

# Middle East Notes

## Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

### September 19, 2013



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

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

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles concerning various views of the success or failure of the Oslo Accords, the role of the UN and of U.S. Jews in the Israeli Palestinian conflict, the possibility of the two-state solution being only an illusion, and other issues.

- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins for September 6 and September 13 give information on its Peacemakers Book Study, encouragement to keep contacting senators in support of the present Israeli Palestinian peace negotiations, various readings 20 years after the Oslo Accords, and other issues.
- James Wall writes about the unsuccessful lobbying efforts of AIPAC in favor of U.S. military action in Syria.
- Peter Beinart in the New York Review of Books writes that U.S. Jews need to hear from Palestinians; truly open conversations with Palestinians may be more discomfiting to U.S. Jews like himself who are committed to the two-state solution than to those skeptical of it.
- Barak Ravid writes that provisional borders for the State of Palestine are unacceptable to the Palestinian leadership, since under this proposal dozens of West Bank settlements and military bases would remain intact for security purposes, taking away 40 percent of West Bank lands.
- A Ha'aretz editorial notes that only the U.S. people are sovereign to make decisions of war and peace regarding their country's army; Israeli decision-makers should give up any pretense of intervening through AIPAC.
- Jeremy Hammond writes a historical piece concerning the role of the UN in creating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Ralph Nader writes that Secretary of State Kerry should get Israeli peace leaders before Congress so that our lawmakers and the U.S. people will be given an opportunity to hear experienced, persuasive Israeli voices for a peace settlement.
- In an interview with +972, Dan Rather notes that he is aware that U.S. reporting on the Middle East conflict is Israel-centric.
- Jeff Cohen writes of his surprisingly inspiring trip to the West Bank and the echoes he heard there of the U.S. civil rights movement.
- Avi Shlaim writes in the Guardian that it is clear to him that the Oslo Peace Accords were wrecked by Netanyahu's bad faith. He writes that this peace process ended up providing Israel with just the cover it was looking for to continue to pursue with impunity its illegal and aggressive colonial project on the West Bank.
- Robert Lifton takes a more positive view of the Oslo Accords in the Times of Israel when he states that Rabin's vision is more relevant than ever today than it was when signed at the White House on September 13, 20 years ago.
- Steven Spiegel also takes a more optimistic view despite that most commentators are declaring the Oslo accords a failure since the conflict remains unsolved. He believes that in many ways, this criticism is simplistic, the result of unrealistic expectations that were bound to be unmet.
- Ian Lustick in the New York Times states that the two-state solution is an illusion, and that diplomacy under the two-state banner is no longer a path to a solution but an obstacle itself.

## 1) [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Bulletins](#)

September 6, 2013 and September 13, 2013

**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 book discussion class! [Sign up today!](#)

**Tell your senators to support peace:** Your help is needed for the peace process to work! It is important that Israelis and Palestinians know that Secretary Kerry's efforts have the support of the United States Congress.

[Click here](#) to tell your senators to join Sens. Tim Kaine (VA) and Martin Heinrich (NM) in cosponsoring Sen. Dianne Feinstein's (CA) resolution praising Secretary Kerry's efforts and pledging the Senate's support for the sustained diplomacy necessary to resolve the conflict.

**[Taking the Cremisan Valley issue to your church:](#)** We have an offline signup sheet for our current action supporting peace and the people of the Cremisan Valley. You can help people add their voice even if they are not online at the time. Please consider taking it to your next worship service, coffee hour or meeting to get more people to join you in voicing their love for peace. This action will be going on into the fall and CMEP will be sure that sign-up sheets get to the President and your Members of Congress.

**[Oslo after 20 years:](#)** Twenty years ago today [September 13] ... PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzak Rabin shook hands in the White Rose Garden after signing the Oslo Accords. The iconic photograph of the two leaders and U.S. President Bill Clinton is both symbolic of what the parties can accomplish through direct negotiations and a warning about the difficulty of resolving this conflict.

Twenty years after Oslo, despite the agreement that "[n]either side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations," there are over 250,000 more Israeli settlers living in the West Bank in settlements many believe were designed to insure there will never be a Palestinian state. An Israeli barrier has been built, 85 percent of which is east of the 1967 lines, eating into land that will be necessary for a viable, contiguous Palestinian state. The rift between the Palestinian political factions of Hamas and Fatah was deepened by differences over Oslo.

However, Oslo has led to some concrete accomplishments and perhaps some lessons learned. The West Bank is relatively stable in the turbulent Middle East. Israel and the Palestinian Authority have made concrete progress on final status issues in a series of negotiations. This week, Yossi Beilin, who helped set the stage for the initial back channel negotiations that resulted in the Oslo Accords said, "The most important component of Oslo was the mutual recognition by Israel and the PLO... Our other mistake was not anticipating the extremists on both sides who would try to spoil it."

According to the Los Angeles Times, "Former Palestinian Authority Prime Minister Ahmed Korei agreed that Oslo's biggest failing was that it included an interim period that allowed Israel to delay making painful concessions on borders and settlements while still claiming to be taking part in an international peace process." He said in the current Secretary of State John Kerry-brokered negotiations, an interim deal will not be accepted.

Former Clinton-era negotiation Aaron David Miller maintains, "While the Oslo process may have failed in the sense that it was never completed, it must be acknowledged that the accords fundamentally changed the framework within which Israelis and Palestinians pursue their national goals, for better and for worse, and in terms of accommodation and conflict between their rival nationalisms. This is a legacy of huge consequence, to the point that in some ways Oslo is not dead at all."

## **2) Obama pauses again; Peace wins, AIPAC loses**

**James M. Wall, September 9, 2013**

Monday, September 9, was planned as a day for the White House to persuade Congress to support military strikes on Syria. The highlight of the day's "persuade Congress" plan was a White House appearance by former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

After a luncheon meeting with President Obama, Clinton pledged her every effort to gain "yes" votes from Congress for a military attack.

Midway through her statement she had to shift, however, from attack mode to peace mode. A rapid series of "surprise" developments swept through London, Moscow and Damascus before dark in Washington Monday.

We may not know until the tell-all book on President Obama's second term is published. But it sure looks like the Obama team spent this past weekend changing its "persuade Congress" plan to a "further pause for peace" plan.

Whatever it was, something led to the weekend shift in White House plans.

The Obama team had read the polls. It was obvious that the majority of the American public wanted no part of more U.S. military presence in the Middle East. Members of Congress read the same polls.

At first only the most hard line pro-Israel members of the House and Senate raised their hands to give a yes vote for an attack. A strange assortment of Republicans, Democrats, progressives and conservatives lifted their hands to defiantly vote no to an attack.

Against such odds, it is rare for AIPAC, Israel's chief Washington lobbying team, to go all out in support of a vote it was going to lose. But AIPAC must have been hearing from Tel Aviv. Israel's government wanted that military strike.

In Israel's view, the greatest threat to its own security—or as some see it, to its military control of the Middle East—runs from the road to Damascus straight through to Teheran, the place where Israel wants to convince the world Iran is building its own stock pile of nuclear weapons.

If Iran has plans to develop a nuclear arsenal, and it denies that it does, it would take decades to catch up to the stock pile of nuclear weapons Israel has stored away in a secure desert hiding place.

AIPAC threw its usual caution to the wind and turned up the heat on Congress for a "yes" vote in support of a strike. It did not work, not even with Hillary Clinton leading the charge. It was time for the White House to give peace a chance.

The shift from "persuade Congress" to another Obama "pause for peace" was launched in London Monday morning when Secretary of State John Kerry made what he attempted to pass off as an off-handed remark. ...

**[Read the entire piece on James Wall's blog.](#)**

### **3) The American Jewish cocoon**

**Peter Beinart, The New York Review of Books, September 26, 2013**

Speak to American Jews long enough about Israel and you begin to notice something. The conversation may begin with Israel, but it rarely ends there. It usually ends with “them.”

Express concern about Israeli subsidies for West Bank settlements and you’ll be told that the settlements don’t matter because “they” won’t accept Israel within any borders. Cite the recent warning by former Shin Bet head Yuval Diskin that “over the past 10–15 years Israel has become more and more racist” and you’ll be told that whatever Israel’s imperfections, it is “they” who teach their children to hate and kill. Mention that former prime minister Ehud Olmert has called Mahmoud Abbas a partner for peace and you’ll be told that what “they” say in Arabic is different from what they say in English.

This spring I watched the documentary *The Gatekeepers*—in which six former heads of Shin Bet sharply criticize Israeli policy in the West Bank—with a mostly Jewish audience in New York. Afterward a man acknowledged that it was an interesting film. Then he asked why “they” don’t criticize their side like Israelis do.

I used to try, clumsily, to answer the assertions about Palestinians that so often consume the American Jewish conversation about Israel. But increasingly I give a terser reply: “Ask them.”

That usually ends the conversation because in mainstream American Jewish circles, asking Palestinians to respond to the endless assertions that American Jews make about them is extremely rare. For the most part, Palestinians do not speak in American synagogues or write in the Jewish press. The organization Birthright, which since 1999 has taken almost 350,000 young Diaspora Jews—mostly Americans—to visit Israel, does not venture to Palestinian towns and cities in the West Bank. Of the more than two hundred advertised speakers at the American Israel Public Affairs Committee’s (AIPAC) 2013 Policy Conference, two were Palestinians. By American Jewish standards, that’s high. The American Jewish Committee’s Global Forum earlier this year, which advertised sixty-four speakers, did not include a single Palestinian.

Ask American Jewish organizations why they so rarely invite Palestinian speakers and you’ll likely be told that they have nothing against Palestinians per se. They just can’t give a platform to Israel’s enemies. In 2010, Hillel, the organization that oversees Jewish life on America’s college campuses, issued guidelines urging local chapters not to host speakers who “deny the right of Israel to exist as a Jewish and democratic state with secure and recognized borders,” “delegitimize, demonize, or apply a double standard to Israel,” or “support boycott of, divestment from, or sanctions against the State of Israel.”

Those standards make it almost impossible for Jewish campus organizations to invite a Palestinian speaker. First, “delegitimize, demonize, or apply a double standard” is so vague that it could bar virtually any Palestinian (or, for that matter, non-Palestinian) critic of Israeli policy. Even supporting a Palestinian state along the 1967 lines would violate the “secure” borders standard, according to Benjamin Netanyahu. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

#### **4) Palestinian official: Israeli proposal for provisional borders unacceptable** **Barak Ravid and Associated Press, Ha'aretz, September 5, 2013**

The Prime Minister's Office has remained silent in the face of a deluge of Palestinian leaks that reportedly outline Israel's positions in the six rounds of talks held over the last month.

According to a report by the Associated Press, Israel suggested the establishment of a Palestinian State with temporary borders, covering 60 percent of the West Bank. "We have no comment on this," said sources at the Prime Minister's bureau.

When talks were launched in Washington at the end of July, both sides committed to not leaking reports on the contents or even the dates of their meetings. According to the agreement made with U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, only the American side would disclose any details relating to the negotiations.

The bureaus of the Prime Minister and of Justice Minister Tzipi Livni, who is the cabinet Minister responsible for the negotiations, have cast a veil of secrecy over the talks. The Israeli side refuses to divulge even the smallest technical details relating to the talks, both before and after each meeting.

In contrast, the last 24 hours have seen at least four reports on details of the talks, coming from senior Palestinian officials, both unnamed and named.

Israel has proposed leaving intact dozens of Jewish settlements and military bases in the West Bank as part of a package to establish a Palestinian state in provisional borders, a Palestinian official told The Associated Press on Wednesday.

The Palestinian team said such a proposal is unacceptable. "We said 'Let's agree on a state based on the 1967 borders first, and then we can agree on having this state in phases.'"

The Palestinian official said formal talks on borders have not yet started, and that negotiations have focused on security matters. He said the Israelis want to retain control of the West Bank's border with Jordan, keep early-warning stations on hilltops, and retain military bases near the Jordanian border.

"Israel is using the issue of security to take land," he said. "From the general discussions we had in the last couple of weeks, the Israelis have shown no intention to dismantle any settlement." He said the current proposals indicated that Israel would seek to retain control over about 40 percent of the West Bank.

Another senior Palestinian official told the Chinese news agency Xinhua that Israel is unwilling to discuss anything except security arrangements. According to him, Israel presented 17 points that include its security demands. He added that in the course of the talks, a dispute broke out over the refusal of the Palestinians to accept any Israeli military presence within the Palestinian state. ...

[\*Read the entire piece here.\*](#)

## **5) In case you were wondering: AIPAC is not Israel**

**Ha'aretz editorial, September 10, 2013**

U.S. President Barack Obama is waging a desperate war this week. Not against Syrian President Bashar Assad, whose country he threatens to attack, but against the American majority that opposes military action in Syria and conveying its disinclination for war to its congressional representatives. This, just as Obama and Secretary of State John Kerry are making a supreme effort to persuade both the Congress and America's allies to support a U.S. attack on Syria, which would preserve the United States' traditional position as "the world's policeman."

In the context of this effort, Obama asked the American Israel Public Affairs Committee to use its influence with Congress to obtain approval for an attack on Syria. Members of the pro-Israel lobby unleashed a torrent of letters arguing for a strike on Capitol Hill, AIPAC's home turf. After years of cool relations with the White House, AIPAC has now cast its lot with the Obama administration. As a result, a congressional veto or, alternatively, a poor outcome from a strike on Syria, will undermine not only Obama but also AIPAC.

As U.S. citizens, AIPAC lobbyists are entitled to express their views to, and to try to influence, elected officials. These rights, however, do not apply to the Israeli citizens, including policy-makers and cabinet ministers, who are speaking out in favor of an attack and even urging the United States to carry it out. They must understand that AIPAC is not Israel, and it is not authorized to express Israeli policy.

It is not yet clear whether a military operation in Syria is indeed necessary to protect American interests. The government in Jerusalem, which is responsible for protecting Israel's interests, has yet to formulate an official position on whether Assad's fall would be good or bad for Israel. The collapse of the Assad regime would indeed break up the Iran-Syria-Hezbollah axis, but there's no way of knowing whether the new regime, or the disintegration of the state into cantons and no man's lands, would be more dangerous or less. In any event, and under any scenario, Israel has no right to send others to conduct military operations, much less in the indirect service of the Syrian rebels and Al-Qaida.

Only the American people are sovereign to make decisions of war and peace regarding their country's army. Israelis and Israeli decision makers should give up any pretense of intervening.

## **6) The role of the UN in creating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict**

**Jeremy R. Hammond, Palestine Chronicle, August 2013**

The United Nations was founded with the stated aim of maintaining peace among nations, but the reality is that not only has it consistently failed to prevent international conflicts, it has had no small part in causing them. One instructive case study was its role in its early years of helping to create the still-unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

According to the preamble to the UN Charter, signed by its founding member states in June 1945, the organization's goal is "to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war" and to "establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained." Article 1 of the Charter further describes the UN's purposes as being to "maintain international peace and security ... in conformity with the principles of justice and international law." The Charter also explicitly recognizes "the principle of equal rights and self-determination of peoples."

Nevertheless, the UN almost immediately upon its founding helped to exacerbate the unfolding situation in Palestine by acting contrary to its own declared principles.

Following the First World War, Great Britain, appointed the occupying power under the League of Nations' Palestine Mandate, proceeded to implement policies that contributed to escalating hostilities between the native Arab and immigrant Jewish communities. After World War II, the League of Nations was replaced by the UN, which assumed authority over the League's Mandates. Britain, unable to reconcile its conflicting promises to both the Arab and Jewish communities, sought to extricate itself from the situation it had helped to create by requesting that the UN take up the question of Palestine. Thus, in May 1947, the UN General Assembly considered and adopted a resolution establishing the UN Special Committee on Palestine (UNSCOP) to investigate and make recommendations.

At the time, the UN consisted of 55 members, including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria. Palestine remained the only one of the formerly Mandated Territories whose independence was not recognized. No representatives from any Arab nations were included in UNSCOP, however, whose membership comprised Australia, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Guatemala, India, Iran, Netherlands, Peru, Sweden, Uruguay and Yugoslavia. Egypt, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia requested that Britain's Mandate be terminated and Palestine's independence recognized, but this motion was rejected.

The population of Palestine at the end of 1946 was about 1,846,000, more than two-thirds of whom were Arab and one-third Jewish. While the growth in the Arab population was due to natural increase, the growth of the Jewish population was mainly the result of immigration, which was supported by British policy. Arabs constituted a majority and owned more land than Jews in every district in Palestine, including Jaffa, which included Tel Aviv. According to the UNSCOP report, Arabs were in possession of about 85 percent of the land, compared to only about 5.8 percent owned by Jews. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)



## **7) To Kerry: Get Israeli peace leaders before Congress**

**Ralph Nader, August 2013**

The new Secretary of State John Kerry taking four trips to the Israeli/Palestinian region in the past two months means yet another U.S. effort for a negotiated peace process between the Palestinians (under ruthless occupation) and the very dominant Israelis. Why should the prospects be any better than the failed attempts by the esteemed former Sen. George Mitchell, and his predecessors?

As senator with a “grade A” from the powerful pro-Israeli government lobby AIPAC, Secretary Kerry has forged a coalition of Israeli and Palestinian businessmen behind a \$4 billion economic assistance plan for the West Bank and Gaza. He is also tapping into the significant Israeli public opinion behind a two-state solution.

Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu is outwardly going through the motions of supporting peace negotiations but demands preconditions and no cessation of expanding Israeli colonies in Palestine. Netanyahu knows how to play the U.S. government like a harp. He talks about negotiations for peace, but remains intransigent.

Back in 1996, he told an applauding joint session of Congress that Israel’s mature economy would no longer need U.S. foreign aid. Today, Israel is a prosperous, bigger economy but is still receiving U.S. foreign aid.

Kerry’s trump card is recognizing the long neglected specific peace offer by the 22-member Arab League in 2002. These Arab countries have renewed and updated their proposal to make it easier for Israel to accept. It includes a comprehensive peace treaty with all Arab nations and Israeli recognition of a Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with minor land swaps.

Netanyahu has given this offer the back of his hand despite its highly publicized reiteration in the ensuing years. But this year, Israeli President (an honorific post) Shimon Peres highlighted the verbal Israeli government endorsement of a two-state solution and urged that “a broad structure of support be created for making progress.”

The problem is that almost nobody in Israel—hawks, peace advocates, or those in the middle—believes anything will come out of Kerry’s shuttle diplomacy.

Here are some reasons why. There is no pressure on Netanyahu’s governing coalition to wage peace. As Ethan Bronner, long-time New York Times reporter in Israel, wrote in the paper’s May 25 edition: “Israel has never been richer, safer, more culturally productive or dynamic.” He might have added that, with huge natural gas finds offshore, Israel is about to be both self-sufficient in fossil fuels and a net exporter.

Nor is there any pressure that Netanyahu recognizes from the Palestinian/Arab side. Palestinians are continually subjugated, impoverished, divided internally and on the losing end of the casualty toll by a ratio exceeding 400 to one. Israel can strike targets in Palestine at will.

...

**[Read the entire piece here.](#)**



**8) Dan Rather: U.S. reporting on conflict is Israel-centric**  
**Ami Kaufman, +972, September 8, 2013**

It's kind of strange to see up close someone who has been a familiar television face for me for decades. So, when Dan Rather looked me straight in the eye, I had to look around to see if everybody else was as starstruck as I was. I think they were.

Rather met with us for a candid chat on his career and insights for us Young Turks (some of us not so young, and even more, not very Turkish). He told us about his departure from the network ("I was too hot to handle"), his interview with Saddam Hussein ("He kept trying to hold my hand") and more. As expected, I just had to get an Israel/Palestine question in the middle of it all:

**How has the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict changed over the years?** On several levels there have been tremendous changes. But in my personal opinion – which I must add is frequently wrong – the basic narrative is remarkably unchanged. This basic narrative, in my opinion, is that Israel, which is a country in which we have no small responsibility in helping to create — President Truman recognized Israel — is an island of democratic government and freedom. It's not the mirror image of us, but the closest there is. It is constantly threatened by any number of combinations of its neighbors. And that's the primary, basic narrative which has not changed.

Now, I would make the argument, and I think a lot of American journalists would, that it hasn't changed because the facts haven't changed. But I'm very aware that there are other people with different opinions about that.

But in other ways it has changed. For one thing, I'm old enough to remember that it was very difficult to report from just about any Arab country. Now, there are many more countries you can go in to.

The other difference, having said that I don't think the spine of the narrative has changed, is that Iran has emerged as probably the most important Islamic power in the region.

Furthermore, the war in Iraq changed the prism through which the whole Middle East is seen and reported in this country – for better and for worse. That includes the prism through which the Israeli-Palestinian problem is seen.

I wish I had the solution to this, but I still think the Middle East is under-reported in some very important ways. Everybody on all sides seems to be frozen in reporting patterns of yesterday, rather than realities of today.

**Can you give me an example?** I would say that in the average U.S. newspaper, the number of stories that have an Israeli dateline will outnumber the number of stories from any other place in the region, except where there is combat. For example, during the Iraq war or now with Syria. So, in that sense, it's Israel-centric. I think there are understandable reasons for that, but how many news organizations have a full time correspondent – never mind a bureau – that's in Palestine? And setting aside that, having a full time correspondent or bureau, how many even send correspondents into the West Bank?

I don't exempt myself from that criticism. But two years ago, we went to the West Bank and spent time there, and did an hour, trying to break that. To be honest, I'm not sure we succeeded but it was our effort to do so. And, predictably, we took some criticism for doing so.

[Read the interview here.](#)

## **9) My surprisingly inspiring trip to the West Bank: Echoes of our civil rights movement**

**Jeff Cohen, Common Dreams, August 27, 2013**

As I prepared for a grueling fact-finding trip to Israel and the Palestinian West Bank (occupied for 46 years), Secretary of State Kerry announced that Israel and the Palestinian Authority had agreed to resume peace talks without preconditions.

On the day my delegation flew to the region, Israel announced that it had approved still more housing for Israeli settlers: "Israel has issued tenders for the construction of nearly 1,200 housing units in occupied East Jerusalem and the West Bank," reported London's Financial Times, "defying U.S. and Palestinian opposition to expansion of Jewish settlements three days before the scheduled start of peace talks."

It's the same old depressing story, with Israel showing little interest in making peace. So before I turn to what's surprising and inspiring in the West Bank, let's acknowledge the bad news: Palestinians are slowly being squeezed out of their homes, deprived of their water and centuries-old olive groves, humiliated on a daily basis by Israeli settlers and the Israeli state in a relentless violation of their human rights that gets worse as much of the world looks away.

But here's the good news: Across the West Bank, Israel's occupation has given rise in recent years to a nonviolent "popular resistance" movement that should be an inspiration to people across the globe. This unarmed resistance has persisted in the face of Israeli state violence (aided by U.S.-supplied weapons and tear gas), lengthy jail sentences for nonviolent protesters and widespread detention and abuse of children.

It was fitting to return to the U.S. on the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington because Martin Luther King Jr. and his legacy of militant nonviolence were invoked by Palestinian activists in virtually every village and town I visited as part of the fact-finding delegation.

Like King, leaders of the Palestinian popular resistance -- from intellectuals to grassroots villagers who'd been repeatedly jailed -- spoke to us about universal human rights, about a human family in which all deserve equal rights regardless of religion or nationality. "We are against the occupation, not against the Jews," was the refrain among Palestinian activists. "We have many Jews and Israelis who support us."

It was indeed inspiring to meet several of the brave Israelis who've supported the nonviolent resistance, often putting themselves in the frontline of marches (their jail sentences are tiny compared to what's dished out to Palestinians). They are admittedly a small minority, thoroughly ostracized within Israel -- a society that seems as paranoid and militaristic today as our country during the McCarthyite Fifties.

NABI SALEH: In this village near Ramallah that's being squeezed by settlers, a leader of the local popular resistance waxed poetic about Israelis who've supported their struggle: "After we started the popular resistance in 2009, we saw a different kind of Israeli, our partner. We see them as our cousin -- a different view than the Israeli as soldier shooting at us, or the settler stealing, or the jailer shutting the cell on us." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

**10) It's now clear: the Oslo peace accords were wrecked by Netanyahu's bad faith**  
**Avi Shlaim, The Guardian, September 12, 2013**

Exactly 20 years have passed since the Oslo accords were signed on the White House lawn. For all their shortcomings and ambiguities, the accords constituted a historic breakthrough in the century-old conflict between Jews and Arabs in Palestine. It was the first peace agreement between the two principal parties to the conflict: Israelis and Palestinians.

The accords represented real progress on three fronts: the Palestine Liberation Organisation recognised the state of Israel; Israel recognised the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian people; and both sides agreed to resolve their outstanding differences by peaceful means. Mutual recognition replaced mutual rejection. In short, this promised at least the beginning of a reconciliation between two bitterly antagonistic national movements. And the hesitant handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat clinched the historic compromise.

Critical to the architecture of Oslo was the notion of gradualism. The text did not address any of the key issues in this dispute: Jerusalem; the right of return of 1948 refugees; the status of Jewish settlements built on occupied Palestinian land; or the borders of the Palestinian entity. All these "permanent status" issues were deferred for negotiations towards the end of the five-year transition period. Basically, this was a modest experiment in Palestinian self-government, starting with the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho.

The text did not promise or even mention an independent Palestinian state at the end of the transition period. The Palestinians believed that in return for giving up their claim to 78% of historic Palestine, they would gain an independent state in the remaining 22%, with a capital city in Jerusalem. They were to be bitterly disappointed.

Controversy surrounded Oslo from the moment it saw the light of day. The 21 October 1993 issue of the London Review of Books ran two articles; Edward Said put the case against in the first. He called the agreement "an instrument of Palestinian surrender, a Palestinian Versailles", arguing that it set aside international legality and compromised the fundamental national rights of the Palestinian people. It could not advance genuine Palestinian self-determination because that meant freedom, sovereignty, and equality, rather than perpetual subservience to Israel. In my own article I put the case for Oslo. I believed that it would set in motion a gradual but irreversible process of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories and that it would pave the way to Palestinian statehood. From today's perspective, 20 years on, it is clear that Said was right in his analysis and I was wrong.

In 2000 the Oslo peace process broke down following the failure of the Camp David summit and the outbreak of the second intifada. Why? Israelis claim that the Palestinians made a strategic choice to return to violence and consequently there was no Palestinian partner for peace. As I see it, Palestinian violence was a contributory factor, but not the main cause. The fundamental reason was that Israel reneged on its side of the deal.

Sadly, the Jewish fanatic who assassinated Rabin in 1995 achieved his broader aim of derailing the peace train. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## **11) Why Rabin's vision is more relevant than ever today** **Robert K. Lifton, The Times of Israel, September 9, 2013**

September 13th marks the 20th anniversary of the signing of the Oslo Accord in the White House. But my connection to the Accord goes back a month earlier to August 20, 1993. On that day, it was announced publicly that after months of secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, an Agreement on a Declaration of Principles was initialed between representatives of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). As I recount in my memoirs, I had a prior appointment to meet Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin that afternoon and to my surprise, despite the important news story, he kept the appointment.

With just the two of us sitting in his office, Rabin expressed concerns about the good faith of the Palestinians and the intentions of PLO leader Yasser Arafat, whom he considered a terrorist. He was so anxious about Arafat that I found myself reassuring him about the abilities of his negotiating team to reach an agreement that left appropriate outs if the other side failed to perform.

That same caution and distrust were present on that beautiful and exciting day when we all gathered on the White House lawn to witness the signing of the Agreement, when Rabin, appearing almost physically pushed by President Clinton, shook the hand of his enemy Yasser Arafat. But it was Rabin's heartfelt speech that explained that as hard as it was for him to shake that hand, it was harder to tell parents of Israeli soldiers that their sons and daughters had died fighting Arabs. "Enough of blood and tears," he said, "We are today giving peace a chance and saying enough."

However, Rabin was motivated by more than the desire to put an end to the pain of war and bloodshed alone. A deep strategic thinker, Rabin had concluded that Israel's interests required that it make peace with its neighboring nations – Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians – in order to be in a position to face the nation that he recognized was Israel's major threat – Iran.

Very sadly, for Israel and the world, Rabin was assassinated before he could carry out his plans. Since then, we've witnessed the failure of the Camp David effort; the violence of the second Palestinian intifada of 2000; the strengthening of Hezbollah after Israel's withdrawal from Lebanon; and the rise of Hamas in Gaza.

It is always difficult to deal with the "what if's" of history but there are two that I think are relevant to any appraisal of the implications of the Oslo Accord:

First, of course, is what would have happened had the extremist Israeli nationalists not murdered Rabin. I believe that there was a far better chance that the peace process would have followed on the foundation set by Oslo. As I noted, Rabin had a clear strategic program that included making a deal with the Palestinians. At the same time, he was highly respected by the Israeli public as one of the first-generation founders of the state, as a warrior and as a strategist so he had the confidence of the public behind him. Very importantly, Arafat also respected him and thus, more than any other Israeli leader, he might have brought the parties together. Of course, the extremist religious nationalists knew all that. That's why they killed him! ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## 12) The case for Oslo

Steven L. Spiegel, Israel Policy Forum, September 13, 2013

Most commentators are declaring the Oslo accords a failure now that the twentieth anniversary of the famous handshake between Bill Clinton, Yitzhak Rabin, and Yasser Arafat on the White House lawn has arrived and the conflict remains unsolved.

But in many ways, this criticism is simplistic, the result of unrealistic expectations that were bound to be unmet.

Looking at the situation from today's vantage point, where Israeli and Palestinian officials cooperate daily, it's easy to forget that when the Israelis and the Palestine Liberation Organization signed the Oslo Accords they were recognizing each other for the first time, and abandoning their relationship as the bitterest of enemies. The world was so shocked by this move that expectations soared to unrealistic heights. Consequently, a widespread assumption developed that since there is no independent Palestinian State, the Oslo accords were a debacle.

The problem with this assumption is that it ignores the fact that many of the positive elements between Israelis and Palestinians we take for granted could not have happened without the Oslo Accords.

With all of the disappointing developments like settlement growth, the fence, and the missile wars with Gaza, it is worth remembering that the Israeli-Palestinian front is one of the quietest locations in the Middle East today. Remarkably, the complex problems of borders, Jerusalem, and refugees, among others, are still being discussed despite interim periods of violence and turmoil. Recently, the situation has even been particularly quiet. And unlike the pre-1993 period, Israelis and Palestinians have now had years of working with each other on mundane and critical problems in the areas of security, and economics, and border crossings.

Perhaps most importantly, unlike in September 1993, today the notion that a two-state solution is the favored answer is accepted by almost all relevant actors: by the Israelis and Palestinians; by most Arab leaders; by the UN community; and by the United States. Before Oslo, a Palestinian state was considered radical and unacceptable. Israel, the United States, and others assumed that the PLO was an objectionable negotiating partner and worried that the PLO would never accept a state of Israel alongside it. Yet today, the discussions being conducted under the auspices of the US Administration are premised on the idea that there should be two states.

There remain serious problems caused by Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and other Palestinian extremists who want one state from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean—destroying Israel. And there are Jewish extremists who also want one state in the same territory, but one that is controlled by Jews. Still, despite these radicals, the notion of a Palestinian state living beside Israel has become conventional wisdom. Polls show that substantial majorities of Israelis and Palestinians, whatever their skepticism and suspicions, would gladly accept the two state solution. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

### **13) Two-state illusion**

**Ian S. Lustick, The New York Times, September 14, 2013**

The last three decades are littered with the carcasses of failed negotiating projects billed as the last chance for peace in Israel. All sides have been wedded to the notion that there must be two states, one Palestinian and one Israeli. For more than 30 years, experts and politicians have warned of a “point of no return.” Secretary of State John Kerry is merely the latest in a long line of well-meaning American diplomats wedded to an idea whose time is now past.

True believers in the two-state solution see absolutely no hope elsewhere. With no alternative in mind, and unwilling or unable to rethink their basic assumptions, they are forced to defend a notion whose success they can no longer sincerely portray as plausible or even possible.

It’s like 1975 all over again, when the Spanish dictator Francisco Franco fell into a coma. The news media began a long death watch, announcing each night that Generalissimo Franco was still not dead. This desperate allegiance to the departed echoes in every speech, policy brief and op-ed about the two-state solution today.

True, some comas miraculously end. Great surprises sometimes happen. The problem is that the changes required to achieve the vision of robust Israeli and Palestinian states living side by side are now considerably less likely than other less familiar but more plausible outcomes that demand high-level attention but aren’t receiving it.

Strong Islamist trends make a fundamentalist Palestine more likely than a small state under a secular government. The disappearance of Israel as a Zionist project, through war, cultural exhaustion or demographic momentum, is at least as plausible as the evacuation of enough of the half-million Israelis living across the 1967 border, or Green Line, to allow a real Palestinian state to exist. While the vision of thriving Israeli and Palestinian states has slipped from the plausible to the barely possible, one mixed state emerging from prolonged and violent struggles over democratic rights is no longer inconceivable. Yet the fantasy that there is a two-state solution keeps everyone from taking action toward something that might work.

All sides have reasons to cling to this illusion. The Palestinian Authority needs its people to believe that progress is being made toward a two-state solution so it can continue to get the economic aid and diplomatic support that subsidize the lifestyles of its leaders, the jobs of tens of thousands of soldiers, spies, police officers and civil servants, and the authority’s prominence in a Palestinian society that views it as corrupt and incompetent.

Israeli governments cling to the two-state notion because it seems to reflect the sentiments of the Jewish Israeli majority and it shields the country from international opprobrium, even as it camouflages relentless efforts to expand Israel’s territory into the West Bank.

American politicians need the two-state slogan to show they are working toward a diplomatic solution, to keep the pro-Israel lobby from turning against them and to disguise their humiliating inability to allow any daylight between Washington and the Israeli government. ...

[\*Read the entire piece here.\*](#)