

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

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

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles concerning the continuing Israeli/Palestinian peace negotiations, the hope and possibility of a two or more nation federation, the isolation and unawareness of U.S. Jews to the suffering of the Palestinians, opposition to U.S. military intervention in Syria, Pope Francis' plea for peace among nations through encounter and dialog, and other issues.

- CMEP's August 30 Bulletin emphasizes that the peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians continues quietly amid regional turmoil; various articles concerning this process are noted and available for download.
- Avraham Burg speaks of a possible Israeli-Palestinian federation using a metaphor of a three-level home with a shared roof, separate living quarters for each tenant and a firm foundation of shared values.
- Uri Avnery shares the same dream as Burg; he believes that a Semitic union, a political and economic union similar to the EU, still has a chance.
- Uri Avnery gives further history of the federation solution and notes that the original UN partition plan included a kind of federation, without using the word explicitly. According to the plan, the Arab and the Jewish states were to remain united in an economic union.
- Robert Cohen asks: Whatever happened to the Torah ethic of the dignity of every person? He believes that Israeli Jews have pursued, not the justice of Deuteronomy, but the imperatives of ethnic nationalism.
- Gideon Levy asks that we imagine all the people of Israel/Palestine living in peace. For one magical moment it seemed like this dream had come true. One state, one park for all its citizens. On the beaches of Jaffa and south Tel Aviv during a few August days one could see masses of Palestinians from the territories who had received permits to celebrate at the sea and gather with Israelis in Yarkon Park.
- Kobi Niv writes that instead of dwelling on technical details and borders, Israelis and Palestinians must strive for conciliation and acceptance, a process that begins at imagining a joint future on this tiny piece of land.
- Rabbi Alana Suskin, director of Strategic Communications at Americans for Peace Now, writes that the choice is clear: a two-state solution, or Israel's future handed over to fanatics, whose behavior in the name of what is "holy" is an abomination.
- Chemi Shalev writes that in a controversial new article in the *New York Review of Books* Peter Beinart lashes out at the U.S. American Jewish "cocoon" that breeds insulation, lack of empathy and an inability to properly defend Israel.
- Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz warned Syria that any aggression against Israel, in retaliation to a possible U.S. military strike, will carry a "painful price."
- Bishop Antoine Audo of Aleppo, Syria has said that even in Syria, there are alternatives to war, and warned that U.S. and foreign military action in the war-torn country could ignite a global war, making the "tragic situation" in Syria much worse.
- Pope Francis adds his voice to the cry for peace which rises up with increasing anguish from every part of the world, from every people, from the heart of each person, from the one great family which is humanity; he calls for a day of fasting and prayer on Saturday, September 7.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin August 30, 2013

Peace process persists amid regional turmoil: While the world debates what to do about the atrocities in Syria, Israeli and Palestinian peace negotiators are operating “beneath the radar” and meeting regularly.

Shlomi Eldar writes, “The rest of the world may be in turmoil, but Justice Minister [responsible for negotiations] Tzipi Livni and Palestinian chief negotiator Saeb Erekat still insist on talking about peace.”

A deadly raid by the IDF on Qalandia in the West Bank raised the specter of a peace talks collapse on Monday, but there is no indication that anything more than one meeting in Jericho was cancelled.

But as the tragic situation in Syria unfolds, some are asking whether peace between Israelis and Palestinians is worth spending energy on now. Eldar responds by writing that, “Maybe all the upheavals occurring in the world provide some kind of advantage to the current round of talks. With everyone paying such rapt attention to the goings-on in Egypt and Syria, and with the concurrent lack of public interest in the talks, there is far less pressure on the negotiators, who have plenty of room to maneuver without fear of being interrupted.”

An article in Politico also tackles the question. Lee Hamilton writes: “I think the reason we find ourselves back in this familiar position is because we rightfully recognize that resolving the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians is among the most important steps we can take toward reducing the overall tension in the region. Arabs continue to view this conflict as a very important dispute, and the plight of Palestinian refugees is both part of their identity and the lens through which they judge Washington and U.S. policies in the region.”

Blessed are the Peacemakers Book Study: Are you interested in becoming more familiar with the background and history of Israeli and Palestinian peace talks and want to be better equipped to discern and analyze the issues at stake? Join CMEP coordinator Skip Cornett for a five-week online two book discussion class! [Click here for more information.](#)

Further reading

[Monastery defaced in apparent “price tag” attack \[Ynetnews\]](#) *“Price tag” sprayed on wall, firebomb thrown at Beit Gamel Monastery; police unit for nationalistic crimes investigating. “Monastery wants to have good relations with Jewish people; we’re not here to pick fight with anyone,” nun says.*

[Tzipi Livni and the quest for peace in Israel and Palestine \[Newsweek and The Daily Beast\]](#) *Achieving a two-state solution, Livni said, is “the reason for me to be in politics.” It’s also a task that rests very much on her shoulders. Given her relationships with Palestinian officials, her credibility with the international community, and, these days at least, her rapport with Netanyahu, Livni may be the only person who can drag Israelis and Palestinians together and—after 65 years of conflict—broker an agreement both sides can live with.*

[Palestinian Children: The Invisible Workers of Israeli Settlements \[The Daily Beast\]](#) *Palestinian child laborers are undocumented, meaning no records of their hours worked are kept. They are paid in cash so that there is no proof of them working on settlements, and they have no official status, health insurance, or rights as employees. Settlers that employ them are well aware of this.*

[Read more on the Churches for Middle East Peace website.](#)

2) A three-story approach to ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Avraham Burg, Ha'aretz, August 5, 2013

Nearly all the discussions on the peace process focus on one thing —a state. Everyone asks whether there is still a chance for the two-state solution, or whether the time has come to consider a single state of all of its citizens, a binational state. Or perhaps we need to think about preserving the status quo of a single state with inherent, and problematic, discrimination. The responses point to a sad, stuck reality. One person's tempting carrot is another's painful stick, and versa.

In essence this is a one-level discussion, the national level: a national home for the Jewish people, a national home for the Palestinian collective, and that's all. Anything below the state - its identity, character, citizens and communities - is scarcely mentioned. And anything above, beyond the state framework, also gets scant attention. As a result many people, from every camp, feel that it doesn't matter what kind of agreement is eventually reached, because it won't solve the real problems.

Even were a Palestinian state to arise alongside Israel tomorrow morning, at best it would only be the expression of an unsatisfactory interim agreement. Those who want the entire territory, on our side or on theirs, will never settle for half, and will continue to undermine the foundations of the partition agreement. On the other hand, those among us who today support partition in effect seek to push across the border all the core issues we have been living with since Israel's establishment, and particularly since 1967: the traumas, the refugees, the dominion and the occupation. ...

It's not only words that are missing from this enterprise, its melody is also adversarial in tone. If the talks do result in a peace agreement, it will be a peace tinged with suspicion and hostility. Many Palestinians are convinced that every Israeli is either a West Bank settler or a soldier, because since the Oslo Accords these are the only Israelis they know. And many Israelis are certain that "they," all Palestinians, hate Israel. The sourness of ... Netanyahu and his cabinet ministers, as well as the suspiciousness of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and his colleagues, are an obstacle to concrete change.

Is it still possible to shape all these materials into a different future? Can a building be erected with more rooms, a greater range of topics, from the Israeli or Palestinian individual to the organizing superstructure above us all? An affirmative answer ... requires us to abandon the one-dimensional, one-level perspective that comes down to "yes" or "no" to a Palestinian state, and to add depth and height. The time has come for three-level thought, starting from the assumption that our fates, Israeli and Palestinian, are intertwined and that it is useless to ignore reality. Cancers left untreated on one side send secondary growths to the other, and there isn't a wall in the world that can stop them.

The first story of the new building will be the foundation, containing the principles upon which the entire future state will be built. Every person between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea is entitled to the same equal rights - personal, political, economic and social. They include the right to protection and security, equal treatment, freedom of movement, property, judicial recourse and the right to vote and to be elected to public office. Regardless of your citizenship, ... you will be bound by the same constitutional framework and principles and entitled to the same fundamental liberties, without discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, faith or national affiliation.

The middle level will be divided between both tenants: an agreed-upon, logical division and separation between the two collective groups in the form of two sovereign states. Each state will express the respective aspirations and values of the Israelis and the Palestinians, each in its own space and as it sees fit in accordance with its own traditions. Each state will conduct its own foreign and defense policy and its domestic and economic policy from this middle level. ...

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

3) An Israeli-Palestinian federation is still the way

Uri Avnery, Ha'aretz, August 8, 2013

In the spring of 1949, just after the armistice agreements at the end of the War of Independence, a small group met to promote the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside the new State of Israel, with an alliance formed between the two peoples. The group consisted of Rostam Bastuni, a Muslim Arab; Jabr Moade, a Druze Arab; and myself. (All three of us were ultimately elected to the Knesset.) We didn't talk explicitly about a federation, but we agreed that the border between the two countries should be open to people and goods. (When it became obvious that we couldn't form a political party, we disbanded.)

In 1956, after the Sinai Campaign, a new group got together that included Natan Yellin-Mor, a leader of the pre-state Lehi underground, writers Boaz Evron and Amos Kenan, and myself. About a year later, the group, Semitic Action, published its "Hebrew Manifesto," which presented an entirely different model for the State of Israel. It proposed a Palestinian state alongside Israel and a confederation of Israel, Palestine and Jordan. We referred to the federation as Ugdat Hayarden (the Jordan Corps), before the Israel Defense Forces adopted the Hebrew word *ugda* to mean a military division.

Immediately after the Six-Day War, many of the same people formed a group called the Israel-Palestine Federation. In the 1970s, Abba Eban promoted an approach similar to the Benelux federation. To my surprise, Yasser Arafat mentioned this idea when I met him in July 1982 in Beirut, which was under Israeli siege at the beginning of the first Lebanon war. He asked, why not a federation of Israel, Palestine, Jordan and maybe also Lebanon? He brought up the idea again during our last conversation, just before he died mysteriously in 2004.

I stopped using the term federation when I realized it was scaring both sides. The Israelis saw a federation as infringing on Israel's independence, and the Palestinians were afraid that this was a Zionist tactic to continue the occupation by other means. Still, it's clear that in a small country like ours, two states cannot exist side by side over time without a strong link between them. Even the 1947 UN partition plan included a federation, though it didn't explicitly use the term. The plan provided for an economic union between the Jewish state and the Arab state.

There are dozens of federations and confederations around the world and no two are alike. The U.S. Civil War was between a northern federation and a southern confederacy. Switzerland defines itself as a confederation of cantons. Russia is a federation and Germany is a federal republic.

A federation between Israel and Palestine, with or without Jordan, would have to adapt to our situation with its own unique form. The important thing is the timing. Writing in Haaretz a few days ago, Avraham Burg compared his plan for a federation to a building with human rights on the ground floor, two states, Israel and Palestine, on the middle level, and a federation on the top floor.

The existence of the Israeli nation-state and the Palestinian nation-state, one alongside the other, would precede the establishment of a federation. As long as a state of Palestine is not established next to the State of Israel in a final peace treaty, it will be hard to get the Palestinians excited about the federation idea.

I am convinced that by the end of this century there will be a world government in one form or another. It is already impossible to solve humanity's existential problems without a binding international authority with powers to make decisions and execute them. Tasks such as saving the earth, organizing a global economy, preventing wars and civil conflicts, protecting human rights, assuring the equality of women and minorities, and eradicating famine and disease all require a new global arrangement. ...

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

4) From human rights to federation, the three-stage solution: A federation – Why not?

Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, August 10, 2013

Avraham Burg (58) was a member of the Labor Party and for some time the Chairman of the Knesset. His late father was a long-time cabinet minister and a leader of the National-Religious Party, before it became a rabid messianic mob. The relations between Burg sr. and me were quite friendly, largely because we were the only two German-born members of the Knesset.

Burg jr., who still wears the kippah of an observant Jew, joined the Labor Party and was a member of the “eight doves,” a moderate grouping in the party.

[On August 5] Ha'aretz published an article [see above] in which Burg proposed linking the “two-state solution” with a two-state federation. He used the metaphor of a building, the first floor of which would consist of human rights, the second floor would host the two states, Israel and Palestine, and the third the federation. This brought a lot of memories to my mind.

In the spring of 1949, immediately after the signing of the original armistice agreements between the new State of Israel and the Arab countries which had intervened in the war, a group was formed in Israel to advocate the setting up of a Palestinian state next to Israel, and the signing of a covenant between the two nations. At the time, that idea was considered heretical, since the very existence of a Palestinian people was strenuously denied in Israel.

The group consisted of a Muslim Arab, a Druze Arab and me. After some time, when our attempts to form a new party failed to get off the ground, the group dispersed. (Curiously enough, all three of us later became members of the Knesset.)

We were of one mind concerning a salient point: the borders between the two states must be open for the free movement of people and goods. We did not use the word “federation,” but something like that was on our minds.

After the 1956 Suez war, a new group took up the idea. It was founded by Nathan Yalin-Mor and me and attracted an impressive array of intellectuals, writers and artists. Yalin-Mor was the former leader of the Fighters for the Freedom of Israel, branded by the British as the most extreme Jewish terrorist organization and known to them as the “Stern Gang.”

We called ourselves “Semitic Action” and published a document, “The Hebrew Manifesto,” which I still think was and has remained unique: a complete, detailed blueprint for a different State of Israel. It contained among many other things the plan for the establishment of an Arab-Palestinian state alongside Israel, and a federation between Israel, Palestine and Jordan, to be called “the Jordan Union.”

In the 1970s, Abba Eban floated the idea of a Benelux-type solution, a name derived from the federation-like arrangement between Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg. To my surprise, when I first met with Yasser Arafat during the siege of Beirut in 1982, he used the very same term: “A federation between Israel, Palestine and Jordan, and perhaps Lebanon too – why not?” He repeated the same idea, in the same words, at our last meeting, just before his mysterious death.

In the course of time, I dropped the word “federation.” I had come to the conclusion that it frightened both sides too much. Israelis feared that it meant diminishing the sovereignty of Israel, while Palestinians suspected that it was another Zionist ruse to keep up the occupation by other means. But it seems clear that in a small land like historical Palestine, two states cannot live side by side for any length of time without a close relationship between them. ...

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

5) Will Jewish Democracy please phone home Robert Cohen, Micah's Paradigm Shift, August 6, 2013

So, peace negotiations have been restarted but nobody's holding their breath for any miraculous breakthroughs in the next nine months.

And why is that?

Well, I could talk about the long-standing American bias towards Israel and the undue influence of the pro-Israel lobby on Congress and the White House. I could mention the appointment of Martin Indyk as the talk's chairman (a former Israel lobbyist and previous U.S. ambassador to Israel).

I could point out that Israel's governing coalition is stacked firmly in favour of continued Settlement expansion. I could remind you that Israel has already said it will never share Jerusalem and refuses to take any responsibility for the creation of the Palestinian refugees in 1948.

So, all in all, it's hard to imagine quite what a fair and principled final status deal would look like that could be remotely acceptable to both sides.

But instead I want to examine a different factor. Something more fundamental to the dynamics of the talks. Something that underpins all of the issues above.

A few weeks ago, Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, made clear that his main motivation for agreeing to the resumption of talks with the Palestinian Authority was to secure the future of a "Jewish and Democratic State of Israel." And he expects the Palestinians to recognise the country in those very precise religious/ethnic terms. At all costs, he wants to avoid anything that looks like it will lead to some kind of bi-national state of all its citizens. In other words, he wants to ensure Israel remains democratic for Jews only, and that means on both sides of the 1967 borders.

It's the description "Jewish and Democratic State of Israel" that takes us to the heart of the matter. It's a shorthand descriptor that always sounds so reasonable, indeed admirable, to most western ears. Far better than those despotic Arab regimes that persecute women and gays and outlaw political dissent. And anyway, don't the Jews deserve their own distinct state that is theirs, and theirs alone, after all they have suffered at the hands of other nations.

There are a number of ways to argue against this position, but the one I'd like to put forward here is that the current way in which the Jewish and Democratic State of Israel is constituted is not very ... well, Jewish.

Orwellian doublethink: The Jewish community, worldwide, needs to wake up to what Zionism has done to the Hebrew conception of "Democracy." And by "Democracy" I mean the ideas of universal human dignity, individual rights and collective responsibilities that have come to define what an ethically grounded community or state should look like. These are the Jewish values I was taught to understand and take pride in as a Jewish youngster. These were the values I was told that we had brought to the community of nations and made witness to even during the darkest moments of our history.

But, during our current "Age of Zionism" we have distorted Jewish ethics to the point where they have become unrecognisable from our traditional teaching. Either that, or we are being asked to live in some strange world of Jewish Orwellian "doublethink" where we are expected to hold in our heads contradictory versions of Jewish Democracy and claim that both are to be admired and respected. ...

[Read the entire piece on the blog Micah's Paradigm Shift](#)

6) Imagine all the people living life in peace

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, August 11, 2013

For one magical moment it seemed like a dream had come true. One state, one park for all its citizens. A slender crescent moon in blackening skies, two days after the first day of the Hebrew month of Elul. Like every Friday night, whitish smoke rises from barbecues on the park lawns. But tonight it's holiday smoke. It's Id al-Fitr, and crowds of Israeli Arabs fill Yarkon Park.

Many Israeli Jews are also in the park, as usual on summer evenings. The parking lots are full, a truck advertising Mansur Landscaping parked alongside Levinson Brothers, engineers. That was the scene two nights ago in Yarkon Park in Tel Aviv.

For one magical moment it seemed like a dream had come true. One state, one park for all its citizens.

On the beaches of Jaffa and south Tel Aviv over the past few days one could see masses of Palestinians from the territories who had received permits to celebrate at the forbidden sea; and in Yarkon Park, Moshe, Grisha and Mohammed grilled the same shish-kebab. The music was also mixed – Israeli Mizrahi, Russian and Arab with touches of Hare Krishna from a procession of passing adherents. Quite a few Arabs were listening to Eyal Golan. Multiculturalism.

In the park of all its citizens, there seemed to be an Arab majority, perhaps half and half. The “demographic danger,” in all its horror, the Zionist dream cut short for a moment. And yet nothing happened. Moshe, Grisha and Mohammed barbecued and all was well with everyone; they were much more concerned about how their meat was grilling than their right to the land. Crowds of children went crazy riding multi-cycles for rent. You could also get a ride on a pony for NIS 20 or mount a wagon pulled by a donkey for NIS 10. The ducks in the lake were a special attraction for children who had never seen a duck before. Sellers of glowing glitter that lit up the sky over the park were making a good living.

Everything seemed forgotten for a moment on this glowing Friday night: the fears and the hatred, the racism and the nationalism, [Upper Nazareth Mayor] Shimon Gapso and [Deputy Minister of Defense] Danny Danon. In this apartheid state this park (and many others) was still open to all its citizens, as opposed to what was the case in the country where apartheid originated, South Africa. Here you have a PR victory (on points) for apartheid-deniers. As much as a quick visit can attest, there were no racist or nationalist incidents in the park, no fights or even remarks.

A few years ago I described on these pages a similar multicultural scene on the Jaffa slope promenade, which was new at the time. That scene has repeated itself there every week. A year ago I described the first holiday in which large numbers of Palestinians were allowed to go swimming in the sea at Tel Aviv, and not a hair on the head of even a single Israeli fell because of it, and that, too, was a great thrill for me. These are the drops in the sea, the first harbingers that should presage something different.

Yarkon Park looked on Friday night the way a country can and should look. It is childlike, dreamlike and silly to think that what happens on one night in the park can suddenly become a way of life. That all the fears and hatred can be left behind, barbecuing meat and making peace, behold how good and how pleasant. But in contrast to other bitter nationalist conflicts, here it is (still) possible. In South Africa, in Northern Ireland, in Bosnia and in Rwanda this could never have happened during their years of strife. We must remember this. We must remember that after we have enumerated all the difficulties and supposedly insurmountable obstacles, two peoples exist here, who, on their basic human levels can (still) find a common language. Try to put an Israeli and a Palestinian from the same socioeconomic background together and then try that with an Israeli and a Swiss person. The Israeli will share a lot more laughs with the Palestinian. ...

[Read the entire piece on the Jews for Justice for Palestinians' website.](#)

7) Imagining Israeli-Palestinian peace

Kobi Niv, Ha'aretz, August 6, 2013

In order to create something, you first have to imagine it, to describe in words the world you want to create. Only then can you build it with deeds. Just ask God.

Therefore, if we, both Palestinians and Israelis, truly and sincerely want to make peace with one another, we must first of all imagine what it will be like. We must imagine how we would like to see that peace. First of all, we must describe that peace in words; only then can we begin to draft it with agreements and lines drawn on maps. Just imagine, for example, in another 12 or 27 or 40 years, the joint Memorial Day for the fallen of the wars of the past between our two nations.

At the very same moment, a two-minute siren will be heard in the streets of Tel Aviv, Nablus, Be'er Sheva and Ramallah. The sons and daughters of both nations – irrespective of where the border will be – will all stop their cars, emerge and stand silently – Jews with kippot, Arabs with kaffiyehs, young Israelis and Palestinians, standing side by side – on roads, in schools and in public institutions, during those two minutes of silence in memory of the fallen of both nations.

If you, we, they (call yourselves and them whatever you like), don't want to or are incapable of imagining this painful, beautiful, moment, the epitome of conciliation and acceptance, then we lack both any hope or way to reach peace and any future, together or separately.

Instead of striving for conciliation and acceptance, instead of imagining a joint future on this tiny piece of land, instead of creating that peace, each time we do meet we dwell on technical details, borders, formulas and other nonsense.

Former South African President Nelson Mandela, one of the greatest statesman of the 20th century, spent an entire generation – 27 years – in prison under South Africa's oppressive, white regime.

When he was released from prison and was finally called upon to lead his nation, to take the reins of power and to make peace between the downtrodden blacks and the whites who had oppressed them, he spent not even one second on seeking revenge for the sins of the past or on figuring out exactly who did what to whom and why. Instead, he just looked straight ahead – toward the shared future of that land's two races, and he created a deep, broad process of national conciliation and acceptance.

We must do the same here, because it is the only option. Not obsessing over who inflicted more suffering on whom, nor trying to reach an agreement that will guarantee either side more land or less water, as if we don't live on the same land and drink the same water.

Nor should we draw lines demarcating where they can sit on a weekday, on which hills they can plant olive trees and we fig trees, when we or they can travel, or when and where they can go to the shore, and to which beaches. That's all nonsense. It's all the same land, the same earth, the same trees and the same fruit. And the same roads, the same hills, the same sea.

It is all inseparable, just as we are inseparable, and the location and the color of the borders don't matter one fig. Anyone who cannot look straight ahead, who always look backward instead – again, ask God – turns into a pillar of salt. His future will be the same as the past that he pines for – a dark future of endless death and killing.

8) Taking stock of ourselves and Israel

Rabbi Alana Suskin, Jewish Journal, August 20, 2013

Rabbi Alana Suskin is the Director of Strategic Communications at [Americans for Peace Now](#).

On this Rosh Hashanah eve, we savor the hope that the New Year will bring the blessing of peace to Israel.

We recall President Obama's historic speech in Jerusalem, where he spoke to our hearts, as Jews and as Americans, about the necessity of achieving Israeli-Palestinian peace. We remember Secretary Kerry's determined efforts to re-launch peace efforts, ultimately bringing the parties back at the negotiating table. We hope and pray that the current talks will end in an agreement - and that greed for land will not deprive Israel of the peaceful, secure future its people long for and deserve.

Back in July, Prime Minister Netanyahu's cabinet voted to release Palestinian prisoners, ostensibly as a sign of seriousness about peace. But soon thereafter, 91 settlements were designated "priority development areas," eligible for special benefits. At the time, Dov Weisglass, a former top advisor to Ariel Sharon, observed: "This is not how you make peace."

In the days that followed, Netanyahu's government advanced some 3000 new settlement units, and officials indicated that more settlement announcements were on the way. This, indeed, is not how you make peace. This is how you hand the future of Israel over to a small minority of Jews who value land over all else, including peace, security, and Israel's survival as a democracy and a Jewish state.

In the book of Numbers (35:34), God warns: "Do not, therefore, defile the land which you will inhabit, wherein I dwell; for I, God, dwell among the Israelites." Yeshayahu Leibowitz, an Israeli Orthodox Jew widely viewed as one of the greatest modern scholars of Torah, suggests that this verse means that God doesn't dwell in the land, but among the Israelites - but only if their behavior meets with God's approval. In short, actions are more important to God than the land.

In the haftarah of that same portion, the Prophet Jeremiah says, "You entered and defiled My land, and made My inheritance an abomination." Leibowitz notes that Jeremiah's rebuke makes sense only if "sacredness" is understood not as something inherent in the land, but as something embodied in the actions of the land's inhabitants. Leibowitz says, "...that verse is directed at us as well. There is nothing more dangerous than cloaking defilement in the garb of holiness. The land itself does not have any inherent quality which sanctifies everything done in it, but only that which is done in it has the potential of imparting holiness to the land."

The West Bank is the land of our biblical forbearers. As Jews, we can respect the settlers' reverence for this Jewish past, even as we reject their desire to recreate it. But more than that, we reject their readiness to sacrifice modern, democratic Israel in favor of re-establishing "Greater Israel," and their willingness, in pursuit of this goal, to deprive Palestinians of their basic rights, including their land, freedom, dignity, and self-determination - or even to terrorize them in "price tag" attacks. About these settlers, and the occupation that supports them, the words of Jeremiah ring true: "You entered and defiled My land."

The Jewish month of Elul, before the New Year and the Days of Awe, is a time to do cheshbon hanefesh - to take stock of oneself, in preparation for the days of repentance. Taking stock, we see that it is not enough to hope for peace in the New Year; we must act to make peace a reality. We must not bury our heads in the sand, rather than admit that Israel is careening down a self-destructive path. We must refuse to be silent as extremists, acting in our name as Jews, defile the land, and defile the miracle that is the modern state of Israel. ...

[Read the entire piece on the Jewish Journal website.](#)

9) IDF chief warns attack against Israel will carry “painful price”

Itamar Fleishman, Ynetnews, August 29, 2013

Against the background of a possible American strike against Syria, the Israeli Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Benny Gantz threatened Israel's neighbor to the north that aggression will carry a “painful price.”

“In the case of fire directed at Israel, it's clear to all the world's leaders that the price will be painful and the enemy's loss a dire one,” the chief of staff said on Thursday.

“The IDF is standing at the threshold of challenging days,” Gantz added. “We've analyzed the different meanings from every possible development, and out of the necessary responsibility, we're readying for every scenario. Our intelligence capabilities, most advanced attack methods and our defense systems in the air, land and sea are alerted and manned by our best soldiers.”

Gantz called on citizens to “continue with their daily routine and preparations for the holidays, with the knowledge that the IDF is standing for their defense determined, strong and ready as ever.”

Earlier, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that Israel is “set” for an American strike in Syria and that there is no need to alter the daily routine: “We've decided to spread out Iron Dome (missile defense system) and our other interception units,” he said during a security consult in Tel Aviv.

Netanyahu stressed that Israel is not involved in the Syrian civil war, but warned that “If anyone tries to harm the citizens of Israel, the IDF will respond mightily.”

Police Commissioner Yohanan Danino also addressed the situation in Syria and said: “I want to tell all of Israel – we are prepared. I ask the citizens of Israel to not change their plans for the upcoming holidays; we will do everything necessary in order to maintain the routine and security of the people. You have someone to rely on.”

President Shimon Peres visited Jerusalem District Police headquarters Thursday morning and addressed recent development in Syria: “What happened in Syria is not just a local event, but a crime against humanity and international law, and therefore the responsible world wishes to respond.”

Peres added: “Israel was and is not involved in the Syrian civil war, however if they try to hurt us we will respond with full force. Israel has a strong, innovative and powerful army and has defense systems like never before. The reports about an attack against Israel are aimed at creating panic.”

A high-ranking IDF source estimated that the U.S. attack is imminent, but that the chances of a Syrian retaliation against Israel are low.

“A U.S.-led coalition is currently being formed, and a number of factors will determine the timing of the strike, including the departure of UN inspectors from Syria and the meeting scheduled for Wednesday between (US President Barack) Obama and the Russians.”

“In any case, the attack is expected to be an American operation. We will only be involved as Syria's neighbors,” he said.

According to AFP, earlier on Thursday the U.S. Navy deployed a fifth destroyer to the eastern Mediterranean. According to a defense official, the USS Stout, a guided missile destroyer, is “in the Mediterranean, heading and moving east” to relieve the USS Mahan, who said both ships might remain in place for the time being.

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

10) Peter Beinart: American Jews willfully ignore the Palestinian perspective of the conflict
Chemi Shalev, Ha'aretz, September 3, 2013

The American Jewish community's enfant terrible, Peter Beinart, is in attack mode once again.

[In a scathing new 5,000-word article](#), Beinart accuses the Jewish establishment of willfully ignoring the Palestinian side of their conflict with Israel and of thus being "a closed intellectual space, isolated from the experiences and perspectives of roughly half the people under Israeli control."

Returning to the respected arena of *The New York Review of Books* in which he published his original controversial 2010 article "The Failure of the American Jewish Establishment," Beinart accuses American Jewish leaders of living in a "cocoon" as far as the Palestinians are concerned. Palestinians are rarely invited to address American Jewish groups, he asserts, just as American Jews visiting Israel with Birthright and similar organizations hardly ever venture into Palestinian cities and towns.

The result, he says, is that American Jews have very little knowledge of the reality of Palestinian lives.

Their isolation and insularity not only translate into an utter lack of empathy for the Palestinians but also to a basic misunderstanding of the conflict itself. This ignorance, he adds, is even detrimental to Israel's most ardent advocates because American Jews "fail to understand the very behavior they seek to prevent."

The article is sure to create the same kind heated discussion and to elicit harsh criticism similar to what Beinart experienced in the past. But Beinart, author of the 2011 book "The Crisis of Zionism" and editor of the "Open Zion" blog at the Daily Beast, told Ha'aretz on Monday that he was not seeking to grab attention or make headlines, as detractors have asserted.

"I'm critiquing the way the American Jewish community operates because I think we're hurting ourselves, and Israel, through our isolation from Palestinians. As Jews and Zionists, I want us to do better," he said.

Beinart takes two of the most prominent of today's American Jewish leaders to task for being "unfamiliar with the realities of ordinary Palestinian lives." While he lauds their frequent "eloquent calls for human rights," Beinart says figures such as the Anti-Defamation League's Abe Foxman and Nobel Peace Prize winner Eli Wiesel often dismiss allegations of Israeli abuse of Palestinian rights because "they don't know the degree to which Palestinians are denied those rights in the West Bank."

"Because most American Jewish leaders have never seen someone denied the right to visit a family member because they lack the right permit, or visited a military court, or seen a Palestinian village scheduled for demolition because it lacks building permits that are almost impossible for Palestinians to get, it is easy for them to minimize the human toll of living, for 46 years, without the basic human rights your Jewish neighbors take for granted."

Beinart says that the widespread ignorance about the Palestinian point of view causes many American Jews to assume that "Palestinian anger toward Israel must be a product solely of Palestinian pathology."

While he doesn't belittle the corrosive influence of Palestinian television and textbook incitement, Beinart says American Jews fail to recognize that some of the hatred towards Israel "may stem not from what Palestinians read or hear about the Jewish state, but from the way they interact with it in their daily lives." ...

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

11) U.S. military action in Syria could spark world war, Syrian bishop warns

CNA/EWTN NEWS, August 28, 2013

ALEPPO, Syria — A Catholic bishop in Aleppo has warned that U.S. and foreign military action in the war-torn country could ignite a global war, making the “tragic situation” in Syria much worse. “The only road to peace is dialogue,” said Bishop Antoine Audo. “War will not take us anywhere.”

“People live in anguish, not knowing what awaits them, and this has been happening during the two years of conflict,” he told the Missionary International Service News Agency.

The Chaldean Catholic bishop of Aleppo, one of the cities worst affected by the turmoil, is also the president of Caritas Syria. He spoke amid escalating international discussions of how to respond to reported chemical-weapons attacks in the country.

On Aug. 26, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry alleged it was “undeniable” that chemical weapons had been used in an attack on civilians in the suburb of Ghouta, outside of Damascus, five days earlier. Kerry blamed the government of President Bashar Assad, but the Assad government has accused the rebels of killing 355 civilians in Ghouta with chemical agents. UN inspectors are visiting the site to determine what happened, but the U.S. has been readying a military response.

Assad’s Syrian government has been locked with rebel groups, including al Qaeda allied forces, in a two-year civil war that has claimed more than 100,000 lives. “I have seen thousands of civilian victims of the violence,” Bishop Audo said. “We are in need of someone who brings us hope for peace, not a new charge of hatred.” He said that “if there is will, dialogue is always possible, even in the darkest situations.”

“Even in Syria there are alternatives to war,” he said.

Catholic leaders familiar with the situation in Syria told the National Catholic Register in July that they wanted all sides to come to the table and negotiate a peace. But U.S. military aid to the rebels, they warned, could empower the Islamists, who dominate the rebel movement, to wipe out the Church in Syria.

In a separate interview with Vatican Radio, Bishop Audo warned, “If there were a military intervention, in my opinion, this means world war.” He echoed Pope Francis’ call for “true dialogue between the different parties of the conflict in order to find a solution.” The “clear” and “direct” words of Pope Francis “give confidence to all of us who are now here, especially in Aleppo, in a very difficult situation,” Bishop Audo said. “The Holy Father’s message is very appreciated by a large part of the population.”

12) Pope Francis’ address, Vatican City, September 1, 2013

Today, dear brothers and sisters, I wish to add my voice to the cry which rises up with increasing anguish from every part of the world, from every people, from the heart of each person, from the one great family which is humanity: it is the cry for peace! It is a cry which declares with force: we want a peaceful world, we want to be men and women of peace, and we want in our society, torn apart by divisions and conflict, that peace break out! War never again! Never again war! Peace is a precious gift, which must be promoted and protected.

There are so many conflicts in this world which cause me great suffering and worry, but in these days my heart is deeply wounded in particular by what is happening in Syria and anguished by the dramatic developments which are looming.

I appeal strongly for peace, an appeal which arises from deep within me. How much suffering, how much devastation, how much pain has the use of arms carried in its wake in that martyred country, especially among civilians and the unarmed! I think of many children who will not see the light of the future! With utmost firmness I condemn the use of chemical weapons: I tell you that those terrible images from recent days are burned into my mind and heart. There is a judgment of God and of history upon our actions which are inescapable! Never has the use of violence brought peace in its wake. War begets war, violence begets violence.

With all my strength, I ask each party in this conflict to listen to the voice of their own conscience, not to close themselves in solely on their own interests, but rather to look at each other as brothers and decisively and courageously to follow the path of encounter and negotiation, and so overcome blind conflict. With similar vigour I exhort the international community to make every effort to promote clear proposals for peace in that country without further delay, a peace based on dialogue and negotiation, for the good of the entire Syrian people.

May no effort be spared in guaranteeing humanitarian assistance to those wounded by this terrible conflict, in particular those forced to flee and the many refugees in nearby countries. May humanitarian workers, charged with the task of alleviating the sufferings of these people, be granted access so as to provide the necessary aid.

What can we do to make peace in the world? As Pope John said, it pertains to each individual to establish new relationships in human society under the mastery and guidance of justice and love (*cf. John XXIII, Pacem in Terris, [11 April 1963]: AAS 55, [1963], 301-302*).

All men and women of good will are bound by the task of pursuing peace. I make a forceful and urgent call to the entire Catholic Church, and also to every Christian of other confessions, as well as to followers of every religion and to those brothers and sisters who do not believe: peace is a good which overcomes every barrier, because it belongs all of humanity!

I repeat forcefully: it is neither a culture of confrontation nor a culture of conflict which builds harmony within and between peoples, but rather a culture of encounter and a culture of dialogue; this is the only way to peace.

May the plea for peace rise up and touch the heart of everyone so that they may lay down their weapons and let themselves be led by the desire for peace.

To this end, brothers and sisters, I have decided to proclaim for the whole Church on 7 September next, the vigil of the birth of Mary, Queen of Peace, a day of fasting and prayer for peace in Syria, the Middle East, and throughout the world, and I also invite each person, including our fellow Christians, followers of other religions and all men of good will, to participate, in whatever way they can, in this initiative.

On 7 September, in Saint Peter's Square, here, from 19:00 until 24:00, we will gather in prayer and in a spirit of penance, invoking God's great gift of peace upon the beloved nation of Syria and upon each situation of conflict and violence around the world. Humanity needs to see these gestures of peace and to hear words of hope and peace! I ask all the local churches, in addition to fasting, that they gather to pray for this intention.

Let us ask Mary to help us to respond to violence, to conflict and to war, with the power of dialogue, reconciliation and love. She is our mother: may she help us to find peace; all of us are her children! Help us, Mary, to overcome this most difficult moment and to dedicate ourselves each day to building in every situation an authentic culture of encounter and peace. Mary, Queen of Peace, pray for us!