

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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This week's Middle East Notes contains articles concerning Kerry's attempts to restart negotiations between the Israelis and Palestinians, an eyewitness account of the occupation, the singling out of Israel for BDS actions, attempts by Israel, often supported by U.S. media, to focus only on the West Bank Palestinians as if the Gaza Palestinians are not part of future negotiations, and other issues.

- The CMEP Bulletins for June 21 and June 28 deal with Kerry's return visits to Israel, attempts to restart negotiations, and the two state- solution debate.
- Cynthia Franklin gives her eyewitness account to the still-unfolding history of ethnic cleansing and Occupation.
- Saed Bannoura reports that the Israeli government is planning one of its largest schemes to illegally confiscate 22,500 dunams (5559.87 acres) in Bethlehem, as part of its illegal "Greater Jerusalem" settlement project.
- Avi Shilon notes in Ha'aretz that there's no reason to waste more words on the necessity of the two-state solution. It is the only solution.
- Danielle Spiegel-Feld published an article in the Jerusalem Post that if the attempt to restart negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians fail, the Palestinians will continue and further emphasize their case to the United Nations.
- Daa Hadid and Ian Deitch write in the Associated Press/Bloomberg News that Bill Clinton urged Israel to make peace with Palestinians in order to survive as a Jewish and democratic state at a recent conference, adding his voice to a chorus of prominent pro-Israel figures warning of the urgency of peacemaking for the country's own survival.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in Ha'aretz that Netanyahu is trying to prevent negotiations from even starting by setting conditions which give Abbas no room to maneuver.
- Dov Waxman in Ha'aretz notes that despite U.S. Secretary of State Kerry's pleas, there's little chance the U.S. Jewish community will pressure the Israeli government to enter negotiations with the Palestinians.
- Dahlia Scheindlin in +972 states that Israeli policy conveys that there is no Palestine, only two chunks of land divided by people, politics and culture.
- Larry Derfner argues in +972 that the singling out of Israel among the world's human rights violators for boycott is fair game since the U.S. singles it out for patronage, while Europe grits its teeth in obedience. Israel is by no means the world's worst malefactor – but it is the only one the world always encourages or, at the very least, protects. When that finishes, the occupation will finish, and so will the justification for singling Israel out.
- The Ma'an News Agency reports that negotiator Saeb Erekat welcomed John Kerry to Ramallah on June 30 but stated that there had been no breakthrough in marathon U.S.-led efforts to revive direct peace talks but Washington's top diplomat said there had been "real progress."

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin, June 21, 2013

Kerry to return amidst two-state debate: On May 24, Kerry concluded his fourth visit to the region in barely two months by saying, "We are reaching the time (when) leaders need to make hard decisions." Kerry has said he will not continue his efforts if he does not feel that the parties are willing to make those "hard decisions" and take steps towards peace. ...

As the CMEP Bulletin discussed last week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has a serious problem with his cabinet. Deputy Defense Minister Danny Danon created a stir when he said that if a peace plan were presented to the current cabinet, it would not be passed. He explained that he and other ministers in opposition to the creation of a Palestinian state did not have a problem with Kerry's efforts only because they did not foresee them becoming fruitful.

This week, Netanyahu's right-wing rival Naftali Bennett told a group of settlers, "The attempt to establish a Palestinian state in our land has ended." He continued by saying the efforts were "futile" because, "Everyone who wanders around Judea and Samaria [the Biblical nomenclature for the West Bank] knows that what they say in the corridors of Annapolis and Oslo is detached from reality. Today there are 400,000 Israeli residents of Judea and Samaria and another 250,000 in eastern Jerusalem." He then called on the government to "build, build, build" more settlements in the West Bank.

Prime Minister Netanyahu, who continues to profess his support for a two-state solution, quickly distanced himself from his minister's comments. He told reporters, "Foreign policy is shaped by the prime minister and my view is clear. I will seek a negotiated settlement where you'd have a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state."

The New York Times responded to Netanyahu's repeated statements in support of a two-state solution by observing, "While Mr. Netanyahu distanced himself from the remarks, questions about the sincerity of his recent pleas for peace resurfaced. Clearly, a dissonance exists in Israeli public opinion, where a strong majority supports two states, but only along parameters the Palestinians have roundly rejected."

Following Bennett's comments, prominent Israeli and U.S. Jewish voices stressed the importance of a two-state solution.

[Politician] Yair Lapid emphasized the danger of not coming to an agreement, telling the Washington Post, "What we have to say is, 'Yes, we've tried this one hundred times, but let's try it one hundred and one, one hundred and two,' until it succeeds. There's no other option. If there is another option, it's too horrific... If we don't go for the two-state solution, this state will stop being a Jewish state."

Israeli President Shimon Peres told A-list well-wishers at his 90th birthday celebration, "The yesterday between us and the Palestinians is full of sadness. I believe that the Israel of tomorrow and the Palestine of tomorrow can offer our children a ray of hope. The advancement of peace will complete the march of Israel towards the fulfillment of its founding vision. An exemplary and thriving country. A country living in peace and security in its homeland and among its neighbors."

U.S. Jewish groups also condemned Bennett's statement. American Jewish Committee executive director David Harris said [the] remarks were "stunningly shortsighted," must be "repudiated by the country's top leaders" and offer "only the prospect of a dead-end strategy of endless conflict and growing isolation for Israel." Abraham Foxman, director of the Anti-Defamation League, [said] that the statements "undermine the seriousness of the Israeli government." He says, "The irony is that these kinds of statements put an added onus on Israel. For, if to go by Bennett or Danon, it is Israel that is saying no to the two-state solution... When in fact it is not Israel that is not serious, it is the other side."

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

Kerry in region: Déjà vu or breakthrough? U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's fifth visit to the region to convince the Israeli and Palestinian governments to restart talks is underway. These near monthly visits are beginning to feel like "déjà vu all over again" as the media hypes the Secretary's visits and he departs with nothing concrete. But this persistence could pay dividends as each visit ratchets up the pressure for both sides to return to the table and avoid blame for any failure.

Ynet reports that on this trip, Kerry is "trying to pin down precisely what conditions President Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu have for resuming talks and perhaps discuss confidence-building measures." With the State Department only describing Friday's meetings as "very productive" and "constructive" here is a review of where things stand:

The Israeli government

- **Conditions:** Netanyahu continues to say the fate of the settlements and borders should be resolved in negotiations and talks should resume immediately without any preconditions. While Netanyahu professes to want to negotiate without preconditions, he does insist that any negotiated Palestinian state be demilitarized without an army or control of its airspace and Israeli forces to remain deployed along the strategic Jordan Valley for a lengthy period of time.
- **Gestures:** The Netanyahu government has not issued new settlement tenders for East Jerusalem or the West Bank since March. But more than 1,000 housing units have advanced through the zoning and permit process during that period. On the eve of Kerry's visit the Israeli government moved closer to constructing 69 apartments in the West Bank settlement Har Homa. For an explanation of the complicated approval process, look at the PeaceNow website.
- **Internal obstacles:** A number of Israeli ministers are openly expressing their opposition to the two-state solution. Those voices are gaining influence. On Tuesday, Danny Danon, Israel's deputy defense minister who opposes a Palestinian state was elected president of the Likud convention by a wide margin and Sunday he will likely become the chairman of the party's central committee. ...

The Palestinian Authority

- **Conditions:** President Abbas demands that settlement activity stop and Israel agree to negotiate on the basis of the 1967 lines, with adjustments, before peace talks resume. The Palestinian negotiators have concerns about future talks being in good faith and fear talks could go on indefinitely as construction in the West Bank continues. After Wednesday's settlement announcement, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said, "Settlement activity in and around occupied East Jerusalem is one of the main reasons why the two-state solution is disappearing, as without East Jerusalem there will be no Palestinian state."
- **Gestures:** The PA has put seeking international recognition outside of negotiations on hold. Last November the UN members voted to upgrade the Palestinians from U.N. observer to non-voting member state and if talks do not start, the PA has made it clear that efforts to gain further recognition will resume, possibly including attempts prosecute claims against Israel in the International Criminal Court. This makes the September UN General Assembly an important date. ...
- **Internal obstacles:** Right now the Palestinian Authority is in disarray after former Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's successor only lasted 18 days on the job before quitting in a huff. Rami Hamdallah accused President Abbas of running the government through two presidential advisers he appointed as deputy prime ministers without consulting the new prime minister. While resignations are often a bargaining tactic in Palestinian politics, thus far he has held his ground. ...

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

2) Sightseeing in the apartheid state: From Ben Gurion to the West Bank **Cynthia Franklin, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, June 13, 2013**

This May, I traveled with nine other U.S. faculty members to East Jerusalem and the West Bank. Part of a region where every millimeter comprises contested space, this land, together with Gaza, is referred to by the United Nations and other international bodies as the Occupied Palestinian Territories, or oPt – Palestinian land under Israeli Occupation. Over the course of our 11 days in the oPt, we met with students and faculty members from five different Palestinian universities, toured towns and refugee camps in the West Bank, visited various organizations, and attended cultural events. On our last morning, Ben Gurion Airport and its “security” system on our minds, our talk over breakfast turned to the impact of the Israeli Occupation on the ability to travel inside and outside of borders that are ever-expanding for Israelis, and constricting for Palestinians.

On the one hand, such talk had been stitched into almost every conversation during our entire time in the oPt. We had met with many Palestinians – students, faculty members, administrators, mayors, directors of research institutes, artists, musicians, writers, bus drivers, activists, teachers, hotel managers, store-keepers. Not a single one of them was without a story of violation experienced if not at Ben Gurion in Tel Aviv (Israel denies most Palestinians living in the West Bank access to this airport, as well as to Jerusalem), then at checkpoints that some of them crossed daily as they took hours to travel – or found themselves unable to move across – distances that should have been traversable in minutes. The West Bank contains 98 fixed military checkpoints, 58 of them internal, and several hundred more “flying” or ad-hoc checkpoints and obstructions at any given time.

As a result, every person had stories of crossings that involved humiliation, and, often, physical violence. These stories, central to daily life under Israeli Occupation, permeated every conversation, even as the Separation Wall that winds for hundreds of kilometers in a crazy cement serpentine stranglehold around and through Palestinian agricultural lands, towns, villages and homes, was rarely out of sight. At Al-Quds University, located in Abu Dis, a short distance from our hotel in East Jerusalem, the Separation Wall presses right up against the University at points. While there, I told a fellow English professor about a hip-hop concert we had attended the night before at the French Consulate in East Jerusalem (it took the French government’s intervention to get the artist MC Gaza a special permit to travel from Gaza to East Jerusalem for the day).

This Al-Quds professor commented that, though he would love to attend cultural events in East Jerusalem, like most West Bankers, Israel does not allow him entry into Jerusalem, and although Abu Dis is technically in Jerusalem, the Wall has cut off his access to much of the city. Upon returning to Honolulu, I read of a home demolition in Abu Dis that had prevented the students we met from entering the campus to take their final exams

Students and faculty at Birzeit University told us how they have to leave for campus hours ahead of time to travel ... only a few miles because they are regularly unable to cross or are held-up at checkpoints. In Hebron, we witnessed how Palestinian residents cannot cross from one side of the street to the other to enter their homes. Instead, they must follow circuitous routes to arrive home while remaining within the yellow or white lines that demarcate the parts of the street upon which they are allowed to walk. Once home, they must enter through back doors to minimize contact with the Jewish settlers.

In our brief time in the oPt, we did our best to grasp the byzantine structures that, despite their seeming incomprehensibility, systematically make movement impossible or extraordinarily difficult for Palestinians. We learned about Palestinian identity papers that trump U.S. passports and make travel even within the oPt extremely limited, and about color-coded license plates that prohibit Palestinians movement through checkpoints. ...

[Read the entire account at the Jews for Justice for Palestinians website.](#)

3) New Israeli plan to rip-off 22,500 dunams from Palestinians in Bethlehem

Saed Bannoura, International Middle East Media Center, June 18, 2013

The Israeli government is planning one of its largest schemes to illegally confiscate 22,500 dunams (5559.87 acres) that belong to the Palestinians in the West Bank city of Bethlehem, as part of its illegal "Greater Jerusalem" settlement project.

Dr. Jad Ishaq, head of the Applied Research Institute (ARIJ) stated that Israel decided to rip-off 22,500 Dunams from Palestinians in Bethlehem, Beit Jala and Beit Sahour. The lands are behind the illegal Apartheid Wall in the area, and illegally fall under the so-called "Absentee Property Law." Dr. Ishaq stated that the Legal Adviser of the Israeli Government recommended that the "guardian" of absentee property [in this case the Israeli occupation] can use the property and place it under his authority.

The "law" comes in direct violation of all related international laws and international treaties, including the Fourth Geneva Convention. Dr. Ishaq further stated that an Israeli court plans to examine the Israeli decision in September of this year, and added that should Israel implement its plan, Bethlehem will be turned into a human warehouse with high density, as all uninhabited lands will be illegally confiscated from their owners.

He said that Israeli plan targets Palestinian lands in Khirbit Al-Mazmourya, Khallit Ar-Ribway, Luka Mountain, Jabal Skhour, Wad Al-Jamal, Jaroun Al-Hummus, Cremisan and all of the lands that became isolated behind the Annexation Wall and the Gilo illegal settlement, in addition to lands in West Jerusalem. The Palestinian expert further said that all of the lands in question have been labeled by the Jerusalem Municipality under "Project 2020" as "Green Areas".

Areas that will be sold to Israeli institutions in order to complete the separation between Jerusalem and Bethlehem, as well as its separation from the rest of the West Bank by a complete belt and chain of settlements around the occupied city of Jerusalem. Ishaq called on the Palestinian Authority to act on the international level in order to raise awareness regarding this very dangerous Israeli plan, and added that "this plan is the biggest land theft carried out by Israel since its establishment in the historic land of Palestine in 1948".

On his part, Bethlehem Governor, Abdul-Fattah Hamayel, said that Israel is violating and bypassing all related international laws and treaties, and added that the Israeli "Legal System" is legalizing crimes and violations against the Palestinians and their property. Hamayel stated that the Palestinian Authority must act now in order to stop this illegal plan, and all of Israel's illegal activities.

The Governor also said that the Palestinian Authority does not trust the Israeli legal system, and that even if the Israeli Supreme Court decided ruled against the plan, the Israeli government will find ways to legalize the project the same way it did with numerous previous settlement projects that were eventually deemed "legal" by the Supreme Court.

He also said that Israel is using these projects in order to foil any attempt to resume the peace process, and is aborting any chances of success of the efforts of U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry.

It is worth mentioning that Israel issued that "Absentee Property Law" in 1950 with the intention to illegally confiscate and rob Palestinian-owned lands that became part of the newly established state of Israel in the historic land of Palestine. The so-called law also states, "Every person who lives outside the state of Israel, or lives in a hostile state, is considered absentee; his lands and property are taken over by the state, and are placed under the authority of the absentee property guardian of the Ministry of Justice."

4) A two-state solution is still possible for Israel and the Palestinians

Avi Shilon, Ha'aretz, June 19, 2013

Economy Minister Naftali Bennett's statement that the idea of a Palestinian state is already "behind us" stems from his worldview, and perhaps also from political considerations. But it's no accident that he said it with such confidence. His tailwind for doing so is coming, of all places, from Israel's peace camp.

About a month ago, for instance, Channel 2 television broadcast a report about the end of the two-state solution that made waves. But most of the people who were quoted as lamenting this shattered dream were from the left. Similarly, after participating in one of the tours of the territories that have become popular recently, a well-known journalist tweeted this Shabbat that a Palestinian state could no longer be established. Many people on Twitter sadly agreed with his statement.

The objective reason for this despair stems from fear that the spread of hundreds of thousands of settlers throughout the territories effectively prevents the Palestine option, given the difficulty of separating the two populations. But it seems that the bigger problem is the subjective one: A kind of mental fatigue has developed over an idea that, despite having become widely accepted, still remains a fantasy.

There's no reason to waste more words on the necessity of the two-state solution. What's important to stress is that this pessimism, which feeds on the feeling that we've missed the deadline, stems from shortsightedness and impatience.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is more complicated than other national conflicts because it has taken place while Palestinian nationalism, and the definition of its goals, were still crystallizing. On November 29, 1947, when the UN General Assembly approved the Partition Plan, nobody was yet talking about a Palestinian state, but rather about an Arab state. When the PLO was established in 1964, it demanded all of Palestine. It would take another 24 years until Yasser Arafat announced his willingness to divide the land, and only five years after that did the Oslo process begin.

Israel's recognition of the necessity of partition has also been slow, but steady. It took 30 years until Menachem Begin became the first leader to grant autonomy -- albeit only administrative -- to the Palestinians, whom he called "the Arabs of the Land of Israel." When the state of Israel was established, Begin's Herut party was still demanding both banks of the Jordan River.

The process that the left underwent has been lengthy as well. It's enough to recall that Yitzhak Rabin, the prime minister responsible for the Oslo Accord, had trouble uttering the word "Palestine" until his dying day.

It's true that since the Camp David summit in 2000, it has often seemed as if we were running in place. But in the meantime, Israel has disengaged from the Gaza Strip, rightist prime ministers Ariel Sharon and Benjamin Netanyahu both recognized the need to divide the land, and the Palestinians abandoned the armed struggle.

If we take the peace with Egypt as an example, it too did not break out overnight, at the moment when Egyptian President Anwar Sadat alighted from his plane at Ben-Gurion Airport. The principles of the eventual agreement had been set down in general terms in the Rogers plan, about a decade before the festive signing of the peace treaty on the White House lawn. But it took years until conditions, and courage, ripened enough to make it happen. ...

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

**5) If negotiations are out, the UN will be in
Danielle Spiegel-Feld, Jerusalem Post, June 19, 2013**

When U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry first tackled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in late March, he made a serious request of Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas: In order to give talks a chance, pledge to temporarily refrain from bringing Israel before the International Criminal Court or taking unilateral actions at the UN. By early April, reports surfaced that Abbas had agreed to postpone any further attempts at waging “lawfare” against Israel for two to three months.

But now, a very consequential deadline looms: September.

With Kerry about to visit Israel again, the scheduled détente about to expire and with talks a ways off, PA representatives are again threatening to take legal actions that could significantly impact Israel and the U.S.

In late May, Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat announced that the PA had completed preparatory legal work to join “63 different UN agencies, conventions and treaties” and would move forward with the planned onslaught at the UN General Assembly in September if talks were not underway by then. Shortly thereafter, the European Union raised the specter of ICC prosecutions against Israel, saying the EU would support a Palestinian appeal to the ICC if negotiations failed to get off the ground due to continued settlement construction.

U.S. officials have begun to signal alarm at the possibility of having to stand alone to battle Palestinian bids at the UN. Last year, the U.S. could only convince seven states apart from Israel to join in opposing the Palestinian statehood bid, and two of them were the ex-U.S. territories of Palau and the Marshall Islands.

Secretary Kerry expressed concern in his recent speech to the American Jewish Committee. “The United States of America will always have Israel’s back,” Kerry said. “But wouldn’t we both be stronger if we had more company?” In Israel, however, there’s been a conspicuous lack of public discussion on the subject.

Israelis have long been dismissive of the UN, which, for good reason, they see as biased. They also tend to view the UN as toothless, and there’s something to this assessment too. After all, the 35 UN Human Rights Council resolutions issued against Israel in the past five years – an astonishing 68 percent of all resolutions against countries during that time – have had little discernible impact.

But the particular Palestinian actions planned for September would have significant direct and indirect consequences.

If the PA applies to join more UN agencies – it joined the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization in 2011 – its applications will likely be accepted. The U.S. will oppose the move, and will expend political capital trying to get others to do so, to avoid the symbolism of standing alone, but won’t be able to veto the applications.

Legislation enacted in the U.S. after the 2011 UNESCO bid requires Congress to stop payments to the PA if Palestine becomes a full member of any other UN agencies before reaching an agreement with Israel. The statute permits Secretary Kerry to waive this funding stop for the current fiscal year. However, Congress could choose not to re-appropriate funds after that. And there’s nothing that should scare a sane Israeli government more than the prospect of a defunded, aid-dependent PA collapsing, leading to a more radical regime or Israel having to govern the West Bank. ...

[Read the entire article on the Jerusalem Post website.](#)

6) Bill Clinton: Israel must make peace to survive **Diaa Hadid and Ian Deitch, Associated Press/Bloomberg News**

Former President Bill Clinton urged Israel to make peace with Palestinians in order to survive as a Jewish and democratic state at a conference Monday evening, adding his voice to a chorus of prominent pro-Israel figures warning of the urgency of peacemaking for the country's own survival.

Clinton spoke hours after an Israeli Cabinet minister declared that the Palestinians would not establish a state in territory Israel controls. It underscored a chasm between the country's official support for creating an independent Palestinian state and the hard-line opponents who dominate Israel's ruling coalition.

Repeating arguments made for years by Israeli doves and centrists, Clinton warned that increasing numbers of Palestinians under Israeli rule will ultimately force the country to lose either its Jewish majority or its democratic nature if Palestinians are not given equal rights as citizens.

"Is it really okay with you if Israel has a majority of its people living within your territory who are not now, and never will be, allowed to vote?" Clinton asked at a conference in central Israel honoring President Shimon Peres, who is turning 90.

"If it is, can you say with a straight face that you'll be a democracy? If you let them vote, can you live with not being a Jewish state? And if you can't live with one of those things, then you are left with trying to cobble together some theory of a two-state solution," he said, with a Palestinian state next to Israel.

Clinton was referring to the 4.4 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank, Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem, territories that Israel conquered in the 1967 Mideast war. Another 1.4 million live inside Israel, alongside about 6.5 million Jews.

Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, but it retains significant control over movement of goods and people. Israel has built more than 100 settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, where some 500,000 of its citizens live. Israel annexed east Jerusalem and sees its settlements there as neighborhoods. The international community does not recognize the annexation.

Peace negotiations have repeatedly stalled in recent years. Palestinians say they will not negotiate while Israel builds in Jewish settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, which they claim for their future state, along with Gaza. Israel insists talks must resume without conditions.

Clinton criticized Palestinians for not negotiating with Israel in 2010, when there was a months-long settlement building slowdown.

The ex-President's comments came after Cabinet minister Naftali Bennett said the Palestinians' hopes of creating a state in territories controlled by Israel had reached a "dead end." Bennett, leader of the Jewish Home Party, echoed ideas expressed by other officials in Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's coalition government.

"The idea that a Palestinian state will arise inside the Land of Israel has reached a dead end," Bennett said Monday at a meeting of the Yesha settler group. "Never in the history of Israel have so many people dealt with so much energy with something so pointless," he said.

The statements came as the U.S. is trying to build momentum for peace talks to resume. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

**7) “Netanyahu is trying to prevent negotiations from even starting”
Zvi Bar’el, Ha’aretz, June 26, 2013**

The prime minister is speaking to us in English again -- this time from the pages of the Washington Post. The idea he proposed is actually captivating: It’s worth adopting just to see Benjamin Netanyahu sitting in a tent on the seam line between Jerusalem and Ramallah, perhaps next to the A-Ram checkpoint, from which he will be able to see the distress of thousands of Palestinians up close. “Until we reach an agreement,” is the time frame Netanyahu carved into his schedule for the planned tent sitting.

Interesting: He’ll sit in a tent for all eternity? And how much will this tent cost us? It’s possible to let the imagination run wild. One can just imagine the horror of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the threat of sitting under a canvas for even one weekend in the stifling heat, amid the swarms of flies, and all to reach an agreement that could be achieved in a cool office, next to a mahogany table and platters of bourekas.

But Netanyahu is also bluffing in English. He will be prepared to enter the tent “without preconditions,” a nice but false slogan, since Netanyahu has two conditions to thwart negotiations: The Palestinians must recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people, and the negotiations must deal with all the core issues.

This is a “double-lock” trick, in which Abbas will be required to discuss an explosive issue like the right of return in the very first stage of the talks, but must also agree from the start that there isn’t anything to discuss, since Israel is the state of the Jewish people. If Abbas doesn’t recognize this, Netanyahu won’t enter the tent. But if Abbas refuses to discuss the right of return, he will breach another of Netanyahu’s conditions, since the prime minister insists on discussing all the core issues at once. And thus, he has brought the negotiations to an end even before they start.

Netanyahu is wrapping his opposition to negotiations in a shroud of legitimacy. He doesn’t want to begin negotiations and then torpedo them over an issue like the drawing of borders or settlement construction. That would risk getting Israel accused of recalcitrance, and of intending to rule the territories forever, and would thus confront Washington with dilemmas that would threaten Israel’s international standing.

Instead, therefore, Netanyahu is trying to prevent negotiations from even starting. Until now, he has made good use of former Prime Minister Ehud Barak’s legacy -- that Israel has “no partner for peace.” He also persuaded the public that it is impossible to conduct talks with someone who doesn’t recognize the State of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. Thus at first glance, there’s nothing left that could undermine the legitimacy of his failure to begin negotiations.

When the differences between Netanyahu, Economy Minister Naftali Bennett and Finance Minister Yair Lapid require the use of a microscope, when the opposition has begun a summer siesta, when the U.S. is gradually withdrawing into itself and Iran is evoking more curiosity than fear, Netanyahu can enjoy nirvana. He isn’t required to have a peace talks agenda, the West Bank is quiet, Hamas is under economic pressure due to its rift with Egypt and the loss of revenue from Iran, and if there are occasional terror attacks, their cost is much lower than that of relinquishing several trailer houses on a hill.

There remains just one insignificant, boring and bothersome problem: What is the Palestinian agenda? Does it include another violent uprising? Will the Palestinians renew their application to the United Nations, this time to achieve full membership as a state rather than just nonmember observer status? How far will the efforts to boycott Israel get? ...

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

8) American Jews are part of the Israeli-Palestinian problem

Dov Waxman, Ha'aretz, June 25, 2013

In an op-ed entitled “Why American Jews Matter,” New York Times columnist Roger Cohen suggests that American Jews could help make peace by pressuring the Netanyahu government to change its policy toward the Palestinians. It’s a nice idea, but it’s unlikely to happen.

Many observers have long seen the American Jewish community as a hindrance to Israeli-Palestinian peacemaking. American Jewish support for Israel, channeled highly effectively by pro-Israel lobby groups like AIPAC into political power in Washington, D.C., is often cited as the reason why the United States has been unable or unwilling to act as an ‘honest broker’ in the peace process. According to this common view, the staunch support for Israel by American Jews, and their outsize influence in American politics, effectively prevents the United States from acting in a manner that many believe is the only way to finally end the long conflict between Israelis and Palestinians—applying pressure on Israel to stop building settlements, end its military occupation of Palestinian territories, and allow the Palestinians to exercise their self-determination and achieve statehood.

Whether or not the pro-Israel lobby, and by extension, the American Jewish community is in any way responsible for the intractability of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, American Jews are now being called upon to actively promote peace. In a much-publicized speech earlier this month to the American Jewish Committee (AJC), Secretary of State John Kerry directly appealed to American Jews to help the Obama Administration in its latest effort to restart the peace process, telling them:

“No one has a stronger voice in this than the American Jewish community. You can play a critical part in ensuring Israel’s long-term security. And as President Obama said in Jerusalem, leaders will take bold steps only if their people push them. You can help shape the future of this process. [...] Let your leaders and your neighbors alike know that you understand this will be a tough process with tough decisions, but that you’re ready to back the leaders who make them. For your children, do this; for your grandchildren, do this; for Israeli children and Palestinian children and for Israel, let them know that you stand behind negotiations that will lead to two states for two peoples living side-by-side in peace and security, and that you are part of the great constituency for peace.”

Will American Jews respond en masse to Kerry’s call? Could they become a powerful force for peace? Can they, as Roger Cohen suggests, play the same kind of role in promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace as Irish-Americans played in the successful peace process in Northern Ireland in the 1990s?

Probably not.

American Jews are not likely to exercise the same kind of pressure on Israel that Irish-Americans applied on Sinn Fein-IRA, which led it to renounce violence and disarm, and helped bring about the Good Friday Agreement. There is very little chance that, sooner or later, the American Jewish community will rise up and collectively tell the Israeli government that they can no longer support it if the occupation doesn’t end.

There are three major reasons for this.

First, American Jews are not quite as ‘dovish’ as many people would like to believe (or as organizations like J Street like to claim). Although they are famously liberal on domestic issues, when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, American Jews are more conservative—they are “hawkish doves.” Although a majority consistently supports a two-state solution to the conflict, most American Jews are very skeptical about the chances of achieving a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians ...

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

9) Who deleted Gaza?

Dahlia Scheindlin, +972, June 26, 2013

A recent New York Times report on the World Economic Forum held at the Dead Sea last month, carried the following headline: “Trying to Revive Mideast Talks, Kerry Pushes Investment Plan for West Bank.” The first paragraph of the article went on to explain:

In an effort to revive the moribund peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, Secretary of State John Kerry announced a plan on Sunday to invest as much as \$4 billion to develop the economy of the West Bank.

And further down in the article:

The idea would be to give the Palestinians an incentive to negotiate and to ensure that a Palestinian state in the West Bank would be viable.

There’s one problem: the word ‘Gaza’ is missing. Its absence psychologically deletes 1.7 million people who make up nearly 40 percent of the Palestinian population in Israel/Palestine and probably a greater portion of the perceived political problem in the region.

Yet it wasn’t Kerry who deleted Gaza. Although he used the term “Palestinian Authority,” which at present rules only over the West Bank, he probably did so because American policy precludes reference to “Palestine” or a Palestinian state. But he clearly had both regions in mind: he spoke of investment in the Palestinian economy (full text here), saying:

Ultimately, as the investment climate in the West Bank and Gaza improves, so will the potential for a financial self-sufficient Palestinian Authority that will not have to rely as much on foreign aid.

And he ended his speech calling to improve lives on both sides and citing as an example, “the little girls that I saw playing in rubble in Gaza.”

Yet something was lost in the rendition provided by multiple news outlets. Palestine became the West Bank. Who deleted Gaza?

Apologies for the predictable answer. When piecing together seemingly irreconcilable aspects of the previous Netanyahu government’s policy, a picture becomes clear: talk the two-state talk to satisfy key allies, while ensuring that the Palestinian people and land are irreparably fragmented to the point where no one is capable of imagining them as a state, even Palestinians themselves.

Selling the message of separation: As part of that larger goal, I submit that there was a highly conscious effort during Netanyahu’s second (previous) term to sever Gaza from the West Bank conceptually, beyond the physical separation imposed by political geography. Three target audiences can be discerned for the message that there are only two lumps of land called Gaza and the West Bank but no Palestine: Israelis, the international community, and no less important, the Palestinians themselves. At least for this one specific mission, Israel surely remembered to take them into account.

Re-reading Netanyahu’s previous term, the first part of the equation – talking the two-state talk – is clear. Given that Washington and European allies view two-states as the only game in town, he grudgingly accepted the notion in the “Bar Ilan speech” early in his term; similarly, endless haggling over re-starting negotiations supposedly conveyed his commitment to the goal. ...

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)

10) Why boycotts against Israel are fair game

Larry Derfner, +972, June 21, 2013

If it wasn't a persuasive argument, Israel's defenders wouldn't keep using it, like they are now against Alice Walker: Why are these left-wingers singling Israel out for boycott, not to mention condemnation, when so many other countries are committing far worse injustices and causing so much more suffering? Why aren't these people boycotting Syria, or Iran, or the Taliban, or Sudan, or Eritrea, or Zimbabwe, or China, or Saudi Arabia, or any of the other regimes and movements whose human rights violations are in a completely different league than Israel's?

And the answer given by Israel's defenders, of course, is that these left-wingers with their BDS and their Israel Apartheid Week are simply anti-Semites. "If the only country you want to label is Israel, that's anti-Semitism," as the Israel Lobby's elder statesman, Anti-Defamation League head Abraham Foxman, recently told The Times of Israel. And it's not just the Israel-right-or-wrong crowd who accepts this argument; even liberals who genuinely oppose the occupation and criticize Israel forthrightly argue that this country shouldn't be singled out for punishment when there are so many more deserving candidates, and these liberals, too, suspect that anti-Semitism is, if not the driving force behind this relentless focus on Israel, then it's one of them.

In a July 2012 post, I wrote that the Western left was obsessed with Israel for the same reason it had been obsessed with South African apartheid, with the Vietnam War and with European colonialism before: because the Western left is peopled overwhelmingly by the "haves" of the world, and "left-wing haves naturally recoil when they see fellow haves lording it over the have-nots. ... For a leftist, that is the ugliest thing on earth, even when elsewhere, other have-nots are being beaten up much worse by 'their own.'" I still think that, but there's also a simpler, less psychological, even fairly obvious reason why there's a Western movement to boycott Israel but not to boycott Syria, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea or other countries whose regimes practice a much "darker" form of repression on their victims than Israel does on the Palestinians.

The reason is that while these other states are, indeed, worse criminals than Israel, no popular movement is needed to convince the public and political leadership in the West that what those regimes are doing is wrong and ought to be stopped. Everybody knows that what Assad is doing is wrong, nobody is publicly defending the mass slaughter he commits; the U.S. has been supporting the rebels and the only debate in the West is whether or not to physically join the war against the Syrian regime. By contrast, in America, by far the world's most powerful, influential country, God help the politician who stands up in Congress or on the campaign trail and denounces Israel's treatment of Palestinians, and God help the one who isn't tough on Israel's enemies, the Arabs.

There is no Syria Lobby in the U.S., but there sure is an Israel Lobby. Is America arming Israel's enemies like it is Syria's? No, America is arming Israel against its enemies to the tune of \$3 billion a year, plus any other goodies Congress gets inspired to throw in. Is the U.S. or any other country debating whether to send in troops to end the occupation? (Samantha Power was branded an anti-Semite for once uttering a few words that seemed to sort of suggest such a thing, and she's had to spend years assuring the Israel Lobby that she didn't mean it.)

As it is with Syria, so it is with Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, the Taliban, Saudi Arabia and so on: they're already on the world's shit list, especially America's. The only debate is over how badly they should be attacked/sanctioned/ostracized/denounced. Israel, by contrast, is the favorite son of the world's only superpower – despite its half-century of tyranny over the Palestinians. ...

[Read the entire piece at +972mag.org.](http://+972mag.org)

11) [PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat welcomed John Kerry to Ramallah](#)

Ma'an News Agency, June 30, 2013

PLO official Saeb Erekat said that there had been no breakthrough in marathon U.S.-led efforts to revive direct peace talks but Washington's top diplomat said there had been "real progress."

"There has been no breakthrough so far and there is still a gap between the Palestinian and Israeli positions," chief PLO negotiator Saeb Erekat told reporters after US Secretary of State John Kerry finished talks in Ramallah with President Mahmoud Abbas, his third meeting in as many days.

But Kerry, however, insisted he had held "very positive" discussions with both sides since starting his intense shuttle diplomacy in Jerusalem on Thursday evening. And he said that with "a little more work" the start of final status talks "could be within reach".

"I am pleased to tell you that we have made real progress on this trip and I believe that with a little more work, the start of final status negotiations could be within reach," Kerry told reporters at Ben Gurion airport just before leaving for Brunei. "We started out with very wide gaps and we have narrowed those considerably," he said, describing them as "very narrow". "We have some specific details and work to pursue but I am absolutely confident that we are on the right track and that all the parties are working in very good faith in order to get to the right place."

Asked if Israel's settlement building had hampered efforts to achieve a breakthrough, he said: "The answer is no, there are any number of obstacles, but we are working through them. We have to have the courage to stay at this and to make some tough decisions," he said.

Kerry, who has over the last four days spent a total 13 hours in talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and another six with Abbas, said he would return to the region without saying when. "I'm going to come back because both leaders have asked me to," he said.

So far, Israel has flatly refused to countenance any return to the 1967 lines. "Netanyahu and his government are not serious about establishing a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders, they speak of a state without clear borders, and we need clarity according to international resolutions," said Azzam al-Ahmed, a senior official of Abbas's ruling Fatah party. "We are ready to resume negotiations according to our clear guidelines," he told Voice of Palestine. "Even with regards to the prisoners' issue, Israel did not provide any clear answer. We want a serious process to be launched," he said.

In another move likely to spark tension, Israel army radio said an Israeli committee was poised to push through a big discount for buyers of nearly 1,000 new homes which are due to be built in annexed East Jerusalem. Last week, on the eve of Kerry's arrival, another local committee gave final approval to build some 70 homes in the same area.