

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles focusing on Secretary of State Kerry's efforts to bring the Israeli government and Palestinians to reconciling negotiations, doubts about any successful outcome, repudiation of the use of Scripture to justify geographical claims, and serious objections to the present Israeli government trying to make the State of Israel "the Nation State of the Jewish People," increasing irrelevancy of the two state solution by continuing settlement construction, and other reading material.

- The May 25 and May 31 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins give information highlighting Secretary of State Kerry's efforts in the region, a report released by the International Crisis Group on the status of unrest in the West Bank, vandalism at a Christian holy site, and other reading materials.
- Psychoactive, a group of Israeli mental health professionals, is seeking to increase awareness around topics such as the mental health effects of occupation on Israeli soldiers and the psychological barriers to peace.
- Shay Hazkani in Ha'aretz states that a file in the Israeli state archives contains clear evidence that the researchers at the time did not paint the full picture of Israel's role in creating the Palestinian refugee problem.
- John V. Whitbeck writes that for almost two decades, the seemingly perpetual Middle East "peace process" has been like a hamster-wheel for Palestinians and a merry-go-round for Israelis.
- Amira Hass reports in Ha'aretz that since the beginning of 2013, Israel has forbidden tourists from the United States and other countries to enter the territories under Palestinian Authority control without a military entry permit – but it has not explained the application process to them.
- Church of Scotland General Assembly 2013 Delegates voted to adopt a report by its Church and Society Council which challenged "claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory."
- Uri Avnery questions the ongoing initiative of the Israeli government to enact a law that would define the State of Israel as "The Nation-State of the Jewish People."
- Chemi Shalev of Ha'aretz represents excerpts from the transcript of a special interview with Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University's Department of History in December 2011, which clearly presents the Palestinian view of the continuing conflict with the Israeli government.
- In an editorial, Eitan Gilboa writes that he believes that Secretary of State Kerry's four visits to the region to jumpstart negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are having little effect. He compares these efforts to an automobile with a weak battery and broken starter.
- Noam Sheizaf writes in +972 that admitting there is no peace process is the best thing Kerry can do for peace.
- Chaim Levinson reports in Ha'aretz that the settlement system is quietly grinding the "two state" solution into fine dust.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 25, 2013

Kerry carries on in quest for peace: U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry visited Jerusalem and Ramallah this week, the fourth visit in barely two months, to revive the peace process. While Kerry's current push is the strongest since Condoleezza Rice's 2008 efforts, he is having difficulty overcoming political inertia and the [persistent] challenge of overcoming the skepticism harbored by both Israeli and Palestinian officials and their people.

Kerry landed in Tel Aviv on Thursday and began a flurry of meetings with Israeli and Palestinian officials. In an appearance before his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Kerry said, "I know this region well enough to know that there is skepticism, in some quarters there is cynicism and there are reasons for it. There have been bitter years of disappointment." Reports indicate that Kerry is pushing for a mixture of economic, political, and security measures to bring the parties to the table. In public, Israeli and Palestinian leaders were supportive of Kerry's efforts. Netanyahu told Kerry in a statement after their meeting, "Above all, what we want to do is to restart the peace talks with the Palestinians... You've been working at it a great deal. We've been working at it together. It's something I want. It's something you want. It's something I hope the Palestinians want, as well."

Days before Kerry's visit, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat made a similar statement, "Make no mistake we are exerting every possible effort in order to see that Mr. Kerry succeeds. No one benefits more from the success of Secretary Kerry than Palestinians and no one loses more from his failure than Palestinians."

According to Menachem Klein, a political science professor at Bar-Ilan University, despite public displays of support officials on both sides are privately saying that they do not have faith in Kerry's efforts. He told the Washington Post, "[Kerry] does not show them that he has a stance that he is ready to put much pressure on the other side," Klein said.

Days before Kerry's visit, he did call Netanyahu to express his displeasure over the news that the Israeli government intended to legalize four settlement outposts. Kerry requested that the government rethink its decision, or at least postpone the legalization. Kerry had earlier requested that Netanyahu "restrain" settlement activity to give him time to work on restarting negotiations.

Before his departure for Jordan to attend an economic conference, he told reporters that he considered coming back to Jerusalem and Ramallah on Monday but decided against it in order to give the sides time to make "hard decisions." This would seem to bode ill for the possibility of progressing talks. On the other hand, the implicit threat to break off diplomacy could spur action.

UN report details April humanitarian concerns: The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) office in Israel/the Palestinian Territories released its April report this week, detailing the humanitarian concerns across the West Bank and Gaza. The report contains many facts and figures about the current situation of the conflict and one of the most concerning statistics is that so far in 2013, the monthly average of Palestinian civilians injured by the Israeli military in the West Bank is double the monthly average of 2012. Additionally, the volume of injuries by rubber-coated bullets and live ammunition has more than tripled, in comparison to last year.

The bulk of the injuries occurred in clashes with the military during Palestinian demonstrations. The Israel Security Agency reported that there was also a higher amount of Palestinian attacks on Israeli soldiers and settlers in the month of April. The most widely publicized Palestinian attack on an Israeli last month was the April 30 stabbing of a settler. This sparked retaliatory violence against Palestinians that continued into this month. ...

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

Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 31, 2013

Kerry floats plan at the Dead Sea: After concluding his fourth trip to Israel and the West Bank, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry headed to a World Economic Forum regional meeting that brought together “titans of industry” wanting to be “enthusiastic allies in the effort to coax a resumption in negotiations.” At the meeting Kerry announced an effort coordinated by Tony Blair, the former British prime minister to see \$4 billion in new investment from the private sector for West Bank and Gaza projects focusing on jobs and tourism.

Israeli president Shimon Peres and Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas also came to the meeting. Peres told the media at a press conference that the two sides should not waste time coming together to find a solution. He said, “As far as the Palestinians are concerned we have a functioning beginning and an agreed solution. The solution is the two-state solution -- living in peace and dignity...I am aware of the missing links residing between the two ends. From my experience I believe it is possible to overcome them, it doesn't require too much time. It is the real interest of all parties concerned.”

Abbas addressed the audience saying “ending the occupation of our land, releasing our prisoners, evacuating settlers and dismantling the apartheid wall are the elements that will make peace and security for you [the Israelis] and for us... This is doable, so let's make peace a reality on the ground for our present and future generations to enjoy.”

While the consensus at the conference was that negotiations and an agreement are paramount, some Palestinian officials welcomed the economic investment plan with reservations, warning that they will not offer political concessions for economic benefits. Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said, “Israel needs to honor its commitments. We have never felt supported by the international community the way we feel now. Anyone who seeks peace, stability and prosperity in the region should realize that this could be done through ending the Israeli occupation.”

ICG report: Buying time in the West Bank: On Thursday, the International Crisis Group released a report on the status of unrest in the West Bank. “Buying Time? Money, Guns and Politics in the West Bank” evaluates the common refrains that a third Palestinian intifada is looming and the Palestinian Authority (PA) may dissolve. Protests over the Palestinian economy in September 2012 and over Palestinian prisoners detained by Israel taking place in February and April 2013 raised these fears but thus far they have been unfounded.

While the report does not specifically mention Secretary Kerry's announcement of economic investment in the West Bank, the report does say, “Western diplomats and many Palestinians believe that, for the foreseeable future, enough money will continue to flow to keep the PA alive... Aid to Palestinians, and particularly to the PA, still literally buys time.” However, “There are ways to further insulate the West Bank against instability, but if the interested parties do not get beyond managing conflict triggers to addressing root issues, today's relative calm could well be fleeting.”

Resuming negotiations is a step that could postpone a “crisis” but their failure could be “accelerating the very dynamics they are meant to forestall, and thus that negotiations for the sake of negotiations risk doing more harm than good.”

The ICG also explores the dangers the PA and the security apparatus faces if the political inertia continues. The report says, “few believe that tight security cooperation can be maintained in the absence of a belief among Palestinians that this work is advancing their national interests, rather than helping Israel to preserve quiet for quiet's sake. Each passing day that the status quo is preserved helps undermine the notion that the West Bank leadership's peaceful political program will bear fruit.” ...

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

2) Confronting the psychological costs of the occupation

Mira Sucharov, Ha'aretz, May 17, 2013

This week's Nakba Day saw a flurry of commemorations. "The Nakba is not a moment in time. The Nakba is an ongoing process," tweeted Yousef Munayyer, executive director of the Palestine Center in Washington, D.C.

One group of Israeli mental health professionals has adopted the spirit of this sentiment by opposing the Israeli system of denial and silencing that they see occurring around the issue of Palestinian victimization specifically through the occupation.

Psychoactive, as the group calls itself, numbers 300 members from various corners of the health field, including psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, art therapists, and occupational therapists. Via an email listserv, the group seeks to increase awareness around topics that are often seen as taboo; the group has organized conferences on the Nakba, the mental health effects of occupation on Israeli soldiers, and the psychological barriers to peace. The group also liaises with Palestinian health professionals in the West Bank around issues of trauma, especially around youth.

Last week I spoke with Elana Lakh, a Jerusalem-based art therapist and psychotherapist who is involved with the group.

Elana and I discussed the treatment of Palestinian youth. The military's aim is to deter others from stone-throwing, she explained. So the soldiers' tendency is to scare, beat and sometimes terrorize. Elana recounted an incident whereby a stone-throwing youth was led, blindfolded and shackled, to the middle of a military compound, with a crust of bread placed in his pant leg and a military dog in close range.

According to Defence for Children International (DCI), most Palestinian youth held in Israeli jails are serving sentences for stone throwing. DCI found that 90 percent of children report being blindfolded, 95 percent having their hands tied, 75 percent being subject to beatings, and 60 percent having been arrested in the middle of the night.

Unlike Israeli youth in the West Bank, Palestinian youth there are subject to Israeli military law. In March 2013, the latest statistics available from DCI, there were 238 Palestinian children in Israeli detention. Elana describes the group's mandate as revolving around the imperative of bearing witness. "Now that there's a wall," Elana says, referring to the West Bank separation barrier, "the Israeli public doesn't know and doesn't want to know." But, she adds, "We have a moral imperative to be present, to be a witness, not to look away. We each need to ask ourselves, what is my nation doing?"

The Psychoactive group is obviously not without its challenges. On one hand is the resistance the group's members encounter from other Israelis, frequently leading to painful disagreements with family and friends, and a broader sense of alienation from the mainstream. The other is the resistance they encounter from Palestinians. Though the group approaches their professional links with West Bank Palestinians from a solidarity standpoint, many Palestinians are reticent about engaging with Israelis due to the informal ban on so-called "normalization" with Israel.

Psychoactive, meaning something that has a specific effect on the mind, can come from foreign substances or can be self-induced, I suppose -- like the kind of collective stupor that comes from living in a bubble where, for many Israelis, the occupation is at minimum an annoying word spoken by leftists, and at most a nuisance for Israeli soldiers to have to carry out during their mandatory military service. But the group's members are aware that occupation carries a weighty psychological cost on both occupier and occupied. ...

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

3) Catastrophic thinking: Did Ben-Gurion try to rewrite history?

Shay Hazkani, Ha'aretz Magazine, May 16, 2013

The Israeli censor's observant eye had missed file number GL-18/17028 in the State Archives. Most files relating to the 1948 Palestinian exodus remain sealed in the Israeli archives, despite the fact that their period as classified files – according to Israeli law – expired long ago. Even files that were previously declassified are no longer available to researchers. In the past two decades, following the powerful reverberations triggered by the publication of books written by those dubbed the “New Historians,” the Israeli archives revoked access to much of the explosive material. Archived Israeli documents that reported the expulsion of Palestinians, massacres or rapes perpetrated by Israeli soldiers, along with other events considered embarrassing by the establishment, were reclassified as “top secret.” Researchers who sought to track down the files cited in books by Benny Morris, Avi Shlaim or Tom Segev often hit a dead end. Hence the surprise that file GL-18/17028, titled “The Flight in 1948” is still available today.

The documents in the file, which date from 1960 to 1964, describe the evolution of the Israeli version of the Palestinian Nakba of 1948. Under the leadership of Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion, top Middle East scholars in the Civil Service were assigned the task of providing evidence supporting Israel's position – which was that, rather than being expelled in 1948, the Palestinians had fled of their own volition.

Ben-Gurion probably never heard the word “Nakba,” but early on, at the end of the 1950s, Israel's first prime minister grasped the importance of the historical narrative. Just as Zionism had forged a new narrative for the Jewish people within a few decades, he understood that the other nation that had resided in the country before the advent of Zionism would also strive to formulate a narrative of its own.

For the Palestinians, the national narrative grew to revolve around the Nakba, the calamity that befell them following Israel's establishment in 1948, when about 700,000 Palestinians became refugees.

By the end of the 1950s, Ben-Gurion had reached the conclusion that the events of 1948 would be at the forefront of Israel's diplomatic struggle, in particular the struggle against the Palestinian national movement. If the Palestinians had been expelled from their land, as they had maintained already in 1948, the international community would view their claim to return to their homeland as justified.

However, Ben-Gurion believed, if it turned out that they had left “by choice,” having been persuaded by their leaders that it was best to depart temporarily and return after the Arab victory, the world community would be less supportive of their claim.

Most historians today – Zionists, post-Zionists and non-Zionists – agree that in at least 120 or 530 villages, the Palestinian inhabitants were expelled by Israeli military forces, and that in half the villages the inhabitants fled because of the battles and were not allowed to return. Only in a handful of cases did villagers leave at the instructions of their leaders or mukhtars (headmen).

Ben-Gurion appeared to have known the facts well. Even though much material about the Palestinian refugees in Israeli archives is still classified, what has been uncovered provides enough information to establish that in many cases senior commanders of the Israel Defense Forces ordered Palestinians to be expelled and their homes blown up. The Israeli military not only updated Ben-Gurion about these events but also apparently received his prior authorization, in written or oral form, notably in Lod and Ramle, and in several villages in the north. Documents available for perusal on the Israeli side do not provide an unequivocal answer to the question of whether an orderly plan to expel Palestinians existed. In fact, fierce debate on the issue continues to this day. ...

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

4) Success requires consequences for failure

John V. Whitbeck, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, June-July 2013

For almost two decades, the seemingly perpetual Middle East “peace process” has been like a hamster-wheel for Palestinians and a merry-go-round for Israelis. All the movement has been a form of running or turning in place. Nothing ever really changes.

As Secretary of State John Kerry shuttles around the Middle East, ostensibly to “kick-start” a resumption of direct Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu insisting that any new negotiations must be “without preconditions” and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas insisting, among other things, that any new negotiations must be time-limited, it is worth recalling a prior negotiations resumption ceremony held at the White House on September 2, 2010.

In announcing that resumption, Mr. Kerry’s predecessor, Hillary Rodham Clinton, stated that that new round of negotiations should be “without preconditions,” as Mr. Netanyahu had insisted, and that both Mr. Netanyahu and Mr. Abbas had agreed that the negotiations should be subject to a one-year time limit or deadline, as Mr. Abbas had insisted.

That round of negotiations went nowhere, and the formally announced “deadline” proved meaningless – for one clear and critical reason. Throughout this “peace process,” all deadlines, starting with the five-year deadline for achieving a permanent peace agreement set in the “Oslo” Declaration of Principles signed almost 20 years ago, have been consistently and predictably missed. Such failures have been guaranteed by the practical reality that, for Israel, “failure” has had no consequences other than a continuation of the status quo, which, for all Israeli governments, has been not only tolerable but preferable to any realistically realizable alternative.

For Israel, “failure” has always constituted “success,” permitting it to continue confiscating Palestinian land, expanding its West Bank colonies, building more Jews-only bypass roads and generally making the occupation even more permanent and irreversible.

In everyone's interests, this must change. For there to be any chance of true success in any new round of negotiations, failure must have clear and compelling consequences which Israelis would find unappealing – indeed, at least initially, nightmarish.

In an interview published on November 29, 2007, in the Israeli daily Ha'aretz, Mr. Netanyahu's predecessor, Ehud Olmert, declared, “If the day comes when the two-state solution collapses, and we face a South African-style struggle for equal voting rights (also for the Palestinians in the territories), then, as soon as that happens, the State of Israel is finished.”

This article helpfully referred to a prior Ha'aretz article, published on March 13, 2003, in which Mr. Olmert had expressed the same concern in the following terms: “More and more Palestinians are uninterested in a negotiated, two-state solution, because they want to change the essence of the conflict from an Algerian paradigm to a South African one. From a struggle against ‘occupation,’ in their parlance, to a struggle for one-man-one-vote. That is, of course, a much cleaner struggle, a much more popular struggle – and ultimately a much more powerful one. For us, it would mean the end of the Jewish state.”

If Israeli public opinion could be brought around to sharing the perception of Israel's position and options reflected in Mr. Olmert's perceptive public pronouncements, the Palestinians would be entering any new round of direct negotiations in a position of strength, intellectually and psychologically difficult though it would be for Palestinians to imagine such a dramatic role reversal. ...

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

5) Israel effectively barring tourists from West Bank by neglecting to explain mandatory permit **Amira Hass, Ha'aretz, May 19, 2013**

Since the beginning of 2013, Israel has forbidden tourists from the United States and other countries to enter the territories under Palestinian Authority control without a military entry permit – but it has not explained the application process to them.

Ha'aretz has learned of a recent case where clerics from the United States had to sign a declaration at the Ben-Gurion International Airport, promising not to enter Area A without permits from the Coordinator of Activities in the Territories. The clerics signed the declaration, but representatives of the Population, Immigration and Borders Authority did not explain to them how to get the permits.

Not every tourist who is planning to visit the West Bank is required to sign the declaration, and no criteria have been published for how people are selected to do so.

The American clerics, who spoke with Ha'aretz on condition of anonymity, were sent by their church to work with Christian communities in East Jerusalem and the West Bank. As a result of the declaration they signed and their inability to decipher the procedure for obtaining the permit, they have been unable to meet with the members of Christian communities in West Bank cities or visit holy places, like the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.

One of the signers, who turned to the United States Consulate in Jerusalem for help, told Ha'aretz that the consulate employees are unaware of the existence of the declaration.

The text of the English-language version of the document reads:

"1. I understand that this permit is granted me for entry and visitation within Israel only, and it has been explained to me that I am unable to enter the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority without advance authorization from the Territory Actions Coordinator and I agree to act in accordance with these regulations.

"2. I understand that in the event that I enter any area under the control of the Palestinian Authority without the appropriate authorization all relevant legal actions will be taken against me, including deportation and denial of entry into Israel for a period of up to ten years."

In the Hebrew version, there is also a clear statement that unauthorized entry to the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority is a transgression of the law. This is omitted from the English version.

The English version does not use the official and common English title "Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories," but translates the Hebrew as "Territory Actions Coordinator," raising doubts as to whether the coordinator's office has seen the form.

The spokeswoman for the Population, Immigration and Borders Authority, Sabine Haddad, wrote to Ha'aretz that the Entry into Israel Law authorizes the interior minister to decide on the entry of foreigners to the State of Israel, but in the case of Judea and Samaria, the Israel Defense Forces chief of general staff makes the determination – with a permit from the coordinator's office required by security legislation.

"When a tourist/foreign national arrives at the international border crossings and it is believed that he wants to enter Judea and Samaria, he should be informed [of the procedure] and asked for his promise to receive a permit from the coordinator's office before his entry – a permit that constitutes an essential condition [of entry to the Palestinian Authority controlled areas]," said Haddad. ...

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

6) Media release: Church of Scotland General Assembly refuses to accept misuse of scripture to claim exclusive right to territory and reaffirms support for Palestinian rights

May 23, 2013

Delegates to the Church of Scotland General Assembly have today voted to adopt a report by its Church and Society Council which challenged "claims that scripture offers any peoples a privileged claim for possession of a particular territory." The Church report argues that it is "doubly wrong to seek biblical sanction" given "the fact that the [Palestinian] land is currently being taken by settlement expansion, the separation barrier, house clearance, theft and force."

The Church also reaffirmed their view that the present situation in Israel/Palestine "is characterised by an inequality in power" and that Israel's blockade of Gaza and illegal military occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem must end before reconciliation is possible.

Delegates further stressed that the human rights of all peoples should be respected and that "this should include the right of return and/or compensation for Palestinian refugees."

The Church and Society Council report, *The Inheritance of Abraham? A report on the "promised land"* was condemned by the Israeli ambassador to the UK when it was first published earlier this month. The conclusions of the revised report presented to the General Assembly were unchanged from the original, while adding introductory remarks and a reaffirming of the Kirk's rejection of racism and religious hatred.

Dr. Bernard Sabella of the Middle East Council of Churches, based in Jerusalem, a delegate to the Church of Scotland General Assembly, called the Church of Scotland report "a wake-up call." Rev Na'el Abu Rahmoun of the Diocese of the Episcopal Church in Jerusalem and the Middle East explained to the General Assembly how Palestinian citizens of Israel face systematic discrimination, and said "we are about 1.5 million, Christians and Muslims together" who are "considered maybe second or third class citizens."

A motion to effectively remit the report until 2014 was overwhelmingly rejected by delegates who agreed instead to promote the widest discussion of the report and its conclusions throughout the local committees of the Church and beyond.

General Assembly delegates also endorsed the Church and Society Council General Report which notes and encourages debate around the Iona Call 2012, a response to Kairos Palestine that endorses the Palestinian call for boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) and other forms of non-violent direct action. Iona Community member Eurig Scandrett said that the Church of Scotland "has not been afraid to speak truth to power - the truth that Israel's claim to Palestinian land is unjustifiable theologically or ethically. Israel's credibility has just been dealt a major blow."

Fiona Napier, Chair of Scottish Palestine Solidarity Campaign, welcomed the General Assembly decisions, saying that "The Israeli government needs to know that Scottish civil society, including our trade unions and churches, refuse to be complicit in their crimes against the Palestinian people and, as we see the situation for Palestinians worsen, we will find and take more effective action in support of Palestinian rights."

7) The State of whom?

Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, May 25, 2013

Can a law be both ridiculous and dangerous?

It certainly can. Witness the ongoing initiative of our government to enact a law that would define the State of Israel as “The Nation-State of the Jewish People.”

Ridiculous 1 – because what and who is the “Jewish people”? The Jews of the world are a mixed lot. Their only official definition in Israel is religious. In Israel, you are a Jew if your mother was a Jewess. This is a purely religious definition. In Jewish religion, your father does not count for this purpose (it is said, only half in jest, that you cannot ever be sure who your father is.) If a non-Jew wants to join the Jewish people in Israel, he or she has to convert to Judaism in a religious ceremony. Under Israeli law, one ceases to be a Jew if one adopts another religion. All these are purely religious definitions. Nothing national about it.

Ridiculous 2 – The Jews around the world belong to other nations. They are not being asked by the promoters of this law whether they want to belong to a people represented by the State of Israel. They are automatically adopted by a foreign state. In a way, this is another form of attempted annexation. It is dangerous for several reasons. First of all, because it excludes the citizens of Israel who are not Jews – a million and a half Muslim and Christian Arabs and about 400,000 immigrants from the former Soviet Union who were allowed in because they are somehow related to Jews. Recently, when the army Chief of Staff laid little flags (instead of flowers) on the graves of fallen soldiers, he skipped the grave of one such non-Jewish soldier who gave his life for Israel.

Even more dangerous are the possibilities this law opens for the future. It is only a further short step from there to a law that would confer automatic citizenship on all Jews in the world, thus tripling the number of Jewish citizens of Greater Israel and creating a huge Jewish majority in an apartheid state between the sea and the river. The Jews in question will not be asked. From there, another short step would be to deprive all non-Jews in Israel of their citizenship.

The (Jewish) sky is the limit.

But on this occasion I would like to dwell on another aspect of the proposed law: the term “Nation-State.” The nation-state is an invention of recent centuries. We tend to believe that it is the natural form of political structure and that it has always been so. That is quite wrong. Even in Western culture, it was preceded by several other models, such as feudal states, dynastic states and so on.

New social forms are created when new economic, technological and ideological developments demand them. A form that was possible when the average European never travelled more than a few kilometers from his place of birth became impossible when roads and railways dramatically changed the movement of people and goods. New technologies created immense industrial capabilities.

For societies to compete, they had to create structures that were big enough to sustain a large domestic market and to maintain a military force strong enough to defend it (and, if possible, to grab territories from their neighbors). A new ideology, called nationalism, cemented the new states. Smaller peoples were subdued and incorporated in the new big national societies. Presto: the Nation-State.

This process needed a century or two to become general. Zionism was one of the last European national movements. As in other aspects – such as colonialism and imperialism – it was a late-comer. When Israel was founded, the European nation-states were already on the verge of becoming obsolete. ...

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

8) [Interview: Rashid Khalidi, Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University](#)

Chemi Shalev, Ha'aretz, December 2011

Q. Let's talk about the Palestinians. Why has the Arab Spring passed them by? And do you think the two-state solution is still possible? Your detractors say that you would not be unhappy about such a development

A. Anyone who is an advocate of the two state solution has to tell me how a forty plus year old process can be reversed. That process, even since Meron Benvenisti starting talking about it in the late eighties, hasn't changed one bit. No Israeli government has ever stopped it. I mean Rabin did a little bit, but that's it. It's inexorable – the bulldozers never stop.

Explain to me how a two state solution is compatible with the continuation of that dynamic. Your newspaper chronicles better than most the rise of that ideology and how it has taken over institutions of the state, one by one, including the army, how the imperatives of this movement, which used to be Harav Kook and a few people in the Revisionist movement who had never been in power – you could count them on the fingers of your hand in 1967 – are now sitting on top of a bulldozer that will never stop, unless somebody stops it. Anyone who's interested in a two state solution – an Israeli, an American, a Palestinian or an Arab – has to explain to me how that process can be reversed, or how the continuation of that process indefinitely into the future is compatible with what anyone would call a "state" can come about in the occupied territories. This is a value-free assessment.

Q. Well people will tell you that with a five percent swap, with a ten percent swap – it is still feasible. But obviously they are not going to stop it while... there was an attempt by the Obama administration.

A. I'm not talking about a settlement freeze. That's not what's at issue. I'm talking about how you uproot what I call "the settlement-industrial complex," which is not 500 or 600,000 in the occupied West Bank and in Occupied Arab East Jerusalem, it's the hundreds of thousands in government and in the private sector whose livelihoods and bureaucratic interests are linked to the maintenance of control over the Palestinians, in the finance ministry, collecting taxes, the people who work for these companies that control these data bases, every Palestinian is on these multiple data bases, four million people, how many entries, how many highly paid software engineers, how many programmers, how many consultants, how many executives – we're talking hundreds of thousands of people. Most of them live prosperous lives right near the Mediterranean and wouldn't go near the occupied territories if their lives depended on it. But their lives and their livelihoods are utterly bound up with the people who live on the West Bank and, to the extent possible, with those who live in Gaza.

I'd love to see an Israeli politician with the courage to deal with those issues. I haven't seen one. So I'm not saying it can't happen – the late Tony Judt once said "anything that one politician has done another politician can undo" – I can see it's conceivable to have a two state solution, but I also see a dynamic...this is not a dynamic that depends on this American president, this is a wider dynamic.

Q. Do you personally support a two state solution?

A. If it was possible? I think it would be a real way-station towards a just resolution of this conflict.

Q. You say a way-station. That is a codeword, you know. So it would not mean the end of conflict.

A. It's a way-station, because a two-state solution will not resolve the problem because there are not just four million Palestinians in the occupied territories and another million or million and a half inside Israel, there are several million other Palestinians. Now some of those Palestinians are perfectly integrated into where they live, and all they might want is a passport and a vacation home or a burial plot – but they have rights, and they have aspirations and they have weight in Palestinian politics. I don't see how a two-state solution that is the final and sole resolution according to Israel's vision, in which nobody comes back to Israel proper – is going to solve all of this. ...

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

9) Op-ed: Weak American battery -- Failure to jumpstart Israeli-Palestinian peace talks another sign of diminished U.S. status in region

Eitan Gilboa, Ynetnews, May 27, 2013

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's visited the region for the fourth time since he took office in February as part of the effort to jumpstart the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians. But the American battery is weak, and the starter doesn't work. Kerry's efforts cannot be detached from the US' status in the region and its failed policies with regards to burning issues such as the war in Syria.

Obama's hesitant conduct in the face of the use of chemical weapons and the supply of advanced Russian missiles to Syria exposed further deterioration of Washington's position in the Middle East and the world. Putin's Russia, which seeks to reclaim its superpower status by incessantly challenging Washington's positions, senses the continued American weakness and is taking full advantage of it.

Obama and Kerry's strategy is based on two false assumptions. The first is that this is the last chance to achieve peace between Israel and the Palestinians due to the results of the revolutions throughout the Arab world, the weakening of Hamas, the weakened status of Netanyahu and the addition of politicians who support the negotiations to his cabinet – such as Yair Lapid and Tzipi Livni. The second assumption is that the only way forward is to reach a permanent, comprehensive agreement which can and should be reached quickly.

As far as Israel is concerned, the revolutions across the Arab world have created uncertainty that does not foster a permanent peace agreement with the Palestinians. If the continued reign of incumbent Arab leaders is uncertain, and if a new leader such as Egypt's Morsi declares his intention to amend the peace treaty with Israel, then what value does an agreement with a leader such as Abbas have?

Hamas is not weaker, and as for the new Israeli government, the Americans would be wise to read Lapid's recent interview with the New York Times. Moreover, the Americans assumed that Obama's visit to Israel, the alleged reconciliation between Israel and Turkey and the softened Arab peace initiative would increase motivation on both sides to resume negotiations, but these developments have yet to produce the expected results.

Kerry threatens that in case the sides do not resume talks he would introduce a new American peace plan. All previous American peace initiatives have failed. Examples include the Johnson plan of 1967; Rogers in 1969; Carter in 1977; Reagan in 1982 and 1988 and Clinton in 2000. The reason for these failures was simple: The Americans presented balanced plans that demanded concessions from both sides, but each side focused on the concessions it was asked to make and ignored the benefits it would reap. The only processes that yield any results emanated from the region itself - such as the peace treaty with Egypt and the Oslo Accords.

In the past American threats carried weight, because the peace plans were accompanied by a threat that those who reject or undermine the initiatives would bear the responsibility and be penalized. Today the Obama administration is perceived as being weak, so the threat is not treated with the same seriousness. Obama wasn't even able to convince Abbas to withdraw his demand for a settlement construction freeze before negotiations with Israel are resumed, and he also failed to persuade Turkish PM Erdogan to cancel his plan to visit Hamas-ruled Gaza.

It seems the alternative that would help advance the peace talks consists of a significant interim agreement that would remain in effect for a period of five years. But in order to implement such a deal, the battery must be recharged and the starter must be replaced.

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10) Admitting there is no peace process is the best thing Kerry can do for peace

Noam Sheizaf, +972, May 25, 2013

Two notes on the Secretary of State's mission to Israel/Palestine.

1. Some time during the month of June, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is expected to announce whether he will be able to reach a breakthrough in the Israeli-Palestinian diplomatic process. Two (out of three) months have passed since President's Obama trip to Israel and Ramallah, and Kerry's mission seems to have met a brick wall. Meaningful negotiations are nowhere nearer than they were last year or the year before. In fact, if there is one thing both Israelis and Palestinians agree about, it is the unlikelihood of a breakthrough.

Kerry just concluded another trip to the region, and due to the lack of progress he won't be coming back in the next couple of weeks. His current visit was conducted under the shadow of the Israeli decision to recognize four new Jewish outposts in the occupied territories – a decision that strayed farther than any previous government from Israel's commitment to the Bush administration to remove all new outposts and refrain from recognizing new settlements.

On Friday, Kerry held a press conference at Ben Gurion International Airport, in which he refused to provide a deadline for his efforts or go into any specifics vis-a-vis the positions of both parties (the full transcription of the press conference can be found [here](#)). Kerry also praised both parties for their desire for peace and warned against giving in to cynicism. He promised to continue his efforts, no matter what hurdles he will encounter.

Many people believe that there is a need to project such "optimism," and nobody likes to be the bearer of bad news. However, what this moment calls for, more than anything else, is some honesty. Kerry would have done his own cause justice if he simply stated that there is no peace process, nor has there been one in recent times, and that the current trends on the ground are likely to continue in the foreseeable future.

Such statement would have forced the Israeli public – or at least parts of it – to seriously assess the long-term implications of its government's policies. Furthermore, it would have saved what is left of the administration's credibility as a broker in this conflict, and it would have forced other states and agencies to reevaluate their relations and level of cooperation with what has become a permanent occupation. Donors to the Palestinian Authority would have to decide whether they want to continue financing what is now an arm of the Israeli administration. Moreover, companies would have to answer for their profits from the status quo. All of the above would become an enormous incentive for change.

Instead, what Kerry is doing – and with him, all those who support his mission or at least pay lip service to it – is providing everyone involved with an alibi for inaction. He is now a part of the problem he is complaining about.

2. ... Kerry was twice asked about the four outposts Israel decided to recognize retroactively. He gave the same response the Obama administration has been giving ever since it was "humbled" ... by the pro-Israeli lobby's attack on the president in 2010: "... our position on settlements and outposts and on the legalization is that we are opposed to it. We believe that that is not appropriate, and, in fact, is not constructive in the context of our efforts to move forward. But it should not be something, as I just said, that prevents us from being able to get to negotiations." And elsewhere: "As I've said, we are trying to get to talks without pre-conditions. We do not want to get stuck in a place where we are arguing about a particular substantive issue that is actually part of a final settlement, and that argument takes you so long that you never get to the negotiations that bring about the final settlement. ..."

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

11) Israel's West Bank settlements grew by twice the size of New York's Central Park in 2012

Chaim Levinson, Ha'aretz, May 27, 2013

Israeli settlements in the West Bank legally expanded by nearly 8,000 dunams (1977 acres) in 2012 – land equaling the entire city of Bat Yam and twice as big as Manhattan's Central Park.

The adjustments were approved by military order, with the Israel Defense Forces' GOC Central Command granting settlement municipalities jurisdiction over the new territories.

Although in recent years the practice of giving large swathes of land to settlements has been abandoned, creeping annexations are still under way. In 2012, settlement-controlled land grew from 530,931 to 538,303 dunams, a total increase of 7,372 dunams, according to a comparison of maps from 2011 and 2012 at the Civil Administration offices.

Settlements can gain control of new land in one of two ways: either by laying claim to land identified in recent years by the so-called "blue-line team," which investigates the ownership of land within and around settlements to determine whether it is owned by Israel or private Palestinian citizens; and through the finalization of land acquisitions by Israeli citizens. Although that land is not inhabited by Palestinians, the act of increasing the settlement's jurisdiction paves the way for new construction projects and the expansion of existing settlements.

The settlement of Ofra, for example, which received 322 new dunams in 2012, includes a small piece of land purchased from Palestinians, as well as expropriated land and land on which the settlers have squatted. The new territory does not just correspond to existing construction in the settlement but includes expropriated land as well as purchased plots. However, all the roads leading to these plots go through private Palestinian-owned land, a fact the IDF's announcement of the land grant failed to mention.

The state is now moving ahead on legalizing the existing homes in Ofra, as well as legalizing 100 housing units whose construction began without permits but was stopped by an interim order of the Supreme Court.

Among the other settlements that received additional land in 2012 are Ma'aleh Adumim, located east of Jerusalem and near the village of Isawiyah, which received 250 dunams; and the Kedumim Regional Council in the northern West Bank, which grew by 1,010 dunams after it was legally granted jurisdiction over the Bar-On industrial zone. ...

Changes were also made to the boundaries of the settlements Itamar and Shiloh, with the area of each increasing by 600 dunams. Beit El was given a bit of land at an adjacent army base to allow for the construction of 300 housing units, compensation for the court-ordered demolition of Givat Ulpana. Smaller adjustments were made to a few other settlements: Eli Zahav, Har Gilo, Betar Ilit, Ma'aleh Amos, Pnei Hever, Sha'arei Tikva and Shadmot Mehola.

Researcher Dror Etkes, an expert on West Bank settlements, says that "While Israeli politicians like Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu have been blathering about their commitment to a two-state solution, the system is quietly and persistently grinding this concept into fine dust."

"If any more proof is needed, it should be noted that most of the municipal jurisdictional areas that were added to settlements over the last year were given to isolated settlements, which, it is clear, could never be attached to Israel in a two-state scenario," Etkes said.