

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
March 20, 2014



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This week's Middle East Notes gives attention to Prime Minister Netanyahu's visit to Washington, D.C., President Obama's interview with Jeffery Goldberg, the AIPAC Conference, the debate about the effectiveness of BDS, the possible failure of the Kerry Peace Plan, the proposed visit of Pope Francis to the Holy Land, links to talks given at the National Summit to Reassess the U.S.-Israel "Special Relationship," recently held in Washington, D.C., and other issues.

- The March 6 and March 14 CMEP Bulletins highlight Netanyahu's visit to Washington, D.C., Obama's interview with Jeffery Goldberg, the AIPAC Conference, continued settlement expansion, Secretary Kerry calling the demand for a Jewish state a mistake, Gaza/Israel tensions, and other issues.
- James M. Wall writes that when President Obama consented to an interview with Jeffrey Goldberg, the president sent an ultimatum to Benjamin Netanyahu: "Time is running out."
- Larry Derfner writes in +972 writes that President Obama's high-profile interview with Jeffrey Goldberg will make it extremely hard for the administration to blame the Palestinians for the expected failure of Kerry's peace initiative.
- Peter Beinart in Ha'aretz notes that the Israeli government cannot claim the high ground against its despotic enemies until it struggles with its own moral corruption in the West Bank.
- MJ Rosenberg writes in the Tikkun Daily that it's the occupation, not BDS, that threatens to end Israel's existence as a democratic Jewish state.
- A Ha'aretz editorial publicizes that Israelis already live in a Jewish state, which is the realization of the Zionist vision and need no Palestinian recognition.
- A powerful debate between APN's Lara Friedman and Rabbi Daniel Gordis took place in the New York Times on whether or not a settlement boycott is best for Israel.
- Rebecca Vilkomerson writes in Tikkun that the inherent contradictions between U.S. liberalism and support for Israeli policies are on a sudden, public, collision course over the issues of human rights and the BDS movement.
- Donna Nevel in the Tikkun Daily observes that many Jewish organizations in the U.S. claim to be staunch supporters of civil and human rights as well as academic freedom. But that when it comes to Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, they make an exception.
- The State of Two States for the weeks of March 2 and March 9 provides noteworthy quotes from U.S., Israeli and Palestinian sources.
- Palestine's Permanent Observer to the UN sent identical letters to the UN Secretary General, President of the UN Security Council and President of the UN General Assembly, in which he briefed them on the ongoing turmoil and the worsening conditions in the occupied Palestinian Territories.
- Naim Ateek in Mondoweiss reports that the Israeli Knesset enactment of a new law recognizing Muslim and Christian Arab communities as separate identities is, to say the least, a deceitful political stunt aimed at sowing seeds of division among Christians and between Christians and Muslims.
- James M. Wall reflects on the pope's planned visit to the Holy Land. In October 1973, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, made his first visit to Jerusalem.
- Michael Lerner believes the Kerry plan will fail because it will be "realistic" rather than visionary, and de facto that means speaking more to the power of Israel and its domestic lobby (not only AIPAC, but the tens of millions of Christian Zionists) than to the aspirations of the Palestinian people.
- The National Summit to Reassess the U.S.-Israel "Special Relationship," held on March 7 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., was a stunning achievement.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin, March 6, 2014

Netanyahu comes to Washington: This week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to Washington to meet with President Barack Obama at the White House and address the annual American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) policy conference. Both were opportunities for us to gauge where the Israeli leader thinks the negotiations restarted by Secretary of State John Kerry last July are headed and specifically whether he will agree to a framework deal to extend them. During his trip, Netanyahu impressed some by strongly expressing his commitment to a peace agreement but his insistence that Israel be recognized as a Jewish state continues to be a roadblock.

Reports from last week indicated that President Obama was entering the fray to personally pressure Netanyahu agree to a framework that would outline general terms for issues like security, borders and refugees. When negotiations restarted over the summer, the original deadline for a deal was the end of April. A framework agreement would keep the parties at the table to hammer out the final status issues on an extended time frame, possibly until the end of 2014.

President Obama did not wait until Bibi landed in Washington to put on the pressure. In a must-read interview with Bloomberg's Jeffery Goldberg, President Obama explained the urgency for a two-state solution: "with each successive year, the window is closing for a peace deal." He continued, "I have not yet heard, however, a persuasive vision of how Israel survives as a democracy and a Jewish state at peace with its neighbors in the absence of a peace deal with the Palestinians and a two-state solution. Nobody has presented me a credible scenario." He also was frank about his concerns over Israel's international isolation should a peace agreement not be reached.

Despite some saying the timing and content of the interview was a "slap in the face" to Netanyahu, during his meeting in the White House the next morning the pair "showed no outright tension as they sat side-by-side." The President praised Netanyahu for, "for the seriousness with which he's taken these discussions" and said "It's my belief that ultimately it is still possible to create two states, a Jewish state of Israel and a state of Palestine in which people are living side by side in peace and security. But it's difficult and it requires compromise on all sides."

Reuters characterized Netanyahu's remarks to the president in front of the media as a "history lesson" of the past twenty years of conflict with the Palestinians and tried to deflect any blame by saying, "Israel has been doing its part, and I regret to say that the Palestinians haven't." President Obama said he would also pressure Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to agree to a framework and extend negotiations.

At the AIPAC conference on Monday night, Secretary Kerry addressed the 14,000 in the audience and expressed his commitment to "ending the conflict with the Palestinians, and in doing so, preserving the Jewish and democratic nature of the state of Israel." He also explained why he is dedicated to finding peace: "This isn't about me. This is about the dreams of Israelis and the dignity of Palestinians. It's about reconciling two peoples who want at long last to live normal secure lives in the land that they have fought over for so long."

Later, Netanyahu took the stage and gave a speech J Street praised as "his most compelling case yet to an American audience for a two-state solution." He told the crowd, "I'm prepared to make a historic peace with our Palestinian neighbors — a peace that would end a century of conflict and bloodshed. Peace would be good for us. Peace would be good for the Palestinians. But peace would also open up the possibility of establishing formal ties between Israel and leading countries in the Arab world." ...

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

Kerry calls recognition demand a “mistake”: On Thursday, Secretary Kerry told the House Committee on Foreign Affairs that he thinks the demand for a Jewish state as the "critical decider of [some Israeli's] attitude towards the possibility of a state and peace" is a “mistake.”

He addressed many global issues during the hearing but took time to comment on the negotiations. In a response to Rep. Brad Sherman, Kerry said, “‘Jewish state’ was resolved in 1947 in Resolution 181, where there are more than forty--thirty--mentions of ‘Jewish state.’ In addition, Chairman Arafat in 1988, and again in 2004, confirmed that he agreed it would be a Jewish state ... I think it's a mistake for some people to be, you know, raising it again and again as the critical decider of their attitude towards the possibility of a state and peace, and we've obviously made that clear. That's a conversation that will continue.” [The exchange happens at about 1:14:30 if you click [here](#).]

In previous statements, President Obama and Secretary Kerry have said they are committed to the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state in a peace agreement and these latest comments don't contradict that. However, Secretary Kerry is making it clear that the United States disagrees with using recognition as a roadblock to pursuing negotiations.

On Wednesday, Secretary Kerry was also on the Hill. Rep. Nita Lowey (NY-17) asked him for a progress report on the negotiations and he responded, “The level of mistrust is as large as any level of mistrust I've ever seen, on both sides. Neither believes the other is really serious. Neither believes that the other is prepared to make some of the big choices that have to be made here.” However he added, “I still believe it's possible, but difficult.... There are gaps – some of them very significant. I believe progress has been made in some areas – we hope we can get some kind of understanding about the way forward.”

On Monday, President Barack Obama will meet with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at the White House to try to get him on board with the framework agreement Secretary Kerry is working on to extend negotiations past their original end of April deadline.

Gaza-Israel tensions flare up: This week, rockets bombarded southern Israel after Israeli soldiers killed three members of the militant Islamic Jihad (IJ) group. Sixty rockets were launched towards Israel, the most since the truce in 2012. Israel responded by striking dozens of targeted locations inside the strip. The rockets and subsequent air strikes caused no casualties on either side. Israeli officials don't expect the violence to escalate further but this does underscore how fragile the situation in Gaza and southern Israel is.

After the two-day flare up, it seems a truce was reached after a final salvo of rockets and strikes Thursday morning. In a phone interview, an IJ leader told The New York Times, “We agreed that each party stops from its side to re-enforce the lull... It's the same 2012 agreement, but today it was emphasized. We are committed to the cease-fire as long as Israel is.” In 2012, in response to increased rocket activity after the targeting killing of a militant in Gaza, Israel launched Operation Pillar of Defense. After eight days military strikes and rocket attacks, a truce was reached. ...

Ha'aretz's defense analyst says an escalation is not in Hamas or Israel's interests. He explains: “The Hamas government in Gaza is actually a rather comfortable partner for Israel in many ways... Israel does not wish to see Hamas replaced in Gaza by someone else – as the alternatives are all likely to be much worse. Hamas, under dual pressure from Israel and, most of all, from the Egyptian generals, is trying first and foremost just to survive. A military clash with Israel would not suit its purposes.”

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

2) Barack to Bibi: "Time is running out"

James M. Wall, March 4, 2014

When President Obama consented to an interview with Bloomberg columnist Jeffrey Goldberg, the President sent an ultimatum to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu: "Time is running out." Obama does not choose a reporter for an individual interview without a clear purpose. In this case, his purpose could have been to use Goldberg as a journalist-messenger, trusted by Israel, but also a columnist for an American media outlet.

In his younger years, Goldberg served in the Israeli army as a prison guard. He even produced a book out of the experience, *Prisoners: A Story of Friendship and Terror*.

The interview with Goldberg is the template President Obama keeps in front of his Israeli visitor, both in Washington and into the future.

Prime Minister Netanyahu came to Washington Sunday night. He met with President Obama Monday and on Tuesday he will address the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Policy Conference. The AIPAC conference customarily functions as a pep rally for AIPAC funders and supporters. At this annual event, through speeches and small group meetings, attendees receive legislative marching orders, essentially a list of legislation AIPAC wants passed in the American Congress.

One key demand that was expected to be high on this year's AIPAC list was pulled, as AIPAC yielded to intense pressure from the White House. The word from the Oval Office to AIPAC was that Congress must not pass tougher sanctions against Iran. To do so would doom U.S. efforts to reach a nuclear agreement with Iran. It is of no small significance that neither President Obama nor Vice President Joe Biden, will attend the AIPAC Policy Conference. The Conference is a political rally; Obama and Biden are focused on diplomacy.

The executive branch was represented at the Conference by U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Jack Lew, an Orthodox Jew, who spoke on Sunday. He reiterated the Obama administration's opposition "to new Iran sanctions during the interim nuclear deal."

In the Obama-Netanyahu meeting Monday, details of which will emerge over time, Netanyahu repeated his usual talking points, insisting "Israel has been doing its part" to forge peace, but that it's been met with "incessant Palestinian incitement."

Obama thanked Netanyahu for participating in what he called "very lengthy and painstaking negotiations" with Kerry over a framework for peace talks. Netanyahu had also read and no doubt studied carefully, Obama's pre-meeting interview with Goldberg. In that interview, which Bloomberg published (March 2) Obama told Goldberg that the window for peace talks is closing. He also said he believes "that ultimately it is still possible" to create a Jewish state of Israel and a state of Palestine."

Obama will host Palestinian Authority President Abbas at the White House on March 17. He will no doubt engage in the same tough talk with Abbas.

In the Bloomberg interview, Goldberg reported that President Barack Obama planned to tell Netanyahu "that his country could face a bleak future — one of international isolation and demographic disaster — if he refuses to endorse a U.S.-drafted framework agreement for peace with the Palestinians".

Obama also said in the interview that he will warn Netanyahu that "time is running out for Israel as a Jewish-majority democracy." ...

[Read the entire piece on Wall's blog, Wallwritings](#)

3) Good news: Obama gives the Palestinians an insurance policy

Larry Derfner, +972, March 4, 2014

Obama's interview with the Bloomberg news agency on Sunday, in which he basically blamed Netanyahu and exonerated Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas for the intractability of the occupation, is a very important event, and very good news. With Netanyahu and Abbas jockeying to avoid the blame for the likely impending failure of Secretary of State John Kerry's peace initiative, the Obama interview with Jeffrey Goldberg will make it very hard for the administration to do Israel's bidding, as is its habit, by pointing the finger at the Palestinians if and when the talks, whose allotted time runs out on April 29, run aground.

At stake in the blame game is momentum: if Washington finds against the Palestinians, Abbas' plans to take Israel to The Hague would stall, as would the "mainstreaming" of the BDS movement. If Washington finds against Israel, the effect would be the opposite. And if Washington blames neither side, then the rest of the world will be left to decide for itself, and its decision will likely be for the Palestinians. In the probable event of the talks failing, Israel's only hope of avoiding an upsurge of world opposition – which is what Justice Minister Tzipi Livni and Finance Minister Yair Lapid, along with top Israeli business people, friendly foreign diplomats, Kerry and now Obama are trying to warn Israel against – is if Washington clears Netanyahu of responsibility and turns its wrath on Abbas.

[Click here](#) for +972 Magazine's full coverage of the diplomatic process

But how can Washington do that after what Obama just said in that interview: "On Abbas: I think nobody would dispute that whatever disagreements you may have with him, he has proven himself to be somebody who has been committed to nonviolence and diplomatic efforts to resolve this issue.

"I believe that President Abbas is sincere about his willingness to recognize Israel and its right to exist, to recognize Israel's legitimate security needs, to shun violence, to resolve these issues in a diplomatic fashion that meets the concerns of the people of Israel. And I think that this is a rare quality not just within the Palestinian territories, but in the Middle East generally. For us not to seize that opportunity would be a mistake.

"You've got a partner on the other side who is prepared to negotiate seriously, who does not engage in some of the wild rhetoric that so often you see in the Arab world when it comes to Israel, who has shown himself committed to maintaining order within the West Bank and the Palestinian Authority and to cooperate with Israelis around their security concerns — for us to not seize this moment I think would be a great mistake."

On Israel's current approach to the conflict: "I have not yet heard ... a persuasive vision of how Israel survives as a democracy and a Jewish state at peace with its neighbors in the absence of a peace deal with the Palestinians and a two-state solution. Nobody has presented me a credible scenario.

"The only thing that I've heard is, 'We'll just keep on doing what we're doing, and deal with problems as they arise. And we'll build settlements where we can. And where there are problems in the West Bank, we will deal with them forcefully. We'll cooperate or co-opt the Palestinian Authority.' And yet, at no point do you ever see an actual resolution to the problem.

"It's maintenance of a chronic situation. And my assessment, which is shared by a number of Israeli observers, I think, is there comes a point where you can't manage this anymore, and then you start having to make very difficult choices. Do you resign yourself to what amounts to a permanent occupation of the West Bank? Is that the character of Israel as a state for a long period of time? ..."

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

4) AIPAC speech pits Netanyahu vs. Herzl on the nature of moral divides

Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, March 5, 2014

Benjamin Netanyahu's speech this week to AIPAC was like Havdalah. It was about separation. "The line I want to draw today," he announced early in his remarks, "is the line between life and death, between right and wrong, between the blessings of a brilliant future and the curses of a dark past...between decency and depravity, between compassion and cruelty." That moral line, he explained, runs along the border between Israel and Syria and it divides Israel from Hezbollah and Iran.

It got me thinking about Theodor Herzl. Herzl was also interested in moral lines. His utopian novel "Altneuland" consists largely of a campaign between two parties in an imaginary Jewish state. One party sees Arabs as full citizens and the other wants to restrict the right to vote to Jews alone. "My associates and I make no distinctions between one man and another. We do not ask to what race or religion a man belongs," declares Herzl's hero, David Littwak. But, Littwak admits, "There are other views among us as well."

It's a very different way of thinking about morality. For Netanyahu, there are moral regimes—like Israel and America's—and immoral ones, like those in Syria and Iran. If you live in one of the moral ones, the important thing is never to lose confidence in your own superiority, and to fight relentlessly against the evil that resides outside your borders and outside yourself.

For Herzl, by contrast, moral lines cut through movements, countries, and even individuals. Even as he sketched the Jewish state of his dreams, Herzl envisioned that state wrestling with illiberal, racist currents within Zionism itself.

It's a debate with strong echoes inside the United States. Since the dawn of the Cold War, the nationalistic right has accused the American left of not believing enough in America's moral supremacy: of launching "apology tours" and "blaming America first" and "practicing moral relativism." Liberals have responded that it is only by recognizing that everyone—Americans included—can be corrupted by power that democracies can avoid the abuses of their tyrannical foes. "All power," argued the liberal Cold War theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, "is a peril to justice" and the "pride and self-righteousness of powerful nations are a greater hazard to their success than the machinations of their foes."

That's what Bibi, and his ideological kinfolk like Dick Cheney, don't understand. Yes, of course, Israel has a better human rights record than Syria and Iran. But there's nothing inevitable about that. It's not because of something inherent in Jewish culture; it's not because we are created that way by God. On the contrary: the Bible is filled with stories of Jewish leaders succumbing to moral and theological corruption. What makes the Israel of today different from its neighbors is the principle that no group of people—no matter how powerful or certain of their own virtue—are beyond the law.

Yet that principle barely operates in the West Bank. While Israeli law theoretically binds Jewish settlers, their Palestinian neighbors—being non-citizens—have little capacity to make the State of Israel enforce it. Between 2005 and 2013, according to a report by the non-governmental organization, Yesh Din, only eight percent of the investigations into settler attacks on Palestinians even resulted in an indictment.

In the words of the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem, "When Palestinians harm Israeli citizens, the Israeli authorities use all means to arrest suspects and prosecute them, including measures that do not comport with international law and that flagrantly breach human rights ... However, when Israelis harm Palestinians, the authorities implement an undeclared policy of forgiveness, compromise, and leniency in punishment." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) [Netanyahu Is mostly right about BDS — but BDS is not the problem](#)

MJ Rosenberg, Tikkun Daily, March 4, 2014

As I have written before, I don't much like the BDS movement for many of the same reasons Prime Minister Netanyahu doesn't. It demonizes Israel, many of its leading proponents are anti-Semites, and its rage against Israel is entirely selective. I also believe (from reading its material) that the movement exists to eliminate the State of Israel by replacing it by "One State" in which Jews will be a minority. As one who supports the continued existence of a secure Jewish state, I have no choice but to oppose the BDS movement. So I wasn't offended by anything Netanyahu said about it in his AIPAC speech.

What did offend me was Netanyahu's (and AIPAC's) use of BDS as a diversion from the main issue: the occupation. It is the occupation, not BDS, that threatens to end Israel's existence as a democratic Jewish state. It is the occupation, not BDS, that has turned Israel into a pariah in most of Europe. It is the occupation, not BDS, that prevents Israel from achieving peace with the Palestinians and the entire Arab League It is the occupation, not BDS, that has jeopardized Israel's standing with liberal and progressive Americans, including the Democratic party at large, not BDS.

In fact, if BDS disappeared tomorrow, all of Israel's problems would remain. All it would lose is a convenient scapegoat. In short, Netanyahu is using BDS as just one more excuse to avoid making tough decisions about the occupation. And he is giving a hostile movement infinitely more credibility than it deserves. The prime minister of Israel should not be giving speeches about a fringe movement that, so far, has accomplished almost nothing—including on US campuses. It's as if Lyndon Johnson gave a speech denouncing the Trotskyists for its opposition to the Vietnam war.

All Netanyahu did was use BDS as another excuse to avoid the issue of the ugly, immoral, illegal occupation itself. So typical. Anything to avoid talking about peace.

6) [Recognizing Israel is enough](#)

Ha'aretz editorial, March 7, 2014

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu gave a captive audience at the AIPAC conference a speech bursting with jaded clichés. Such clichés have long become a sterile substitute for serious policy. The audience applauded, fittingly, and even gave him a number of standing ovations, as is customary. But anyone looking in Netanyahu's speech for a hint of real willingness to reach a solution to the conflict – would only find himself up against those fortified walls again.

The main one is Netanyahu's demand of Palestinian leader Abbas to "recognize the Jewish state – no excuses, no delays; it's time. ... [In so doing] you would be telling Palestinians to abandon the dream of flooding Israel with refugees. ... Make clear that you are ready to end the conflict."

This is a false statement. The Palestinian president and his predecessor, Yasser Arafat, have recognized the State of Israel. Israel has also received the same recognition from Egypt and Jordan. The Arab states that signed the Arab Peace Initiative have also offered that recognition if Israel withdraws from the occupied territories.

Abbas has declared day and night that a solution can be found even for the Palestinian refugee problem and that the Palestinians have no intention of flooding Israel with refugees. Israel has rudely ignored these declarations. Even if the Palestinians decide to consent to Netanyahu's ultimate precondition, he has said nothing to encourage them to do so. Would he be ready, in exchange, to uproot dozens of settlements and tens of thousands of settlers? Would he agree to divide Jerusalem?

Netanyahu's outstretched hand for peace could have been a heartwarming gesture, had he not placed in front of it this barbed wire that belies his declarations. Israelis live in a Jewish state, which is the realization of the Zionist vision. They need no Palestinian recognition. The world also recognizes the Jewish national home, but not the occupation or the Jewish extension that has installed itself in the Palestinian territories and is sabotaging any peace solution.

Israel's security does not depend on outposts and settlement blocs, but on real peace with its neighbors. Only that can ensure the Israelis' ability to maintain their Jewish state. The condition to recognize the state's Jewishness must therefore be removed from the negotiation table.

7) Is a settlement boycott best for Israel?

New York Times, March 2, 2014

Lara Friedman, a former U.S. foreign service officer, is the director of policy and government relations for Americans for Peace Now. Daniel Gordis is the Koret distinguished fellow and chair of the core curriculum at Shalem College in Jerusalem. He is the author of Menachem Begin: The Battle for Israel's Soul.

A powerful debate between APN's Lara Friedman and Rabbi Daniel Gordis in the New York Times.

Introduction: Israel's expansion of settlements in the occupied territories has been an obstacle to the two-state solution, considered the most likely hope for peace with the Palestinians. The boycott, divestment and sanctions movement has called for worldwide disassociation with Israel to end the occupation. Even many supporters of the two-state solution, though, condemn the movement because it attacks Israel itself and supports the right of refugees to return to homes in Israel that were theirs before its creation. But what about a boycott of the territories, and all activity within them, to end the occupation? Would that be in the best interest of Israel and the most likely path to peace?

Lara Friedman: Remove the obstacle to real peace -- Many Israelis hope that settlements will establish irreversible Israeli control over the West Bank and East Jerusalem, and create what they hope will be an insurmountable obstacle to the emergence of any future Palestinian state. ...

Israeli supporters of settlements and opponents of a Jewish state (including some in the global BDS movement) despise the idea of boycotting settlements. Their zero-sum aspirations – either for a Greater Israel or Palestine-from-the-river-to-the-sea – are grounded in the insistence that Israel and the occupied territories are indivisible.

A settlement boycott, in contrast, insists not only on the illegitimacy of settlements, but also on the legitimacy of Israel, as defined, until a future agreement, by the 1949 armistice line, the "Green Line." ...

Settlements have already cost Israelis dearly The security costs, too, have been high, with Israel's lines of defense gerrymandered to accommodate settlements and with soldiers and resources continually diverted from protecting Israel against threats, to servicing the settlers. Most important, settlements threaten the two-state solution, without which Israel's future as a democracy and a Jewish state are in peril.

A policy of boycotting settlements – adopted by nations and people who care about Israel – can push Israeli leaders to finally choose: Do they stand with settlements or do they stand with an Israel that truly seeks peace with its neighbors? Such a policy is clearly in the best interests of Israel, and may prove critical to keeping open the path for peace.

Daniel Gordis: Palestinian intransigence is the obstacle -- Polls indicate that two-thirds of Israelis would cede almost all of the West Bank to make peace with the Palestinians. The reason that no agreement has ever been reached is not because of the settlers – who oppose such concessions but who would be outvoted in a plebiscite – but because the Palestinians are not interested in a deal. Boycotting the settlements is immoral, for it would punish Israelis for Palestinians' failure to accept the Jewish state.

In recent decades, the Israeli position on the Palestinians has shifted sharply. The left-leaning Prime Minister Golda Meir said, in the 1970s, "There is no Palestinian people." But matters have changed. For the past four years, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has supported the principle of a Palestinian state. What has not changed, however, is the Palestinians. The Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, recently reiterated his stance that recognizing Israel as a Jewish state is "out of the question." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) Liberal values and the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement **Rebecca Vilkomerson, Tikkun, March 10, 2014**

The inherent contradictions between American liberalism and support for Israeli policies are on a sudden, public, collision course. Until very recently, it was easy to identify as someone who cares for human rights and equality, while in practice avoiding forms of activism that impose any consequences for its actions on Israel. Those days may be drawing to a close.

Omar Barghouti's recent op-ed in the Sunday New York Times, the ultimate prize in opinion piece placement, made a cogent, thorough, and, most importantly, principled argument for BDS based on the values of equality and fighting against oppression. Also taking a clear stance against anti-Semitism, his piece was a clarion call for support to the prototypical liberal readers of the New York Times. And, in fact the letters to the editor printed in response to his piece were overwhelmingly positive.

During the same period, two BDS-related campaigns were making headlines around the world. When Scarlett Johansson became the spokesperson for SodaStream, a company with its main factory in an Israeli settlement, the worldwide pressure resulted in her being forced to choose between being a spokesperson for Oxfam, a human rights organization, and her SodaStream gig. It seems that no one, not even A-list celebrities, can be considered humanitarians or human rights advocates any longer if they have anything at all to do with the settlements, which, of course, are illegal under international law.

Meanwhile, when the American Studies Association (ASA) passed a resolution endorsing a form of academic boycott against Israeli institutions in December, the backlash began to build, resulting in multiple states, as well as Congress, introducing legislation that would punish or condemn the ASA for its actions. The first bill, introduced in New York, was backed by Sheldon Silver, the power broker of the state legislature. It sailed through the Senate and was expected to pass within days. But a coalition quickly coalesced to fight the bill, with university faculty and administrators weighing in, culminating in a New York Times editorial that condemned the bill for its assault on political speech on campuses. The bill in its current form was withdrawn. Though a new version is slowly wending its way through the legislature, the lesson to be heeded is that it is no longer cost free for politicians to try to score political points by attacking critics of Israel while shredding free speech.

This is nothing short of a new reality. So it is not surprising that people who identify themselves as liberal, who have been willing to gently criticize Israel—but not to the point of endorsing any action that would compel it to change its behavior—are finding themselves tied in knots in trying to reconcile their values with their positions on Israel.

Critics of the BDS movement often use loaded language and fear-based appeals to rally opposition against BDS. Right here on Tikkun Daily, for example, Timothy Villareal's post on Barghouti's op-ed attributes thoughts to a nameless Palestinian to "prove" that the Palestinians want to "kick the Jews out"—without any acknowledgement of the over 700,000 Palestinians who were "kicked out" of Israel (i.e., became refugees during the Nakba)—including, perhaps, the anonymous man he has just quoted. Villareal then goes on to accuse Barghouti of "craftily" using references to equality, universal human rights, and historic Jewish liberalism to hoodwink young idealists into supporting BDS. The blatant appeal to the classic racist stereotype of Arabs who can't be trusted is dusted off to dismiss the idea that the Palestinian-led campaign for BDS could be taken at face value, without any examination of the consistent application of these values in BDS campaigns worldwide.

He writes: "... [He] craftily spells this out by tugging at the heartstrings of those who deeply sympathize with the right of Palestinian national self-determination, and broader Arab human rights and dignity." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

9) Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) and the American Jewish Community

Donna Nevel, Tikkun Daily, March 7, 2014

Many American Jewish organizations claim to be staunch supporters of civil and human rights as well as academic freedom. But when it comes to Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions (BDS) against Israel, they make an exception. In their relentless opposition to BDS, they leave even core principles behind.

The Palestinian-led call for BDS, which began in 2005 in response to ongoing Israeli government violations of basic principles of international law and human rights of the Palestinian people, is a call of conscience. It has strengthened markedly over the last few years among artists, students, unions, church groups, dockworkers, and others. Media coverage of endorsers of the boycott has gone mainstream and viral. Recent examples include Stephen Hawking's refusal to go to Jerusalem for the Presidential Conference, the successful campaign surrounding Scarlett Johansson's support for Soda Stream and its settlement operation, and the American Studies Association (ASA) resolution that endorsed boycott of Israeli academic institutions.

Alongside BDS's increasing strength have come increasingly virulent attacks on, and campaigns against it. These attacks tend to employ similar language and tactics – as if the groups are all cribbing from the same talking points – including tarring BDS supporters as “anti-Semitic” and “delegitimizers.”

These attacks simply don't address or grapple with the core aspirations or realities of BDS. As described by Hanan Ashrawi, executive committee member of the PLO, in a recent letter in the New York Times, BDS “does not target Jews, individually or collectively, and rejects all forms of bigotry and discrimination, including anti-Semitism.” She goes on to explain that “BDS is, in fact, a legal, moral and inclusive movement struggling against the discriminatory policies of a country that defines itself in religiously exclusive terms, and that seeks to deny Palestinians the most basic rights simply because we are not Jewish.”

The use of name-calling like “anti-Semites” and “delegitimizers” is problematic for a number of reasons, not only because its claims are untrue, but also because it takes the focus off the real issue at hand – whether and how Israel is, in fact, violating international law and basic human rights principles – and, instead, recklessly impugns the characters of those advocating for Israel to be held accountable.

Criticisms, even extremely harsh ones, of the Israeli state or calls to make a state democratic and adhere to equal rights for all its citizens are not anti-Semitic. Rather, anti-Semitism is about hatred of, and discrimination against the Jewish people, which is not anywhere to be found in the call for BDS, and these kinds of accusations also serve to trivialize the long and ugly history of anti-Semitism.

Most recently, the anti-BDS effort has moved to the legislative front. A bill, introduced in the New York State Assembly last month, would have trampled academic freedom and the right to support BDS in its quest to punish the ASA and deter any who might dare to emulate its endorsement of the academic boycott. Those supporting the bill were opposed by a broad coalition of education, civil rights, legal, academic, and Palestine solidarity organizations, as well as Jewish social justice groups. The bill was withdrawn, but a revised version has been introduced that is designed, like the original, to punish colleges that use public funds for activities related to groups that support boycotts of Israel, including mere attendance at their meetings.

The Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) worked closely with the sponsors of the New York bill. Like the JCRC, rather than engaging in substantive debate about the issues raised in relation to BDS, the Israeli government and many Jewish communal organizations choose, instead, to try to discredit and derail the efforts of those supporting BDS. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

10a) [The State of Two States - Week of March 2, 2014](#)

The week opened with President Obama's remarks on the peace process in an interview with Bloomberg, published on Sunday. While this may signify President Obama becoming more involved in the process, the escalating situation in Ukraine poses serious pressures for the White House as well as Secretary of State John Kerry. Also taking place this week was the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) Conference in Washington, at which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other prominent figures discussed various issues concerning the State of Israel, including the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations and the Iranian nuclear threat. Finally, on Wednesday, Israeli navy commandos boarded and seized a merchant ship in the Red Sea carrying an Iranian shipment of weapons headed for Palestinian militant groups in Gaza.

"What I do believe is that if you see no peace deal and continued aggressive settlement construction—and we have seen more aggressive settlement construction over the last couple years than we've seen in a very long time—if Palestinians come to believe that the possibility of a contiguous sovereign Palestinian state is no longer within reach, then our ability to manage the international fallout is going to be limited." – President Barack Obama speaking in an interview with Bloomberg View's Jeffrey Goldberg (Sunday 3/2)

"We don't have to do anything that undermines Israel's security. [President Obama] quoted one of the rabbinic sages [Hillel the Elder], 'if not now, when?' I'll also quote one of the sages, 'if I am not for myself, who will be for me?' I think that events from the past few days highlight even more the fact that at the moment of truth, the world won't come help us when we need it." – Economy Minister Naftali Bennett responding to Obama's interview, as quoted by Israel Army News Radio (Monday 3/3)

"Peace would be good for us. Peace would be good for the Palestinians. But peace would also open up the possibility of establishing formal ties between Israel and leading countries in the Arab world. Many Arab leaders—and believe me, this is a fact, not a hypothesis, it's a fact—many Arab leaders today already realize that Israel is not their enemy, that peace with the Palestinians would turn our relations with them and with many Arab countries into open and thriving relationships." – Prime Minister Netanyahu addressing AIPAC in Washington, DC (Tuesday 3/4)

"We are willing to listen and to talk, but we will not accept conditions. Those who want to set conditions should look for other partners...Giving in to conditions has never helped in the past. It is important to remember history, people try to deny history." – Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman speaking about the current Israeli-Palestinian negotiations to the Institute of Certified Public Accountants in Tel Aviv (Wednesday 3/5)

"At a time when it is talking to the major powers, Iran smiles and says all sorts of nice things...This is the true Iran, and this state cannot possess nuclear weapons. We will continue to do whatever is necessary in order to defend Israel's citizens." – Prime Minister Netanyahu responding to Israel's seizing of a ship headed to Gaza and carrying Iranian missiles (Wednesday 3/5)

"Kerry will return to the Middle East. But the president may not. And that more than anything is the punishment for Crimea...The notion that a distracted US and president preoccupied with Ukraine and Russia will 'leave us alone' is not good news, even if you do not believe in the viability of the current process. It is a possible nightmare because the next US president and the next secretary of state may actually think it is not a bad foreign policy idea to 'leave us alone.'" – Alon Pinkas, IPF Israel Fellow, writing about the effect of the Crimea conflict on American involvement in peace negotiations, in the Jerusalem Post (Thursday 3/6)

10b) [The State of Two States - Week of March 9, 2014](#)

This week was marked by regional violence and a wary anticipation of Secretary of State John Kerry's framework proposal. This week, Israeli troops shot and killed a Jordanian judge who tried to seize a gun from an Israeli soldier, sparking protests in Jordan. Three Palestinian Jihadist operatives were also killed, launching a barrage of rockets from Gaza into the south of Israel. A ceasefire was declared on Thursday, yet several rockets continued to be fired into Israel. On Wednesday, at the 2015 State Department Budget meeting, Secretary Kerry revealed he is still optimistic about the peace negotiations despite a sense of mistrust between both sides. Kerry also said, in a House Committee of Foreign Affairs meeting, that he does not believe Prime Minister Netanyahu should insist that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish State. Looking ahead to next week, President Obama will sit down with Palestinian Authority President Abbas on March 17 to discuss the state of the current peace negotiations.

"I think [the Kerry document]...is a possible path toward moving the talks forward. It will take us at least a year to exhaust these negotiations but I can't say that the Palestinians will accept this document, and I also have not seen it yet." – Prime Minister Netanyahu talking with Israel Radio about the future of the peace process if both sides accept Kerry's initiative (Sunday 3/9)

"The Kerry initiative is not yet dead. I remain hopeful that the secretary of state will somehow extract from the uncertainties of the current diplomatic situation an agreement that will win the support of both sides. But with the deadline approaching, it is not too early for Israel to be considering her next step if agreement is not reached. And I can't help thinking that [Michael] Oren, realizing how grim the prospects might be for Israel, came forward for precisely that reason. Since he was Israel's most widely respected diplomat for a reason, let us hope that Israel's leaders -- and American Jews -- are listening." – Rabbi Eric Yoffie writing for Haaretz about Former Israeli Ambassador to the US Michael Oren's suggestion for Israel to come up with a fallback plan if talks should fail (Monday 3/10)

"It is true that most of our public is right-wing, but it can easily be made to change sides. After all, Shas has already supported the Oslo Accord. Besides, we have already been linked to the left in the past." – Senior member of Shas revealing to Al-Monitor where some people in the party may stand regarding the settlements and future elections (Wednesday 3/12)

"Neither believes the other is really serious. Neither believes that the other is prepared to make some of the big choices that have to be made here... [yet] each of them has helped to inch forward...And in this particular challenge, inches are acceptable and pretty good and helpful. And we're going to keep moving the way we're moving." – Secretary of State John Kerry speaking at the 2015 State Department budget hearing (Wednesday 3/12)

"We affirm that Hamas and the resistance will never allow the occupation to create a new reality at the expense of the Palestinian resistance or changing the agreement for calm into an agreement for surrender." – Hamas leader Sami Abu Zuhri defending the use of rocket fire into Israel (Thursday 3/13)

"If Abu Mazen won't agree to extend the negotiations with Israel for a period of another year, there's a possibility that the fourth installment of the prisoner release won't be carried out." – Minister Yaakov Peri of Yesh Atid discussing the peace negotiations and planned prisoner release currently set for March 28, as quoted in Israel Hayom (Thursday 3/13)

"We aren't going to allow either Islamic Jihad or any other entity in the Gaza Strip to disrupt the lives of the citizens of Israel. When there's no quiet in the south, the Gaza Strip won't be quiet either, in a way that will make the terrorists regret the rockets they fired. Hamas is responsible for the turn of events in the Gaza Strip, and it too need to take into account that we will not tolerate [rocket] fire on us, and if it doesn't know how to enforce quiet, it is going to pay a price." – Defense Minister Moshe Yaalon discussing the rocket fire with military officials as quoted in Ma'ariv (Thursday 3/13)

11) UN observer sends identical letters addressing deteriorating conditions in Occupied Territories

March 6, 2014

Palestine's Permanent Observer to the United Nations, Riyad Mansour, sent on Wednesday identical letters to the UN Secretary General, President of the UN Security Council and President of the UN General Assembly, briefing them on the ongoing turmoil and the worsening conditions in the occupied Palestinian Territories.

In his letter, Mansour said that the deteriorating political conditions in Palestine are due to the Israeli provocative, illegal policies, and that the Israeli authorities have violated international humanitarian law, particularly the provisions of the Geneva Convention regarding the protection of civilians during armed conflicts.

"In grave violation of international humanitarian law, namely the provisions of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilians in Armed Conflict, the occupying Power carried out a military strike yesterday, 4 March, that killed two Palestinians in Beit Hanoun in the north of the besieged Gaza Strip," the letter said.

Mansour called to immediately lift the inhumane Israeli siege on Gaza. Gaza's population is estimated at 1.7 million people.

"In this regard, we also reiterate the demand for the immediate and full lifting of the inhumane, illegal and immoral blockade imposed by Israel, the occupying Power, on the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which amounts to the collective punishment of 1.7 million people."

He further condemned the continuing Israeli settlement activities in the West Bank and called upon the international community to implement relevant international law and the relevant UN resolutions to stop settlement construction.

"We are compelled to once again draw attention to the continuation of Israel's illegal colonization campaign in all its manifestations in Occupied Palestine, including in East Jerusalem," added the letter.

"We reiterate our calls on the international community to uphold international law and the relevant United Nations resolutions in this regard with a view to bringing a halt to Israel's construction and expansion of settlement building and its related infrastructure in the Palestinian land."

Mansour concluded his letter renewing his call for holding Israel accountable for its grave violations to rescue the final peace opportunity based on international consensus.

"We reiterate the urgent appeals for international efforts to hold Israel, the occupying Power, accountable for its grave violations and to compel it to immediate cessation of all illegal activities in order to salvage the small chance that remains for achieving a peaceful solution based on the longstanding international consensus in this regard."

12) New Israeli legislation favoring Christians seeks to divide Palestinian community

Rev. Dr. Naim Ateek, Mondoweiss, March 5, 2014

On February 23, 2014, the Israeli Knesset enacted a new law that recognizes Muslim and Christian Arab communities as separate identities, giving them their own representation in an employment commission. The law passed by a margin of 31 to 6.

The new law passed by the Knesset favoring Christians is, to say the least, a deceitful political stunt by Likud-Beiteinu members aimed at sowing seeds of division among Christians and between Christians and Muslims. For the last sixty-five years, the government of Israel has not shown favoritism or bias towards the Christian community of the land, so why now?

During the Nakba of 1948, the Christians, like the Muslims, were dispossessed by the Zionists and were forced out of their homeland. Furthermore, during the military rule imposed by Israel on all Palestinians who stayed inside the Israeli state (1948-1966), Israel did not show favoritism to Christians over Muslims. Both were discriminated against and both were treated as unwanted aliens in their own land. There is a plethora of documentation to substantiate the history of that period. The problem for Israel in those days was not the Palestinians' religious affiliation but their Palestinian national identity.

I believe that the new law reflects the moral bankruptcy of the government of Israel. Indeed, it must be in trouble to allow itself to stoop so low as to blatantly use this tactic to attempt to win the support of some Christians abroad, and, at the same time, sow dissent among Christians and Muslims. It is the old adage of "divide and rule." This law is sinister in that it exploits the sensitive tensions among the religious communities of the Middle East, especially in light of what has been happening in Egypt and now is happening in Syria. I am certain that the Palestinian community is mature enough not to fall into such a despicable religious trap.

There is another dishonest and hidden angle to this law. Jewish religious tradition has always considered Christianity, not Islam, as the mortal enemy of Jews and Judaism. This is due to the fact that the Christian faith came out of the same foundation as the Jewish faith, namely, the Hebrew Scriptures, i.e. the Christian Old Testament. I still remember the Israeli religious establishment discouraging Jewish students from visiting Christian churches while encouraging them to visit Muslim mosques. The advisory pointed out that there was greater affinity between Judaism and Islam, while the gap was quite wide between Judaism and Christianity.

What has caused this sudden infatuation with Palestinian Christians to merit new legislation? Or is it just an ugly political stunt? What favors can the right-wing Israeli government give the Palestinian Arab Christians who are Israeli citizens? Will it restore their confiscated land to them? Will it grant them equality with their fellow Jewish citizens? Or are we witnessing another divisive Israeli ploy similar to when Israel set the Druze community apart from its Arab base?

It is worth mentioning that over sixty years ago, Israel managed to make the Druze religion a separate ethnic entity, thus separating them from their Arab roots. Through this new legislation, Israel wants to make the Christian religion a separate ethnic identity in order to separate them from their Arab Palestinian roots. But in spite of what Israel has done to the Druze community, an increasing number of young Druze men have been resisting imposed Israeli military service.

Israel has been very shrewd in concocting devious ways and means to impose its will on the Palestinians and keep them weak and divided. It continues to connive ways to limit and even deprive them of their rights to the land so they will give up and leave.

I am certain that the Christian community in Israel will see through this new Israeli legislation, will expose its sinister nature, and reject it. It is my hope also that our people's resilience and maturity will foil the Israeli government's insidious objectives. This we can do through our unity and solidarity, as well as through our determination to continue to work for a just peace, inclusive democracy, and human dignity for all the people of our land.

13) Pope Francis plans second visit to Jerusalem

James M. Wall, March 10, 2014

Pope Francis currently plans to visit Amman, Bethlehem and Jerusalem, May 24-26. This will be his second trip to Jerusalem. The Pope's first visit was 41 years ago. On that trip, he arrived in Jerusalem in October, 1973, just before war began between Israel and its Arab neighbors. That war was fought between a coalition of Arab states led by Egypt and Syria, against Israel. The war lasted from October 6 to October 25.

On his second trip to Jerusalem in May, 2014, there will be no war to interrupt the Pope's journey. There is, however, a labor strike by Israeli diplomatic personnel which began this week. The unions are striking for higher wages and better working conditions.

At first it was believed the Pope's trip would be delayed or cancelled, since diplomatic personnel are needed to handle such a high profile visitor. However, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, the Vatican's Secretary of State, has said that while the strike has caused "some apprehensions," the trip will not be delayed.

The Vatican is especially eager to have the Pope's visit coincide with the 50th anniversary of Pope Paul VI's visit, the first in modern times. Since that 1963 visit, two more Popes have come to visit, Pope John Paul II in 2000 and Benedict XVI in 2009.

The Times of Israel reports that in October 1973, Jorge Mario Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, made his first visit to Jerusalem. Bergoglio, then in his mid-30s, stopped in Jerusalem after completing training in Rome for his new job as the Provincial Superior of the Society of Jesus in Argentina.

When the war began, Father Bergoglio was confined to the American Colony Hotel, in East Jerusalem. The Vatican recalls he spent his time "studying the Letters of Saint Paul to the Corinthians." During his enforced stay at the American Colony, he read books he borrowed from the library of the Jerusalem branch of the Pontifical Biblical Institute.

We may never know if young Father Bergoglio put aside his study of the letters of Paul long enough to cross the parking lot of the American Colony Hotel to visit the book store there. If he had done so, he could have discovered some important volumes about the political situation in 1973, and the history of the Arab-Israeli war that had started during his visit.

It happens that a few weeks after that Arab-Israeli war ended in late October 1973, I made the first of my more than 20 trips to the region. Like Father Bergoglio, I stayed at the American Colony Hotel. I was originally scheduled to make my trip at the same time as Father Bergoglio, but I waited until the war had ended. That is a choice I regret, if only because I missed my chance to meet the future Pope Francis.

With no war to distract me, and no future Pope still in residence, a few weeks after Father Bergoglio stayed six days at the American Colony in 1973, I arrived at the American Colony Hotel. I was there because as the new editor of The Christian Century magazine, a trip was arranged for me (but not financed) by the American Jewish Committee. Like the future Pope Francis a few weeks earlier, I followed the usual Israeli-controlled schedule. Until, that is, with the help of an American Mennonite missionary stationed in Jerusalem I ditched my Israeli minder.

Together with Leroy Friesen, I traveled into the West Bank for a life-changing journey, first to Jericho and then to Birzeit College (now a university). There I met (for the first of many times) the school's young president, Hanna Nasir, and a young college professor, Hanan Ashrawi, newly arrived from graduate studies in Virginia. ...

[Read the entire piece at Wall's blog, Wallwritings.](#)

14) [Why the Kerry Middle East peace framework will fail](#)

Michael Lerner, Huffington Post, March 11, 2014

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, perhaps prodded by private discussions with Secretary of State Kerry, has taken a bold move in peace negotiations with the Palestinian Authority by acknowledging the possibility that Jewish settlers could remain in the West Bank, but as citizens of a Palestinian state, just as hundreds of thousands of Palestinians today live as peaceful and law-abiding citizens of Israel.

In turn, Palestinian Prime Minister Abbas has acknowledged the need for security for Israel and Palestine, and called for a NATO presence on the West Bank, both to secure Israel and Palestine from outside interference and to protect each side from terrorists who will almost certainly do anything they can to disrupt and discredit any peace treaty that might be agreed upon.

These are important steps. But they each seem more aimed at dodging the inevitable bullet: who gets blamed when this whole process fails. To help Obama and the Democrats get through the November elections, both sides might be willing to drag on the negotiations. But unless Secretary of State Kerry is willing to put forward a comprehensive settlement plan that speaks to the legitimate needs of both sides, his program is doomed to failure.

And it will fail, because Kerry's plan will be "realistic" rather than visionary, and *de facto* that means speaking more to the power of Israel and its domestic lobby (not only AIPAC, but the tens of millions of Christian Zionists) than to the aspirations of the Palestinian people.

The central issue for the Palestinians, beyond borders adhering closely to the pre-1967 borders with some land swaps to make it possible for some West Bank settlement to be included inside Israel while giving Palestine land equivalent in values, historic and military significance, and a capitol for their state that includes all of East Jerusalem, is this: there must be the appearance of justice for the 800,000 plus Palestinian refugees, many forced out of their homes by the Israeli army or by Jewish terrorist groups, and for their several million descendants, many of whom still live in some of the worst conditions on the planet in Gaza or in refugee camps in Arab lands.

Kerry should propose that Israel allow 20,000 such refugees to return to Israel each year for the next 40 years, a number significant enough to be taken seriously by Palestinians but small enough to eliminate worries that the Palestinians would quickly become the majority inside Israel and thus have two Palestinian states. This must be accompanied by a public apology from Israel for its part of the responsibility for the disaster that happened to the Palestinian people in 1948 (without claiming that Israel has all of the responsibility or guilt).

Kerry's plan must offer reparations from the international community to Palestinian refugees and their descendants, as well as to families who suffered measurable loss or incarceration in Israeli prisons during the Occupation. The amount should be generous so that Palestinians will be brought to an economic level equivalent to the Israeli median income within a ten-year period. The same level of reparations must also be made available to all Jews who fled Arab lands between 1948 and 1977. After all, it is the international community, by tolerating or promoting anti-Semitism for hundreds of years, that caused the urgent need for the Jewish people to return to our ancient homeland.

In turn, Palestine must apologize to the Israeli people for the acts of terror against Israeli civilians that created huge security fears for Israelis in the past decades, and recognize Israel as a Jewish state with special right of return for Jews just as the Palestinian state will have special rights of return for Palestinians. In both cases, the full religious and political rights of minorities must be assured, legal equality guaranteed, discrimination against minorities criminalized, and teaching of hatred toward the other effectively banned.

Kerry's framework agreement is unlikely to include these, and hence will be as short-lived as the Oslo Accord of 1993. To be realistic, the U.S. plan must be visionary -- and the Obama Administration must use its full power to popularize that vision both in the citizens of the US and the Middle East, rather than propose something less visionary that will quickly fall apart.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun Magazine: A Jewish and Interfaith Critique of Politics, Culture and Society, and author of The Left Hand of God: Taking Back Our Country From the Religious Right.

**15) National Summit a resounding success
If Americans Knew & Washington Report on Middle East Affairs
March 12, 2014**

From the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs (WRMEA): The National Summit to Reassess the U.S.-Israel "Special Relationship," held on March 7, 2014 at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., was a stunning achievement. Knowledgeable experts at this nonpartisan symposium examined the impact of U.S. financial, military, and diplomatic support for Israel. At least 350 attendees gathered from all over the country (and as far away as Japan). The Press Club had to set up extra chairs to accommodate an overflow audience, which exceeded all expectations.

WRNEA has heard from readers around the country who watched the entire event on C-Span. If you missed it, please visit <http://natsummit.org/> for a link to watch C-Span's broadcast.

View each of the six panels:

Panel 1.0 [How does the Israel lobby influence Congress?](#)

Paul Findley, Janet McMahon, Cynthia McKinney, and Delinda Hanley

Panel 2.0 [Does Israel and its lobby exercise too much influence on U.S. decisions to wage war in the Middle East?](#)

Stephen Sniegowski, Karen Kwiatkowski, Gareth Porter, and Brigadier General (Ret) James David

Panel 3.0 [Does the "special relationship" transcend the rule of law?](#)

Grant Smith, Ernie Gallo, Mark Perry, and Spike Bowman

Panel 4.0 [How did the "special relationship" come to be?](#)

Stephen Walt, Geoffrey Wawro, John Quigley, and Alison Weir

Panel 5.0 [Has Israel lobby captured political parties and news media?](#)

Jeffrey Blankfort, Allan Brownfeld, Justin Raimondo, Scott McConnell, and Phil Weiss

Panel 6.0: [Is Israel really a U.S. ally?](#)

Paul Pillar, Ray McGovern and Philip Giraldi