

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
September 4, 2014



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.](#)

The next Middle East Notes will be available on October 2. During September MOGC will have periodic updates on Gaza/Israel/Palestine news available on its webpage: www.maryknollogc.org. For daily information, click any of the following links:

[Ha'aretz](#)

[Ma'an News](#)

[Peace Now's News Nosh](#)

[Tikkun Daily](#)

This week's Middle East Notes 15 articles concern the destruction in Gaza, the present "long-term" cease-fire, continued construction of Israeli housing units on the West Bank, growing Israeli intolerance of Israelis' criticism of their government, and other pertinent articles.

- Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin provides info on the long-term cease-fire, some political responses to this cease-fire, the necessity of rebuilding Gaza, and a selection of other articles.
- The State of Two States for the week of August 24 includes quotations from various sources concerning the cease-fire.
- Former IDF member Idan Barir writes that artillery shells cannot be aimed precisely and are not meant to hit specific targets. Israel cannot argue that it was doing everything in its power to spare the innocent.
- Middle East Monitor records that Israel started construction on hundreds of housing units in the West Bank and Jerusalem since its assault on the Gaza Strip began in early July.
- Aeyal Gross in Ha'aretz wonders how a war that could have been prevented, that achieved nothing and that claimed many victims could win such sweeping support?
- William Cook in News Analysis-Palestine writes that ultimately it is not just Netanyahu who must bear the blame for the 45 days of mass destruction on a defenseless people unable to walk, run, fly or swim away from Gaza; it is the majority of Israeli people's leaders.
- According to Palestinian News Network, sources have confirmed that President Abbas has set into action a plan comprised of three stages, with the aim of reaching an independent Palestinian state.
- Ha'aretz writer Gideon Levy wonders how did he -- not even Israel's most widely read or most widely distributed journalist -- become an object of such rage and hatred? It seems that it's because feeling dismay is treason, compassion is heresy and that placing responsibility is an inexpiable crime.
- Gideon Levy writes in Ha'aretz that in civilian life, anyone suspected of manslaughter or murder is immediately arrested, with an investigation coming later. In the IDF the opposite is true.
- Matthew Kalman notes in Ha'aretz that even as the Hamas rockets were falling, West Bank settlers and Palestinian villagers were forging a historic new co-existence initiative.
- Peter Beinart writes in Ha'aretz that supporters of the two-state solution must start putting their bodies on the line.
- Ha'aretz editorial: Easing restrictions on Gaza won't create conditions for normal life or offer any economic or diplomatic horizons --the blockade merely foments violent rebellions against Israel.
- Mordechai Kremnitzer notes in Ha'aretz how sad and embarrassing it is that in present-day Israel, one cannot broadcast the simple humanist message that a child in Gaza is first of all a child.
- During the Hamas-Israel war, Jeff Halper of the Israeli Campaign Against Home Demolitions published a number of pertinent articles to which links are provided.
- Jeffrey Heller in Reuters writes that Israel announced on Sunday a land appropriation in the occupied West Bank that an anti-settlement group termed the biggest in 30 years, drawing Palestinian condemnation and a U.S. rebuke.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin

August 28, 2014

Long term cease-fire: Israel and the Palestinians agreed to an Egyptian brokered open ended cease-fire on August 26th, following 50 days of fighting that began July 8th. Effective immediately, Hamas and Islamic groups agreed to stop all rocket and mortar fire into Israel and Israel agreed to cease all military action, including ground operations. Israel also agreed to open border crossings in order to allow for an easier flow of goods into Gaza and the extension of fishing limits off the Gaza coast to 6 miles; both were included in the 2012 cease-fire agreement, but never fully implemented. Another key element of the cease-fire stipulates that the Palestinian Authority, with international donors, will coordinate reconstruction of Gaza. Longer term issues such as the construction of a Gaza seaport and airport, the release of Hamas prisoners in the West Bank by Israel, possibly in trade for the remains of the two Israeli soldiers believed held by Hamas, and the demilitarization of Gaza will be discussed in a month.

Events leading up to the cease-fire: Terms of this open ended cease-fire are similar in substance to a proposal accepted by Israel on July 15th, but rejected by Hamas. Both Israel and Hamas are claiming victory; there were fireworks in Gaza City Tuesday night and Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh praised Gaza residents as true heroes, while Netanyahu claimed to have dealt Hamas its toughest blow. In the week prior to the cease-fire a number of other violent events took place including, Israel's assassination of three Hamas military leaders, Hamas' execution of Palestinians accused of collaborating with Israel, and the death of an Israeli boy from rocket fire.

Political responses: Responses to the cease-fire have been mixed. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry strongly supported the cease-fire and called it an opportunity to address long term issues. Israeli Knesset members criticized Netanyahu for declaring victory and accused him of failing to disarm Gaza, dismantle Hamas, and bring security to southern Israel.

Two days after the cease-fire took effect, a Fatah official announced that the PLO will submit an application to the UN Security Council on September 15th requesting a timetable for an Israeli withdrawal to the pre-1967 lines. If rejected by the UN Security Council, the PLO will request the International Criminal Court hold Israeli leaders accountable for war crimes. However, an appeal to the UN is a double edged sword. The UN has accused Israel and Hamas of violating international law and could hold leaders of both accountable for war crimes.

Rebuilding Gaza: As quiet resumes, the international community turned its focus to assessing the damage and rebuilding costs in Gaza. Norway and Egypt are planning a donor conference for September. Norway's minister of Foreign Affairs said that conditions in Gaza must change; the international community cannot be expected to pay for another reconstruction. He indicated donors want President Abbas to receive the aid and be responsible for reconstruction in Gaza. Israel has said it will support massive investment to rebuild Gaza, but only if Gaza is demilitarized. A former Palestinian spokesman indicated these international and Israeli conditions on aid to Gaza will put strain on the Palestinian unity government.

Some Gazans began to leave UN shelters and return to their homes on Wednesday. UNRWA reported a reduction from 2,000 to 400 people in one shelter. According to the UN, beginning estimates indicate 13 percent of the housing stock in Gaza has been affected with 5 percent uninhabitable. In addition to homes, the water treatment plant, the power plant, and hundreds of factories in Gaza were destroyed crushing infrastructure and increasing already high unemployment.

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

2) The State of Two States - Week of August 24

Fighting between Israel and Hamas entered its seventh week. On Tuesday, the fiftieth day of the conflict, Israel and the Palestinian factions agreed to an Egyptian brokered open-ended ceasefire. IPF issued a statement of support and remains guarded in our optimism that the halt to the fighting will be sustained. On Wednesday, Al-Qaida's Syria wing, Al-Nusra Front, and other Islamist fighters took control of the Syrian side of the Israeli-Syrian border. On Thursday, a senior Palestinian official commented that the Palestinians would take Israel to the International Criminal Court unless the UN Security Council imposes a timeline for Israeli withdrawal from the occupied Palestinian Territory. Many in Israel continue to have mixed feelings about the accomplishments of Operation Protective Edge, and with an end to fighting, the attention is now focused on the political and diplomatic outcomes of the operation.

“The senior Hamas officials need to know that we are going to hunt them, reach them and make them pay the price for what they have done to the southern State of Israel. No one is immune, not the political leadership, not the leadership overseas. No one.” Finance Minister Yair Lapid in a comment about the targeting of Hamas leaders, as reported by Ma’ariv. (Monday 8/25)

“The State of Israel definitely wants to strengthen the PA and wants the PA to have more than a foothold in the Gaza Strip. And if we could reach that situation, and if the PA could replace the Hamas government, I not only think that the State of Israel would lend a hand, it would help. But Abu Mazen, instead of going in this direction and trying to reach a solution, is going in the direction of international institutions, in the direction of accusations and incriminations, he is following the radical Islamic Qatar track instead of taking a moderate constructive path. This would also be acceptable to the US and to the State of Israel and the EU.” Science, Technology and Space Minister Yaakov Peri, in an interview with Yoman. (Monday 8/25)

“The question is now ‘What’s next?’ Gaza suffered three wars and are we expecting another one? We will consult friends and the international community, and we can’t continue with ‘cloudy negotiations.’” President of the Palestinian Authority Mahmoud Abbas, in a speech announcing the long-term ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian factions. (Tuesday 8/26)

“We are approaching the next phase with our eyes wide open. We have been down this road before and we are all aware of the challenges ahead. Both the Israelis and the Palestinians have strong views about their needs and the future of the region. Certain bedrock outcomes, though, are essential if there is to be long term solution for Gaza. Israelis have to be able to live in peace and security, without terrorist attacks, without rockets, without tunnels, without sirens going off and families scrambling to bomb shelters. Palestinians also need to be able to live in peace and security and have full economic and social opportunities to build better lives for themselves and for their children. Getting there will not be easy, but it is the only path to a future that the people on both sides deserve.” Secretary of State John Kerry, in a statement regarding the ceasefire. (Tuesday 8/26)

“The only goal that Hamas had, to lift the siege, was not achieved. There will be no seaport, there will be no airport, no materials will enter Gaza that can be used to build rockets or tunnels. That is the Israeli position and will be presented as soon as the negotiations resume. And this time, unlike other times, this will not be considered illegitimate. Because the US, Europe, the UN, all realize that without demilitarization, there will be no rehabilitation of Gaza.” Deputy Foreign Minister Tzahi Hanegbi, in an interview with Yoman. (Wednesday 8/27)

“Taking the case to the ICC is conditional upon the Security Council response to our request.” Senior Palestinian official Nabil Shaath, in a comment about future Palestinian international steps. (Thursday 8/28)

[***Find the entire collection of links here.***](#)

3) Why it's hard to believe Israel's claim that it did its best to minimize civilian deaths

Idan Barir, The World Post, August 12, 2014

Among the difficult reports streaming in from Gaza over the past few weeks, two especially painful events have captured my attention. The first was the shelling of a UN school building in Jabaliya, where a number of families that had escaped or been forced to flee their homes had taken refuge. At least 15 civilians were killed, and dozens more wounded. Israel argued they were targeting an area from which fire had been directed at Israeli forces. The second was the bombing of a bustling market in the Shuja'iyah neighborhood. At a time of precious few opportunities for civilians to safely buy food and other vital supplies, 16 people were killed and around 200 were wounded. Shops, stalls and merchandise were burned or destroyed. Harsh criticism of Israel followed each incident but -- as in the past -- Israel defended its actions, arguing that it was targeting militants and doing its best to avoid civilian casualties.

I served as a crew commander in the Israeli artillery corps at the beginning of the Second Intifada, and I feel compelled to counter this claim from Israel. The images, evidence and army reports from recent operations in Gaza -- of more than 1,900 deaths (a number which will likely increase by the time you read this) and a large amount of the population left without shelter -- show that Israel has deployed massive artillery firepower. Such firepower is impossible to target precisely. Artillery fire is a statistical means of warfare. It is the complete opposite of sniper fire. While the power of sharpshooting lies in its accuracy, the power of artillery comes from the quantity of shells fired and the massive impact of each one. In using artillery against Gaza, Israel therefore cannot sincerely argue that it is doing everything in its power to spare the innocent.

The truth is artillery shells cannot be aimed precisely and are not meant to hit specific targets. A standard 40 kilogram shell is nothing but a large fragmentation grenade. When it explodes, it is meant to kill anyone within a 50-meter radius and to wound anyone within a further 100 meters. Furthermore, the humidity in the air, the heat of the barrel, and the direction of the wind can all cause unguided shells to land 30 or even 100 meters from where they were aimed. That is a huge margin of error in somewhere as densely packed as Gaza. The imprecision of this weaponry is so great that Israeli forces are compelled to aim at least 250 meters away from friendly troops to ensure their safety -- even if those troops are sheltered. In military terms, this distance is called the "safe range of fire." In 2006, when shelling was first used against the Gaza Strip, the "safe range of fire" for Palestinian civilians was reduced from 300 to just 100 meters. Shortly afterwards, a stray shell landed inside the home of the Ghabeen family in Beit Lahiya, killing a young girl, Hadeel, and wounding other members of her family.

In response to this and similar tragedies, human rights organizations appealed to the Israeli High Court of Justice to cease this lethal practice, and in June 2007 the Attorney-General announced that no more artillery fire was to be used in the Gaza Strip. But just a few years later, during Operation Cast Lead, extensive artillery fire was again aimed at the heart of the Gaza Strip. And up until the recent ceasefire, throughout Operation Protective Edge, Israel has fired thousands of artillery shells into Gaza -- causing intolerable harm to civilians and widespread destruction, the extent of which will only be fully exposed when the fighting ceases. It's true that in at least some cases, the army has informed civilians of its plans to attack a certain area and advised them to leave. But this in no way excuses the excessive damage and huge toll on civilian lives.

I write this with great sorrow for civilians hurt on both sides. Sorrow for our soldiers who have fallen in this operation, and sorrow for the future of my country and the entire region. I know that as I write, soldiers like me have fired shells into Gaza. They had no way of knowing who or what they would hit. Faced with so many innocent casualties, it is time for us to state very clearly: this use of artillery fire is a deadly game of Russian roulette. The statistics, on which such firepower relies, mean that in densely populated areas such as Gaza, civilians will inevitably be hit as well. The IDF knows this, and as long as it continues to use such weaponry, it will be hard to believe when it claims to be minimizing civilian deaths.

As a former soldier and an Israeli citizen, I feel compelled to ask today: have we not crossed a line?

Idan Barir served in the Israeli artillery corps during the Second Intifada and is a member of Breaking the Silence

4) While Gaza war rages, Israel quietly speeds up settlement construction in the West Bank and Jerusalem

Middle East Monitor, August 21, 2014

Israel started construction on hundreds of housing units in the West Bank and Jerusalem since its assault on the Gaza Strip began in early July, Palestinian experts on settlement issues in the West Bank said. Experts told the Anadolu news agency that Israel has refrained from announcing ongoing construction work in the new housing units to avoid further tensions in the West Bank and more international pressure during the war.

Anadolu's correspondent reported settlement expansion activities since the beginning of the war on Gaza, wherein Israel annexed more Palestinian agricultural land to build new housing units in settlements that are located on the road linking Nablus, north of the West Bank, with Ramallah in the centre. The correspondent said that according to eyewitnesses, there is ongoing construction work in the northern Jordan Valley and in Bethlehem, south of the West Bank.

"Israel unofficially gave settlers the green light to carry out construction work in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, especially inside large settlement areas, without tendering or licensing [for new construction]," said Suhail Khalilieh, a researcher at the Applied Research Institute in Jerusalem (ARIJ). "Relevant bodies will work later, after the end of the war, on issuing official decisions to license them," he added.

"Through daily monitoring of tenders for the construction of new settlement or housing units published in Israeli media, we can notice that there is a significant decrease [in the number of tenders] in comparison to the situation before the war on Gaza," Khalilieh added, noting that the Israeli government is adopting the policy of "silent settlement expansion" likely because it fears an increase in popular anger in the West Bank and a rise in international pressures on Israel.

Ghassan Daghlas, who monitors settlement activity north of the West Bank, said that settlement construction ... has not stopped but rather it is witnessing abnormal growth amid silence from Israeli officials. Daghlas pointed out that settlement construction has increased by 60 percent. He said that settlers' attacks on Palestinians in the West Bank have decreased amid the war on Gaza, noting that this can be attributed to the fear of the outbreak of a new uprising in the West Bank, which is not preferred by the Israeli authorities especially during the Gaza war. "The West Bank has witnessed a decline in the number of Israeli attacks during the war on Gaza. There is a desire to avoid popular rage," he said.

Another expert who specialises in settlement activity, Abdul Hadi Hantash, classified settlement construction into two categories: The first is publicly announced construction, and the second is discrete construction that the Israeli authorities do not unveil. Hantash told Anadolu that since the beginning of the Gaza war, Israel has accelerated discrete construction, adding that building has been concentrated in large settlement areas such as Gush Etzion - near Bethlehem, Ma'ale Adumim - in East Jerusalem, and Ariel - in the north of the West Bank).

He noted that settlers have seized thousands of dunams of agricultural in the vicinity of Salfit and Nablus. Hantash also said that the Israeli settlements council, the Yesha Council, is currently implementing plans that it had prepared and submitted to the government before the Gaza war. The council is now capitalising on the war and implementing these plans without obtaining government approval, Hantash explained.

According to Anadolu's correspondent, the West Bank is witnessing tensions due to the Israeli war on the Gaza Strip, which has continued since July 7. Palestinians stage rallies and sit-ins that often result in confrontations with the Israeli army, which has caused the death of 22 Palestinians and the injury of hundreds, according to official Palestinian sources.

5) Why did Israelis support the pointless Gaza war?

Aeyal Gross, Ha'aretz, August 19, 2014

It's hard to write against a war when people are fearful of rocket fire, worried about their relatives both at home and at the front, and mourning the dead. But the question must be asked. It's hard to write against a war when people are fearful of rocket fire, worried about their relatives both at home and at the front, and mourning the dead. But the question must be asked: Why was there so much public support for a pointless war that could have been prevented, and that exacted a heavy price in human lives, both from us and from the Palestinians?

It's especially hard to understand support for the war among those who aren't supporters of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu – people who understand that he has thwarted every diplomatic opportunity, yet nevertheless accept the argument that “if they're shooting at you, there's no alternative.” This artificial separation between diplomatic moves and the war will lead to other unnecessary wars.

[M]any things could have been done. For instance, how is it possible to justify the years-long blockade of Gaza, which included elements that have no relationship to security, like the ban on importing chocolate and coriander (which continued until the botched raid on a Turkish-sponsored flotilla to Gaza in 2010)? Or the restrictions on civilian movement, which remain in place to this day?

People ask why there was no development in Gaza. The restrictions on exports prevented economic development, and when students from Gaza wanted to study in the West Bank, Israel forbade it. The usual response is that the blockade was a consequence of the Hamas government and the rocket fire on Israel, but does this justify imprisoning an entire nation? Israelis who were shocked when foreign airlines froze flights to Ben-Gurion Airport can't understand how residents of the Gaza Strip have been living for years now?

Despite the Israeli illusion that the occupation had ended, the lives of Gaza residents remained dependent on the arbitrary policies of Israel's government. At the same time, Israel continued to ignore peace initiatives like the Saudi proposal and golden opportunities like the Palestinian unity government. A weakened Hamas entered this government on terms set by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, thereby enabling us to conduct negotiations with a representative Palestinian government. Instead, Netanyahu used the unity government as an excuse to avoid negotiations, even though now he is negotiating with Hamas.

If you think that by refusing negotiations, continuing construction in the settlements and abusing Gaza residents Netanyahu caused the situation to deteriorate into war, it's impossible to separate the diplomatic from the military. We were dragged into war because Netanyahu, contrary to the popular myth, did not display restraint and moderation.

At a certain point Israel found itself engaged in escalation, which experience shows produces no benefits but only harm. Nevertheless, at any given moment Netanyahu could and should have switched to the diplomatic track and called for beginning immediate negotiations with the Palestinian leadership of the unity government, under the auspices of the Saudi initiative and the Quartet, while completely freezing settlement construction and eliminating every aspect of the blockade of Gaza not related to security. It's also hard to understand the support for the war in light of experience, which shows that Israeli aggression neither deters nor reduces the rocket fire. The operation that was supposed to bring security to Israel's citizens did the opposite: It brought more insecurity and more Israeli victims than all the years of rocket fire did. Just like in the past, the largest number of rockets was fired at Israel during the military operation. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) Transference of evil: Netanyahu, a creature without morality or mercy

William A. Cook, News Analysis, Palestine, August 25, 2014

[During an interview on August 20, when Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu was asked by Wolf Blitzer, “What goes through your mind when you see [the painful pictures of children dying... and the thousands of refugees],” the prime minister responded: “ Hamas targets civilians, we don’t... They want to pile up as many dead as they can...the more dead the better.”]

This is a calculated response to transfer the evil to the victims of Israel’s superior power, to blame Hamas, the government of the people, for their own slaughter. It is indeed an intended deception to cloak the true intention that every living Gazan man, woman and child was and will be for the rest of their lives impacted by this horror so calculatingly leveled against a defenseless people, an evil that is decidedly not banal, it is an insidious, barbaric, malicious, merciless evil perpetrated by methodically guided intelligent, deceitful men, Zionists, both on the people of Gaza and on true Jews in Israel and all true Jews around the world.

There is need today to comprehend the mentality of those who rule in Israel. That mentality has dominated the international scene for the past 45 days and counting in Gaza. The mentality governing Israel is most visible through its Prime Minister, a man caught in the vice of a system that forces the continuation of the administration in power to accede to the demands of its radical elements if it is to stay in power, and the necessity of the PM to self-promote his value by promoting actions diametrically opposed to human rights and international law.

Gaza stands as a glaring mirror of human suffering visible to the whole world wherein they see themselves suffering and join the mothers and fathers in sympathy for the oppressed in Gaza; yet that suffering is not visible as such to the vast majority of Israelis; it is as though they cannot see beyond their own internal selves, as though no other humans exist beyond their own conception of self, as though what they believe dictates the conditions and justifies the conditions irrespective of world values and morals. The suffering of Gazans is not theirs to see; what they suffer is not caused by Israel; indeed, Hamas has used Israeli weaponry to destroy their own people without the permission of the Israelis, to have the world condemn Israel and sympathize with the Palestinians, and to force Israel to unwillingly join their insidious end.

Netanyahu’s response ignores international law that allows for the oppressed to act against their occupiers; he hides the truth of Hamas’ rockets under a deluge of obfuscation as though the entire civilian population of Israel had a few seconds to escape death as rockets rained down on the whole of Israel, and not mention that one was killed.

It is a sin of omission, a decidedly deceptive omission of relative facts, that he, Netanyahu, stopped the negotiations for peace, that he chose to send missiles in the thousands (more than the 13,000 tons of explosives ... of one of the atomic bombs dropped on Japan in 1945) into Gaza to intentionally destroy them, their sewage, their water, their commercial buildings, their farms, their fishing boats, their schools, their mosques, missiles that did not miss their intended targets and that did indeed rain down on the whole of Gaza (see “How many bombs has Israel dropped on Gaza?” Ali Abunimah, August 18, 2014, *Electronic Intifada*). ...

The estimated cost of the total ammunition used in Gaza fighting is estimated at about 1.3 billion shekels [\$370 million]. According to the army’s figures, 39,000 tank shells, 34,000 artillery shells, and 4.8 million bullets were supplied during the fighting. Senior military figures estimate that land forces alone used at least 60 percent of the 5,000 tons of ammunition given to them, but the IDF [Israeli army] cannot yet evaluate it accurately. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) Abbas to develop three-stage plan for independent Palestinian statehood

International Middle East News Center (IMENC) editorial, August 31, 2014

According to the Palestinian News Network (PNN), Palestinian sources have confirmed that President Mahmoud Abbas has set into action a plan comprised of three stages, with the aim of reaching an independent Palestinian state.

The sources told London-based "Middle East" newspaper that Abbas intends to give the USA a period of time which may extend to up to four months, in order to delineate the borders of a Palestinian state, adding that they will ask Israel to show a map bearing its borders, before negotiations.

If Israelis refuses to define these borders, Palestinian leadership plans to go to the UN Security Council, under the umbrella of the Arab states, to request Israel withdraw from Palestinian areas occupied in 1967.

If this option fails, Palestinian leadership will attempt to join all international organizations, including the International Criminal Court, in proceeding with actions to prosecute Israeli leaders.

President Abbas reportedly agreed to this plan with head of Hamas political bureau, Khaled Meshaal, during their recent meeting in Qatar.

A meeting is set to be scheduled between a Palestinian delegation to include both President Abbas and Saeb Erekat, and U.S. Secretary of State and Middle East Quartet member John Kerry, to whom Palestinians will officially present the plan, asking him to support it.

The new developments follow several past moves, by Abbas, in joining relevant international organizations, during last year's round of failed peace talks -- moves which have been essentially stalemated by Israeli threats and accusations against Palestinian leadership.

See: [Abbas signs applications to join more UN institutions, treaties](#)
[Israel punishes PA for filing requests to join international organizations](#)
[Abbas agrees to extend negotiations with Israel](#)

8) What it's like to be the most hated man in Israel

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, August 27, 2014

It was four years ago. The British newspaper *The Independent* published an interview under the title: "Is Gideon Levy the most hated man in Israel or just the most heroic?" The question was groundless – I wasn't the most hated, and certainly not the most heroic. In the summer of 2014 the answer would be more succinct – I'm the most hated, second only to Khaled Meshal. Unpleasant, but not too terrible, at this point. The narrator must not become the story; a journalist is always the means, not the end.

And yet, it's impossible to ignore the troubling question: How did one journalist – and not the most widely read or the most widely distributed – become an object of such rage and hatred? How is one small cracked mirror, a tiny pocket flashlight, capable of evoking so much fury? How is it that one voice made so many Israelis, from left and right, north and south, blow their top?

It can only be that even the last of the inciters are conscientious people. They too feel, apparently, that something is burning under their feet, under the rugs of justifications and defenses they laid for themselves. Otherwise, why are they seething with such rage? And why are they no longer sure they're in the right?

The truth is, I'm very proud of what I wrote in this wretched war and I'm ashamed of the responses – which said more about Israeli society than they did about anything I wrote. It's a society that is denying itself to death, fleeing from the news and lying to itself in its propaganda and its hatred. No other war had turned my stomach, every day and every hour, like this one did. The horrific pictures of Gaza haunted me. They were almost not shown in the Israeli media, the greatest voluntary collaborator of this war. I thought it was impossible to not be appalled by the crimes in Gaza, that it was okay to express compassion for its residents, that 2,200 killed people are an outrageous matter – regardless whether they're Palestinians or Israelis. I thought it was okay to be ashamed, that it was necessary to remind ourselves that some people bear responsibility for the brutality, and these people aren't only Hamas, but first and foremost the Israelis, their leaders, commanders and even their pilots.

For the average Israeli, who has become accustomed to blame the Arabs and the whole world for all his country's wrongs, it was too much, certainly at a time of war. I thought it was my duty to express my sentiments in real time, in the time of truth. I knew it wouldn't make much difference, but I felt the things had to be said. The absolute majority of Israelis thought otherwise. They thought that comparing between the blood of Israelis and Palestinians is a sin. That feeling dismay is treason, compassion is heresy and that placing responsibility is an inexplicable crime.

Well, dear friends, history has proved long ago that the brainwashed majority isn't always right, certainly not when it falls on the negligible minority with such ferocious aggression. I've been covering the Israeli occupation for some 30 years. I've seen possibly more occupation than any other Israeli (excluding Amira Hass). That's my original sin. That is also what forged my awareness more than anything else. I've heard all the lies, seen the ongoing injustices from point-blank range. Now they've reached another of their ignoble nadirs in this damned war. That's what I've written about and that's what Ha'aretz reported, thus becoming another target of hatred. It wasn't only our right; it was our professional obligation.

The spiteful looks in the street, the curses and attacks have made no difference. Nor will they. The thuggish right wing, the complacent, indifferent, doubt-free center, even the always smug so-called left, which claimed that I was "ruining the left," all joined in one shrill choir, proving that the differences between them are smaller than they had appeared.

There were enough people who wrote and spoke, ad nauseam, about Israel's right of way, which is always absolute and about the Jewish victim, which is the only victim in the world. I wanted to say something else as well – and the majority opinion almost went berserk. So let them get angry, let them hate me, let them attack and ostracize me – I'll go on doing my thing.

9) [The IDF's real face](#)

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, August 30, 2014

Khalil Anati was from the Al-Fawar refugee camp in the southern part of the West Bank; a soldier in an armored jeep shot him in the back with a live round and killed him as he was running home. He was 10 years old. Mohammed Al-Qatari was a promising soccer player from the Al-Amari refugee camp near Ramallah. A soldier shot him from a distance of several dozen meters while he was taking part in a demonstration against the Gaza war. He was 19 years old when he died. Hashem Abu Maria was a social worker from Beit Ummar who worked for the Geneva-based NGO Defense for Children International. He participated in a demonstration against the Gaza war, trying to protect children by preventing them from throwing stones. An IDF sharpshooter situated on a distant balcony shot and killed him. He was 45 years old, a father of three children. Soldiers killed two more demonstrators at that demonstration.

These people were among many others killed by IDF fire far from the battlefields of Gaza. According to data provided by the United Nations Office for Coordinating Humanitarian Affairs, the IDF killed 20 adults and three children in the West Bank during the fighting in Gaza. Soldiers also wounded 2,218 people, 38 percent of them by live fire, a particularly high number in comparison to 14 percent in the first half of 2014 and four percent in 2013.

None of those killed were endangering soldiers' lives, none of them were armed or deserved to die.

The fighting in Gaza loosened all restraint. Under its umbrella soldiers permitted themselves to use live fire in order to disperse demonstrations, settle scores with people throwing stones or Molotov cocktails – including children – and punish anyone demonstrating against the war. Perhaps these soldiers were envious of their comrades fighting in Gaza, perhaps they were frustrated at being far from the real action – in any event they were confident that no harm would befall them, not while in Gaza there was almost a massacre taking place, with the nation's heart going out to its fighting men.

No one stopped them, no one was arrested or prosecuted. "The Military Police is investigating" has become code for the IDF spokesman in his automatic responses, a code which blurs and conceals, until the files gather dust and are forgotten. In civilian life, anyone suspected of manslaughter or murder is immediately arrested, with an investigation coming later. In the IDF the opposite is true. First comes an investigation, usually leading nowhere, even when the circumstances are straightforward. There is no question of arresting anyone, even when the incident cries out to the heavens, as in the case of the shooting at Al-Fawar. The soldier who killed the boy is apparently continuing with his life as usual.

These are routine practices associated with the occupation. There is no comparison to the numbers in Gaza, but this routine exposes the true face of the IDF, the way it regularly conducts itself with regard to Palestinians, and especially its persistent disregard for their lives and deaths. There was no war being waged on the West Bank – soldiers were not facing battalions of Izz-ad-Din al-Qassam fighters, nor were they up against attack tunnels, rockets, sharpshooters or explosive devices. Yet see how they killed and maimed, using live fire against demonstrating youths and even children; how they cut short the life of a soccer player who a few weeks earlier had been promised a brilliant career by Sepp Blatter, the president of FIFA; or the lives of a 10-year-old refugee boy and a social worker innocent of any crime.

The crimes committed in the West Bank will not be investigated by any international tribunal – there is no need to prepare excuses, write reports or enlist lawyers. But it is precisely these smaller incidents – after all, what are 20 deaths in contrast to the hundredfold larger numbers in Gaza? – that should worry us. There was no war here, hardly any acts of terror, only angry demonstrations by those who were understandably driven to distraction by the fate of their brethren in Gaza. Note how they were treated by IDF soldiers.

This is the behavior of the nation's army, its soldiers now lauded by all. One can respect and cherish the people's love for its soldiers, but one should remember what these soldiers do as part of their routine military service, day in, day out, year after year.

10) From price tag to peace tag **Matthew Kalman, Ha'aretz, August 21, 2014**

In the West Bank settlement bloc of Gush Etzion south of Bethlehem, not far from the spot where three Israeli teenagers were abducted and murdered in June, a small group of Israeli settlers has spent weeks secretly planning what most might regard as a suicide mission aimed at local Palestinian villagers.

This week, as sirens blared to warn of more incoming rockets from Gaza, two of the settlers unveiled their plan to Ha'aretz at their unmarked West Bank headquarters, hidden behind high walls and locked gates, on condition that certain names, locations and other details would not be revealed.

But Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger of Alon Shvut and Shaul Judelman of Bat Ayin weren't shy about revealing the aim of their mission: dialogue, co-existence and peace.

There are many Israeli-Palestinian dialogue groups, but trust and contacts have been battered by the kidnapping of the three teens, the murder of Mohammed Abu Khdeir, Hamas rocket attacks and the Israeli assault on Gaza. So it's unusual to find any co-existence movement starting up in these troubled times, and even more unusual that it should emerge from within the Israeli settler community. They are quietly getting up to speed, organizing small, grassroots projects involving adults and children from both sides. They asked that Ha'aretz not reveal any details but I observed two days of inspiring and fun activities that helped to break down the barriers of hostility and suspicion between the communities.

"Our goal here is empowering moderate voices on both sides to be able to stand with their communities and look beyond the other side as a pure enemy and see that our destiny here in some way is together," says Judelman, a follower of the late Rabbi Menachem Froman of Tekoa, a settler rabbi who forged close ties with Palestinian religious figures and met frequently with Yasser Arafat.

"The politicians will work out the way to a diplomatic solution, but we are working from the ground up," he says.

On the Palestinian side, there is fierce resistance to anything seen as "normalization" with the Israeli occupiers. None of the Palestinians that spoke to Ha'aretz would allow their names to be published. One former Palestinian prisoner whose brother was murdered in cold blood by a soldier who was never punished, says he has become an activist for non-violence and peace.

"We want to show the children another side of the enemy. At the end of the day, they are the ones who pay the price for the conflict. They are not responsible for what the grown-ups are doing. They are just the victims of the grown-ups and their lack of responsibility. We want to encourage them to have hope for the future," he says.

Judelman says he understands why Palestinians are suspicious of Israeli attempts to gloss over the inequality between the two sides.

"This is about whether we can get to a place where we're seeing each other as peers and living a normal life together," he says. "But it's also an awareness that we're not getting here from equal places at all and there's a lot of work to do within both of our communities for that vision to come alive, and we both have a lot of responsibility to make a lot of change."

Judelman and his colleagues have established contacts with Palestinians in several neighbouring villages. For many, it is the first time they have ever spoken to anyone on the other side. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

11) The next step for liberal Zionists after Gaza: a Freedom Summer with Palestinians

Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, August 28, 2014

The third Gaza war in less than six years now seems to be over. On the surface, despite the horrifying destruction, it doesn't appear to have ended much differently than its two predecessors. But if you think of each war as a snapshot in political time, you can see how the picture has changed.

With each war, the prospects of an American-brokered two state solution have dimmed. In late 2008, when Israel launched Operation Cast Lead, its prime minister supported a Palestinian state free of Israeli troops on almost 95 percent of the West Bank. Today, Israel's prime minister has essentially ruled that out. In 2008, the United States had just elected a president eager to put Israeli-Palestinian peace near the center of his foreign policy agenda. Now that American president has given up. In 2008, it was rare and exotic to hear intellectuals propose alternatives to the two state solution. Now the *New York Times* publishes them all the time.

The Boycott, Divestment and Sanction (BDS) movement is built for this moment. Its activists long ago abandoned hope that Washington would aid the Palestinian cause. Nor would they mourn the demise of the two state solution, since key BDS leaders oppose the existence of a Jewish state within any borders. The American Jewish right is built for this moment too. The more hostile global opinion becomes to Israel, and the more that hostility shades into anti-Semitism, the more hawkish Jewish groups can stand at the ramparts, ignoring Israel's misdeeds and raising money by telling Jews that we're living in the 1930s once again.

In the United States, the people least prepared for this new era of outside-the-Beltway activism are us: Those American Jewish liberals who still consider the two state solution the best hope for a just peace between the River and the Sea. Although J Street, the most well-known liberal Zionist group, was born only six years ago, it was born in a prior age. In its first year of life, 2008, it saw Ehud Olmert and Mahmoud Abbas come within months of inking a two state deal. (That's what the two of them have subsequently said). In its second year, 2009, it saw Barack Obama appoint a high-profile envoy to kick-start the peace process. It's understandable, therefore, that J Street fashioned itself as Obama's "blocking back," clearing a path so Congress didn't sabotage the White House's efforts at peace.

J Street has made important gains. It has forged alliances with a growing number of Democratic members of Congress and with some of the Democratic Party's biggest Jewish donors. And it has helped destroy the myth that most American Jews support the Israeli government no matter what it does. But by itself, J Street's strategy of pressuring Washington to pressure Israel won't work if the White House won't aggressively run the ball. And there's little reason to believe that this White House, a Hillary Clinton White House or a Republican White House, will. Without outside pressure, however, it's unlikely Israel will elect another government eager for a two state solution anytime soon. The lesson of the last few years, in fact, is that absent outside pressure, the Palestinian issue recedes from Israeli politics entirely.

The problem, for people who believe in the two state solution, is that most of the pressure that exists today comes either from Hamas terrorism or a BDS movement that is largely hostile to Israel's existence. It's time for American Jews who support Israel but oppose the occupation to commit to large-scale, direct action of our own. And the most important place to do so is in the West Bank. Palestinians in villages like Bil'in and Nabi Saleh have been protesting, unarmed, for years against the theft of their land. But their efforts receive little attention in American Jewish circles or in the American press. Few American Jews have any idea that under the military law that governs Palestinians in the West Bank, Israel routinely criminalizes freedom of speech and assembly. Or that peaceful protesters can be held in detention for years without trial. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

12) There's no whitewashing the Gaza blockade

Ha'aretz editorial, September 1, 2014

It is in Israel's interest to avoid intense social and economic pressure on Gaza, a senior military officer told Ha'aretz reporter Amos Harel over the weekend. This wise statement by the senior officer raises three questions: Why did the defense establishment remember to examine the ramifications of the Gaza blockade on its residents only after the war? Why is the Israel Defense Forces suggesting that the politicians ease the blockade, instead of the politicians initiating this crucial step on their own? And what is the practical meaning of this generosity?

As there are those toting up victory points in Operation Protective Edge and crowing unnecessarily about how Hamas achieved nothing, easing the conditions of Gaza's residents is liable to be interpreted as a concession, or even as capitulation. The voices coming from the IDF stem from concern that political interests will prevail over the diplomatic or moral interest in lifting the closure.

But even this positive suggestion, if adopted, can't whitewash the perverse blockade. Easing its terms alone, as we've seen in the past, doesn't create conditions for normal life, doesn't offer any economic or diplomatic horizon, and at best serves as insufficient cover for the government's claim that it has no dispute with the people of Gaza, but only with Hamas. Moreover, the version of relief the IDF is suggesting has in the past been no more than symbolic gestures, like allowing in equipment to finish building a new hospital in Gaza, or worse, took the form of an inhumane calculation of how many calories each resident needed, which was used to derive what products would be allowed into the Strip.

The Gaza Strip, with its 1.8 million people, doesn't need generosity or favors. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who speaks vaguely of a "diplomatic horizon," must end the blockade, fully open the crossings between Gaza and Israel and give a real chance for development to bring quiet, after it's been proven that the blockade merely foments violent rebellions against Israel.

This doesn't mean that Israel must give up the close inspection of the goods that enter or leave the Strip, to assure that no weapons are smuggled in and that the open crossings are not exploited by terrorists seeking to carry out attacks in Israel. But there is a big difference between security checks and even a minimum security prison. Israel has the power to close that gap and work on behalf of its mutual interests with the residents of Gaza.

13) Mourning for Gazan children isn't left-wing **Mordechai Kremnitzer, Ha'aretz, September 1, 2014**

The Israel Broadcasting Authority had no problem approving the broadcasting of two infomercials geared at winning hearts, one by Chabad and the other by an organization espousing national unity. In contrast, when it was asked to approve a broadcast by human rights group B'Tselem, which wanted to read out the names of some of the Gazan children who were killed during Operation Protective Edge, it refused to do so. A petition to the High Court of Justice to overturn this decision was denied on the grounds that this was a politically divisive topic.

The ruling did not include a discussion of whether there do exist categories of apolitical values that cannot be disputed in an enlightened country. These categories include universal humanist values, at the core of which is the equality of value and sanctity of all human life. This value leads to the concept that the death of anyone not involved in a war is an evil that, even if unavoidable, should be minimized. Even when every effort is made to limit such deaths, they are still lamentable. It is worthy and important to express regret for these fatalities, in order to maintain the understanding that they are evil and to prevent people from getting used to them, thus undermining this truth. Anyone who doesn't feel sorrow at the death of a child killed in war, even one on the other side, is lacking in feelings of shared humanity. If there are many such people, something very basic is missing in the cultural, educational, leadership and media systems of such a society.

It appears that Justice Elyakim Rubinstein shares the position that there are certain universal human truths. It is otherwise difficult to understand his words regarding the attitudes towards innocent people in times of war. He wrote that "as human beings, we deeply regret the loss of innocent lives in Gaza." He also wrote that in conducting its just war against a cruel opponent that is indifferent to the blood of civilians, "Israel must be cognizant of the distress of innocent people on the other side, including children." If anyone wanted to broadcast these words during a war, would the judge then become a politically controversial figure?

Justice Rubinstein attributed political motivations to B'Tselem, claiming that their intended broadcast was aimed at stopping the war. This attribution is contrary to the moral objectives of the organization, and was used only as a basis for the judicial decision. But the decision has no basis, conforming to a growing trend which attributes left-wing politics to anyone articulating universal humanist statements. The same type of tendentious and false attribution could be applied to Rubinstein's words as well. How sad and embarrassing that in present-day Israel, one cannot broadcast a simple humanist message that a child in Gaza is first of all a child, even during a war. He is a person, he has a name. His death saddens anyone with a shred of humanity. How sad that every message gets a political label, that universal humanistic statements are depicted as controversial. If everything is disputed, what is common to Israel's citizens? In what sense is it a human society?

The court had a golden opportunity to sketch for Israel's society some basic human characteristics which cannot be disputed, which are above politics, which make us human, constituting the basis of everything else.

The court had an opportunity to elevate itself above the vulgar discourse currently prevalent in Israeli society, which labels everything as political, while suppressing any universal discussion in the service of exclusionary, particularistic messages which elevate our status while denigrating that of others. The court had an opportunity to salvage the Jewish nature of this country, both national and cultural, protecting it from its destructive interpreters who impose on it a seal of racism and ultra-nationalism; from those who remove from its Jewish character any universal humanistic feature, who undermine it while corrupting and distorting it. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

14) Three interviews/articles from Jeff Halper, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)

Israel's message to the Palestinians: "Submit, leave or die" (ICAHD) - The seemingly blind and atavistic destruction and hatred unleashed on the Palestinians over the past few weeks is not merely yet another "round of violence" in an interminable struggle. It is the declaration of a new political reality. The message is clear, unilateral and final: This country has been Judaized: it is now the Land of Israel in the process of being incorporated into the state of Israel. You Arabs (or "Palestinians" as you call yourselves) are not a people and have no national rights, certainly to our exclusively Jewish country. You are not a "side" to a "conflict." Once and for all we must disabuse you of the notion that we are actually negotiating with you. We never have and never will. You are nothing but inmates in prison cells, and we hereby declare through our military and political actions that you have three options before you: You can submit as inmates are required to, in which case we will allow you to remain in your enclave-cells. You can leave, as hundreds of thousands have done before you. Or, if you choose to resist, you will die.

Globalizing Gaza: How Israel undermines international law through "lawfare" (ICAHD) - Operation Protective Edge was not merely a military assault on a primarily civilian population. As in its previous "operations" (Cast Lead in 2008-9 and Pillar of Defense in 2012), it was also part of an ongoing assault on international humanitarian law (IHL) by a highly coordinated team of Israeli lawyers, military officers, PR people and politicians, led by (no less) a philosopher of ethics. It is an effort not only to get Israel off the hook for massive violations of human rights and international law, but to help other governments overcome similar constraints when they embark as well on "asymmetrical warfare," "counterinsurgency" and "counter-terrorism" against peoples resisting domination. It is a campaign that Israel calls "lawfare" and had better be taken seriously by us all.

The Palestinians' message to Israel: "Deal with us justly. Or disappear." (Mondoweiss) - The Palestinians' messaging of peace, security and, yes, justice, was always buried under Israeli spin That seemed to change suddenly when, on August 26th, Israel announced that it had accepted a permanent cease-fire with no pre-conditions, to be followed by a month of negotiations over issues of concern to Gazans Maybe the message of Operation Protective Edge is that the Palestinians cannot be beaten militarily, that Israel will never know security and normal life as long as it maintains its Occupation, that, indeed, for all its strength, it is liable to disappear if it doesn't deal justly with the natives.

15) Israel claims West Bank land for possible settlement use, draws U.S. rebuke
Jeffrey Heller, Reuters, August 31, 2014

Israel announced on Sunday a land appropriation in the occupied West Bank that an anti-settlement group termed the biggest in 30 years, drawing Palestinian condemnation and a U.S. rebuke. Some 400 hectares (988 acres) in the Etzion Jewish settlement bloc near Bethlehem were declared “state land, on the instructions of the political echelon” by the military-run Civil Administration.

“We urge the government of Israel to reverse this decision,” a State Department official said in Washington, calling the move “counterproductive” to efforts to achieve a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

Israel Radio said the step was taken in response to the kidnapping and killing of three Jewish teens by Hamas militants in the area in June. Tensions stoked by the incident quickly spread to Israel’s border with Gaza, which is controlled by Hamas, and the two sides engaged in a seven-week war that ended on Tuesday with an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire.

The notice published on Sunday by the Israeli military gave no reason for the land appropriation decision. Peace Now, which opposes Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank, territory the Palestinians seek for a state, said the appropriation was meant to turn a site where 10 families now live adjacent to a Jewish seminary into a permanent settlement. Construction of a major settlement at the location, known as “Gevaot,” has been mooted by Israel since 2000. Last year, the government invited bids for the building of 1,000 housing units at the site.

Peace Now said the land seizure was the largest announced by Israel in the West Bank since the 1980s and that anyone with ownership claims had 45 days to appeal. A local Palestinian mayor said Palestinians owned the tracts and harvested olive trees on them.

Israel has come under intense international criticism over its settlement activities, which most countries regard as illegal under international law and a major obstacle to the creation of a viable Palestinian state in any future peace deal.

Nabil Abu Rdainah, a spokesman for Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, called on Israel to cancel the appropriation. “This decision will lead to more instability. This will only inflame the situation after the war in Gaza,” Abu Rdainah said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu broke off U.S.-brokered peace talks with Abbas in April after the Palestinian leader reached a reconciliation deal with Hamas, the Islamist movement that dominates the Gaza Strip.

In a series of remarks after an open-ended ceasefire halted the Gaza war, Netanyahu repeated his position that Abbas would have to sever his alliance with Hamas for a peace process with Israel to resume.

The administration of President Barack Obama, who has been at odds with Netanyahu over settlements since taking office in 2009, pushed back against the land decision. It was the latest point of contention between Washington and its top Middle East ally Israel, which also differ over Iran nuclear talks. “We have long made clear our opposition to continued settlement activity,” said the State Department official, who declined to be identified. “This announcement, like every other settlement announcement Israel makes, planning step they approve and construction tender they issue, is counterproductive to Israel’s stated goal of a negotiated two-state solution with the Palestinians,” the official said. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)