

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
February 6, 2014



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This week's Middle East Notes presents articles highlighting the Kerry framework for negotiations, the growing BDS movement in Europe and the U.S., continuing hardships for civilians in Gaza, settler violence on the West Bank, the separation barrier's division of the Catholic town of Beit Jala, and other issues.

- CMEP's Jan. 23 Round Up and Jan. 30 Bulletin focus on continuing work on the Kerry framework for negotiations, weakening of Israeli opposition to these negotiations, and further readings.
- Jon Queally in Common Dreams states that if the Palestinians and Israelis find a way to proceed, everything is still possible. But if either or both don't agree, Kerry would have to take his mission to its logical, fanatical conclusion and declare the end of the negotiated two-state solution.
- The Palestinian News Network reports that Dr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the UN, said that the international community must act to hold Israel accountable for its violations and crimes and salvage the prospects for the realization of peace and justice in this year.
- Hirsh Goodman in a *New York Times* op-ed believes that the "boycott, divestment, sanctions" (BDS) movement has started to resonate with trade unions, churches, universities and international companies in Europe and the United States, who see Israel as oppressing Palestinians and violating their human rights.
- Omar Barghouti in the *New York Times* Sunday Review notes that Israel is threatened by the effectiveness of the nonviolent strategies used by the BDS movement, including its Israeli component, and by the negative impact they have had on Israel's standing in world public opinion.
- Arad Nir in Al Monitor Newsletter is of the opinion the Israeli defense minister's apology for what he said about Secretary of State Kerry proves that when the U.S. pressures Israel, it gets what it wants; but will it demand an Israeli compromise with the Palestinians and accept the price of this pressure?
- Eldad Beck in Israel News writes that while still expressing much optimism regarding an imminent deal, Kerry warns that Israel runs great risks, and only has momentary security that is bound to change if peace talks with Palestinians flounder.
- Nahum Barnea offers an analysis in Ynet News observing that when Kerry warns Israel against a South Africa-style international boycott, he knows what he's talking about.
- Larry Derfner writes in +972 that unlike any other aspect of the occupation, settler violence is something nobody outside the radical fringe in Israel will defend. And yet, nobody — in Israel or internationally — has found the political will to put a stop to the decades-long phenomenon, even when the victims are U.S. citizens.
- Zafrir Rinat writes in Ha'aretz that the Gaza Strip is facing a severe shortage of potable water and that Israeli and Palestinian experts agree that immediate action is necessary.
- Amira Hass notes in Ha'aretz that a UN report says that 2013 saw an escalation in IDF activity against Palestinians, with Palestinian popular resistance to arrests on the rise.
- Zenit, the Vatican News Agency, reports that Canada's bishops have joined the global call to stop Israel from placing the Wall on Cremisan Farmland and the nearby convent, saying that it will only "deepen the wounds between Palestinians and Israelis."
- Nir Hasson in Ha'aretz notes that the West Bank fence aims to enclose Gilo, but also cuts off Beit Jala from Catholic monasteries that provide educational services. The Supreme Court has ordered the government to explain why it refuses to alter the route of the separation barrier near the Palestinian village of Beit Jala, south of Jerusalem.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Round Up, January 23, 2014

As the world focuses on the tragedy in Syria and talks in Geneva, a framework agreement between Israelis and Palestinians is still quietly developing.

Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Israeli special envoy Isaac Molcho traveled to Washington to meet with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry ahead of his meeting with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Davos in the coming days. They discussed the framework agreement Secretary Kerry is still trying to finalize something that both sides feel they can live with. According to Ha'aretz, Secretary Kerry will hold a similar meeting with Palestinian officials in Washington next week. Acceptance of Kerry's framework as the basis of negotiations by both sides will take the pressure off as the original April deadline comes closer.

The gaps on the core issues of the conflict, including borders, security, refugees and Jerusalem, remain wide. Specifically, the question of security on the Jordan Valley border has attracted attention as a main point of contention between Israeli and Palestinian negotiators.

Many papers are reporting that Secretary Kerry plans on announcing a vague plan in Aqaba, Jordan with Netanyahu, Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah II. London-based Arabic paper Al Hayat claims the Palestinians are dismayed by the "fuzzy" details.

Contributing to the Palestinian's dismay is the announcement that Israel will move ahead with another 381 homes for settlers in the West Bank, less than two weeks after unveiling plans for 1,877 more units, some in the contentious East Jerusalem. So far this year, the Israeli Civil Administration has announced 2,530 new settlement units. In response to the announcements, Erekat simply told reporters, "Netanyahu's government does not want peace."

Sometimes considered a "payer not a player," the EU has warned that there will be consequences for both sides if a deal isn't reached. EU Ambassador to Israel Lars Faaborg-Andersen said this week, "We have made it clear to the parties that there will be a price to pay if these negotiations falter." The EU is easily the largest donor to the Palestinian Authority but, "It has been made very clear to the Palestinians that just sitting around and waiting is not an option." Cutting aid would also put a larger burden on Israel. The ambassador said, "I think it is realized in Israel that this money is key to the stability of the West Bank and in Gaza. If we don't provide the money ... I think there is a great likelihood that Israel would have to provide far more."

Further reading

- **Encountering Peace: A very personal statement on peace** [Gershon Baskin, JPost] There is only one solution to the Israeli- Palestinian conflict – two states for two peoples. As a Jew, a Zionist and a proud Israeli I want to have prosperous and happy neighbors living in a state of their own, next to Israel, living side-by-side in peace. ...
- **There's reason for optimism on Arab-Israeli peace** [Michael Cohen] Generally, betting on a Middle East peace deal is the political equivalent of playing Three Card Monte. It's impossible to win. But, at the same time, there are real reasons for optimism about where this process might lead. In fact, Israelis and Palestinians may be closer to peace today than any point in the past 65 years.
- **Jordan and Palestinian refugees** [Daoud Kuttub, Huffington Post] An interesting development is taking places in Jordan: Forty years after the Rabat Summit, which declared the PLO as the "sole legitimate representative" of the Palestinian people, one aspect of representation is being challenged. Jordanian officials, including the prime minister, the speaker of the Parliament and the foreign minister, were recently quoted as demanding a greater role for Jordan in the peace talks. ...

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

Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin, January, 30, 2014

Kerry plan details emerge as Israeli coalition wobbles: The buzz surrounding Secretary Kerry's framework continues to grow as some speculate on the content and others try to ensure it's dead on arrival.

This week, Thomas Friedman reports in *The New York Times* that according to U.S. officials he's spoken with, Kerry is planning to present, "a U.S. framework that will lay out what Washington considers the core concessions Israelis and Palestinians need to make for a fair, lasting deal." He writes, "The 'Kerry Plan,' likely to be unveiled soon, is expected to call for an end to the conflict and all claims, following a phased Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank (based on the 1967 lines), with unprecedented security arrangements in the strategic Jordan Valley." He also says that some settlement blocs will remain in the West Bank, but Israel will "compensate the Palestinians with Israeli territory." It will call for Palestinians to have a capital in East Jerusalem, Palestinians recognizing "Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people" and no right of return for Palestinian refugees into Israel.

The ideas themselves are not groundbreaking. Variations of this formula have been known for years, but getting the parties to accept them would be historic and could move the negotiations decisively closer to ending to the occupation.

Friedman concludes that if this doesn't work, "Israelis and Palestinians need to understand that Kerry's mission is the last train to a negotiated two-state solution. The next train is the one coming at them." But of course not everyone sees it that way. Israeli Economy minister and perpetual coalition troublemaker Naftali Bennett launched an "unprecedented attack" against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu that could shake up the Israeli government. Bennett slammed Netanyahu's willingness to allow Jewish-Israeli settlers to remain in a future Palestinian state if they wish saying, "Our ancestors will never forgive an Israeli leader who divides our land and our capital."

The statement appeared to personally offended Netanyahu, who reportedly offered an ultimatum to Bennett: apologize or get kicked out of the cabinet. One Likud official told Ha'aretz that, "a lack of apology comes at a price." He continued, "If he doesn't apologize, he endangers the composition of the current government. We have enough alternatives to Habayit Hayehudi. A government without Bennett can continue to worry about the security of the state just like every government before him." ...

Removing Bennett's Jewish Home party out of the coalition and replacing it with center and center-left parties that support negotiations has the potential to free up Netanyahu to make the tough decisions needed to make peace. The leader of the Labor party has already said it would join to coalition to support the negotiations if the members of the far right leave. However, such a move could also split the prime minister's own Likud party. Netanyahu may be unwilling to wage this battle just yet, but he certainly has political possibilities to pursue a negotiated two-state solution should the time come.

Take action: The people of the Cremisan Valley need your help. The Israeli government plans to build a barrier for security through the valley impacting 58 families who tend to the land, many of them Christian. There is also a convent run by six nuns for nearly 400 local children. The case is now in the hands of the Israeli Supreme Court. The wall would surround the school on three sides and separate the convent from the neighboring monastery, which produces the famous Cremisan wine. The nuns would lose access to 75 percent of their land and the school would be situated in a military zone accessible through a locked fence. [Read a personal letter from CMEP Field Director Rev. Doris Warrell and then take action.](#) Tell your representative today to do what they can to support the Christians of the Cremisan Valley and our shared hopes for a lasting peace! ...

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

2) If Friedman got “The Kerry Plan” right – No deal, says senior Palestinian official Jon Queally, Common Dreams, January 31, 2014

If the details circulating in the U.S. and Israeli press over the last few days regarding the framework of the peace agreement being crafted by Secretary of State John Kerry are accurate, says at least one senior Palestinian official, the ongoing but fragile talks between the Palestinian Authority and Israel will come to an abrupt end.

Seemingly based on Thomas Friedman’s mid-week column in *The New York Times* that said Kerry would back a deal in which the “right of return” would not be featured while demanding recognition of Israel as “the state of the Jewish people” and only a vague description of important boundaries, the official told Ha’aretz on Friday that such a framework would be unacceptable.

“We don’t know what the meaning of a capital in Jerusalem is and how the Americans see Jerusalem and whether this conforms to the Palestinian position,” the official, who insisted on anonymity, told the Israeli newspaper. And added: “The American demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state alongside a vague formulation of the right of return cannot be a basis for any outline that could lead to an agreement.”

According to Friedman’s column on Wednesday:

The “Kerry Plan,” likely to be unveiled soon, is expected to call for an end to the conflict and all claims, following a phased Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank (based on the 1967 lines), with unprecedented security arrangements in the strategic Jordan Valley. The Israeli withdrawal will not include certain settlement blocs, but Israel will compensate the Palestinians for them with Israeli territory. It will call for the Palestinians to have a capital in Arab East Jerusalem and for Palestinians to recognize Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. It will not include any right of return for Palestinian refugees into Israel proper.

Though the revelations basically follow the well-worn outlines of the U.S. position on the “two state solution”—Friedman himself didn’t think he was making news in the column (“I thought what I wrote was already out there in the public sphere,” he said later)—the description in the column was enough to create a brief media firestorm given the sensitive nature of the talks.

According to Ilene Prusher, also writing in Ha’aretz, the column by Friedman, who has been in Israel all week, “was widely quoted as a definitive development across the Israeli media. And when Friedman spoke at the Jerusalem Press Club on Thursday night, Uri Dromi, the JPC director, gave him a ‘mazel tov’ on the important scoop.”

According to Prusher, Friedman “chuckled” in response and said he didn’t even think the description of the “Kerry Plan” needed a source because he thought he’d already read about it in Ha’aretz and elsewhere.

Beyond the “Two State Solution”: One final, though noteworthy, aspect of the Friedman article this week is where he writes: *If the Palestinians and Israelis find a way to proceed with the Kerry plan, everything is still possible. Success is hardly assured, but it will prove that it’s not midnight yet. But if either or both don’t agree, Kerry would have to take his mission to its logical, fanatical conclusion and declare the end of the negotiated two-state solution. (If not, he loses his credibility.) If and when that happens, Israel, which controls the land, would have to either implement a unilateral withdrawal, live with the morally corrosive and globally isolating implications of a permanent West Bank occupation or design a new framework of one-state-for-two-people. ...*

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Mansour: International community must hold Israel accountable for its crimes and violations Palestinian News Network, January 24, 2014

Dr. Riyad Mansour, Permanent Observer of the State of Palestine to the United Nations in New York, said that the international community must act collectively to hold Israel accountable for its violations and crimes and salvage the prospects for the realization of peace and justice in this year.

Mansour statements were made in identical letters sent to the UN Secretary-General, President of the Security Council (Jordan) and President of the UN General Assembly, on Israeli aggressive and illegal actions against the Palestinian people.

Mansour said in his letter: "While serious peace efforts are being undertaken both regionally and internationally to achieve peace and to salvage the Two-State solution, Israel instead continues to choose aggression and colonization. Since the resumption of peace talks, the occupying Power hasn't ceased its oppressive and destructive measures which threatening to derail the peace talks."

He pointed out to "the latest spate of Israeli crimes took place on Wednesday, 22 January, in the Gaza Strip, an integral part of the State of Palestine, which remains under an oppressive, unlawful blockade. For the second time in a week, Israeli occupying forces launched military strikes against the Gaza Strip, firing a missile at a car carrying Ahmed Zaanin, 21 years old, and Mahmoud Zaanin, 23 years old, killing them both."

He added, "In addition to the killing of Palestinian civilians, Israel continues with its illegal, provocative measures that continue to aggravate tensions. While all these issues were highlighted during the State of Palestine's intervention at the Security Council on 20 January 2014, in particular the issue of continued settlement activities, which more than 40 Member States who addressed the Council reiterated the illegality of settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem and the obstacle they pose to peace."

He also pointed out to the Israeli decision that was made in 22 January to "move forward with its plans for another 261 new units in two settlements located deep in the West Bank. This includes 256 units in the so-called settlement of 'Nofei Prat,' between Jerusalem and Jericho, which according to Peace Now dramatically changes the settlement, expanding its size and population significantly, in fact tripling its size. Another five settlement units in the massive settlement of 'Ariel' in the North."

He also talked about the announcement made by the Jerusalem municipality to build a new settlement "neighborhood" south of the City, which would include 1,700 settlement units. Furthermore, a further 381 new settlement units were approved to be built in the so-called settlement of "Givat Zeev" north of Jerusalem.

"Along with the innumerable violations to Palestinian rights as a result of illegal settlements, racist and fanatic Israeli settlers continue to wreak havoc and destruction on Palestinian properties and land throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem," said Mansour.

In the recent period, extremist settlers have continued to vandalize homes and to destroy olive groves and other farm lands. The most recent attacks occurred yesterday when Israeli settlers uprooted over 600 recently planted olive and almond saplings in the village of Sinjil, north of Ramallah in the West Bank. It should be noted that the saplings were planted by the International Committee of the Red Cross to support Palestinian farmers, and would have benefited more than 70 families." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) Losing the propaganda war

Hirsh Goodman, The New York Times, January 31, 2014

On Feb. 4, 1965, as a teenager, I left South Africa, the country of my birth, for a new home in a place I'd never been — Israel.

I loved South Africa, but I loathed the apartheid system. In Israel, I saw a fresh start for a people rising from the ashes of the Holocaust, a place of light and justice, as opposed to the darkness and oppression of apartheid South Africa.

Now, almost 50 years later, after decades of arguing that Israel is not an apartheid state and that it's a calumny and a lie to say so, I sense that we may be well down the road to being seen as one. That's because, in this day and age, brands are more powerful than truth and, inexplicably, blindly, Israel is letting itself be branded an apartheid state — and even encouraging it.

In apartheid South Africa, people disappeared in the night without the protection of any legal process and were never heard from again. There was no freedom of speech or expression and more "judicial" hangings were reportedly carried out there than in any other place on earth. There was no free press and, until January 1976, no public television.

Masses of black people were forcibly moved from tribal lands to arid Bantustans in the middle of nowhere. A "pass system" stipulated where blacks could live and work, splitting families and breaking down social structures, to provide cheap labor for the mines and white-owned businesses, and a plentiful pool of domestic servants for the white minority. Those found in violation were arrested, usually lashed, and sentenced to stints of hard labor for a few shillings per prisoner per day, payable to the prison service.

None of this even remotely exists in Israel or the occupied territories. But, increasingly, in the mind of the world it does. This is because of Israel's own actions and a vigorous campaign by those who oppose its occupation of Palestinians' land and, in some cases, Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. They understand that delegitimization is Israel's soft belly and apartheid the buzzword to make it happen.

International isolation is potentially more dangerous for Israel than the Iranian nuclear program. The Palestinians and their supporters, particularly the young generation, some of whom have graduated from the best universities in the world, have come to realize that the stones of the first intifada and the suicide bombers of the second are yesterday's weapons in yesterday's war.

Boycott, divestment and sanctions are now the way they seek to end the Israeli occupation or Jewish Israel itself. Their message has started to resonate with trade unions, churches, universities and international companies in Europe and the United States, who see Israel as oppressing Palestinians and violating their human rights.

A Dutch pension giant's decision last month to divest from Israel's five largest banks because of their ties to occupation rang warning bells in Israel's business community and the Treasury. According to the finance minister, even a partial European boycott would cost Israel 20 billion shekels (about \$5.7 billion) in exports annually and almost 10,000 jobs. But the greatest damage is self-inflicted.

The "apartheid wall," "apartheid roads," colonization, administrative arrests, travel restrictions, land confiscations and house demolitions are the clay apartheid comparisons are made of, and cannot be hidden or denied, for as long as Israel continues with the status quo. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) Why the boycott movement scares Israel

Omar Barghouti, *The New York Times Sunday Review*, January 31, 2014

If Secretary of State John Kerry's attempts to revive talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority fail because of Israel's continuing construction of illegal settlements, the Israeli government will likely face an international boycott "on steroids" as Mr. Kerry warned last August.

These days, Israel seems as terrified by the "exponential" growth of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (or BDS) movement as it is by Iran's rising clout in the region. Last June, ... Benjamin Netanyahu effectively declared BDS a strategic threat. Calling it the "delegitimization" movement, he assigned the overall responsibility for fighting it to his Strategic Affairs Ministry. But BDS doesn't pose an existential threat to Israel; it poses a serious challenge to Israel's system of oppression of the Palestinian people, which is the root cause of its growing worldwide isolation.

The Israeli government's view of BDS as a strategic threat reveals its heightened anxiety at the movement's spread into the mainstream lately. It also reflects the failure of the Foreign Affairs Ministry's well-endowed "Brand Israel" campaign, which reduces BDS to an image problem and employs culture as a propaganda tool, sending well-known Israeli figures around the world to show Israel's prettier face.

Launched in 2005 by the largest trade union federations and organizations in Palestinian society, BDS calls for ending Israel's 1967 occupation, "recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality," and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and lands from which they were forcibly displaced and dispossessed in 1948.

Why should Israel, a nuclear power with a strong economy, feel so vulnerable to a nonviolent human rights movement?

Israel is deeply apprehensive about the increasing number of American Jews who vocally oppose its policies — especially those who are joining or leading BDS campaigns. It also perceives as a profound threat the rising dissent among prominent Jewish figures who reject its tendency to speak on their behalf, challenge its claim to be the "national home" of all Jews, or raise the inherent conflict between its ethno-religious self-definition and its claim to democracy. What I.F. Stone prophetically wrote about Israel back in 1967, that it is "creating a kind of moral schizophrenia in world Jewry" because of its "racial and exclusionist" ideal, is no longer beyond the pale.

Israel is also threatened by the effectiveness of the nonviolent strategies used by the BDS movement, including its Israeli component, and by the negative impact they have had on Israel's standing in world public opinion. As one Israeli military commander said in the context of suppressing Palestinian popular resistance to the occupation, "We don't do Gandhi very well."

The landslide vote by the American Studies Association in December to endorse an academic boycott of Israel, coming on the heels of a similar decision by the Association for Asian-American Studies, among others, as well as divestment votes by several university student councils, proves that BDS is no longer a taboo in the United States.

The BDS movement's economic impact is also becoming evident. The recent decision by the \$200 billion Dutch pension fund, PGGM, to divest from the five largest Israeli banks due to their involvement in occupied Palestinian territory has sent shock waves through the Israeli establishment. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) When America has the will, Israel finds the way

Arad Nir, translated by Aviva Arad, *AI Monitor Newsletter*, January 21, 2014

If we can learn one thing from the apology of Israeli Defense Minister Moshe “Bogie” Ya’alon for the harsh remarks he leveled at U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, it’s that when America wants something, Israel has no way out of it. As in the crisis with Turkey after the violent clash on the Mavi Marmara ship in May 2010, this time as well, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Ya’alon tried to evade the U.S. request for an apology. But while in the Marmara episode it took Jerusalem three years and irreparable strategic damage for them to be convinced, last week it happened in less than a day.

Just as the administration in Washington demanded and received an explicit apology from the Israeli minister of defense, so can the president of the U.S. demand that the prime minister of Israel walk in the diplomatic path Kerry is charting. But if President Barack Obama displays the necessary decisiveness to force Israel to accept critical compromises to advance an arrangement with the Palestinians, he will also have to pay a heavy personal and political price. At this stage, it’s hard to believe that Obama is willing to withstand the heavy pressure that will be placed on him if he tries to twist Netanyahu’s arm at the moment of truth of the diplomatic process, and be dragged into a public confrontation with him.

Ben Caspit determined here that “Israelis only understand force,” and examined the ability of various boycotts to motivate and persuade Jerusalem to advance in the peace process. It’s doubtful whether those threatening with sanctions are aware that placing any sort of sanctions will exact a price not just from the citizens of Israel but also from those who enact them. All the more so if this be an official, declared policy. Israel and its supporters will accuse Europe that it, the enlightened continent, is discriminating against Jews again. The president of the United States, if he decides to put real pressure on Netanyahu, such as a diplomatic plan with an ultimatum attached to it, will pay a clear price tag.

In the eyes of opponents of the peace process, Obama will turn into a hater of Israel and will be presented as a bitter enemy. He will have to withstand harsh and manipulative political criticism from both houses of Congress. He will be the target of poison arrows launched at him by most of those who see themselves as friends of Israel, not to mention loud protests led by the powerful Israel lobby and by the organized Jewish community.

Ya’alon’s insulting comments, which said that Kerry’s efforts to reach an agreement stem “from an incomprehensible obsession and a sense of messianism,” were published close to the publication of the memoir of former U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*. For a limited time, Gates was the American colleague of Ya’alon’s as minister of defense, but the two knew each other back when the Israeli minister served at the Ministry of Strategic Affairs. From the initial reports on the book, it seems that Gates, “as a very strong friend and supporter of Israel,” believes that “Jerusalem needs to think anew about its strategic environment. ... Given a Palestinian birthrate that far outpaces that of Israeli Jews, and the political trends in the region, time is not on Israel’s side.”

Gates, like Kerry and Obama, is convinced that Israel must settle the question of the occupation. Gates, [first appointed by a Republican], ... stayed at the Pentagon throughout [Obama’s first term.] That is, the U.S. administration’s recognition of the necessity to reach an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians isn’t a personal, Democratic “obsession” of one politician or another.

The course of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians over the years proves that nothing has changed. Just as the late Prime Minister Ariel Sharon understood, when he formulated the disengagement from the Gaza Strip, it seemed that the only way to achieve an arrangement between the sides was to force it on them. Sharon, in his way, took preventative steps and initiated a unilateral withdrawal to avert a plan that the Americans would force him to accept. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) Kerry: Israel's security is "illusionary," boycott around the corner

Eldad Beck, Israel News, February 1, 2014

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said at the Munich Security Conference in Germany that a failure of the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks is not an option, and that all the parties involved should acknowledge that any alternatives to a possible agreement would be unacceptable.

However, he noted that in light of the complex situation in the Middle East, the possibility of not achieving an agreement cannot be entirely ruled out.

Kerry warned that the status quo between Israel and the Palestinians cannot continue. While there is prosperity and momentary security in Israel, he said, it is an illusion that is bound to change if talks flounder: "The risks are very high for Israel. People are talking about boycott. That will intensify in the case of failure. We all have a strong interest in this conflict resolution."

Kerry expressed, without much elaboration, his appreciation to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and chief Israeli negotiator Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, stressing that both have taken tough decisions in the process of negotiations with the Palestinians.

[The] U.S.'s top diplomat further implicitly addressed criticism towards him that was expressed by Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon regarding a "messianic pursuit" after peace in the Middle East: "I believe in the possibility or I wouldn't pursue this," he said. "I don't think we're being quixotic ... We're working hard because the consequences of failure are unacceptable."

Kerry added that both U.S. President Barack Obama and himself are entirely committed to the negotiations, and believe that a possible deal would be the key to an entire change of the Middle East.

While stressing that the alternatives to the success of the negotiations would not be tolerable by any party and expressing sheer optimism, Kerry still noted that the dynamic in the field proves that the possibility of a failure still persists. All parties must work together, Kerry stated, in order to start believing in an achievable peace opportunity.

Kerry avoided commenting on the content of talks between Israel and the Palestinians and information that was recently published in American media about the subject.

The United States hopes to complete a "framework" accord in coming weeks and will then try to negotiate a final peace deal by the end of 2014, a U.S. official said this week, according to a participant in a briefing with American Jewish leaders.

U.S. envoy Martin Indyk said the framework would address core issues in the conflict, including borders, security, refugees and Jewish settlements, a participant in the briefing said.

8) Take Kerry at his word

Nahum Barnea, Ynet News, February 4, 2014

Abbas has learned something from Netanyahu, and from a series of Israeli prime ministers who came before him: You don't say no to an eager, focused and ambitious American foreign minister. In any event, you don't say no explicitly.

In conversations with foreigners, even this past weekend, Abbas makes sure to emphasize the positive aspect of the American mediation efforts. Netanyahu is demanding that the Palestinian state will be demilitarized, he says. I am in favor of that. I have no need for an army. If we establish an army, it will eventually carry out a coup against me. A civil police force, like we have today, will suffice.

Netanyahu is demanding a long transition period until the final implementation, he says. We said that three years were enough. Now I'm ready for five years. Israel and Jordan are afraid of what will happen in the Jordan Valley. Fine. I have no objection that an international force, for example a Jordan and NATO force, will be stationed in the Jordan Valley after the transition period, and stay there for good.

I will not declare my recognition in Israel as a Jewish state, he says, but I am leaving, between the lines, room for creative thought. The UN's November 1947 partition resolution (Resolution 181) spoke about a Jewish state and an Arab state that will be established on the territory of the Land of Israel. Arafat adopted the resolution. He reiterated this sentence in his own voice. Arafat may be the flak jacket which will enable Abbas to accept the Israeli demand without being presented as a traitor among his public.

He accepts, implicitly, the Clinton outline on Jerusalem. The Jewish neighborhoods beyond the Green Line will be under Israel's sovereignty; the Arab neighborhoods will be under Palestine's sovereignty. But he insists that east Jerusalem will be the capital of the Palestinian state, including the Holy Basin and the surrounding neighborhoods, and not what the Israelis like to refer to as "Greater Jerusalem."

He has adopted a sophisticated stance in regards to the future of the settlements as well, which gives him room to maneuver. First of all, he says, we'll come up with an accepted borderline. In the next stage Israel will be able to build as much as it wants in its blocs; in the settlements east of this line it will freeze construction. Their future will be decided later on in the negotiations.

He insists that in the land swap the Palestinian state will receive, as promised, "an equal territory, both in size and quality." When he is reminded how hard it will be to implement this promise, he explains that he is not guided by a passion for territory but by the Israeli refusal to realize the right of return. If the Palestinian state is supposed to take in 300-400,000 refugees, he says, it needs territory.

Chance of success bigger than estimates: In the current point in time, as the end of the time Kerry has set for himself draws near, the game is taking place simultaneously in two courts. In one court there is a blame game – how each side can minimize the damage it suffers the day after the talks fail; in the second court there is an agreement game – how each side can advance its interests in the document issued by the Americans. The chances of success are not great, but they are much bigger than the estimates which have accompanied the talks since their beginning.

In the first months of Kerry's mission it seemed as if President Obama, following the experience of his first term's failures, was distancing himself from the negotiations. There may have been a change in this significant issue as well. One of the senior officials of the previous administration, who visited Israel last week, explained that in the past three years he has left Obama wants to focus on his heritage. He is turning to the Left in the Democratic Party, which sees the achievement of an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians as highly important. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Settler violence: It comes with the territory

Larry Derfner, + 972, January 21, 2014

Kamal Shaban, a farmer in the West Bank village of Sinjil, is watching workmen repair a local family's house that had recently been firebombed by settlers in the middle of the night, forcing the parents and five children asleep inside to flee to the rooftop. As for himself, Shaban tells me that during the autumn olive harvests, settlers have stoned the laborers in his fields, turned over a tractor, stolen sacks of olives and once broke a worker's arm with a big rock – all under the eye of Israeli soldiers required by the Supreme Court to protect the farmers. He asks: "Why do the United States, the European Union and the United Nations call Hamas terrorists and Hezbollah terrorists, but they don't call these people terrorists?"

The phenomenon of settler violence against Palestinians, which is as old and as vibrant as the settlements themselves, tells you everything you need to know about how serious Israel is about ending its rule over a foreign people. It also tells you everything you need to know about how serious the world is about forcing Israel to end it.

Settler violence, lately characterized mainly by masked young men roaming the West Bank and attacking Palestinian farmers with stones, clubs or rifles and burning their olive groves, their fields, and occasionally their schools, mosques and homes, is a unique feature of the occupation. Unlike every other aspect of it – the conquest of another people's homeland by military force and land theft, the brutality, the house demolitions and expulsions, the whole system of officially sanctioned subjugation – settler violence is something nobody outside the radical fringe in Israel will defend. This, alone, they'll denounce.

And yet it goes on. The world doesn't penalize or even threaten to penalize Israel for it. If a decades-long reign of terror on unarmed Palestinians by Jewish gangs backed by an army of occupation is tolerable, not only to Israel but to the United Nations, European Union, United States and the rest of the world, then everything Israel does to the Palestinians is tolerable. Then the occupation as a whole is tolerable.

An attack each day: Settlers attack Palestinians in the West Bank on an average of once a day, according to the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Last year there were 399 assaults – 93 in which Palestinians were injured, another 306 in which their property was damaged or destroyed. The frequency of these attacks has stayed fairly stable over the last four years, but it is quadruple the rate in 2006, when OCHA began tracking these incidents.

As we drove in Zakaria Sadah's van up Route 60 through the northern part of the West Bank, he pointed out some of the landmarks. "In this house we're passing," he narrated, "a group of settlers went in and attacked a mother and her children, stripped their clothes off, sent them to the hospital. That house over there, about 15 settlers set it on fire, some soldiers were in on it, too. In that village over there they burned the sports hall, uprooted olive trees three or four times..."

Sadah, the West Bank field worker for Rabbis for Human Rights, takes us through the heartland of the "price tag" movement – near the Nablus-area settlement Yitzhar and the settler outposts Esh Kodesh, Adei Ad, Shvut Rachel, Kida and Ahiya, and, surrounded by them, two of the most frequently targeted Palestinian villages, Jalud and Sinjil.

"In the seat you're sitting in," he tells me, "the ambassador from Belgium sat, diplomats from the EU sat, the UN, the U.S. Next week I'm taking someone from the American consulate so he can see what the settlers are doing. I take foreign VIPs on tours about once a month, and they're all shocked at what they see." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

10) In Gaza, water -- and time -- are running out

Zafir Rinat, Ha'aretz, January 28, 2014

The Gaza Strip is facing a severe shortage of potable water and immediate action is necessary, Israeli and Palestinian experts said Monday.

Without the provision of water to meet basic needs in the near future, Gaza could see a spike in diseases due to the reduction in the quality of water available, the environmental and water experts warned at a conference hosted by Tel Aviv's Eretz Israel Museum.

A collaboration by Friends of the Earth Middle East and the Institute for National Security Studies, the conference focused on including environmental and water issues in the talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Among the participants was Prof. Uri Shani, former head of the Water Authority and current Israeli representative in the talks with the Palestinians and Jordanians on water. Shani said Gaza already has a high rate of water pollution-related childhood illnesses, which threaten to cross over to Israel as well. Shani said the international project to establish a desalination plant for Gaza would take years to complete and warned that an additional supply of water is needed now.

Another participant in the conference was Dr. Mohammed al-Hamidi, former director of the Environment Ministry in the Palestinian Authority and now a private environmental consultant. He said there are types of desalination plants that could be set up more quickly if Israel were more flexible and did not hold up permits for their construction. He agreed with Shani that regardless of the progress on the peace process, there was an urgent need to alleviate the water shortage in Gaza.

" Hamas is not working to solve the water problem. Israel has ignored it too, and so far has not kept its promises to increase the water supply," said Gidon Bromberg, the Israeli director of Friends of the Earth Middle East, after the conference. "In addition, there are problems with the electricity supply in the Gaza Strip, which makes it difficult to construct desalination or sewage treatment facilities. We are facing a disaster, since in a little while there will be no water in Gaza. No fence will stop a million and a half people - with no reprieve offered by Hamas - who will try to reach Israel so that they will have water to drink."

The inhabitants of the Gaza Strip are almost completely dependent on water from the southern coastal aquifer. But increased demand is depleting the aquifer, and it is increasingly vulnerable to penetration by seawater and saltwater penetration from deep layers of soil. In addition, with the lack of treatment facilities sewage is trickling through the soil and threatening contamination.

The demand for water in the Gaza Strip is expected to increase by 60 percent by the end of the decade. According to UN estimates, only one-tenth of the drinking water in Gaza meets the sanitation standards set by the World Health Organization. The WHO estimates that as early as 2016, the groundwater will be unusable, and the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip will be left without a source of water.

11) Tensions in the West Bank are rising, together with IDF, settler violence

Amira Hass, Ha'aretz, January 31, 2014

About an hour after Dr. Mustafa Barghouti's Wednesday afternoon talk on the extreme tension gripping the West Bank, which is liable to erupt at any time and in any place, a group of youngsters from the Jalazun refugee camp clashed with Palestinian police. Angry posts on Facebook suggested they fight those with whom they should be fighting – the Israeli army.

About three weeks ago, a clash took place near the camp, north of Ramallah. Residents blocked major roads in protest of the public and government's lack of interest in the rapidly deteriorating situation there, which was set off by a prolonged UNRWA workers' strike. On Wednesday, there was a confrontation in central Ramallah. This time, the youngsters came out in droves from the hospital in the center of town, demanding that local shops and restaurants close in solidarity with their friend, Mohammad Mubarak, who was killed by IDF troops two hours earlier. Storeowners refused to heed the youths' calls, and Palestinian police began shooting in the air to chase the youths away.

Some of them were arrested and beaten by police, a camp resident told Ha'aretz. Underneath the patriotic, nationalist character of the young protesters' demands to close the shops hid the matter of economic status, which isn't often discussed in the open: Ramallah has become a symbol of the huge gaps between wealthy Palestinians and all the others, particularly the refugees. One man willing to speak about this issue openly, with Ha'aretz as well, is the head of the Jalazun camp's popular committee, Fatah member Mahmoud Mubarak. On Thursday, he sat in mourning at the Jalazun camp, and staunchly denied the Israeli version of the events surrounding his son's death.

According to the IDF Spokespersons' unit, the younger Mubarak opened fire on troops exiting a guard post, and was killed when the soldiers returned fire. According to the family and Palestinian media, the 21-year-old had been working for three weeks on a Palestinian ministry public works project to repair a local road, funded by USAID. His job was directing traffic.

Finding a job – even if it's only for four months, like this one – takes a great deal of luck. The soldiers, according to the Palestinian reports, humiliated Mubarak, beat him, made him take off his road safety vest, made him run back and forth, and then shot him. "Executed in cold blood," read the newspaper headlines. He wasn't holding a weapon. Maher Ranim, Palestinian minister of public works and housing, was quick to release a statement casting doubt on the Israeli version of events. The sensitivities here are clear: the contractor and the Palestinian public works ministry are responsible for the political faithfulness of the workers. The American government has become the largest benefactor to the Palestinian Authority (and UNRWA) in recent years, and all ministry workers, contractors, or anyone else who receives aid, must sign a declaration that they do not support terror.

On Thursday, the soldiers at the post had already been rotated out. One of the new ones relayed what he heard from his friends. "A day earlier they spoke with him [Mubarak] asked him if he wanted water," said the soldier. "The bullet holes in the concrete aren't that big, because of the distance he shot from, and the weak weapon he used," explained the soldier. The soldiers concurred that it wasn't smart for him to shoot: he was in an open area, completely exposed to the soldiers at the post.

The irrationality of the shooting from such an exposed place actually backs up the story told by the boy's father. On Thursday, a seven minutes' drive away from Jalazun, in a sunny courtyard near Jalazun's event hall, the family received hundreds of condolers. "He went to work just like any other Wednesday. Where could he have gotten a weapon from?" Many find it easy to accept that the soldiers killed Mubarak in cold blood, as they've experienced the recent Israeli escalation in oppressing the civilian Palestinian population. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

12) Canada's bishops join global call to stop Israel from placing wall on farmland, convent
Zenit Vatican News Agency, January 29, 2014

On January 29, the president of Canada's bishops' conference released the following letter to John Baird, Canada's minister of foreign affairs, regarding the proposed plan for a security wall in the Cremisan Valley, near Bethlehem.

The Israeli Supreme Court began hearings on the case on the 29th.

Dear Minister Baird,

As President of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (CCCCB), I write to express our concerns about the security wall in the Cremisan Valley which will cut off some 58 Christian families from their agricultural land and some 400 impoverished children from their school. Our concerns are fully shared by Bishops from Europe, South Africa and the United States, as you will see from the attached statement issued today by the Coordination of Episcopal Conferences in Support of the Church in the Holy Land. I participated in this year's meeting of the Holy Land Coordination, and was able to visit with families from Beit Jala who will be affected. Similarly, my predecessor as CCCB President, Archbishop Richard Smith of Edmonton, visited the Cremisan Valley last year as part of the 2013 meeting of the Holy Land Coordination, and it too reached the same conclusions. ...

The Cremisan Valley lies in the West Bank on the Palestinian side of the Green Line adjacent to the towns of Beit Jala and Bethlehem. The State of Israel plans to re-route the separation barrier through the Cremisan Valley. The barrier will harm those families whose livelihoods depend on these lands, and will cut off other families from their agricultural and recreational lands and water sources. Should the barrier be built as proposed, it will also be virtually impossible for the Salesian Sisters there to fulfill their mission of service to the local community. The Sisters run a school that educates 400 poor children and provides much needed employment in its school and in the tilling of soil and harvesting of its produce. Indeed, the convent will be in a military zone surrounded on three sides by towers, walls and wires and patrolled by armed soldiers. This zone will confiscate most of the convent's property.

From a solely religious perspective, the proposed wall will also prevent the traditional religious May procession from Cremisan to Beit Jala, and prevent the centuries-old Christmas procession beginning at the Monastery of Mar Elias. The barrier will separate the Salesian monastery for male religious from the convent for women religious, as well as separate both houses from their lands. Moreover, the monastery will be cut off from Bethlehem, and its religious community will be unable to employ local Palestinians to care for its property and its vineyards, and in particular to run the monastery winery. Furthermore, it will prevent a vital source of revenue in the sale of olive oil, wine and other produce to tourists and pilgrims.

Consistent with the Holy See's position, Canada's Catholic Bishops are aware of Israel's need for security, and we fully support that right. Nevertheless, we believe the wall as planned will only deepen the wounds between Palestinians and Israelis. We are convinced, with our brother Bishops from around the world, that the extension of the wall will raise more scepticism from the international community. As it is, the security wall is already perceived by many as an illegal "land grab".

The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land has also condemned the planned route of the wall in the Cremisan Valley. Their October 23, 2012, new release stated: "The planned construction of the wall will put more pressure on the remaining Christians living in Bethlehem. Without an income and a future for their children, more people will make the decision to leave the Holy Land." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

13) Court to state: Explain refusal to alter security barrier that splits Palestinian town

Nir Hasson, Ha'aretz, February 4, 2014

The Supreme Court has ordered the government to explain why it refuses to alter the route of the separation barrier near the Palestinian village of Beit Jala, south of Jerusalem.

The Beit Jala municipality, along with local residents and a Catholic convent and monastery in the area, petitioned the court against the separation barrier's planned winding route aimed at enclosing the southern Jerusalem neighborhood of Gilo, which is beyond the Green Line. "Why were no alternative paths for the fence in the area considered?" asked Supreme Court President Asher Grunis in the ruling. The court has given the government until April 10 to explain why it won't alter the route.

In the meantime, construction on the barrier in the area has been frozen.

Under the government's plan, the fence will separate the women's convent from the nearby men's monastery of the same order, leaving the monastery on the Israeli side of the barrier and the convent on the Palestinian side.

Petitioners argue that the planned fence route would cut off Beit Jala from the educational services provided by the Cremisan Monastery and Convent, which is run by the order of the Salesians of Don Bosco. They also say the separation barrier would separate Beit Jala residents from thousands of dunams of agricultural land, and the only areas left for expansion of the village.

The village residents are also protesting the paving of a new road in the area that will cut through ancient agricultural terraces and a national park, to shorten the route between Jerusalem and the convent and monastery. "The route of the fence in the area has caused terrible suffering to residents," said Ghiath Nasser, the lawyer representing the Beit Jala municipality. "It cuts off the city from the only areas fit for development and its historic monasteries, which are an integral part of the city."

The Council for Peace and Security, an independent organization of peace-minded Israelis with experience in national security, filed a friend-of-the-court brief supporting the petition. It offered an alternative route for the separation barrier in the area, suggesting that the barrier hew closer to Gilo and the Green Line, without cutting off Beit Jala from the farmland or the monasteries. The alternate route would also limit the harm to the nearby village of Walaja, which according the original plan, would be completely surrounded by fences.

The Defense Ministry said "the security establishment is charged with completing the fence around 'the outskirts of Jerusalem,' thereby closing the last remaining gap in protection of the city. The security establishment will act in accordance with the court decisions, as it has until now."

Also, the Supreme Court ruled Sunday that the Transportation Ministry must consider reducing the amount of land allotted for train tracks near the West Bank village of Batir, south of Walaja.

Reducing the area allotted for the tracks would make it easier to move the separation barrier away from some of Batir's ancient agricultural terraces, which have been designated a world heritage site because of the views they offer and their cultural value as an example of ancient irrigation methods. Batir residents were joined by officials from the Israel Nature and Parks Authority, which also opposes the fence in this area, and offered an alternative solution.

During the court hearing, petitioners said just 700 people per day use the train line in that area, which provides service from Jerusalem to Beit Shemesh. The petitioners said this does not justify building the barrier in the area.