

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**June 20, 2013**



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

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

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles reflecting on Kerry's peace efforts among U.S. Jews, the occupation, continuing settlement activity, and the possible simultaneous demise of the two-state solution and of the Zionist dream.

- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Executive Director Warren Clark writes that Secretary of State Kerry is continuing the quest for peace between the State of Israel and the Palestinians with hopes that a turning point in negotiations might be reached.
- The CMEP Bulletin for June 14 observes that dissent within the Netanyahu cabinet is complicating moves for peace.
- Noam Sheizaf in +972 republished an unprecedented letter by former European leaders and peace process veterans which recognizes Western support for the occupation and calls for immediate steps that will bring an end to it.
- Barak Ravid and Chemi Shalev write of Secretary of State Kerry's words to U.S. Jews that the coming days will determine Middle East fate for decades. [Read full text of Kerry's speech to the American Jewish Committee (AJC) – in which he called on U.S. Jews to proactively and wholeheartedly support a two-state solution to Israel's conflict with the Palestinians –on AJC website.]
- Rabbi Eric Yoffie writes in Ha'aretz that U.S. Jews must embrace Kerry's appeal to pressure Netanyahu. He comments that the time is up; a way must be found to arrive at a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that will end the occupation.
- Foundation for Middle East Peace Report on Israeli Settlements and Map of Settlement Growth and Population includes observations on the settlement policy of the Netanyahu government.
- In an open letter Leonard Fein writes in Americans for Peace Now that the first slogan put forward by Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) was *hakibbush mashchit* – the occupation corrupts. He believes that as Israel approaches the 46th anniversary of the corrupting occupation, this slogan is all too true.
- Uri Avnery writes in Ha'aretz that Israel has invented something unprecedented: eternal occupation. In 1967, because no pressure was brought to bear on Israel to return the occupied territories.
- Ari Shavit writes in Ha'aretz that new construction in Judea and Samaria is proceeding at the highest pace in seven years, and that If this continues, the Netanyahu-Lapid-Bennett government will put an end to the two-state solution, the Jewish democratic entity, and the Zionist dream.
- Uri Avnery writes that the vast majority of today's Israelis, especially anyone younger than 60 years old, cannot even imagine an Israel without the occupied territories.

## 1) Kerry carries on in quest for peace; a turning point for negotiations?

*Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Executive Director Warren Clark wrote the following reflection in early June 2013.*

Despite all odds, generous doses of public cynicism, and repeated proclamations by pundits of the death of the “Two State Solution” (the end of conflict and end of claims based on creation of a viable Palestinian state) Secretary of State Kerry, building on the visit of President Obama to Israel and the West Bank last March, has captured the attention of all concerned in his attempt to get an agreement to start meaningful direct negotiations in the next few weeks between Israelis and Palestinians.

Kerry might just make some real progress. His tactic has been what former Secretary of State James Baker called the “dead cat” approach. No one wants a dead cat left on their porch. No one wants to appear in public to be the first one to say “no” to negotiations.

Kerry has backed up his effort with a threat. If the two sides cannot agree on a meaningful plan for negotiations by a date certain – currently late June – then Kerry will cease his intense mediation effort. This is not an empty gesture. This strategy was used successfully by Secretary Baker in June 1990 when he famously told the Israeli government, “When you are serious about negotiations, call us,” after Prime Minister Shamir laid out strict conditions for entering into talks. Shamir later said he would have used negotiations to buy time to expand Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

That confrontation ended in the loss of the next Israeli election by Shamir in 1992 to Yitzak Rabin, who then signed the Oslo Accords in 1993. This history of confrontation and a lost election is doubtlessly not lost on Kerry or Prime Minister Netanyahu.

How has Kerry gotten as far as he has?

Prominent U.S. friends of Israel and many Israelis themselves have echoed the warning given by Kerry to the American Jewish Committee on June 3 that Israel’s continued occupation and expansion of settlements in the West Bank is leading to Israel’s increasing international isolation. Examples are the lopsided vote in the UN last November to recognize Palestine as a state and the recent announcement by the prominent physicist Stephen Hawking that he would boycott a conference in Israel this month hosted by President Shimon Peres because of the occupation.

The impasse over negotiations is based in the refusal of the Netanyahu government to resume negotiations where they left off in 2008 with the previous government coupled with the refusal of the Palestinian Authority (PA) to enter into negotiations unless new Israeli settlement construction is suspended in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Prime Minister Netanyahu has said repeatedly he is willing to enter into negotiations without preconditions, but the PA fears that without suspension of construction, negotiations would only be used by Netanyahu to buy more time as they have in the past to expand the Israeli population in the West Bank. Another failed negotiation would risk leaving the PA worse off politically than they are now. ...

[Read the entire piece on CMEP’s website.](#)

## 2) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, June 14, 2013

**Dissent in Netanyahu cabinet complicates efforts:** With Kerry continuing his attempts to bring the Israeli and Palestinian governments to the negotiating table, political pressures in Israel have been rising at the prospect that something might just happen to change the current stasis in negotiations. Some of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition partners are giving him headaches as he tries to convince the world of his willingness to engage in negotiations.

On June 6, Israel's Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon, from Netanyahu's Likud party, said to The Times of Israel, "Look at the government: there was never a government discussion, resolution or vote about the two-state solution... If you will bring it to a vote in the government — nobody will bring it to a vote, it's not smart to do it — but if you bring it to a vote, you will see the majority of Likud ministers, along with the Jewish Home [party], will be against it."

Although several senior members of the cabinet have supported efforts to restart negotiations, Danon said, "Today we're not fighting it [Netanyahu's declared goal of a Palestinian state], but if there will be a move to promote a two-state solution, you will see forces blocking it within the party and the government." If Kerry succeeds and Israelis and Palestinians agreed on a two-state solution, "then you have a conflict," but he does not see that happening because "today there is no partner, no negotiations, so it's a discussion. It's more of an academic discussion."

The Hatuna Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who came close to negotiating terms for an agreement with the Palestinians in 2008 threatened to leave the coalition if Israel was not going to negotiate a two state-solution. She told journalists, "Prime Minister Netanyahu is going to have to decide whether to let 'Danonism' get the upper hand in the discussions, or to allow those forces in Israel that realise that a peace agreement is an Israeli interest to make the decisions... We will not remain in the government without a peace process."

On Tuesday, Netanyahu's office released a statement while on a trip to Poland that read, "The two governments [Israel and Poland] agree about the urgent need for progress toward a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... by way of direct negotiations without any preconditions [emphasis added]." This was interpreted as a repudiation of Danon until the next day. Netanyahu's aides said that the prime minister did not see or approve the text before it was sent out in a press release, a likely consequence of the Foreign Ministry's staff strike and an empty foreign minister cabinet position. Netanyahu is holding the position for his ally Avigdor Liberman who is currently on trial for corruption.

A member of Netanyahu's staff clarified that while the prime minister personally believes in a Palestinian state, "It is not the Israeli government's position - not because the government takes the opposite position but simply because the government has no official position on the Palestinian subject. Prime Minister Netanyahu's position is that he supports the establishment of a demilitarized Palestinian state that will recognize the Jewish state, with appropriate security arrangements."

This distinction between [Netanyahu]'s position and the cabinet's non-position on creation a Palestinian state left many blinking, but in fact that reflects the landscape of Israel's politics. ...

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

### **3) Former senior EU officials: “Oslo process has nothing more to offer”**

**Noam Sheizaf, +972, April 20, 2013**

A group of senior former European officials, including former prime ministers, foreign ministers and diplomats, is urging the European Union to abandon the Oslo process and come up with new urgent measures that will put an end to the occupation, Ali Gharib reports for Open Zion.

In a letter addressed to the Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy for the European Union, Catherine Ashton, the former officials write:

*We are [...] appealing to you, and through you to the members of the Council of Ministers, to recognize that the Peace Process as conceived in the Oslo Agreements has nothing more to offer. Yet the present political stalemate, while the situation deteriorates on the ground, is unsustainable.*

Perhaps the letter’s greatest novelty is a recognition that the West is contributing to the occupation. “It is time to give a stark warning that the Occupation is actually being entrenched by the present Western policy,” wrote the former officials.

Among the signatories to the letter are Guiliano Amato, Former Prime Minister of Italy Lionel Jospin, Former Prime Minister of France Miguel Moratinos, Former Foreign Minister of Spain and Javier Solana, as well as the Former High Representative and Former NATO Secretary-General. Solana was also the EU’s representative in the Quartet who was supposed to lead the peace process.

The signatories of the letter express disappointment from the (lack of) leadership on the part of the U.S., and are now calling for “a realistic but active policy,” which will include a recognition of the state of affairs in the West Bank as occupation; an action against the erosion of the ‘67 borders by Israel, and perhaps most important – a re-evaluation of the financial arrangements with regards to the Palestinian Authority (in other words, the 19 signatories want the EU to stop bankrolling the occupation).

The letter has no formal bearing, but that fact that it includes some of the senior EU officials who dealt with the Middle East peace process attaches an extra value to it. This is also a clear vote of no-confidence for the American leadership, perhaps due to the degree of Israeli influence over U.S. foreign policy in the region.

A fundamental change in EU policy is somewhat unlikely, mainly due to the consensus mechanism which is used to determine foreign policy. Out of the 27 member states, there are always a few governments – even one is enough – who back the Israeli policy in the occupied territories, or at least oppose any effective measures against it. Currently, the Czech Republic is considered the most supportive of the Israeli policies.

Still, some changes take place on state level: Akiva Eldar reported yesterday in Al Monitor that 13 member states of the EU including Britain, France, Spain and the Netherlands, support labeling of products imported from West Bank settlements. ...

**[Read the full text of the letter sent to Representative Ashton by the former EU officials here.](#)**

#### **4) Kerry to U.S. Jews: Next few days will determine Middle East fate for decades** **Barak Ravid, Chemi Shalev, The Associated Press and Reuters, June 4, 2013**

The coming days will be crucial for both Israelis and Palestinians, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Monday, warning against the dire implications of failing to reach a two-state solution.

In a speech to the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Kerry stressed to a strongly pro-Israel crowd the need for urgent progress on a peace deal ending more than six decades of conflict, providing Israel with regional security and the Palestinians with their long-sought independent state.

“If we do not succeed now, we may not get another chance,” Kerry said about the peace process, describing it as “hardly a process at all” right now. “I have heard all of the arguments for why it is too difficult to end this conflict,” he added. “Cynicism has never solved anything. It has never given birth to a state, and it won’t.”

**[Please take a couple of minutes to read Kerry’s speech in its entirety on the AJC website.](#)**

Kerry warned that without a two-state solution, Israel will have to choose between its Jewish and democratic nature. He also stressed the need to recognize the fundamental aspirations of the Palestinian people.

Those who believe the Israeli-Palestinian status quo is sustainable and that the separation fence will bring security to Israel are “lulling themselves into a delusion,” the U.S. secretary of state said.

“The absence of peace is perpetual conflict. ... We will find ourselves in a negative spiral of responses and counter-responses that could literally slam the door on a two-state solution,” he said.

Kerry also warned that Israel would be isolated in the international arena if the standstill continues. The Palestinians have already begun considering opting for unilateral efforts at the United Nations, and if they do so, they will garner more votes than they did last time, when they sought – and achieved – non-member observer state status, he said. Furthermore, the eruption of a protest movement in the West Bank would result in greater delegitimization of Israel, said Kerry, cautioning against the dire potential of what might happen if the Palestinian Authority were to collapse.

The U.S. secretary of state said the best way to guarantee Israel’s security would be by reaching a two-state solution, and that one state for two peoples is simply an unrealistic scenario for both sides.

**Fifth visit:** Meanwhile, U.S. officials said Monday that Kerry will return to the Middle East next week in another bid to revitalize peace hopes, with the contours of a package possibly emerging to lure Israel and the Palestinians back into direct negotiations. ...

**[Read the entire article on the Ha’aretz website.](#)**

## **5) Why U.S. Jews must embrace Kerry's appeal to put pressure on Netanyahu** **Rabbi Eric Yoffie, Israel Policy Forum, Ha'aretz, June 7, 2013**

When it comes to Israel, there are two kinds of Jews: Those who believe that the occupation of the West Bank can go on forever, and those who don't.

This is not the same division as that which exists between hawks and doves. We know that Israeli hawks are often content to see the occupation continue, but many doves who hate their country's presence in the territories have also come to see it as a necessary evil that is likely to last for the indefinite future. And many American Jews have adopted the same mindset. Like their Israeli counterparts in both camps, they assume, whether they love the occupation or hate it, that it has been around for 46 years and it will be around for a lot more.

This past week, Secretary of State Kerry addressed himself to the nothing-can-ever-change view of things. Speaking with a power and passion that we don't always hear from him, Kerry delivered a simple, eminently clear message: Time is up. Disaster is at hand. And therefore a way must be found to arrive at a peace agreement between Israelis and Palestinians that will end the occupation. Not in the distant future, but very soon. And Americans Jews must help.

This is not the way that senior Administration officials usually talk to Jewish groups about Israel. They hint, imply, suggest, and often equivocate. They are careful not to offend. But Mr. Kerry chose bluntness and candor on his way to an emphatic conclusion: "The status quo is simply not sustainable." This was a speech, it should be said, that was lovingly delivered; Kerry, after all, is a man with impeccable pro-Israel credentials, and his personal concern and devotion to Israel were amply on display.

While the audience was appreciative, his words will garner little support from the American Jewish right, which has been contemptuous of Kerry's efforts from the beginning. Its leaders are convinced that the peace Kerry is so aggressively advocating can never be reached. (For a sample of initial responses to the speech, see [here](#).)

But the purpose of this address was not at all to offer possible details of an agreement; it was to take on the thinking of those in America—and in Israel—who are convinced that Israel can continue with things as they are.

Israel absolutely cannot, Mr. Kerry said. And the specifics came in explaining what that meant, focusing on the disastrous deterioration of Israel's international position and the dire consequences for the Palestinian Authority and for security in the territories if progress is not made.

In private conversations, Administration officials have expanded on these points, laying out just how serious they believe the situation to be: European backing for Israel, already collapsing, will disappear; the Palestinians will go to the International Criminal Court over settlements and will win support throughout the world; and Mr. Abbas—who, whatever one thinks of him, opposes violence and terror—will step down a failure, to be replaced by who-knows-what, or perhaps by nothing at all. ...

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

## **6) May-June 2013 Report on Israeli Settlements, Map of Settlement Growth and Population Foundation for Middle East Peace**

[The May-June 2013 Report on Israeli Settlement in the Occupied Territories is now available here.](#)

**[Observations on Israel's settlement construction program:](#)** Secretary of State John Kerry has revived U.S. interest in a diplomatic solution to the conflict between Israel and Palestinians. The government of Benjamin Netanyahu, for its part, has temporarily reduced certain elements of its settlement expansion program, suspending tenders for a number of weeks for new construction in some of the largest settlements. More broadly, however, the main components of the program proceed unhindered.

**[To our readers:](#)** Many Americans do not grasp the massive scale of Israel's 46-year project of settlement of the West Bank and its increasingly apparent goal of permanent control over the area and its Palestinian populace. Israeli officials claim they are driven by security needs based on alleged Palestinian hostility to peace, that Israel's claim to the land is historically and biblically justified, and that Israel is the main victim in the conflict. But this narrative is slowly unraveling.

**[Map: Israeli settlements: Population growth and concentration, 1995–2011:](#)** This map illustrates the steady growth of Israeli settlements throughout the West Bank since the height of the Oslo Peace Process in 1995 through 2011. For some years, optimists have assumed that, given international opposition to Israeli settlement and occupation, and Palestinian demographic pressures, Israel would compromise on its settlement policy and a two state peace would eventually emerge.

[Settlement timeline, February 1 - February 28 2013](#)

[Additional links on the FMEP website.](#)



## **7) The occupation corrupts: An open letter from Leonard Fein**

**Americans for Peace Now, June 5, 2013**

The first slogan put forward by Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) was *hakibbush mashchit* – the occupation corrupts. Now, as we approach the 46th anniversary of the corrupting occupation, we can understand how prescient that slogan was.

Set to the side the manifest corruption involved in retroactively “legalizing” settlement outposts that had been slated for demolition. Set to the side the preferential treatment offered settlers, at the obvious expense of citizens within the Green Line. Set to the side the displacement of Arabs or their separation from their lands. Instead, consider the deeper corruption that comes of ruling another people. Consider what it does to an 18-year old’s soul to find himself, herself, in charge of a check point, deciding whether a pregnant woman really requires clearance, an elderly man warrants courtesy. Consider the transition that 18-year old must experience as s/he returns home from his or her duties, back to hearth and family, the abrasions of service temporarily interrupted.

It is sometimes proposed that Israel’s strength is represented by the normalcy of everyday life within the Green Line, and there is some truth in that. But the price of that normalcy plainly involves a closing of the eyes to the insult and injury visited upon the Palestinians, whether explicitly or simply by the fact of occupation. So it is that Israel fails in its promise of equality even to its own Palestinian citizens; so it is that racist habits are formed and develop unimpeded; so it is that “price tag” attacks multiply, as do vigilante assaults, as do mean-spirited attacks on olive trees, now and then on mosques, and above all on people.

Elie Wiesel long ago observed that “Words name things and then come to replace the things they name.” The word “occupation” is a telling example of that truth. By now, it rolls trippingly off our tongue, replacing the affront it signifies, enabling us the illusion of normalcy. That illusion is, in a word, corrupting. It corrupts the intellect, it corrupts the heart. It makes a mockery of empathy, that sixth sense on which so much else – including, not least, civil society – depends.

Forty-six years and counting. ... A resolution of the conflict becomes more remote with the passage of time. Earlier hopes come to seem naïve. The status quo governs, and few ask whether it is sustainable. Even when the erstwhile directors of the Mossad, all of them, caution unambiguously that Israel’s policies imperil the country, their message does not resonate. Nor is there sufficient recognition of the fact that the status quo is not stable, not at all, that it generates a coarsening of attitudes that gathers momentum and finds increasing expression in behavior.

That is the heart of the corruption. And that is the heart of the ongoing threat, the threat not merely to the Israel of our dreams and sometimes fantasies, but to the quotidian Israel, the everyday Israel to which we are so resolutely attached.

*Hakibbush mashchit* – the occupation corrupts.



## **8) Occupation? What occupation?**

**Uri Avnery, Ha'aretz, June 7, 2013**

Every person is endowed with a certain denial mechanism they can use to avoid the shame, fear, guilt and pain involved in coping with their improper actions. Instead of facing their failure, accepting reality and dealing with it, they simply enter a state of denial.

But denial extracts a heavy price from the denier. The mental effort involved in self-deception causes serious mental harm. Someone who denies facts is declaring that he has a mental problem. He needs treatment. For 46 years we have been in this situation. We are denying one of the most significant phenomenon of our national existence, if not the most central one: the occupation.

We can use the well-worn metaphor of the huge elephant in the room, whose presence we deny. Elephant? What elephant? Here? We tiptoe around the elephant and avert our gaze so we won't have to look at it. After all, it doesn't exist.

We are ruling completely over another people. This influences every sphere of our national life – our politics, our economy, our values, our military, our legal system, our culture and more. But we don't see – and don't want to see – what is going on only a few minutes' drive from our homes, over the black line known as the Green Line. We have become so accustomed to this situation that we see it as normal. But the occupation is intrinsically an abnormal, temporary situation.

Under the law of nations, an occupation is said to occur when one state conquers the area of another state during wartime and then holds it as an occupier until peace is achieved. Because of the temporary nature of an occupation, international law imposes severe restrictions on the occupying state. It is not permitted to transfer its own citizens to the occupied area, it is forbidden to build settlements there, it is forbidden to seize lands, and so on.

Israel has invented something unprecedented: eternal occupation. In 1967, because no pressure was brought to bear on Israel to return the occupied territories, Moshe Dayan came up with a brilliant idea – to continue the occupation forever. If Israel had annexed the territories, it would have been forced to grant civil rights to the occupied population. But in a state of occupation, it could maintain control without giving the conquered people any rights at all – not human rights, not civil rights and certainly not national rights. A real egg of Columbus.

We are a moral people – in our own eyes, at least. How do we resolve the contradiction between our extreme morality and our blatantly immoral circumstances? Simple: We go into denial.

“Power corrupts,” said the British statesman Lord Acton. “And absolute power corrupts absolutely.” The occupation is the most absolute power there is. It has corrupted everything good about us – it has corrupted the army that maintains the occupation, the soldiers who are forced to terrorize the civilian population every night, the government institutions that bypass the law in the dark, the courts that implement the occupation laws, and the entire country, which is violating international law every day.

If we ask ourselves what has happened to our country, we simply have to open our eyes and look at the elephant. “He who confesses and forsakes finds mercy,” the book of Proverbs tells us. It isn't enough to admit and recognize that a sin has been committed; we must abandon the wrong path we've taken. In our case, to save our souls and our state, we must forsake the occupied territories.

But before we can forsake, we must first admit and recognize that something is wrong.

## 9) [Israel's spectacular suicide](#)

Ari Shavit, Ha'aretz, June 13, 2013

Few people paid attention to the news that during the first quarter of 2013, there were 865 housing starts in the settlements. That was a 176 percent increase over the parallel quarter last year and a 355 percent increase over the fourth quarter of 2012. Although settlers are only four out of every 100 Israelis, of every 100 housing starts this year, 8.5 were in the settlements. While in sovereign Israel the scope of new construction is slowing, new construction in Judea and Samaria is now proceeding at the highest pace in seven years.

The trend is clear: Within a short time the number of settlers will increase dramatically, as will their ability to block any attempt to divide the land. If it continues this way, the Netanyahu-Lapid-Bennett government will put an end to the two-state solution, the Jewish democratic entity, and the Zionist dream.

This is not a question of peace. In the coming years there will be no peace between Israel and the Palestinians. Nor is it a question of total and immediate withdrawal. In the coming years Israel will not be able to hand over the West Bank to the Palestinians in the same hasty way it gave them the Gaza Strip. But it is a question of survival. Will Israel, at the last minute, stop flooding the occupied territories with settlers? Will the Zionist enterprise retain the option of going back to being a moral enterprise?

Will the Jewish state choose life, or become unwittingly dissolved in an occupation that is becoming eternal?

As of now the answers are clear: No, no, and no. The Likud of Danny Danon prefers the Land of Israel over the State of Israel. Naftali Bennett's Habayit Hayehudi ("The Jewish Home") is determined to drown the Jewish national home in the swamps of colonial decay. Yair Lapid's Yesh Atid ("There is a future") is turning out to be the party of opportunistic ambiguity, turning its back on the Zionist future. It's just as Labor chairman Shelly Yacimovich said last week in the Knesset, that the national camp of Labor-Meretz-Kadima is now sitting in the opposition, while it's the government of right-right-right that is on the verge of establishing a binational reality that will be irreparable.

From the settlers' perspective, everything's fine. Their situation has never been so comfortable. The international community is slowly internalizing the fact that the fundamental problem in the Middle East is not the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but the pathological political culture of the Arab world. The United States and Europe are too tired to confront the intense determination of the heirs of Gush Emunim. Israel can sell a navigation app for a billion dollars at the same time that it has lost its way. Right now there is no power within Israel, nor any power outside Israel, that can force Israel to save itself from its settlers. The most important minister in the government – Housing and Construction Minister Uri Ariel – can continue the momentum that began in the first quarter of the year. The government of no future will allow him to continue to break records in settling Judea and Samaria. While 20 ministers are engaged with all sorts of nonsense, the housing minister is burying Zionism in the hills. ...

Thus, from the Israelis' perspective things are not good. They are not good at all. True, soon there will be a budget and soon there will a "sharing of the burden," and it's going to be a great summer. The restaurants along the coast will be full and the nightclubs will be full and Tel Aviv will be as lively as ever. But the fact that in 2013 Israelis still haven't found a sane political party that will protect them sanely from the settlements, means that even as they are partying, they are dying. Even as they are winning, they are committing suicide. This country has, in the past, seen a few group suicides. But never has it seen a suicide so spectacular and so sweet and so unnecessary as the quiet suicide it is committing now.

## **10) Triumph and tragedy**

### **Uri Avnery, June 15, 2013**

It started low-key. A little piece of paper was thrust into the hand of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol as he was reviewing the Independence Day parade. It said that Egyptian troops were entering the Sinai peninsula. From there on alarm grew. Every day brought menacing new reports. The Egyptian president, Gamal Abd-al-Nasser, issued blood-curdling threats. UN peacekeepers were withdrawn.

In Israel, worry turned into fear, and fear into fright. Eshkol sounded weak. When he tried to raise public morale with a speech over the radio, he stumbled and seemed to stutter. People started talking about a Second Holocaust, about the destruction of Israel.

I was one of the very few who remained cheerful. At the height of public despair, I published an article in Haolam Hazeh, the news magazine I edited, under the headline "Nasser has walked into a trap." Even my wife thought that was crazy.

My good cheer had a simple reason.

A few weeks before, I had given a talk in a Kibbutz on the Syrian border. As is customary, I was invited to have coffee afterwards with a select group of members. There I was told that "Dado" (General David Elazar), the commander of the Northern sector, had lectured there the week before, and then had coffee. Like me.

After swearing me to secrecy, they disclosed that Dado had told them – after swearing them to secrecy – that every evening, before going to bed, he prayed to God that Nasser would move his troops into the Sinai desert. "There we shall destroy them," Dado had assured them.

Nasser did not want the war. He knew that his army was quite unprepared. He was bluffing, in order to please the Arab masses. He was egged on by the Soviet Union, whose leaders believed that Israel was about to attack their main client in the region, Syria, as part of a worldwide American plot.

(The Soviet ambassador, Dmitri Chuvakhin, invited me for a talk and disclosed the plot to me. If so, I said, why not ask your ambassador in Damascus to advise the Syrians to stop their border attacks on us, at least temporarily? The ambassador broke into laughter. "Do you really believe that anyone there listens to our ambassador?")

Syria had allowed Yasser Arafat's new Palestinian Liberation Movement (Fatah) to launch small and ineffectual guerilla actions from its border. They also spoke about an Algerian-style "popular liberation war". In response, the Israeli Chief of Staff, Yitzhak Rabin, had threatened them with a war to change the regime in Damascus.

Abd-al-Nasser saw an easy opportunity to assert Egypt's leadership of the Arab world by coming to the defense of Syria. He threatened to throw Israel into the sea. He announced that he had mined the Straits of Tiran, cutting Israel off from the Red Sea. (As it transpired later, he had not sown a single mine). ...

[Read the entire piece on the Gush Shalom website.](#)