

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**March 14, 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 here](#)

This week's Middle East Notes examines the recent AIPAC conference in Washington, speculations and hopes about President Obama's upcoming visit to Israel and Palestine, the destruction of the continuing occupation and detention of minors, some historical background information about the Balfour Declaration, and other issues.

- The March 1 and March 8 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins give information on the possibility of a third intifada, Pope Benedict XVI and the Middle East, the recent AIPAC conference, Secretary of State Kerry's meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, the UNICEF report on Israeli treatment of Palestinian minors, and other issues.
- Warren Clark, executive director of CMEP, shares his reflections on the announcement that the President Obama will be visiting Israel and the West Bank in March.
- Gideon Levy in Ha'aretz writes that the same Israeli society so upset by the fate of a single prisoner, Gilad Shalit, does not even begin to grasp the depth of distress the Palestinians feel over the thousands of their people who are in Israeli prisons.
- **Balfour and Palestine, a legacy of deceit** details the negotiations between Balfour as a representative of the Lloyd George government and senior Jewish representatives prior to the Balfour Declaration in November 1917.
- Rachel Liel in Ha'aretz writes that the last four years created an unprecedented and dangerous alienation between the Israeli leadership and liberal American Jewry.
- In January, Pax Christi International released a statement supporting new initiatives by civil society towards the end of Israel's settlements policy and the active ban of Israeli settlement products.
- Noam Sheizaf in +972 labels Dennis Ross as Prime Minister Netanyahu's attorney and the informal Israeli ambassador in Washington, D.C.
- **During AIPAC conference, activists launch ad campaign to end \$30 billion aid package to Israel:** Activists and artists with several Palestine solidarity and human rights organizations launched advertising campaigns during the recent AIPAC conference.
- Arthur Hagopian of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF) states that the Armenian Church and other church leaders support the two-state solution in Palestine.
- Yitzhak Benhorin writes that after meeting with Jewish leaders, President Obama spoke with 10 Arab American leaders who expressed hope that he will show his commitment to Palestinians during his visit to Israel Palestine. Some Arab leaders however left the meeting disappointed over Obama's failure to present peace plan.

## 1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 1, 2013

**Intifada deciphered:** The fearful buzzwords in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict related media this week is “third intifada” in response to mass protests that are sweeping the West Bank. The phrase pops up periodically during periods of unrest but thus far, a widespread uprising worthy of the title has not materialized. The question remains: will a third intifada occur?

**Rundown of recent unrest:** Fueling the recent protests in the West Bank are the hunger-striking prisoners in Israeli administrative detention and the death of a Palestinian in Israeli custody. Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails used hunger strikes in April 2012 to protest Israel’s use of administrative detention (imprisonment without trial) and prison conditions. After 2,000 prisoners joined the movement, Israel conceded to improving conditions and not renewing administrative detention orders on some of the prisoners. Protests in recent weeks have centered around four prisoners. According to the BBC, “Two of the prisoners - Samer Issawi and Ayman Sharawna - were released under a prisoner exchange deal, which freed Israel captive Gilad Shalit from Gaza in 2011, but later rearrested - Issawi for breaching his release conditions and Sharawna for undisclosed reasons. AFP news agency says Sharawna is an alleged Hamas activist involved in attacks on Israelis.

“The other prisoners - Tareq Qaadan and Jafar Ezzedine - are being held under ‘administrative detention,’ a controversial practice whereby suspects can be imprisoned without charge or trial for renewable periods of up to six months at a time.”

The unrest was exacerbated by the death of a Palestinian man in Israeli custody ... Israeli officials initially said the 30 year old died of a heart attack but that the Palestinian minister of prisoner affairs claims that, “The signs that appeared during the autopsy show clearly that he was subjected to severe torture that led immediately to his death.” An Israeli spokesman later said the broken bones could have been caused by efforts to revive him.

Thousands of Palestinians attended Jaradat’s funeral in Hebron ... and protests flared up in several cities, including Bethlehem where Israeli forces responded to protests by shooting two teenage boys, ages 13 and 16, critically.

While protests raged in the West Bank, in Gaza a subgroup of Al Aqsa Martyrs Brigade, the military wing of the Palestinians’ Fatah faction, said it fired a rocket in response to what it called the “assassination” of Jaradat. The rocket landed on a road outside Ashkelon, causing no injuries but it was the first since November’s cease-fire. According to *The New York Times* reports that before [the] rocket, “Israel has violated the cease-fire several times by firing on fishermen and farmers approaching newly relaxed security perimeters, but the agreement has otherwise held.” ...

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

## 2) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 8, 2013

**AIPAC in DC, Kerry and Abbas meet in Riyadh:** Every year, the American-Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) attracts supporters from around the United States to come to Washington for speeches, panels and a day of lobbying. For those of us not part of the annual conference, the high level speakers and the buzz surrounding the large event provide plenty of fodder for pundits to speculate on the state of U.S.-Israeli relations and the future of the peace process. This year much of the focus was on President Obama's upcoming trip to Israel and the West Bank in the coming weeks.

*The New York Times* described this year's AIPAC environment by reporting, "The thundering ovations, slickly produced videos and legions of lawmakers were the same as ever. But something was missing as the American Israel Public Affairs Committee convened here this week for its annual conference: tension."

While in previous years there has been tension between the U.S. administration and the Netanyahu government over the peace process and Iran, this year Vice President Joe Biden was dispatched to charm the crowd and emphasize the close relations between the administration and Israel ahead of the president's visit. He told the crowd of 13,000 that "No president has done as much to physically secure the state of Israel as President Barack Obama."

Vice President Biden only briefly mentioned the Palestinians in his 35 minute speech, in stark contrast from his 2009 AIPAC speech where he told conference goers: "You're not going to like this," before declaring that the Obama administration wanted Israel to stop building settlements.

In the weeks leading up to Obama's March 20 visit to Israel and the West Bank, the administration has downplayed expectations of a grand peace proposal. Instead the goal will be to improve relations with Israelis. In preparation for the visit, he met privately with American Jewish leaders for over an hour at the White House on Thursday. Most of the participants spoke anonymously to reporters after the event. One commented that the president "acknowledged that near-term prospects for peace are bleak" but "a deal with the Palestinians remains the only way for Israel to achieve long-term security."

While expectations for Obama's visit vary, some argue that his role should be to promote peace, not propose it. Douglas Bloomfield writes that his "most urgent task is to speak directly to the Israeli people, whose confidence and backing he will sorely need if he is to eventually prod their government to the peace table...The United States has been most successful when it was not the proposer but the closer." ...

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

### **3) Once more into the breach?**

**Warren Clark, CMEP Executive Director**

**February 27, 2013**

The announcement that the president will be visiting Israel and the West Bank in March keeps hope alive that some real effort can be made to help overcome the political inertia that is perpetuating the insecurity and suffering created by intractable conflict in the Holy Land.

It is encouraging that President Obama now seems willing at the beginning of his second administration to take up the struggle once more – as requested in a letter facilitated by CMEP to the president in January from 36 national church leaders and over 2,400 supporters. However, the president has learned there are real limitations on the U.S. ability to influence developments decisively.

Both sides seem dysfunctional and incapable of taking meaningful steps on their own to move towards stabilizing, reducing or resolving the conflict. Israel just conducted an election run mostly on domestic issues in which the conflict was hardly mentioned. Israeli public opinion seems to live in a dream world where the occupation is out of sight, out of mind, and can be expected to go on indefinitely without major consequences. In Gaza, Israel and Hamas seem locked in an endless cycle of blockade, restrictions, and horrendous violence, including sometimes lethal rocket attacks aimed at non-combatants justified as political speech. Palestinian political factions in the West Bank and Gaza remain divided on the fundamental issue of whether the Palestinian Authority's approach of security cooperation with Israel and the U.S. and occasional confrontational diplomacy will be more effective in achieving self-determination than the willingness of Hamas to use violence.

Many observers say they believe Prime Minister Netanyahu will not agree to creation of a Palestinian state anywhere between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River. He sought to undercut the Oslo peace accords in the 1990s. He declined to renew offers made to Palestinians by his predecessor government in 2008. His agreement in 2009 under U. S. pressure to the idea of a Palestinian state – the two state solution – has been contradicted by plans for accelerated and expanded Israeli settlement construction in the West Bank. In the fall of September 2010 he declined to extend a limited suspension of construction of new Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem and the West Bank as urged by the president. In May 2011 he rejected proposals by the president for negotiations for Palestinian self-determination based on the 1967 lines with mutually agreed land swaps.

It seems the Prime Minister cannot accept the parameters suggested by President Clinton in 2000 and the Palestinians cannot accept anything less.

Yet political circumstances today are not what they were even a few years ago. ...

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

#### **4) The pain of almost a million arrests** **Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, February 28, 2013**

Eight hundred thousand. That is the number of Palestinian residents arrested and imprisoned in Israeli jails since the beginning of the occupation, according to *The New York Times*. Almost a million people.

That estimate could be a bit high; some say it's "only" 600,000. After all, there is no exact number. But the general picture is clear and chilling: When people say that Israel imprisons the Palestinian people, this is what they mean: the physical, concrete, overcrowded and torturous imprisonment of people in jail. It's not just the checkpoints, the separation fence and the psychological barriers, but the real ones as well.

Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians who live under the occupation have endured that experience, if only once in their lives. Among the approximately four million residents of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip today, hundreds of thousands of people bear physical and emotional scars and carry with them the memory of their imprisonment.

So do millions of others – the members of their families. About 4,500 Palestinians are in prison today. Almost every home in the territories has one family member who was arrested. Every family has a prisoner, or one who was released.

The jail term could be decades – there are still 123 prisoners from before the 1993 signing of the Oslo Accords – or it could be a matter of only a few days. It usually starts with a brutal home invasion, almost always in the dead of night, in the presence of the wife, parents and children, shocked out of their sleep and anxious about the fate of their humiliated loved one.

It continues with the tough, jolting interrogation by the Shin Bet. Afterward come the days, months and years in difficult conditions with no telephone conversations, sometimes with no visitors for years on end. It is always a humiliating experience for the prisoners and their families.

There were years when appalling torture methods were also part of the menu of atrocities that Israel served the Palestinian people. Two hundred and three people died in prison, most of them under torture. Most of it stopped with the High Court of Justice's ruling in 1999, which curbed the use of torture by security services, declaring many of its practices illegal.

But even today the methods of arrest, interrogation and imprisonment are unbearable. While some of the Palestinian prisoners were arrested for murderous acts of terror, most of them are in jail for political activity. Many of them were imprisoned without trial, sometimes for years.

The military justice system that decided the fate of hundreds of thousands of people does not deserve to have the word "justice" associated with it. Every brief visit to a military court and every protocol proves it as much as a thousand witnesses could. Short hearings, sometimes without appropriate translation; evidence that is no evidence at all; incriminating testimony from collaborators and informants of dubious character; judges not all of whom are jurists; cruel interrogations that lead to false confessions; immunity that prevents defendants from receiving an adequate defense, and draconian punishments. ...

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

## 5) [Balfour and Palestine, a legacy of deceit](#)

*This article, written by Sir Anthony Nutting, originally was published by the Council for Arab-British Understanding (CAABU) in 1975; it details the negotiations between the Lloyd George government and senior Jewish representatives prior to the Balfour Declaration in November 1917. It states among other things that the UK government clearly understood the intention of these senior Jewish representatives that the Jewish homeland would comprise the whole of Palestine ...*

One of the most shattering and shaming indictments of British Foreign policy ever framed has recently come to light in a collection of state documents compiled by Doreen Ingrams and entitled "Palestine Papers 1917-1922, Seeds of Conflict" (John Murray, 1972). As the Foreword very properly reminds us, "the (Palestine) conflict began not in 1948 but in 1917" with the publication of the Balfour Declaration, and to understand the intensity of the hatred which exists today between the Arabs and Israel, it is necessary to go back to that crucially important watershed in the history of the Middle East. But Mrs Ingrams does a lot more than merely recall how the eviction of the Arabs of Palestine to make way for the creation of the Israeli state began more than half a century ago. Letting the record speak for itself, she also lays bare the cynicism with which British Ministers at that time committed themselves to the creation of a Jewish state in Palestine, with a total and deliberate disregard for the rights and interests of the Arabs who then numbered 92 percent of the country's population.

Until now even those best informed on the history of Palestine since the First World War have been inclined to give Balfour and his colleagues the benefit of the doubt about their ultimate intentions. They have accepted that to the British Government of the day the Balfour Declaration meant no more and no less than it said, when it proclaimed that Britain would help to establish a "national home" for the Jewish people in Palestine without prejudice to the rights of the existing Moslem and Christian Arab population. Consequently there has arisen a widespread idea that Ministers both then and in later years must have been duped by the wily Zionist Movement ... And the fact that, after twenty years of British rule in Palestine, the "national home" became the Jewish state of the Zionists' dream, and in so doing dispossessed all but a handful of Arab inhabitants of their homes has been attributed to weakness rather than duplicity on the part of Balfour and his successors.

No longer can anyone be under such an illusion. For the Government of the day stand condemned out of their own mouths and writings of conniving at and furthering every Zionist design from the issue of the Balfour Declaration onwards. In document after document of the State Papers ... brought to light the sordid proof is revealed that Balfour and his colleagues knew exactly what the Zionists were up to and that, with the honourable exceptions of Lord Curzon and Edwin Montagu, they had every intention of helping them to fulfil their aims. Worse than this, the Government deliberately set out to deceive the Arab majority in Palestine as to their real intentions with promises and guarantees that they had "nothing to be frightened about" and that Britain would "never consent" to a Jewish Government being set up to rule their land. ...

**[Read the entire extensive piece at the website of the Balfour Project](#)**, which has been created by a group of British individuals to mark the approaching 2017 anniversary of the Balfour Declaration. "We believe British people need to learn what our nation did a hundred years ago, and understand how those actions are perceived today by all concerned; and to acknowledge, with honesty and humility, where reprehensible attitudes and unethical behaviour in our nation contributed to the ensuing impasse. The historical record clearly identifies elements of racism and anti-Semitism, deceit and cynical hypocrisy, arrogance and exploitation."

## **6) Restore American Jews' faith in Israel**

**Rachel Liel, Ha'aretz, March 5, 2012**

The coalition negotiations are at their height, but one thing already seems certain: Following Yair Lapid's campaign promise, the new government is expected to be more effective and smaller. Ministerial portfolios like "Society and Heritage" and "Regional Cooperation" will disappear – and with them also the Ministry for Public Diplomacy and Diaspora Affairs, which was invented especially for Yuli Edelstein, a Likud-Yisrael Beiteinu MK. The disbanding of superfluous ministries is of course welcome, but we must not throw out the baby with the bath water. Surprising as this may sound, it is precisely the issue of relations with the Diaspora that should become central in Benjamin Netanyahu's third government.

In particular, relations between the government of Israel and American Jewry took some tough blows over the past four years. Outwardly, the American Jewish community continues to support Israel, but off-the-record, its leaders, activists, donors, and community members have expressed bitter criticism at both the absence of a political initiative and the increasing ultra-nationalism in Israeli society. The gloomy wave of anti-democratic legislation, attempts to harm the Supreme Court and human rights organizations, discrimination against women, and expressions of racism against Palestinians, Israeli Arabs, homosexuals, social activists, refugees and asylum seekers, have altogether created an unprecedented and dangerous alienation between the Israeli leadership and historically-moderate American Jewry.

It appears that the outgoing Israeli government has forgotten that the vast majority of American Jews hold progressive opinions. Between 70 and 78 percent of American Jews voted for Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, and most of them did so because they deeply identify with the liberal values Obama represents of social justice, civil rights, and diplomacy as a way to solve international crises. The sweeping support that Obama received among U.S. Jewry during the recent U.S. elections proves that the Jewish community did not go astray and follow attempts to depict the president as an opponent of Israel and his opposition to unnecessary military adventures as "an abandonment of Israel's security." The opposite is true: This was an overwhelming vote of confidence in Obama's moderate line, even with regard to Israel and the Middle East.

In other words, the line taken by the government of Israel against millions of liberal American Jews was fundamentally mistaken. Rather than cultivating the strategic relations between the Jewish communities on both sides of the ocean on the basis of common values, the government has preferred to let the supporters of Kahane's ideology in the Knesset take over and lead Israel in an extremist, nationalistic, and racist direction. Thus, relations between Israel and the U.S. have deteriorated on every level: not only between Netanyahu and Obama, but also with many leaders of the American Jewish community, who have been appalled by the aggressive winds blowing from Jerusalem.

So what has changed now? The elections of 2013 proved that the Israeli public champions a relatively moderate civil agenda. On the eve of President Obama's planned visit to the region, all signs indicate that the political arena is about to shift and that U.S.-Israel relations are also likely to reach a turning point. This is also, therefore, a golden opportunity to turn over a new leaf with American Jewry. ...

**[Read the entire piece at Ha'aretz's website.](#)**



## 7) [Pax Christi International calls for an end of Israeli settlements](#)

*Settlements have been a serious blow to the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians in recent years. In January, Pax Christi International, the Catholic peace movement, released the following statement.*

Given an uncertain post-election political landscape in Israel, Pax Christi International calls attention to an issue which was largely neglected in the Israeli election campaign and is not nor looks to be a priority in the negotiations about the formation of a new Israeli government: the illegitimacy of the Israeli occupation and the continuation of the settlement policy.

1. In a recent statement, Pax Christi International urged the international community to avoid supporting in any way ... the settlement business. "In the Foreign Affairs Council of May 2012, the EU member states supported the correct labelling of Israeli settlement goods. As done by the UK and Denmark, each member state, should, as a minimum measure, come forth with concrete procedures to ensure correct labelling of all settlement products." Pax Christi International asks the EU Foreign Affairs Council to urge its members to implement this principle of correct labeling.

2. Pax Christi International considers the above-mentioned appeal all the more relevant and urgent in view of the Israeli announcement in December of the expansion of Jerusalem in northeastern (area E1) and southern (Bethlehem area) directions, making continuity between the northern and southern part of the West Bank increasingly problematic, and underlining Israel's undeclared policy of making a two-state solution out of touch with reality on the ground.

3. Therefore, urgent action is needed by the international community to stop this process. In a new report the Palestinian Human Rights organization Al Haq pointed out that "although the EU repeatedly states that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law, it continues to allow settlement products to enter its markets. The EU is Israel's largest trading partner, receiving about 20 percent of total Israeli exports."

4. According to Al Haq, settlements in the Jordan Valley – the large swath of fertile agricultural land in the West Bank that is dominated by Israeli agribusiness – contribute 40 percent of herbs, 50 percent of grapes and 40 percent of dates exported by Israel. "The flourishing agricultural environment in the West Bank, particularly in the Jordan Valley area, coupled with the exploitation of water and other natural resources found in the occupied territory, has ... turned Israeli settlements into profitable corporations," says the report.

5. Pax Christi International supports Al Haq's statement regarding EU's position: "As things stand, the EU is doing little more than ticking a box by acknowledging that settlements are illegal. Until they support this rhetoric with action and ensure that no assistance or recognition is provided to settlements, even indirectly, any such criticism will continue to be meaningless."

6. While criticism by itself is a political and diplomatic fact and important, it is also clear that given the grave situation on the ground, additional urgent actions are required with regard to the settlement process.

[Pax Christi International](#) will therefore support new initiatives by international civil society towards the end of Israel's settlements policy and the active ban of Israeli settlement products.



## **8) Dennis Ross: Netanyahu's attorney in Washington**

**Noam Sheizaf, +972, March 4, 2013**

Veteran U.S. diplomat Dennis Ross had a full page op-ed in *The New York Times* this weekend, in which he presents a 14-step program that is supposed to establish a framework for renewing the diplomatic process. The piece includes a lot of talk about peace, but the action items are lifted from Netanyahu's policy book, demonstrating again why the Palestinians were right when they refused to meet Ross – the man is the informal Israeli ambassador to Washington. Only that in the past, his positions were closer to those of the Israeli center (Kadima/Labor); today he is teaming up with the Right.

Ross juxtaposes a list of "demands" from each side – which are in fact directed only at the Palestinians. They are to publicly recognize Israel's connection to Jerusalem – despite the fact that it is the Israeli government which refuses to acknowledge Palestinians claims to the city, not vice versa. They need to include Israel in their maps – Ross knows all too well that since 2009 it has been the Israeli side that refused to open maps in the talks. And so on.

From Israel, Ross demands it stop construction of settlements beyond the separation barrier, but he accepts and even explicitly supports building projects west of it, in an area consisting of 8 percent of the West Bank. This is perhaps the most astonishing point in the article, because it: (a) encourages Israeli construction in the occupied West Bank – something the entire international community, including all American administrations, refused to do so far; (b) it accepts Israel's interpretation of the notion of "settlement blocs," including the Ariel and Kadumim "fingers," which cut through the northern West Bank, and; (c) it sees the security barrier Israel unilaterally constructed on Palestinian land (and not on the internationally recognized 1949 armistice lines) as the future borders of the Palestinian State.

Thus, Ross is echoing Binaymin Netanyahu's refusal to see the 1967 border as the starting point for any negotiations. It is worth noting that annexing 8 percent of the West Bank to Israel means dropping the idea of equal land swaps, because Israel won't be able to come up with more than 3-4 percent of land west of the Green Line with which to compensate the Palestinians for the annexed settlement blocs.

In short, Ross' plan puts the entire burden on the Palestinians, and accepts the Israeli leadership's preconditions, including an unprecedented recognition of most of the settlements before negotiations even began.

The idea that the Israeli leadership should get whatever it wants (in order to accommodate Israelis' various anxieties, justified or not) – and that as a result, it would understand that the occupation needs to come to an end – is so bizarre and so disconnected from the realities of political behavior that it's difficult to believe it has been the corner stone of American diplomacy for the last couple of decades. Left alone, Israeli leaders choose the easy way of accepting the status quo.

Ross' has left the administration but his ideas are still popular in Washington. This is not because they have any chance of working – by now, it's clear that he is one of the least successful diplomats ever to work for an American administration – but because they create the comfortable illusion that it's possible to achieve "peace" without confronting the Israeli government and its powerful allies in D.C., something nobody really wants to do. Instead, he suggests redrafting American policy according to the new desires of the Israeli politicians, while applying the real pressure on the Palestinian side (acting as "Israel's attorney," as Aaron David Miller, another American negotiator, has called this approach). If adopted again by the administration, this short-sighted and dangerous policy is only likely to bring more suffering on Palestinians (and consequently on Israelis), and further diminish whatever American credibility is left in the region.

## **9) During AIPAC conference, activists launch ad campaign to end \$30 billion aid package to Israel**

**The Electronic Intifada, March 4, 2013**

Over [March 2-3], the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the largest Israel lobby group in the U.S., began its annual policy conference in Washington, D.C. AIPAC is a longtime target of Palestine solidarity activists, who have protested and disrupted various fundraising and policy conferences.

Activists and artists with several Palestine solidarity and human rights organizations launched advertising campaigns this weekend to coincide with the AIPAC conference, placing placards at metro stations which call for an end to the U.S.' multi-billion dollar aid package to Israel.

A series of placards have been produced by a joint project of the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation and the graphic design activism initiative Visualizing Palestine.

In a joint press release, the U.S. Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation and Visualizing Palestine stated:

A three-day mobile truck ad highlighting the devastating impact U.S. weapons have on Palestinians will follow AIPAC attendees during their conference and as they lobby Members of Congress for more weapons for Israel.

In addition, ads at three Washington, D.C. Metro train platforms — Pentagon, Mt. Vernon Square/Convention Center, and Foggy Bottom — highlight the budgetary trade-offs of providing weapons to Israel at the expense of failing to fund local community needs.

In the press release, the U.S. Campaign's National Advocacy Director, Josh Ruebner, stated: "At a time when the sequester is cutting billions of dollars from programs to help those in need, it is grotesque that AIPAC is lobbying Congress this week for ever-increasing amounts of military aid to Israel, especially as these U.S. weapons are used by Israel — in violation of U.S. laws — to violate Palestinian human rights." And Ahmad Barclay, Lead Information Architect with Visualizing Palestine, added: "We see visual media as an essential tool in communicating marginalized social justice issues to a mainstream audience. We hope that this ad campaign will spur U.S. taxpayers to question more actively where their money is being spent at such a critical time."

In addition, activists with Jewish Voice for Peace have also launched an activism campaign with advertisements in the DC metro area.

JVP stated in a press release that 100 billboards are carrying the ads which highlight "the gap between AIPAC's peace-killing policy positions and most Jewish Americans." ...

**[Read more, and see the ads, at the Electronic Intifada's website.](#)**

## **10) Armenian Church supports two-state solution in Palestine**

**Arthur Hagopian, Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation (HCEF), March 4, 2013**

Leading figures among the Armenian and Greek Orthodox ecumenical movement in the U.S. have joined a pride of other leaders of Christian, Moslem and Jewish religious and lay organizations and institutions, pledging to mobilize support for peace in the Middle East.

Armenian Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, the Director of Ecumenical Affairs for Armenian Orthodox Church in America [and] Father Mark Arey, the Director of the Office of Ecumenical Affairs for the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America, believe time is running out for both Israelis and Palestinians.

The loose umbrella of the U.S. National Interreligious Leadership Initiative (NILI) for Peace in the Middle East , which includes Theodore Cardinal McCarrick, Archbishop Emeritus of Washington, Imam Mohammed Magid, President, Islamic Society of North America, and Rabbi Peter Knobel, Past President, Central Conference of American Rabbis, warns that the possibility of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was waning, and urged "immediate, sustained U.S. leadership before darkness falls on the hopes for a peaceful resolution." ...

Aykazian was in Jerusalem last week to participate in the elections for a new Armenian patriarch and had been one of the contenders for the position, and had he won, his voice would have carried further: the Armenian Patriarchate of Jerusalem is one of the three Guardians of the Christian sanctuaries in the Holy Land. The other two are the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate and the Catholic (Franciscan) Custodia.

The group believes the most viable solution to the Arab-Israeli conflict is a two-state agreement that provides for a secure and recognized Israel living in peace alongside a viable and independent Palestinian state.

"With the support of the international community, Israelis and Palestinians can achieve a lasting peace. A new dawn is possible," they said in a statement they released.

Mourning the lives lost and shattered during the recent violence that gripped the region, the group warned that what had been seen, over the past years, "will keep happening if movement towards a viable two state-solution continues to stagnate."

As things stand now, "the status quo is unsustainable and dangerous to both Israelis and Palestinians," they conceded, but stressed now is not the time for "another cycle of recriminations. It is time to break the cycle of violence with bold initiatives for peace."

"The current dangerous stalemate, including the legacy of past failed peacemaking efforts, undermines our security and that of others, destabilizes the region, fuels terrorism and extremism, allows continuing Israeli settlement expansion, and prolongs Palestinian disunity. These realities and the absence of negotiations threaten to kill the prospect of a viable two-state peace agreement, the only realistic solution to the conflict," they said. ...

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

**11) Obama meets Arab American leaders ahead of Israel trip**  
**Yitzhak Benhorin, Reuters and Ynews, March 12, 2013**

President Barack Obama [on March 11] met Arab American leaders who urged him to deliver a message of hope to the Palestinian people on his Middle East trip this month, even though he has made clear he will not use the visit to launch a new Israeli-Palestinian peace initiative.

Obama hosted about 10 leaders at the White House just four days after holding talks with representatives of major Jewish organizations in preparation for his travels to Israel, the West Bank and neighboring Jordan.

Obama met the group on Monday to seek input for his meetings in the region. He is expected to hold separate talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and Jordan's King Abdullah.

"He underscored that the trip is an opportunity for him to demonstrate the United States' commitment to the Palestinian people - in the West Bank and Gaza - and to partnering with the Palestinian Authority as it continues building institutions that will be necessary to bring about a truly independent Palestinian state," a White House official said. Obama also told them he would "reiterate America's commitment to Israel's security," the official said.

Many Palestinians have been disappointed by Obama's failure to do more to advance a peace deal, despite having declared Middle East diplomacy a high priority when he took office. The Obama administration has opposed recent Palestinian statehood bids at the United Nations while at the same criticizing Israeli settlement expansion.

Obama told Jewish leaders on Thursday he would not be carrying a new peace plan when he arrives in the region, though he did not rule out a diplomatic push at a later date. The West's nuclear standoff with Iran and the civil war in Syria are expected to top his agenda.

"We are pleased to have shared with President Obama our recommendations and vital messages that he should convey to the Palestinian people," Arab American groups said in a joint statement. "The United States, through sustained, balanced, constructive engagement, can facilitate a peaceful, lasting resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - a resolution that is essential to long-term security in the Middle East."

The statement was from the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee, American Task Force for Palestine, American Federation of Ramallah Palestine and Arab American Institute.

The White House did not issue a statement at the end of the meeting. Nevertheless, several Arab American leaders who attended the meeting issued a statement thanking the president for seeing them.

James Zogby, the Arab American Institute president, noted that Obama would not have the opportunity to address Palestinians, but counseled means of sending a direct message to the Palestinians.

[Read the entire article here.](#)