

Middle East Notes

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

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This week's Middle East Notes examines the hopes and challenges of the visits of Secretary Kerry and President Obama to Israel and the West Bank, opposition to BDS in the U.S., the continuing occupation and imprisonment of Palestinians, the influence of the Israeli and Christian Zionist lobbies, and other issues.

- Churches for Middle East Peace February 15 and February 22 Bulletins feature articles on the upcoming visit of President Obama to Israel and the West Bank, release of aid to the Palestinian Authority, Netanyahu's difficulties in forming a government, Israeli concerns about films to be presented at the Academy Awards, and other issues.
- Dmitry Shumski writes in the Israel News that "if before the Holocaust the moral basis of Zionist nationalism was that the Jews, like other nations, had the right of self-determination, since the Holocaust the Zionist ethos claims that the Jews, like other nations, are entitled to steal this right from other peoples."
- Peter Rugh in the Nation of Change writes how the "Battle of Brooklyn" backfired when many students of Brooklyn College admitted that they had never heard of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, or BDS, until recently, when attempts to shut a lecture event down generated nationwide media attention. Then, they became curious and responsive.
- Jerry Haber asks in "What's so wrong with BDS" why there was such a need to explain and defend the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement (BDS) at Brooklyn College.
- Carlo Strenger states in Ha'aretz that the status quo of Israel's West Bank occupation is catastrophic illusion and on Israel's mistaken assumption that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is unlikely to change. He quotes Ruth Gavison, one of Israel's most respected legal scholars, who said that "by ignoring international law Israel only hurts itself."
- Philip Giraldi posted "Towards a Christian Zionist Foreign Policy" in Antiwar.com. This article explains that Christian Zionism is not a religion per se, but rather a set of beliefs based on interpretations of specific parts of the Bible that has made the return of the Jews to the Holy Land a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ. The belief that Israel is essential to the process has led to the fusion of Christianity with Zionism, hence the name of the movement.
- Pax Christi International presents a written intervention to the Human Rights Council of the UN which calls upon the HRC to address the issues of visas, prisoners, civil society, settlements, water, and the separation Wall in an effort to achieve a peaceful solution. Both parties must be held accountable for their actions, which violate international law.
- A Ha'aretz editorial titled "Draconian arrests of Palestinians" emphasized that there is no measure of justice or reason in jailing a man for years because he visited an adjacent neighborhood or even assumed political activity.
- The State of Palestine exists: On January 3 Mahmoud Abbas, acting in his capacities as President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, signed Decree No. 1 for the year 2013 which states that the name "Palestinian National Authority" shall be replaced by the name: "State of Palestine."
- Uri Avnery writes in "Peace and Watermelons" that he is not optimistic that the visits of Secretary of State Kerry and President Obama to Israel and Palestine will have any real effect on lasting reconciliation.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin, February 15, 2013

While U.S. President Barack Obama may hope to restart the peace process on his trip to Israel and the West Bank next month, he has already reinvigorated the peace process pundits in Israel, the U.S. and elsewhere who are eager to speculate on his agenda in the region and how high expectations should be. With few details confirmed by the White House thus far, suggestions and speculations are running the gamut from left to right, and optimistic to pessimistic.

According to Politico, the suggested itinerary from Israeli officials to the White House was leaked: "If the Israelis get their way, Obama would land in Jerusalem on March 20. After laying wreaths at Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum, Mount Herzl, and Yitzhak Rabin's tomb, he would meet with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu ... and the two would have a joint press conference afterward ... The following day, Obama would meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah and then return to Jerusalem, where he would join Netanyahu to visit a model of Second Temple Period Jerusalem, the Shrine of the Book with the Dead Sea Scrolls, and a museum exhibiting Israel's latest science developments ... Obama would then deliver a public address to Israelis at an undetermined forum ... He would have dinner with President Shimon Peres. On March 22, Obama and Netanyahu would visit Israeli troops at an Iron Dome battery before departing Israel for Jordan, where he would meet with King Abdullah."

After reporters asked about the proposed itinerary that puts the president in the West Bank for just a few hours, the White House responded that "Obama's schedule has not been finalized."

In Israel, competing efforts are underway to get President Obama to speak in either Rabin Square or a West Bank settlement. A Facebook group "Speech for Peace" is hoping that Obama will come to Rabin Square, "a symbolic site which saw the assassination of Yitzhak Rabin on November 4, 1995." The movement calls on Obama "to speak directly on "our people's friendship, the hope for change, and the prospects for peace, security and prosperity in the Middle East."

The pro-settler media source Arutz Sheva reports that a settler group is drumming up support for Obama to visit a West Bank settlement [the West Bank is often referred to by settlers as Judea and Samaria, its Biblical name]. A spokesman for the group said, "It is more logical that he would speak in Samaria, the true center of Israel...If 50,000 people join us, Obama will calm down and will not listen to the madness of the Left, so let's try to do something truly big here, and destroy the Left's plans."

What will Obama bring to the table? An interview with U.S. Ambassador to Israel Dan Shapiro clarified a few aspects of the visit. He told Israel's Army Radio, "We have a very urgent agenda...We have a very complex agenda about Iran, Syria and the need to get Israel and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table, so it's important to begin as fast as possible." He also said, "President Obama is not coming with conditions or demands. He is coming to confer with all our partners about problems and challenges we are dealing with in the region." ...

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

2) CMEP Bulletin, February 22, 2013

With President Barack Obama expected in Israel next month, Benjamin Netanyahu is having trouble forming a government to receive him. An unlikely alliance between Yair Lapid of the centerist Yesh Atid party and Naftali Bennett from the right-wing Habayit Hayehudi party has made it almost impossible for the prime minister to form a new coalition. Netanyahu needs 61 votes to start a government and renew his term as prime minister ... [but] the only party he has successfully courted is Hatunah, led by Tzipi Livni. With her comes six seats and a lot of baggage to the coalition.

Unlikely tandem causes Bibi headaches: The political alliance between Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi and Lapid's Yesh Atid forms a bloc of 31 seats in the Knesset, the same number that Netanyahu's hybrid Likud-Beiteinu party holds. This partnership is giving Netanyahu problems that few expected. Lapid ran as a moderate, primarily concerned with addressing economic inequality in Israel. Bennett is religiously observant and considered to be even further to the right of Netanyahu regarding the occupation and settlements. But the tie that binds Lapid and Bennett is an avid desire for Israel's ultra-Orthodox citizens to share the burden of military service, from which they are currently exempt. Netanyahu has resisted such a move to appease his usual reliable ultra-Orthodox coalition partners Shas and United Torah Judaism. The Los Angeles times reports that, "without the support of the [ultra-Orthodox] parties, which together have 18 seats, Netanyahu would be far more dependent upon Lapid and Bennett for his government's survival."

The prime minister needs 61 votes of confidence in order to be confirmed, but those votes do not all have to come from within the coalition. The Times of Israel cites a source close to Netanyahu that says he "plans to form a coalition of Hatnua, Kadima, Shas and United Torah Judaism, giving his government 57 seats and placing the blame for new elections squarely on Bennett's shoulders" for not cooperating. This could be a risky gambit. Analyst Shalom Yerushalmi believes that "if Netanyahu were smart, he'd do whatever it takes to get Lapid and Bennett in now, or risk going to new elections and winding up being the head of third-largest party, begging for a seat at the table with Yair Lapid, and ... Bennett."

It is nearly impossible for Netanyahu to form a coalition without either Lapid or Bennett. Netanyahu met with Bennett to woo Habayit Hayehudi to join a government with Shas, United Torah Judaism (UTJ), Kadima and Hatunah. Netanyahu even offered him the position of education minister, a position that religious Zionist parties usually want. According to the Jerusalem Post, "Bennett rejected the offer and maintained his understandings with Lapid that neither party would join a coalition without the other."

Livni joins with negotiations mandate: ... While Livni and Netanyahu have had vast political rifts, she joined the coalition under the condition that she will be allowed to coordinate peace negotiations with Palestinians. At a joint press conference she said she joined the coalition as a "strategic and moral imperative to leave no stone unturned, to exhaust any possibility and become a part of any government that commits to bringing peace." She later said, "I won't be a fig leaf for the Netanyahu government. I have full authority to run the negotiations" with the Palestinians. ...

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

2) Demography scare strengthens occupation

Dmitry Shumsky, Ha'aretz, February 13, 2013

The results of last month's election show that without a doubt, most Israelis are not afraid of a "binational" state.

Although Meretz doubled in strength, in general those parties supporting division of the land have been shoved even further to the margins. This is primarily due to the disintegration of Kadima and the modest showing of its successor, Hatnuah, which like its predecessor aims to preserve the Jewish majority in the State of Israel through a diplomatic separation between Israelis and Palestinians.

So it must be asked why most Israelis don't seem impressed by the numbers being repeatedly waved about by the Arab-counters among us. Why hasn't the rhetoric about the demographic threat managed to persuade the public that a diplomatic arrangement is urgently needed?

The answer to these questions isn't complicated. The truth is that most Israelis are very well aware of the demographic threats, but they believe that the most efficient way to deal with the Palestinian "demographic problem" is to maintain the status quo. Those who voted for Likud-Yisrael Beiteinu and Habayit Hayehudi would be most offended if they'd be accused of demographic complacency.

The ongoing oppression, enslavement and imprisoning of another people that the right-wing parties promote is meant to break the spirit of the people being oppressed, imprisoned and enslaved - so that more and more of them will understand that it would be in their interest to find some other country to live in.

One can assume that politicians and other public figures who support the two-state solution have adopted the language of demographic threats for tactical reasons, hoping to win the support of citizens concerned about maintaining a Jewish majority. But the demographic discourse is a double-edged sword.

By sketching out horrifying scenarios about the ongoing erosion of the Jewish population between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, this kind of talk deepens the sense of dread and loathing that the Jewish public harbors toward the Palestinian people. These feelings nourish the power of the right-wing, nationalist elements who propose to continue and improve on the current methods being used to reduce the Palestinian population.

Therefore, the two-state solution must be advanced not as a way to keep as many Palestinians as possible away from the Jews - which the current occupation policy promotes in any case - but as one of the possible ways to realize the principle of equal national rights between the Jews and Palestinians who live between the river and the sea. ...

The problem is that the principle of different peoples having equal national rights - a primary component of Zionist ideology when Zionism was the national movement of a persecuted nation - is not self-understood by Jewish Israelis, not in this era of national sovereignty for a people who were slaughtered before the eyes of an apathetic world.

If before the Holocaust the moral basis of Zionist nationalism was that the Jews, like other nations, had the right of self-determination, since the Holocaust this Zionist ethos has undergone an incredible metamorphosis, such that it now claims that the Jews, like other nations, are entitled to steal this right from other peoples.

It's time to repair this ethical-national inversion. The distorted logic of "equal rights" with regard to the suppression of other peoples must be replaced by a renewed commitment to the principle of equal national rights among peoples.

3) How the battle of Brooklyn College backfired

Peter Rugh, Nation of Change, February 12, 2012

A line of people formed around the block in front of Brooklyn College last Thursday evening. Dozens of police officers scrutinized the overflow crowd entering the school's student center for weapons. Across the street, officers separated demonstrators whose opposing chants intermingled in the freezing cold wind. Members of the press weren't allowed to come inside, but outside reporters asked people what compelled them to turn up. Many replied that they had never heard of the boycott, divestment and sanctions movement, or BDS, until recently, when attempts to shut the event down generated nationwide media attention. Now, they were curious.

Brooklyn College is a sprawling red brick campus with colonial-style buildings surrounded by a neighborhood of fast-food joints and retail storefronts. Though thousands of miles from Israel and the Palestinian territories, last week the school found itself square in the middle of the ongoing struggle over land, resources and human rights.

Carlos Guzman, a member of Students for Justice in Palestine at Brooklyn College, recalls that the commotion started almost immediately after his group began promoting an event about the BDS movement. "The Zionists don't want people to know about BDS," said Guzman. "They don't want people to know the U.S. is using our tax dollars" — \$115 billion in mostly military aid since 2012 — "to fund the oppression of Palestinians."

The aims of the BDS movement are threefold: the withdrawal of Israel from Palestinian territories captured by force in 1967, ending racial discrimination against non-Jews within the state of Israel and the right of return — along with reparations — for those evicted from their homeland since the founding of Israel. As a means to these ends, Palestinian civil society groups put out a call in 2005 for their supporters across the globe to boycott Israeli goods, divest from companies profiting from the oppression of Palestinians, and levy sanctions against Israel until it complies with these demands and international law, including the 1973 UN convention against apartheid.

The current BDS movement was modeled after a similar effort against apartheid in South Africa, which together with internal resistance helped topple the apartheid regime in 1994. It is in South Africa that BDS has gained the most momentum, garnering the support of former leaders of the struggle against white supremacy in the country, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu. In December, the ruling African National Congress voted to endorse BDS officially. In the United States, however, the movement remains controversial. There have been hundreds of BDS events on college campuses across the country over the years, but what helped cause a particular stir this time was that Brooklyn College's political science department voted to co-sponsor the forum.

Harvard law professor and Brooklyn College political-science alumnus Alan Dershowitz was among the first to oppose the BDS event. In an op-ed that appeared in the New York Daily News, Dershowitz called for the school's "anti-Israel hatefest" to be canceled or for a pro-Israel speaker to be invited to speak at it. ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

4) What's so wrong with BDS

Jerry Haber, Open Zion/Daily Beast, February 7, 2013

Controversial speakers appearing on campus are as American as apple pie. So why are critics riled up about an event organized by the Brooklyn College chapter of Students for Justice for Palestine, where Prof. Judith Butler and Omar Barghouti are explaining and defending the Boycott, Sanctions, and Divestment (BDS) movement against Israel?

Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz complains that the event is co-sponsored by the political science department, which is inappropriate for an academic unit, unless it sponsors all sides of a controversial issue. For him the co-sponsorship implies an endorsement of a political view that may have a chilling effect—indeed, an adverse career effect—on opponents of that view within the department.

I can sympathize with the claim that academic units should not co-sponsor events with student groups, although many universities, including Harvard, permit it, and I am not aware that Prof. Dershowitz has spoken out against this practice on other issues besides the Middle East. As the director of a Jewish Studies program that houses Israel Studies, I have instituted a policy against co-sponsorships with student groups (although we occasionally contribute modest sums for refreshments, which is what student groups are often looking for anyway).

But forget the co-sponsorship issue: What if the political science department had on its own initiative invited Butler and Barghouti to explain the aims of the BDS movement to its faculty and students? Prof. Dershowitz doesn't just object apparently to a department "endorsing" a controversial speaker. He also objects to a department even sponsoring a controversial speaker unless opposing views are presented—an unusual and impossible demand for departments.

I suspect that the real reason for the Brooklyn College brouhaha is the belief among mainstream Israel supporters that those who support BDS belong to the extremist, loony fringe of Israel-haters. Free speech may require that they be allowed to speak on campus when invited by student groups, and, indeed, they appear regularly not only at colleges like Berkeley and San Francisco State, and but also at Penn and Harvard. But a respectable institution should publicly disavow their positions and relegate the event to a room in the crowded Student Union.

The real issue here is not freedom of speech for controversial ideas but rather the presentation of the BDS movement as beyond the pale.

I have written elsewhere about why liberal Zionists should consider supporting the global BDS movement. To the claim that the BDS movement is anti-Israeli I pose the question, "Was the BDS movement in South Africa anti-South African?" For many whites and most Afrikaners, and the South African government at the time, the answer would have been yes. For them, apartheid was an essential part of the South African regime. Dismantle apartheid, and the country, no matter what its name, would never be the same. Yet it was possible for those who opposed apartheid to contemplate a better place for all South Africans, blacks, whites, and colored. For them the BDS movement against apartheid was not directed against the South African people but against the policies of its government. ...

[Read the entire article here.](#)

5) Status quo of Israel's West Bank occupation is catastrophic illusion

Carlo Strenger, Ha'aretz, February 13, 2013

Obviously Israel's political attention is focused on the ongoing negotiations for the next coalition. This may be the reason why one of the most important opinion pieces that have been published here in the last years went all but unnoticed, Ruth Gavison's "By ignoring international law Israel only hurts itself."

First a few words about Gavison: she is one of Israel's most respected legal scholars, and she has put decades of work into formulating a constitutional framework for Israel as a Jewish and Democratic State. She has tried to show that the Jewish Nation State can be consistent with and grounded on international law, and has tried to find ways to meet the needs of both Israel's secular and religious constituencies. In other words: her life's work is largely to give the Zionist project a legal grounding. Let me also add that Gavison always makes sure to be as careful and precise as possible in her formulations, and takes her responsibility as legal scholar and public intellectual extremely seriously.

The bottom line of Gavison's article is simple and crystal clear. Any way you may look at it, Israel's settlement activity in the West Bank is illegal according to international law. In fact, according to the Treaty of Rome endorsed in 1998 settling the population of a conquering country in occupied territory is considered a war crime. She makes clear that no reading of international law supports the conclusion of the Edmond Levy committee that claims that Israeli settlements are legal.

Gavison's urgent recommendation to any future government is to embark on a negotiated solution with the Palestinians as soon as possible. She warns that if the conflict is not solved, Israel will be in a very weak position. If the Palestinians and the international community will resort to a legalistic approach, Israel might well find itself under sanctions and unable to insist on its legitimate security needs, like a demilitarization of the West Bank.

Gavison, I reemphasize, is not only a highly respected legal authority, but also extremely cautious. I am convinced that she has thought through every aspect of her argument countless times. Her conclusion is crystal-clear: Israel may soon find itself in a truly threatening situation. Playing at "we want negotiations, but the Palestinians don't fulfill preconditions like recognizing Israel as a Jewish state" is not enough: a solution must actually be achieved.

This is deeply opposed to Israeli political culture of the last decades. As the former Shin Bet chiefs interviewed in Dror Moreh's highly praised documentary "The Gatekeepers" keep reiterating, Israel's political leaders always avoided formulating a clear strategic goal on the Palestinian conflict. The reticence of Israeli politicians to address the Israel-Palestine conflict has good reasons: the left was practically wiped off the political map because it is seen as responsible for the second Intifada, and very few politicians are willing to take any further risks in this direction.

As a result Israel's political discourse is largely based on the mistaken assumption that the status quo of the occupation can be perpetuated indefinitely. ...

[Read the entire piece on Ha'aretz's website.](#)

6) Towards a Christian Zionist foreign policy

Philip Giraldi, Antiwar.com, February 13, 2013

Countries frequently define themselves by what they believe to be true. When reality and belief conflict that definition might well be referred to as a “national myth.” In the United States many believe that there exists a constitutionally mandated strict separation between religion and government. In practice, however, that separation has never really existed except insofar as Americans are free to practice whatever religion they choose or even none at all. The nation’s dominant religion Christianity has in fact shaped government policy in many important areas since the founding of the republic. Tax exemption for the churches would be one example of legislation favoring organized religion while in the nineteenth century the governments of a number of American states had religious clauses written into their constitutions and also collected special tithe taxes to support the locally dominant Christian denomination. The practice only ended with the passage of the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868.

Christian Zionism is not a religion per se, but rather a set of beliefs based on interpretations of specific parts of the Bible – notably the book of Revelations and parts of Ezekiel, Daniel, and Isaiah – that has made the return of the Jews to the Holy Land a precondition for the Second Coming of Christ. The belief that Israel is essential to the process has led to the fusion of Christianity with Zionism, hence the name of the movement.

The political significance of this viewpoint is enormous, meaning that a large block of Christians promotes a non-reality based foreign policy based on a controversial interpretation of the Bible that it embraces with considerable passion. Christian Zionism by definition consists of Christians (normally Protestant evangelicals) who believe that once the conditions are met for the second coming of Jesus Christ all true believers will be raptured up into heaven, though details of the sequence of events and timing are disputed. Many Christian Zionists believe that the Second Coming will happen soon, within one generation of the return of the Jews to the Holy Land, so they support the government and people of Israel completely and unconditionally in all that they do, to include fulfilling the prophecy through encouraging the expansion by force into all of historic Judea, which would include what remains of the Palestinian West Bank.

One other aspect of Christian Zionism is the belief by some that the end times, as they refer to it, will be preceded by world government (conveniently seen as the United Nations) and years of war and turmoil with a final enormous battle pitting the forces of good against the forces of evil in which all the evildoers will be destroyed and the righteous will be triumphant. The battle is supposed to take place at Armageddon, an undisclosed location in the Middle East that some believe is derived from the name of the ancient Hittite capital Megiddo.

That Christian Zionists believe the return of Christ is imminent and that there will be major wars and a final battle in the Middle East preceding it would appear to be irrelevant to most of us, but it has in this case real world consequences because of their involvement in American politics and most particularly in some aspects of US foreign policy. Evangelical Christians began to mobilize and became a potent political force in the late 1970s and 1980s in reaction to moves by the Jimmy Carter White House to challenge the tax status of independent Christian schools. ...

[Read the entire piece on antiwar.com](http://antiwar.com)

7) The spiral of violence in Israel and Palestine should be broken: A written intervention to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations
Pax Christi International, February 17, 2013

Pax Christi International, which has special consultative status with the United Nations, submitted a written intervention before the 22nd Session of the UN Human Rights Council on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict taking place in Geneva February 25-March 22, 2013.

22nd Session of the Human Rights Council – Item 7, Human rights situation in Palestine and other occupied Arab territories

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be identified by a spiral of violence in which it is trapped. The structural violence is the military occupation by Israel over Palestinian Territories, which is marked by violations of International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Law. Since the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT) were seized in 1967, both communities have been consumed by violence. Both the Israeli army and settlers and Palestinian armed groups commit violence against civilians. The spiral of violence that has engrossed Palestine and Israel for such a long time continues, causing more than physical violence.

... Pax Christi International calls on the Human Rights Council to:

- Address the numerous issues with illegal Israeli settlements; work to prevent Israel from further expanding settlements and encourage the beginning of their dismantling.
- Hold Israel accountable for their violations of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in respect to the lack of sufficient water quality and quantity.
- Call on the UN and its members to take measures to discourage the completion of the separation barrier in violation of United Nations and General Assembly Resolutions.
- Encourage Israel to issue more visas for Palestinians seeking employment in order to allow Palestinians to earn their livelihood legally in Israel, given the de-development of the Palestinian economy caused by the Israeli occupation and the resultant dependence of Palestinian workers on the Israeli economy. Security clearance measures should be relaxed so as to make checkpoints more efficient and to prepare for their eventual closure.
- Request that Israeli forces reduce the number of child prisoners, increase communication techniques between prisoners and their families, and permit Palestinian prisoners access to medical services.
- Strengthen support for Palestinian civil society and hold Israeli forces responsible for the raiding of three NGOs in Area A of the West Bank, where Israeli military is not permitted to enter.
- It has become increasingly urgent that the spiral of violence of the Israel-Palestine conflict come to an end, with each party being held responsible for its actions. Without accountability, the spiral will only continue, growing evermore perilous. Pax Christi International encourages and supports the Human Rights Council in taking an active and effective role in finding solutions to the many human rights violations occurring in Israel and Palestine. ...

[Read the entire document, including extensive footnotes, on the Pax Christi International website.](#)

8) Draconian arrests of Palestinians

Ha'aretz editorial, February 20, 2013

There is no measure of justice or reason in jailing a man for years because he visited an adjacent neighborhood or even assumed political activity.

Fourteen Palestinians freed in the Gilad Shalit deal were arrested by the IDF and Shin Bet security service. Amira Hass reported on Sunday in Ha'aretz that five of them might serve from 16 to 28 years in prison due to secret or negligible offenses they are accused of committing after their release. This revolving door system is not only inhuman in itself, it also undermines the agreements Israel signed and will make future deals much harder to achieve.

The arrest of the 14 Palestinians was possible due to the confidential 2009 changes in the military law, decree 1651, which were introduced as the negotiations were being held. These changes allow the IDF and Shin Bet to re-arrest any person released before the end of his original term, following offenses that do not involve terrorist actions, such as traffic violations, participating in illegal demonstrations or illegal entry to Israel – and that based on confidential evidence. This can lead to imprisonment for decades. The military committee that considers the violation of release conditions is staffed by IDF officers.

Samer Issawi was re-arrested because it was claimed he left Jerusalem after his release and drove to the adjacent A-Ram neighborhood, thus violating his release conditions. Ibrahim Abu Hajla, according to the IDF, returned to his civilian political activity with the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, an organization that is part of the PLO, which signed the Oslo Accords with Israel. The evidence concerning the other arrested Palestinians remains secret.

Issawi has been on a hunger strike for a total of more than 200 days now, and this strike as well as the hunger strike of another Shalit deal released prisoner, and these repeat arrests are justly arousing public rage among the Palestinians.

Even if the repeat arrests of the 14 are legal, according to military decrees, they are draconian, and reek of cruelty and abuse. There is no measure of justice or reason in jailing a man for years because he visited an adjacent neighborhood or even assumed political activity. If none of the 14 Palestinians committed any terrorist activities Israel should free them immediately.

9) The State of Palestine exists

Huffington Post, January 9

On January 3 Mahmoud Abbas, acting in his capacities as President of the State of Palestine and Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization, signed "Decree No. 1 for the year 2013." While he did so with minimal ceremony or fanfare, and while the change formalized by this decree should surprise no one after the UN General Assembly's overwhelming vote on November 29 to upgrade Palestine's status at the United Nations to "observer state," this change is potentially historic.

By this decree, the Palestinian Authority, created for a five-year interim period pursuant to the Oslo Declaration of Principles signed on the White House lawn in September 1993, has been absorbed and replaced by the State of Palestine, proclaimed in November 1988, recognized diplomatically by 131 of the 193 UN member states and supported in the recent General

Assembly vote by an additional 28 states which have not yet formally recognized it diplomatically.

After citing the November 29 General Assembly Resolution, Article 1 of the decree states: "Official documents, seals, signs and letterheads of the Palestinian National Authority official and national institutions shall be amended by replacing the name 'Palestinian National Authority' whenever it appears by the name 'State of Palestine' and by adopting the emblem of the State of Palestine." Concluding Article 4 states: "All competent authorities, each in their respective area, shall implement this Decree starting from its date."

In his correspondence, Yasser Arafat used to list all three of his titles under his signature -- President of the State of Palestine, Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority ... It is both legally and politically noteworthy that, in signing this decree, Mahmoud Abbas has listed only the first two titles.

There is no further need for a Palestinian leader to be three-headed or three-hatted. While the Palestine Liberation Organization will continue to represent all Palestinians everywhere, those Palestinians who live in the State of Palestine (whose territory is defined by the November 29 General Assembly Resolution as "the Palestinian Territory occupied since 1967") or who, living elsewhere, will be the proud holders of new State of Palestine passports will now also be represented by the State of Palestine.

Perhaps due, at least in part, to the low-key manner in which this change has been effected, it has attracted remarkably little attention from the international media or reaction from other governments, even the Israeli and American governments. This is not necessarily disappointing, since passive acceptance is clearly preferable to furious rejection.

The relatively few and brief media reports of the change have tended to characterize it as "symbolic." It could -- and should -- be much more than that. If the Palestinian leadership plays its cards wisely, it could -- and should -- represent a turning point toward a better future.

The State of Palestine now exists on the soil of Palestine albeit still, in varying degrees and circumstances, under belligerent occupation by the State of Israel.

In its November 29 Resolution, the General Assembly "Affirms its determination to contribute to the achievement of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and the attainment of a peaceful settlement in the Middle East that ends the occupation that began in 1967 and fulfills the vision of two States, an independent, sovereign, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security with Israel, on the basis of the pre-1967 borders."

The members of the international community must now show their determination not simply in words but also in deeds and actions. In a world which professes to take human rights and international law, including the UN Charter, seriously, the perpetual belligerent occupation of one state by another state is inconceivable. The fact that the Israeli occupation of Palestine has been permitted to endure, expand and entrench itself for more than 45 years represents an appalling black mark against mankind. This occupation must now end.

10) [Peace and watermelons](#)

Uri Avnery, February 23, 2013

OpEdNews.com

Rabbi Michael Lerner of Tikkun writes that Uri Avnery's article (below) is brilliantly correct in its conclusions. But, it needs two qualifications: 1. The Israel Lobby is not primarily AIPAC and the Jewish world, but the tens of millions of Christian Zionists who mistakenly believe that the best way to be friends with the Jewish people until Jesus returns and forces all Jews to convert or go to suffering eternally in hell is to give a blank slate of approval to whatever the Israeli government decides to do, including holding on forever to its Occupation. ... 2. The U.S. could play a central role if it were to now unequivocally put forward the details of a settlement agreement that the U.S. was proposing to both sides.

One of the most interesting and prolonged private debates I have had in my life was with the brilliant Dr. Nahum Goldmann. The subject: American peace initiatives.

It was an unequal debate, of course. Goldmann was my elder by 28 years. While I was a mere editor of an Israeli news magazine, he was an international figure, President of the World Zionist Organization and the World Jewish Congress.

In the mid '50s, when I was looking for a personality who could possibly contest David Ben-Gurion's stranglehold on the prime minister's office, I thought of Goldmann. He had the necessary stature and was liked by moderate Zionists. No less important, he had a clear set of opinions. From the first day of the State of Israel, he had proposed that Israel become a "Middle Eastern Switzerland," neutral between the U.S. and the Soviet Union. For him, peace with the Arabs was absolutely essential for the future of Israel.

I visited him in a luxury suite in Jerusalem's classy King David hotel. He was wearing a silken dressing gown, and when I made my offer, he responded: "Look, Uri, I like the good life. Luxury hotels, good food and beautiful women. If I challenged Ben-Gurion, all these would disappear. His people would vilify me as they do you. Why would I risk all that?"

We also started a discussion that ended only with his death, some 27 years later. He was convinced that the U.S. wanted peace between us and the Arabs, and that a major American peace effort was just around the corner. This was not simply an abstract hope. He assured me that he had just met with the highest policy-makers and had it from the highest authority. Straight from the American horse's mouth, so to say.

Goldman was also an inveterate name-dropper. He regularly met with most major American, Soviet and other political personalities, and never failed to mention this in his conversation. So, being assured by the incumbent U.S. presidents, ministers and ambassadors that the U.S. was just about to impose peace on Israelis and Arabs, he told me just you wait. You'll see.

This belief in an American imposed peace has haunted the Israeli peace movement for decades. In advance of the coming visit of President Obama to Israel next month, it is raising its weary head once more. ...

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