

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
January 23, 2014



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This week's Middle East Notes highlight hopes and fears concerning the success or failure of the Kerry negotiations and the possible implications of both, reflections on Ariel Sharon and his legacy, the conflicting and conflict provoking meanings of Israel as a "Jewish State," and other issues.

- The January 9 and 16 CMEP Bulletins focus on difficulties around the framework for Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations, plans for Pope Francis's visit to the area, continuing settlement construction, attacks on Palestinians, Ariel Sharon's death and other issues.
- In his blog, James Wall notes that the year 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of World War I; it is possible that we will witness the start of another conflict, driven by the same stupidity, greed and lust for power that produced that war.
- Wall also writes in his blog that Ariel Sharon embodied and acted on the worst elements of intolerance, racism and greed a nation can embrace and that the impact of the path on which he set Israel has resulted in today's self-imposed isolationism.
- M.J. Rosenberg writes in Tikkun Daily that nobody wants to discuss the new conditions Netanyahu keeps adding in his effort to defeat John Kerry's effort to achieve peace.
- In IMEMC News, Alison Weir publicizes that subcommittees of both the Senate and the House released a budget on December 10 that included \$284 million primarily for defense systems in Israel. This is on top of the annual \$3.1 billion in military aid the U.S. gives Israel.
- Yoel Marcus writes in Ha'aretz that if Kerry fails to clinch a framework peace agreement, the U.S. will punish Israel not by cutting military aid, but by doing the worst of all: washing its hands of Israel and leaving it at the mercy of a vengeful Europe and its boycotts.
- In the New Yorker, Bernard Avishai comments on Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as a "Jewish state," or as "the nation-state of the Jewish people."
- Chris Doyle writes in Al Arabiya English that Sharon wrecked the two-state solution by his policies and actions.
- Yitzhak Laor writes Ha'aretz that none of Ariel Sharon's many eulogies spoke of the families who lost their children, for the Palestinians of Sabra and Chatila, for the people of West Beirut, for the many dead that Sharon left in his wake.
- Daniel Sokatch and David N. Myers wrote an article in the Los Angeles Times stating that Israel must begin to construct a meaningful sense of identity and confer an equal stake in the well-being of the society on all those entitled to call themselves citizens whether they are Jewish according to religious law, Jewish only by citizenship or non-Jewish.
- In the newsletter of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, Jeff Halper states that he believes 2014 will likely mark the beginning of the end of the Israeli occupation but not through the linear "peace process" in which the Israelis and Palestinians have been trapped these past three and a half decades.
- A recent Ha'aretz editorial states that when European countries, Israel's allies, warn about Jerusalem's policy in the territories, it's a threat that can't be dismissed.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins for January 9 and 16, 2014

Is Israel reaching a political tipping point? (January 9) In four days of meetings with Israeli and Palestinian negotiators last week, Secretary Kerry discussed the content of a framework that he will propose “within weeks.” Before leaving Israel he said, “The path is becoming clearer... And it is becoming much more apparent to everybody what the remaining tough choices are.” The serious prospect of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu making these “tough choices” is concerning to the Israeli right wing and peace process spoilers are becoming more vocal.

Ha’aretz writer Barak Ravid reports that the framework will be substantial. He writes, “In the coming weeks, Obama will become personally involved in Kerry’s effort. He will have to approve the framework agreement before Kerry can officially present it, and he won’t accept a weak, superficial document. Obama wants a meaty, substantive proposal.”

Over the past five months, right wing members of Netanyahu’s governing coalition have been largely mum about the peace process, convinced that Secretary Kerry’s efforts were not serious and placated by continued settlement building. There was a sense that if they weathered the storm, Kerry’s energies would wane and the status quo could continue.

Secretary Kerry has proved indefatigable and with his framework agreement looming, he now has everyone’s attention. Israeli columnist Shalom Yerushalami wrote, “Since the beginning of this week, the sense here has been that something is happening. Something has shifted, mainly beneath the surface.” The Economist notes the alarm of the rejectionists and concludes, “[Kerry] may be getting somewhere, after all.”

One dividing element is the 1967 lines. Reports indicate that the framework will include Israel’s acceptance that any final agreement with the Palestinians will be based on the 1967 lines with land swaps to ensure Israel can keep its major settlement blocks.

This is where Trade Minister Naftali Bennett draws the line. He said in speech Monday, “No more word games: the 1967 lines mean dividing Jerusalem and giving up the Western Wall, the Temple Mount and the Old City,” Bennett said. “In what way will our history remember a leader that gives up Jerusalem? We won’t sit in such a government.”

Given comments like that, it is hard to imagine that Netanyahu’s coalition could survive any type of acceptance of the framework. But that doesn’t mean he isn’t trying to hold it together without getting blamed for sinking the negotiations. Barak Ravid writes, “Likud Knesset members who spoke with him in recent days had the impression that he’s searching for a way to tell Kerry ‘yes,’ while somehow keeping his coalition intact... Netanyahu is concerned that rejecting the document will cause the world to place blame for the failure for negotiations. His dream is for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to torpedo it instead. But there’s no guarantee that will happen.”

A Netanyahu adviser told Ravid, “We haven’t turned into leftists. We simply see the reality and understand what’s liable to happen. And it’s worrying.”

Netanyahu does have some support in his cabinet. Sunday, Finance Minister Yair Lapid addressed a meeting of his Yesh Atid party, the second largest in the coalition and said, “As someone who is familiar with the progress in the peace process, it’s real ... There’s a real opportunity that is closer than it appears to be to reach an arrangement, and we mustn’t miss it ... I want to strengthen the Prime Minister and to call on him to make every effort to realize this opportunity.” ...

[Read the entire Bulletin on CMEP's website.](#)

Israeli defense minister blasts Kerry's peace efforts (January 16): Last week, CMEP warned that as negotiations on a framework agreement get more serious, opponents to a deal will get more vocal, putting more pressure on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. This week, Israel's defense minister caused a diplomatic uproar after insulting Secretary John Kerry's efforts to reach a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians.

Israeli paper Yedioth Ahronoth reported that Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon said in private meetings, "Secretary of State John Kerry...is acting out of an incomprehensible obsession and a messianic feeling - cannot teach me a single thing about the conflict with the Palestinians," and "Throughout the recent months, there is no negotiation between us and the Palestinians, but rather, between us and the Americans. The only thing that can 'save' us is that John Kerry will get a Nobel Peace Prize and leave us alone."

A State Department spokesperson fired back, "The remarks of the Defense Minister if accurate are offensive and inappropriate especially given all that the United States is doing to support Israel's security needs...Kerry and his team, including General Allen, have been working day and night to try to promote a secure peace for Israel because of the Secretary's deep concern for Israel's future...To question his motives and distort his proposals is not something we would expect from the Defense Minister of a close ally."

According to the Jerusalem Post, U.S. officials asked "Netanyahu to issue a statement distancing himself from both the criticism of Kerry, as well as the criticism of the diplomatic process itself." That did not happen. After Yaalon met with Netanyahu, the defense ministry issued a statement saying, "The defense minister had no intention to cause any offense to the secretary, and he apologizes if the secretary was offended by words attributed to the minister." Netanyahu later praised the close relationship between the United States and Israel.

Ha'aretz writer Chemi Shalev explains that "Ya'alon's remarks...are the zenith of what seems to be a concerted campaign of off-the-record slaps in the face and not-for-attribution kicks in the teeth that unnamed Israeli sources have been waging against Kerry in recent weeks."

Shalev continues to say that the State Department's strong rebuke is a product of "all the pent up frustration and anger that U.S. officials have amassed in many long months of control and restraint" in the face of the repeated criticism of the peace process by Israelis officials.

This diplomatic spat will have consequences. Ha'aretz diplomatic correspondent Barak Ravid thinks Yaalon's comments will make him persona non grata at the negotiating table and in Washington. He writes, "It is still difficult to assess the damage caused by Defence Minister Yaalon's disgraceful, mocking and arrogant comments...Even after his apology, Yaalon still has to find a way to rehabilitate his relations with Washington. Otherwise he will see the inside of the White House and Pentagon only in photographs."

Many Israelis fear that with the comments by right wing members of the government, they will be on the losing end of the blame game that would follow the failure of negotiations. For his part, Secretary Kerry remains undeterred. He told reporters in Qatar, "We just can't let one set of comments undermine that effort, and I don't intend to."

[Read the entire Bulletin on CMEP's website.](#)

2) Israel aggression leaves little hope for peace

James M. Wall, January 2, 2014

The year 2014 marks the 100th anniversary of the start of the First World War. That conflict began on July 28, 1914. It did not end until November 11, 1918. Keep those dates in mind because by July 28, 2014, it is possible that we will witness the start of another conflict, driven by the same stupidity, greed and lust for power that produced the First World War.

That repeat of history was evident in the bad news for the Palestinians that preceded the arrival in Tel Aviv on Thursday of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry. The bad news came in the verbal bluster and actions of Israeli political leaders who insist Israel will continue to aggressively build settlement housing on Palestinian territory.

The demand by Israel that IDF units must continue to patrol the Palestinian Jordan Valley is one more egregious step Israel is taking to guarantee that Kerry's attempts to form a peace agreement will never succeed. ...

Into this atmosphere of Israeli expansionism, [Kerry] returned to the region this week for his tenth visit, bringing plans for discussion by Israeli and Palestinian leaders. Specific details have not been fully revealed, but the actions of Israel and the failure of the U.S. to object to those actions, suggest that Kerry brings with him proposals as toxic to justice as were those artificial western-imposed Middle East borders drawn by western powers after the First World War.

In his book, *A Peace to End All Peace*, David Fromkin examines the "peace" that emerged from the First World War that began 100 years ago this coming July. In the Middle East, Fromkin writes, decisions "made by the Allies during and after the First World War," led to the creation of a new map for that region, a map drawn not for the well-being of the indigenous populations, but a map designed to satisfy the greed and lust for power and obsession for control by outside powers.

Those post First World War decisions were not made in the open. They were, rather, made under the nightmarish haze of propagand and lies. Fromkin explains:

British officials who played a major role in the making of those [post First World War] decisions provided a version of events that was, at best, edited and, at worst, fictitious. They sought to hide their meddling in Moslem religious affairs and to pretend that they had entered the Middle East as patrons of Arab independence—a cause in which they did not in fact believe.

The ominous parallels between 1914 and 2014 should be obvious to justice-minded political leaders today, except for the fact that justice is not on the table in Tel Aviv nor Ramallah this week. Israel, a major colonial power imposed on the region with help from western powers, is using the long drawn out "peace process" as a decoy from reality. Meanwhile, by force and guile, new borders are drawn around expanding settlements, borders that are designed to complete Israel's control of what it has long seen as Greater Israel, stretching from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea.

These actions are clearly post First World War redux. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Ariel Sharon dies after eight years in a coma

James M. Wall, January 15, 2014

Ariel Sharon died January 11, 2014, eight years and one week after he suffered a stroke January 4, 2006. At the time of his stroke, Sharon was the 11th Prime Minister of Israel.

The stroke left him in a permanent, brain dead, vegetative state. It was not the final chapter of life a proud man could have wanted. A medical blog described Sharon's final years: "With the help of modern medicine, his body soldiered on. His kidneys no longer worked, and he received dialysis to keep them operating. In 2013, he even underwent surgery to treat an infection related to his kidney failure."

Deprived of dignity, his body systems sustained by modern technology, Sharon lingered for eight years, largely forgotten by the world. Ramifications of his legacy, however, remain very much alive in Israel. Sharon embodied and acted on the worst elements of intolerance, racism and greed a nation can embrace.

The impact of the path on which Sharon set Israel resulted in today's self-imposed isolationism. Thanks to the legacy of right wing leaders like Sharon, and Menachem Begin Israel has been unable to resist the impact of a boycott movement that has attacked Israel's economy and undermined its world image.

As a demonstration of this isolation, no foreign leaders attended his final service, which was conducted Monday in front of the Knesset. The highest ranking world figure at the service was U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, a politician with an eye on 2016, who appeared as concerned about Israel's close bond to the U.S. as he was about Sharon.

Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was there, not as a public official, but as the staff director of the Quartet (the United Nations, the European Union, the United States and Russia), itself a lingering, dying effort to sustain and monitor peace efforts between Israel and the Palestine Authority.

It is a measure of how far Israel has fallen in world esteem that when the assassinated Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was buried in 1995, a sitting U.S. President and two former U.S. presidents were in attendance. Egypt was the only Arab state to send a low level representative to Sharon's service. The last eight years have not been good for either Israel or a comatose Ariel Sharon. If you read or look beyond the main stream media, It is not hard to see why.

Max Blumenthal sums up Sharon's legacy for The Nation:

A central player in Israeli affairs since the state's inception, Ariel Sharon molded history according to his own stark vision. He won consent for his plans through ruthlessness and guile, and resorted to force when he could not find any. An accused war criminal who presided over the killing of thousands of civilians, his foes referred to him as "The Bulldozer." To those who revered him as a strong-armed protector and patron saint of the settlements, he was "The King of Israel." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) Israel: The dream dies

M.J. Rosenberg, Tikkun Daily, January 9, 2014

Nobody I know is interested in talking about Israel anymore. I think that may be because virtually all my friends are essentially pro-Israel and have supported Israel their entire lives. Now their attitude is “what’s there to say?” as if Israel was a friend with an alcohol problem who, despite everyone’s best efforts, simply chooses drinking to excess over being sober. You know the alcohol is killing him but you also know that it’s his considered choice to drink. He’s weighed the risks and chosen alcohol. There isn’t anything anyone can do. So you stop talking about him, other than the occasional sigh at the mention of his name. It’s wrong, but essentially you stop actively caring. That is the way it is with Israel. Nobody wants to discuss the new conditions Netanyahu keeps adding in his effort to defeat not the Palestinians but Secretary of State John Kerry’s effort to achieve peace. First the demand that Israel be recognized “as a Jewish state.” Then allowing the fanatic settlers in Hebron to remain along with the satellite outposts populated by the violent “settler youth.” Then there is keeping troops in the Jordan Valley, along the border with Jordan, thereby ensuring that any Palestinian state in the West Bank would be as sovereign and viable as the ghetto Israel created in Gaza. The latest: Netanyahu is hard at work trying to prove that President Mahmoud Abbas, who Netanyahu himself credits with preventing terrorist attacks against Israel, is, you guessed it, an anti-semitite.

Why waste time discussing these things? Everyone knows that these Netanyahu conditions are nothing but pretenses.

So we ignore them, even though we know Israel is committing suicide. In fact, our indifference helps create the conditions for suicide. After all, if Jews don’t much care about Israel anymore, then who does?

Right-wing Christians? True, they “love” Israel but not nearly as much as they love the idea of banning abortion, discriminating against GLBT people, lowering taxes on the rich, erecting walls against immigrants, eliminating unemployment insurance, and winning the War Against Christmas. They like talking about Israel a lot (mainly to inoculate themselves against the charge of anti-semitism which most Jews sense they are) and as part of the active dream of some to convert the Jews. But that is about it.

No, the only Americans that Israel can count on [are] Jews and they are losing interest. Big time. But, you say, Israel still can count on the politicians who look to AIPAC for campaign contributions. They aren’t going anywhere.

And that’s true. So long as there is money in it, one can count on Bob Menendez, Lindsey Graham, and the like to “stand with Israel.” But that will last only as long as there is money in it. And that money will run out as the old Jews die off and their children choose other causes, causes that are not morally compromising.

AIPAC is the only thing that is keeping Congress in line in support of Netanyahu’s refusal to compromise with the Palestinians and his determination to destroy any chance of ending the Iran nuclear problem peacefully. Anyone who thinks that will last knows nothing about the political trajectory of Jews under 70, let alone under 40. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) U.S. Congress triples budget request to Israel **Alison Weir, IMEMC News, December 13, 2014**

While many Americans are gearing up for the Christmas holidays and trying to earn the money to buy their children presents, and while the number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits surged, Congress voted yet more money to Israel.

It also passed two other measures pushed by the Israel lobby. Almost none of this was reported by U.S. mainstream media.

The budget committees of both the Senate and the House released a budget on December 10 included \$284 million for U.S.-Israeli “joint defense” – in fact, primarily for defense systems in Israel. These defense systems are aimed at shielding Israel from perceived threats in the region. For context, rockets from Gaza have killed some 29 Israelis in just over a decade, during which time Israeli forces killed approximately 4,000 Gazans. Congress is virtually assured to pass the budget.

This money is on top of the \$3.1 billion in military aid the U.S. gives Israel every year. It is also triple the already-generous \$96 million the Obama administration had requested for the programs. The additional money is specifically to fund weapons systems that in many cases compete with American-made systems, likely costing thousands of American jobs.

Meanwhile, last week saw a surge in first-time applicants for unemployment. The number of people seeking U.S. unemployment benefits rose 68,000 last week to a seasonally adjusted 368,000, the largest increase in more than a year. But since some unemployment benefits are from a special program that is set to expire soon, as many as 2.1 million Americans will lose this assistance by March.

Also last week, and also under the media radar, the House passed a bill by a 399-0 vote that would increase the U.S. commitment to Israel’s qualitative military edge over everyone else in the region. The bill requires that the president report every two years to Congress on how Israel's advantage is being maintained – up from the previous requirement that this be done every four years.

On top of that, the House Energy and Commerce Committee approved legislation that would create a strategic energy partnership between Israel and the United States. The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) is working to ensure that the legislation will be passed by the full House of Representatives. AIPAC is generally considered one of the top two most powerful lobbying organizations in Washington.

A similar bill has been introduced in the Senate. Sponsors of the bills come from both parties, as is typical with Israel-related legislation thanks to the power of the Israel lobby.

Reps. Doug Collins (R-Ga.) and Brad Schneider (D-Ill.), introduced the bill to enhance Israel’s qualitative edge, while Fred Upton (R-Mich.) and Rep. Henry Waxman (D-Calif.) led the charge for the strategic energy partnership. Sens. Ron Wyden (D-Ore.), Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska), and Mary Landrieu (D-La.) introduced a parallel bill in the Senate. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) Not even God will save us

Yoel Marcus, Ha'aretz, January 10, 2014

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is supposed to be Israel's great miracle. The anxiety suffered by some members of the government, from Bibi to Naftali Bennett, is baseless: Kerry is neither the problem nor the solution. He is not a magician healing all ills. He's merely the catalyst for an opportunity to generate a regional agreement. He concluded the Iranian affair quietly, without leaks or public threats, without a single shot being fired and – above all – without allowing Israel to make good on its threat to attack. So no matter how heroic we think we are, we can heave a sigh of relief and count our blessings.

Now Kerry is staking his entire career on the Middle East, especially if he truly aspires to be elected the next president of the United States. He's always catching a plane. He's the most senior and renowned American diplomat who worked over Christmas. At the start of his journey through the Middle East, Kerry paled in comparison to Henry Kissinger. But, unlike Kissinger, who was a Jew serving as secretary of state under an anti-Semitic president – and was met with protests and slurs like "Jewboy" from Israelis, despite his help in the Yom Kippur War and the consequent peace process – Kerry is 100 percent gentile, despite the rumor that somewhere in the family tree there's a Jewish grandparent.

Kerry's height and great shock of hair are reminiscent of some of the early U.S. presidents: Upright, full of energy, he bounds down the stairs of his official plane without holding onto the railing, more manly than the way President Obama dances all the way from the gangway to his greeters (yes, Bibi and Sara, you're allowed to be jealous). People personally acquainted with Kerry are impressed by his drive, his ability to circumvent problems and his preference for a simmering cauldron over a seething one. He's setting up a framework agreement that is somewhat painful for both sides, which is preferable to being grilled – together – over the crater of a volcano.

Kerry has been instructed by Obama to reach a deal in the region so that the president can deal with domestic issues, such as the health-care crisis. At the same time, Kerry knows that a regional peace agreement would be a feather in his own cap – an achievement that would help him fulfill his dream of defeating Hillary Clinton and becoming the next president of the United States. Kerry's philosophy is to prefer an imperfect solution to a failed one. He wants to create a dynamic in which neither side can claim victory. Kerry is not so naive as to think that the release of prisoners, little by little, will create conditions for a peace agreement.

Kerry also shares the opinion of military experts who believe the problem of the Gaza Strip cannot be resolved separately from an agreement with the Palestinian Authority. On the other hand, does Mahmoud Abbas have the wherewithal to make peace with Israel on the basis of recognizing it as the nation state of the Jewish people? This is one reason he Kerry wants to involve Saudi Arabia and Jordan in the peace process. It is meant to strengthen the Palestinians. It's a substitute for involving the Arab League, an idea that has become unfeasible.

The Israeli leadership must grasp that Israel's security depends on peace. Security does not contradict peace; on the contrary. But let's say there is no peace agreement. What will happen to Israel? Will it be boycotted? The fact is, in Benjamin Netanyahu's three terms as prime minister, the U.S. has yet to come down on us. So why now, when Bibi is Bennett's hostage and doesn't even have a majority in his own party, would we have to evacuate settlements and goad the price-tag zealots to continue mistreating Arabs in the name of God? Because the U.S. will punish us – not by cutting military aid, but by doing the worst of all: washing its hands of Israel and leaving us at the mercy of a vengeful Europe and its boycotts. There is no way that even God would let us rule another people.

7) The Jewish state in question

Bernard Avishai, *The New Yorker*, January 2, 2014

Jodi Rudoren writes in today's Times [[read article here](#)] that the great sticking point for Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations is Benjamin Netanyahu's demand that Palestinians recognize Israel as a "Jewish state," or as "the nation-state of the Jewish people"—something along these lines. Rudoren asks, "Can Israel preserve its identity as a Jewish democratic state while also providing equal rights and opportunities to citizens of other faiths and backgrounds? With a largely secular population, who interprets Jewish law and custom for public institutions and public spaces? Is Judaism a religion, an ethnicity or both?"

Netanyahu's demand has at least three layers to it. The first is symbolic, without practical significance – understandable, but superfluous. The second is partly symbolic, but is meant to have future practical significance; it is contentious but resolvable. The third, however, is legal: it has great practical significance, and is, for any Palestinian or, for that matter, Israeli democrat, deplorable. We are no longer debating resolutions at fin-de-siècle Zionist congresses. Making laws requires settled definitions, and what's being settled in Israel is increasingly dangerous. Netanyahu's demand is a symptom of the disease that presents itself as the cure.

On the first, symbolic point: Israel is obviously the state of the Jewish people, in the sense that vanguard Jewish groups in Eastern Europe dreamed of a Hebrew revolution, which launched the Zionist colonial project, which engendered a Jewish national home in Mandate Palestine, which earned international backing to organize a state after the Holocaust – a state that became a place of refuge for Jews from Europe and Arab countries – that is, a state with a large Jewish majority whose binding tie (to bring things back to Zionism's DNA) is the spoken Hebrew language.

When Palestinians say they recognize Israel, they are implicitly recognizing this reality; they are acknowledging the name of a communal desire. The state is not called Ishmael, after all.

At the most visceral level, when we Israelis insist that Israel be recognized as Jewish, we mean that we want this narrative recognized, the same way in which Palestinians implicitly want acknowledgement of their particular formative sufferings at the hands of Zionism when they say "Palestinians" rather than "southern Syrians." To say, as Yair Lapid, Israel's Minister of Finance, does, that he doesn't care what Palestinians think is rude. When Palestinian spokespeople speak to Israeli reporters in Hebrew, they are recognizing Israel in the most poignant possible way. To ask for more is tactless.

That leads to the second, partly symbolic, partly practical aspect. Why does Netanyahu insist that this recognition is not enough? Because, he claims, in any negotiation with the Palestinians, it must be understood in advance that there can be no "right of return" for Palestinians to Israel – and, therefore, accepting this formulation, "the state of the Jewish people" signifies a joint decision to preclude a flood of Palestinian refugees into Israel's borders and onto its electoral rolls.

But Netanyahu's claim is false, and puts a stumbling block where a pathway needs to be cleared. ...

[***Read the entire piece here.***](#)

8) Sharon wrecked the two-state solution

Chris Doyle, *Al Arabiya English*, January 14, 2014

Ariel Sharon was the most formidable opponent that the Palestinian people have ever faced. Militarily, he was one of Israel's most gifted military generals, brave, brilliant but ruthless. His talents helped Israel win wars in 1948, 1956, 1967 and 1973. Ideologically he was a Greater Israel fanatic, championing the settler movement, devising strategic settlement plans that would erase the Green Line, separate Jerusalem, fragment the West Bank and control strategic resources, particularly water. He entered politics to execute this vision for Israel with extraordinary success. More than any other Israeli figure, he has engineered the cantonised West Bank of today and the devastating Palestinian geographic (West Bank and Gaza) and political divisions (Fatah and Hamas) that make a final political settlement now so remote.

There was little mystery about Sharon's strategy for those who followed his career closely. It was explicit and consistent. His most lauded metamorphosis from bulldozer to peace builder was more spin than substance. The late Graham Usher, a brilliant journalist who passed away recently, once observed to me that that "if Netanyahu said that he would kill Arafat tomorrow, he would advise the Palestinian leader to do nothing. If Sharon said so, Arafat would be best advised to leave immediately." For Sharon, in contrast to Netanyahu, personal ambition came second to decisive action to realise his dream.

Sharon believed passionately in a Greater Israel and went along with the peace treaty with Egypt precisely because it did not threaten Israel's hold on the West Bank. As housing minister, he masterminded around 100,000 Israelis settling in areas of the West Bank and another 73,000 as prime minister. He summed up his view in 1998 when he told settlers that "everybody has to move, run and grab as many hilltops as they can, to enlarge the settlements because everything we take now will stay ours...Everything we don't grab will go to them [the Palestinians]." His disciples heard his call and a hundred new hilltop outposts were set up across the West Bank.

Arafat was Sharon's obsession. In his view, Arafat was dangerous because he was the symbol of Palestinian nationalism, whose regular visits to the White House and a Nobel Peace Prize marked an international acceptance that infuriated Sharon. He knew that Hamas, on the other hand, could never gain such global support. He opposed the Oslo Accords and was terrified that a peace deal, so nearly reached in the summer of 2000 at Camp David, would have ended everything he had worked for. His response was his deliberately provocative visit to the Temple Mount on Sept. 28, 2000 that triggered the second Intifada, the death of the peace talks and his election as prime minister.

As prime minister, Sharon was once more in confrontation with Arafat. Sharon promised Israelis he would provide security whilst expanding settlements and without signing any peace deal. He declared Arafat to be irrelevant and backed this up by confining the PLO leader to just a few rooms of his Ramallah headquarters. His then-Foreign Minister, Silvan Shalom, summed up Sharon's view in 2011: "between Hamas and Arafat, I prefer Hamas." Sharon did not want to negotiate terms but dictate them. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) The Ariel Sharon we didn't want to remember

Yitzhak Laor, Ha'aretz, January 20, 2014

Someone must stand up for the families who lost their children, for the Palestinians of Sabra and Chatila, for the people of West Beirut.

Okay, we will mention everyone, all the comparisons, what a leader, gentleman, pal and he had a driver (as the song goes), and he ate falafel, raised sheep, had a sense of humor, and comedians Eli Yatzpan and Tuvia Tzafir, and singer Miki Gavrielov.

Everything is so sweet. The early massacres, the peak of which was the one at Qibya, were commando; the one at Sabra and Chatila was "controversial."

A woman who lost her child gave a eulogy, erasing from collective memory the parents who lost their children and who, already in 1982, for the first time in Israeli history, demonstrated against the defense minister and the first war in which large numbers of soldiers refused to fight.

Soon streets and town squares will be renamed for Ariel Sharon and this "reawakening of Israel" will be another chapter in the syllabus, and there will be no one to rescue the collective opposition memory from this totality.

One can say there is no room for other voices; everything drowns in "heroism," "enemies," disengagement, steps for peace and "in my opinion:" On one hand the state, on the other hand the wise, honest men and women; but not the left that says otherwise, remembers together what is drowning in schmaltz.

And one can say this is the power of the state, that can erase the memory of the opposition; and one can count all the ways in which, in light of the Israeli addiction to national mourning, the public voice of the opposition has gone silent. This is the Alzheimer's of political awareness: A leftist agenda that, like a newspaper, becomes obsolete overnight.

Yet someone had to stand up and speak of the many dead that Sharon left in his wake, irrespective of his "character," and of his lawlessness, when he put settlements all over in order to preclude a solution to the conflict. That was the logic of the ghettoist "disengagement." Someone needed to stand up and speak, in one eulogy, about the ruthless way he conducted the wars, including the war in Lebanon; about the pulverization of besieged West Beirut from the air, every day, only in order to kill Yassir Arafat. Someone should have spoken, someone should have said that even among military men there are different shades, and Sharon represented the worst of the men of blood.

It didn't happen. The Arab dead were not invited to participate in the national memory, and the memory of the Jewish veterans of the Lebanon War remained with them, privatized, like their nightmares, and they are already in their 50s and 60s. The Labor Party, which opposed the war and Sharon at some stage or other no longer knows what to say about the past, as if any criticism would "spoil" the party's standing with Channel 2 television and its clones. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

10) Israel's dilemma: Who can be an Israeli?

Daniel Sokatch and David N. Myers, Los Angeles Times, January 14, 2014

Simply put, citizenship should not be divided into classes.

Recently, Israel has been beset by a pair of controversies relating to its Arab minority: first, the proposal over whether to resettle Bedouin Arabs against their will in state-sponsored towns, and second, the renewed call by Israel's foreign minister to "transfer" Arab residents of northern Israel to a new state of Palestine should one be established.

At issue here is not only the status of Israel's Arab population but the concept of citizenship in Israel. If threats to the status of Israeli citizenship continue unchecked, Israel's very democracy is imperiled.

Israeli citizenship is designed very differently from the American model. Here, if you are born in the country or become an American citizen, you retain your citizenship unless you seek to renounce it. U.S. citizenship is not conditioned on ethnic or religious origin, and every citizen has the same rights and responsibilities.

In Israel, it's more complicated, with a variety of pathways to different categories of citizenship. All Jews in the world are eligible, under Israel's 1950 Law of Return, to be fast-tracked to Israeli citizenship. And yet even citizenship for Jews is not simple. Those born to a Jewish father rather than mother or converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis may qualify for citizenship according to the Law of Return, but do not qualify as Jews in the eyes of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Accordingly, they are precluded from marrying those registered by the ministry as Jewish because marriage in Israel is controlled by religious authorities. In fact, these Jews are, in some respects, accorded second-class citizenship in terms of their personal status.

Palestinian Arabs and Druze born in Israel are citizens by birth. But residents of East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed after the 1967 Six-Day War, are not. They are conditional residents, not citizens — conditional on living in East Jerusalem continuously or, for those able to travel abroad for the purposes of study or work, maintaining a regular return schedule to ensure their residency is not endangered.

East Jerusalem Palestinians may apply for Israeli citizenship (with no guarantee of success), but the number who have had their permanent residency revoked by the Israeli government since 1967 is as large as the number who have been successful in attaining citizenship. For this reason, Palestinians in East Jerusalem live in constant fear of losing the right to live in their homes.

Similarly grim are the prospects of citizenship for migrant workers in Israel, who come from places like Thailand and the Philippines. Often, their children speak Hebrew as their first language, attend Israeli schools and even do military service. But this does not qualify them for citizenship. Nor do the thousands of African refugees in Israel have a path to citizenship, or even access to social benefits such as healthcare and work permits, under a government that seeks to expel them as "infiltrators." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

11) Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions, January 2014 Newsletter

Jeff Halper

Let's begin with the good news: 2014 will likely mark the beginning of the end of the Israeli Occupation – although its final demise and the emergence of something new and just will need our focused and strategic intervention.

The linear process in which we have been trapped these past three and a half decades reached its dead end long ago, certainly by 1999 when Ehud Barak effectively ended the Oslo “peace process,” but it has taken until now for that fact to manifest itself politically. The imminent failure of the Kerry initiative has finally made it clear that the process of systematically eliminating the two-state solution through ever-expanding and more permanent “facts on the ground,” initiated by Begin and Sharon in 1977 but pursued with equal if not more vigor by Labor governments, has achieved its goal. All the more so since the interminable “peace process,” beginning in Madrid in 1991, the dead horse still being pushed by Kerry, has finally rolled over.

At the end of a linear process two things can happen: the status quo is simply frozen in place indefinitely, which is what Israel is hoping for (the status quo, of course, being one of continued Israeli expansion and Palestinian confinement) or the whole process collapses, opening up new, previously unacceptable, possibilities. The first, I believe, is impossible. Not only has civil society resistance to the Occupation turned the Israel-Palestinian conflict into a truly global issue, at the level of the anti-apartheid struggle, but the concurrent shift in public opinion world-wide is beginning to trickle up into the governments and corporate headquarters. Israel faces only increased isolation and sanctions; it cannot normalize its Occupation or make it disappear from political view.

Which leaves us with the second: collapse opening up new possibilities.

The failure of the Kerry initiative will trigger two fateful consequences culminating in a collapse of the status quo. First, Israel, arguing that it has “no partner for peace” and must therefore take unilateral acts to protect itself, will likely annex Area C, the 62 percent of the West Bank under full Israeli control today, and the site of the settlements. (Israel, of course, has already annexed East Jerusalem, and Netanyahu refuses to allow Kerry to even mention Jerusalem in the “framework” agreement he is drafting). With that Israel expands from 78 percent onto 85 percent of historic Palestine and locks the Palestinians into impoverished and disconnected enclaves – although, to make its annexation more palatable, Israel could “generously” concede strips of Area C so as to make the Palestinian “cantons” (as Sharon called them) a little more contiguous. With the two-state solution thus irrefutably dead and no further “peace process” in the offing, the Palestinian Authority would likely resign or collapse, an act that could well force Israel to reoccupy the Palestinian cities of the West Bank and, inevitably, Gaza as well.

This chain of events, I would submit, will create an intolerable situation, forcing the international community to act, with or without the U.S. With the air finally cleared of the two-state solution and faced with raw occupation, the only option for resolving the conflict, a one-state solution, will finally emerge into the light. Here is where Palestinian civil society must assert its agency, its will. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

12) Netanyahu shouldn't plant land mines to assuage the extreme right

Ha'aretz editorial, January 19, 2014

Israel and European countries are censuring each other over Israel's policy in the territories. The Europeans are unhappy with the continued construction in the settlements, while Israel is unhappy with "the one-sided position they consistently assume against Israel, and with the Palestinians," as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has put it.

This state of affairs may give us the impression that the disagreement is based on a reciprocal apportioning of guilt, which the Israeli side has the power to solve using statements and the summoning of ambassadors.

This is an erroneous impression. When a group of European countries, Israel's allies, coordinate diplomatic pressure on Jerusalem and warn about the implications of Israel's policy in the territories, the significance isn't just diplomatic. It becomes a threat that Israel cannot dismiss with censure.

Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon has called the American mediation efforts "messianic."

The Ministerial Committee for Legislation has approved the annexation of the Jordan Valley. The prime minister has published tenders for the construction of 1,400 housing units in the territories and has proposed that Beit El become part of the settlement blocs that will remain in Israel's hands. And he objects to a withdrawal from Hebron in the name of the "rights of the Jewish people."

When all this happens, European countries and the United States are entitled to conclude that Israel is doing everything it can to stop the peace process and torpedo the framework agreement that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is toiling over.

"When did the EU call in the Palestinian ambassadors to complain about incitement that calls for Israel's destruction?" the prime minister has asked foreign reporters, rhetorically. But Benjamin Netanyahu got it wrong. No senior official in the Palestinian Authority is calling for Israel's destruction.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' objection to the construction of thousands of housing units in the territories isn't incitement, it's a legitimate position of leaders who fear for the future of their territory. These leaders are standing helpless in the face of a construction drive in the settlements.

Netanyahu isn't allowed to confound the public with futile slogans, censure of European countries and mockery of the United States. Western countries' intolerance toward Israel isn't just a worry, it's the opening of a diplomatic opportunity whose value even Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman recognizes – based on his own declaration.

Netanyahu must understand that his position requires him to stick to a policy that looks out for Israel's interests. He shouldn't plant permanent land mines in the negotiation process in an attempt to find favor with the extreme right.