

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
January 3, 2013

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This week's Middle East Notes features Christmas messages from the Holy Land and an end of the year reflection on the fading possibility of a two state solution. Blessings, hope and lasting peace in the New Year.

- **December 24 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** This Bulletin explores the E-1 settlement construction's meaning to the viability of the two-state solution, U.S. response to this planned construction and other issues.
- **A child in a manger: Liberation through nonviolence, Sabeel's Christmas message:** Our prayers and thoughts focus on the plight of our brothers and sisters in Palestine-Israel, especially the Gaza Strip, as well as in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and throughout our region.
- **What Palestinians want for Christmas:** Nabil Sha'ath writes in Ha'aretz that justice for Palestinians is possible in 2013, if people throughout the world act in bringing long-awaited peace to the region.
- **This Christmas remember Palestine's Christians:** Mairead Corrigan-Maguire reports through the Ma'an News Agency that these are distressing times for the Christians of the Holy Land, as revealed by a South African ecumenical delegation who were "traumatized" during an Advent visit to Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and East Jerusalem this month. Upon their return, they jointly said that they "did not expect the extent to which Israel violates international law to oppress the Palestinian people."
- **Bethlehem then and now:** Rev. Mitri Raheb, a Lutheran Palestinian pastor, writes that at the time of Jesus, Bethlehem was a little town of 300-1,000 inhabitants. What people might not know is that the city of Bethlehem today is not in Israel but in Palestine, and that it is a bustling city with 28,000 people. One third of them are Palestinian Christians.
- **At Midnight Mass, top cleric congratulates Abbas on UN bid:** Jillian Jones writes in Ha'aretz that Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal gave sermon at Bethlehem's Church of the Nativity and praised the Palestinian President for being "at the forefront of those who worked and continue to work for nonviolence, peace and justice."
- **In Christmas address, pope decries slaughter in Syria:** In Christmas message, Pope calls for meaningful Israel-Palestinian negotiations and for an end to the slaughter in Syria.
- **Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation compilation of Christmas messages:** Christmas messages from Christian and civic leaders in Bethlehem and Jerusalem speak of peace, justice and hope.
- **2013: It's now or never for the two-state solution:** Former Palestinian minister Ziad Abu Zayyad says in Ha'aretz that if the international community doesn't stop Israel from killing the last chance for the two-state solution, this option will disappear forever to be replaced by a long painful bloody struggle which will end in a bi-national state, an option that Israel will never accept voluntarily.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin

December 24, 2012

Settlements receive international attention: After announcing new West Bank and East Jerusalem settlement construction plans on December 5, the Netanyahu government in Israel found itself in hot water with much of the international community. Several settlement announcements since then ... indicate the Israeli government intends to keep taking the heat.

On November 9, the vast majority of the countries in the UN General Assembly, including all but one of EU nations, expressed impatience with the Israeli government by abstaining or voting for the Palestinian delegation to receive “non-member observer state” status in the UN. The Israeli government’s retaliatory settlement announcement did little to show them a willingness to engage in a meaningful peace process. On Wednesday, focus shifted back to the UN stage as 14 out of 15 members of the Security Council spoke out against settlement expansion.

On December 5, the Israeli government announced plans for construction in E-1, an area between the settlement Ma’ale Adumim and Jerusalem that cuts off Bethlehem and Ramallah from East Jerusalem, the aspirational capital of a Palestinian state. It also bisects the quickest route between Ramallah and Bethlehem.

Over a period of four days this week, the Netanyahu government announced an “unprecedented” 6,600 new units. The most controversial area set for possible new construction is Givat Hamatos. Jerusalem’s local planning committee granted a final approval for building in the area south of Jerusalem which would make it the first new settlement in 14 years. If built, the plan would isolate East Jerusalem from the southern parts of the West Bank.

According to Daniel Seidemann, an Israeli anti-settlement expert, “Givat Hamatos may not have the notoriety of E-1...but its impact will be nearly as devastating. For example: the implementation of the Clinton Parameters and the Geneva Accords remains possible today; the implementation of both will no longer be possible after just the construction of even this first stage of Givat Hamatos, due to the fact that such construction will result in the Palestinian neighborhood of Beit Safafa being completely surrounded by settlements.”

After the Security Council’s monthly meeting on the Middle East on Wednesday, fourteen of the fifteen members spoke outside the chamber to denounce Israel for the flurry of settlement announcements in recent weeks. The council president said 14 countries made the statements because efforts to get the council to agree on a resolution or statement had failed. The statement from the EU countries said: “France, Germany, Portugal and the United Kingdom are extremely concerned by and strongly oppose the plans by Israel to expand settlement construction in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and in particular plans to develop the E1 area. The viability of the two-state solution that is key for Israel’s long-term security is threatened by the systematic expansion of settlements. Settlements are illegal under international law and detrimental to any international efforts to restart peace negotiations and secure a two-state solution... We call on the Israeli government to rescind these plans and recall that we will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders, including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties.”

Noticeably absent from the microphone was the United States. The council president representing Morocco said the 14 countries made the statements because efforts to get the council to agree on a resolution or statement had failed. According to the representative from India, the Security Council members could not come up with a statement that could satisfy the U.S. enough to withhold its veto. ...

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

2) A child in a manger: Liberation through nonviolence

Sabeel's Christmas message, December 25, 2012

An edited version of the Christmas 2012 message from Sabeel's executive director, Naim Ateek:

This is not the first time that Christmas comes and our area of the Middle East is entangled in severe political and military turmoil. Sabeel's Christmas letter, therefore, starts with our prayers and thoughts focused on the plight of our brothers and sisters in Palestine-Israel, especially the Gaza Strip, as well as in Syria, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and throughout our region.

Recently in Palestine-Israel, we have been trapped yet again in a war where the brunt of the violence is borne by the common people, especially the women and children. Indeed, since the creation of the state of Israel almost 65 years ago, peace has eluded us and our area has enjoyed only a modicum of stability and security. By and large, political leaders seem to believe that war is the great resolver of conflicts, yet our many wars have only exacerbated the conflict and brought us greater misery.

In reflecting on the Christmas story, what stands out to me this year are the words of the angel to the shepherds, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." The people of first century Palestine were looking for salvation and liberation from the oppressive yoke of the Roman Empire. They were looking for a military leader to overthrow their oppressors and lead them to victory. The angel, however, declared that their savior had come in the form of a helpless child. Today's Palestinians are looking for salvation and liberation from the oppressive yoke of Israel. Tragically, and too often, it is through the clamor of the instruments of war and violence that we seek our liberation. Yet true and lasting liberation can only come through the power of nonviolence.

Ironically, Israel prefers to keep entrenching its occupation, expanding its illegal settlements, and devouring Palestinian land, rather than pursue a genuine peace with the Palestinians on the basis of UN resolutions and international law. Those of us who live in the present hopeless morass know that the government of Israel is not ready for such a peace. In fact, for those who have eyes to see, the recent UN bid clarifies the situation well. The overwhelming number of countries that voted yes for Palestine as an observer non-member state could no longer tolerate the intransigence of the government of Israel (138 voted for; 41 abstained; 9 voted against). This is unprecedented in the history of the Palestinian struggle. This may be a sign of the advent of peace for all the people of our region - peace that is not based on the arrogance of military power but on the power of justice through nonviolence.

Sadly, Israel is intoxicated by its military prowess, causing it to live in a state of denial concerning the movement of history. It is important to read the signs of the times. Martin Luther King once said, "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice." The light of truth is beginning to shine, and it will dispel the darkness that has spread regarding Palestine. ...

At this crucial time, let us ... work together to end all violence and acts of war. Let us call for an empowered UN that can assume its historic responsibility, address the root causes of the conflict over Palestine, end the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land, and implement UN resolutions, thus guaranteeing the human and political rights of the Palestinians. Only then will all the peoples of the land enjoy a shared life of peace and security in Palestine and Israel. The world must remember that the Palestinians, at this juncture in their history, yearn to fulfill their most fundamental human needs of justice, dignity, and liberty. This is a pursuit so basic that the hope and struggle for it will never die.

The angel said, "This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger." Through nonviolence and solidarity among Palestinians, Israeli Jews, and friends around the world, and with the help of God, peace and security based on justice will be achieved.

3) What Palestinians want for Christmas

Nabil Sha'ath, Ha'aretz, December 24, 2012

... [Bethlehem and Jerusalem today] are still as intrinsically linked as they were two millennia ago. Palestinian families and friends live in close proximity across the area; the corridor running from Bethlehem through occupied East Jerusalem up to Ramallah is responsible for generating 35 percent of Palestine's national economic output, and includes the most important pilgrimage destinations in Palestine.

However, the two cities are being systematically severed from one another in a very unnatural, destructive and tragic way by the Israeli colonial enterprise; by a military force which, in 2002, was responsible for the siege and damage of Bethlehem's Old City and the Church of the Nativity, as well as rich historical sites in other Palestinian cities. Even more harmful than the damage done to the physical heritage of Palestinian Christian and Muslim history, is the ongoing daily effect of Israeli occupation on the lives of Palestinians in the area, and throughout occupied Palestine.

In 2002, Israel began building a wall, 83 percent of which is constructed on Palestinian land and all of which is considered fully illegal under international law. This wall divides Bethlehem and Jerusalem, the Church of the Nativity from the Holy Sepulcher, for the first time in history. It leaves us Palestinians with very little of our own land and practically no natural resources, and with no freedom to move within our own country.

Jesus' message was one of justice and peace. Despite this aggressive Israeli occupation, our message follows the light of hope brought by the Prince of Peace. We hope that this light of hope will soon become a light of freedom. This is our message. That is why we went to the United Nations, where an overwhelming world majority understood our message of peace. This is our way to break the current political deadlock and salvage the two-state solution which Israel is so intent on destroying. ...

But the overwhelming message of peace, sent from the UN, was met with more Israeli intransigence, and the approval of thousands of new settlement units aimed to divide Bethlehem from Jerusalem, particularly in the [settlement of Givat Hamatos](#), which will complete the physical separation of the Palestinian cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem around the area of the Mar Elias monastery, where the Christmas procession to Bethlehem starts every year. ...

Much of the land used for settlement construction in this area belongs to Palestinian Christians from the Bethlehem district who are unable to access their property due to the construction of the illegal Israeli wall and a variety of restrictive and humiliating checkpoints. This land includes many dunams of property belonging to Palestinian churches.

Israel also announced its intention to move forward with the construction of over 3,000 settlement units around the rest of Occupied Jerusalem, aiming to give a fatal blow to the internationally-endorsed two-state solution.

By the end of [2012] an estimated two million tourists will have visited Bethlehem. We hope that they will see more than just the Church of the Nativity and a souvenir shop or two. We hope that they will open their eyes, as good Christians, Muslims, Jews or those of any other faith - simply as good human beings, and not turn a blind eye to this grave injustice. ...

The Palestinians' wish this Christmas is that the international community will not only continue to stand by us, but seriously act to put an end to the Israeli occupation, which has been contradicting the universally held values of justice and peace for almost half a century. It is a time of year when our faith and hope are renewed; we believe justice is possible in 2013. What we now need is support from our brothers and sisters throughout the world, to act with us in bringing long-awaited peace to the region.

4) This Christmas, remember Palestine's Christians
Mairead Corrigan-Maguire, Ma'an News Agency, December 29, 2012

Recently, the Israeli Embassy in Ireland posted a “thought for Christmas” its Facebook page to the effect that if Jesus Christ and his mother Mary alive today, they would be “lynched in Bethlehem by hostile Palestinians.” ...

These are distressing times for the Christians of the Holy Land, as revealed by a South African ecumenical delegation who were “traumatized” during an Advent visit to Palestinian Christians in Bethlehem and East Jerusalem this month.

Upon their return, they jointly said that they “did not expect the extent to which Israel violates international law to oppress the Palestinian people.”

They reported that “it felt like walking into another apartheid ambush ... the multiple Israeli house demolitions, the discriminatory Israeli legal system, the daily intimidation of Palestinians by the Israeli Defense Forces, the Israeli Apartheid Wall and its associated regime of restrictions on movement and access for Palestinians, the imprisonment of a large percentage of Palestinians (including children), the ongoing confiscation of Palestinian water and land, the closure of previously bustling Palestinian streets and businesses.”

To simply take the case of Bethlehem – although Christians live in many other areas of Palestine and Israel – one sees that from an historic high of 80 percent in 1947, Christians now make up only around 20 percent of the population. The past decade alone has seen over 10 percent of Christians leaving their homeland.

While there have been attempts by some with anti-Islamic or pro-Israel agendas to place the blame for this on “Muslim extremism,” Palestinian Christians are the first to point out that is an untruth. A poll found that an overwhelming majority of Bethlehem’s Christians blamed the Israeli occupation and its effect on the local economy for this migration.

“If there was no political problem, the economic situation would be good, so the problems are linked,” says Hanna Eissa, the deputy minister of Christian religious affairs in the Palestinian Authority.

George Rishmawi of the Palestinian Center for Rapprochement has said that “Christians are part of the Palestinian social fabric ... and of Islamic culture. Palestinians do not differentiate between Muslims and Christians,” and that “Israel makes no distinction between Christians and Muslims about land grabs.”

Rishmawi cites Jabal Abu Ghneim as an example; most of this land, confiscated by Israel for the illegal settlement of Har Homa, is Christian land.

Indeed, these illegal Jewish-only settlements pose a grave threat to Palestinians, Christian and Muslim alike, in Bethlehem. Since the Israeli occupation of the West Bank began in 1967, some of the largest settlements blocs have been built between Bethlehem and occupied East Jerusalem.

Today there are 22 of these settlements established on Bethlehem’s land, while the illegal separation wall ... steals a further 980 acres and restricts freedom of movement and trade.

This western network of settlements isolates Bethlehem from Jerusalem, and if expanded to the east will stop any possible growth of Bethlehem towards the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea.

[Read the entire piece on Ma'an's website.](#)

5) Bethlehem then and now

Rev. Dr. Mitri Raheb, December 9, 2012

“O little town of Bethlehem” is one of the most famous Christmas hymns. Bethlehem has become almost a mythological place: Children imagine it with a few “huts,” a few camels and the holy family. At the time of Jesus, Bethlehem was a little town of 300-1,000 inhabitants. What people might not know is that the city of Bethlehem today is not in Israel but in Palestine, and that it is a bustling city with 28,000 people. One third of them are Palestinian Christians.

... [W]hat happened in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago was something real. Jesus was born as a refugee. His family was forced to leave Nazareth and go to Bethlehem. Later his family had to flee the brutality of King Herod and go into hiding in Egypt for two years. Today Bethlehem has almost 20,000 Palestinian refugees who lost in 1948, when the State of Israel was established, their land, homes and belongings and came to Bethlehem seeking refuge. They are still living in three refugee camps waiting for a just solution.

The Christmas story of the Bible has nothing to do with what we know today as Christmas. Take the story of the Magi or the kings from the East. That story is read in a nostalgic way and is being performed over and over again. But a closer look at the story will show that it talks about the Roman Empire and their occupation of Palestine. Empires do not control only the native people they rule; they also work to ensure that visitors coming in contact with the land and its native people are controlled. In 2010 a well-known evangelical preacher came to attend a theological conference in Bethlehem. Upon arrival at Ben Gurion Airport in Tel Aviv, Israeli officials told him that they would like to invite him for a cup of coffee in their offices and have a chat. For almost four hours he was questioned about his decision to attend a conference in Bethlehem, what he thought of the Palestinian Kairos Document, and how he knew some of these “radical” Palestinian theologians. This was supposed to be VIP treatment. Others who are part of solidarity movements with Palestine are often detained at the Israeli airport and sent back to their home countries.

When this highly reputed American evangelical preacher told us his story I told him, “Welcome to Palestine. As someone who knows his Bible well you should not have been surprised by such treatment. The same VIP treatment was also extended to the Magi from the east that came to see Jesus in Bethlehem. Herod too invited them ‘for a cup of coffee’ to ascertain why they wanted to travel to Bethlehem, and how they knew about the newborn child. So now you have experienced something biblical. Welcome to the Holy Land!”

I still recall how everyone in the group laughed. Then an American woman attending the conference asked me, “So what should we tell the Israelis at the airport when they question us about where we have been? What should we say?” I replied, “I wish I could tell you what the angel told the Magi, after visiting Jesus; basically showing them another route not controlled by the Empire. Unfortunately, all roads, airports and borders are controlled by Israel. By the way, an invitation to drink a cup of coffee by Israeli or Arab intelligence authorities is known in political jargon as interrogation.” We seldom read the story of the Magi as them being interrogated by the occupation that holds the power. But this is what it was.

Bethlehem at the birth of Jesus was a besieged city. Today Bethlehem is again a besieged city surrounded from three sides by a 25 foot high concrete wall. So what if Jesus were to be born today in Bethlehem? If Jesus were to be born this year, he would not be born in Bethlehem. Mary and Joseph would not be allowed to enter from the Israeli checkpoint, and so too the Magi. The shepherds would be stuck inside the walls, unable to leave their little town. Jesus might have been born at the checkpoint like so many Palestinian children while having the Magi and shepherds on both sides of the wall. ...

[Read the sermon in its entirety on Rev. Dr. Raheb's website.](#)

[**6\) At Midnight Mass, top cleric congratulates Abbas on UN bid**](#)

Jillian Jones, Ha'aretz, December 25, 2012

As throngs of Christian pilgrims converged on Bethlehem's Manger Square for a glimpse of the celebrated midnight Mass this Christmas Eve, the Holy Land's top Roman Catholic cleric was inside the Church of the Nativity congratulating Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on a job well done at the United Nations.

"You, Mr. President ... have been at the forefront of those who worked and continue to work for nonviolence, peace and justice," said Latin Patriarch Fouad Twal, in Arabic, during his sermon at the compound's Church of St. Catherine.

Abbas, who was seated up front for much of the service, appeared stoic as Twal, a Palestinian resident of Jordan, congratulated him on the UN vote last month to upgrade the Palestinians' status: "We appreciate your efforts and the courageous positions you have taken at the regional and international levels," Twal said to Abbas. "Your efforts have borne fruit in the recognition of Palestine as a nonmember observer state by the United Nations. This recognition should be a decisive step toward peace and security for all."

With Jordanian Foreign Minister Nasser Judeh and ambassadors from around the world also in attendance, Twal called on "politicians and men of goodwill to work with determination for peace and reconciliation that encompasses Palestine and Israel in the midst of all the sufferings in the Middle East."

"Christmas is an occasion for celebration, even at a time when many of you are suffering for one reason or another," he continued. "Thousands of young people are anxiously waiting in prison to regain their freedom. Families are separated and awaiting travel permissions in order to live together or gather together under the same roof."

"You continue to suffer the unending occupation. Gaza and the south of Israel have just emerged from a war with consequences that are still visible both physically and mentally. Our prayers include all Arab and Jewish families that have been touched by the conflict."

Twal went on to address the turmoil throughout region, inviting the congregation to "pray fervently for our brothers and sisters in Syria, who are dying mercilessly," "the people of Egypt who are fighting for national agreement, freedom and equality," and for "unity and reconciliation in Lebanon, in Iraq, in Sudan, in the other countries of the region and the rest of the world." ...

But even as Bethlehem celebrated this politically charged Christmas - the first since Palestine was recognized by the UN as a nonmember observer state last month, and the first since the Church of the Nativity was named a cultural heritage site by UNESCO in June - in one little corner of the church, in a small underground chapel, the world outside seemed to disappear.

A stone's throw away from the grand St. Catherine's Church, where diplomats and dignitaries hobnobbed beneath soaring white arches, a very different scene was taking place deep within the Grotto of the Nativity, where a 14-point silver star marks the spot where Jesus is said to have been born. There, nuns and pilgrims held a warm, intimate service of their own, hidden from the cavernous nave above. Awash in candlelight, the modest faithful intoned Christmas hymns in a multitude of languages. Melodious "Amens" drifted up from the shrine where Mary is said to have lain Jesus' crib. A gaggle of nuns lifted their heads from prayer to watch on, for a moment, with wrinkled smiles.

Here, there was no thought of Abbas, no mention of war or of conflict – just serenity, and the universal sweetness of a pilgrim singing "Silent Night" on Christmas Eve.

7) In Christmas address, pope decries slaughter in Syria

Associated Press, December 26, 2012

In his Christmas message to the world Tuesday, Pope Benedict XVI called for an end to the slaughter in Syria and for more meaningful negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians ...

Delivering the traditional speech from the central balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, Benedict also encouraged Arab spring nations, especially Egypt, to build just and respectful societies. ...

Less than 12 hours earlier, Benedict had led a two-hour long Christmas Eve ceremony in the basilica. He sounded hoarse and looked weary as he read his Christmas message and then holiday greetings in 65 languages.

In his "Urbi et Orbi" speech, which traditionally reviews world events and global challenges, Benedict prayed that "peace spring up for the people of Syria, deeply wounded and divided by a conflict that does not spare even the defenseless and reaps innocent victims."

He called for easier access to help refugees and for "dialogue in the pursuit of a political solution to the conflict." Benedict prayed that God "grant Israelis and Palestinians courage to end long years of conflict and division, and to embark resolutely on the path to negotiation."

Israel, backed by the United States, opposed the Palestinian statehood bid, saying it was a ploy to bypass negotiations, something the Palestinians deny. Talks stalled four years ago.

Senior Palestinian official Saeb Erekat said that in a meeting with the pope last week, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas "emphasized our total readiness to resume negotiations." The Palestinians have not dropped their demand that Israel first stop settlement activities before returning to the negotiating table. ...

8) Christmas messages from church leaders in Palestine

Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation, December 2012

- [Christmas message: HB Patriarch Fouad Twal](#)
- [Christmas message: H.E President Mahmoud Abbas](#)
- [Christmas message: Fr. Pierbattista Pizzaballa](#)
- [Christmas message: HE Bishop Dr. Munib A. Younan](#)
- [Christmas message: HE Bishop Suheil Dawani](#)
- [Christmas message of the Heads of Churches of Jerusalem](#)

[**9\) 2013: It's now or never for the two-state solution**](#)

Ziad Abu Zayyad, Ha'aretz, December 30, 2012

As 2012 ends, we should look back at how the events of the past year may have suggested routes for renegotiating the Palestinian: Israeli conflict.

Firstly, we should examine the role of Egypt. The ceasefire between Hamas and Israel was achieved through Egypt's mediation, and its willing[ness] to be the guarantor, which included an unwritten commitment to tighten control over its borders with the Gaza Strip, and preventing the smuggling of weapons through Sinai to Gaza.

This suggests the possibility that Egypt can have a major influence on Hamas, by controlling the flow of military supplies to Hamas' arsenal and by influencing its future tactics. The exercise of Egyptian influence in the Gaza Strip may well put an end to the possibility that Sinai will become the new Tora Bora of the Middle East, and this influence serves the interests of both Israel and Egypt as well as the wider stability of the region. Egypt's new leadership, dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, has an interest in advancing its integration into the international community, by behavior adhering to international norms that will gain it legitimacy, and by developing and normalizing its relations with the U.S. administration.

Today, the Egyptian leadership is facing a delicate internal situation as a result of continued protests against the new constitution. The door is open for many possible scenarios, starting from restoring stability to sinking into the mud of chaos. Assuming the internal crisis will be overcome, which is the most probable scenario, it might be followed by an intensive Egyptian effort to conclude the [Fatah-Hamas reconciliation](#) and a regional and international effort to move the Palestinian-Israeli negotiations forward towards a resolution of the conflict. Such a development is very likely to happen right after the Israeli elections in January 2013.

There are Israelis who believe that Egypt's role in the agreement between Hamas and Israel should be used to resolve the problem of Gaza - meaning that there should be an Egyptian takeover of the Strip, as was the situation before the 1967 war. Those who push for this option concomitantly aim to abort the chance of creating a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem by reviving the so-called Jordanian option.

On the other hand, the PLO leadership, headed by President Mahmoud Abbas, believes that the UN recognition of the State of Palestine on the borders of June 1967 - with East Jerusalem as its capital - will represent the international terms of reference for any future negotiations with Israel by defining beforehand the future borders of the State of Palestine. The UN General Assembly recognition of the State of Palestine and its borders blocks the road in front of Israeli plans to avoid withdrawal from the West Bank, to give back Gaza to Egypt, and to revive the Jordanian option. No doubt that Abbas' achievement in the UN contributed much to restoring his credibility, in the wake of Hamas' claims of victory in its fight against Israel, in what has become known in the Palestinian media as the "Eight Days War."

The year 2013, with a new/old administration in the White House, possibly a new/old government in Israel, reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah, and the increasing pressure of the international community to put an end to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, will be a decisive year.

Israeli plans to build thousands of new housing units on Palestinian occupied land including the new settlement in the area known as E-1 that isolates Jerusalem from the West Bank, are being seen worldwide as a warning red light. It is now or never. Either the international community will stop Israel from killing the last chance for the two-state solution, or this option will disappear forever, and be replaced by a long painful bloody struggle which will end in a bi-national state, an option that Israel will never accept voluntarily.