

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
June 5, 2014



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This week's Middle East Notes focus on Pope Francis' visit to Jordan, Palestine and Israel, U.S. responsibility for oppression of Palestinians, "occu-partheid," struggle for survival in East Jerusalem, continued settlement building as an obstacle to peace, the June 8, 1967 attack on the USS Liberty, the unity government of Fatah and Hamas, and other issues.

- The May 30 Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin gives further comment on Pope Francis's visit to Palestine and Israel and links to other articles of interest pertaining to the occupation and peace.
- Gabe Huck writes that U.S. Americans have a responsibility to know the story of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict: "We Americans have had and still have our hands, arms, money and weight on the side continuing the oppression."
- Bradley Burston in Ha'aretz believes that whether what Israel is doing is apartheid or occupation, the Netanyahu government actually benefits from the fact that the debate over the designation apartheid often focuses on terminology, and not on concrete steps to fight it.
- The State of Two States for the weeks of May 18 and May 25.
- Noam Sheizaf +972 notes that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted of his settlement building achievements in a recent meeting with young Likud supporters.
- Emily L. Hauser in Ha'aretz writes that the 21st century municipality of Jerusalem is a political construct that is an affront to the Jerusalem to which Jewish hearts have turned for millennia.
- Uri Avery writes that the use of "both" when referring to Israel and the Palestinians is based on a lie. When one says that "both" did not behave as expected, that "both" did not make the "necessary hard decisions" that "both" should stew in their own juice, one consciously or unconsciously assumes that they are equal. Nothing is further from the truth.
- Charlie Hoyle writes in Ma'an News that as thousands of Israelis marched through East Jerusalem on recently to celebrate its capture in 1967, the Palestinian community continues its struggle to survive in a city marked by systematic political, economic, and social divides.
- Daoud Kuttab in Ma'an News states that at all levels, the visit of Pope Francis to Jordan and Palestine was a huge success. For about 26 hours everything was implemented as planned. And the few unplanned moments worked out quite well, leaving indelible memories and images.
- A Ha'aretz editorial notes that South Africa's last president under white rule has suggested that Israel risks heading toward apartheid if it does not reach a peace deal with the Palestinians and work towards a two state solution.
- Ori Nir in Ha'aretz warns that while Israeli politicians insult the world to score points with right-wing voters at home, they are alienating Israel's most important, loyal allies: progressive U.S. Jews.
- If Americans Knew remembers that on June 8, 1967, 34 U.S. servicemen were killed and 174 were wounded during an Israeli attack on the USS Liberty.
- Farid Jubran in an Ynetnews op-ed notes that the Pope's visit was an opportunity to highlight distress and discrimination suffered by Christian community in State of Israel.
- Gershon Baskin in the Jerusalem Post writes that Israel at present does not have a prime minister who will make peace with the Palestinians; if Netanyahu continues to walk down the dangerous path of going against the entire world, as he is doing today, he will not be in power for much longer.
- A Ha'aretz editorial notes that if Israel had recognized the Palestinian government that was elected in 2006 or cooperated with the Palestinian unity government, all would have been spared numerous casualties on both sides. Israel cannot repeat the same mistake again.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace, May 30, 2014

Pope Francis boosts morale in Bethlehem: In the course of 55 hours, Pope Francis pulled off a whirlwind tour of the Holy Land that deftly managed to acknowledge both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives while emphasizing the need for peace in the region.

After spending a day in Jordan, Pope Francis became the first pontiff to travel directly to the West Bank, highlighting the Vatican's support for Palestinian 2012 UN recognition. He flew straight to Bethlehem, met with President Mahmoud Abbas and then rode through the city in the "popemobile," that was open to allow him to get closer to worshippers. For many, the most powerful moment of Pope Francis' trip to the Holy Land came en route to Manger Square. In an unscheduled stop, the pontiff got out of his vehicle to pray for several minutes at the separation wall. A Vatican spokesman said Pope Francis' prayer at the wall was a "personal decision" and "this wall is a sign of division, that something is not functioning right...[the prayer] signifies for me his desire for peace, for a world without walls."

Next, he held mass in Manger Square, which was packed with 10,000 people. There, he extended an invitation to President Shimon Peres and President Mahmoud Abbas to join him for a summit at the Vatican. He said, "Here, at the birthplace of the Prince of Peace, I wish to invite you to join me in heartfelt prayer to God for the gift of peace. I offer my home in the Vatican as a place for this encounter of prayer," he said. They both quickly announced they would be willing to go and the meeting is scheduled for June 8.

For lunch, he met with families that represent many of the concerns problems Palestinian Christians face today, including the occupation, land confiscation, and the blockade of Gaza. One family spoke to him about Israeli efforts to seize his land for the security barrier in the Cremisan Valley. He then made his way to Deheishe refugee camp where he told a group of children to never "abandon hope, and always look forward. You don't solve violence with violence. Peace is achieved with hard work and dignity."

According to Palestinian journalist Daoud Kuttab, the trip was a "resounding success" as it boosted the morale of the Palestinian Christians. He wrote, "high-level visits such as that by the Pope go a long way towards strengthening the resolve of Arab Christians to stay put in the land where Jesus was born and raised."

Instead of driving six miles to Jerusalem, Pope Francis took a helicopter to Tel Aviv for a welcoming ceremony with President Shimon Peres and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He then traveled to Jerusalem. He then met with the head of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Bartholomew I, to commemorate 50 years since the leaders of the churches met for the first time in 500 years. They made a joint appearance at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and later signed an agreement that "pledged to continue on the path towards unity between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches."

On Monday he visited the Dome of the Rock and met with the grand mufti of Jerusalem. He said, "May no one abuse the name of God through violence, may we work together for justice and peace." The next stop was the Western Wall, where he left a note with the Lord's Prayer in the stones. At the suggestion of Netanyahu, Francis made another unscheduled stop at the memorial to Israeli terror victims. Israeli officials had expressed disappointment over the pope's stop at the separation barrier the day before. Later in the day he went to Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust Museum, and laid a wreath on the grave of Theodore Herzl, the father of political Zionism. ...

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

2) Why no time for Palestine?

Gabe Huck, Celebration, July 2014

For decades I had no time for Palestine. I paid attention, I knew the story roughly, but I didn't become involved. This wasn't Vietnam or nuclear weapons or poisoning the oceans. It wasn't U.S. racism or Cambodian genocide. And at times it even seemed that there were two sides to the story. Or, if not two sides, at least the hard question: What can we ever do now? If we who live in the U.S. can't give it all back to the people from whom it was stolen, how can we demand that Israelis do this? What place on earth hasn't seen its inhabitants defeated and their land rebranded?

But I was troubled. Why did people I greatly respected give this Palestinian struggle so much of their attention? Didn't they see that, like so many other situations, the Palestinians had to start living in present reality and put all that anger to work for good? What is the point of handing down a hopeless cause from one generation to the next?

So I didn't trouble myself with learning more of the Palestinian story. Also, I was sometimes engaged in understanding Judaism and its rituals and in Jewish/Catholic dialogue. The latter did show me that many Jews were, at great cost sometimes, engaged in opposing the making and maintaining of a specifically Jewish state. But it also showed me that Zionism often ran strong even in Jewish friends who had been and continued to be active on the right side, to my thinking, of nearly every other economic and political and moral question.

Until recent years, I was missing what is now compelling. The painful reason why we Americans have a responsibility to know the story and take active stands on the issue of Palestine is this: We have had and still have our hands, arms, money and weight on the side continuing the oppression. For whatever reason – guilt, need for a Middle Eastern friend, winning elections at home – as a nation we have distorted the history and ignored the hard demands of justice, all the time flattering ourselves as if we could be unbiased mediators and peacemakers. Manipulated or not, we have played a determining role in all that's happened since the state of Israel was created by the UN in 1948. We've had only a few moments when truth seemed to butt in: e.g., Dwight Eisenhower in 1956 telling England to stop the Israeli-British-French invasion of Egyptian territory or we'd cut off their allowance. That ended it.

That was a rare moment. And to make sure it didn't happen again, pro-Israeli forces built up, with no subtlety whatsoever, a lobby so strong that whenever they wish, they can produce two-thirds or better of our 535 elected members of Congress to vote for anything they're told to vote for regarding Israel. And to do so on 24 hours' notice.

In part this power, beyond that of any other nation in the world in influencing U.S. policy and budget and media, comes not only from Israel's lobbies in the U.S., but from their alliance with the leadership of certain fundamentalist Christian organizations. The latter take as gospel some not-so-old but very unscriptural ideas about Jesus coming back only when the Jews are gathered again in the land around Jerusalem. When that happens, so their story goes, the longed for end of the human exile is in sight. God will then eternally punish most all of us excepting those who were waiting (included among those to be punished, of course, are all Jews who have not converted to Christianity). Jerry Falwell's often-quoted statement sums up the Christian side of the alliance: "To stand against Israel is to stand against God. We believe that history and scripture prove that God deals with nations in relation to how they deal with Israel."

[U.S. monetary aid] to Israel ... is now at \$3.5 billion each year. ... On a per capita basis, Israel, already richer than 80 percent of the nations, far outranks all other recipients of aid. ... The U.S. shields Israel from any efforts of the UN Security Council to hold Israel accountable for its occupation of [Palestine] ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) Occu-Partheid: By any name, it's ruining Israel. Can it be reversed?

Bradley Burston, Ha'aretz, May 20, 2014

Let me introduce myself. I know next to nothing about apartheid. I don't know how it felt to be its victim, how the system worked in practice, the extent to which boycotts brought it down. I can bring little of value to the intense current debate over apartheid, whether or not the word applies to Israel's relationship to the Palestinians, or may apply soon, or never will.

I do, however, know something about occupation. And not only because I spent so much of my life in an IDF uniform, occupying. Southern Lebanon, northern Sinai, Hebron to Abu Dis, Gaza to the Golan - if Israel's captured it, I've occupied it.

I understand why it is so important for some people to prove that Israel is an apartheid state, and why others recoil from the word. Apartheid is an obscenity. An ugly, malignant lesion of a word. A time bomb. Apartheid is an internationally recognized synonym for politically rooted crimes against humanity, for maliciously oppressive segregation of such magnitude that the nation which practices it, begs to be shunned as a pariah, a leper state, a moral menace, unworthy to exist.

By contrast, just as we have learned to, for lack of a better term, live with occupation, we have learned over time to live with the word. The very fact that "occupation" tends to connote something temporary, helps ease the processes through which it is fast becoming not only permanent, but seemingly irreversible.

We've learned to live with the idea that occupation exists solely for the sake of the settlement enterprise – and with the fact that both occupation and settlement blacken Israel's name as nothing else. Settlement and occupation are the essential reasons that Israel stands accused of apartheid. They are the fuel of boycott. They are our curse.

Without minimizing the importance of the discussion of whether what Israel is doing is apartheid or occupation, I believe that the Netanyahu government - which is doing everything that it can to shore up the occupation and render it irreversible – actually benefits from the fact that the debate over the designation apartheid often focuses on – and dead-ends in - terminology, and not on concrete steps to fight it.

So here's the opinion of one veteran occupier who doesn't want any Israelis to spend any more of their lives occupying another people: It doesn't matter what you call it. Call it Occu-Partheid, if that will in any way shift the discussion from what to call it, to how to end it.

Why do I say this? Because I believe with everything I have seen, that the curse of settlement, the curse of Occupartheid, is no more permanent than any other. This is what we've all seen, pulling into Sinai and south Lebanon and Gaza, and later pulling out: Nothing in the Mideast is irreversible. Nothing in the Mideast is eternal. Nothing in the Mideast is indivisible.

It may be that Israelis have grown inured to, or literally walled-off from, the devastating effects of Occupartheid on millions of Palestinians. But they can feel the costs of Occupartheid to Israel's security – the drains on military training, morale, the diversion of tens of thousands of artillery, armor, infantry, even air force soldiers, to Occupartheid duty for which they are undertrained, underequipped and emotionally unprepared. They know, better by the year, the social welfare costs of diverting affordable housing and allotments for health care, education, and transportation to the settlements.

Every day, separation wall or no, Israelis still manage to see how Occupartheid is ruining this place that we love. The ways it drains our resources, saps our hopes, undermines democracy, and fosters violence, corruption, racism, and inequality. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) [The State of Two States - Week of May 18](#)

After settling down from the Maccabi Tel Aviv win in the Euroleague basketball championship, the news in Israel shifted focus to more political matters. Israeli politicians discussed various ways to handle the current and future state of the peace negotiations amidst outbreaks of violence following the deaths of two Palestinians on Nakba Day. On Sunday, Justice Minister Tzipi Livni unexpectedly met with PA President Mahmoud Abbas to discuss the PA's reconciliation with Hamas and where Abbas sees the future of the peace talks, which stirred up debate and speculation throughout the week. In other peace negotiation news, Jordan's King Abdullah II urged Secretary of State John Kerry to continue advocating for the talks between the Israelis and Palestinians on Tuesday night.

“The prime minister never trusted Martin Indyk based on his previous experience. Now it's clear why. In the 1990s Indyk was the mediator and already back then it was clear that he was not an honest broker. The prime minister never trusted him but agreed to Kerry's request that he mediate...In a reality in which the Palestinians unilaterally went to the UN and formed a government with a terror organization, Indyk dares to blame Israel. This just shows that he never was an appropriate mediator.” — Bayit HaYehudi MK Ayelet Shaked speaking in an interview with Israel's Army Radio (Sunday 5/18)

“It is regrettable that the Jewish Home, along with ministers from the right wing, continues to try and stick spokes in the wheels of the peace process because they fear possible progress. Neither the contents, nor the style and mainly not the moral preaching from the Jewish Home, which wears a mask of hypocrisy and deceives the public, are worth a serious response.” — Hatenua MK Amram Mitzna replying to Shaked's comments, as reported by Ma'ariv (Monday 5/19)

“I want to say a few words in my own voice. We in Hatnua will continue to act to promote the interests of the State of Israel out of a deep concern for our future. I wish to remind everyone that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is still with us and an ostrich policy is not an option as far as we're concerned. Boycotting the other side, not talking and not listening--I think that is being irresponsible and even negligent.” — Justice Minister Tzipi Livni responding to criticism for meeting Abbas (Tuesday 5/20)

“One promising idea is to encourage multinational corporations to invest in Palestinian areas by offering economic incentives such as insurance guarantees and tax breaks. There are also ways to streamline the export process for Palestinian manufacturers so products can reach their destination quickly and in perfect condition. Israel has become known as the 'Startup Nation,' but now it is time to build a 'Startup Region.’” — Economy Minister Naftali Bennett writing in the Wall Street Journal (Tuesday 5/20)

“We have turned over a new leaf in terms of the differences that we have. Hamas made many sacrifices in order to be closer to our brothers. But there will be no compromises with the invader...Reconciliation doesn't mean that we will stop the resistance against the occupiers. Resistance will last for as long as the occupation lasts...I am aware of the fact that there are real challenges before us, but we can cope with them.” — Hamas Political Bureau Director Khaled Mashal referring to Hamas' relationship with Israel (Wednesday 5/21)

“The picture says everything. The picture of Tzipi Livni sitting with Abu Mazen while the State of Israel wages an international war to impose sanctions on the PA if it unites with Hamas. I personally spoke to dozens of Members of Congress to act to stop funding the PA. The Foreign Ministry is taking action. And at the same time, she sits down with Abu Mazen. Israel can't speak in two voices. It can't tell the world: this is about to be a Hamas government while the justice minister sits and has her picture taken and talks with the PA chairman, who met with Haniya in the morning.” — Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon speaking with Israel Radio (Thursday 5/22)

“I hope we resolve it, for our sake. I hope we resolve it because I don't want a binational state. I hope we resolve it because I'd like to have broader and more open relations with the Arab world, and I hope

to resolve it in order to remove the unjustified attacks on Israel. But we are proceeding ahead despite this. We don't mortgage our future to the maturation of Palestinian politics." — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaking with Bloomberg's Jeffrey Goldberg (Thursday 5/22)

[The State of Two States - Week of May 25](#)

The week began with the Pope's visit to the West Bank and Israel, including an impromptu prayer session at the separation barrier in Bethlehem on Sunday and an unscheduled stop at an Israeli terrorism victims' memorial on Monday. The Pope also extended an invitation for a joint prayer session at the Vatican on June 8th to Israeli President Shimon Peres and PA President Mahmoud Abbas, which was accepted by both individuals. On Wednesday, Israelis commemorated Jerusalem Day, the anniversary of the IDF's gaining control in the Old City in the 1967 Six-Day War. Finally, amid the stagnation of Israeli-Palestinian peace talks, a senior Palestinian Authority official reportedly announced on Friday that the US has invited the new Palestinian unity government Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah to an official visit in Washington, according to Ma'ariv.

"It is for the Israeli leadership to explain to their people what the Arab Peace Initiative is. They read it. They are the best qualified to go to their people and say: 'Listen, this is a good proposal. Let's take it up.'" — Prince Turki bin Faisal Al Saud (Saudi royal family), speaking with Maj. Gen. (res.) Amos Yadlin and Washington Post Columnist David Ignatius at the German Marshall Fund in Brussels (Monday, 5/26)

"There will be no more freezes, we will not accept delays and restrictions in Jerusalem, Judea and Samaria, and we will continue to build in all parts of our country...Jerusalem will not be divided again. Between the Jordan and the sea there will be only one state, and that is the State of Israel." — Housing Minister Uri Ariel speaking at Jerusalem Day celebrations at the Mercaz Harav Yeshiva (Tuesday, 5/27)

"If there is annexation—there will be no government. There is no solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict except for two states for two people, and these annexations are the way to a bi-national state and an end to Zionism. I am not prepared to have that." — Finance Minister Yair Lapid responding to Uri Ariel's remarks as reported by Ma'ariv (Wednesday, 5/28)

"His decision to ignore the Middle East was explained implicitly: the United States' energy independence, a weariness from wars in the region and an abhorrence of long-term involvement in places in which there is no vital American interest. Anyone in Israel who is pleased with that speech does not completely understand its destructive implications." — IPF Israel Fellow Alon Pinkas commenting on President Barack Obama's West Point commencement speech (Thursday, 5/29)

"The most important thing is that this government will mean the end of this terrible division and it will reactivate the Palestinian democratic system." — Mustafa Barghouti, independent Palestinian politician, referencing Mahmoud Abbas' decision to request that Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah form a new government with Hamas under the terms of the unity pact reached last month (Thursday, 5/29)

"I love Israel, but I don't understand why a country that is so strong in economic innovations and initiatives can be so weak in diplomatic innovations and initiatives. You need to learn to accept criticism. Not everyone who criticizes you is your enemy. Bibi (Netanyahu) is my friend and there are things about him I admire, but we have differences of opinion. I think Israel needs to initiate a great move towards the Palestinians...If you take small risks, the profit will be small; a big risk will bring a big profit...Israel needs to put a significant offer on the table and then see how everyone reacts. The profit will be all yours: if the other side accepts it, you'll get an agreement. If the other side says no, the world will know Israel wants peace. The whole world thinks you are a strong state. The only place in the world that does not think you are a strong state is Israel." — France's former president Nicolas Sarkozy speaking about the need for Israel to take a more active role in negotiations, as reported by Yedioth Ahronoth and translated by APN (Friday, 5/30)

**5) [“Peace talks? What peace talks,” the Israeli prime minister jokes with supporters from his party](#)
Noam Sheizaf +972, May 25, 2014**

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted of his settlement building achievements in a recent meeting with young Likud supporters. Responding to a question from the audience, Netanyahu said: “I was threatened in Washington: ‘not one brick’ [of settlement construction] ... after five years, we built a little more than one brick...”

Asked “about peace talks with the Palestinians,” Netanyahu reportedly replied, “about the – what?” to which the audience responded by breaking out into laughter.

Last year was a record year in settlement construction in the West Bank. According to figures released by the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS), there were construction starts on 2,534 housing units last year, not including East Jerusalem – an increase of 123 percent from 2012, and more than any other year since the CBS began compiling data.

Netanyahu’s quotes were posted online by Akiva Lamm, a Likud member from Kiryat Arba, a settlement near Hebron. Lamm himself posed a question to Netanyahu on the lack of new construction in his home settlement, and on Israel’s prisoner releases during the American-led negotiations with the Palestinians. This was Netanyahu’s reply (my translation):

When I entered the Prime Minister’s Office for my second term, I was summoned to Washington. “Not one brick,” they told me (referring to settlement construction in Judea, Samaria and East Jerusalem). I was threatened specifically: “Not one brick.” The pressure from the international community and the Americans was enormous. I don’t think anyone in Israel was under such pressure. And still, after five years on the job, we built a little more than “one brick.” But the important thing is to do it in a smart way, in a quiet way, without inflammatory statements.

Do you think it’s a problem for me to say, “I am a hero, I am strong, I don’t care about anything, what do I care what the world says?” I don’t have any problem saying that, but it would be a lie. Whoever tells you that doesn’t deserve to be prime minister; he is a populist. This is not a feature leader. A leader knows to stand up to international pressure by maneuvering.

Imagine yourself standing on a hill overlooking the whole valley. You get to see all the obstacles below from above – some from the right and some from the left – and then when you walk down, you know exactly where to go in order to avoid the obstacles. What matters is that we continue to head straight toward our goal, even if one time we walk right and another time walk left.

Netanyahu then went on to speak about how important U.S. support is, and how well his speeches were received by the U.S. congress. This reminded Akiva of similar remarks Netanyahu made 10 years ago, when he explained how he was able to manipulate the Clinton administration and debunk the Oslo accords.

6) Today's Jerusalem is neither eternal, undivided nor holy

Emily L. Hauser, Ha'aretz, May 28, 2014

Jerusalem Day, we're told, celebrates the reunification of Israel's eternal capital, symbolizing "the continued historical connection of the Jewish people to Jerusalem." It's a moment to remember that, as Prime Minister Netanyahu once said, "Israel without Jerusalem is like a body without a heart." So we're told, and so the vast majority of Jews in Israel and abroad believe. Jerusalem is our heart, our soul – a small, holy spot on the map around which everything else revolves. So we're told. Except that it's a lie. "Jerusalem" – as currently constituted, featured on maps, and represented by Israel's government – is not eternal. It is not undivided. And it is certainly not holy.

The geographic location to which Jewish hearts have turned for millennia is small, corresponding roughly to today's Old City; the holy part – the area on which the Israelites were commanded to establish a resting place for the Divine Presence – is more modest still, consisting of the Temple Mount. When we stand before the Western Wall, or orient ourselves toward it in worship, we're weaving our prayers and longings with those of all Jews, reaching across miles and years and touching the core of that which holds us in community.

Zionism stems from that faith experience, but is not identical to it. Zionism is a modern idea, a nationalist movement which, like all nationalist movements, centers on a shared language, culture, and land. That's why Uganda was nixed as an alternative – because the Jewish people's shared land is anchored by our holy city. Yet it simply cannot be argued (not honestly, at least) that the 21st century municipality that carries the name "Jerusalem" is that same place.

Jewish Jerusalem certainly has a history beyond the hamlet that originally encircled the Temple; some 15 square miles of Jewish neighborhoods were well established by 1948, largely west of the ancient walls. These neighborhoods existed alongside (and/or in tension with) a flourishing Palestinian Arab community; peripheral Palestinian villages to the north and east fell within Jerusalem's orbit with ties that were financial, religious, and social. When Israel was established, these areas and the Old City (some two and a half square miles) were held by Jordan.

The 1967 "reunification" of the city included not just the annexation of our holy sites, however, nor even just non-Jewish Jerusalem, but also large swathes of the West Bank that were never considered part of the city by anyone, least of all residents. In all, this came to about 27 square miles.

In the ensuing decades, Palestinian-owned West Bank land has been ceaselessly expropriated for new Jewish neighborhoods (such as Ramot, Gilo, and Har Homa), blurring the Green Line almost beyond recognition; by 2008, Jerusalem was more than a hundred times larger than in Zionism's early days, nearly three times bigger than in 1967. When you find Jerusalem on today's map, you're not looking at an eternal entity. You're looking at a very recent construct, created by politicians for political reasons.

And undivided? Well. Beyond the cultural, linguistic, and religious divides – beyond even the wildly disproportionate budgeting for Jewish and Palestinian residents – for several weeks this spring, well before the scandal of contaminated water effected the lives of Jewish residents, tens of thousands of Palestinian Jerusalemites had no regular supply of water. None. For weeks. In Israel's eternal, and undivided capital.

Which brings us, finally, to the word "holy." The sacred nature of the earth and stone imbued with centuries of our striving toward the Holy One Blessed Be He cannot be changed by any amount of political maneuvering or geographic gymnastics. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) In Their Own Juice

Uri Avery, Gush Shalom, May 24, 2014

According to press reports, President Barack Obama has decided to let Binyamin Netanyahu and Mahmoud Abbas “stew in their own juice.” That sounds fair. The United States has tried very hard to make peace between Israel and Palestine. Poor John Kerry has devoted almost all of his considerable energies to getting both sides to meet, to talk, to reach compromises.

At the end of nine months, he found out that it was a false pregnancy. No baby, not even a fetus. Nothing at all. Ungrateful, these Middle Easterners. So it seems that the reaction is justified. You don't want to fulfill our wishes? Go to hell. Both of you.

The important word in these sentences is “both.” But “both” is based on a lie. When one says that “both” did not behave as expected, that “both” did not make the “necessary hard decisions” that “both” should stew in their own juice, one consciously or unconsciously assumes that they are equal. Nothing is further from the truth.

Israel is immeasurably stronger than Palestine in every material respect. One resembles a sleek American skyscraper, the other a dilapidated wooden shack. Palestine is under occupation by the other half of “both.” Palestinians are totally deprived of all elementary human and civil rights. Average income in Israel is 20 times higher than in Palestine. Not 20 percent, but a staggering 2,000 percent. Militarily, Israel is a regional power, and in some respects a world power.

In this reality, speaking of “both” is at best ignorant, at worst cynical. The very presentation of this picture of “both” is tantamount to acceptance of the Israeli narrative.

What does it mean for “both” to stew in their own juice?

For Israel, it means that it can continue to build new settlements on Arab land in the occupied West Bank without foreign interference. It can make life in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ever harsher, in the hope that more and more Palestinians will prefer to leave. Arbitrary killings of civilians by occupation troops occur every few days.

Some of us realize that this course is leading to disaster in the form of a bi-national state, in which an ever-growing disenfranchised Arab majority will be ruled by the Jewish minority. That is called apartheid. But most Israelis don't see it.

Israelis are happy, and never happier than this week. In a modern repetition of the Biblical David-and-Goliath story, the Tel Aviv Maccabi basketball team beat the formidable Real Madrid team for the European championship. National pride has risen to Olympic heights. (In a childish race, President Peres and Prime Minister Netanyahu each tried to waylay the winning team on its way to the popular reception in Rabin Square, in order to bask in reflected glory.)

So Israel can stew happily, the more so since the US continues to pay us their annual three billion dollar tribute, provide us with arms and use their UN veto power to protect us from international censure.

For the Palestinian side of “both,” stewing in their own juice means something very different. The effort to achieve Fatah-Hamas reconciliation proceeds slowly and can break down at any moment. It depends on Abbas' success in forming a Unity Government composed of impartial “technocrats” and Hamas' willingness to give up its sole rule in the Gaza Strip. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) Jerusalem divided, unequal as Israel marks 1967 capture

Charlie Hoyle, Ma'an News Agency, May 28, 2014

As thousands of Israelis march through East Jerusalem on Wednesday to celebrate its capture in 1967, the Palestinian community continues its struggle to survive in a city marked by systematic political, economic, and social divides. Every year, thousands of right-wing Israelis march through East Jerusalem neighborhoods and the Old City in a national holiday described by Israel's Ministry of Tourism as marking the "liberation" and "reunification" of the city.

But for Palestinians, who make up 40 percent of the population, the day is a reminder of their historic dispossession and compounds their ongoing marginalization from a city which was once the political, economic, and cultural center of Palestinian life. Over 75 percent of Palestinians, and 82 percent of children, live below the poverty line in East Jerusalem, according to the Association for Civil Rights in Israel.

There are huge discrepancies between East and West Jerusalem in terms of education, health, water access, and planning, while Israel has also revoked the residency of 14,309 Palestinians since occupying the city in 1967, with 106 in 2013 alone.

Palestinians in Jerusalem are granted "permanent resident" status, similar to foreign, non-Jewish citizens who choose to live in Israel, and are not Israeli citizens.

Despite forming nearly half of the city's population, only 10 percent of Jerusalem's municipal budget is spent on Palestinians. "It's increasingly obvious that Israel is doing anything it can within its own legal structures to push young Palestinian families and couples out of town," Micha Kurz from Grassroots Jerusalem, an NGO in East Jerusalem, told Ma'an. "Not only are living conditions very poor, but healthcare is inaccessible. People can't find jobs, and no new Palestinian neighborhoods have been built (since 1967) while Israel has been building settlements on Palestinian land."

Only 14 percent of East Jerusalem is zoned for Palestinian residential construction, ACRI says, while one-third of Palestinian land has been confiscated since 1967 to build illegal Jewish-only settlements. The construction of the separation wall has also cut off East Jerusalem from the West Bank and forced nearly 100,000 Palestinians in areas such as Ras Khamis, Ras Shahada, and the Shuafat refugee camp to live in "abject neglect" on the outskirts of the city. Between 60,000-80,000 Palestinians in those neighborhoods have been cut off from a regular water supply for over three months.

Jerusalem Day is a celebration of the Zionist narrative, Kurz says, and is designed in such a way that Israelis ignore the fact that Palestinians have no right to vote nationally, have few economic prospects, and enjoy none of the public services afforded to Jewish residents. "Thousands of Israelis will be marching through Palestinian neighborhoods shouting: 'It's time you leave this town.' This is what the celebration is about; it's systematic. "Within the next 10 or 20 years Palestinians will be cleansed out of Jerusalem, politically and economically, but also culturally and religiously. Give it another generation or two."

Erasing the Green Line: Despite being one of the key final-status issues to be resolved in any future peace agreement, Jerusalem Day celebrations promote a clear rejection of the idea that Jerusalem will eventually be shared between Palestinians and Israelis.

"At the same time that the Israeli government claimed to Pope Francis that they protect Christians, reality says otherwise: Jerusalem day is a reminder for everyone that according to the Israeli government in occupied Jerusalem there is no place for Palestinians, either Christians or Muslims," Xavier Abu Eid, a communications adviser with the PLO, told Ma'an. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Analysis: Pope visit a resounding success

Daoud Kuttab, Ma'an News Agency, May 29, 2014

At all levels, the visit of Pope Francis to Jordan and Palestine was a huge success. For about 26 hours everything was implemented as planned. And the few unplanned moments worked out quite well, leaving indelible memories and images. The Pope's visit was billed as pilgrimage to the Holy Land and the slogan chosen by the Vatican was unity, in reference to the historic meeting planned with the head of the Orthodox Church in Jerusalem.

Fifty years after a similar trip was made by Pope Paul VI, the trip was aimed at rekindling the spirit of unity among Christians of different denominations, as well as an interfaith effort.

Pope Francis was accompanied by Muslim and Jewish religious leaders (one each) from his days; the spirit of unity was evident in various meetings, speeches and homilies.

But the highlight of the entire trip was not planned, rehearsed or even expected.

The Pope had decided not to cross any checkpoints to enter the UN-declared non-member state of Palestine and so the idea of an image of the Pope interacting with the occupation or seeing the wall was thought to have been bypassed by the decision to visit Palestine flying a Jordanian military helicopter straight to Palestine.

As he was driving around Bethlehem in his open car, the Pontiff passed by the entrance of the Aida refugee camp and noticed the separation wall. It is hard for anyone not to take notice of the 10-meter-high wall (which the media insist on calling a separation barrier) and it is even harder for the Jesuit Pope who has empathy for the weak and oppressed not to stop.

To lessen the impact of the image of the pope at the wall, Israeli media spin tried to show that the point where the Pope stopped was simply a barrier between Israel and the West Bank. That is not true. The wall, built deep on Palestinian land, divides the Aida camp in half, surrounds Rachel's Tomb and cuts off Palestinian communities from each other for the exclusive benefit of Jews.

The Pontiff's visit in Jordan had its own headline-grabbing moment. After being personally driven by the King to the baptismal site, the Pope met handicapped children as well as Syrian and other refugees. In his speech to those gathered, including journalists and live TV cameras, the Pope sounded angry about the continuation of the violence in Syria. An Associated Press report said that the Pope deviated from his prepared remarks to blast arms traders praying to God to "convert those who seek war, those who make and sell weapons!"

The Pope reiterated his call for peace but did not spare the group he felt was responsible for making war. "We all want peace, but looking at the tragedy of war, looking at the wounded, seeing so many people who left their homeland who were forced to go away, I ask: 'Who sells weapons to these people to make war?'" he asked. "This is the root of evil: the hatred, the love of money."

The visit went without a hitch. Security officials were worried about the insistence of this humble pontiff not to travel in a glass-covered vehicle, to be able to greet and touch the believers. In Jordan, Christians came from Lebanon to swell the numbers of those from Jordan, Syria and Iraq.

In Bethlehem, Christians from Gaza were allowed to participate in the Manger Square mass, and a large contingent of Palestinian Christians came from the Galilee, even though they were unhappy that the Holy See had skipped a visit to Nazareth and other important stops during any Holy Land pilgrimage. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

10) South Africa's De Klerk: Without peace, Israel heading toward apartheid **The Associated Press, May 28, 2014**

South Africa's last president under white rule has suggested that Israel risks heading toward apartheid if it does not reach a peace deal with the Palestinians. The comments by F.W. de Klerk echo warnings made by Palestinian, American and dovish Israeli officials. But his words carry special meaning, given his role in South Africa's painful history of race relations. De Klerk was the last president under apartheid and along with the late Nelson Mandela, brought about the end to decades of systematic racial discrimination against blacks, jointly winning the 1993 Nobel Peace Prize.

Comparisons to South Africa's racist rule have increased in public discourse about Israel and its treatment of Palestinians. In April, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry — who had been mediating negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians — set off an uproar when he made a similar warning. In an interview aired Tuesday on Israeli Channel 2 TV, de Klerk said calling Israel an apartheid state now was “unfair.” But he said that without the establishment of a Palestinian state, Israel may have to contend with the consequences of one state for both peoples.

“The test will be (does) everybody living then in such a unitary state, will everybody have full political rights?” de Klerk said. “Will everybody enjoy their full human rights? If they will, it's not an apartheid state.” He added: “There will come in Israel a turning point where if the main obstacles at the moment which exist to a successful two-state solution are not removed, the two-state solution will become impossible.” De Klerk was in Israel receiving an honorary doctorate from the University of Haifa.

Israeli backers of the creation of a Palestinian state say relinquishing control of the Palestinian territories and its roughly residents is the only way to ensure Israel's future as a democracy with a Jewish majority. Following the collapse of the most recent round of peace talks, fears that the sides could be headed toward a single “binational” state are growing. The Palestinians want the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem — territories captured by Israel in 1967 — for their hoped-for independent state. Israel is a democracy whose Arab minority holds citizenship rights. Israeli Arabs often complain of discrimination but have reached senior positions in government, the judiciary, the foreign service and other fields including the military.

But it is the situation in the West Bank that sparks comparisons to apartheid. The territory is home to two populations — a Palestinian majority of some 2.4 million people and a Jewish settler minority of 350,000 — that are subject to two vastly different legal and political systems. Israeli West Bank settlers, for instance, can vote in Israeli elections, while Palestinians cannot. Israel captured the West Bank from Jordan in the 1967 Middle East war.

Israel vehemently rejects any comparison to apartheid-era South Africa. While South Africa's was a system rooted in race, Israel says the differences in the West Bank stem from legal issues and security needs. Most of its leaders, including hard-line Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, have endorsed the idea of establishing a Palestinian state to protect Israel's Jewish majority. “The two-state solution might be the best one,” de Klerk said. “You'll have to move fast. See the window of opportunity. Jump through it. It might close.”

A number of prominent centrist Israelis, including former prime ministers Ehud Olmert and Ehud Barak, and the current chief peace negotiator, Tzipi Livni, have invoked the apartheid analogy in their calls for a peace agreement and change in the status quo. Paul Hirschson, a South African-born spokesman for Israel's Foreign Ministry, brushed off de Klerk's remarks, saying Israel would not accept a one-state solution. “It's not a warning. It's a comment by people who misunderstand Israel, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Middle East,” he said.

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

11) American Jews are running out of patience with Israel

Ori Nir, Ha'aretz, May 28, 2014

Lately, American friends are asking me whether Israeli leaders are thinking straight, whether they realize how unreasonable their statements sound here in Washington, and how odd some of their policies seem.

These are people who support Israel, who genuinely care about its wellbeing, who follow the news from Israel with genuine concern, and who cannot comprehend what seems to them like self-destructive behavior. Behavior such as stepping up settlement construction while President Obama and Secretary Kerry are trying to advance peace for Israel; or publicly bad-mouthing and humiliating America's secretary of state. Not to mention discriminatory practices and vile statements against non-Orthodox Jews; government tolerance of Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox discriminatory practices against women; blatantly bigoted, racist and xenophobic statements by senior officials, and an endless flow of words and deeds that are inconsistent with liberal American values.

This frustration is not all new, and to a large extent it's being tempered by all that is good and beautiful about Israeli society and culture, but there is a growing discontent with the news from Israel. It is particularly evident in Washington, where the policy community desperately wants to be reassured that Israel is still a dependable, sane and stable peace-seeking ally.

Recent weeks provides a wealth of examples. Israel's Economy Minister, Naftali Bennett, told Ha'aretz that Kerry's peace initiative is "suicide" for Israel and boasted, "We saved the country" by sabotaging Kerry. Later, in a Wall Street Journal article, Bennett laid out his plan for annexing almost two-thirds of the West Bank. He had the audacity to write that "annexing Area C would limit conflict by reducing the size of the territory in dispute, which would make it easier to one day reach a long-term peace agreement."

Then there was Prime Minister Netanyahu's reported threat to fire Tzipi Livni, his cabinet minister responsible for negotiating with the Palestinians, because she met with Palestinian President Abbas. And then there was the way Israeli officials reacted to the killing of the two Palestinian teenagers in the West Bank town of Bitunia. Automatic flat-out denials before an official investigation was even launched, accusations of forgery, conspiracy theories, and not a shred of concern at what seems to have been an avoidable loss of two young lives. Foreign Minister Lieberman rejected Washington's request to investigate the incident, calling the request "hypocrisy." Why hypocrisy? Because 170,000 people were killed in Syria, Israel's top diplomat explained.

The middle finger that Israeli politicians are flipping at the world may score points with right-wing voters, but it is poking the eye of Israel's most important and most loyal allies: Pro-Israel U.S. opinion leaders, primarily progressive American Jews. A new study by the Jerusalem-based Jewish People Policy Institute explores the dissonance that diaspora Jews experience (the study obviously focused on American Jews) when their values – and particularly what they consider "Jewish values" clash with official Israeli policies. The study focuses on the question of Israel as a Jewish and democratic state, and it presents the discord in light of the way in which non-Israeli Jews perceive Israel as Jewish and democratic and their wishes to enhance its Jewishness, its character as a democracy, or both.

The study therefore neglects to highlight the bafflement – sometimes even the horror – among many American Jews (and other supporters of Israel) as they realize that many Israeli leaders have ceased to actively pursue peace as a critical national security objective and that many Israelis have ceased to cherish it as a value. Many American Jews who are uncomfortable with some of Israel's more controversial policies and practices are willing to accept them as long as Israel pursues peace. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

12) The USS Liberty, If Americans Knew, May 28, 2014

On June 8, 1967, 34 [U.S.] American servicemen were killed and 174 were wounded during an Israeli attack on the USS Liberty. According to former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas Moorer, "Those men were then betrayed and left to die by our own government." The survivors are still awaiting justice.

Copied below are various links to articles on the USS Liberty; for a complete listing, go [here](#).

Aid and comfort to the enemy: American Legion honchos betray Liberty veterans (Counterpunch)

Despite the USS Liberty crew's extraordinary record of heroism, American Legion personnel have repeatedly treated Liberty veterans, their families, and their friends with arrogance, disrespect, and even disdain that many feel demeans these American servicemen, their ship, their service to their country, and the memory of their 34 fellow crewmembers who never returned. [more](#)

The men killed in Israel's attack on the USS Liberty (USSLiberty.org)

Compiled by USS Liberty survivors Jim Ennes and Joe Meadors at USSLiberty.org. If you are not yet familiar with the deliberate Israeli attack on the USS Liberty, please read the findings of the Independent Commission of Inquiry, composed of three admirals and generals of the U.S. armed forces and one ambassador, including former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Thomas H. Moorer and Medal of Honor recipient General Raymond G. Davis. [more](#)

Death on the USS Liberty: Questions remain after 35 years (The VVA Veteran)

Full recognition of the struggles and sacrifices made by the men who served – 34 of them for the last time – on the Liberty won't come, survivors and their supporters say, until there is a congressional investigation of the attack and its aftermath. They maintain that this is the only such incident in American history that never received a congressional investigation. [more](#)

Liberty victims did not die in vain (U.S. Naval Institute proceedings)

The Liberty's crew did not die in vain. In extremely short order, her vital intelligence, and demise, helped convince two great Americans, Lyndon Johnson and Dean Rusk, that they must make swift and critical decisions. Those decisions saved the Middle East and U.S.-Soviet relations from a disaster course. They would want us to honor the USS Liberty. [more](#)

Friendless fire? (U.S. Naval Institute proceedings)

Growing numbers of former senior government and military officials have begun speaking out. Among those in support of the ship's 200-plus survivors, in addition to those mentioned previously and in the accompanying sidebar, are: former Chief of Naval Operations and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Admiral Thomas Moorer, then CIA Director Richard Helms, then-NSA Director Marshall Carter, Carter's Deputy Louis Tordella (who wrote on the Israeli Navy's report, "A nice whitewash!"), NSA "Liberty incident" analyst Walter Deeley, and Hayden Peake, professor of intelligence history at the Joint Military Intelligence College and retired CIA officer. [more](#)

13) Christians' life in Israel not so wonderful

Farid Jubran, Ynetnews, May 30, 2014

Pope Francis' historic visit to Israel, beyond its political and symbolic meaning, was highly important for the Christians living in the country. It was an opportunity to put their distress on the agenda.

The Christians' situation in the Middle East is difficult. In Iraq, Syria and Egypt, churches are torched and Christians are slaughtered over their religion as a matter of routine. In some parts of Syria the Islamic Sharia laws have been applied, Christians are forbidden to conduct ritual ceremonies in public and special taxes have been imposed on them.

On the background of the religious persecution in many of the region's countries, there is an impression that the Christians' situation in Israel is good. In his latest AIPAC address, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu boasted that Israel was "the one country in the Middle East that protects Christians," and Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor elaborated on the wonderful treatment of Christians in an article in the Wall Street Journal.

Comparing between the situation of Christians in Israel and the situation of their brothers in the Middle East is populist and shameful. The "only democracy in the Middle East," whose leaders say has "shared values" with the countries of the West, should compare the situation of its minorities to the situation of minorities in the countries it has shared values with, rather than to the situation of minorities in Middle Eastern countries.

There are some 140,000 Christians in Israel, 1.7 percent of the population. A minority of a minority, exposed to waves of hatred. How can anyone forget the image of Knesset Member Michael Ben-Ari ripping the pages of the New Testament at the Knesset and throwing them into the garbage while uttering harsh words of incitement?

Jews in Israel fire gunshots inside churches and set fire to monasteries, spray-paint malicious graffiti and slash the tires of Christians' cars. In the Old City of Jerusalem, religious Jews spit on monks, and in Christian cemeteries gravestones are shattered. Death threats are sent to bishops and heads of Christian communities. Dozens of hate crimes – and the authorities stand idly by, apart from a few words of condemnation to do the minimum.

The state itself restricts the churches' activity immensely by imposing a strict and discriminating regime of visas for Christian clerics. A priest who wishes to stay in Israel in order to serve in one of the Christian communities will be forced to undergo a humiliating *via dolorosa* on the part of the authorities until he receives the stay permit, if at all.

Many Christian clerics have been residing in Israel for several decades and are still restricted to a visa which does not grant them any social rights, despite their years-long service for the community in churches, schools, hospitals, senior citizens' homes, etc.

The Christian schools that have existed in this country for centuries, in which generations of Christians, Muslims and Jews have been educated, are suffering from discrimination in the form of significantly low budgets compared to the state schools and a lack of Christian supervisors. In addition, their identity, nature and the autonomy they have always enjoyed are constantly undermined.

The Christian community itself is divided on the issue of its sons' enlistment with the army, and the debate is inflaming the situation. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

14) Encountering peace: Annexation's trappings **Gershon Baskin, Jerusalem Post, May 28, 2014**

I am Jewish, I am a Zionist and I am a loyal citizen of the State of Israel. I believe that as a Jew, a Zionist and an Israeli the most important mission the State of Israel must achieve is peace with our neighbors.

With over 35 years' experience working with Arabs and Palestinians, personally organizing and conducting over 2,000 face to face meetings between groups of Israelis and Palestinians – many of them officials on both sides – I believe that reaching a full, comprehensive end-of-conflict and end-of-claims agreement between the State of Israel and the State of Palestine is possible. I believe that because this conflict is based on the claims of two national movements for the same piece of land, each demanding a territorial expression of their identity, this conflict became resolvable once both sides accepted the principle of partition. The feasibility of resolution became even more real after 1988 when the Palestinians decided to limit their territorial demands to 22 percent of the land between the river and the sea. Since that time, their demands have not increased, and the conflict remains resolvable.

It is quite clear that we have suffered another failed round of attempts to reach agreement. When this happens, the parties become more convinced that the conflict is not resolvable. Each side places the blame on the other. I have already written in this column that I am totally convinced that most of the responsibility for the failure is directly on the shoulders of Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. My column last week provided evidence for my claim. I will not repeat it.

I am now concerned about where we go from here. There are no negotiations going on and as long as Netanyahu is in power and remains opposed to the creation of a viable Palestinian state on 22 percent of the land there is no reason to even wish for negotiations to resume. They would once again be devoid of any real content. There will be no "pax Americana" – a U.S.-imposed solution is not in the cards. The EU, although it may want to seriously get engaged in resolving the conflict, will not – it is not capable of creating enough agreement among its 28 member states to be effective.

The main challenge before the Palestinians is to refrain from another round of violence. The Palestinians have the support of the international community; they are the underdog and have global sympathy. Israel has lost the support of the world and is seen as an occupier and worse.

Israel's image will continue to deteriorate in the world as it continues to build more settlements and more housing in existing settlements. The most dangerous thing for the supporters of the policies of the Israeli government and the settlers is for the Palestinians to be peaceful and non-violent. The more the Palestinians succeed in presenting themselves as victims, the more support they will generate.

The Palestinians will probably continue with their applications to international organizations and conventions including trying to gain support of the United Nations Security Council to gain full membership as a state member of the United Nations. Israel too failed in its first application for membership and only gained it the second time around. The Palestinians have many other non-violent steps they can take including continuing to build their economy and their institutions, even if Israel tries to punish them for their decision to act as an independent state under occupation.

It is clear to me that settlers and the extreme right-wing members of the Israeli government will work overtime to provoke the Palestinians into violence. It will be very difficult for the Palestinians to resist using violence in response to settler and army violence, to hate attacks, to the cutting down of olive trees, the demolishing of homes and removal of Palestinians from Area C. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

15) Editorial: Recognize the new Palestinian government

Israel's refusal to deal with the Fatah-Hamas coalition is both puzzling and damaging

Ha'aretz, June 2, 2014

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is expected to announce the establishment of a new Palestinian government. On the eve of this announcement, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu found it proper to warn that the Israeli government would cut off any contact with the new Palestinian Authority except for necessary security coordination.

Within this threat is an inherent contradiction: If the prime minister is prepared to continue security cooperation with the government of Palestine, does this not constitute recognizing the government it plans to boycott?

But it's not just this contradiction that's puzzling. The Palestinian government to be formed is the result of the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah and reflects Hamas' recognition of the Palestinian Authority, which was born of the Oslo Agreements that Hamas had opposed with all its might. This reconciliation is the result of heavy Arab pressure, is supported by all the Arab states and by most of the Palestinian public, and has the backing of several European leaders. Israel, which invested great effort in foiling the diplomatic negotiations, is now citing the Palestinian reconciliation as a decisive reason for freezing the talks, as if before the reconciliation it was rushing to continue the process. Israel's refusal to recognize this government is liable to portray it once again as the party refusing to give the diplomatic channel a chance.

The quality of the Palestinian government and its makeup are the Palestinians' business. Just as Israel or any other country cannot dictate the composition of the Egyptian or Jordanian governments, so it must be with the Palestinian government. The mission of the new government is to tend to the needs of five million Palestinian civilians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to manage their health, education and welfare services, maintain law and order, and develop the Palestinian economy. Israel should welcome the fact that it is not required to operate or fund those services.

If Israel had recognized the Palestinian government that was elected in 2006, or had cooperated with the Palestinian unity government that was established afterward, we would have been spared numerous casualties on both sides. Israel cannot repeat the same mistake. So long as the new Palestinian government continues to stick to the agreements it signed with Israel and seeks to continue cooperating with Israel, Netanyahu may not cut off ties with it or threaten to boycott it. He would be better off investing his efforts in renewing the diplomatic process with the partner that still exists.