

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
April 3, 2014



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This week's Middle East Notes gives attention to peace negotiations in process between Israelis and Palestinians, the controversy over recognition of the "Jewish State of Israel," the impossibility of a bi-national State of Israel, statements from the UN on the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and recent UN Human Rights Council resolutions voted against by the U.S., the "Judaization" of Jerusalem and the West Bank, the use of boycotts to demand justice for the Palestinians, and other issues.

- The March 20 and March 28 CMEP Bulletins give updates on: Abbas and Obama's meeting at the White House; the debate over the "Jewish" State of Israel; Israeli release of Palestinian prisoners; Hamas' role and control in Gaza, and other items of interest.
- John V. Whitbeck in the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs writes that a primary roadblock to any agreement in the current round of negotiations is the understandable Palestinian refusal to accept the Israeli demand that Palestine explicitly recognize Israel as a or the "Jewish State"—a legally and intellectually bizarre demand clearly intended to make any agreement impossible.
- Peter Beinart in Ha'aretz says that Israel has never been able to define the term "Jewish state." This lack of clarity is part of the Palestinians refusal to negotiate on the basis of this ambiguous term.
- An editorial in Ha'aretz notes that the head of J Street, Jeremy Ben-Ami, believes that it is unreasonable to expect any Palestinian leader to consent to recognition of Israel as a "Jewish" state.
- Salman Masalha writes in Ha'aretz that in the absence of partition the conflict will not be solved but will only be delayed.
- Jack Houry (Associated Press) writes that Arab leaders will never recognize Israel as a Jewish state, and will blame it for a lack of progress in the Mideast peace process.
- Lara Friedman in Ha'aretz notes that unlike Israel's insistence on the "Jewish state," Israeli and Palestinian leaders need to find a formula that reconciles two opposing national narratives.
- The UN Department of Public Information has released a statement from the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, and on the situation in Jerusalem.
- The State of Two States for the weeks of March 16 and March 23 list pertinent quotes from parties involved in the "two state solution."
- Barak Ravid in Ha'aretz notes that the UN Human Rights Council is scheduled to vote on five anti-Israel resolutions, one of which includes a call to boycott and divest from West Bank settlements.
- A Ynetnews editorial reports that four UN human rights resolutions, which focused on Israel's treatment of Palestinians, passed 46-1, with the U.S. the only country to vote against.
- According to Ma'an News Agency, PLO leader Saeb Erekat said that actions against Palestinians indicate that Israel prioritizes settlement expansion and settlers' demands over peace, negotiations.
- Ori Nir in Ha'aretz: "You don't have to love everything that the U.S. Secretary of State will present in his 'framework' paper - but there is too much at stake not to support a chance for peace."
- Daniel Levy in Ha'aretz writes that a Palestinian Bantustan won't end the conflict; the lopsided Kerry framework is a step backward for Palestinians and rewards Israel's intransigence.
- UN Human Rights High Commissioner Navi Pillay expressed concern at a recent surge in violence in and around the Gaza Strip by both local groups and Israeli forces.
- Conor McCarthy observes in The Electronic Intifada that Ireland invented boycotts to demand justice and that now is the time to use them to demand justice for Palestine.
- Jeff Halper writes in the Ma'an News that the "Judaization" of Jerusalem and the West Bank continues apace, despite (and in fact because of) the so-called "Kerry initiative."

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 20, 2014

Abbas meets with Obama: On [March 17], Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas met with President Barack Obama at the White House to discuss the peace process and the framework for a final agreement. The results of the meeting were similar to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's White House meeting two weeks ago: there was little apparent progress.

While the substance of the talks has been kept mostly under wraps, it is not a secret that the Israelis and Palestinians still have large gaps in their negotiating positions. When Secretary Kerry reconvened the talks in July, he set an April 29 deadline to put pressure on the parties to negotiate seriously. With that deadline fast approaching, a meaningful framework agreement could push back the deadline while bridging the gaps on core issues such as borders, Jerusalem and refugees. But he needs is the Israelis and Palestinians to sign on. It is not yet clear if that is possible.

President Obama's role this week was to soften President Abbas' stance on framework issues. He commended Abbas for, "consistently renounced violence, has consistently sought a diplomatic and peaceful solution that allows for two states, side by side, in peace and security," and he spoke of the political risks he wants the both Abbas and Netanyahu to take.

President Abbas took the opportunity to advocate for the Palestinian negotiating positions. Chief negotiator Saeb Erekat said, "We put a map to president Obama, showed him the extent of what happened since we began [negotiations] in July... It is a very ugly map. This was supposed to be land of the Palestinian state." Erekat also said that no framework document was presented to them in the meeting.

Prisoner issues reemerges: A prisoner release scheduled for March 29 is going to make an agreed framework even trickier. As a gesture to restart the negotiations, Israel agreed to release over a hundred prisoners in four waves. The previous three have caused a lot of drama among members of Netanyahu's cabinet, and this one is expected to be no different.

Since this is the last scheduled release before the initial deadline for talks is set to expire, the Israeli government could call it off if the Palestinians don't agree to extend the timeframe. Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, one of the few doves in Netanyahu's cabinet confirmed the release is conditional on a framework agreement and said, "There was never any automatic commitment to release prisoners unrelated to making progress in negotiations."

President Abbas has said he will consider extending the talks if the prisoners are freed but the Israeli government fears he will simply walk away from talks after the release.

Predictably, members of Netanyahu's coalition are already expressing their outrage at another prisoner release. Defense Minister Danny Danon said this week, "I will not be part of this executive branch if it will condone and take further steps toward releasing prisoners ... the day that the next Palestinian murderer takes his first steps out of jail, I will send a resignation letter." ...

Urge agreement to end of conflict: For the first time the Catholic, Coptic, Lutheran and Episcopal heads of churches in Jerusalem and the Franciscan Custodian of the Holy Places are joining with U.S. Christian denominations and groups to support urgent efforts to reach a comprehensive agreement to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. CMEP Executive Director Warren Clark delivered the ecumenical letter to Shaun Casey in the State Department [on March 20]. Now it's time for you to take action – [use this link](#) to show your support and endorse the letter. ...

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

Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 28, 2014

Will prisoner release tank talks? While the Israeli-Palestinian peace talks are scheduled to continue at least until April 29, mistrust surrounding a planned prisoner release for March 29 could doom the talks early.

As a goodwill gesture to restart negotiations in July, Israel agreed to release 104 Palestinian prisoners from Israeli jails in four waves. Palestinian negotiators then agreed to halt efforts for recognition of Palestine in international bodies and not pursue cases against Israel in the International Criminal Court for the duration of the talks.

The first three releases in August, October and December touched a nerve in Israeli society. Many of these prisoners have been convicted of killing Israelis and the victims' families protested setting them free. Dissent has also been vigorous within Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's cabinet.

With the talks at an impasse and scheduled to end next month, there is even more pressure surrounding the fourth release. This time, Israeli leaders are using it as a bargaining chip to extend the negotiations, fearing that Palestinian negotiators walk away a few weeks after the release. The New York Times reports, "To head off criticism from those who might say they are balking on a promise, Israeli leaders argue that the release was to be a result of nine months of negotiations, which have not really taken place: The last substantive meeting between the sides was in November."

Secretary of State John Kerry flew to Amman to meet Abbas Wednesday to find a way to continue the negotiations. After their meeting, officials in Ramallah said that Abbas is open to extending the time frame, provided the Israeli government goes through with the prisoner release. In a poll conducted this week in the West Bank in Gaza, "Some 65 percent of 1,200 Palestinian adults interviewed this month by the Palestinian Center for Policy and Survey Research would support talks running to the end of the year 'if Israel agrees to release more Palestinian prisoners.'"

If the prisoner release does not take place, the PA has hinted it is prepared to resume activities in the UN and ICC. On Fatah official said, "The target date of the fourth stage is a key date that can attest to the intentions of Israel. Any delay or shirking by Israel means a blatant violation of understandings, and the PA will make the appropriate decisions."

While the release of prisoners convicted for murder can be traumatic for Israelis, many pundits are pointing out it didn't need to happen. There was another gesture that would have been far less painful: a settlement freeze. Don Futterman writes in Ha'aretz, "As we approach the fourth and final prisoner release, we should direct our fury at our prime minister. Benjamin Netanyahu entered into this devil's bargain to avoid any kind of settlement freeze, which would have kept the prisoners in their cells."

Late Thursday night, the Jerusalem Post reported that the release will not happen this weekend. The committee that selects the prisoners to be released must announce the list within 48 hours of the release (not including Shabbat) in order for the High Court to hear appeals. It hasn't happened and no date for the announcement has been publicized. The situation is still developing as Secretary Kerry plans on meeting with Abbas again this week in hopes of finding a way to keep him at the table. The lack of a prisoner release will make his job a lot tougher.

Stay tuned to the [CMEP Facebook page](#) for the latest developments.

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

2) On the “Jewish State of Israel”

John V. Whitbeck, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (WRMEA)

March/April 2014

News reports continue to suggest that one of the primary roadblocks to any agreement in the current round of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations is the understandable Palestinian refusal to accept the Israeli demand that Palestine explicitly recognize Israel as a or the “Jewish State”—a legally and intellectually bizarre demand clearly intended to make any agreement impossible while facilitating Israel’s post-failure public relations campaign to assign to the occupied Palestinians responsibility for Israel’s latest success in producing failure.

Palestinian acceptance of this Israeli demand would constitute explicit Palestinian acquiescence in permanent second-class status for Palestinian citizens of Israel and in the liquidation of the rights of millions of Palestinian refugees, as well as implicit Palestinian acceptance that the ethnic cleansing of Palestine was morally justified, which in turn would require conceding that Palestinians are sub-humans not entitled to fundamental human rights. No Palestinian leadership could accept this demand and survive. Israelis know that. That is why the demand is being made.

While few anticipate that the current round of negotiations (which, according to Israeli press reports, Binyamin Netanyahu now wants to extend for a further year beyond their end-April deadline so as to kill more time while building more settlements) will produce anything, the State of Palestine could and should take constructive action now to disarm the “Jewish State” gambit, which the Israeli prime minister appears to view as his best hope for shifting blame, at least in Western eyes, to the Palestinians.

The State of Palestine could and should reiterate that Israel’s self-identification is a matter for Israelis (not Palestinians) to decide and then publicly announce that, should Israel choose to change its official name from “State of Israel” to “Jewish State of Israel,” the State of Palestine, while preferring democracy as a matter of principle and hoping that Israel will in the future become a fully democratic state, according equal rights, without any discrimination based on race or religion, to all its citizens, would persist in its efforts to end the Israeli occupation of the State of Palestine and would enter into any agreements which might subsequently be reached with the relabeled Jewish State of Israel.

Subject only to the one exception noted below, all states are free to determine and embellish their “official names” as they please. There are four official “Islamic Republics”: the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Islamic Republic of Mauritania and the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. ...

Some official names are counterintuitive to the point of absurdity, such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea...or, potentially, the “Jewish and Democratic State of Israel.”

Two official names suggest a status akin to family-owned businesses, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (the Hashemite ruling family of the Hejaz having been driven out of their ancestral fief by the all-conquering Al-Saud family from Nejd and subsequently accorded territorial consolation prizes by their former Western allies while the Al-Saud affixed their family name to Arabia).

In one case, a state’s official name has been imposed on it by the United Nations as a condition for UN membership and is rejected and not used by the state itself – the “Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia,” which prefers to call itself the “Republic of Macedonia” but whose right to use the name “Macedonia” is disputed by Greece. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Before Abbas recognizes the Jewish state, Israel must define it **Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, March 19, 2014**

I have a suggestion for Mahmoud Abbas. The next time Benjamin Netanyahu demands that you recognize Israel as a "Jewish state," tell him that you'll agree on one condition. The Israeli cabinet must first agree on what "Jewish state" means. That should get you off the hook for a good long while.

Israel has never been able to define the term "Jewish state." That's part of the reason it lacks a constitution. Nor, I suspect, can the leaders of Hillel, even though they urge local chapters to make supporting "a Jewish state" a litmus test for potential speakers.

In truth, there are as many definitions of "Jewish state" as there are definitions of "Jew." For simplicity's sake, let's describe two, and imagine how Abbas might respond were Netanyahu to actually define the concept he's asking the Palestinian leader to endorse.

Jewish State Number One rests on the conviction that given Jewish history, Jews need a state that safeguards Jewish life. To ensure that the state upholds this mission, Jews must maintain political power. And maintaining Jewish political power trumps pretty much everything else.

Such a state works aggressively to keep its non-Jewish population low and politically weak. It denies citizenship even to non-Jewish refugees fleeing extreme persecution. To prevent its Palestinian population from growing, it denies citizenship to West Bank Palestinians married to Israeli citizens. It delights in policies that reduce the birthrate among Palestinian citizens of Israel, as Netanyahu did in 2007, when as finance minister he noted that cuts in child welfare payments had had the "positive" effect of sparking "a dramatic drop in the birth rate" of the "non-Jewish public." Such a state seriously considers redrawing Israel's border so as to deposit Israel's Palestinian citizens outside the state without their consent, as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman famously proposed. It, of course, denies any Palestinians who left Israel during its war of independence the ability to return.

In addition to numerically limiting Israel's non-Jewish population, Jewish State Number One limits their political influence. On ideological grounds, it seeks to ban Palestinian Israeli parties from running for the Knesset, as Lieberman's associates have done. It insists that to be legitimate, governing coalitions must enjoy a Jewish parliamentary majority.

Given his actions, and the actions of his political allies, it's pretty clear that this is the kind of Jewish state Netanyahu wants. It is a state from which Israel's Palestinian citizens feel understandably alienated. And it's a state that mocks the promise in Israel's Declaration of Independence of "complete equality of social and political rights...irrespective of religion, race or sex."

Were I Mahmoud Abbas, I'd say again and again that Jews have a profound historical connection to the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea and the right to live safely in any part of it. But if Netanyahu asked me to endorse Jewish State Number One, I'd tell him to stick it where the sun don't shine.

Then there's Jewish State Number Two. It starts with the same conviction: that given Jewish history, Jews need a state that safeguards Jewish life. It too acknowledges the value of Jewish political power, and even endorses non-coercive measures, like the promotion of aliyah, which boost Jewish numbers. But because it considers the state's democratic character as important as its Jewish character, it rejects any measures that undermine the rights and dignity of Israel's non-Jewish citizens. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) J Street: Jewish state demand not realistic at present

Ha'aretz, March 23, 2014

The progressive, American, pro-Israel lobbying group J Street has come out against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's demand that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the Jewish state – at least during the current round of negotiations.

In a letter to supporters last Friday, J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami wrote that the issue should not be allowed to derail the negotiations at the current time.

“These issues are appropriately settled as part of a final peace agreement – and not now as part of a framework for continued negotiation,” Ben-Ami wrote.

He noted that U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry had “also cautioned Israelis against turning the ‘Jewish state issue’ into ‘the critical decider of their attitude towards the possibility of a state and peace.’”

The “core issues of identity, recognition, rights and redress” will have to be addressed in a final, comprehensive agreement to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ben-Ami said.

“Resolving the conflict requires mutual recognition by Israel and a new state of Palestine of each other as the national homeland of their respective people,” Ben-Ami wrote. “In a final agreement, both states should agree to treat all their citizens equally without regard for religion, race or background and reach an agreed-upon resolution of all outstanding claims.”

Saying that mutual recognition can be part of a package deal once the parties have settled the issues of borders, security, Jerusalem and refugees, Ben-Ami averred: “It is simply unrealistic and unreasonable to expect any Palestinian leader to consent to what has become for all intents and purposes an Israeli ultimatum right now.”

Derailing the talks over the issue may win Netanyahu some propaganda points, Ben-Ami concluded, but “he would be throwing away for the Jewish people our best chance to end the conflict in years. With goodwill and creativity, the parties can surely surmount this obstacle and move on.”

5) Discard the false visions of a binational state

Salman Masalha, Ha'aretz, March 19, 2014

The time has come to speak to the point. The Jews and the Arabs aren't going anywhere. You don't have to be a genius to realize that the present situation is intolerable both morally and politically. Anyone who claims that the conflict in Israel is a national one must have enough honesty and intellectual courage to present his own vision of a national solution.

There are some people, both on the hallucinatory right and the equally hallucinatory left, who are thinking about not dividing the country. But in the absence of partition the conflict will not be solved. We won't reach a situation of "one person, one vote," but rather a continuation of the occupation and splashing around in the mud puddles of the Jewish and Muslim religions. So we have to put aside the false visions of life in a binational state. Since the absolute majority in each of the Jewish and Palestinian communities wants to live a national life in its country, there is no avoiding a division of the land into two nation-states, with all that entails.

An end to the conflict requires good will among both nations. Such good will demands that both sides internalize, fully recognize and agree on the basic principle: Both nations have a strong connection to this land. Clearly anyone who rejects this fundamental principle is not seeking a genuine solution to the conflict.

It must be emphasized that dividing the land is a diplomatic division into two nation-states: A Hebrew-Israeli one and an Arabic-Palestinian one. The division will be based on the Green Line, not because of any sanctity attached to it, but because it's the line that enjoys broad international backing. In addition, in order to ensure that the agreement between the two nations will in fact end the conflict, the principle of separation of religion and state must be anchored in a Basic Law in the parliaments of both countries. Such a law is designed to bypass the complications related to the religious, ethnic and national definitions of the citizens of the two countries.

When the State of Israel itself is unable to define who and what is a Jew, it cannot make demands to be recognized as a Jewish state. Even more so when one fifth of its citizens are Arabs living in their country and their homeland. Therefore, if there is insistence on recognition of Israel as a "Jewish state," it is equally important to insist on it being a "Jewish state and the country and homeland of the Arabs who are citizens of the state."

It's clear that the "linguistic majority" in every country is what determines its cultural identity. At the same time, it wouldn't hurt the majority to learn and know the language of the minority, the language of the next-door neighbor. That's why in both states the language of the neighboring state should receive official status. Determining the status of the neighbors' language is required for the education of the coming generations. Because the citizens of both countries are like tenants in a shared house. They are tenants of a shared homeland.

Like any properly administered country, and in accordance with the rules of international law, it should be emphasized that the nationality in both states is no more than a diplomatic-civic nationality. A Jew who chooses to remain under Palestinian sovereignty will be considered a Palestinian for all intents and purposes, like any other Palestinian citizen. The same is true of all citizens under Israel sovereignty. The suggested separation between civic nationality and religious-ethnic nationality is designed to bypass a prohibitively tall obstacle – the demand to define the states based on the ethnic-religious majority of its citizens.

A state, as such, has no religion. The citizens of the state can believe in one religion or another, or not believe in any religion at all. In the final analysis, it is the dominant language that determines the identity of the place. Therefore, what will bring an end to the conflict once and for all is the recognition of Palestine as an Arabic – not a Muslim – state, and of Israel as a Hebrew – not a Jewish – state, and a redeemer shall come to Israel and Ishmael.

6) [Arab League rejects Israel as Jewish state](#)

Jack Khoury, Associated Press, published by Ha'aretz, March 26, 2014

Arab leaders said Wednesday they would never recognize Israel as a Jewish state, blaming it for a lack of progress in the Mideast peace process. "We hold Israel entirely responsible for the lack of progress in the peace process and continuing tension in the Middle East, the League communique said. "We express our absolute and decisive rejection to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state."

The statement, which came at the end of a two-day summit in Kuwait, also rejected what the Arab League described as the continuation of Jewish settlement building in the West Bank and the "Judaization" of Jerusalem and "attacks in its Muslim and Christian shrines and changing its demographics and geography."

On Tuesday, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed the summit, charging that during the past eight months of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, Israel has refused to end the occupation and instead worked to perpetuate it. Rather than seeking to achieve a just and viable peace, he added, Israel has recently erected new obstacles to such a peace, like its demand for recognition as a Jewish state.

In Israel, a senior official accused Abbas of threatening to "torpedo the peace process" and parading "rejectionism as a virtue." "By reiterating his adversarial maximalist position, Abbas is undermining President (Barack) Obama's vision of peace and torpedoing Secretary Kerry's efforts to move the process forward," said the official, speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter with the media.

The League's announcement rejects a key demand of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Mideast peace talks. Netanyahu believes there cannot be peace without such a recognition. The Palestinians oppose this, saying it harms the rights of Palestinian refugees displaced from what is now Israel, as well as those of Israel's Arab minority. Wednesday's announcement sets the stage for the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to take a tough line in talks later in the day with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry in Jordan.

Arab leaders, at loggerheads over numerous issues including Egypt and Syria, pledged at the end of a two-day summit in Kuwait on Wednesday to work to end their divisions.

The 22 members of the Arab League also denounced killings of civilians by the Syrian government.

"We pledge to work decisively to put a final end to divisions," read their final statement, read out to media by Kuwaiti Foreign Ministry undersecretary Khaled al-Jarallah.

Three weeks ago, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain recalled their ambassadors from Qatar, accusing it of failing to abide by an accord not to interfere in fellow Arab states' internal affairs.

Officials have said the spat was over Qatar's support for Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, which was ejected from power by the military last year after mass protests against the Islamist president, Mohammed Morsi, and has now been outlawed.

Arab states have also been at odds over the civil war in Syria, with some countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar supporting rebels battling to overthrow President Bashar al-Assad, while a minority back Assad.

"We condemn in the strongest terms the massacres and the mass killing committed by the Syrian regime's forces against the unarmed people," the final communique read.

"We call for a political solution to the Syrian crisis in accordance with the Geneva One declaration."

7) What Israeli Palestinian mutual recognition really means

Lara Friedman, Ha'aretz, March 30, 2014

By now everyone has realized that there's a new issue on the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations agenda that's not going away: The demand that the Palestinians not only recognize Israel – something they have done repeatedly, starting in 1993 – but that they recognize Israel as “a Jewish state,” or some similar wording. No such “recognition-plus” demand was made of Egypt or Jordan, nor was it mentioned in the Oslo agreement or subsequent Israeli-Palestinian documents. It made a brief appearance in the Annapolis talks of 2007, but only as a marginal issue. Only in 2009 did it truly come into play, courtesy of Netanyahu.

Netanyahu's decision to introduce the issue into the Israeli-Palestinian negotiating dynamic seemed to be a cynical one. He was faced with a U.S. president determined to forge ahead with peace and a Palestinian president who embraced the two-state solution, rejected violence, and was actively cooperating to fight terrorism. This left Netanyahu scrambling for a pretext to argue that Israel had no Palestinian partner for peace, as cover for his own anti-peace, pro-settlement policies. Thus was born the “recognition-plus” demand, which today is accepted by many Israelis and supporters of Israel as a condition for any peace agreement, and even as a precondition for continuing to sit at the negotiating table with the Palestinians.

Israeli insistence that the Palestinians adopt this specific formula of recognition has already been proven to be an obstacle to peace. It is seen by many Palestinians as effectively requiring them to renounce their national narrative and accept the delegitimization of their own history, suffering, and grievances. It is viewed as asking them to recognize, in essence, prior Jewish claims that erase their own rights, both in terms of lands lost and as refugees. Moreover, this demand is seen by many – on both sides of the Green Line – as requiring Palestinian President Abbas to “sell out” the more than one million Palestinians who are citizens of Israel, sabotaging their own efforts to break down the barriers to equality inside Israel.

And nobody should forget: The latter Israelis – 20 percent of the total population of Israel – may play a pivotal role in ensuring the passage of a referendum on a future peace agreement.

That's the bad news. The good news is that this controversy brings to the fore a critical issue that was going to come up eventually: The need to reconcile irreconcilable national narratives. This issue will be at the core not only of resolving the Palestinian refugee issue, but of agreeing on any meaningful articulation of an end-of-conflict, end-of-claims commitment. Herein lies the opportunity.

For many Israelis, the “recognition-plus” demand has taken root not because they are looking for an excuse not to make peace, but, at least in part, because it taps into their longing to not simply be tolerated in the Middle East, but to be embraced, in the region and the world, as a legitimate, indigenous nation, consistent with Israel's founding Zionist narrative of the return of the Jews to their historic homeland.

For many Palestinians, rejection of the “recognition-plus” demand is a function of their own narrative. It is the narrative of an indigenous people living for generations in the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea, only to be expelled or occupied as the result of the creation of Israel and subsequent disastrous wars.

In short, the demand and its rejection go to the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. They embody the shared desire of Israelis and Palestinians for self-determination in their own countries, and for acknowledgment of their core narratives.

Recognizing what this argument is really about opens the door for people on both sides of the conflict – and on both sides of the Green Line – to start grappling with this critical issue and with the challenge of finding a recognition formula that addresses the needs, and respects the sensitivities, of both sides. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) Statement by Bureau of Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, on the situation in Jerusalem/UN General Assembly, Department of Public Information

March 5, 2014

The Bureau of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People is alarmed by recent developments and increased tensions in Occupied East Jerusalem.

We are particularly concerned by the increasing incursions by Israeli extremists and political leaders, including Government officials, on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound. These incidents provoke Palestinian and other Muslim worshippers and often lead to clashes, in which Palestinian civilians are injured, tear-gassed and detained. In another worrying development, the Knesset recently began a debate on a bill to impose "Israeli sovereignty" over Al-Haram Al-Sharif. Such actions with regard to this highly sensitive area provoke the Palestinians and may also be perceived as serious acts of incitement in the wider region. Moreover, these actions undermine the current negotiations process, threatening the prospects for peace.

These recent actions are indicative of a strategy aimed at altering the legal, demographic, physical and cultural character of East Jerusalem. Such actions are clearly prohibited under international law. House demolitions, evictions, land expropriation and the revocation of residency rights of Palestinian Jerusalemites are also on the increase. In 2013, 565 structures were demolished in East Jerusalem, displacing 298 Palestinians, including many women and children. Palestinians are permitted to build in only 14 percent of East Jerusalem, and a third of Palestinian land in East Jerusalem has been expropriated since 1967. In the same period, the residency status of more than 14,000 Palestinians has been revoked by Israel.

Moreover, the wall, a vast system of checkpoints and the imposition of a strict "entry permit" regime have effectively cut off East Jerusalem from the rest of the West Bank, restricting Palestinian movement, fragmenting the Palestinian Territory and exacerbating the already dire economic and social conditions of Palestinian residents.

Israel also continues to construct settlements in East Jerusalem, in violation of international law and in defiance of the international community's repeated calls for ending such illegal acts. Since the resumption of peace talks last July, Israel announced construction plans for more than 5,000 new settlement units in Palestinian neighbourhoods in the city.

The Bureau of the Committee wishes to reaffirm that East Jerusalem remains an integral part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory and is subject to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention, as affirmed by numerous Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention clearly states: "The occupying Power shall not deport or transfer parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies."

The question of East Jerusalem is a crucial permanent status issue. A sovereign, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital and with arrangements for the holy sites acceptable to all, is a core requirement for the achievement of a just and lasting peace.

The Bureau of the Committee calls on the Security Council to act without delay to address these alarming developments, which are in defiance of the Council's resolutions The Bureau also calls on the Security Council to continue monitoring violations of the aforementioned resolutions and to act accordingly for their implementation.

The Committee will continue to carry out its mandated work until the question of Palestine is resolved in all its aspects. It calls on the international community to do its utmost to make 2014, the International Year of Solidarity with the Palestinian People, a decisive year in achieving the freedom and national rights of the Palestinian people and a peaceful solution to the conflict in all its aspects. The Committee will revisit this important issue at its upcoming Joint Meeting with the League of Arab States on 10 March 2014.

9) [The State of Two States, Week of March 16 \(Israel Policy Forum\)](#)

Commotion in the Middle East escalated this week, forcing both U.S. and Israeli politicians to divide their attention among several different countries. The week began with a meeting between President Obama and President Mahmoud Abbas on Monday, with Abbas returning to Ramallah declaring that he did not make any concessions to Obama. On Tuesday, a Hezbollah-triggered explosive injured four IDF soldiers on the border with Syria, prompting an Israeli attack on Syrian outposts on Wednesday. Several Israelis have made statements regarding the fourth prisoner release scheduled for March 29, causing much uncertainty and debate. Simultaneously, developments surrounding the P5+1 talks with Iran, the Syrian conflict and the situation in Crimea continue to raise concerns about the future stability of the region and their effect on the U.S.-led peace talks.

“We had thought the ones who should lead the campaign against Iran is the United States...The U.S. at a certain stage began negotiating with [the Iranians], and unfortunately in the Persian bazaar, the Iranians were better...We [Israelis] have to look out for ourselves.” – Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon speaking about U.S. diplomacy in front of an audience at Tel Aviv University; he later apologized for his statements (Monday 3/17)

“I have to commend President Abbas. He has been somebody who has consistently renounced violence, has consistently sought a diplomatic and peaceful solution that allows for two states, side by side, in peace and security; a state that allows for the dignity and sovereignty of the Palestinian people and a state that allows for Israelis to feel secure and at peace with their neighbors.” – President Obama speaking alongside PA President Abbas at the White House (Monday 3/17)

“Mr. President, I’m aware that you have several international concerns in various places around the world and we know that you are dedicating your time and effort for peace, and so are the teams that are working on this. We count on these efforts and we will build on them because we consider this to be a historic opportunity to achieve peace.” – PA President Abbas speaking alongside President Obama at the White House (Monday 3/17)

“The U.S. needs to depart from the square of what’s possible [in the Israeli view] to the square of what’s needed. [The Obama administration] is showing some genuine indication of what’s needed.” – Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erekat commenting on the current state of U.S.-led negotiations (Tuesday 3/18)

“The prison keys are in the hands of [Palestinian President] Mahmoud Abbas and the decisions he makes over the next few days.” – Justice Minister Tzipi Livni referring to the fourth prisoner release planned for March 29 (Tuesday March 18)

“I think we must not release more terrorists. I say that if more terrorists are released, I will not be part of the government. This is not a simple thing to say... It would be immoral and wrong to release more murderers and get nothing in return. This also weakens the State of Israel’s fortitude when the Middle East sees us and Abu Mazen laughs at us.” – Defense Minister Danny Danon remarking in an interview with Army Radio (Wednesday 3/19)

“I think part of the logic for the White House in adding the Riyadh stop on to the end of President Obama’s trip was to have an opportunity for him to sit down the King Abdullah and other leaders in the region face-to-face and say to them, American interests in the Middle East have not changed, we are still committed to the security of the region. We’re still committed to Middle East peace, we’re still committed to preventing Iran from getting a nuclear weapon and to be able to do that face-to-face. But there’s no question that the Crimean crisis is complicating the trip’s purpose in sending that message.” – Tamara Cofman Wittes, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at Brookings Institution, talking on an IPF conference call (Wednesday 3/19)

[The State of Two States, Week of March 23 \(Israel Policy Forum\)](#)

This week, tensions have intensified around the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations as the fourth and final prisoner release rapidly approaches this weekend. On Tuesday, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas declared that he would not recognize Israel as a Jewish state at the Arab League summit in Kuwait. In turn, the Arab League released a statement fully supporting this position. On Wednesday, Secretary of State John Kerry put his trip to Italy on hold in order to meet with Abbas in Amman. With the prisoner release scheduled for this weekend, Israeli politicians are pressuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to postpone the release until the Palestinians can commit to extending the peace negotiations. There have been reports that the U.S. has suggested the release of Jonathan Pollard alongside the prisoner release, with the hope that it will help extend the talks. Also this week, reports of reconciliation between Israel and Turkey have strengthened in the face of elections in Turkey.

“We are asking you to ask the cabinet, the Americans and the Palestinians to decide to immediately replace the gesture of releasing prisoners and terrorists in a fourth round with a construction freeze in the settlements, for at least as long as there are negotiations between us and the Palestinians. Mr. Prime Minister, a construction freeze can always be stopped and unfrozen, but turning the wheel back after releasing many more prisoners and terrorist-murderers is something that is impossible.” – MKs from the Labor Party and Shas faction suggesting alternatives to the prisoner release as reported by Megafon News (Tuesday 3/25)

“We hold Israel entirely responsible for the lack of progress in the peace process and continuing tension in the Middle East. We express our absolute and decisive rejection to recognizing Israel as a Jewish state.” – The Arab League’s statement after their summit, declaring their stand on Israel’s demand to be recognized as a Jewish state (Wednesday 3/26)

“[Jonathan Pollard] has absolutely no connection to this [the peace talks]... He should be released unrelated to this...Along with his release, we will have to make the kind of concessions that we must not make. Ideas in the air are a prisoner release that includes Israeli Arabs, another is a construction freeze. This must not be allowed. What I think is happening is that the pressure on us is being stepped up because ultimately, we fold...I think we should take an example from Abu Mazen. He knows how to say no. He doesn’t budge a millimeter. The West knows this and that’s why it doesn’t put pressure on him.” – MK Uzi Landau of Yisrael Beiteinu speaking in an interview with Israel Radio’s news magazine (Wednesday 3/26)

“For the defense minister to state that President Obama is not supportive of Israel is an affront not only to the president, but also to all those who have worked to ensure a strong, unshakable U.S.-Israel alliance through Democratic and Republican administrations alike. It’s one thing to oppose U.S. initiatives; it’s another to do so in a manner that’s disrespectful, denigrating and threatening to the U.S.-Israel relationship.” – Peter Joseph, Chair of IPF, remarking on Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya’alon’s sharp criticism of American foreign policy (Wednesday 3/26)

“Israel is trying to worm its way out of releasing the prisoners. They will be held responsible for any repercussions of this.” – Palestinian Minister of Prisoners affairs Issa Qaraq speaking with the Voice of Palestine radio station (Thursday 3/27)

“While both sides can, do and will blame [Kerry] for their inability, unwillingness and reluctance to make decisions, as they habitually did to his predecessors, they would be wise to consider the following: After Kerry’s efforts, mediation and involvement, it is difficult, perhaps impossible, in the event that Kerry fails, to see a near-future secretary of state investing resources, time, reputation and American foreign policy capital. Why should he?” – Alon Pinkas, IPF Israel Fellow, commenting on the peace negotiation’s blame game (Thursday 3/27)

10) [UN body to vote on settlement-boycott resolution](#)

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, March 23, 2014

The United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva is scheduled to vote on five anti-Israel resolutions later this week, one of which includes a call to boycott and divest from West Bank settlements. The draft of this particular resolution, which is being submitted by the Arab states and the Palestinian Authority, is especially worrisome to Israeli officials because for the first time it includes wording that seems directly derived from recent boycott, divestment and sanction campaigns. Because Foreign Ministry work sanctions have paralyzed Israel's diplomatic activity, no steps were taken to try to soften the wording of the resolutions or block them.

A senior Israeli official said that the resolution is making officials in the Prime Minister's Office very nervous. Though the resolution is not binding, its passage is liable to encourage efforts to boycott Israeli and foreign companies that operate in the settlements.

After Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's aides realized that no one at the Foreign Ministry planned to address the issue, they considered dispatching deputy National Security Council chairman Eran Lerman to Geneva to try to convince the United States and members of the European Union to help soften the resolution. In the end it was decided not to send Lerman because the PM's aides concluded that he would be unlikely to wield much influence. Lerman is not accredited to the UN institutions in Geneva, which means he cannot attend UNHRC debates or even enter the UN compound. He would have been forced to meet Western diplomats in their offices or in local cafes.

The draft resolution as published by UN Watch in Geneva states that the Israeli settlement enterprise makes Israel responsible for serious violations of international law, and calls on UNHRC member nations not to facilitate the continuation of these violations. "The direct or indirect assistance of States and private entities to the settlement enterprise constitute obstacles that have frustrated international efforts for the end of the occupation and fulfillment of the right of self-determination of the Palestinian people," the resolution says.

The draft also notes "the probability of liability, including international criminal liability, for corporate complicity in breaches of international law related to illegal settlements," and expresses satisfaction "that some businesses have withdrawn from settlements due to awareness of these risks."

The resolution calls on all nations "to implement the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights in all circumstances, including in Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, their territory and/or under their jurisdiction, including those owned or controlled by them, that conduct activities in or related to the settlements, respect human rights throughout their operations, by taking all necessary steps — including by terminating their business interests in the settlements."

The resolution also calls for UNHRC member states to inform private persons and businesses of "the financial, reputational and legal risks, as well as the possible abuses of the rights of individuals, of getting involved in settlement-related activities, including economic and financial activities, the provision of services in settlements and the purchasing of property, and to prevent and discourage such involvement."

11) U.S. defends Israel at UN Human Rights Council meeting

Editorial in Ynetnews, March 31, 2014

Israel's staunch ally, America, was the sole buffer against five resolutions which passed Friday against the Jewish State at the UN's top human rights body. Four of the resolutions, which focused on Israel's treatment of Palestinians, passed 46-1, with the U.S. the only country to vote against.

On the final day of the body's winter session, the American representative to the body condemned controversial Agenda Item 7, which required a discussion of Israel at every gathering, saying that such resolutions are not only biased "but they work against our collective efforts to advance a peaceful resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict."

Paula Schriefer, the U.S. representative to the UN's Human Rights Council, called on the council's members to "avoid actions that hinder" such an outcome, in a short speech in which she argued that "council continually singles out Israel for criticism without acknowledging the violent attacks directed against its people."

She noted that "none of the world's worst human rights violators, some of whom are the objects of resolutions at this session have their own stand alone agenda item at this council," and emphasized that "only Israel, a vibrant and open democracy, received such treatment."

The fifth resolution under Agenda Item 7, which passed with the support of 33 members, condemned Israeli treatment of the Syrian population on the Golan Heights. Schriefer ridiculed the resolution: "To consider such a resolution while the Syrian regime continues to slaughter its own citizens exemplifies the absurdity of this agenda item."

No representatives of the Foreign Ministry were present because of an on-going general strike.

12) Erekat: Israel has prioritized settlements over peace

Ma'an News Agency, March 23, 2014

Recent Israeli actions against the Palestinian people indicate that Israel has given priority to settlement expansion and the demands of settlers over peace and negotiations, a top PLO negotiator said Sunday.

Member of the PLO Executive Committee Saeb Erekat made his remarks during separate meetings with Luxembourg's foreign minister Jean Asselborn, UN envoy Robert Serry and U.S. peace envoy Martin Indyk. Erekat's remarks come only a day after Israeli forces three Palestinians during a raid on Jenin refugee camp and news that Israel had approved more than 2,000 new homes in six different Jewish settlements across the West Bank.

Erekat said that these practices, as well as the repeated raids on the Al-Aqsa mosque compound and the tightening of restrictions against Palestinian worshippers, constitute a "systemic" effort to foil U.S. and international efforts to implement a two-state solution based on the 1967 borders.

On Thursday, UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process Robert Serry said that he was "gravely concerned" by Israel's new settlement plans. He added: "Settlements are illegal under international law and cannot be reconciled with Israel's stated intention to pursue a two-state solution."

"This development is particularly unhelpful against the backdrop of a volatile situation on the ground and as U.S.-led peace negotiations have reached a critical stage," he said.

Peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians were relaunched in July under the auspices of the U.S. after nearly three years of impasse. Israel's government has announced the construction of thousands of settler housing units and its army has killed 60 Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza since the talks began.

13) Two-staters, unite behind Kerry **Ori Nir, Ha'aretz, March 24, 2014**

There's a kind of hush in the peace camp as Secretary of State John Kerry prepares to issue the "framework" for continued Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. And unlike Karen Carpenter's saccharine song, this hush is not intended to make room for the sound of lovers in love. It's a hush of inhibition, the silence of the skeptics who have known too many past disappointments.

And that's a shame. Not because there is no reason for skepticism. There are lots of reasons. But because there are also reasons for hope. And these reasons deserve to be enhanced by support from the peace camp.

Think about it: When was the last time that a determined U.S. president and a dogged secretary of state prepared a U.S. paper to be put on the table to pressure both Israeli and Palestinian leaders to negotiate seriously? When was the last time that an American president and his top diplomat framed their brokering efforts not as an act of benevolence toward Israelis and Palestinians who yearn for peace, but as a key U.S. national security interest, effectively telling the leaders of both peoples: "You owe it to us as much as you owe it to your publics."

Hope stems also from the positive role that the international community is playing, expressing support for both parties, promising benefits if a peace deal is achieved, but underscoring the liabilities of the continued status quo. And from the Arab League, which continues to re-affirm its peace initiative, offering Israel full normalization with the entire Arab world if Israel reaches a peace deal with the Palestinians.

As risk averse as both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas may be, they are leaders who can deliver. Both of them. If Netanyahu decides to go for a peace deal (and yes, it is a very big "if"), most Israelis would follow. The same goes for Abbas. He will face internal opposition, but polls and pundits indicate that if he offers a viable deal that promises Palestinians independence and hope for a better future, they will support it. Both leaders are already pressured by important players in the Israeli and Palestinian elites to take bold steps for peace. These include prominent businesspeople and security officials. And both leaders have made some positive statement in recent days.

In the coming days, Secretary Kerry is expected to submit his "framework" document to Netanyahu and Abbas. It will not be a perfect document. Many in the peace camp will pounce on what they will consider imperfections. Many, who have previously perfected the art of making the perfect the enemy of the good, will do that again. Unwittingly they will play into the hands of the anti-peace opposition, into the hands of those who are experts at making the status quo the enemy of vital change. That would be a terrible mistake.

.... Kerry's "framework" is not an endgame, but merely an on-ramp, a tool to re-energize the languid negotiating process. It is supposed to boost negotiations, not to stifle them.

The peace camp has a role to play – modest as it may be – in determining whether the negotiations take off after the "framework" is put on the table. You don't have to love everything in the U.S. document. But if you support the two-state solution you must do what you can to support this effort, which the Obama administration has justifiably been depicting as possibly a last ditch attempt.

It may be a good thing that the expectation level from this process is low and that there is no premature exuberance. The Israeli opposition seems pretty drowsy as well. But the moment will soon come in which Obama and Kerry could use all the public support they can have. That's our moment. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

14) A Palestinian Bantustan won't end the conflict

Daniel Levy, Ha'aretz, March 27, 2014

The brouhaha surrounding the fourth phase of an Israeli release of Palestinian prisoners demonstrates just how inconsequential the current supposed peace talks really are. When conflicts are resolved or critical negotiating moments reached, political prisoners are invariably traded or released, almost irrespective of the crimes for which they have been convicted.

But in this case the prisoner issue serves as a substitute for, not an indication of, substantive political progress. The entire four-part prisoner release was itself a product of two things: PLO Chairman Abbas' weakness - he failed to achieve either a settlement freeze or terms of reference for an Israeli withdrawal, prisoners were his fallback; and Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu's cynicism – the releases are an easier domestic political sell and provide the opportunity (repeatedly) for depicting Abbas as a “terrorist-hugger.”

The current prisoners dilemma will likely pass, but the deeper malaise and impasse surrounding Israeli-Palestinian affairs remains.

The logic of the current U.S.-led effort is apparently predicated on the assumption that by offering Israel unprecedented security deliverables within a two-state deal (under a package put together by U.S. General John Allen), together with front-loading recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, that Netanyahu would then be unable to dodge a serious negotiation on territory. That logic, combined with the ever-present American unwillingness to deploy any leverage viz its Israeli ally. Predictably enough, the Israeli leadership has pocketed the American concessions, demanded that the Palestinians follow suit, and asked for more.

Credible leaks regarding the content of a possible Kerry framework proposal suggest that the generous Israeli willingness to accept more is being seriously considered by U.S. officials. The danger now is that a U.S. framework for further negotiations will constitute a step backward for the Palestinians on every issue in the peace talks when compared to the Clinton parameters of December 2000. The framework text is set to be less specific than Clinton on both Palestinian east Jerusalem being Palestine's new capital and on territory, with no ceiling or ratio on land swaps, and more specific in further diluting Palestinian sovereignty to accommodate Israeli security maximalism and in embracing an exclusively Israeli historical narrative.

But perhaps this is not a problem at all and a solution will be better served if Palestinians adjust their expectations, accept whatever mini-statelet is offered and get on with building their future.

Except what is on offer, essentially a Palestinian Bantustan, is not a recipe for collective Palestinian betterment and would be illegitimate in most Palestinians' eyes. The kind of lop-sided arrangement under consideration would also be unattainable and unsustainable, ultimately serving neither Israelis nor Palestinians. In fact a framework that shifts the goalposts in this way would further undermine the already listless prospects for a two state outcome. The offer of a “Palestine” that is more Bantustan than sovereign state serves to enhance, by comparison, the attraction for Palestinians of an equal right's one-state alternative. On the Israeli side the political take-away will be that more settlements and intransigence will ultimately be indulged not opposed by the U.S. – fuelling extremism rather than moderation.

The notion that the Palestinian leadership should accept even a problematic framework in order to call Israel's bluff is a vacuous one. The U.S. cannot in good faith commit to holding Israel accountable for its rejectionism and to placing the dead cat at Netanyahu's door. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

15) [UN rights chief hits Israel over settlements](#)

Reuters, Israel News, March 24, 2014

The building of Israeli settlements and attacks by settlers on Palestinians are a major source of much abuse of rights in the West Bank, the United Nations' top human rights official said on Monday.

Human Rights High Commissioner Navi Pillay also expressed concern at a recent surge in violence in and around the Gaza Strip by both local groups and Israeli forces.

"Israeli settlement-related activities and settler violence are at the core of many of the violations of human rights in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem," she told the UN's 47-nation Human Rights Council in Geneva.

The settlements not only had a significant impact on the right to Palestinian self-determination, but activities around them "also violate the entire spectrum of Palestinians' social, cultural, civil and political rights," she said.

"Despite repeated calls for Israel to cease settlement activity, ongoing settlement construction and acts of settler violence continue with devastating consequences for Palestinian civilians," said Pillay, a former judge of the International Criminal Court who has visited Israel and the territories. Many countries deem Israel's settlements in the West Bank illegal. Palestinians decry them as a barrier to achieving a viable state, while Israel considers some of its settlements as a security buffer.

Israel withdrew its troops and settlers from Gaza in 2005, and Hamas – an Islamist group which rejects Israel's existence – seized control of the territory two years later, fueling tension which often leads to cross-border violence.

The Gaza violence, Pillay declared, was reflected in increased rocket fire by Palestinian armed groups directed at Israel and Israeli airstrikes on the area.

She said "the targeting of civilians and the indiscriminate firing of rockets towards Israel is a violation of international law. The response through air strikes by Israel is excessive and often causes destruction to personal and public property."

Pillay said an Israeli blockade of Gaza must be lifted, "with due regard to Israeli security concerns." Egypt also blockades Gaza from its side of the border. Referring to the West Bank administered by the Palestinian Authority, she said UN monitors there had documented "a dramatic increase in fatalities and injuries in incidents of use of force by Israeli security forces" in 2013.

There was an urgent need to ensure accountability for such incidents through independent investigations into allegations of unlawful killings or torture and ill-treatment and to prosecute those responsible, Pillay said. Israel's Foreign Ministry has been on strike since Sunday. Other officials had no immediate response to Pillay's remarks.

16) Ireland invented boycotts, so let's use them to demand justice for Palestine
Conor McCarthy, The Electronic Intifada, March 17, 2014

The term “boycott” has its origins in Ireland.

It entered the English language during the Land War of the 1880s — the struggle across the Irish countryside between impoverished tenant farmers and their often absentee landlords.

When Captain Charles Boycott, an agent of a major landowner in County Mayo, sought to evict tenants for non-payment of rent, he was shunned by the local communities: his workers went on strike, local tradespeople refused to deal with him; even the local post office refused to take his mail. So it is fitting that Irish people have undertaken a number of significant boycott campaigns as a means of fighting injustice.

In 1984, a group of mainly female workers in Dunnes Stores, a supermarket chain, went on strike in order to comply with a trade union decision that they refrain from handling South African fruit. Nelson Mandela personally thanked members of the group following his release from prison.

In keeping with this tradition, Academics for Palestine was recently formed in Dublin. Its main purpose is to encourage Irish universities to support the 2005 call made by representatives of a wide cross-section of Palestinian society for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) against Israel.

To their shame, some Irish universities are involved in research partnerships with Israel's arms industry and its academic supporters. Trinity College Dublin, for example, has participated in a surveillance technology project alongside Elbit, one of two main suppliers of drones used by Israel to attack civilians in Gaza.

University College Cork has teamed up with the Technion, a Haifa-based institution that has developed bulldozers specifically designed for demolishing Palestinian homes. These projects are financed by the European Union.

Israel has taken part in the EU's scientific research activities since 1997. Since then, its universities and enterprises have coordinated no fewer than 1,070 EU research projects and participated in 3,000 more (“Academia against apartheid,” Academics for Palestine, February 2014).

A veteran Irish politician Máire Geoghegan-Quinn is currently overseeing the EU's research program. Despite a row last year over “guidelines” reiterating EU policy that work undertaken in Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank should not be eligible for research funding, Geoghegan-Quinn has taken no action to prevent Israeli weapons-producers from receiving subsidies.

As a result, companies that make Israel's tools of occupation and apartheid will be able to benefit from Horizon 2020, the Union's new multi-annual research scheme.

When academics cooperate with Israel, they lend its apartheid policies a veneer of respectability. The task of critical intellectuals is to challenge the spurious legitimacy that some of our colleagues in universities have conferred on Israel and to expose the lies told by officialdom.

Our task is all the more important, considering that the Irish media has for the most part refused to investigate our country's academic cooperation with Israel. At our launch, Academics for Palestine presented a list of more than 140 Irish academics who support calls for a boycott of Israel. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

17) Analysis: Demolishing homes, demolishing peace
Jeff Halper, Ma'an News Agency, March 27, 2014

Jeff Halper is the director of the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD).

The “Judaization” of Jerusalem and the West Bank continues apace, despite (and in fact because of) the so-called “Kerry initiative.”

Over the past few months the Israeli government has intensified its campaign of demolitions in Jerusalem, in the strategic E1 area between Jerusalem and the Maale Adumim settlement, in the South Hebron Hills and in the Jordan Valley.

According to UN figures, 231 Palestinians have been displaced from their homes in the first two months of 2014. During that short time 132 structures were demolished, a pace outstripping that of 2013, when 1,103 structures were demolished and 663 people displaced, itself the highest level in the past five years. Besides homes, “structures” refers as well to livestock pens, fences, water reservoirs and even public buildings such as schools, all vital to the livelihood and communal life of Palestinians.

Overall, the ICAHD estimates that since 1967 some 29,000 Palestinian homes and livelihood structures have been demolished in the Occupied Territories – and that doesn’t include the ongoing demolition of thousands of other homes of Palestinian and Bedouin citizens of Israel.

At the same time, of course, the Israeli government has announced the construction of thousands of new homes and infrastructural projects in the settlements of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Thus, while recently approving another 1,500 housing units in the illegal East Jerusalem settlement of Ramat Shlomo, 558 in other East Jerusalem settlements and 3,500 more in the West Bank, it issued demolition orders for 2,000 housing units in the nearby area of Ras al-Khamis and the Shuafat refugee camp.

“Demolition” is only the visible part of the problem, of course. Displacement caused by lack of access to water or agricultural land and the actual expropriation of lands necessary for the continuation of Palestinian communal life is the real point of the demolition policy.

In East Jerusalem, the Israeli government is establishing a “national park” on the lands of Issawiya and al-Tur to the northeast of the city, fragmenting East Jerusalem communities while creating a “bridge” between Israeli Jerusalem and Maale Adumim -- creating a so-called “Greater (Israeli) Jerusalem” that divides the West Bank on half and effectively ends any prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state.

Following a process Israel ... calls “Judaization,” 40 percent of the Jewish residents of Jerusalem now live in the Palestinian part of the city, in expansive settlements that confine Palestinians to tiny ghettos.

Palestinian Sheikh Jarrah is being depopulated and replaced by Israeli Jews; recently the municipality announced the construction of a massive twelve-story “campus” of dormitories and classrooms for Jewish yeshiva students in the heart of the neighborhood.

Silwan is also in the process of being erased from the map: it has already been renamed “The City of David,” declared an Israeli national park and “Judaized” by dozens of settler families. The government plans to demolish 88 Palestinian homes in order to make way for parking lots and park facilities.

In other parts of Jerusalem – al-Tur, for example, or Jabal Mukkaber, Sur Baher and Beit Hanina – demolitions occur at a slower but steady pace, “under the radar” to avoid international criticism but enough to prevent Palestinian families from improving their standards of living. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)