

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**May 8, 2014**



*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.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes focus on responses and reactions to the unity arrangement between Fatah and Hamas, the collapse of the peace negotiations and Israel's role in that collapse, Kerry's use of the apartheid word in regards to Israel, implications of Israel as a "bi-national" state, objections to Netanyahu's move to make Israel the national homeland of the Jewish people, "price tag" terrorism by Jewish settlers, and other issues.

- The Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletins of April 17, April 24 and May 2 present commentary and articles (some of which are dated but remain useful reading) on Palestinian Christians remaining steadfast in spite of restrictions on Holy Week travel, the reconciliation process between Fatah and Hamas and Israel's reaction, the failure of the nine months of negotiations, controversy arising from Kerry's use of the apartheid word, and other matters of interest.
- Barak Ravid writes in Ha'aretz that Jerusalem chooses to see the unity deal between Fatah and Hamas as a threat, despite having argued that Abbas doesn't represent all Palestinian people.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in Ha'aretz that reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas presents a dilemma not only for Israel, but for the U.S. as well.
- Jack Khoury writes that Abbas has stated that the unity government with Hamas would recognize Israel and condemn terrorism, and that the Palestine Liberation Organization alone – and not the new government – will be in charge of the negotiations with Israel.
- In Ma'an News, Abbas said that the unity government would continue to follow previous PLO policies, and that he remains willing to extend peace talks with Israel.
- Alon Ben-Meir writes in the Huffington Post that Israel now faces a fateful crossroads: either end the occupation, or continue the subjugation of the Palestinians and forfeit the one historic chance to become a truly free nation that can live up to the promise of its divine creation.
- Chris Carlson writes in IMEMC: Secretary of State John Kerry said to a number of senior international officials that Israel risks becoming an apartheid state if it does not make peace soon. The remark was made at a closed-door meeting of the Trilateral Commission.
- Ha'aretz: Kerry denied that he in any way considered Israel to be an apartheid state. "I do not believe, nor have I ever stated, publicly or privately, that Israel is an apartheid state or that it intends to become one." However he did not deny that he said Israel risks turning into an 'apartheid state.
- Chemi Shalev writes in Ha'aretz: Kerry's conservative critics and the peace process' right-wing rivals didn't stop to ascertain the exact Kerry's exact wording but launched an all-out offensive blasting his policies and demanding his head.
- Jack Khoury writes in Ha'aretz: As nine-month period for negotiations ended, Abbas reiterated that there will be no peace with Israel without defined borders of a future state.

Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erekat said that Israel actively sabotaged talks, using every opportunity to consolidate its “apartheid regime.”

- Barak Ravid writes in Ha’aretz: Special U.S. envoy Martin Indyk left Israel following Israel’s decision to suspend peace talks with the Palestinians. The U.S. and Israel governments are seemingly on a collision course over what happens if technocrats’ Fatah and Hamas cabinet is established in Ramallah.
- Ramzy Baroud writes in Ma’an News: One particular character who stands out as a testament to the inherently futile “peace process” exercise is Martin Indyk. His undying commitment seems to be not to peace, but to Israel, or, more accurately, to “peace” as envisioned by Israel.
- John V. Whitbeck writes in Ma’an News: Netanyahu’s “destruction of Israel” mantra should not be taken seriously, and it is long overdue for Western governments to cease demonizing Hamas as an excuse for doing nothing constructive to end a brutal occupation which has now endured for almost 47 years.
- Aluf Benn writes in Ha’aretz: Netanyahu chose to avoid the political risk of peace-making to keep his coalition together and stay in power.
- Jack Khoury writes in Ha’aretz: The PLO says it is ready to resume negotiations on condition Israel freezes settlements and frees the fourth batch of prisoners.
- Ma’an News Agency: Israel will seek to anchor its status as the national homeland of the Jewish people in law, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday
- Saeb Erekat writes in an op-ed Time magazine: The ruling coalition of Israel should stop wasting its energy on excuses and start realizing that apartheid is not a sustainable option. Israel’s rejection of Palestinian national unity has little to do with Hamas and a lot to do with its own unwillingness to do what is needed for a just and lasting peace.
- The State of Two States from the Israel Policy Forum: As the deadline for peace negotiations passed on April 29, talks between all sides dissolved.
- Israeli finance minister and chairman of the Yesh Atid Party, Yair Lapid, has stated to the Wall Street Journal that there is a chance for Israel to potentially conduct talks with Hamas if the group “renounces terror” and “recognizes Israel.”
- Geoffrey Aronson writes that the latest U.S. State Department Country Reports on Terrorism 2013 included the acts of “price tag” violence by Israeli settlers.

### **1a) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 17, 2014**

**Palestinian Christians remain steadfast:** While Easter is a time for hope, for Palestinian Christians it is also a time for resilience and steadfastness. Pilgrims from around the world flood Jerusalem during Holy Week but local Christians face many Israeli restrictions as they try to worship in the sacred city.

East Jerusalem Christians filed a petition to the Israeli Supreme Court to reduce some of the restrictions on attendance at the famous Holy Fire ceremony in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre on Holy Saturday. In recent years, Israeli police have set up roadblocks and security checks that deter many Palestinian worshipers from attending the celebrations. The heads of five Eastern Orthodox churches and the Franciscan Custos of the Holy Land have joined the petition.

Last year, the EU issued a report calling the behavior of the Israeli police in 2013, “disturbing.” After clergy were roughed up, the Heads of Churches in Jerusalem issued a statement saying

they, “watched with sorrowful hearts the horrific scenes of the brutal treatment of our clergy, people, and pilgrims in the Old City of Jerusalem during Holy Saturday last week. A day of joy and celebration was turned to great sorrow and pain for some of our faithful because they were ill-treated by some Israeli policemen.”

The Israel Police responded by saying: “The police is preparing to secure the Saturday of Light event and to assure the security of the many participants, as is done for other events in which it enables all religions freedom of worship, subject to the law and maintenance of public order. As every year, there will be roadblocks around the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and participants’ entry will be supervised, to prevent a disaster and maintain their safety.”

The Israeli permit process is another major impediment for West Bank and Gazan Christians who want to worship in Jerusalem. They must apply for permits to enter Jerusalem, which are nearly impossible for entire families to get. This year, Palestinian officials said Israel only issued permits to Palestinian men over the age of 35 and under 16. Despite the restrictions “hundreds” of Gazans were able to go to Jerusalem and the West Bank to worship.

In an annual tradition, 13 patriarchs and heads of churches in Jerusalem issued a hopeful Easter message this year highlighting the importance of peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land:

We call upon all Christian people, people of other faiths and in fact all people of goodwill – to pray earnestly for a good outcome from the current Peace Process in the Holy Land, conformity with International law and indeed for peace throughout our troubled world. Despite the acute difficulties of the current situation, we would urge all parties to seize this moment of historic opportunity. A peace which does not seek to abolish discrimination between different communities is no peace at all. For peace to be real, it must embrace justice and a desire for reconciliation.

Reconciliation between God and humanity, and between people who are opposed to one another, springs from the Cross and is vindicated by the Resurrection. May this Easter season bring joy and peace to all people. Christ is risen: He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

+Patriarch Theophilos III, Greek Orthodox Patriarchate  
+Patriarch Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarchate  
+Patriarch Nourhan Manougian, Armenian Apostolic Orthodox Patriarchate  
+Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa, ofm, Custos of the Holy Land  
+Archbishop Anba Abraham, Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate, Jerusalem  
+Archbishop Swerios Malki Murad, Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate  
+Archbishop Aba Daniel, Ethiopian Orthodox Patriarchate  
+Archbishop Joseph-Jules Zerey, Greek-Melkite-Catholic Patriarchate  
+Archbishop Mosa El-Hage, Maronite Patriarchal Exarchate  
+Bishop Suheil Dawani, Episcopal Church of Jerusalem and the Middle East  
+Bishop Munib Younan, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land  
+Bishop Pierre Malki, Syrian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate  
+Msgr. Joseph Antoine Kelekian, Armenian Catholic Patriarchal Exarchate

[Click here to read the entire Bulletin.](#)

## **1b) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 24, 2014**

**Reconciliation further complicates peace process:** A peace agreement was signed on Wednesday but not the one Secretary of State John Kerry wanted. In a surprising turn of events, Fatah and Hamas signed a reconciliation agreement that may end their seven year feud and the current peace process.

In 2006, Hamas overtook Fatah in the parliamentary elections held in the West Bank and Gaza. Disagreements over implementing a Hamas-run government culminated in a violent split in 2007. Since then, the Fatah-dominated PA has governed the West Bank and Hamas has controlled Gaza. Elections have not been held since. PA President Mahmoud Abbas' term was to expire in January 2009.

Abbas has allowed close security cooperation with the Israeli Defense Forces in the West Bank and been a strong proponent of non-violent resistance and the two-state solution. The Hamas take-over of Gaza led the Israeli government to institute a blockade, contributing to a humanitarian crisis worsened by the Israeli invasion in 2009 and other military actions. Hamas has not renounced non-violent resistance and rockets continue to be fired into Israeli from inside Gaza.

With Abbas unable to make progress towards ending the occupation in the West Bank through these negotiations, and the humanitarian situation in Gaza worsening, both Fatah and Hamas could use a boost in public opinion. Unity is popular amongst Palestinians and many of their Arab benefactors, such as Qatar.

When reports that the parties were meeting to discuss a unity agreement, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said, "Does he (Abbas) want peace with Hamas or peace with Israel?" Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman was even more blunt and said signing a deal with Hamas would be "signing the termination of negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority."

On Wednesday, the deal was signed.

The terms of the agreement signed in Gaza are essentially the same as agreements the parties signed in Doha and Cairo in previous years, which failed to be implemented after disagreements over issues such as the integration of their security forces. If the deal goes through, the first parliamentary elections in eight years could be held within six months.

On Thursday, Israel called off negotiations.

According to Ha'aretz, after a five hour meeting, members of Netanyahu's cabinet, "voted unanimously to halt the peace talks, whose allotted time runs out on Tuesday, until the make-up of the new Palestinian government and its policy become clear." After the meeting, Netanyahu said, "Hamas has fired more than 10,000 missiles and rockets at Israeli territory and has not halted terrorist actions against Israel even for a minute. The agreement between Abu Mazen and Hamas was signed even as Israel is making efforts to advance the negotiations with the Palestinians." ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

### **1c) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 2, 2014**

**Kerry, the A-Word and Not Giving Up:** After last week's Hamas-Fatah agreement was signed, the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations were officially put on pause as the details of that agreement get hammered out. U.S. envoy Martin Indyk left the region and President Obama cited a lack of, "political will to actually make tough decisions" on both sides for the current suspension of talks. However, it was a statement by Secretary Kerry mentioning apartheid that made headlines.

On Sunday, the Daily Beast reported that Secretary Kerry told a group of businessmen: "A two-state solution will be clearly underscored as the only real alternative. Because a unitary state winds up either being an apartheid state with second-class citizens—or it ends up being a state that destroys the capacity of Israel to be a Jewish state... Once you put that frame in your mind, that reality, which is the bottom line, you understand how imperative it is to get to the two-state solution, which both leaders, even yesterday, said they remain deeply committed to."

Despite Secretary Kerry's remarks clearly referencing a future danger of not making peace, the semantic outrage was swift. David Harris, executive director of the American Jewish Committee, responded, "The use of the word 'apartheid' is not helpful at all. It takes the discussion to an entirely different dimension... In trying to make his point, Kerry reaches into diplomatic vocabulary to raise the stakes, but in doing so he invokes notions that have no place in the discussion."

Secretary Kerry quickly released a statement which said, "I have been around long enough to also know the power of words to create a misimpression, even when unintentional, and if I could rewind the tape, I would have chosen a different word to describe my firm belief that the only way in the long term to have a Jewish state and two nations and two peoples living side by side in peace and security is through a two state solution." He also said that while many Israeli leaders including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have invoked the specter of the word apartheid, "it is a word best left out of the debate here [in the U.S]."

Despite the clarification, the seeds for debate were sown. In the Jerusalem Post, Gershon Baskin repeated Secretary Kerry's words and "[believes] in every single one of them." He tells his fellow Israelis to "wake up!" and face what he says is a reality.

J Street defended Secretary Kerry with a statement saying, "Instead of putting energy into attacking Secretary Kerry, those who are upset with the secretary's use of the term should put their energy into opposing and changing the policies that are leading Israel down this road."

In the same meeting, Secretary Kerry addressed the future of the frozen peace talks. He said, "The reports of the demise of the peace process have consistently been misunderstood and misreported. And even we are now getting to the moment of obvious confrontation and hiatus, but I would far from declare it dead...You would say this thing is going to hell in a hand basket, and who knows, it might at some point, but I don't think it is right now, yet." ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

## **2) Palestinian reconciliation is an opportunity for Israel**

**Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, April 24, 2014**

Mere minutes after first reports of a breakthrough in the Hamas-Fatah reconciliation talks on ending a seven-year rift began to emerge, the prime minister's bureau launched a broadside attack on the development on all fronts. Talking points were distributed to the ministers, reporters' phones bombarded with text messages, and fire and brimstone began pouring from the prime minister's Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Arabic media liaison, Ofir Gendelman, has surpassed himself and issued tweets with fiery declarations that wouldn't have embarrassed the Friday sermons delivered by Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh in one of Gaza's mosques. In one of his tweets, Gendelman wrote in Arabic that Israel could "crush" both Fatah and Hamas, if only it so chose.

The belligerence of Netanyahu and his people was expected. It was another Pavlovian response of the Israeli government to the changes happening in the Middle East. As with the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, Hassan Rohani's election victory in Iran or the interim agreement between the world powers and Tehran on the latter's nuclear program, Israel's response once again was negative, broadcast panic, and related any change of the status quo as a threat, rather than an opportunity.

The Israeli government response was not only expected, it was hypocritical. For the five years in which Netanyahu has been sitting in the premier's chair, he has negotiated with Hamas for more time, with more seriousness and with far more good will than with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. For those who have forgotten, Netanyahu reached at least two written agreements with the Gaza terror group; one in the 2011 deal in return for the kidnapped soldier Gilad Shalit, and the second confirming the cease-fire that ended Operation Pillar of Defense in 2012.

Netanyahu, who squeezed Abbas hard in exchange for freeing 80 pension-age prisoners who had been sitting in Israeli jails for more than 20 years and who broke up negotiations with the Palestinian Authority over the release of 14 Arab Israeli prisoners, was prepared to give Hamas 1,000 young and healthy terrorists, among them Arabs Israelis. While Netanyahu refused to allow Abbas any sign of Palestinian sovereignty in the West Bank, he did not hesitate to recognize Hamas as sovereign in Gaza.

Breaking the record for hypocrisy was chief Israeli negotiator Tzipi Livni, who added another layer of carpenter's glue to the chair she occupies in the Justice Ministry. Livni toed the prime minister's line, and with an impressive show of eye-rolling argued that the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation pact "undermines peace efforts and the opportunity that was only recently created." What Livni forgot to say was that even if the negotiations are temporarily resuscitated, they will merely continue the fruitless talks she had been conducting during the past eight months.

An Israeli government that really wanted to advance the two-state solution would have been pleased and seen the reconciliation agreement not as a threat, but as an opportunity. After all, it was Netanyahu, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, and their colleagues in the cabinet who argued that Abbas doesn't really represent the Palestinian people and no progress could be made so long as the PA didn't control Gaza. The reconciliation agreement, if implemented, could provide a response to exactly these arguments by creating a government that represents all the Palestinians.

The reconciliation agreement is also an opportunity because Hamas' serious problems might force the organization to change direction, as happened with Yasser Arafat and the PLO after the 1991 Gulf War. The unity deal calls for Hamas to join the PLO and accept its principles – which includes the recognition of Israel and acceptance of the Oslo Accords and the Road Map. The significance of this agreement is also that for first time, Hamas seems willing to give up some of its grip on the Gaza Strip in favor of a unity government.

Implementation of the agreement will also mean elections for president and the Palestinian parliament, which have not taken place for years. Given the precarious condition of the Hamas in Palestinian public opinion, especially in the Gaza Strip, new elections will almost certainly decrease its political power. New elections will also renew Abbas' mandate - or bestow greater public legitimacy on whoever might be elected in his stead – making the Palestinian leader a stronger, more stable and more reliable partner for Israel.

### **3) The new Palestinian Authority** **Zvi Bar'el, Ha'aretz, April 24, 2014**

Gaza Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh's festive declaration that the era of intra-Palestinian division was over, and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' approval of the understandings reached between Hamas and Fatah are just the beginning of the implementation of the reconciliation agreements that were signed in May 2011 and ratified in 2012.

It is, first of all, a declaration of intent, meant to make clear to the Israeli and American governments that they can no longer relate to the two parts of Palestine as separate entities. Whoever wants a peace agreement with the Palestinian people and seeks an end to the historic conflict can no longer ignore Hamas and the other radical groups, and will have to address the unified administration as the Palestinians' agreed-upon representatives. If only two days ago the United States was threatening to withhold aid if Abbas dismantled the PA, this agreement clarifies that while dissolving the PA is no longer on the agenda, from now on it will be a different PA.

The road to establishing this new authority, however, is still long and strewn with mines. The decision in principle that Abbas would be the representative prime minister, with two deputies who will be responsible for operating a government of "technocrats," does not resolve the questions of the personal composition of the government, of disarming Hamas of its weapons and the subordination of its armed forces to a unified military leadership, of how aid budgets will be distributed so as to allow Hamas to continue to fund its institutions (as opposed to those government offices for which it will be responsible), and the method of preparing for new elections tentatively scheduled for the end of the year or early next year.

Past experience, starting from the 2006 election which Hamas won decisively, shows that these practical questions are what constantly tripped reconciliation efforts, even before the Hamas takeover of Gaza in June 2007 and even after reconciliation agreements were signed in Cairo and Doha. The disputes that will be raised by these questions could impede reconciliation this time as well, but the political and diplomatic circumstances in which both the PA and Hamas now find themselves are different than those that prevailed in the past and may foster a better result this time around.

Hamas' economic and political distress, its empty coffers, Egypt's blockade of Gaza, weakening ties with Iran and the pressure inside Gaza led to Hamas making a major concession that facilitated the reconciliation talks. Hamas' political chief Khaled Meshal agreed to first discuss establishing a joint government before elections were held and before all the clauses of the reconciliation agreement were implemented.

Moving from a position that demanded the entire agreement as a package to a position of accepting an interim government and only afterward elections, leaves Abbas in charge at least until the end of 2014 -- the same time the negotiations with Israel are meant to end, if there's an agreement to extend them. And if the reconciliation agreements are implemented, Abbas will also be remembered as the one who "fixed" the historic failure of letting Gaza slip from under the control of the agreed-on Palestinian leadership to control by Hamas, which is not part of the PLO. Therefore, even if he does not succeed in achieving a peace agreement with Israel, at least he will be credited for uniting the Palestinian people.

On the practical level, Abbas will have to deal with the expected Israeli reaction to the unification. Although he has said that reconciliation does not contradict a continuation of peace talks, Israel doesn't see it that way; on the contrary, Israel may see this step as a game-changer and even as a unilateral voiding of the Oslo Accords that the PLO signed.

This is not a solely an Israeli dilemma. The U.S. will also have to reassess its position given the anticipated partnership with Hamas, which does not recognize the State of Israel. Will Washington agree to cooperate with a Palestinian government that includes representatives of a terror group, or will it see the new Palestinian government as a government of technocrats that doesn't represent any ideology?

It's worth noting that the U.S. cooperates with the Lebanese government even though Hezbollah is a member, and it also supports reconciliation between the Afghan government and the "moderate" factions of the Taliban. The American government is even assisting radical Islamist groups in Syria that are not affiliated with Al-Qaida.

#### **4) Abbas: Palestinian unity government will recognize Israel, condemn terrorism**

**Jack Khoury, Ha'aretz and Reuters, April 26, 2014**

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas said on Saturday the unity government with Hamas would recognize Israel and condemn terrorism, but he said that Palestine Liberation Organization alone – and not the new government – will be in charge of the negotiations with Israel.

Abbas said he was still ready to extend the stalled peace talks, as long as Israel met his long-standing demands to free prisoners and halt construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Abbas responded to criticism that his party is reconciling with a terror organization saying that Israel had also made agreements with Hamas during the presidency of Mohammed Morsi in Egypt.

Israel suspended the troubled, U.S.-brokered negotiations with Abbas on Thursday after he signed a unity pact with rival Islamist group Hamas - a movement which has sworn to destroy Israel. Commentators said the discussions had already hit a brick wall before the reconciliation, and the United States had been struggling to extend them beyond an original April 29 deadline for a peace accord.

Abbas, for the first time since the suspension of talks, said he was still open to re-starting the negotiations and pushing on beyond the deadline. There was no immediate response from Israeli negotiators. "How can we restart the talks? There's no obstacle to us restarting the talks, but the 30 prisoners need to be released," Abbas told a meeting of senior leaders in the Palestine Liberation Organization at his presidential headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah.

"On the table we will present our map, for three months we'll discuss our map. In that period, until the map is agreed upon, all settlement activity must cease completely," he told the officials, who were gathered for a two-day conference to assess the Palestinian strategy to achieve statehood. "Without these conditions, we will tell Israel to go ahead and take responsibility over the West Bank and the daily affairs of the Palestinians" Abbas said.

Talks veered toward collapse after Israel refused to release a final group of Palestinian prisoners it had pledged to free in March, and after Abbas signed several international treaties - a move that Israel said was a unilateral move towards statehood.

Palestinians accused Israel of not focusing enough during the last nine months of negotiations on drawing future borders between Israel and the future state of Palestine, and they denounced the expansion of Jewish settlements on Palestinian lands.

## **5) Abbas: New government recognizes Israel and rejects violence**

**Ma'an News, April 26, 2014**

President Mahmoud Abbas said on Saturday that the unity government would continue to follow previous PLO policies and that he remains willing to extend peace talks with Israel, which halted the talks in response to a Fatah-Hamas unity deal signed earlier in the week.

During a televised speech kicking off two days of PLO Central Council meetings in Ramallah, Abbas reasserted that he would be willing to extend negotiations with Israel if it pledged to freeze settlement construction and release the last round of prisoners as agreed at the beginning of the talks. Israel has dismissed the conditions.

"The upcoming government will obey my policy," Abbas told the PLO council. "I recognize Israel and reject violence and terrorism, and recognize international commitments." "Without Jerusalem there will be no negotiations," Abbas added, pledging also that the Palestinians would never recognize Israel as a "Jewish state."

Abbas said that the Palestinian recognized it as a state in 1993 and should not have to accept its religious identity, which has been a central Netanyahu demand.

He pointed out that no similar demand was made of Egypt or Jordan when they signed peace treaties recognizing Israel. He applauded the efforts of US Secretary of State John Kerry, with whom Abbas said he met 40 times during the past nine months.

"He was serious and he put in a huge effort, but unfortunately without results."

With regards to Wednesday's reconciliation deal with Hamas, Abbas said the unity government would recognize Israel and renounce violence. "The upcoming government will obey my policy," he said. "I recognize Israel and reject violence and terrorism, and recognize international commitments."

A senior Hamas official in Gaza who concurred told AFP that it was a "mostly positive" speech. "It is not the government's mission to take care of political issues," Bassem Naim, an adviser to Hamas' Gaza premier Ismail Haniyeh, said. "It has only three main missions: unifying the Palestinian organizations, preparing for elections and reconstructing Gaza."

Abbas spoke ahead of Palestinian crisis talks expected to focus on US peace efforts and the unity deal. Wednesday's PLO-Hamas deal infuriated Israel, which said it would "not negotiate with a Palestinian government backed by Hamas, a terror organization that calls for the destruction of Israel," and vowed unspecified "measures" in response.

The PLO recognized Israel's right to exist in 1988, but say that recognizing Israel as a "Jewish state" could jeopardize the right of return for Palestinian refugees and limit the rights of Palestinian citizens of Israel.

*AFP contributed to this report.*

## 6) Forfeiting Israel's reason to exist

Alon Ben-Meir, *Huffington Post*, April 23, 2014

It is a given that every Jew in and outside Israel wants to see Israel as a vibrant country: an economic powerhouse with a thriving democracy, self-confident and secure, capable of defending itself and deterring any enemy far and near from challenging its right to exist, at peace with its neighbors, respected by the international community, excelling in its humanity and caring about others, a beacon and a light unto other nations.

Yes, Israel can be all that and some, I am sure. All Israeli leaders, regardless of political leaning, believe in their heart of hearts that the country that has risen from the ashes of extinction to a glorious nation offers a refuge and a haven to every Jew, so that never again will any live at the whims and mercy of others. This is why Israel exists and what it is meant to be, and this is the only way Israel will realize its destiny.

Today Israel faces a fateful crossroads: either end the occupation, or continue the subjugation of the Palestinians and forfeit the one historic chance to become a truly free nation that can live up to the promise of its divine creation. The imminent collapse of the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations raises the critical question: will the Israeli-Palestinian conflict ever be resolved? More than six decades of debilitating violent discord did little to usher in an agreement. The shifting reality on the ground made the prospect for a solution increasingly dimmer, more distant, and laden with ominous danger.

Continued occupation of Palestinian land slowly consumes Israel's moral standing and physical well-being, inching it ever closer to self-destruction. Though the Palestinians are not innocent bystanders, Israel and Israel alone must now bear the burden because it is the undisputed power that can change the course of events and prevent the looming disaster.

No one knows the history of the Jews better than the Jews themselves. Persecution, segregation, expulsion and death unmatched in human history were their lot nearly everywhere. But such unspeakable historic misfortune offers no license to inflict pain, suffering and indignity onto others. Knowing the true meaning of dehumanization, degradation and derision must give rise to the Jews' moral values and humanity by treating the Palestinians with compassion and sensitivity. With the inevitability of coexistence and fate intertwined, what hope will be in the offing for tomorrow if not harmony and peace?

A new disaster will be waiting in the wings, obliterating the Jews' dream to build a lasting free nation like many others, rather than live in isolation as a garrison state surrounded by fences and foes, caging itself in and drowning in an ocean of hostility and contempt.

Occupation must end not only because of its inherent injustice, as it demeans, debases and degrades the Palestinians, but because of what the occupation does to the Israelis — it discredits and disgraces Jewish heritage and changes the once-oppressed Jews into merciless, heartless oppressors. No, this is not why Israel was created.

The Jews' historic victimhood proffers no license to victimize others. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## **7) Kerry: Israel risks becoming apartheid state**

**Chris Carlson, International Middle East Media Center Editorial Group (IMEMC)**

**April 28, 2014**

According to U.S. media, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said to a number of senior international officials that Israel risks becoming an apartheid state if it does not make peace soon. The remark was made at a closed-door meeting of the Trilateral Commission on Friday, The Daily Beast news website reported Sunday.

According to the publication, a source at the gathering provided them with a recording of Kerry's statements: "A two-state solution will be clearly underscored as the only real alternative. Because a unitary state winds up either being an apartheid state with second class citizens — or it ends up being a state that destroys the capacity of Israel to be a Jewish state."

"Once you put that frame in your mind, that reality, which is the bottom line, you understand how imperative it is to get to the two state solution, which both leaders, even (Thursday), said they remain deeply committed to."

The publication said that U.S., Western European, Russian, and Japanese senior officials and experts were at the event. To quote Ma'an, the term "apartheid" is a reference to South Africa's 1948-1994 oppressive and racially segregated social system.

While both Kerry and President Barack Obama have refrained from using the term when speaking of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Ma'an further states, former president Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) titled a 2006 book that he wrote on the subject "Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid."

Kerry also insisted that the peace process was not dead. "The reports of the demise of the peace process have consistently been misunderstood and misreported. And even we are now getting to the moment of obvious confrontation and hiatus, but I would far from declare it dead," Kerry said, according to the Beast. Just Thursday, Israel said it was halting peace talks with the PLO, following a unity deal with the Hamas, who heads the Palestinian government in Gaza.

On Sunday, it was indicated that Israel would freeze 19 Palestinian construction projects in the occupied West Bank, as a response to the deal and an apparent effort to implement sanctions on the PA. Since peace talks began in July, Israel has announced construction plans for literally thousands of settler homes in the occupied West Bank and killed over 60 Palestinians.

*IMEMC is a media center developed in collaboration between Palestinian and International journalists to provide independent media coverage of Israel-Palestine.*

## **8) Kerry: I do not believe Israel is an apartheid state**

**Ha'aretz, April 29, 2014**

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry denied on Monday night that he in any way considered Israel to be an apartheid state. "I do not believe, nor have I ever stated, publicly or privately, that Israel is an apartheid state or that it intends to become one," Kerry said, in a rare personal statement released by the U.S. State Department.

That said, Kerry did not deny that he said Israel risks turning into an 'apartheid state' in a closed meeting in Washington last week, as reported by Ha'aretz. The statement was greeted with dismay by Israel and heavily criticized in the United States.

"If I could rewind the tape, I would have chosen a different word to describe my firm belief that the only way in the long term to have a Jewish state and two nations and two peoples living side by side in peace and security is through a two state solution," the secretary of state said in his statement.

Noting that Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and former prime ministers Ehud Barak and Ehud Olmert had all "invoked the specter of apartheid to underscore the dangers of a unitary state for the future," Kerry conceded that "it is a word best left out of the debate here at home."

Chemi Shalev adds that the White House was also unhappy with the uproar created by Kerry's words, according to a knowledgeable source, and likely pressed Kerry to issue his personal statement.

The secretary defended his record on Israel, saying, "For more than 30 years in the U.S. Senate, I didn't just speak words in support of Israel, I walked the walk when it came time to vote and when it came time to fight. As Secretary of State, I have spent countless hours working with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Justice Minister Livni because I believe in the kind of future that Israel not only wants, but Israel deserves.

"I want to see a two state solution that results in a secure Jewish state and a prosperous Palestinian state, and I've actually worked for it... I will not allow my commitment to Israel to be questioned by anyone, particularly for partisan, political purposes." Kerry reiterated that, "in the long term, a unitary, binational state cannot be the democratic Jewish state that Israel deserves or the prosperous state with full rights that the Palestinian people deserve.

## **9) John Kerry's humiliation elates his enemies, delights opponents of the peace process**

**Chemi Shalev, Ha'aretz, April 29, 2014**

In Yiddish one says “shlimazl mit esik” – bad luck with vinegar. That’s what Secretary of State John Kerry has looked like, nebbish, in the past 48 hours. Not only is his immense, courageous but possibly reckless investment in the Arab-Israeli peace process about to go down the drain, now he is being forced to eat humble pie and to apologize for one little “apartheid” that escaped his lips in a closed forum. If it wasn’t so sad, it would be hilarious.

Don’t get me wrong: contrary to the derailment of the peace process, for which the parties to the conflict should be held responsible, this mess was entirely of Kerry’s own making. Just as he admonishes Vladimir Putin on a daily basis, Kerry should have known that gentlemanly 19th century rules of off-the-record briefings are no longer applicable in the media madhouse of the 21st century. As a veteran politician who has been around Washington for over 30 years, Kerry should also have remembered the strict politically-correct guidelines that apply to Israel: just as white people are forbidden from repeating the criticisms that African-Americans may hurl at themselves, so American statesmen are not allowed to utter the word “apartheid,” despite the fact that numerous senior Israeli politicians have done so before.

Therefore, when Kerry told the exclusive Trilateral Commission that without a two-state solution, Israel risks turning into “an apartheid state with second-class citizens” he was using words that would hardly cause a ripple in the Knesset but nonetheless sparked a ruckus on Capitol Hill. When Kerry’s conservative critics and the peace process’ right-wing rivals were apprised of the discreet grumbles emanating from Jerusalem and the more vocal protestations of several Jewish organizations, they didn’t stop to ascertain the exact Kerry’s exact wording but launched an all-out offensive blasting his policies and demanding his head.

Unfortunately for Kerry, the developing apartheid storm caught his boss Barack Obama in a press conference in Manila at a particularly peevisish time, as he angrily lashed out at his critics and tried to deflect a growing tide of disapproval of his overall foreign policy, from the Far to the Middle East and everything in between. Some White House officials, already uncomfortable with Kerry’s total devotion and what they felt was his unfounded optimism about prospects for Israeli-Palestinian peace, began to tear their hair out when they heard about the apartheid brouhaha. The president has enough problems, they said, telling Kerry, according to knowledgeable sources, to strike the offending word from the record.

The bottom line is that the extraordinary personal statement that Kerry issued on Monday night delighted his enemies, who didn’t expect his resignation and were happy to make do with his humiliation. It satisfied Jewish leaders, who are apparently more concerned about the delegitimizing potential of the word “apartheid” being uttered by a Secretary of State than they are of creating the impression that they can dictate his statements. And it elated opponents of the peace process, who hope that the unpleasantness may quench Kerry’s Sisyphean thirst to reach a Middle East agreement.

And we are left with a poignant look at of yet another well-meaning American leader who wants to save Israel from itself and is put through the grinder in return, upholding one of Clare Booth Luce’s favorite expressions: “no good deed goes unpunished”. Now we have to wait and see whether Kerry opts to turn the other cheek, like a good Catholic, or to walk in the footsteps of Obama who, after similar Middle Eastern experiences, decided to adhere to the advice of the Book of Proverbs: “Thorns and snares are in the way of the crooked; whoever guards his soul will keep far from them.”

## **10) PA chief negotiator: Israel sabotaged talks, pushing toward "apartheid regime"**

**Jack Houry, Ha'aretz, April 30, 2014**

With the nine-month period for U.S.-brokered negotiations ending on Tuesday (April 29), Chief Palestinian Negotiator Saeb Erekat said that Israel actively sabotaged talks, using every opportunity to consolidate its "apartheid regime." "To build settlements in occupied land, kill Palestinians and demolish hundreds of Palestinian homes is certainly not the behavior of a government that wants to end occupation but of a government that wants to turn occupation into annexation," Erekat said, according to the Palestinian Ma'an news agency.

Erekat added that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu used "every possible tool in order to consolidate its apartheid regime." Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, meanwhile, said Tuesday that there would be no peace with Israel without the definition of borders of a future Palestinian state. "Since the creation of Israel, nobody knows what the borders are. We are determined to know our borders and theirs, without that there will be no peace," he said, according to AFP.

Abbas laid out his conditions for returning to the negotiating table with Israel after the current round of talks, which started in July last year, ended in crisis. "If we want to extend the negotiations there has to be a release of prisoners ... a settlement freeze, and a discussion of maps and borders for three months during which there must be a complete halt to settlement activity," he said. Regarding the recent reconciliation agreement with Hamas, the Fatah leader said that highest on the agenda after the formation of the new government would be setting a date of elections for the presidency, the parliament, and the Palestinian National Council.

Abbas, who was speaking at a conference for establishing a special fund for support for Jerusalem, said that as far as the Palestinians are concerned, East Jerusalem is an Islamic and Christian Arab city, and the capital of the Palestinian state. He said that the decision of the United Nations General Assembly in November 2012 confirms this position, despite the fact that to this day Israel denies this fact and refuses to recognize the status of Jerusalem for the Palestinians.

The Palestinian leader declared he would allocate a million dollars to the budget of the Palestinian presidency for the special fund. He called on conference participants, which included businessmen and representatives of Arab countries, to initiate projects in order to guarantee a Palestinian hold on East Jerusalem.

## **11) U.S. envoy Indyk leaves Israel as talks falter, no clear plans for return**

**Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, April 28, 2014**

Special U.S. envoy Martin Indyk left Israel yesterday following Israel's decision to suspend peace talks with the Palestinians, Ha'aretz has learned. Indyk is expected to take part in consultations in Washington, D.C. over coming weeks, but it is unclear when he and his team will be returning to the region. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is to leave today for a week-long diplomatic trip in Africa. Only after his return will consultations begin in the State Department and White House regarding continued American involvement in the peace process.

Over the past months Indyk has been spending most of his time in Israel, holding long meetings every day with the Israeli and the Palestinian negotiating teams, together and separately. The assessment in Jerusalem is that as long as the talks are in hiatus, even if Indyk does come to the region, it would be for "maintenance" only.

Significant disagreement is developing between Israel and the United States over what will happen if a technocrats' cabinet is established in the Palestinian Authority that acts in keeping with PA President Mahmoud Abbas' platform and the conditions of the Mideast Quartet – recognizing Israel, rejecting violence and honoring previous agreements.

The Americans believe that, under such circumstances, there would be no reason not to cooperate with the new government and renew the talks. However, Israel opposes any cooperation with the new government as long as all of its components and supporters, particularly Hamas, do not recognize Israel, reject terror and honor previous agreements.

If the technocrats' government is established and meets the Quartet's demands, Israel is expected to come under heavy pressure not only by the United States but also the European Union, to recognize the new government and cooperate with it. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton released a statement yesterday in which she expressed concern over the suspension of the talks, but supported the establishment of a Palestinian unity government.

However, Ashton also noted that the EU required the entire new Palestinian government to be committed to nonviolence, the two-state solution, and honoring previous agreements, including those that included recognition of Israel's right to exist.

Meanwhile, Economy Minister Naftali Bennett said yesterday that the Oslo era was coming to a close and a new era, the "realistic era," was beginning. Speaking at a foreign press briefing, Bennett said that Israelis and Palestinians had to learn to coexist. "Anyone looking at the reality understands that we will not reach a peace treaty in the foreseeable future," he said.

Bennett said that Israel should annex Area C – the part of the West Bank under Israeli civil and security control, which is more than 60 percent of the West Bank. He even proposed giving full Israeli citizenship to 100,000 Palestinians he says are living in that area. He said that Palestinians living in Area A (Palestinian civil and security control) and Area B (Palestinian civil control and Israeli security control) should be given "autonomy on steroids," adding: "That is the best we can manage at present."

**12) Martin Indyk and the moral crisis at heart of Obama's peace  
Ramzy Baroud, Ma'an News Agency, April 26, 2014**

To understand how thoughtless the U.S. latest "peace process" drive has been, one only needs to consider some of the characters involved in this political theater. One particular character who stands out as a testament to the inherently futile exercise is Martin Indyk. Indyk, a former U.S. ambassador to Israel, was selected by Secretary of State John Kerry for the role of Special Envoy for negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

Under normal circumstances, Kerry's selection may appear somewhat rational. Former ambassadors oftentimes possess the needed expertise to navigate challenging political landscapes in countries where they previously served. But these are not normal circumstances, and Indyk is hardly a diplomat in the strict use of the term.

As the U.S.-sponsored peace process began to falter, Kerry made a peculiar move by dispatching his envoy Indyk to Jerusalem. On Friday, April 18, Indyk took on the task of speaking to both sides separately. International media depicted the event as a last ditch effort to revive the talks, and to help bridge the gap between the PA's Mahmoud Abbas and Israel's Benjamin Netanyahu.

The envoy visit took place a day after intense and difficult talks were reported to have taken place between Israeli and PA negotiators. "No breakthrough was made," an official Palestinian source told AFP of the Thursday meeting. It was not that any progress was expected. Both sides are not talking about resolving the conflict per se, but the deliberations were mostly concerned with deferring Kerry's deadline for a "framework agreement," slated for April 29.

The Americans want to maintain the charade for reasons other than peace. Without a "peace process" the U.S. will be denied an important political platform in the Middle East. U.S. administrations have bestowed upon themselves the title "honest broker." Of course, it takes no particular genius to realize that the Americans were hardly honest in their dealings with both parties. In fact, the U.S. was not a third party at all, but was and remains steadfast in the Israeli camp. It used its political and financial leverage as a platform that allowed it to advance Israeli interests first, and their own interests second. Indyk is an example.

Martin Indyk, the prospective harbinger of peace, worked for the pro-Israeli lobby group AIPAC in 1982. AIPAC is a right-wing outlet that has invested unlimited funds and energy to impede any just and peaceful resolution to the conflict. It has such a strong grip over U.S. Congress to the extent that some have suggested that Capitol Hill has become, in a sense, an occupied territory by Israel and its allies.

Indyk's most important contribution to Israel, however, was the founding of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy in 1985, another Israeli lobby outlet that has done tremendous damage to the credibility of U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East by using "intellectuals" and "experts" as mediums.

Writing in Mondoweiss last year, Max Blumenthal recalled some interesting statements made by Indyk at J Street's first annual convention in Washington, D.C. in 2009. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

### **13) Analysis: What “destruction” of Israel?**

**John V. Whitbeck, Ma’an News Agency, April 30, 2014**

When, in response to the threat of potential Palestinian reconciliation and unity, the Israeli government suspended “negotiations” with the Palestine Liberation Organization on April 24 (five days before they were due to terminate in any event), Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office issued a statement asserting: “Instead of choosing peace, Abu Mazen formed an alliance with a murderous terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel.”

In a series of related media appearances, Netanyahu hammered repeatedly on the “destruction of Israel” theme as a way of blaming Palestine for the predictable failure of the latest round of the seemingly perpetual “peace process.”

The extreme subjectivity of the epithet “terrorist” has been highlighted by two recent absurdities -- the Egyptian military regime’s labeling of the Muslim Brotherhood, which has won all Egyptian elections since the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak, as a “terrorist” organization and the labeling by the de facto Ukrainian authorities, who came to power through illegally occupying government buildings in Kiev, of those opposing them by illegally occupying government buildings in eastern Ukraine as “terrorists.” In both cases, those who have overthrown democratically elected governments are labeling those who object to their coups as “terrorists.”

It is increasingly understood that the word “terrorist,” which has no agreed-upon definition, is so subjective as to be devoid of any inherent meaning and that it is commonly abused by governments and others who apply it to whomever or whatever they hate in the hope of demonizing their adversaries, thereby discouraging and avoiding rational thought and discussion and, frequently, excusing their own illegal and immoral behavior.

Netanyahu’s assertion that Hamas “calls for the destruction of Israel” requires rational analysis as well. He is not the only guilty party in this regard. The mainstream media in the West habitually attaches the phrase “pledged to the destruction of Israel” to each first mention of Hamas, almost as though it were part of Hamas’ name.

In the real world, what does the “destruction of Israel” actually mean? The land? The people? The ethno-religious-supremacist regime? There can be no doubt that virtually all Palestinians -- and probably still a significant number of Native Americans -- wish that foreign colonists had never arrived in their homelands to ethnically cleanse them and take away their land and that some may even lay awake at night dreaming that they might, somehow, be able to turn back the clock or reverse history.

However, in the real world, Hamas is not remotely close to being in a position to cause Israel’s territory to sink beneath the Mediterranean or to wipe out its population or even to compel the Israeli regime to transform itself into a fully democratic state pledged to equal rights and dignity for all who live there. It is presumably the latter threat -- the dreaded “bi-national state” -- that Netanyahu has in mind when he speaks of the “destruction of Israel.” For propaganda purposes, “destruction” sounds much less reasonable and desirable than “democracy” even when one is speaking about the same thing.

In the real world, Hamas has long made clear that notwithstanding its view that continuing negotiations within the framework of the American-monopolized “peace process” is pointless and a waste of time, it does not object to the PLO trying to reach a two-state agreement with Israel, provided only that, to be accepted and respected by Hamas, any agreement reached would need to be submitted to and approved by the Palestinian people in a referendum. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

#### **14) Netanyahu, hero of the binational state?**

**Aluf Benn, Ha'aretz, May 1, 2014**

Netanyahu chose to avoid the political risk of peacemaking to keep his coalition together and stay in power. But where can Israel go from here? Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, wants to stay in power for as long as possible. He deploys a zero-risk strategy aimed at keeping his rightwing political base behind him, while convincing the public that he alone could lead the country in times of regional turmoil. This week, Netanyahu overcame a key challenge to his coveted political stasis. The deadline for U.S.-sponsored Israeli-Palestinian talks passed, while Netanyahu's governing coalition remained intact.

Netanyahu missed an opportunity. He could have leveraged his unchallenged leadership to make headway towards peace, freed Israel from the moral and political burden of its endless occupation in the West Bank, and drawn the country's permanent borders. The Israeli public would widely support any peace program endorsed by Netanyahu. And for the first time in his turbulent 30-year career, Bibi could have been the national hero, leading from the center, rather than remaining the aloof master of PR.

But Netanyahu wasn't interested. Even when shown polls indicating that a peace breakthrough would make him extremely popular, he shrugged and kept looking to the right, to make sure his base was still there. The scar from his first term – when the left and far-right joined to topple him following the Wye River accord he signed with Yasser Arafat – wouldn't heal.

Recent attempts to make peace faced huge challenges. Since the collapse of talks at Camp David, in 2000, Israeli mainstream opinion has accepted the "no partner" narrative, which holds that the Palestinian leadership is neither willing nor able to compromise. This belief has kept Netanyahu's policies unchallenged in Israel.

Two things were different this time. First, there was the unexpected energy and motivation of John Kerry. Second, the threat of boycott and sanctions against Israel moved from the fringe of the western left to the mainstream conversation, following the EU ban on funding for Israeli settlements. This created a potential stick to push Netanyahu toward flexibility.

But it wasn't enough to secure a deal. True to form, Netanyahu smiled at the American initiative, waiting to see whether Kerry carried a big stick or was merely on a freelance fishing expedition. When Kerry announced the resumption of talks in July 2013, the Israeli leader said that the two-state solution was important to prevent a "binational state." But soon enough, Bibi realized that Kerry lacked presidential backing, and Israel expanded settlements and launched a smear campaign against Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Netanyahu's demand for Palestinian recognition of Israel "as a Jewish state" appeared to be a non-starter, blocking any progress.

The breaking point came with the issue of Palestinian prisoners, convicted for pre-Oslo terrorist murders, including 14 Israeli citizens. That was Abbas's price for the talks. The far-right party in Netanyahu's coalition threatened to leave if they were released. Theoretically, Netanyahu could have formed a different, pro-peace coalition, but he didn't want to repeat the Wye River experience. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## **15) Palestinians return to UN, but leave door to peace talks open**

**Jack Khoury, Ha'aretz, April. 29, 2014**

The Palestinian outreach campaign to United Nations agencies is designed to put the Palestinian Authority on the map in a world ruled by international law, rather than one subject to Israel's dictates, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said Monday. That was the logic behind Sunday's decision by the Palestine Liberation Organization's Central Council, its highest body, to continue the efforts to become a signatory to the Geneva Conventions, Erekat said.

As a UN observer state, Palestine has the right to continue to reach out to UN agencies, Erekat stressed, though he noted that the strategy was predicated on Arab, European and Russian support. The Central Council authorized the Palestinian leadership to ask the UN General Assembly and Security Council to condemn settlement construction, the Judaization of Jerusalem and damage to mosques and churches, the council said in a statement. It also said the Palestinian leadership was authorized to request sanctions on Israel and the boycott of the companies and institutions that cooperate with the policy of occupation.

The onus is on the international community to ensure that Israel takes responsibility for its policies in the West Bank, including its breaking of the law as an occupying power, the statement continued. At the same time, the statement noted, the Palestinian leadership agreed to return to the negotiating table, on condition that Israel freeze settlement construction and proceed with the fourth stage of the prisoner release, as agreed.

Representatives of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine left the council chamber in protest at the decision to leave open the option of continuing the negotiations. The two-day council meeting focused on the central issues of reconciliation with Hamas, the negotiations with Israel, popular resistance and the lifting of the Israeli blockade on Gaza. The council gave its support to the Fatah-Hamas reconciliation agreement, signed last week, and added its voice to the call for early elections. It also blamed Israel for the failure of the negotiations.

A senior PLO official told Ha'aretz that the PA was aiming to join 63 international bodies and treaties, following Israel's failure to release the fourth batch of prisoners, which voided the agreement between the two sides. The decisions that were reached give Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas freedom of action in dealing with the international community, the official said, though the timing of the move would be dictated by developments. "We want the occupation to be very costly for Israel, both diplomatically and internationally," he said.

The official stated that Israel's policy in recent years had been to deprive the PA of authority, other than the payment of salaries and the continuation of security cooperation, as well as to ensure the continuation of the separation between the West Bank and Gaza. "Now that we have begun to unify, the next step will be to continue the process with the UN bodies," he said.

Today as a part of their coordinated campaign Palestinians will circulate a document prepared over the past few days delineating Israeli violations over the past nine months. According to a senior Palestinian official involved in the preparation of the document, it will be given to diplomats stationed in the West Bank in order to make it clear to the international community that it is Israel, not the Palestinians, that is responsible for the failure of the talks.

The document, a copy of which was obtained by Ha'aretz, states that over the nine months of negotiations with Israel 61 Palestinians were shot and killed, more than 1,000 Palestinians were wounded, and 173 houses were demolished. Many more incidents in which Palestinian property was damaged and other forms of violations were also reported.

## **16) Israel PM looking to enshrine “Jewish state” in law**

**Ma’an News Agency, May 5, 2014**

Israel will seek to anchor its status as the national homeland of the Jewish people in law, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Thursday. “One of my main missions as prime minister of Israel is to bolster the status of the State of Israel as the national state of our people,” Netanyahu said in a speech in Tel Aviv, a transcript of which was provided by his office. “To this end, it is my intention to submit a basic law to the Knesset (parliament) that would provide a constitutional anchor for Israel’s status as the national state of the Jewish people.”

Netanyahu has made recognition of Israel as a Jewish state a key demand in the crisis-hit peace talks with the PLO, which formally drew to a close on Tuesday. The PLO recognized Israel’s right to exist in 1988 and say accepting Israel as a Jewish state would be tantamount to accepting the Nakba, or “catastrophe,” of 1946, in which around 760,000 Palestinians were forcibly displaced by Jewish militias.

The chairman of Netanyahu’s coalition Yariv Levin congratulated Netanyahu for his “historic decision that will bring Israel back to a Zionist course after years of ongoing legal eroding of the fundamental principles, upon which the state was founded.” Previous attempts failed

“The prime minister has instructed me to push forward with the legislation without delay, as a continuation of the original bill I initiated,” said Levin, a hardline member of Netanyahu’s Likud party. In 2011 Avi Dichter, a member of the Kadima party, attempted to pass such a law, but it was shot down by then-Kadima head Tzipi Livni. In 2013, Levin brought forth a mellowed version of a similar bill, which also was not advanced.

Netanyahu’s Thursday declaration was met with fierce opposition from the very coalition minister in charge of legislation, Justice Minister Livni, who vowed she would not enable such a law. “Livni will continue to defend democracy, she has objected past initiatives that come at the account of democratic values in favor of ‘Jewish’ ones, and will do so even if the one proposing (the law) is prime minister,” her spokeswoman Mia Bengel wrote on Twitter.

Menachem Hofnung, a professor of political science at the Hebrew university, said such a proposal would probably not have a majority in the current cabinet. He also said such a law was “not necessary”. “There are already basic laws which state that Israel is Jewish and democratic,” he said. “So I’m not sure what is the effect of another law, besides putting another obstacle to the peace process.”

Palestinian officials have repeatedly said that recognizing the concept of Israel as a “Jewish state” is unnecessary and threatens the rights of nearly 1.3 million Palestinian citizens of Israel who remained in their homes during the displacement of the majority of the Palestinian population.

Earlier this year, PLO Executive Committee Member Hanan Ashrawi said that Israel wants to “create a narrative that denies the Palestinian presence, rights, and continuity on the historic Palestinian lands.” A “Jewish state” recognition would exempt Israel from its responsibility toward the Palestinian refugees who were forcibly displaced from their homes in 1948, she added.

The right of Palestinian refugees to return to their land is enshrined in article 11 of UN resolution 194. Israel has never officially recognized the right of a Palestinian state to exist.

## **17) With status quo on its side, Israel happily rejects peace** **Saeb Erekat, Time magazine, April 29**

During nine months of negotiations, Israeli officials have constantly questioned our ability to make peace. World leaders visiting Tel Aviv have been faced with rhetorical questions like “Shall we make peace with Gaza or the West Bank?” or statements like “Mahmoud Abbas does not represent all Palestinians.”

Last week, after we announced our national reconciliation agreement, Israel contradicted its own argument: suddenly peace was impossible due to Palestinian unity.

During the early 1980s, Israel’s excuse was the Palestinian Liberation Organization’s refusal to recognize Israel. In 1988, we recognized Israel on 78 percent of historical Palestine, a deeply difficult and historic concession. Twenty-six years later, the number of Israeli settlers within the remaining 22 percent has tripled. Next, Israel’s excuse was lack of Arab recognition.

In 2002, the Arab League introduced the Arab Peace Initiative, offering recognition from 57 Arab- and Muslim-majority countries in exchange for Israel’s respect for UN resolutions. Israel’s response? More settlements. Most recently, the Israeli government came up with a further qualification -- that we should recognize Israel as a Jewish state, safe in the knowledge that this could not be accepted. Rather than being afraid of not being recognized, it seems Israel is afraid of recognition.

Today, Netanyahu and those representing him, including Lapid, Yaalon, Lieberman, Bennett and Ariel, are creating a new excuse to avoid the necessary decisions for peace. This Israeli government, which continues its settlement activities all over Palestine, is trying to blame national reconciliation for its own failure to choose peace over apartheid.

First and foremost, reconciliation is an internal affair. Not a single party in Netanyahu’s government has recognized Palestine. Nor have we asked them to. Political parties do not recognize states. Governments do.

Secondly, reconciliation and negotiations are not mutually exclusive. Reconciliation is a mandatory step in order to reach a just and lasting peace. The agreement ratifies the PLO’s legitimacy to negotiate with Israel, honors all Palestinian commitments and obligations towards international law and previous agreements and calls for the formation of a national consensus government comprising independent professionals. This government is not going to negotiate with Israel: its sole mandate will be to prepare for elections, provide services and build institutions.

Palestinian reconciliation can be rejected only by those who aim to perpetuate the status quo. This is precisely what the government of Israel has been doing during nine months of negotiations: killing 61 Palestinians, advancing more than 13,000 units in Israeli settlements, conducting almost 4,500 military operations on Palestinian land, demolishing 196 Palestinian homes and allowing more than 660 settler terror attacks against Palestinians.

Being consistent with its policies on the ground, Netanyahu’s government has refused to recognize the 1967 border or even put a map on the table proposing Israel’s idea of its final borders. Netanyahu has ensured that he is unable to do this by surrounding himself with the most extremist sectors in Israel, including the settler movement, from which he selected his foreign minister, housing minister and the Knesset speaker. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## 18) [The State of Two States, Week of April 27](#), Israel Policy Forum

*As the deadline for peace negotiations passed on April 29, talks between all sides dissolved. Nevertheless, world leaders including EU Foreign Policy Chief Catherine Ashton and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon have been urging both Israelis and Palestinians to continue discussions. On Sunday, The Daily Beast leaked a recording of a meeting between John Kerry and other world leaders. Kerry's use of the word "apartheid" sparked much debate and criticism. On Thursday, the Secretary of State announced there would be a pause in peace negotiations, but assured they would resume in the near future as both Palestinians and Israelis have expressed willingness to return to the table. Also on Thursday, Benjamin Netanyahu initiated a basic law explicitly declaring Israel a Jewish state.*

"A two-state solution will be clearly underscored as the only real alternative. Because a unitary state winds up either being an apartheid state with second-class citizens—or it ends up being a state that destroys the capacity of Israel to be a Jewish state...Once you put that frame in your mind, that reality, which is the bottom line, you understand how imperative it is to get to the two-state solution, which both leaders, even yesterday, said they remain deeply committed to." — Secretary of State John Kerry discussing possible consequences for an end in peace talks during a closed-door meeting with world leaders on Friday, comments for which he apologized later in the week (Sunday 4/27)

"What happened to the Jews in the Holocaust is the most heinous crime to have occurred against humanity in the modern era... On the incredibly sad commemoration of Holocaust Day, we call on the Israeli government to seize the current opportunity to conclude a just and comprehensive peace in the region, based on the two states vision, Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security." — PA President Mahmoud Abbas speaking to American rabbi Marc Schneier (Sunday 4/27)

"With Palestine's new international status, we will continue shaping our country as a peace-loving nation that respects human rights and international law, a commitment already assumed during the announcement of national reconciliation. This includes our right to make use of international forums in order to end Israeli violations and achieve the fulfillment of our long overdue rights." — Saeb Erekat, head of the Palestinian Negotiation Team, writing on the conclusion of the peace talks (Tuesday 4/29)

"Notwithstanding the current state of play, the parties are to be commended for the intense effort reported to have been made under the guidance of Secretary Kerry and his team...Both sides must overcome the obstacles posed by their own rejectionists to two states who, despite representing minority views, hold disproportional political influence. As President Obama has suggested, both sides have terrifyingly difficult decisions to make, which are unavoidable. The United States has a crucial national interest in seeing the Israelis and Palestinians reach accord and should also take this moment to reflect on how it can best serve all of these interests." — IPF Chairman Peter Joseph reacting to the pause in negotiations (Tuesday 4/29)

"The Declaration of Independence sets, as the cornerstone in the life of the state, the national Jewish identity of the State of Israel. To my great regret, as we have seen recently, there are those who do not recognize this natural right. They seek to undermine the historic, moral, and legal justification for the existence of the State of Israel as the nation-state of our people...it is my intention to submit a basic law to the Knesset that would provide a constitutional anchor for Israel's status as the nation-state of the Jewish people." — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declaring his intentions for a new law during his visit to Independence Hall (Thursday 5/1)

"Many people said to us, don't stop. Keep going. We answered them: It's in your hands. Take responsibility for your own fate. But they held firm—they preferred that we do the job for them. Public indifference was one of our toughest problems." — Senior U.S. administration officials involved in the Kerry initiative speaking confidentially with Israeli journalist Nahum Barnea, as reported in Yedioth Ahronoth (Friday 5/2)

## **19) Yair Lapid: Israel may still negotiate with Hamas**

**IMEMC, May 3, 2014**

Israeli finance minister and chairman of the Yesh Atid Party, Yair Lapid, has stated to the Wall Street Journal that there is a chance for Israel to potentially conduct talks with Hamas if the group “renounces terror” and “recognizes Israel.” He added that this is not the first time something of this nature has happened, and used the PLO as an example in that “it used to be a terror organization,” but has since renounced the use of violence and recognizes the state of Israel.

In March of 2006, Hamas released its official legislative program, which clearly indicated that Hamas was willing to refer the issue of Israeli recognition to a national referendum. Under the heading “Recognition of Israel”, it stated: “The question of recognizing Israel is not the jurisdiction of one faction, nor the government, but a decision for the Palestinian people.”

The same year, following the Gaza election, the leader of Hamas sent a letter addressed to former U.S. President George W. Bush, in which he declared that Hamas would accept a state on the 1967 borders, including a truce. The Bush administration failed to reply.

In July of 2009, Hamas’s political bureau chief, Khaled Meshal, stated that Hamas’ willingness to cooperate with a resolution to the conflict included a Palestinian state based on those 1967 borders, and provision that Palestinian refugees be given the right to return to Israel and that East Jerusalem be recognized as the new state’s capital.

The Palestinian right of return is guaranteed by UN General Assembly Resolution 194. The assembly has reaffirmed Resolution 194 every year since 1949. Multiple subsequent resolutions from the UN have reaffirmed the right of return, including General Assembly Resolution 169 and Security Council Resolution 237. By 2010, the UN had officially recognized nearly five million Palestinians as refugees.

Despite Israel’s continued cry of “security concerns” to both Western officials and lobby-targeted taxpayers who fund the Israeli occupation with tens of billions of dollars, sterling pounds and highly advanced weapons and defense systems, each and every year, in addition to the billions in church donations, the Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades, of Hamas notoriety, has operated mostly in small cells and relied mostly on homemade weapons, in their resistance to the illegal Israeli occupation.

Palestinian rocket and mortar attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip have occurred since 2001, killing a small number of people, mostly civilians, and injuring hundreds. However, in this year alone, the current Israeli regime is responsible for the death of 18 Gaza Palestinians and the injuries of over 100.

Default Hamas projectiles are not equipped with guidance systems and are tipped with only a relatively tiny warhead, if any at all. And, though outbreaks of serious violence do erupt from the Palestinian side, they are usually in response to Israeli violations and incitements against the Palestinian people and their property, with the majority of Palestinian child detainees being held on charges of throwing stones. Each year, around 500-700 Palestinian children, some as young as 12, are arrested, detained and prosecuted in the Israeli military detention system.

Following the recent truce between Fatah and Hamas, the EU issued a statement in support of the reconciliation. However, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu declared that Israel would not deal with a Palestinian government backed by Hamas. He said that said both he and US Secretary of State John Kerry were “absolutely stupefied” that Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas embraced the organization.

The Hamas party operates primarily out of the Gaza Strip and the PA has no official army, navy or air force to speak of. However, Lapid’s statements reflect a more open position to negotiations than that of other members of the Israeli government’s coalition, like Netanyahu or Naftali Bennett.

## **20) U.S. terror report details “price tag” violence by Israeli settlers** **Geoffrey Aronson, Al Monitor, May 5, 2014**

On April 30, the U.S. State Department issued its annual Country Reports on Terrorism 2013. The report catalogues the multifaceted local, regional and global security threats to U.S. interests characterized by Washington as terror. Included in this catalogue of dangers is what the Barack Obama administration, taking its cue from the Israelis, defines as “price tag” actions — that is, destructive and intimidating actions by Israelis directed against Palestinians and their property, including mostly land but also mosques and vehicles in the West Bank, and increasingly in Israel itself.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has refused to legally characterize such actions as terror. The Israeli security cabinet has authorized the Ministry of Defense to classify groups that perpetrate “price tag” attacks as “illegal associations,” a less emotive and legally extreme kind of transgression. Some political and security officials, however, do not shrink from calling a spade a spade. Already in September 2012, Minister of Internal Security Yitzhak Aharonovitch announced the establishment of a new police unit to counter settler violence and called for a “zero-tolerance policy against terror, the desecration of Islamic religious institutions, attacks on symbols of governance and attacks commonly known as ‘price tag.’”

“We know who are committing these acts and plan to make more arrests shortly. We intend on putting these criminals behind bars,” Aharonovitch said while visiting the mosque in the Israeli Arab village Fureidis, the site of one recent such attack. “These are a bunch of criminals taking the law into their own hands. Most of them are in Judea and Samaria, are part of the extreme right and we know who most of them are.”

The Obama administration concludes, however, that Israel goes wobbly when it comes to confronting “price tag” terror. The report observes that such attacks continue and their perpetrators operate with impunity.

“Attacks by extremist Israeli settlers against Palestinian residents, property and places of worship in the West Bank continued and were largely unprosecuted, according to UN and NGO sources,” notes the State Department. “The UN Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs reported 399 attacks by extremist Israeli settlers that resulted in Palestinian injuries or property damage. Violent extremists, including Israeli settlers, vandalized five mosques and three churches in Jerusalem and the West Bank, according to data compiled by the UN.”

The price tag phenomenon is not some incidental byproduct of continuing occupation and settlement. Since 1967, for example, no less than 800,000 olive trees have been uprooted in the West Bank, according to a joint report by the Palestinian Authority (PA) and the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem. The West Bank olive industry supports the livelihoods of roughly 80,000 families.

The sense of insecurity fostered by such destruction is one element in a broad spectrum of efforts by Israel, official or otherwise, to undermine the ability of Palestinians to confront the existential threat that Israel’s territorial expansion poses to them, not only personally but also as a national community. ...

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