

Middle East Notes, May 22, 2014

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns



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This week's Middle East Notes highlights concerns about the ending yet necessity of peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, security preparations for the Pope's visit, hate crimes and "price tag" operations, responses and reactions to the possibility of a Fatah/Hamas Palestinian government, reflections on Israel's Independence Day, the Nakba, and other issues.

- The May 9 and May 16 Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletins present reflections on the end of the peace negotiations, "price tag" tensions, preparations for Pope Francis's visit, reconciliation between Fatah and Hamas and the planned for unity government, and other concerns.
- Richard Falk writes in *Global Justice in the 21st Century* that peace talks should not be resumed; the revival of direct negotiations last August between Israel and the Palestinian Authority was mainly a strong arm initiative of the U.S. government.
- A Ha'aretz editorial says that U.S. special envoy Martin Indyk issued a strong condemnation of Israel's settlement activity in the West Bank on Thursday night, saying that it could "drive Israel into an irreversible binational reality."
- Jack Houry writes in Ha'aretz that chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat's accuses Israel of hypocrisy in opposing the Palestinian Authority's reconciliation deal with Hamas.
- Rebecca Steinfeld writes in Ha'aretz that a serious challenge for liberal Jews in and out of Israel is to choose whether to go toward a Jewish or a democratic one-state.
- *The State of Two States*, Weeks of May 4 and May 11, 2014, from Israel Policy Forum.
- Ma'an News Agency reports that Pope Francis makes his first trip to the Middle East this month accompanied by Jewish and Muslim intellectuals to push for inter-religious dialogue amid stalled peace talks between Israelis and the Palestinians.
- Charlie Hoyle writes in Ma'an News Agency that hate crimes targeting Palestinians and church property in Israel have prompted community leaders to express outrage at the culture of impunity and growing extremism which allow attacks to go unpunished.
- Israel's best known writer, Amos Oz, says that Israelis behind a wave of hate crimes against Muslims and Christians are "Hebrew neo-Nazis." (Ma'an News Agency)
- A Ha'aretz editorial says that hate crimes by Jews against Arabs have become routine; the question is when, not if, the "price tag" perpetrators will take up arms and cause a disaster.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in Ha'aretz that the word "apartheid" hides the darker aspects of the occupation of Palestinian Territories.
- Amira Hass writes in Ha'aretz that violence and bullying are what the Israel Defense Forces' presence in Hebron and the West Bank is really all about.
- Jimmy Carter writes in the *Washington Post* that the Palestinians' plans for the coming months are clear: to form a new unity government and expand involvement in the UN.
- Khaled Titi writes in the Ma'an News Agency that the situation in Israel-Palestine is racial segregation, as one group controls the other's freedom of movement, education and development.
- Saeb Erekat writes in Ha'aretz about the Nakba catastrophe and the need for Israel to come to terms with the horrors it has caused since 1948, by ending its subjugation of millions rather than intensifying its denial and trying to legitimize its persecution.
- The Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU) presents 10 facts about the Nakba when, some 60 years ago, approximately 750,000 Palestinians lost their homes and belongings, farms and businesses, towns and cities as Jewish militias seeking to create a state with a Jewish majority in Palestine, and later, the Israeli army, drove them out.

1a) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 9, 2014

Peace talks post-mortem: On July 30, 2013, Secretary of State John Kerry stood at the White House with Palestinian Chief Negotiator Saeb Erekat and Israeli Justice Minister Tzipi Livni to announce that peace talks were officially restarted. At the end of his remarks, Secretary Kerry said he would be the only one authorized to speak about the progress and, “that means that no one should consider any reports, articles, or other – or even rumors – reliable, unless they come directly from me, and I guarantee you they won’t.”

Remarkably, leaks were held to a minimum during the nine-month duration of the talks. As of now, these negotiations are “on pause.” One prominent U.S. official is speaking out, likely off the record, about what went right and the future possibilities of negotiations, but mostly he spoke about what went wrong: settlement construction.

An anonymous U.S. official told Yedioth Ahronoth, “There are a lot of reasons for the peace effort’s failure, but people in Israel shouldn’t ignore the bitter truth - the primary sabotage came from the settlements. The Palestinians don’t believe that Israel really intends to let them found a state when, at the same time, it is building settlements on the territory meant for that state... That does not reconcile with the agreement.” Ha’aretz reports that the source for this interview was likely Ambassador Martin Indyk, special envoy for Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

According to the Israeli group Peace Now, negotiations were a boon to the settlement enterprise. They calculated that, “During the nine months of Secretary Kerry’s efforts in the region, the Israeli government promoted plans and tenders for at least 13,851 housing units in the settlements and East Jerusalem - an average of 50 units per day and 1,540 units per month.” Most notably, “the average yearly number of tenders was four times higher compared to previous years.”

Officially, the reason the talks are suspended remains the Hamas-Fatah agreement, which was signed a week before the original nine-month timeframe was up. However, the U.S. official (again, likely Indyk) told Yedioth Ahronoth that the “announcements of new housing tenders in settlements limited Abbas’ ability to show flexibility. He lost his trust in the talks.”

In a speech to the Washington Institute, Indyk addressed the issue on the record. He said, “The settlement movement...may well drive Israel into an irreversible bi-national reality. If you care about Israel’s future, as I know so many of you do and as I do, you should understand that rampant settlement activity – especially in the midst of negotiations – doesn’t just undermine Palestinian trust in the purpose of the negotiations; it can undermine Israel’s Jewish future. If this continues, it could mortally wound the idea of Israel as a Jewish state – and that would be a tragedy of historic proportions.”

Earlier in the week, there were rumors that Indyk is about to resign from his post. After the “anonymous” interview he likely gave to Yedioth Ahronoth, Israeli officials told Ha’aretz that, “these harsh statements are an indication that Indyk is laying the groundwork for a resignation.” U.S. officials replied saying it is “premature to speculate.” ... Secretary Kerry announced that he is open to releasing more details about the progress made during the nine months and continuing talks soon. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

1b) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 16, 2014

“Price tag” tensions ahead of papal visit: Tensions are high in Jerusalem over increased acts of vandalism and intimidation by extremist Israelis against several Christian sites ahead of Pope Francis’ visit to the Holy Land from May 25-27. In the latest incident last week, anti-Christian graffiti appeared on the offices of the Assembly of Bishops at the Notre Dame center, a complex owned by the Vatican. The crimes have left many wondering why the Israeli government hasn’t been able to put a stop to them.

These incidents sometimes known as “price tag” attacks, have been a problem for several years. The U.S. State Department defines them as, “property crimes and violent acts by extremist Jewish individuals and groups in retaliation for activity they deemed to be anti-settlement.” According to the Latin Patriarchy of Jerusalem, “the extremists have engaged in assault, threats and vandalism of all kinds, against Christian places of worship, and against Muslim, Palestinian and Israeli Arab villages... They have also attacked Israeli peace activists of left-leaning organizations, [Peace Now]...and even the army itself.” Initially these attacks were confined to the West Bank, but more recently, they have proliferated east of the Green Line, causing more attention

In the most recent attack on May 7, graffiti reading “Death to Arabs and Christians and those who hate Israel” appeared on the offices of the Assembly of Bishops at the Notre Dame center, a complex owned by the Vatican. Pope Francis is set to meet with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the center during his visit. Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal responded to the incident by saying, “The unrestrained acts of vandalism poison the atmosphere, the atmosphere of coexistence and the atmosphere of collaboration, especially in these two weeks prior to the visit of Pope Francis.”

Patriarch Twal also questioned whether the Israeli government was committed to bringing the perpetrators of these attacks to justice: “Everyone knows the Israeli police set up special units to track attacks like these. In light of the fact that the great majority of vandalism acts do not lead to trials, we must ask if the government is willing to get down to the root of the problem.”

This year, for the first time, the U.S. State Department has included price tag attacks in their annual country reports on terrorism and noted the attacks were “were largely unprosecuted.”

The Economist cites Vatican officials involved in the planning for Pope Francis’ visit that say that Israel is turning Jerusalem into a “military base” and “planning a strict permit regime, insisting that the Holy Father travels in an armored car, with the public kept at arm’s length behind a security cordon” to ensure his safety. In Bethlehem, Palestinian authorities are opening up the streets and providing the pope with an open car.

The attacks have caused outrage among many Israelis. This week, hundreds of Arabs and Jews protested the weak government response in front of the prime minister’s office. Rabbis for Human Rights president Arik Ascherman told the Jerusalem Post, “So often throughout history terrible things happened when good people were silent. It’s good that there is only a small number of people doing this and that our national leadership has condemned it, but what is happening is a desecration to God’s name and antithetical to everything the Torah stands for.” ...

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)

2) Why the peace talks collapsed—and should not be resumed

Richard Falk, Global Justice in the 21st Century, May 2, 2014

A week ago Israel suspended participation in the peace talks in response to news that the Palestinian Authority's Fatah had for a third time concluded a unity agreement with the Hamas leadership of Gaza. Such a move toward intra-Palestinian reconciliation should have been welcomed by Israel as a tentative step in the right direction. Instead it was immediately denounced by Netanyahu as the end of the diplomatic road, contending that Israel will never be part of any political process that includes a terrorist organization pledged to its destruction. Without Hamas' participation any diplomatic results of negotiations would likely have been of questionable value, and besides, Hamas deserves inclusion. It has behaved as a political actor since it took part in the 2006 Palestinian legislative elections, and has repeatedly indicated its willingness to reach a long-term normalizing agreement with Israel if and when Israel is ready to withdraw fully to the 1967 borders and respect Palestinian sovereign rights. The contention that Hamas is pledged to Israel's destruction is pure hasbara, a cynical means to manipulate the fear factor in Israeli domestic politics, as well as ensuring the persistence of the conflict. This approach has become Israel's way of choosing expansion over peace, and seemingly ignoring its own citizens' mandate to secure a stable peace agreement.

Israel had days earlier complained about an initiative taken by the PA to become a party to 15 international treaties. Again, a step that would be viewed as constructive if seeking an end to the conflict was anywhere to be found in Israel's playbook. Such an initiative should have been interpreted in a positive direction as indicating the Palestinian intention to be a responsible member of the international community. Israel's contrary lame allegation that by acting independently the PA departed from the agreed roadmap of negotiations prematurely assuming the prerogatives of a state rather than waiting Godot-like for such a status to be granted via the bilateral diplomatic route.

To remove any doubt about the priorities of the Netanyahu-led government, Israel during the nine months set aside for reaching an agreement, authorized no less than 13,851 new housing units in the settlements, added significant amounts of available land for further settlement expansion, and demolished 312 Palestinian homes. These acts were not only unlawful, but actually accelerated earlier settlement trends, and were obviously provocative from a Palestinian perspective. As Ha'aretz columnist, Gideon Levy, observed in a TV interview, if Israeli authorizes even one additional housing unit during negotiations it is sending a clear signal to the Palestinian people and their leaders that it has no interest in reaching a sustainable peace agreement.

The revival of direct negotiations last August between the Government of Israel and the Palestinian Authority was mainly a strong arm initiative of the U.S. Government, energized by John Kerry, the American Secretary of State, who has put relentless pressure on both sides to start talking despite the manifest futility of such a process from its outset. Such resolve raises the still unanswered question, "why?" Kerry melodramatically proclaimed that these negotiations were the last chance to save the two-state solution as the means to end the conflict, in effect, declaring this new round of U.S. sponsored negotiations to be an all or nothing moment of decision for the Palestinian Authority and Israel. Kerry has reinforced this appeal by warning that Israel risks isolation and boycott if no agreement is reached ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Indyk: Settlements could drive Israel into binational reality **Ha'aretz, May 9, 2014**

U.S. special envoy to the Middle East peace talks Martin Indyk issued a strong condemnation of Israel's settlement activity in the West Bank on Thursday night, saying that it could "drive Israel into an irreversible binational reality."

"Rampant settlement activity – especially in the midst of negotiations – doesn't just undermine Palestinian trust in the purpose of the negotiations; it can undermine Israel's Jewish future," he said. "If this continues, it could mortally wound the idea of Israel as a Jewish state – and that would be a tragedy of historic proportions."

Indyk was speaking at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy's founders' conference, where he gave a review of the nine months of peace talks.

In a carefully nuanced speech that blamed and praised both sides equally, the U.S. envoy said that, while both Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas had shown flexibility in the talks, the leaders "don't feel the pressing need to make gut-wrenching compromises."

If the U.S. is the only party with a sense of urgency, "the negotiations will not succeed," he said.

"The fact is both the Israelis and Palestinians missed opportunities, and took steps that undermined the process," Indyk stated. "We have spoken publicly about unhelpful Israeli steps that combined to undermine the negotiations. But it is important to be clear: We view steps the Palestinians took during the negotiations as unhelpful too."

Indyk's objective seemed to be the same as that of visiting U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice, who met both Netanyahu and Abbas earlier in the day: To prevent the situation deteriorating further and coax the sides back into negotiations.

"It is critical that both sides now refrain from taking any steps that could lead to an escalation and dangerous spiral that could easily get out of control," he said. "Thus far since the negotiations been suspended they have both shown restraint and it is essential that this continue."

Comparing the current negotiations with former secretary of state Henry Kissinger's peace-making with Egypt, Indyk said that American President Barack Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry would never suspend military relations with Israel as Kissinger had done. "Those military relations are too important for both our nations," he said.

He added that the U.S.-Israel relationship had changed dramatically since Kissinger's day. "Only those who know it from the inside – as I have had the privilege to do – can testify to how deep and strong are the ties that now bind our two nations. When President Obama speaks with justifiable pride about those bonds as 'unbreakable' he means what he says." Indyk said that he had seen many hopeful signs during the course of the negotiations – "moments of recognition by both sides of what is necessary." But it had not been enough to bring the talks to a successful conclusion. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) Chief PA negotiator: Israel hypocritical on Palestinian reconciliation

Jack Khoury, Ha'aretz, May 9, 2014

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat on Thursday accused Israel of hypocrisy in opposing the Palestinian Authority's reconciliation deal with Hamas. During the past nine months of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, attorney Isaac Molho, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's personal envoy to the talks, complained repeatedly that the PA does not represent the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip and that Israel had no assurance the PA would be able to impose a future peace deal on Hamas, Erekat said in an interview with Radio Ashams in Nazareth.

"Molho held this issue as a sword and laid it on our necks: What will you do with Gaza, and how will you deal with Gaza?" Erekat said. "And now they're attacking us for turning our faces toward Palestinian national unity," Erekat said in the interview. "Israel has forgotten that it reached agreements and understandings with Hamas under the auspices of Sheikh Morsi, yet it attacks us for implementing the reconciliation agreements." In 2012, then-Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi brokered a deal that ended a round of fighting between Israel and Hamas.

On Thursday, Fatah head of international relations Nabil Sha'ath also addressed the Israeli response to the Palestinian reconciliation, and said Netanyahu is in a "Catch 22": "On one hand, before reconciliation with Hamas, the claim was that Fatah has no control over Hamas and thus doesn't represent all Palestinians, and on the other hand, after the deal, the claim is we made an agreement with a terror organization."

Erekat said the recent breakdown in Israeli-Palestinian talks was Israel's decision and that the last few meetings with American mediators had been devoted to finding a way to extend the negotiations. "If Netanyahu's intentions were honest, we would have reached an agreement within nine months," he said. Erekat also confirmed a statement by Shimon Peres earlier this week that significant progress had been made in Peres' talks with PA President Mahmoud Abbas in 2011, but that the talks ended after Netanyahu ordered Peres not to attend a scheduled meeting in Amman, Jordan.

"I can confirm that there were indeed contacts and talks with Peres on several occasions, including in London, and a meeting was arranged under Jordanian auspices in Amman," Erekat said. "I and Abu Mazen [Abbas] were there, and we waited, but Peres never arrived and explained that Netanyahu prevented him even from holding the meeting." Erekat did not detail the understandings reached with Peres, but said they included a border based on that Israel had prior to the summer of 1967, when Israel occupied the West Bank.

Peres said in an interview on Tuesday that he and Abbas had been on the verge of signing a deal when Netanyahu ordered an end to the talks, which he had originally approved. He and Abbas had reached agreement on "almost every point," Peres said, including the refugees and Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. But "Netanyahu had the impression there was a better offer, [which would be] brought by Tony Blair." Blair was, and still is, special envoy on behalf of the Quartet on the Middle East, comprised of the U.S., the UN, the EU and Russia. Regarding Palestinian refugees, Peres said, Abbas "accepted the Arab [League] formulation that the refugee problem will be solved in a 'just and agreed' fashion." As for borders, "Instead of speaking about the 1967 borders, we spoke about the size of the [Palestinian] state's territory and not about its borders," so as to allow for territorial swaps, Peres said. "He [Abbas] agreed to this."

5) On Israel's 66th Independence Day Rebecca Steinfeld, Ha'aretz, May 7, 2014

Now is supposedly crunch time for liberal Zionists. The latest diplomatic attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict appears to have failed, and with it the two-state solution upon which liberal Zionism depends. As a result, political scientist Dov Waxman says liberal Zionists must confront a painful question: "if a two-state solution is now impossible, should they support, however reluctantly, a one-state solution?" If so, should they prioritize their Zionism in favour of a Jewish one-state, even if this means foregoing their liberalism? Or should they prioritize their liberalism in favour of a democratic one-state, even if this means forgoing their Zionism?

Whether to go right toward a Jewish one-state or go left toward a democratic one-state is a serious challenge for liberal Jews both inside and outside Israel, who are committed to liberal values such as equality and civil rights. It is also an important question for diplomats, as reflected in U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's recent remarks that Israel could become an apartheid state.

On Israel's 66th Independence Day (May 5 in 2014) in the 47th year since the 1967 Arab-Israeli war brought large numbers of Palestinians under Israeli control, there has never been a more urgent time to ask – and more importantly, to answer - these questions. Yet, I would argue that these questions are neither new nor confined to the area beyond the "Green Line."

Historically, alongside a push for democracy, Zionism has also been driven by two illiberal forces: ethno-nationalism and settler colonialism. Zionism is premised on the belief that Jews constitute an ancient nation that requires self-determination in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel, in order to protect itself from ubiquitous and annihilationist anti-Semitism. Since Jews were dispersed across the globe and the area identified for Zionist settlement, Palestine, was already inhabited, Zionism could only be realized through a process of mass migration, territorial acquisition, population displacement, and the assertion of political control – a process known as settler colonialism.

In fusing nationalism with settler colonialism, Zionism was not unique. The Pilgrims to New England also saw themselves as fulfilling a prophetic mission and establishing a model society; settler colonists in Australia and South Africa were also predominantly white Europeans living amid a mass of relatively impoverished natives; and settlers to both Palestine and North America first worked through, and later threw off, their British imperial backers. This is partly why the historian, Derek Penslar, argues that "the Zionist project was historically and conceptually situated between colonial, anti-colonial, and post-colonial discourse and practice."

The critical difference is that, unlike these other examples, which have at least formally dismantled the legal and institutional systems that privileged settler status, Israel's settler colonial history is ongoing and intensifying, both within the "Green Line" and beyond it. The contradictions of liberal Zionism are particularly severe and stark in the West Bank, where prolonged military rule since 1967 means Palestinians there live without a right to vote for the government that controls the majority of their land and most aspects of their lives. But even describing the Palestinian Arab population that now remains within Israel's recognized borders as a "minority" reflects and legitimizes facts on the ground. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) The State of Two States, Week of May 4

This week was marked by stark transitions: the transition from Israel's Memorial Day to Independence celebrations, and the move to pause Israeli-Palestinian negotiations. As direct conversations between the Israelis and Palestinians officially came to a close last week, this week the vast majority of discussions among the parties focused on reflecting on this past round of talks and thinking about the future of the two states. Throughout the week, Hamas officials have been declaring that they will never recognize Israel. On Wednesday, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu and International Relations, Intelligence and Strategic Affairs Minister Yuval Steinitz met with U.S. National Security Adviser Susan Rice in Jerusalem, where they discussed the state of negotiations with Iran, the civil war in Syria, the breakdown of the negotiations with the Palestinians and the situation in Ukraine. On Thursday, Rice spoke with President Abbas in Ramallah about the Palestinian government's reconciliation with Hamas and its relationship with the United States. Also on Thursday, U.S. Special Envoy Martin Indyk spoke in detail about the recent breakdown of talks at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy.

- “Hamas will not recognize Israel. This is a red line that cannot be crossed. The future government is not interested in providing Israel with recognition, and the conditions set by the Quartet committee do not concern us one bit...Hamas will not burden the next government's success with hurdles and obstacles. On the contrary, it will strive to market it internationally. We were encouraged by the level of regional and international acceptance of the reconciliation. Russia and the EU endorsed it, and the American and Israeli stances against it saw some marked retreat, which is encouraging.” — Mousa Abu Marzouk, deputy chairman of Hamas' political bureau speaking with Al-Monitor (Monday 5/5)
- “The time has come to remove the mask from Abu Mazen and say clearly that he is a peace rejectionist and he doesn't really want to reach an agreement for the people he supposedly represents. We expect the international community to stand behind its declarations and demand that Hamas comply with the Quartet's three conditions.” — Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman commenting on the prospect of a Palestinian unity government as reported by Makor Rishon (Tuesday 5/6)
- “There is no partner on the other side. That is the reality. Our soldiers are intelligent enough to understand the complex situation on the field and to know how to deal with it. There's no immediate solution...The Palestinian threat [to dismantle the Palestinian Authority] is an empty threat. Palestinian political and economic interests are stronger than that.” — Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon discussing Palestinian politics with the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee (Wednesday 5/7)
- “He's 79 now, he's weary, he wants to leave office, and he's more focused on succession now than on making peace. I think he came to the conclusion that he didn't have a reliable partner for the kind of two-state solution that he was looking for. And he kind of shifted to his legacy and the succession.” — U.S. Special Envoy Martin Indyk explaining President Abbas' recent attitude toward the talks (Thursday 5/8)
- “The settlement movement on the other hand may well drive Israel into an irreversible binational reality. If you care about Israel's future ... you should understand that rampant settlement activity – especially in the midst of negotiations – doesn't just undermine Palestinian trust in the purpose of the negotiations; it can undermine Israel's Jewish future. If this continues, it could mortally wound the idea of Israel as a Jewish state – and that would be a tragedy of historic proportions.” — U.S. Special Envoy Martin Indyk emphasizing the obstacle presented by Israeli settlements in the West Bank (Thursday 5/8)

- “Ambassador Rice underscored that while we have come to a pause in the parties’ talks, the United States believes the only way to achieve lasting peace is through direct negotiations that lead to two viable, independent states living side-by-side in peace and security...She reiterated U.S. policy that any Palestinian government must unambiguously and explicitly commit to nonviolence, recognition of the State of Israel, and acceptance of previous agreements and obligations between the parties.” — White House Press Release addressing the meeting between Susan Rice and Mahmoud Abbas (Thursday 5/8)
- “One observation I was surprised to hear from Obama administration officials these past couple of days concerns Netanyahu’s own willingness to continue down the Kerry-designed negotiations path. Despite his reputation, they said, they’re convinced Netanyahu is gripped by a sense that time is not on Israel’s side. If Israel does not find a way to end the occupation of most of the West Bank, its democracy will be imperiled. This understanding is one not shared by some members of Netanyahu’s own governing coalition, and American officials have privately expressed sympathy for his political predicament.” — Jeffrey Goldberg on the fallout of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations (Thursday 5/8)

[The State of Two States - Week of May 11](#)

This week, Israeli news talk shifted away from international affairs to focus on more domestic affairs. In the forefront of the news earlier in the week was former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert’s trial, where he was sentenced to six years in prison for corruption. Security issues also stirred trouble as protests broke out in Israel because of the murder of a young girl in Afula. On Thursday, protests connected to the Palestinian commemoration of Nakba Day left two Palestinians dead and two Israeli journalists injured after being attacked by a Palestinian mob and rescued by Palestinian security. Prime Minister Netanyahu primarily focused his week on the diplomatic affairs between Israel and Asian countries as he spoke with India’s President-elect and Japanese politicians to strengthen ties. Politicians on the American and Israeli sides also continued to evaluate the peace talks and the problems all parties faced when the peace negotiations collapsed. At the end of the week, U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel met with Israeli leaders to reaffirm the United States’ support of Israel. Also on Thursday, Minister of Justice Tzipi Livni met with Abbas for an unauthorized meeting in London.

- “I don’t think that we should give up the hope for peace. The format for peace is a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state of Israel. That is, they have a state for their people, for their self-determination, and we have a state for the Jewish people - where we’ve been for four thousand years.” — Benjamin Netanyahu discussing Israel’s politics with Japanese publication Mainichi Shimbun (Tuesday 5/13)
- “A two-state solution is unfortunately unlikely and not because of Israel. We’d make most of the sacrifices, but only because the Palestinians lack the national cohesion necessary to sustain a state structure. Our identity exists entirely independently of theirs; theirs cannot exist without denying ours. Accepting us would sever the one thread that - sometimes - holds them together.” — Former Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. Michael Oren corresponding via email with David Rothkopf, CEO of FP Group and publisher of Foreign Policy magazine (Wednesday 5/14)
- “We need to see a Palestinian state. We need to move on peace, which has been frozen for many years. There will be a real chance for peace in the region. We are ready to play any role that will achieve peace and security in the region.” — Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi, Egypt’s next head of state declaring Egypt’s support of continued peace negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians (Thursday 5/15) ...

7) Pope tackles rifts with Middle East “pilgrimage of prayer” Ma’an News Agency, May 12, 2014

VATICAN CITY (AFP) -- Pope Francis makes his first trip to the Middle East this month accompanied by Jewish and Muslim intellectuals to push for inter-religious dialogue amid stalled peace talks between Israelis and the Palestinians. The head of the world’s 1.2 billion Catholics, who has garnered a reputation as a reformer as well as defender of the downtrodden since his election last year, has referred to his journey as a “pilgrimage of prayer.”

Francis’s trip from Amman to Bethlehem and Jerusalem from May 24 to 26 will aim to reach beyond the walls of Catholicism and mark the 50th anniversary of a historic rapprochement between the Catholic and Orthodox worlds. In an unprecedented move, Francis will be accompanied throughout by Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Islamic studies professor Omar Abboud -- old friends of the Argentine pope from when he was the archbishop of Buenos Aires.

“Every gesture and word will be scrupulously analyzed,” Andrea Torielli, a biographer of the pontiff, wrote on the Italian website Vatican Insider. “This is precisely why the pilgrimage of a pope who named himself after the saint of peace and has chosen two representatives of the Jewish and Muslim faiths as travel companions, can help renew dialogue,” he said.

Security for the crowd-loving pope will be high after a series of hate crimes against the Catholic Church and Muslims in Israel, and the Vatican hopes the visit will draw attention to the plight of the region’s Christians.

On his first day, Francis will pray on the banks of the River Jordan for the victims of the Syrian conflict and meet some of the families among the 600,000 refugees who have sought shelter in Jordan since the war broke out. He will also meet with Jordan’s King Abdullah II.

In Israel, the pope is expected to launch a fresh call for reconciliation with the Palestinians after the collapse this month of the latest efforts to broker peace and the apparent entrenchment of both sides. He will squeeze diplomatic meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Mahmoud Abbas into his tight schedule, which will see him give 15 speeches during 20 stops around the area.

The world’s first Latin American pope will travel to Bethlehem, the site revered as Jesus’ birthplace in Palestine, before meeting children from the Aida, Azza, and Dheisheh refugee camps. He will visit Jerusalem, claimed by both Israelis and Palestinians as their capital, and any reference he makes to the West Bank wall of separation, Palestinian prisoners, or Israeli settlements will be closely watched.

Francis will also stop to pray at the sacred Jewish Wailing Wall, before visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial site on the western slope of Mount Herzl.

He will meet the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem -- the Muslim cleric in charge of Jerusalem’s Islamic holy sites -- at the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is considered Islam’s third holiest site but is also revered by Christians and Jews. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) Palestinians demand action against “wave of hatred” in Israel

Charlie Hoyle, Ma’an News Agency, May 13, 2014

BETHLEHEM (Ma’an) -- A recent wave of hate crimes targeting Palestinians and church property in Israel has prompted community leaders to express outrage at the culture of impunity and growing extremism which allow attacks to go unpunished. On Friday, vandals spray-painted anti-Christian graffiti on a Jerusalem church, one of at least a dozen attacks in the past two months by Jewish extremists who have also set fire to mosques, slashed tires of Palestinian cars, and vandalized church property and religious cemeteries.

The pope’s visit to the Holy Land on May 25 has increased attention surrounding the incidents, but Palestinian religious and community leaders say hate crimes targeting Palestinians have always existed, and are in some cases encouraged by Israeli government policy. “The (Israeli) government is not doing enough; with all these attacks we didn’t see any arrests. We fear there is a political cover-up from parties in Israel who don’t want the incidents to be exploited,” Rev. Jamal Khader, spokesman for the pope’s visit to Palestine, told Ma’an.

Khader says that there is most likely no link between the increase in attacks and the pope’s visit, but he worries that impunity for incidences of vandalism will eventually lead to more serious crimes against Palestinians. “If they create this wave of hatred the next move will be attacking people. We should not wait until they translate into physical attacks against clergy and local Christians.”

Bernard Sabella, an expert on Palestinian Christian history, says that historically, attacks on Christian institutions and clergy by extremist Jewish groups are not new, but still leave a “sour taste” for Palestinians. “There are elements within the Israeli political structure that don’t want to pursue the persecution of these people, or they don’t think it is a high priority,” Sabella told Ma’an. “Unfortunately when these attacks take place we don’t see the Israeli prime minister and other high officials taking action by visiting the sites of such attacks.”

Sabella says that some extremist religious Jews see attacks against Christian institutions as a “mitzvah,” or commandment, while others are deliberately responding to the pope’s upcoming visit by demonstrating opposition to the presence of Christians in Israel. “That leaves a really sour taste in our mouths and we feel that this is not fair. This is hitting the Christian community and telling the local Christians that they are not welcome.”

Policy of expulsion: On Sunday, Latin Patriarch Fuad Twal condemned the wave of attacks and questioned the Israeli government’s commitment to bringing the perpetrators to justice. “Given that the vandals are largely unprosecuted, one must question the priority of the government to get to the bottom of the problem,” he said.

To Hind Khoury, deputy chair of the board of Sabeel, an ecumenical center in Jerusalem for Palestinian Liberation Theology, hate attacks are part of a wider context of policies designed to put pressure on Palestinian communities in both Israel and the occupied West Bank. “There is an accepted policy whereby a ruling power is allowed to pursue this policy of expulsion. This impunity has caused Israelis, who are veering more and more to the right, to become fundamentalists and to believe in their exclusive right to the land,” she told Ma’an. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Israeli writer calls anti-Palestinian vandals “Hebrew neo-Nazis”

Ma’an News Agency, May 12, 2014

JERUSALEM (AFP) -- Israel’s best known writer, Amos Oz, says that Israelis behind a wave of hate crimes against Muslims and Christians are “Hebrew neo-Nazis,” Ha’aretz newspaper reported on its website Saturday. It quoted the award-winning author as saying terms such as “price tag,” widely used to describe attacks on Palestinians and others by Jewish extremists, are sanitized euphemisms.

They are “sweet names for a monster that needs to be called what it is: Hebrew neo-Nazi groups,” Ha’aretz quoted Oz as telling guests Friday at an event marking his 75th birthday. He said there was a difference between perpetrators of such events in Israel and elsewhere. “Our neo-Nazi groups enjoy the support of numerous nationalist or even racist legislators, as well as rabbis who give them what is in my view pseudo-religious justification,” Ha’aretz quoted him as saying.

Earlier Friday, vandals spray-painted anti-Christian graffiti on a Jerusalem church, despite police stepping up security around religious sites ahead of a visit by Pope Francis later this month. “Price tag ... King David for the Jews ... Jesus is garbage” was written in Hebrew on the wall of St George’s Romanian Orthodox church near an ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood.

Police also said “Death to Arabs” was found written on a house in the Old City in East Jerusalem, and swastikas were scrawled on the wall of a west Jerusalem apartment.

After Hebrew graffiti reading “Death to Arabs and Christians and to everyone who hates Israel” was daubed on its Notre Dame complex in Jerusalem on Monday, the Roman Catholic church demanded Israeli action.

“The bishops are very concerned about the lack of security and lack of responsiveness from the political sector, and fear an escalation of violence,” the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem said. The attacks on Christian property come amid a rise in anti-Arab property crimes. Israeli ministers held an emergency meeting Wednesday, pledging to enforce harsh measures against perpetrators.

Although police have made scores of arrests, there have been nearly no successful prosecutions for such attacks, and the government has come up under mounting pressure to authorize the Shin Bet internal security agency to step in.

The Pope’s visit to the region is scheduled to begin in Jordan on May 24.

10) In Israel, Jewish terror exists

Ha'aretz editorial, May 11, 2014

Hate crimes by Jews against Arabs have become routine in Israel — not only in the West Bank, where they are an integral part of the occupation and settlement policy. Last month 16 incidents targeting Arabs were recorded in the West Bank and Israel, compared with 17 in the first three months of the year and 48 in all of 2013. But these attacks, euphemistically called “price-tag incidents,” are still being treated as unrelated acts of violence by a small number of “wild weeds.”

In July, under pressure from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the inner cabinet refrained from defining the perpetrators of price-tag incidents as members of a terror organization, settling for the lesser offense of “unauthorized assembly.” Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch are now reexamining that decision.

From the legal perspective, the difference between the two definitions is insignificant; the police can arrest, question and prosecute the perpetrators under either category. The significance is the message the government sends to the public and the degree of its determination to stop crime motivated by bigotry and racism.

The first step in stamping out these crimes is to recognize the existence of Jewish terror, which is not different from other forms of terror and must be treated as such. Even if the perpetrators of hate crimes have no formal organization, they receive support from both the public and spiritual leaders. They openly conduct a dialogue of terror over the Internet and are nurtured by a racist and ultranationalist ideology that preaches violence.

Their actions have implications for national security, for people’s sense of personal security and Israel’s ability to claim that it protects the security of ethnic and religious minorities. Amid the rising frequency of these incidents, the question is when, not if, the perpetrators will take up arms and cause a disaster.

The battle against Jewish terrorists goes beyond enforcement and punishment. It’s a battle for the consciousness of the Israeli public, much of which views these terrorists as God’s messengers on a mission to carry out divine commandments. Netanyahu has a hand in shaping this attitude — in his efforts to increase Israel’s Jewish identity at the expense of other communities.

In this he has the support of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who views the country’s Arab minority as excess weight that should be transferred to a future Palestinian state. This ultranationalist spirit is the foundation of the price-tag acts. The prime minister is responsible for changing it.

11) [Crying "apartheid" is sign of a desperate left](#)

Zvi Bar'el, Ha'aretz, May 7, 2014

"When I can't travel on the roads the settlers travel, what is this if not apartheid?" chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat half-asked, half-asserted in an interview with television's Channel 10. Those separate roads may be one of the most tangible symbols of the regime of separation between settlers and Palestinians, along with the warped legal system Israel uses to run the territories, which has one law for settlers and another for Palestinians, and the verdicts that encourage this separation whenever they ratify land thefts by either settlers or the state.

Indeed, "apartheid" has become an easy-to-absorb, symbolic linguistic coinage that ostensibly encapsulates all the evil and brutality of the occupation. But for all the harsh associations the term evokes, apartheid is merely a whitewashed term that seeks to hide an even harsher reality – the occupation. For according to those who cling to the term "apartheid" to describe the situation in the territories, if Israel had only given the Palestinians equal rights and let them travel on the wide roads it paved for the settlers, and if the occupation's subjects could only have come and gone as they pleased, as if they were settlers, the situation would have been terrific. The occupation would have disappeared, and the Palestinians' national aspirations would have had no justification.

Occupation by its nature creates deep discrimination and enormous disparities between the rights of the occupier and the occupied. These don't relate only to the way the occupation shapes daily life, or to the restrictions it places on freedom of movement, freedom of expression and the legal remedies to which the occupied are entitled. Occupation thwarts or delays the realization of national aspirations for independence and sovereignty, but it doesn't conceal them. Apartheid, in contrast, destroys the basis of equality between citizens of the same state.

The British occupations of Egypt and India, the French occupation of Algeria and the American occupation of Iraq could have been considered apartheid because of the differences in rights accorded to the occupier and the occupied. Yet nobody ever defined these regimes as apartheid. The reason for this was the understanding that occupation is not a natural or perpetual situation, even if it lasts for decades. Therefore, it must comply with the conditions set down in the international conventions that regulate situations of occupation.

At the heart of this understanding lies recognition of the fact that the occupied population isn't an integral part of the occupying country. They have their own national identity and existence, and they have no intention of dissolving it into the identity and existence of the occupying state. All this differs from apartheid in South Africa, where the state's white citizens imposed a formal, multilayered regime of separation on the black citizens who constituted the majority.

And this is why the left is mistaken – or more accurately, confused – when it adopts apartheid as a greater danger than the occupation itself. It's as if it were saying, "Give us an enlightened occupation, and we could live with it just fine." This trend also includes another interesting development, which holds that if we can't end the occupation, we'll create a binational state in which the government will be forced to grant the Palestinians equal political and civil rights. This is paternalism. Did anyone ask the Palestinians if they want a binational state? Have they already given up their aspirations to become a free people in their own land?

The left's use of the term "apartheid" is nothing more than a cry of despair and frustration over its inability to change the government's policy – a kind of cry for help to the world to save us from ourselves, so we won't become like South Africa. For if the world helped destroy one apartheid regime, maybe it would be possible to recruit it for the same mission once again, this time for us, the bold liberals, who for years now haven't even gone out to demonstrate against the occupation.

Anyone who nevertheless wants to find apartheid can find it in the Jewish Israeli attitude toward the state's Arab citizens – but not in the territories. In the territories, there's an occupation. And no more attention-getting label, like apartheid, can conceal its ugliness.

12) Why do Israeli soldiers bully Palestinians?

Amira Hass, Ha'aretz, May 12, 2014

Why did his commanders send a soldier with a record of violence to bully Palestinians in Hebron? The IDF Spokesperson's Unit chose to respond to Ha'aretz's question with "no comment." Perhaps that's because the right answer is: Violence and bullying are what the Israel Defense Forces' presence in Hebron and the West Bank is really all about. And another right answer: The IDF's first mission in the West Bank is to ensure the continuation of the settlement enterprise, which means expelling the Palestinians from their land. The violence of the army and the settlers serves this mission. The proof? The hundreds of buildings in Hebron's Old City that have been emptied of their owners and tenants.

The violent and bullying behavior of David Adamov — the soldier who was videotaped aiming his rifle at a Palestinian teen, setting off a storm in the media, especially the social media — was not exceptional. What was exceptional was that the Israeli public initially believed he was sent to military prison because of his violence toward Palestinians.

By what authority did Adamov and his fellow soldiers detain several Palestinians for two hours at a military checkpoint whose entire purpose is to ensure that members of the Chosen People can march proudly down Shuhada Street and that Palestinians are kept away? This incident predated that of the now-famous video. To this question, too, the IDF Spokesperson declined to respond. In any event, soldiers (and employees of civilian contractors) detain Palestinians freely at every checkpoint and roadblock. The robbery of the Palestinians' time by the Israeli authorities — at every level, both military and civilian — is an integral part of the Israeli domination regime.

Why do soldiers bark obscenities at Palestinians? I didn't ask the IDF Spokesperson this question. Since I first began covering the occupation, nearly a quarter-century ago, I have learned that soldiers must do so in order to overcome the cognitive dissonance in which they operate. After all, 18 and 20-year-olds can think and feel, in short, be responsible for their actions — and here I part ways with the military experts, obviously.

Clearly, 18- and 20-year-olds know the Palestinians are human beings just like us. The trash talk and humiliation builds up the dehumanization, until the soldiers are convinced that the Palestinian is different. Commanders don't want to stop this, because only then can the soldiers fully carry out their mission: to prevent the Palestinian from walking down the street where he lives, to prevent him from living on the street where he and his parents were born, to destroy the livelihoods of many thousands of people. Humiliation of the Palestinians by every level of the civilian and military apparatus is an inseparable part of building a nation of overlords.

The IDF Spokesperson's Unit also chose not to respond to questions concerning the arrest of Saddam Abu Sneinah, the youth from the video who was holding prayer beads, and who Adamov said was holding brass knuckles and supposedly threatening him, the poor guy. Threatened? In a settler area, in front of a checkpoint manned by armed soldiers? Next to a military camp? Chief of Staff Benny Gantz — With soldiers who are so weak, insecure and delusional, you should be very worried. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

13) United Palestinian government may provide new opportunities for peace **Jimmy Carter, Washington Post, May 12, 2014**

Although intensive Middle East peace efforts by Secretary of State John F. Kerry have not produced an agreement, they have clarified the issues and still can produce significant dividends. His team of negotiators now is much more familiar with the complex disputes and obstacles to be overcome, as are the Israelis and Palestinians who have participated in the discussions.

It is obvious that both Israel and the Palestinians have a vital interest in a two-state solution, based on international law and UN resolutions approved by participating nations. President Obama has discussed some of these key factors, calling for no more settlements in the occupied territories and an adherence to the pre-1967 borders (with some mutually agreed changes). Previous U.S. presidents have made other substantive proposals on sensitive questions involving mutual security, East Jerusalem and the right of return of Palestinians.

Adhering to these commonly understood international assumptions, Kerry could issue a summary of his conclusions, as a “framework for peace.” It would be helpful to the general public, within the Holy Land and in other nations, and to anyone who makes future efforts for a comprehensive peace.

With the suspension of U.S.-sponsored peace talks, dangerous unilateral steps are likely to continue. During the previous nine months of negotiation, 14,000 new Israeli settlement units were approved, more than 3,000 Palestinians were arrested and 50 were killed, provoking troubling examples of Palestinian retaliation, including the deaths of three Israelis.

The Palestinians’ plans for the coming months are relatively clear: to form a new unity government and expand involvement in the United Nations. Although condemned by some, the decision by the leaders of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas to reconcile their differences and move toward elections can be a positive development. In the past, similar efforts have been abandoned because of strong opposition from Israel and the United States, but the resolve to succeed is now much stronger among leaders in the West Bank and Gaza. This reconciliation of Palestinian factions and formation of a national unity government is necessary because it would be impossible to implement any peace agreement between Israel and just one portion of the Palestinians.

In order for a united Palestinian Authority to remain viable with recognition of the international community, it will be necessary for all participants to accept the principle of peaceful resolution of differences and to recognize the right of Israel to exist within its pre-1967 borders as modified by mutual agreement.

The decision by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to have Palestine become more deeply involved in the United Nations can also be beneficial. The first 15 treaties the Palestinians decided to accept on April 1 were carefully chosen, being commitments to comply with the four Geneva Conventions of 1949, later protocols of 1977 regarding the laws of war and others related to discrimination against women and the rights of children. These are all idealistic and peaceful in nature and should cause no concern in Israel or Washington. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

14) Apartheid is 66 years old

Khaled Titi, Ma'an News Agency, May 13, 2014

“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,” U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said in an effort to minimize the damage caused by his comments leaked from a closed forum, that Israel could become an apartheid state.

So why is apartheid so irritating in the Israeli context? First of all, because Israel, which has just celebrated 66 years of independence, is the only country in the world which can still be mentioned in the apartheid context in the 21st century.

Secondly, the connotation of the term “apartheid” focuses on a comparison which will lead to a complete overlap between the reality of life in Israel and the reality of life in South Africa in the 20th century – a regime/policy of racial segregation.

It's true that there isn't a complete overlap between Israel today and South Africa of those days, but if we examine the reality of life in Israel in accordance with the racial segregation theory, apartheid is already here, between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, and no green or purple line can blur it, and neither can artificial definitions of territories and populations.

There are two peoples here, and one people controls the other people. It controls its freedom of movement, its education, its social and economic development, where it lives and where it doesn't, what it will do for a living and where. The Jews control the Palestinians and decide what is right and what is wrong for them. There is no other description of the reality of our life here apart from racial segregation.

The refusal to accept this argument stems from the disregard towards the slew of examples on the ground which prove the Jewish control over the Palestinians' lives.

If there is no apartheid here, what should we call a situation in which the civil law applies to the settlers and the military law applies to the Palestinians? What is the political meaning of stripping Palestinians of their land, restricting them with a concrete fence and building multi-story buildings on that land for the Jews? And what is the explanation for the humiliation of a laborer from Hebron at Israeli checkpoints?

The Israeli control alongside the loss of any chance for the existence of a sovereign Palestinian state on the ground will officially turn into apartheid. No other name will change the content. The early stage of this process will be a bi-national state, which is the final institutionalization of the Jewish state as a state of racial segregation.

Don't get me wrong. The exclusivity of the Jewish control, which will soon enjoy a legal status, is not only relevant to the occupied Palestinians. The “separate development” theory is alive and kicking within the State of Israel too.

The Palestinian citizens of Israel are second-class citizens. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

15) Israel can't erase the Nakba from history

Saeb Erekat, Ha'aretz, May 15, 2014

Today (May 15) is the anniversary of what we Palestinians refer to as the Nakba, our catastrophe – although a single word cannot begin to explain it, and a single day cannot begin to commemorate it. More than ever before, Israel needs come to terms with the horrors it has caused since 1948, by ending its subjugation of millions rather than intensifying its denial and trying to legitimize its persecution. Peace can only come through justice and reconciliation.

This day, in 1948, marks the forced exile of over 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and lands. Some were subjected to brutal massacres, many fled for fear of their lives. A few managed to stay in what would become Israel. All suffered. Sixty-six years later, all continue to suffer. The Nakba is a story of fear and intimidation, of denial and persecution, a cruel, unending reality.

Today in occupied East Jerusalem, Palestinian families are evicted from their homes due to claims that their property belonged to Jews before 1948, while being forbidden from returning to their pre-1948 homes in West Jerusalem.

In Gaza – one of the most densely populated areas in the world – 1.2 million refugees overlook the open areas of what is now southern Israel. In my own home town, Jericho, there are two refugee camps where thousands continue to live in miserable conditions. In 2014, Palestinian children died of starvation at the Yarmouk refugee camp in Syria.

Israel, which claims to be a democracy for all its citizens, continues to ban the villagers of Iqrit and Kufr Birem, two Christian villages in the Galilee, from returning to their lands, despite a ruling from the Israeli High Court of Justice on the matter.

This is not the only example of persecution within Israel. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's promotion of the "nationality bill," determining Israel as the Jewish nation-state, is one more in a long line of discriminatory laws against a fifth of Israel's own population, the original inhabitants of the land. A list of laws which make it not only acceptable, but legally admissible, to discriminate against Israel's own citizens for belonging to a different ethnic-religious group.

Meanwhile, in the land which Israel has illegally occupied since 1967, settlers and soldiers use similar methods of intimidation and fear to force Palestinians from their homes.

The reality in the West Bank is no less than apartheid, and, in Gaza, out and out siege. Both within occupied Palestine and further afield, those who have been waiting 66 years, with their keys in hand, continue to wait.

Palestine has recognized Israel's right to exist since 1988. We are not asking for Hebrew not to be an official language or Jewish holidays not to be official holidays. The character of Israel is not for us to define.

But we will not allow any Palestinian to be portrayed as the immigrant or intruder in his or her own land. We were here in 1948: We were here for centuries before that ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

16) Ten facts about the Nakba

Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU), May 14 2014

Sixty years ago, approximately 750,000 Palestinians lost their homes and belongings, their farms and businesses, their towns and cities. Jewish militias seeking to create a state with a Jewish majority in Palestine, and later, the Israeli army, drove them out. Israel rapidly moved Jews into the newly-empty Palestinian homes. Nakba means “catastrophe” in Arabic, and Palestinians refer to the destruction of their society and the takeover of their homeland as an-Nakba, “The Catastrophe.”

1. **The Nakba is a root cause of the Israeli/Palestinian problem:** It is marked on May 15, the day after Israel declared its independence in 1948.
2. **This traumatic event created the Palestinian refugee crisis:** By the end of 1948, two-thirds of the Palestinian population was exiled. It is estimated that more than 50 percent were driven out under direct military assault. Others fled as news spread of massacres committed by Jewish militias in Palestinian villages like Deir Yassin and Tantura.
3. **Jewish leaders saw “transfer” as an important step in the establishment of Israel:** Jewish leaders spoke openly of the need to use military clashes to expel as many Palestinians as possible before other Arab countries could come to their defense. ... Israel’s first Prime Minister, David Ben Gurion, said, “We must use terror, assassination, intimidation, land confiscation, and the cutting of all social services to rid the Galilee of its Arab population.”
4. **Hundreds of Palestinian villages and towns were destroyed:** Jewish forces depopulated more than 450 Palestinian towns and villages, most of which were demolished.
5. **Palestinian property and belongings were simply taken:** The newly-established Israeli government confiscated refugee land and properties without respect to Palestinian rights or desires to return to their homes.
6. **Some Palestinians stayed in what became Israel:** While most Palestinians were driven out, some remained in what became Israel. Although citizens of the new state, they were subject to Israeli military rule until 1966. Today, Palestinian citizens of Israel comprise nearly 20 percent of Israel’s population. They have the right to vote and run for office, but more than 20 Israeli laws explicitly privilege Jews over non-Jews. Nearly one-quarter of Israel’s Palestinians are “internally displaced” persons, unable to return to the homes and lands that were taken from them.
7. **There are still millions of Palestinian refugees dispersed around the world:** Today, there are 4.4 million Palestinian refugees registered as such with the United Nations, and at least another estimated one million who are not so registered. Thus a majority of the Palestinian people, around 10 million persons, are refugees.
8. **Refugees have internationally-recognized rights:** All refugees enjoy internationally-recognized rights to return to areas from which they have fled or were forced out, to receive compensation for damages, and to either regain their properties or receive compensation and support for voluntary resettlement. This right was affirmed for the Palestinians by UN Resolution 194 of 1948. Israel, however, does not allow Palestinian refugees to return, although a Jew from anywhere in the world can settle in Israel.
9. **Justly resolving refugee rights is essential to Middle East peace:** An overwhelming majority of Palestinians believes that refugee rights must be fulfilled for peace between Palestinians and Israelis to endure. And according to an August 2007 poll by the Jerusalem Media and Communications Center, nearly 70 percent believe that refugees should be allowed to return to “their original land.”
10. **The Nakba has implications for Americans:** Israel’s ongoing denial of Palestinian rights - and unconditional U.S. financial and diplomatic support for Israel - fuels anti-American sentiment abroad. A 2002 Zogby poll, conducted in eight Arab countries showed that “the negative perception of the United States is based on American policies, not a dislike of the West.” The same poll showed that “the Palestinian issue was listed by many Arabs among the political issues that affect them most personally.” Resolution of the Palestinian refugee issue would undoubtedly improve America’s international image, by proving that the U.S. government supports the consistent application of international law.