

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
May 9, 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 information on settlement expansion in the Cremisan Valley; a link to the U.S. State Department 2012 Human Rights Report; a "Nakba Pack" of articles; background material on the Balfour Declaration; the Arab League's modified stance on Israel/Palestine borders; the use of the Oslo Accords to consolidate Israeli control of "the occupied territories"; and other current issues.

- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins for April 28 and May 3 give background on settlement expansion in the Cremisan Valley, the restated Arab Peace Initiative, continued violence on the West Bank and Gaza, and other issues.
- The April 26 Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) News documents recent relationships of Palestinian Christians with their Israeli and Syrian neighbors.
- Ben White states that it is the conclusion of the U.S. State Department, in its newly-published Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012, that Israel practices "institutional and societal discrimination" against Palestinian citizens.
- Ynet News reports that Palestinian President Abbas is calling upon rival factions to form unity government following Fayyad's resignation; he is urging Hamas "to cooperate."
- Ynet News reports that the Guardian has published declassified documents that show that the British government "realized the partition of the country and the establishment of the State of Israel would result in a war - that the Arabs would lose."
- James Renton in Ha'aretz asks whether Britain should apologize for the Balfour Declaration, stating that rather than a colonist's love song to Zionism, as some pro-Palestinian UK campaigners now claim, the Balfour Declaration of 1917 was based on miscalculations, anti-Semitism and propaganda, and set in train a war that is yet to end.
- Resource: If Americans Knew offers a "Nakba Pack" of articles which document that with the founding of Israel on May 14, 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes, never to be allowed to return.
- Danielle Spiegel-Feld writes in an Israel Policy Forum policy analysis that it's hard not to be alarmed by the number of commentators predicting that Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's resignation will precipitate a certain and swift decline in the West Bank, but that these foreboding prophecies are premature.
- The Associated Press states that it seems that the Arab League has softened its stance on Israel's final borders. Speaking on behalf of an Arab League delegation to Washington, the Qatari Prime Minister renewed call for Mideast peace, citing for first time possibility of "comparable," mutually agreed and "minor" land swaps.
- Adam Hanieh writes in the Jacobin that the Oslo Accords weren't a failure for Israel. They served in fact as a fig leaf to consolidate and deepen its control over Palestinian life.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin, April 28, 2013

Legal blow to Cremisan Valley: The Israeli Special Appeals Committee for land seizure under emergency law released its verdict on April 24, regarding the case of the Cremisan Valley against the separation wall. The Society of St. Yves, a Catholic human rights group, had represented the monastery in the Israeli courts in this case that has gone on for seven years. Israel is now expected to press ahead with construction of the vast West Bank barrier around a convent near the Christian town of Beit Jala.

The barrier will cut the Cremisan convent off of 75 percent of their land as well as a monastery with which they have close relations. Additionally, over 50 Palestinian Christian families of Beit Jala will no longer have access to their agricultural land. Xavier Abu Eid, a diplomat in the Palestine Liberation Organization explains: "The occupation hurts Christians and Muslims both, but affects the Christian community more because it's a smaller percentage of the population [...] This is a matter of their survival, as this is one of the last pieces of land the community owns."

State Department releases 2012 Human Rights Report: The U.S. State Department released its annual human rights report last week that details abuses around the world. The Israel and the Occupied Territories sections do not reveal anything new, but they do catalog the incidents where human rights abuses carried out by Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

According to the report, "the three most significant human rights abuses across the occupied territories were arbitrary arrest and associated torture and abuse, often with impunity, by multiple actors in the region; restrictions on civil liberties; and the inability of residents of the Gaza Strip under Hamas to choose their own government or hold it accountable." ...

[Read the entire April 28 Bulletin here.](#)

CMEP Bulletin, May 3, 2013

Arab peace initiative back on the table: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met with top Arab League officials in Washington on Monday to discuss the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative and the revival of the moribund peace process, an issue that Kerry has focused on intensely in his first months as the U.S.' top diplomat. Following the meeting, Qatari Prime Minister and chair of the Arab Peace Initiative follow-up committee Hamad bin Jassim said it was "an important meeting, an important era, which we hope will lead to peace, a comprehensive peace between the Arabs and the Israelis."

The biggest announcement stemming from the meeting was Jassim's announcement that the Arab League backed a solution based on the 1967 lines with "comparable and mutual agreed minor swap of the land" which brings the Arab League in line with President Obama's 2011 proposal and shows a shift towards compromise. The original Initiative does not concede to any "land swaps" that would allow Israel to keep some of its settlements built east of the Green Line in the West Bank.

The Arab League proposal calls for "a full Israeli withdrawal from all the territories occupied since 1967, including the Syrian Golan Heights to the lines of June 4, 1967," a just solution to the Palestinian refugee problem in accordance with UN General Assembly Resolution 194 and the acceptance of an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital. In return, the Arab countries affirm that they will "consider the Arab-Israeli conflict ended," establish normal relations and maintain a comprehensive peace with Israel. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

2) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) News, April 26, 2013

Following are synopses of articles posted recently on the HCEF website. To read the articles in their entirety, [check the HCEF website](#).

Patriarch recognizes Salam Fayyad for his work benefiting Christian churches: On Wednesday, April 24, 2013, His Beatitude, Fouad Twal, Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, praised the achievement of the outgoing Prime Minister Salam Fayyad in working for the good of Christian Churches. He visited the Prime Minister at his residence in Ramallah, accompanied by Bishop William Shomali, Auxiliary Bishop of Jerusalem and Palestine, and Father George Ayoub, Chancellor.

Archbishop Atallah Hanna appeals for the release of kidnapped bishops from Aleppo: Archbishop Atallah Hanna Sebastia, Archbishop of the Greek Orthodox Church in Jerusalem, appealed to all people to work as soon as possible in order to release Bishop Paul Yazigi of the Archdiocese of Aleppo Greek Orthodox Church and Bishop John Ibrahim of the Archdiocese Aleppo for Syrian Orthodox.

The separation wall in the Valley of Cremisan changes route, but does not stop: The Israeli Special Appeals Committee for land seizure under emergency released its verdict on actions brought by a convent of the Salesian Sisters and many families of Palestinian farmers against the stretch of the separation Wall that the Israeli authorities want to build in the Valley of Cremisan. The verdict, released on April 24, proposes a change in the route of the Wall, so that the convent of sisters remains accessible from the town of Beit Jala and the Palestinian territories.

Churchmen highlight threat to Palestinian Christians: "When justice is done we will have peace; when peace is achieved we will begin the long haul of reconciliation." That was the message of a delegation of senior Palestinian Christian churchmen who visited the Ireland last week to promote the Kairos Palestine document, which seeks a just peace between Palestinians and Israelis as well as an end to illegal settlements in Palestine.

First friendship pact between Christians and Muslims in Bethpage: On Monday, April 22, Bishop William Shomali, Auxiliary Bishop of Jerusalem, went to the Mount of Olives in Bethpage and, together with the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem and other officials, signed a friendship pact between the Christian people of a housing complex of the Custody of the Holy Land and their Muslim neighbors. A first!

Bishop Munib Younan condemns kidnapping of Syrian Christians: With anger and dismay, we have heard the news of the abduction of Metropolitan Paul Yazigi and Mar Gregorios Yohanna Ibrahim of the Syriac Orthodox Archdiocese of Aleppo. We strongly condemn this heinous act.

Christian Armenians voice deep affiliation with Syria: While marking the 98th anniversary of the Armenians' Martyrs Day, scores of Christian Armenians participated in the prayers ceremony that was held Wednesday in the Syrian capital of Damascus to stress their deeply-rooted affiliation with Syria.

Palestinian Christians battle the route of the Israeli barrier: Palestinians in this Christian village are hoping the new pope can succeed where others have failed - pressing Israel to drop plans to build a stretch of its West Bank separation barrier through their picturesque valley.

Temporary occupation of a Christian hermitage by Jewish settlers: A small hermitage with a chapel, built on a plot of the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem, near the town of Taybeh (30 kilometers north-east of Jerusalem), has been the scene in recent days of a brief occupation by some Jewish settlers, probably from the nearby settlement of Ofra. The incident occurred on Friday, April 19. The settlers were temporarily settled in the hermitage, unattended for about a year - after it was built and inhabited by a Greek-Catholic monk - and hoisted the flag of Israel.

3) No Palestinians have their full civil rights respected

Ben White, Electronic Intifada, April 22, 2013

[The following piece was published on the Jews for Justice for Palestinians' website.](#)

Israel practices “institutional and societal discrimination” against its Palestinian citizens: this is the conclusion of the U.S. State Department in its newly-published Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012. The annual country report on Israel contains uncomfortable reading for pro-Israel advocacy groups, particularly given who is publishing it. With regards to problems faced by Palestinians with Israeli citizenship, the State Department notes the following:

* “Resources devoted to Arabic education were inferior to those devoted to Hebrew education in the public education system.”

* “Approximately 93 percent of land was in the public domain, including approximately 12.5 percent owned by the NGO Jewish National Fund (JNF), whose statutes prohibit sale or lease of land to non-Jews.”

* “Approximately 60,000 Bedouin lived in at least 46 unrecognized tent or shack villages that did not have water and electricity and lacked educational, health, and welfare services.”

* “The law bars family reunification when a citizen’s spouse is a non-Jewish citizen of Iran, Iraq, Syria, or Lebanon. Citizens may apply for temporary visit permits for Palestinian male spouses 35 years old or older or Palestinian female spouses 25 years old or older, but may not receive residency based on their marriage and have no path to citizenship.”

In addition, the report also records human rights abuses perpetrated by the Israeli authorities against Palestinians in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip, such as:

* “excessive use of force against civilians, including killings; abuse of Palestinian detainees, particularly during arrest and interrogation; austere and overcrowded detention facilities; improper use of security detention procedures; demolition and confiscation of Palestinian property; limitations on freedom of expression, assembly, and association; and severe restrictions on Palestinians’ internal and external freedom of movement.”

The State Department’s observations on Israel’s institutionalized racism and systematic violations of Palestinian rights are far from comprehensive or flawless. But it is a marked contrast to the kind of tokenism popular with Israel’s propagandists – like the Jewish Agency’s Avi Mayer’s tweeting of the appointment of a Palestinian citizen to the position of director of the emergency department at Hadassah University Medical Center, a story he shared nine times over one hour.

NB: [The link to the JFJP site](#) also leads to a link to the State Department’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012: The Occupied Territories. This is a many paged report, worth reviewing.

4) Abbas calls Hamas to start talks on unity government

Ynet News, April 27, 2013

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas said today that he would begin talks with rival factions including Islamist Hamas to form a unity government, a crucial step towards healing years of damaging internal divisions. But, underscoring the chasm between Abbas’s Fatah movement and Hamas, Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said Abbas had not consulted his group about his move and the Islamists had only heard about it in media reports.

Hamas and Western-backed Abbas, who heads the more secular Fatah that holds sway in self-rule areas of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, have been at loggerheads since Hamas seized the Gaza Strip in a brief civil war in 2007. Past unity attempts have foundered because Hamas and Fatah have been unable to agree a joint agenda, above all on how to handle the conflict with Israel. Hamas is committed to Israel's destruction while Fatah supports a negotiated solution providing for a Palestinian state co-existing alongside Israel.

The need to form a new administration was prompted by the resignation earlier this month of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad because of a rift between him and Abbas and it has created an opportunity for Abbas to forge a unity government. Abbas published a statement on the Palestinian official news agency, WAFA, on Saturday urging factions "to cooperate" with his effort to form a national unity government that would be charged with readying presidential and parliamentary elections.

Hamas and Fatah have repeatedly failed to bridge their political differences despite signing an Egyptian-brokered reconciliation agreement in 2011. There have been no substantive moves to implement the accord. Hamas rejects the interim peace accords which Fatah leaders signed in the 1990s with Israel. Peace talks between Israel and Abbas have been stalled since 2010 over Israeli settlement expansion in the West Bank.

Wasel Abu Youssef, a member of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO), the Palestinians' highest decision-making body led by Abbas, said Palestinian basic law required forming a new administration because of Fayyad's resignation.

"Abbas's step has thrown the ball into Hamas's court to agree on a date for holding elections and they will be responsible for the failure if they do not accept," Abu Youssef told Reuters. Abu Zuhri said holding elections was not possible under the current circumstances in the West Bank because Israel maintained overall control of the territory and Fatah continued to arrest Hamas men and curb their freedoms.

5) 1948 British report: Arabs will lose war Ynet News, April 26, 2013

Even prior to withdrawing its troops from Israel in 1948, the British government realized the partition of the country and the establishment of the State of Israel would result in a war - that the Arabs would lose, according to declassified UK government documents published Friday by the Guardian. Another document from 1946 states that "the Jewish public in Israel supports terrorism, in light of British policy."

According to the British newspaper, various Colonial Office reports paint a picture of increasing "terrorist acts" by the Jews, and the external pressure from the U.S., the UN and the Zionist movement to divide the country. In addition, the documents criticize British Mandate officials who were concerned with "how to allocate between them two Rolls-Royces and a Daimler" during the tense times.

Colonial Secretary George Hall was told "The Jewish public ... endorsed the attitude of its leaders that terrorism is a natural consequence of the general policy of His Majesty's Government." This included the illegal infiltration of Jews into Palestine.

Another document quoted a British official who, in a report to London in October 1946, more than a year before the UN vote over the partition plan, said that "Arab leaders appear to be still disposed to defer active opposition so long as a chance of a political decision acceptable to Arab interests exists." "There is a real danger lest any further Jewish provocation may result in isolated acts of retaliation spreading inevitably to wider Arab-Jewish clashes," the report read.

Papers also reveal that moderate Jewish leaders were afraid to be seen as “Quislings,” after the Norwegian Nazi-collaborating leader whose name became synonymous with treason. Pressure by the Zionist lobby in America is cited as another instigating factor for the Jews.

A report written in early 1948, as the war for Israel broke out, read “Jewish victories ... have reduced Arab morale to zero and, following the cowardly example of their inept leaders, they are fleeing from the mixed areas in their thousands. It is now obvious that the only hope of regaining their position lies in the regular armies of the Arab states.”

The Guardian described the papers as having “a remarkable contemporary resonance.” Thus, according to the British newspaper, a wartime report intended for British intelligence officials said Arab nationalism had a “double nature ... a rational constructive movement receptive of western influence and help and an emotional movement of revolt against the west.” The report concluded by saying “The conflict between these two tendencies will be decided in the present generation. The first aim of the policy of the western powers must be to prevent the triumph of the second tendency.”

6) Should Britain apologize for the Balfour Declaration?

James Renton, Ha'aretz, April 29, 2013

The British government should apologize for the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917; that’s the argument of an international five year campaign by the Palestinian Return Centre in London. They’re right in their demand—Britain should apologize. But not because the British favored Zionism over the rights of the Palestinians, as both cheerleaders and critics of Balfour tend to assume. The truth of the Declaration and its legacy is much less clear cut. Rather than a story of grand pro-Zionist design, it is one of miscalculation and unintended consequences.

It is over 95 years since A.J. Balfour, the British Foreign Secretary, wrote to Lord Rothschild regarding the British Cabinet’s support for the “establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people.” The recent announcement that the original text of the Declaration will come for the first time to the Jewish state in 2015 received significant exposure in the Israeli media, with commentators describing the Declaration as a seminal moment in the path towards Jewish independence. The PRC campaign, “Britain, It’s Time to Apologize,” presents a different perspective. “Ever since” the Declaration, they argue, “Palestinians have suffered tremendously under the shadow of Britain’s colonial past.” Their aim is to obtain one million signatures for a petition in “condemnation of British colonial policy between 1917-1948” in time for the 100th anniversary of the Declaration in 2017.

The campaign for an apology matters today for two reasons. First, the court of international public opinion has become much more central in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, stimulated by the strategy of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to campaign for UN recognition of Palestinian statehood. Second, in October 2012 the British High Court judged that three Kenyans could bring a case against the British Government for abuses suffered during the Mau Mau rebellion against British rule. ...

But what did the British really promise in 1917? In the wake of the Declaration’s publication, most Zionists and their opponents assumed that the “national home” meant a Jewish state. There is, however, little proof that this was the British government’s intention. When the Cabinet agreed to issue the Declaration on October 31, 1917, they did not come to a conclusion as to what the national home, once established, would look like. This was because the government’s interest in Zionism was not focused on the movement’s future in Palestine. Rather, their principal goal was to use Zionism as a means of fostering pro-war propaganda in Russia and the U.S. - two key British allies in the struggle against Germany. British policy-makers were desperate to combat the advance of revolutionary socialism and of pacifism in Russia, and to mobilize the full resources of the U.S., which were deemed to be essential for victory. The Cabinet considered that by backing Zionism, Britain could obtain in both countries, and around the world, the support of a powerful agent of influence – “the Jews.” So while the

government did not devise a plan for the future of Zionism in Palestine, they quickly established - in December 1917 - a Jewish propaganda bureau, the "Jewish Section" of the Foreign Office's Department of Information. Headed by the British civil servant and Zionist Albert Hyamson, the "Jewish Section" worked to convince world Jewry of Britain's profound support for Zionism.

This propaganda policy was based on mistaken assumptions about Jews, derived from influential anti-Semitic ideas and conceptions of race and nationalism. Figures like Balfour and Prime Minister Lloyd George thought that Jews possessed immense power, especially in the U.S. and Russia. They also believed that most Jews were Zionist. Both of these assumptions were incorrect. The upshot, however, was the Government conclusion that support for Zionism would be a great help to British interests in the war against Germany and its partners.

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

7) Resource: Nakba packs Available from If Americans Knew

With the founding of Israel on May 14, 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes, never to be allowed to return. Hundreds of towns were razed; villagers were massacred. Their very existence on the land was nearly wiped from history. Commemorate that catastrophe by informing your communities about this core injustice that remains so central to the ongoing conflicts in Palestine/Israel and around the world.

Nakba Pack -- Contains 10 of each of the following booklets, 50 of each one-sheeter, and 50 of each card. Suggested donation, \$44 + postage.

- * 50 copies of The Catastrophe: How Palestine Became Israel, a full-color trifold brochure
- * 50 copies of What Israel's 'Right to Exist' Means for Palestinians, a full-color trifold brochure
- * 50 copies of A Synopsis of the Israel/Palestine Conflict, a one-page fact sheet on the history of the conflict and statistics on the toll of the conflict
- * 50 copies of U.S. Media and Israeli Military: All in the Family, a one-page article on media bias and distortion
- * 50 copies of USA Map Cards, which encourage U.S. Americans to imagine how they would feel if they were in the position the Palestinians are in
- * 50 copies of Shrinking Palestine Map Cards, showing a series of maps of the region
- * 10 copies of "The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict" booklets providing a detailed history of the conflict
- * 10 copies of "Palestinian Refugees Right to Return and Repatriation" booklets explaining the plight of Palestinian refugees and their rights

Nakba Pack Lite -- Contains same materials (50 copies each) except only one copy of "The Origin of the Palestine-Israel Conflict" and one copy of "Palestinian Refugees Right to Return and Repatriation." Suggested donation, \$26 + postage

Order from <http://www.ifamericansknew.org> or email orders@ifamericansknew.org.

A note on the suggested donation: If Americans Knew offers published materials free, as supplies allow, though donations are requested whenever possible to cover the printing and shipping costs. The "suggested donations" listed are designed to cover only the cost of printing the materials.

A note on shipping: Materials usually are sent using U.S. Post Office Priority Mail envelopes and boxes. These offer a flat rate rather than charging for the weight of the materials included. Current rates (subject to change by the Post Office) are: \$5.05 for a large envelope, \$11.30 for a medium box and \$15.30 for a large box.

8) Fayyad's resignation: A blow, but not time to mourn just yet **Israel Policy Forum, Danielle Spiegel-Feld, April 24, 2013**

It's hard not to be alarmed by the number of commentators predicting that Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's resignation will precipitate a certain and swift decline in the West Bank.

Writing for the Washington Post, conservative columnist Jennifer Rubin declared that Fayyad's exit meant "losing practically the only Palestinian leader committed to building civil society," while the Jerusalem Post's editorial board suggested that his resignation "ends hopes, at least for the time being," that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be resolved peacefully. Former Bush Administration official Elliot Abrams, for his part, has predicted that once Fayyad leaves office, the Palestinian security forces, which operated with great professionalism to-date, will become a "Fatah goon squad."

These foreboding prophecies are premature. Fayyad is worthy of much, if not all, the compliments that are being lavished upon him, and as Thomas Friedman wrote in today's New York Times, "that Fayyad's brand of non-corrupt, institution-focused leadership was not sufficiently supported by other Palestinian leaders, the Arab states, Israel and America is really depressing." It is also true that his resignation does not bode well for the long-term stability of the Palestinian Authority. And yet, it's still too soon to declare that the West Bank is now on the verge of imminent collapse, or that the reforms Fayyad instituted will certainly or quickly come undone.

The most basic reason to postpone making such forecasts is that Fayyad may actually continue to play a significant role in Palestinian politics for quite some time. Although Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has accepted Fayyad's resignation, Abbas has reportedly asked Fayyad to stay until a new government is formed. This could take quite a while. In a conversation with IPF, the prominent Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab emphasized that there's a good deal of uncertainty as to exactly how long Abbas will take to form a new government. Several commentators have speculated that Fayyad could possibly stay in the post as a caretaker throughout the transition.

Abbas has good reason to delay in moving forward: Under the terms of a 2011 agreement reached between Fatah and Hamas, Abbas himself is supposed to lead a national unity government as prime minister. And although reconciliation is realistically still a long way off, the Palestinian street and certain Arab governments who are pushing to end the Palestinian schism, could interpret Abbas' decision to appoint a new prime minister other than himself as a sign that he's turning his back on unity aspirations. In this context, it's not surprising that the New York Times quoted the chief executive of the Palestinian Stock Exchange last week as stating that he was "convinced [Fayyad] will remain the caretaker prime minister for the foreseeable future," and over the weekend Ha'aretz cited unnamed Fatah officials for the proposition that Abbas is "reportedly in no hurry to appoint a new prime minister."

Notably, going against the trend, a recent report issued by the American Task Force on Palestine (ATFP) predicted that Fayyad will not stay on as a caretaker and will soon leave his post. However, ATFP also forecasts that Fayyad will remain a powerful influence in Palestinian public life after leaving the prime minister's bureau, which may temper the impact of the resignation. "Far too many of the assessments of his resignation, both in the Middle East and the West, have read like political obituaries," the ATFP report asserted, indicating that they expect him to maintain an important presence in the Palestinian political scene for a while.

Furthermore, even if Abbas does appoint a new prime minister soon, the man often mentioned as the front runner to replace Fayyad, Dr. Mohammad Mustafa, possesses several of the same qualities that have earned Fayyad respect in the West. Like Fayyad, Mustafa is an American-trained economist who had a long career at the World Bank. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Arab League softens stance on Israel's final borders

The Associated Press, April 30, 2013

Speaking on behalf of an Arab League delegation to Washington, Qatari PM renews call for Mideast peace, citing for first time possibility of 'comparable,' mutually agreed and 'minor' land swaps. Arab countries endorsed a Mideast peace plan Monday that would allow for small shifts in Israel's 1967 border, moving them closer to President Barack Obama's two-state vision.

Speaking on behalf of an Arab League delegation to Washington, Qatari Prime Minister Sheik Hamad Bin Jassem Al Thani called for an agreement between Israel and a future Palestine based on the Israel's border before the 1967 Mideast War. But, unlike in previous such offers, he cited the possibility of "comparable," mutually agreed and "minor" land swaps between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

Al Thani spoke after his delegation met across the street from the White House with Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry, who has been pushing Arab leaders to embrace a modified version of their decade-old "Arab Peace Initiative" as part of a new U.S.-led effort to corral Israel and the Palestinians back into direct peace talks.

Those negotiations have hardly occurred at all over the past 4 1/2 years amid deep disagreement over Israeli settlement construction in lands the Palestinians hope to include in their country.

"We've had a very positive, very constructive discussion over the course of the afternoon, with positive results," Kerry said at Blair House, speaking with Al Thani at a podium beside him and senior officials from five other Arab governments behind them. He praised the Arab League for the "important role it is playing, and is determined to play, in bringing about a peace in the Middle East ... and specifically by reaffirming the Arab Peace Initiative here this afternoon, with a view to ending the conflict."

Kerry said that he and Biden stressed the vision that Obama outlined in 2011, when he became the first American leader to publicly declare Israel's pre-1967 lines as the basis for an Israeli-Palestinian settlement.

The declaration, while including the caveat of mutually agreed territorial trades between the two parties, raised a furor in Israel and led to public sparring only days later between Obama and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu when the Israeli leader visited the White House.

While little has changed in Israel's public posture, the remarks by Al Thani suggest that Kerry has had some success, at least, in coordinating a more unified regional strategy between the U.S. and its Arab partners. Top officials from the Arab League, Bahrain, Egypt, Lebanon, the Palestinian territories and Saudi Arabia attended the meeting.

Although revolutionary when it was introduced by Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the 22-member Arab League, the initiative has never been embraced by Israel. And Palestinian officials have previously spoken out against any changes to its terms. What was striking, and perhaps most limiting, about the initiative was its simplicity, offering Israel comprehensive recognition in the Arab world in exchange for all lands conquered in the 1967 Mideast war. ...

Kerry, who has been to the Middle East three times in his short stint as secretary of state, stressed that any peace process going forward would focus on bringing about "direct negotiations between the parties." He said the U.S. and the Arab League will hold continued consultations and more meetings because they agree that "peace between the Israelis and Palestinians would advance security, and stability in the Middle East." ...

[Read the entire piece on St. Louis Post-Dispatch website.](#)

10) The Oslo illusion

Adam Hanieh, Jacobin, Issue 10, April 2013

This year marks the twentieth anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accords between the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and the Israeli government. Officially known as the Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, the Oslo Accords were firmly ensconced in the framework of the two-state solution, heralding “an end to decades of confrontation and conflict,” the recognition of “mutual legitimate and political rights,” and the aim of achieving “peaceful coexistence and mutual dignity and security and ... a just, lasting and comprehensive peace settlement.”

Its supporters claimed that under Oslo, Israel would gradually relinquish control over territory in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, with the newly established Palestinian Authority (PA) eventually forming an independent state there. The negotiations process, and subsequent agreements between the PLO and Israel, instead paved the way for the current situation in the West Bank and Gaza. The Palestinian Authority, which now rules over an estimated 2.6 million Palestinians in the West Bank, has become the key architect of Palestinian political strategy. Its institutions draw international legitimacy from Oslo, and its avowed goal of “building an independent Palestinian state” remains grounded in the same framework. The incessant calls for a return to negotiations — made by U.S. and European leaders on an almost daily basis — harken back to the principles laid down in September 1993.

Two decades on, it is now common to hear Oslo described as a “failure” due to the ongoing reality of Israeli occupation. The problem with this assessment is that it confuses the stated goals of Oslo with its real aims. From the perspective of the Israeli government, the aim of Oslo was not to end the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip, or to address the substantive issues of Palestinian dispossession, but something much more functional. By creating the perception that negotiations would lead to some kind of “peace,” Israel was able to portray its intentions as those of a partner rather than an enemy of Palestinian sovereignty.

Based on this perception, the Israeli government used Oslo as a fig leaf to cover its consolidated and deepened control over Palestinian life, employing the same strategic mechanisms wielded since the onset of the occupation in 1967. Settlement construction, restrictions on Palestinian movement, the incarceration of thousands, and command over borders and economic life: all came together to form a complex system of control. A Palestinian face may preside over the day-to-day administration of Palestinian affairs, but ultimate power remains in the hands of Israel. This structure has reached its apex in the Gaza Strip — where over 1.7 million people are penned into a tiny enclave with entry and exit of goods and people largely determined by Israeli dictat.

Oslo also had a pernicious political effect. By reducing the Palestinian struggle to the process of bartering over slivers of land in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, Oslo ideologically disarmed the not-insignificant parts of the Palestinian political movement that advocated continued resistance to Israeli colonialism and sought the genuine fulfillment of Palestinian aspirations. The most important of these aspirations was the demand that Palestinian refugees have the right to return to the homes and lands from which they had been expelled in 1947 and 1948. Oslo made talk of these goals seem fanciful and unrealistic, normalizing a delusive pragmatism rather than tackling the foundational roots of Palestinian exile. Outside of Palestine, Oslo fatally undermined the widespread solidarity and sympathy with the Palestinian struggle built during the years of the first Intifada, replacing an orientation toward grassroots collective support with a faith in negotiations steered by Western governments. It would take over a decade for solidarity movements to rebuild themselves. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)