with violence against Israel increasing and Obama having signed an Iran deal that Netanyahu hates, John Kerry has less leverage and Netanyahu has more excuses. Yet the more Kerry caves to Netanyahu - for instance, by backing a 10-year Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley even though the Clinton Parameters called for Israel to leave within three - the weaker he makes Mahmoud Abbas, a man who may be too weak to sign a conflict-ending deal already.

Kerry himself has said that if "we do not succeed now, we may not get another chance." He's right. If he fails, the United States won't take another shot until it inaugurates a new president in 2017, and maybe not then. In the meantime, the Israeli-Palestinian struggle will move outside Washington as Palestinians take their case to international organizations, college campuses, religious and labor groups and European consumers. And for the organized American Jewish community, that's a disaster because universities, international organizations and liberal religious groups are exactly the places the American Jewish establishment is weak.

It's sadly ironic. The organized American Jewish community has spent decades building influence in Washington. But it's succeeded too well. By making it too politically painful for Obama to push Netanyahu toward a two-state deal, the American Jewish establishment (along with its Christian right allies) is making Washington irrelevant. For two decades, the core premise of the American-dominated peace process has been that since only America enjoys leverage over Israel, the rest of the world should leave the Israel-Palestinian conflict in America's hands.

But across the world, fewer and fewer people believe Washington will effectively use its leverage, and if the Kerry mission fails, Washington will no longer even try. The Palestinians are ready with a Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign that shifts the struggle to arenas where the American Jewish establishment lacks influence. In the Russell Senate Office Building, Howard Kohr and Malcolm Hoenlein's opinions carry weight. In German supermarkets and the Modern Language Association, not so much.

But the decline of the American-led peace process is only one reason 2014 may spell the decline of organized American Jewish influence. The other is Iran. For two decades, AIPAC and its allies have successfully pushed a harder and harder American line against Iran's nuclear program. In Congress, where a bipartisan group of senators has just introduced new sanctions legislation over White House objections, that hard-line agenda remains popular. But in the country at large, it risks alienating the Americans who will dominate politics in the decades to come. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

11) The State of Two States, week of December 29

Israel Policy Forum

Just after ringing in the new year, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry landed in Israel on Thursday for meetings with President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu with the intention to discuss a potential framework agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Prior to Kerry's arrival, Israel released 26 Palestinian prisoners in the third phase of the prisoner release, a precondition for ongoing peace talks. It was also announced this week that British Prime Minister David Cameron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel will make separate official visits to Israel next month in a show of support for the continuation of negotiations.

“There is no connection between the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and Tunisia. Its resolution is not the solution for stabilizing the Middle East... If the alternatives [of not reaching an agreement] are a European boycott or rockets out of Nablus and Ramallah on Ben-Gurion Airport, I'd prefer a European boycott.” – Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon, speaking at the Calcalist conference (Tuesday, 12/31/13)

“This needs to be said clearly: the conflict is the Israeli economy's glass ceiling.” – Justice Minister Tzipi Livni explaining that the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict has serious implications for the Israeli economy at the Calcalist conference (Tuesday, 12/31/13)

“But Mr. Netanyahu is dead wrong in not understanding that the road to dealing with Tehran goes through Ramallah, and that time is running out not only for halting Iran's nuclear weapons program but also for resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Moreover, he fails to comprehend that maintaining the status quo on the Palestinian question poses a major obstacle to progress on the Iranian issue.” – Former Shin Bet Chief Ami Ayalon emphasizing the importance of the negotiations for overall regional stability (Wednesday, 1/1/14)

“I think that it was made unequivocally clear that when there is a prisoner release, the construction in Judea and Samaria will continue.” – Minister for Intelligence, International Relations and Strategic Affairs Yuval Steinitz referring to the juxtaposition of the prisoner release and the settlement construction announcement in an interview with Yoman (Wednesday, 1/1/14)

“We are sending a clear message to Israel and the Americans: The Jordan Valley belongs to the Palestinians.” – Palestinian Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah opposing the symbolic Israeli ministerial vote to annex the Jordan Valley in Maariv (Wednesday, 1/1/14)

“There are two vital components for security [in the Jordan Valley]. One is an IDF presence, the second is the presence of settlements.” – Deputy Foreign Minister Zeev Elkin supporting a continuous Israeli presence in the Jordan Valley in an interview with Yoman (Thursday, 1/2/14)

“Now, I want to emphasize that the discussion of an agreed framework has emerged from the ideas that both parties have put on the table. My role is not to impose American ideas on either side but to facilitate the parties' own efforts. An agreed framework would clarify and bridge the gaps between the parties so that they can move towards a final peace treaty that would resolve all of those core issues.” – Secretary of State John Kerry speaking at a press conference in Jerusalem (Thursday, 1/2/14)

“The potential beauty of this framework is that it would lay the groundwork for the fundamental concessions each side would make without plunging into the details, where many devils lurk...The problem with this is that it still requires bold and courageous decisions from two men who have built their political lives on caution and procrastination...Abbas and Netanyahu have every reason to avoid any genuinely substantive deal, even on a 'framework.'” – Jackson Diehl examining Secretary Kerry's framework agreement in the Washington Post (Thursday, 1/2/14)

12) The world's blatant double standard - in Israel's favor **Larry Derfner, +972, December 27, 2013**

As of Friday at noon, a Google search of “human rights sanctions” turns up over 40 million results. There are human rights sanctions and other punishments against China, Russia, Iran, Syria, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Yemen, Belarus, Cuba, North Korea and lots of other countries. And these sanctions weren’t put in place by some minor academic group like the American Studies Association, but by the United States of America, the European Union and/or the UN Security Council. Furthermore, these sanctions hurt those countries quite a bit more than the ASA’s boycott of Israeli colleges is likely to hurt Israel.

Yet you would think from the reaction to the recent ASA boycott that no other country in the world is being punished for its human rights violations. Everybody’s jumping on ASA president Curtis Marez’s quote on why the organization was going after Israel instead of other, far worse malefactors: “One has to start somewhere,” he told The New York Times. But while the ASA may be starting with Israel, the powers-that-be in the world have gone after any number of human-rights violating countries – yet still haven’t gotten to Israel and its 46-year military dictatorship over the Palestinians.

If you look at the serious, painful punishments the world metes out to oppressor nations, Israel is not being singled out, it’s being let off the hook.

Would Israel’s defenders like to see the world treat this country like it treats Iran – by “bringing it to its knees” with “crippling sanctions,” not to mention the clamor from some quarters to bomb its nuclear facilities?

Or would they like Israel to be treated like Syria – by freezing its foreign assets and denying entry to any Israeli involved in the occupation? Would they want the U.S. to arm some of the groups fighting Israel? Would they have preferred Israel being one step away from getting bombed by the U.S.? Would they rather that the world powers destroy Israel’s chemical weapons, or would they choose the ASA boycott?

Or if not like Syria, would Israel’s advocates want this country to be treated like China – with the U.S. vetoing its international loan applications and the U.S. and EU imposing an arms embargo on it? By the way, lots of countries are faced with arms embargoes by the U.S., EU and/or the UN, including Congo, Eritrea, Somalia, Sudan and Zimbabwe. Israel, by contrast, gets \$3 billion worth of arms from America every year.

And how about Zimbabwe; would Alan Dershowitz have Israel trade the ASA boycott for Zimbabwe’s punishments? Not only does the African nation face an embargo on arms, it’s up against one on international loans, too. Its fearless leader Robert Mugabe has been made radioactive – anybody who has dealings with him stands to have his assets frozen and his entry barred to the U.S. and EU.

Even big, powerful Russia has it worse than Israel – 18 Russian officials said to be involved in the prison killing of dissident lawyer Sergei Magnitzky in 2009 have had their assets frozen and their entry barred to the U.S., and there are constant calls for the EU to follow suit. How many Palestinians have been killed wrongfully by Israeli soldiers, police, Shin Bet agents and settlers during the occupation; are the U.S. and EU punishing any of them or their superiors for that?

And now, because of its anti-gay laws and statements and the gay-bashing climate they’ve encouraged, Russia is facing boycotts far more powerful than the one imposed by the ASA. ... Here’s an irony: Bibi Netanyahu himself just agreed to join other world leaders, starting with Obama, in boycotting the [Olympic] Games. Do Obama [and his colleagues] boycott any Israeli showcase event because of the occupation, which is an incomparably worse crime than Russia’s anti-gay laws and harassment?

[Read the entire piece here.](#)