

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**April 11, 2013**



*Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes contains reports on the treatment of Palestinian prisoners by Israel, President Obama's visit to Israel and the West Bank, Secretary Kerry's scheduled visits to restart negotiations, continuing settlement growth, the viability of a two state solution and other issues.

- The March 28 and April 5 CMEP Bulletins feature reports about Holy Week ceremonies in the Holy Land, violence after the death of Maysara Abu Hamdiya, 64, the second prisoner to die in Israeli custody in two months, and comments on the scheduled visit of Secretary of State Kerry to the Middle East.
- Lena Odgaard writes in Al-Monitor Palestine Pulse that although thousands of Christians from across the globe flocked to Jerusalem to follow the footsteps of Jesus during the Easter festivities, Christian Palestinians living only five to 15 miles away could not.
- In +972 Noam Sheizaf writes of veteran Israeli negotiator Shaul Arieli and the failure of the Oslo Accords, various Israeli prime ministers' commitment or lack thereof, to ending the occupation, and the only solution Arieli believes both sides could live with, however unsatisfied they might be with it.
- Joel Braunold writes in +972 that although it is the establishment opinion that two states will happen, those opposing it are literally executing a plan to kill it.
- In a speech at the Carnegie Endowment in Washington, D.C., Professor Ian Lustick of the University of Pennsylvania states that Israel needs a new map.
- James Wall writes that many political progressives have harshly criticized President Obama's recent trip to Israel and Palestine. They claim he was too warm toward Israel and too lukewarm toward Palestine. Wall doesn't believe that these critics paid close attention to what the president actually said and saw on this trip.
- Gideon Levy writes in Ha'aretz of Israeli doctors who betray their training in the delay of treatment and subsequent death of Palestinian prisoners as in the case of Maysara Abuhamdieh.
- Carlo Strenger comments in Ha'aretz on Rashid Khalidi's new book, *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, which shows how catastrophic the settlement policy has been not only for Palestinians, but also for Israel.
- Ari Avnery writes in Gush Shalom that President Obama feels the fears of the Israelis yet seems to feel nothing for the Palestinians. During his short visit to the West Bank his feet were in Palestine, his head was in Israel. He walked in Palestine. He talked to Palestine. But his thoughts were about the Israelis.

## 1) [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 28, 2013](#)

Thousands of Christians from around the world are gathering in Jerusalem to celebrate Holy Week, joining many Palestinian Christians, the “living stones” of the Holy Land. On Palm Sunday they climbed the Mount of Olives to re-enact Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem, a powerful scene punctuated with activism as many Palestinian worshipers took the opportunity to raise awareness of the approximately 50,000 Christian Palestinians living in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza.

During the procession, members of local Palestinian parishes carried banners bearing the word "Palestine," the name of their parish, and their distances from Jerusalem. Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza must apply for military permits in order to enter Jerusalem.

It is hard to tell how many Palestinian Christians will be able to come to Jerusalem during Holy Week. PLO official Hanan Ashrawi said some 60 percent of Christian applicants in Bethlehem and the Palestinian West Bank town of Ramallah had their requests rejected. Military spokesman Guy Inbar contradicted her estimate, saying they had issued nearly 20,000 permits so far, and only rejected the applications of 190 Palestinians.

On Holy Thursday, Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal celebrated the Mass of the Lord's Supper at the Basilica of the Holy Sepulchre and asked worshipers to “pray for our Church, for our Holy Land and for the entire Middle East, that the Lord may wash us of all the dust of divisions, infidelity, injustice and the thirst for power.” He talked about the violence in the region and said, “Politicians will continually fall short in bringing about democracy and justice while our Holy Land is in the state of conflict that is tearing it apart: peace in the Holy Land is the key to peace in the Middle East.”

Bishop Munib Younan of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land encourages Palestinians Christians to remain hopeful in his Easter message.

He writes, “On the Via Dolorosa, Jesus encountered all the dark forces that we experience in the Middle East today. He sacrificed himself so that we might hope and we can trust his power. We will not allow extremism, oppression, violence, bloodshed, hatred, walls or confiscated lands to diminish our hope, to make us give in to despair. The hope of living with dignity, justice, and reconciliation will triumph over the dark forces we face. This is the power of the cross today. This is the hope of Christians in Jerusalem and the whole Holy Land.”

### **Further reading**

[Obama appeals to Israel's conscience](#), by Fareed Zakaria (The Washington Post)

[Kerry meets Palestinian, Israeli leaders after Obama visit](#) (Reuters)

[Poll: Most rightist Israelis would support Palestinian state, dividing Jerusalem](#) (Ha'aretz)

[Settlements, not solutions, top agenda for new Israeli government](#) (Christian Science Monitor)

[Israel reopens Gaza border crossings](#) (The Associated Press)

[A tour puts a city in reach and at arm's length](#) (The New York Times)

[Hope in Hebron](#) by David Shulman (The New York Review of Books)

[CMEP Conference, May 20-21, Washington, D.C. Learn more at the CMEP website.](#)

## **CMEP Bulletin, April 5, 2013**

The death of a Palestinian prisoner in an Israeli jail ignited protests in the West Bank and Gaza this week that included demonstrations in the streets that led to the fatal shootings of two Palestinian youths, a strike by thousands of Palestinian prisoners, two rockets fired from Gaza and subsequent Israeli airstrike. While periodic upticks in violence seem to be par for the course in the region, this latest round will make Secretary of State John Kerry's job much harder while he's visiting this weekend.

**Violence after prisoner death:** Maysara Abu Hamdiya, 64, is the second prisoner to die in Israeli custody in two months putting more attention on an issue that unites Palestinians across party lines. Palestinian society views prisoners as heroes and their treatment has been the spark for many protests over the past two years. Abu Hamdiya was a retired general in the Palestinian Authority security services detained by Israel in 2002 and was serving a life term for attempted murder for his involvement in a failed suicide bombing in a Jerusalem cafe.

The head of the Palestinian prisoner's society accuses Israeli authorities of medical neglect, including a delayed cancer diagnosis, failure to provide adequate and timely treatment, and a previous refusal to release him on humanitarian grounds. According to an Israeli autopsy, the cancer began in the vocal cords and had spread to the lungs, neck, chest, liver, spine and ribs. After news of his death spread Tuesday, protests erupted in several places including Hebron, Abu Hamdiyeh's hometown. On Wednesday in the Anabta village near Tulkarem, two teenagers were fatally shot during clashes with Israeli soldiers. An Israeli military spokesperson said troops opened fire after protestors threw Molotov cocktails at a military post.

The funerals for the deceased were held on Thursday in Hebron and Anabta and clashes continued. In Hebron, Abu Hamdiyah's death appeared to have temporarily united Palestinians from different factions. Mourners raised the flags of Fatah and its rivals, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.

Demonstrations over Abu Hamdiyah's death also took place in Gaza. At a mock funeral, one protestor said, "Yes, he's from the West Bank, but this reflects that we are one nation, one country, regardless of the division that the Israeli occupation is trying to do."

A small Islamic extremist group fired rockets into southern Israel Tuesday, saying it was acting in support of the Palestinian prisoners. There were no casualties or damage. Israel retaliated late Tuesday night with an airstrike in Gaza, its first since a cease-fire that ended eight days of cross-border fighting in November, which also did not result in any casualties. Hamas has allegedly arrested two members of the hardline group responsible for the attack.

Kerry's third visit to region in a month: The violence adds yet another obstacle in the way of Secretary Kerry as he travels to the region for the third time in a month in hopes of laying the groundwork needed restart the moribund peace process. Thus far, it doesn't appear that anything will move past the stage of "talking about talks." ...

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

## **2) Palestinian Christians face greater restrictions this Easter**

**Lena Odgaard, Al-Monitor Palestine Pulse, March 29, 2013**

Thousands of Christians from across the globe are flocking to Jerusalem to follow the footsteps of Jesus during the Easter festivities. But while pilgrims from Africa, Asia, the U.S. and Europe can easily spend the most important Christian holiday in the historic city, Christian Palestinians living only five to 15 miles away cannot. According to Palestinian priests, the number of permits available have been greatly reduced for this holiday.

Christian pilgrims marked Palm Sunday, March 24, by dancing and singing songs of worship in a long procession from the top of the Mount of Olives down to the Old City. Among them were also Palestinian congregations carrying banners with the messages: “Ramallah — 15 kilometers from Jerusalem,” “Beit Sahour — 9 kilometers from Jerusalem” and even one holding a picture of the permit Palestinians must obtain to access Jerusalem. Their aim was to spread awareness of how close the Palestinian Christian parishes in the West Bank are to the Holy City, though most are not allowed to go there.

In a news release on March 24, Hanan Ashrawi of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) expressed frustration that some parishes had received only 30 percent to 40 percent of the permits they had requested.

“There should not even be a question of needing permits to visit one’s own city,” she said: “East Jerusalem is the occupied capital of the Palestinian people and freedom of worship is a basic human right for all of our Christian and Muslim citizens, a right which is being systematically and increasingly denied by a foreign occupying force.”

According to the Catholic News Service, the Israeli government said it had dismissed only 192 of the 19,000 requests it had received, citing security reasons. Ashraf Khatib, also from the PLO, said that he was certain of the decrease in permits, as he himself had taken part of the Palm Sunday procession both this year and last year.

“Last year we had buses from all the parishes, around 17 to 18. This year only eight buses came. Some places, like Jenin, did not get any permits and while we had four buses last year from Bethlehem, there was only one this year,” he said. But according to Khatib, it is difficult to count on the number of permits given, as there is a policy of issuing permits to only some family members, thereby preventing the whole family from going.

Abeer, a Palestinian Orthodox Christian, is very familiar with the unpredictable pattern of obtaining permits. “This year only my eldest son [of 17 years] got a permit — me, my husband, our other son and my parents didn’t,” Abeer told Al-Monitor in Ramallah, adding: “What threat are my parents to Israel?”

Abeer explained her family also wanted to go to Jerusalem for Christmas, but her 13-year-old son was held back at the Qalandia checkpoint separating the West Bank and east Jerusalem. “They said he had to have a permit, but to get a permit you need to have an ID, and for that you must be 16,” Abeer said. Instead, Abeer’s family had to change their plans and went to the monastery in Jericho. “To get the permits is so difficult, and there is no logic,” she said. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

### 3) The Israeli negotiator who thinks two states are still possible

Noam Sheizaf, +972, March 27, 2013

Shaul Arieli is a man on a dual mission: educating Israelis about the conflict and diplomatic process with the Palestinians, and making the point that the two-state solution is both possible and necessary. His latest publication in Hebrew, *A Border between Us and You* (Yeditoth Ahronoth Books 2013), is a 500-page handbook to the history of the conflict, with an emphasis on the diplomatic and political process. It is written in very simple (and sometimes simplistic) language, with lots of maps, tables and even entries describing notable leaders on both sides ...

I asked Shaul Arieli for an interview in order to gain more first-hand knowledge and analysis of the history of the negotiations, including what's really behind terms like "settlements blocs" and "land swaps." Lately, the mere idea of talks has been put under scrutiny (much of it justified, in my opinion), so I wanted to know what went wrong in the past, and have we, as some claim, "passed the point of no return" with regards to the two-state solution ...

Arieli, 54, is the seventh son of Jews who emigrated from Iran. He served in various roles in the IDF, the last one being the commander of Gaza's Northern Division before and during the first Oslo Accord, a position he left in order to serve in the negotiating team that was formed in Prime Minister Rabin's office. He took part in negotiations under Netanyahu (in his first term) and Barak. Ariel Sharon stopped the diplomatic process, and Arieli joined the Geneva Accord – an informal agreement between PLO leaders and Israeli negotiators, which has since taken the form of an advocacy organization.

Arieli is a member of the Council for Peace and Security, an Israeli think tank dedicated to advancing a settlement with the Palestinians. He is also the author of nine books on the conflict. He has led hundreds of tours of the West Bank, separation barrier and East Jerusalem to Israeli politicians, diplomats, businessmen and activists. Lately, he made the news after Yair Lapid prevented his party members from going on one of Arieli's tours to East Jerusalem, claiming that "our party opposes a division of the city."

**Of all the Israeli prime ministers you served under or observed, who came closest to a final status agreement?** Rabin, Shimon Peres, Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert wanted to reach an agreement (even if Barak denies it today). Sharon didn't believe in agreements. I had the chance to see the way prime ministers matured in their positions. The dramatic changes took place with Barak and Olmert – by the time negotiations broke they were in a very different place. The only leader who was negotiating something real, something possible, was Olmert [in Annapolis]. But it was too late in his term, when he was almost a lame duck. Olmert internalized the concept of reciprocity. Barak never did, and Rabin was in a different era. He didn't have the chance to end the process.

**Did the Palestinians refuse?** I will quote Olmert himself: the Palestinians never refused. They didn't accept some of our proposals, just as we didn't accept some of theirs. Israelis think that Olmert gave "a generous offer" to the Palestinians. But the Palestinians would say the same. Mahmoud Abbas was ready for land swaps that would leave 75 percent of the settlers under Israeli authority, including in neighborhoods in East Jerusalem. Abbas went a long way toward Israel on every issue. ...

[Read the entire interview on the +972 website.](#)

#### **4) The one-state plan according to Israel's top settlement council**

**Joel Braunold, +972, March 22, 2013**

With President Obama visiting Israel, many groups are trying to get his attention so they can let the president know what they think he should do. Included within the pleas from the peace camp and the “Free Pollard” camp is a document prepared by the Yesha Council titled, “Judea and Samaria – It’s Jewish, It’s Vital, It’s Realistic.”

Questions answered within this Kafkaesque document include: why the demographics are on the settlers’ side, why the Palestinians are stealing water from Israel, and what is the legal history of Israel’s settlement enterprise. Most interesting, however, is the nine-step plan that the Yesha Council has created at the end of the document to fulfill their vision.

The main tool that the Yesha Council has to achieve its vision are its political advocates in the Knesset and in the government. Their building in the West Bank happens through the good graces of the state authorities. Although the main party through which the Yesha Council operates is the Jewish Home party (Habayit Hayehudi), it also has representation in Likud and Yisrael Beiteinu, along with a scattering of MKs in some of the centrist parties. Members of their communities operate across the center and the right of the Israeli political spectrum.

The following is a list of nine steps from which can see the underlying Jewish Home strategy during the coalition talks. Additionally we can start to make sense of some of the other Knesset moves and statements by members of the settler community on the national stage.

**Step 1: Renewing the strong belief in the supremacy of the Jewish claim to the Jewish Homeland and the justness of taking measures to maintain control of it.** In the coalition agreement between Likud and Jewish Home was a bill to make the Jewishness of the state supreme. This is a redo of the Avi Dichter bill from the last Knesset. No one is quite sure of which version will hit the Knesset, if it gets through Tzipi Livni, but it is part of a big move to decouple the concepts of Jewish and democratic state as equal and promote the former at the expense of the latter. The motivations behind this become clear in a strategy that is tied into biblical land claims and preparing for a situation where the civil rights of millions of Palestinians are going to have to be restricted.

**Step 2: Uniting the nation and its leadership.** Throughout the coalition talks, Bennett was the peacemaker between Yair Lapid and Benjamin Netanyahu and has pledged to be a leader for all of Israel, not just the settlers. His party has also taken over key ministries that can affect the cost of living across Israel. Bennett has been very keen to be seen as responding to the J14 protests and be a transformative politician who can transcend the tribal politics of the moment and be one of the new leaders of Israel alongside Lapid. By also slipping in the raising of the electoral threshold into the coalition agreement, he can ride the wave of Jewish Home’s current popularity and force others from his camp to work with him if they want any representation at all. By forcing people into a broad tent he gives himself a broader appeal and solidifies himself and by extension the Yesha Council firmly into the mainstream. ...

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)



## 5) Israel needs a new map

*Remarks by Prof. Ian Lustick, University of Pennsylvania, sponsored by Foundation for Middle East Peace (FMEP) and Middle East Policy Council, February 26, 2013, Carnegie Endowment, Washington, D.C. Prof. Lustick is the author of, most recently, "Trapped in the War on Terror."*

I'm delighted to be here. I want to thank Phil Wilcox and Anne Joyce from the Foundation for Middle East Peace and the Middle East Policy Council. I also want to mention my friend and colleague from years ago who created the Foundation for Middle East Peace, Merle Thorpe, Jr. It was thanks to his vision and generosity that I was able to undertake some of the work I did in the 1980s on Israeli settlements and their larger political significance.

In November 2010, I spent a long and fascinating evening with a dozen veteran settlers from the ideological core of the movement previously known as Gush Emunim. I was in their settlement to discuss ha-matzav (the situation) with these Jews who were living the political consequences of their ideology every day. At the end of a long evening, I asked them a question I've asked almost every Israeli I have met for the last fifteen years: can you describe a future for the country which you like and which you think can be achieved? When I first began asking this question in the late 1990s, Israeli Jews in the center-left of the political spectrum had little difficulty answering with one version or another of the two-state solution. On the other hand, apart from those who would simply say they trusted in HaShem (God) to make things work out, I had very little luck finding Israeli Jews on the right side of the spectrum capable of describing a future for the state and its relationship with the Arabs and the region as a whole that they liked and that they thought was possible. But by the early 2000s, it was not only the right that had difficulty answering this question; few in the center or left could do so either.

I was therefore not surprised at this meeting with the Gush Emunim activists in 2010 when not a single one of them was capable of answering that question. One settler declared that – for reasons he did not explain – the question itself was unfair. He was actually told by his colleagues, “No, actually, we have to realize this is a fair question,” but he insisted it was unfair. What was striking was the glum realization that none of those present, usually so voluble and confident on so many topics, could describe a future that in its basic outlines they themselves could consider as both satisfying and attainable.

The angst that filled their room that night is part of a larger, oft-commented-upon sense of depression, worry, even existential dread that has settled upon the Jewish state. A revealing sign of this abiding mood is the prevalence in Israeli political discussions of conditional sentences in which the main clause refers to the survival of the state. For example: “If Iran gets nuclear weapons, the state will not survive”; “If settlements are not built, the state will not survive”; “If more settlements are built, the state will not survive”; “If the youth are not brought to believe in the Zionist dream, the state will not survive”; “If the education system is not improved, the state will not survive”; “If the Galilee, Jerusalem and the Negev are not settled with Jews, the state will not survive”; “If a two-state solution is not implemented, the state will not survive”; “If Israel abandons Judea and Samaria, the state will not survive”; “If the Golan is returned to Syria, the state will not survive”; “If aliyah (immigration) does not increase, the state will not survive” ...

**[Read Prof. Lustick's remarks in their entirety, plus the extensive Q & A session, on the Middle East Policy Council website.](#)**

**6) Obama: “Look at the world through [Palestinian] eyes”  
James M. Wall, Friends of Sabeel-North America, April 3, 2013**

Many political progressives have harshly criticized President Obama’s recent trip to Israel and Palestine. They claim he was too warm toward Israel and too lukewarm toward Palestine. Did these critics pay close attention to what the President actually said and saw on this trip? I don’t think so.

The president declined to speak to the Israeli Knesset, asking instead for a younger audience. In his speech to Israeli youth, the President said:

[T]he Palestinian people’s right to self-determination and justice must also be recognized. Put yourself in their shoes — look at the world through their eyes. It is not fair that a Palestinian child cannot grow up in a state of her own, and lives with the presence of a foreign army that controls the movements of her parents every single day.

Bethlehem Mayor Vera Baboun told Daoud Kuttub she was especially pleased that the arrival of a khamsin\* sand storm that hit the area on Friday, forced the president to forego an Israeli helicopter. She observed that: By driving, Obama would have no choice but to see the wall surrounding the city. It was as if, she said, “God willed that Mr. Obama enter from the gate of reality, rather than from the sky of no reality.” Mayor Baboun, the mother of five, is Bethlehem’s first woman mayor. A former Bethlehem University English literature professor, she was elected in October 2012. She is also a professor who has a way with words.

MJ Rosenberg was one observer of the president’s trip who paid close attention to the fine print that emerged from the trip. Rosenberg, a former AIPAC staffer, now a harsh (and well-informed) critic of both AIPAC and Israel, reported on the speech the president gave to young Israelis:

In words that must have shaken Netanyahu, Obama referred to “the moral force of nonviolence” to resist the occupation. Coming out of left field, this was probably an indication that Obama read the Sunday *New York Times* magazine cover story on non-violent resistance in the West Bank by Ben Ehrenreich. Obama compared the Palestinian struggle to the civil rights movement in America, invoking his own daughters as beneficiaries of that struggle.

This presidential encouragement of the one form of protest that Israeli officials fear most as threatening their hold on the West Bank was significant. It is easy to imagine Palestinian protesters now marching against the settlements, waving photos of Obama along with his words endorsing non-violent resistance’s “moral force.”

Rosenberg adds that “the most significant part” of Obama’s speech came when the President referred to the Palestinians’ right to justice, specifically referencing settler violence that goes unpunished” Rosenberg adds that he believes Obama is the first U.S. president to use “the language of justice in discussing Palestinian rights, which is, of course, how Palestinians rightly see it.” ...

[Read the entire piece on Wall’s website, Wallwritings.](#)



## **7) Israeli doctors who betray their training**

**Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, April 4, 2013**

From Shin Bet personnel nobody expects any measure of compassion or humanity. But where are the doctors? They studied medicine. Perhaps their parents pushed them to be doctors or perhaps they had a burning desire to enter this profession from the time they were children. They certainly thought about a career but they also thought about the sanctity of this profession, about the noble aspiration to save lives and cure the sick. They certainly read the Hippocratic Oath, which is a very moving document. In the oath's Hebrew version, which was composed by Prof. Lipman Halpern in 1952, they also swore that they would "help all sick people irrespective of whether they are strangers, or Gentiles, or humiliated citizens, or respected ones."

They studied medicine in Jerusalem, in Moscow, in Budapest and in Odessa. They dreamed of a career but, in the end, they found themselves working as physicians in the Israel Prison Service or in the Shin Bet security service, although even there they had no reason to be ashamed of their profession. Some of them certainly encountered the case of Maysara Abuhamdieh, a prisoner who was serving a life sentence. In August 2012, Abuhamdieh complained of sharp pains in his throat. Only after six months (!?) -- that is, only last February -- was he diagnosed as suffering from cancer of the esophagus. Only after two additional months had already elapsed -- that is, on March 30 -- was it decided that he would be hospitalized in Soroka Medical Center in Be'er Sheva. He died two weeks later.

During those critical months, his desperate family appealed to Physicians for Human Rights - Israel: Their beloved Maysara could barely speak any more because of the pain and they shuddered to consider the possibility that he might not receive proper medical care. A month ago, a representative of that organization submitted to the prison service's top medical officer, Chief Superintendent Dr. Liav Goldstein, the urgent request that the prisoner receive medical treatment. Goldstein did not even bother to reply.

Israel's 2001 law governing the early release of prisoners authorizes the prison service's parole board to arrange for the early release of a prisoner whose days are numbered. In this case, the board operated at an appallingly slow pace. When asked to explain this week why Abuhamdieh, who was obviously dying, was not released early, Commissioner Nazim Sabiti, commander of the prison service's southern district, simply stated that a meeting of the board was indeed held on the subject of the prisoner's release.

All this transpired under the supposedly watchful eye of physicians who had taken the Hippocratic Oath. These same physicians allow the hospitalization of prisoners who are hand- and foot-cuffed even when in serious condition, as was the case with Abuhamdieh.

These same physicians saw the situation of another prisoner, Zuheir Lubada, whose kidneys and liver were diseased and who was dying. Lubada was released from prison only after he had slipped into a comma and was in serious condition; he died a week later. These same physicians enable the scandalous practice of solitary confinement for months and even years on end, despite the report of the Israeli Medical Association's ethics committee that has categorically stated that this practice inflicts irreversible physical and emotional damage on inmates. ...

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

## **8) Leading Palestinian intellectual: U.S. was never a fair broker of Israeli-Palestinian peace Carlo Strenger, Ha'aretz, April 3, 2013**

Last week in New York I had breakfast with Rashid Khalidi, a leading Palestinian intellectual who has written extensively on the development of Palestinian identity and served as an advisor to the Palestinian delegation to the negotiations with Israel and the U.S. from 1991 to 1993.

Khalidi, who is Edward Said Professor of Modern Arab Studies at Columbia and directs its Middle East Institute, is not very optimistic - to say the least - about the prospect for Middle East peace. On that point we connected rather easily, as neither of us is sanguine about the Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

My own pessimism is based on the one hand on my reading of Israel's internal dynamics and the deep level of fear and distrust Israelis feel vis-à-vis the Arab world, and on the other hand, the Arab world's difficulty to express its acceptance of Israel more clearly - among other reasons, because its regimes do not want an open conflict with the increasingly powerful Islamist ideology.

In Khalidi's view, the whole peace process has been a sham to begin with. He thinks Israel never intended to allow a viable Palestinian state to emerge, and that the U.S. has never acted as a fair broker in the Middle East.

Khalidi told me he believes the complex intertwining of U.S. and Israeli domestic politics has led to the point where the U.S. does not really oppose Israel's settlement policy even if this policy runs counter to American long-term interests.

Back in Israel I wanted to understand Khalidi's position more in depth, so I read his new book *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, which was an emotionally difficult experience. Most of the facts in his book were already known to me, though Khalidi has unearthed new documents that show the inner workings of various U.S. Administrations regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The book in a sense complements two other recent books written by Israelis that show how all Israeli governments since 1977 actively promoted the West Bank's gradual colonization: Idith Zertal and Akiva Eldar's *Lords of the Land: the War over Israel's Settlements in the Occupied Territories* and Gershom Gorenberg's *The Unmaking of Israel*.

*Brokers of Deceit* is a very angry book, and that anger is primarily directed at Israel. Khalidi repeatedly emphasizes former Prime Minister Menachem Begin's stipulation that no peace process should lead to the creation of a Palestinian state. Khalidi aims to show that Israel's policy since 1977 has been to create facts on the ground that would indeed preclude the possibility of a Palestinian state while playing the charade of a "peace process" that was basically meant to lead nowhere. (Khalidi uses the term with ire and irony).

[He] is also angry with the Palestinian leadership for accepting Israel's terms of reference for such a vacuous peace process. But most of all, he is angry at successive U.S. administrations that, under the guise of being fair brokers have been ... essentially Israel's lawyers. ...

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

## **9) Obama feels the fears of the Israelis. He feels nothing for the Palestinians**

**Ari Avnery, Gush Shalom, April 6, 2013**

Obama in Israel: Every word right. Every gesture genuine. Every detail in its place. Perfect.  
Obama in Palestine: Every word wrong. Every gesture inappropriate. Every single detail misplaced. Perfect.

It started from the first moment. The President of the United States came to Ramallah. He visited the Mukata'a, the "compound" which serves as the office of the President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas.

One cannot enter the Mukata'a without noticing the grave of Yasser Arafat, just a few paces from the entrance. It is impossible to ignore this landmark while passing it. However, Obama succeeded in doing just that. It was like spitting in the face of the entire Palestinian people. Imagine a foreign dignitary coming to France and not laying a wreath at the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. Or coming to Israel and not visiting Yad Vashem. It is more than insulting. It is stupid.

Yasser Arafat is for the Palestinians what Gorge Washington is for Americans, Mahatma Gandhi for Indians, David Ben-Gurion for Israelis. Father of the nation. Even his domestic opponents on the left and on the right revere his memory. He is the supreme symbol of the modern Palestinian national movement. His picture hangs in every Palestinian office and school.

So why not honor him? Why not lay a wreath on his grave, as foreign leaders have done before? Because Arafat has been demonized and vilified in Israel like no other human being since Hitler. And still is. Obama was simply afraid of the Israeli reaction. After his huge success in Israel, he feared that such a gesture would undo the effect of his address to the Israeli people.

This consideration guided Obama throughout his short visit to the West Bank. His feet were in Palestine, his head was in Israel. He walked in Palestine. He talked to Palestine. But his thoughts were about the Israelis. Even when he said good things, his tone was wrong. He just could not hit the right note. Somehow he missed the cue.

Why? Because of a complete lack of empathy.

Empathy is something hard to define. I am spoiled in this respect, because I had the good fortune to live for many years near a person who had it in abundance. Rachel, my wife, hit the right tone with everyone, high or low, local or foreign, the old and the very young.

Obama did so in Israel. It was really amazing. He must have studied us thoroughly. He knew our strengths and our weaknesses, our paranoias and our idiosyncrasies, our historical memories and dreams about the future.

And no wonder. He is surrounded by Zionist Jews. They are his closest advisors, his friends and his experts on the Middle East. Even from mere contact with them, he obviously absorbed much of our sensitivities. As far as I know, there is not a single Arab, not to mention Palestinian, in the White House and its surroundings. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)