

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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Middle East Notes will again be electronically available every two weeks. This week's Notes focus on the Fatah/Hamas reconciliation, destruction and rebuilding of Gaza, criticism and support of Mahmoud Abbas' UN speech, Prime Minister Netanyahu's UN speech, and other items of interest.

- Chris Gunness of the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees writes in Ha'aretz that it's against Israel's own interests to deprive the next generation in Gaza of a future.
- Gideon Levy laments Ha'aretz that even if Israelis put aside their moral blindness which wasn't shocked by a single event during the Gaza fighting, it's impossible to comprehend the complacency afterwards.
- Zeev Sternhell emphasizes in Ha'aretz that most Europeans do not doubt the Jews' right to an independent state, but they vehemently object to a reality in which masses of people are kept under occupation and their basic rights consciously trampled.
- Sarah Posner in Religion Dispatches explores the difficulties U.S. rabbis are having expressing anything other than support for the Israeli government.
- Peter Beaumont in the Guardian records that the two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, have reached a "comprehensive" agreement that would turn over the civil administration of Gaza immediately to officials of a Palestinian unity government led by President Mahmoud Abbas.
- Jonathan Cook in Counterpunch says that a letter signed by 43 veterans of an elite Israeli military intelligence unit declaring their refusal to continue serving the occupation has sent shockwaves through Israeli society.
- Peter Beaumont and Julian Borger write in the Guardian that Mahmoud Abbas called on the UN to back deadline for Israeli withdrawal; he accused Israel of genocide in Gaza conflict and declared U.S.-brokered peace process dead.
- A Ha'aretz editorial states that Israel's criticism of Abbas' speech to the UN is the rhetoric of despair. Even when the Palestinian president is accusing Israel of genocide and crimes against humanity, he hasn't turned his back on the diplomatic process.
- Barak Ravid notes in Ha'aretz that Prime Minister Netanyahu's UN speech was a tour de force of déjà vu. His address to a deserted hall was full of threats and dangers, but lacked any strategy or a detailed, diplomatic program.
- Jack Khoury and Jonathan Lis write in Ha'aretz that Palestinian officials charge that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the UN General Assembly was misleading propaganda devoid of any vision for peace.
- The September 25 Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin noted the Hamas Fatah agreement, President Obama's speech to the UN, President Abbas' English speech to U.S. students, and links to another fine set of articles.

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas gave two speeches in New York City at the end of September. Click on the links below to read the transcript of his addresses:

1) [To students at Cooper Union, September 22, 2014](#)

2) [To the UN General Assembly, September 26, 2014](#)

1) Put the children first: Lift the blockade on Gaza

Chris Gunness, Ha'aretz, September 17, 2014

The opening of the school year in Gaza this week was the most harrowing in living memory. Hundreds of psychologists were on hand at all 252 UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) schools to lead a week of counseling for 241,000 students. We began with a roll call to see who was alive or dead. Five hundred children were killed in the conflict, an average of ten a day. There was nowhere safe for children to run, nowhere safe to hide. Many died inside their homes. The UN could not provide safe sanctuary. 65 UNRWA schools were hit directly or indirectly, some while housing the displaced. Children died as they slept next to their parents on the floors of UN classrooms.

Almost every child in Gaza has a sibling, a parent, some family member or a friend who was killed, injured or maimed for life, often before their eyes. Of the three thousand children wounded, we estimate that one thousand will have physical disabilities for the rest of their lives. Every child over six in Gaza has lived through three such wars. The UN estimates that 375,000 children are deep in trauma.

Behind these statistics are real lives each with a dignity and a destiny that must be nurtured and respected. Allow me to tell you about one of them – the nephew of my colleague, Kamal. A missile struck the house where he lived with his extended family. Four of his brother's children were severely injured as they slept. Kamal's eight-year-old nephew was wounded by shrapnel to the face. He was taken to hospital unconscious. The child awoke from his coma blind. We found a hospital in Amman to take the boy. But his mother was denied passage out and eventually his aunt accompanied the sightless boy from Gaza. Ten days later, his father was in the mosque about to pray. It was hit. The child found himself both sightless and fatherless.

The children of Gaza have bleak horizons. About 60,000 houses were damaged of which 20,000 are uninhabitable. Even before the current violence 71,000 homes needed repair or rebuilding. The public infrastructure on which they depend has been eroded by years of blockade with water, sewage and electricity systems decimated further by the latest violence. The neighborhoods where the children of Gaza once played lie in ruins, their recreational spaces littered with unexploded Israeli ordnance, which must be cleared before recovery can begin in earnest. The majority of Gaza's 110,000 homeless people are children.

UNRWA stands ready to play its role in rebuilding Gaza. We have a two year plan and though we'd rather be asking our donors to fund the \$56 million deficit in our regular programs for such things as educating half a million children in states and territories around Israel, we will rise to the challenges of reconstruction. But we cannot rebuild Gaza with our hands tied behind our backs. The only way to get our education program back on its feet, the only way to give back to children a belief in a peaceful and dignified future, is to lift the blockade. News of an agreement to reconstruct Gaza is welcome, as under present arrangements, Gaza will not be rebuilt.

The collective punishment of 54 percent of Gaza under 18, children living under a blockade since 2007, must end. It is illegal under international law. Children cannot be deprived of a future on the pretext that militants placed rockets in UN schools - which UNRWA exposed and condemned. They cannot be deprived of a decent education because militants fired rockets from areas near their schools or indeed because militants built tunnels. Let that be the subject of investigations along with wider issues about the conduct of hostilities. Let there be transparency and accountability. Responsibility for breaches of international law must be established.

Meanwhile, let us take the politics out of education. Let us put children first, recognizing that the futures of all children in this region are inextricably linked. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

2) [War? What war? Gaza gets forgotten in a hurry](#)

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, September 18, 2014

Sometime this summer, between the singer Ninet's getting pregnant and getting married, a war went on here. It ended and was forgotten. That's how it is in a bipolar society that fluctuates between mania and depression, between scandal and festivities, between commemoration and suppression. One moment the entire nation is an army at war, the next it's as if nothing had happened. Even the Israeli sacrifice has been forgotten – not to mention the killing and destruction in Gaza, which were never really mentioned in the first place. Except for the direct victims, nobody seems to remember that a war went on.

It goes without saying that nobody is drawing conclusions or learning lessons (except for defense officials and their extortion of the state budget). Israel is jubilant again. It has returned to its nonsense as if there hadn't been a war, as if another will never break out, as if an hour's drive from Tel Aviv there was no devastated swath of land, smashed by Israel's hands, where the inhabitants are suffering horribly while Israel is exultant.

Gaza hasn't forgotten. There's a whole list of people who can never forget: the 1,500 orphaned children; the 3,000 wounded children; the 1,000 crippled children; the 110,000 residents still crowded in UNRWA shelters in inhumane conditions; the tenants of the 18,000 buildings destroyed or badly damaged, leaving 2.5 million tons of debris nobody knows what to do with; the 450,000 people without water and the 360,000 who, according to the World Health Organization, are suffering from PTSD after our bombardments. None of these people can be expected to forgive, and this isn't the first time this has happened.

Not only has Israel forgotten they exist, the world might be about to abandon them. Apart from Norwegian Foreign Minister Borge Brende, no foreign statesman has bothered to visit Gaza to see the scope of the disaster. That's because of Hamas; you know, those guys the Quartet once decided, in one of its most idiotic decisions, not to talk to. Then there's Israeli propaganda, which compares Hamas to the Islamic State.

Israel's suppression and the international abandonment of Gaza are intolerable. Even if we put aside the crassness and moral blindness in Israel, which wasn't shocked by a single event during the war, it's impossible to comprehend the complacency afterwards.

There was a war here, Israel paid too, and already it's forgotten? No soul-searching? No cost-benefit analysis, at least? The public debate hasn't found time for questions that should disturb every Israeli, like, uh, was it worth it? What did Israel get out of this war? What's it doing to prevent the next one? Do not disturb, Israel is busy with zero-VAT on apartment purchases.

Nothing has been learned. The negotiations with Hamas should be resumed soon, but there are no signs that Israel plans to find the time. Far-reaching proposals to solve Gaza's problems are a pipe dream. The "victor" will continue to push the "defeated" into a corner, leaving it in ruin and misery, which will lead to another round of violence sooner or later. And the world isn't lifting a finger — either in the form of pressure on Israel (and Egypt) to stop the blockade, or for the urgent rebuilding of Gaza.

Winter is coming, so what will happen to the tens of thousands of homeless people? The negotiations' resumption date is approaching, so what will happen if the talks aren't resumed, or if they flame out? Is anybody thinking about it? When the rockets return to Israel's skies — and they will if the blockade isn't lifted — Israel will again pretend to be surprised, offended and angry. How dare they! Then the planes will bomb and the big guns will fire shells — another inevitable round of fighting that will lead nowhere. For such is Israel's arrogance and complacency. There was a war, it was forced on us of course, and we won. Maybe there will be another one soon, though it also won't be Israel's fault, and Israel will win again. In the meantime, we have Ninet.

3) [It's the colonialism they hate, not Jews](#) Zeev Sternhell, Ha'aretz, September 19, 2014

Most Israelis, especially those on the right and center, find it convenient to believe that the current hostility toward Israel is anchored in anti-Semitism. Although anti-Semitism did not disappear in 1945 – just as racist and extreme nationalist tendencies in Europe were not eradicated – the fact is that, until the 1970s, no country was held in higher esteem or more admired as a model than Israel. Even the Palestinians were considered refugees who bore sole responsibility for their own fate.

The criticism began when it became clear that Israel was not intending to withdraw from the West Bank. As the occupation grew deeper, and as a colonial regime developed in the territories, the opposition grew and turned into hostility – until, in the wake of the destructive operations in the Gaza Strip, it became hatred that has penetrated wide circles within Europe. To this must be added the fact that the Muslim population is growing in Western Europe and gradually becoming more central in society, politics and the universities there.

There is no doubt that anti-Semitic tendencies feed into the anti-Israel sentiment. But equally, hostility toward Israel's oppressive policies feeds into the anti-Semitism and antipathy toward Jews. Anyone who wants to nurture the Jewish communities as a pro-Israeli pressure group must understand that this comes at a price. In most cases the hostility is not directed at Israel as the state of the Jews, but rather as the last colonialist state in the West.

Most Europeans do not doubt the Jews' right to an independent state, but they vehemently object to a reality in which we are keeping masses of people under occupation and consciously trampling their basic rights.

The right wing is settling Jews in the West Bank by virtue of an historical claim whose source is in a divine promise: Does anyone still take seriously the argument that a promise given to our ancestors justifies the denial of the Palestinians' human rights? Every rational person sees these claims as no more than cynical cover for the desire to annex most of the territories, if not all of them.

As for the Gaza Strip, which is perceived as one big prison, there is nothing left to say. The destruction and ruin have eradicated from the public's consciousness the fact that, at the start of Operation Protective Edge in July, it was a justified response to indiscriminate Palestinian rocket-firing. As the operation grew longer and its aims changed, and as the bodies piled up and Hamas' inability to respond effectively to Israeli firepower became more and more apparent, the question of whether Israel's attacks complied with the criteria of international law ceased to be of interest: Many people saw the attacks as a violent manifestation of an appalling disregard for human life.

Over time, there has been increasing hatred of Israel's refusal to recognize the Palestinians' equal right to a state of their own. This is how the failure of U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry's peace talks are being understood. The Israeli right sees the Jews as the sole masters of the land. However, this use of naked force is arousing disgust in the Western world. The notion that the entire land belongs to the Jews and they are, therefore, allowed to steal the Palestinians' lands and annex East Jerusalem, along with other large swaths of the West Bank, is indicative of the behavior of a nation of masters – and in our time this is totally unacceptable.

The West's political elite is not speaking out openly against Israeli colonialism, for fear of encouraging the anti-Semitic monster. But at the universities and in the schools, in the media and on social networks, they are already saying this explicitly: It is untenable that the Jewish past serve as a justification for cruelty in the Palestinian present.

4) Too hot for shul: Rabbis seek healthy Israel dialogue after Gaza **Sarah Posner, USC Annenberg – Religion Dispatches, September 22, 2014**

During an American University panel on the recent war in Gaza earlier this month, Rabbi Shira Stutman related a story of a friend who was scandalized to learn that her rabbi served on J Street's Rabbinic Cabinet. The friend told Stutman that she was considering leaving the synagogue she had belonged to for over 20 years—only to discover that Stutman, too, is affiliated with J Street.

"I said to her, please don't do that, that's the worst thing that can happen to the Jewish community," said Stutman, who serves the largely millennial congregation at the historic Sixth and I Synagogue in Washington, D.C.'s Chinatown. She said she urged her friend to meet again and again with her rabbi "until you can figure out how you can have a conversation." "We need to have these conversations," said Stutman, "and I still think synagogues are the best place for them."

Co-sponsored by J Street, the school's J Street U chapter, and the New Israel Fund, the event was titled "Test of the Crisis in Gaza: Who We Are and What's Next?," an acknowledgement of the unprecedented polarization of American Jews produced by this summer's war in Gaza.

Stutman is, along with over 840 other rabbis and cantors, a member of the Rabbinic Cabinet of J Street, the "pro-Israel, pro-peace" Washington advocacy group that arrived on the scene less than a decade ago, billing itself as a pro-Israel alternative to the long-dominant American Israel Public Affairs Committee.

Despite Stutman's optimism about synagogues as the locus for difficult conversations about American Judaism's most contentious topic, few rabbis believe they are able to create a space where conversations can take place without participants' fear of recrimination.

Rabbis are "terrified" of talking about Israel, said Rabbi Jill Jacobs, executive director of T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights (formerly Rabbis for Human Rights-North America), which has 1800 affiliated rabbis. "Rabbis tend to be more progressive than their congregations and more knowledgeable" about Israel, Jacobs added, but fear losing their jobs, members, and donations, as well as contending with pushback from their more hawkish congregants—who may well be a very vocal minority.

Rabbi Eric Yoffie, the past president of the Union for Reform Judaism, wrote in the denomination's magazine ("Muzzled by the Minority," Fall, 2014) that he knew of rabbis who had expressed views "somewhat critical of Israel's policy toward the Palestinians," only to be met with a reaction of "such outrage, contempt, and ferocity" that they chose to "simply remain silent on the subject in public."

A 2013 report by the Jewish Council for Public Affairs, based on an online survey of over 500 mostly Reform and Conservative rabbis, found that nearly half "hold views on Israel that they won't share publicly, many for fear of endangering their reputation or their careers." The survey found that 43 percent of rabbis who identified as dovish reported feeling "very fearful" of expressing their true views on Israel, compared to just 29 percent of moderates and 25 percent of hawks. A full 74 percent of the dovish rabbis reported feeling "very" or "somewhat" fearful of expressing their views.

Rabbi Sharon Kleinbaum, the Reconstructionist-ordained rabbi of Manhattan's Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST), a non-denominational, LGBT-inclusive congregation, said, "I think there's a larger chilling effect in the American Jewish world, yes; I've gotten so many phone calls and voicemails [from people] who have had something happen to them—this summer I do believe it has gone off the rails." Yet, Kleinbaum said, "I do think my job is to create a Jewish space in which this discussion can take place without saying this person is not a good Jew and another is a good Jew. That, I think, is a reachable goal for my community."

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) [Fatah and Hamas agree deal for unity government to take control of Gaza](#)

Peter Beaumont, The Guardian, September 25, 2014

The two main Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, have reached a “comprehensive” agreement that would turn over the civil administration of Gaza immediately to officials of a Palestinian unity government led by President Mahmoud Abbas. The agreement, negotiated in Cairo, is designed to ease the long blockade of Gaza by Israel and Egypt and open the way to reconstruction of the war-ravaged coastal entity. A recent Palestinian Authority study estimated the cost of reconstruction in Gaza following this summer’s 50-day conflict with Israel at \$7.8bn (£4.8bn).

Palestinian officials said the agreement would allow the Palestinian Authority to take control over the border crossings of the Gaza Strip, including the crucial Rafah crossing into Egypt – a key demand of Egypt’s president, Abdel Fatah al-Sisi. According to sources in Egypt close to the talks, Palestinian Authority security forces would also control the Philadelphia corridor, a key strip adjoining the border with Egypt.

Officials from the rival factions began meeting in Cairo on Wednesday to try to overcome their differences and strengthen their hand for talks with Israel slated for late next month.

The breakthrough deal would formally bring an end to Hamas’s seven-year long rule of Gaza, during which time it has fought three wars with Israel. Hamas asserted its control over the Gaza Strip in 2007 after winning Palestinian legislative elections the year before. “Fatah and Hamas have reached a comprehensive agreement for the unity government to return to the Gaza Strip,” said Jibril Rajoub, a senior official in Fatah.

Hamas official Mousa Abu Marzouk and Fatah’s head of delegation, Azam al-Ahmad, later confirmed a deal had been reached, the details of which are expected to be formally announced later on Thursday.

Although the two sides agreed to a unity deal before the recent war between Israel and Hamas, plans to implement the technocratic unity government’s – led by Abbas – were stalled over a series of disputes. Hamas formally stepped aside on 2 June, but Abbas accusing it of continuing to run a “parallel” administration as de facto ruler in the Gaza Strip.

Hamas in turn complained that Abbas’s Palestinian Authority was refusing to pay 45,000 Hamas employees in Gaza. “All civil servants will be paid by the unity government because they are all Palestinians and it is the government of all Palestinians,” said Azzam Ahmed, of Abbas’s Fatah movement.

Another key point of contention has been who will be allowed to declare war and manage any future conflicts. Ceasefire negotiations that ended the conflict in Gaza in August stipulated that the Palestinian Authority led by Abbas should take over administration of Gaza.

Ceding effective control of Gaza, especially so soon after the end of the latest round of conflict with Israel, would be a significant step for Hamas. In the last seven years both Fatah and Hamas have clamped down on their rivals in their respective power bases in the West Bank and Gaza. Years of attempted mediation had failed to bring the two sides closer until the signing of their reconciliation agreement in April, which despite being mired in bitter disputes has progressed further than many had anticipated. ...

The Palestinian agreement was crucial in order to present a unified strategy during talks with Israeli negotiators due in October. Those talks, under Egyptian mediation, are aimed at reaching a durable ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinians after the Gaza war, which killed more than 2,140 Palestinians, most of them civilians, and 73 on the Israeli side.

6) The occupation's dark underbelly exposed

Jonathan Cook, Counterpunch, September 23, 2014

A letter signed by 43 veterans of an elite Israeli military intelligence unit declaring their refusal to continue serving the occupation has sent shockwaves through Israeli society. But not in the way the soldiers may have hoped. Unusually, this small group of reservists has gone beyond justifying their act of refusal in terms of general opposition to the occupation. Because of their place at the heart of the system of control over Palestinians, they have set out in detail, in the letter and subsequent interviews, what their work entails and why they find it morally repugnant.

Veterans of the secretive Unit 8200, Israel's NSA, say it is drummed into new intelligence recruits that no order is unlawful. They must, for example, guide air strikes even if civilians will be harmed. The 43, all barred by Israeli law from identifying themselves publicly, say they avoided serving during Israel's latest attack on Gaza, fearing what would be permitted. But their concerns relate to more than the legality of military attacks.

In a telling admission, one reservist said he first questioned his role after watching *The Lives of Others*, a film depicting life under the Stasi, East Germany's much-feared secret police. The Stasi are estimated to have collected files on five million East Germans before the Berlin Wall fell.

According to the refuseniks, much Israeli intelligence gathering targets "innocent people". The information is used "for political persecution", "recruiting collaborators" and "driving parts of Palestinian society against itself". The surveillance powers of 8200 extend far beyond security measures. They seek out the private weaknesses of Palestinians – their sex lives, monetary troubles and illnesses – to force them into conspiring in their own oppression. "If you required urgent medical care in Israel, the West Bank or abroad, we looked for you," admits one.

An illustration of the desperate choices facing Palestinians was voiced by a mother of seven in Gaza last week. She told AP news agency that she and her husband were recruited as spies in return for medical treatment in Israel for one of their children. Her husband was killed by Hamas as a collaborator in 2012.

The goal of intelligence gathering, the refuseniks point out, is to control every aspect of Palestinian life, from cradle to grave. Surveillance helps confine millions of Palestinians to their territorial ghettos, ensures their total dependence on Israel, and even forces some to serve as undercover go-betweens for Israel, buying land to help the settlements expand. Palestinians who resist risk jail or execution.

The implication of these revelations is disturbing. The success of Israel's near half-century of occupation depends on a vast machinery of surveillance and intimidation, while large numbers of Israelis benefit directly or indirectly from industrial-scale oppression. Unlike their predecessors in Israel's tiny refusal movement, the soldiers of 8200 have been uniquely exposed to the big picture of occupation. They have seen its dark underbelly – and this gives their protest the potential to be explosive.

Some in the international media have framed the soldiers' bravery as a sign of hope that Israelis may be waking to the toll of the occupation on Palestinians and the health of Israeli society. The dissenters of 8200 believed the same: that their confessions might lead to national soul-searching, investigations into their allegations, and mass protests like those that greeted news of Israeli war crimes in Lebanon in the early 1980s. They could not have been more mistaken.

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, set the tone, denouncing the letter as "baseless slander". The army said the soldiers would be "sharply disciplined". The defence minister, Moshe Yaalon, termed them "criminals". ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) Mahmoud Abbas calls on UN to back deadline for Israeli withdrawal

Peter Beaumont and Julian Borger, The Guardian, September 26, 2014

Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas has called on the UN Security Council to support a resolution setting a clear deadline for Israel's withdrawal from the occupied territories as he in effect declared the U.S.-sponsored Oslo peace process over.

In a hard-hitting speech to the UN general assembly in New York, he also accused Israel of "war crimes carried out before the eyes of the world" during the recent 50-day Gaza war that ended in a ceasefire on 26 August, adding that Israel had "perpetrated genocide".

"We will not forget and we will not forgive, and we will not allow war criminals to escape punishment," Abbas declared. Palestinian officials were expected to start working with members of the security council to seek backing for a resolution setting a timeframe for the ending of what he called the "racist and colonial" occupation – a resolution certain to be opposed by the U.S.

According to diplomatic sources, the proposed resolution has caused a rift with the U.S., which had been working for some months on another resolution with the Israelis, Jordanians and Qataris aimed at bolstering the Gaza ceasefire with an exchange of Palestinian security guarantees for some loosening of Israel's economic stranglehold.

The official U.S. reaction described the comments as "offensive and deeply disappointing". State department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said: "Such provocative statements are counterproductive and undermine efforts to create a positive atmosphere and restore trust between the parties." Abbas's speech drew a furious response from senior Israeli officials, with foreign minister Avigdor Lieberman describing it as "diplomatic terrorism".

"Abu Mazen's [a nickname for Abbas] statements to the UN general assembly clearly illustrate that he doesn't want to be – and cannot be – a partner to a diplomatic settlement," Lieberman said. "There's a reason that Abu Mazen entered into a joint government with Hamas." He added: "[He] complements Hamas in that he is preoccupied with diplomatic terrorism and slanderous claims against Israel."

Aides to Israeli prime minister Binyamin Netanyahu were also harsh in their condemnation. "Abbas's speech was full of lies and incitement. This is not the way a man who wants peace speaks," said one. The White House later said that Barack Obama would host Netanyahu for a meeting on Wednesday to discuss Israel's relationship with the Palestinians, the situation in Gaza, Iran nuclear talks, and the fight against Islamic State militants.

Even though the U.S. holds the presidency of the security council, diplomats said the Abbas resolution would most probably find support from the nine council members necessary to pass. Only Britain, Australia and Lithuania would be expected to abstain, forcing the U.S. to use its veto.

Although Abbas insisted Palestine was committed to "a just peace through a negotiated solution", the moves underlined the frustration among Palestinians over U.S. proprietorship of the peace process amid a new desire to internationalise efforts to secure a two-state solution.

Faced with a veto of the resolution, Palestinian sources say Abbas will accelerate moves to join UN and international bodies, including accession to the international criminal court.

In some of his strongest language to date, Abbas declared that the [U.S.]-backed ... peace process, which has dragged on for two decades, was dead, saying it was "impossible to return to negotiations" ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) [Israel's criticism of Abbas' speech is the rhetoric of despair](#)

Ha'aretz editorial, September. 27, 2014

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' aggressive speech at the UN General Assembly was seen in Israel as clear proof that Abbas does not want peace, that he is slandering Israel and cannot be a partner for an agreement. "This is not the way a man who wants peace speaks," came a remark out of the Prime Minister's Office. What exactly does Israel expect from a person who has 2,200 dead Palestinians on his mind — a greeting for a happy Jewish New Year in Hebrew?

Since the Palestinian president was elected a decade ago, Israel has tried to prove that he is not a partner for negotiations because he is "too weak," "too extreme," "does not control Hamas" or, on the contrary, is Hamas' loyal partner. So Israel can't complain that its policies, starting with its constant nose-thumbing at Abbas' demands to freeze construction in the settlements, led to Abbas' speech in front of the international community.

Rhetoric plays a great role in creating an atmosphere and promoting policy. But it should not be confused with policy.

Even when Abbas is accusing Israel of genocide and crimes against humanity, he has not turned his back on the diplomatic process, which remains an anchor of his policy. The Palestinians, he said, seek "to achieve peace by affirming the goal of ending the Israeli occupation and achieving the two-state solution, of the State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, over the entire territory occupied in 1967, alongside the State of Israel."

At the same time, Abbas made clear to the Palestinian people, Israel and the countries of the world that he aspires to hold the next talks with Israel as president of a recognized country, not as head of an organization, a movement or an authority. He intends to ask the United Nations to set a date for the end of the occupation and a renewal of talks with Israel on borders. That's a worthy policy after the 47 years that have eroded Israel's borders.

The government is now grasping at Abbas' statements as if it were grasping at a life raft. This helps Israel market its opposition to renewing peace talks; it helps it keep hold of the territories and expand the settlements. But leaning on Abbas' speech reflects nothing but fear and weak leadership. Israel has neither an answer nor a strategy for the diplomatic elements in Abbas' address.

9) [Netanyahu's empty UN speech was a tour de force of déjà vu](#)

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, September 30, 2014

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stepped into the UN headquarters in New York on Monday and found it nearly empty. This year, as last year, Netanyahu had arrived after the party had ended. The leaders of the larger countries had addressed the General Assembly last week and left, and Netanyahu found himself speaking to the foreign ministers of Liechtenstein, Iceland and Bahrain.

The General Assembly plenum was mostly empty, and the diplomats who were there sank into their chairs and looked bored. From the podium Netanyahu certainly noticed the abandoned seats. In the upper balcony, however, he also saw his donors and patrons from the U.S. Jewish community, who had come, as every year, to cheer him from the stands. They included Ron Lauder, Malcolm Hoenlein and, naturally, Sheldon Adelson. Together with Netanyahu's armada of advisers, they rose and applauded every time they detected a need to boost morale – when Netanyahu mentioned Iran, when he declared that the IDF was the most moral army in the world, and when he attacked the organization under whose logo he was speaking.

If anyone was expecting to hear something new from the prime minister, they were left with feelings of disappointment, sourness, and primarily déjà vu. The United Nations was the same United Nations and the speech was the same speech. Several of the sound bites and arguments Netanyahu used on Monday have appeared in each of his General Assembly addresses over the last five years. At times his speech sounded like a collection of clichés and slogans from members of his cabinet – like the line from Naftali Bennett about the Jewish people not being occupiers in their own land.

Even a familiar gimmick reappeared, but as often happens, the sequel was less successful than the original. Instead of the bomb drawing and the red line of two years ago that became a viral video hit, we got a poster with a less-than-clear photo of Palestinian children playing near a Hamas rocket launcher. The people in the first rows had to strain to understand what they were looking at, and Netanyahu himself needed a second or two to turn the picture right-side up.

Netanyahu, as usual, spoke mainly about threats and dangers. The international battle against Islamic State fell into his hands like a ripe fruit and helped him convey his messages about Hamas and the Iranian nuclear program. But it's not certain that his speech persuaded anyone. Most of the world does not believe that Hamas - which is part of the Palestinian national movement - and the Islamic State, which is seeking an Islamic caliphate, are "branches of the same poisonous tree" or that a Shi'ite power like Iran and a small Sunni organization like the Islamic State are two sides of the same coin.

Moreover, as in previous years, his speech lacked any strategy or an orderly, detailed, diplomatic program. But Netanyahu regularly deflects criticism of his lack of initiative. He is convinced that his policy of standoff and status quo is the correct one, and he tends to ridicule those who, in his words, call on him to "jump off the cliff" or "dive into deep water."

The Prime Minister made a few general remarks about partnering with moderate states in the region to promote peace - but then dumped the responsibility for this on the Jordanians, Saudis and Egyptians. So in the end, Netanyahu made it clear that he wants peace - but only on his terms. Anyone listening to his speech in Riyadh, Cairo, or Amman was probably asking himself: Mr. Netanyahu, after all the grand words, what are you willing to do to make it happen?

10) Palestinian, Arab Israeli leaders lash out at Netanyahu's 'Islamophobic' UN speech

Jack Khoury and Jonathan Lis, Ha'aretz, September 30, 2014

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech to the UN General Assembly on Monday was misleading propaganda devoid of any vision for peace, Palestinian officials charged.

Referring to Netanyahu's statement that he is ready for a historic compromise with the Palestinians, Nabil Abu Rudeineh, a spokesman for Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, said any such compromise must be based on the international community's decisions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the General Assembly's decision in November 2012 to recognize Palestine as a nonmember observer state. It also requires an immediate halt to settlement construction and to attacks on holy sites, he said.

Chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat said, "There's a saying that if you don't stop a man who is lying after 24 hours, the lies turn into facts. That's what happened to Netanyahu."

Hanan Ashrawi, a member of the PLO's Executive Committee, said that Netanyahu spoke arrogantly, acting as if world leaders were stupid and unaware of the occupation or of what happened in Gaza during this summer's war. She termed the speech pure propaganda that completely ignored the occupation and the Palestinians' right to self-determination. It was also Islamophobic, she charged, because it lumped together all the different strains of Islam.

"I believe the world won't buy this merchandise again," Ashrawi added. "Netanyahu's attempt to talk with the Arab states before the Palestinians is ludicrous; he's trying to skip over the main issue – which is the Palestinian issue. Netanyahu didn't offer any vision; he is continuing his policy of playing for time in order to survive politically and continue building in the settlements."

Within Israel, Netanyahu's speech predictably elicited mixed reactions. MK Ahmed Tibi (United Arab List-Ta'al) said the speech was "Islamophobic, empty of diplomatic content and included a brutal, lying, personal attack on Abu Mazen," Abbas' nickname. Describing Abbas as a Holocaust denier was the act of a political hack, not a responsible leader, Tibi continued, while the claim that Abbas wants "a judenrein Palestine with no Jews is dishonest and cynical. The Palestinians want a Palestine without settlers, and there's nothing more just than that."

In contrast, coalition chairman MK Yariv Levin (Likud) praised Netanyahu, saying, "His speech tore the mask off Abu Mazen's face and proved that he's a partner for Hamas, not a partner for peace."

Moreover, Levin added, "The mirror the prime minister held up to the world with regard to Iran, radical Islam and the Palestinians' ongoing rejectionism reflects a courageous, sober policy that the leaders of every party in Israel would do well to stand behind."

Opposition leader and Labor Party chairman MK Isaac Herzog said that "Netanyahu knows how to speak, and I agreed with more than a little of what he said, but the problem is that the world no longer listens to him." In addition, he charged, "It's not clear which Netanyahu we're supposed to believe" – the one who spoke yet again about a diplomatic compromise, or the one who, during his five years in office, did absolutely nothing to advance a diplomatic initiative.

"We've had it already with speeches that remain on paper," Herzog continued. "The world is demanding that Netanyahu provide diplomatic payment in exchange for his important demands regarding Israel's security, and he isn't providing it."

11) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, September 25

Obama speaks to the UN: U.S. President Barack Obama told the UN September 24 that the “situation in Iraq and Syria and Libya should cure anybody of the illusion that the Arab-Israeli conflict is the main source of problems in the region.” This is a shift from his 2013 UN address in which Obama said that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been “a major source of instability for far too long.” Wednesday, Obama went on to assert that “the status quo in the West Bank and Gaza is not sustainable” and promised that “so long as I am President, we will stand up for the principle that Israelis, Palestinians, the region and the world will be more just and more safe with two states living side by side in peace and security.” Netanyahu is scheduled to meet with the U.S. president at the White House in a week. Among likely topics of discussion is the aftermath of the Gaza war.

Abbas speaks to the American public: Two days before Obama’s UN address Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas addressed, for the first time, American students, faith leaders and public at Cooper Union in New York City. The speech was sponsored by CMEP and Abbas was introduced by CMEP Executive Director Warren Clark. Abbas shared his prayer for a “free and independent Palestine that will live side by side in peace, security and prosperity with its neighbor the state of Israel” and reminded everyone that “security requires justice and an end to the occupation.” When Abbas told the audience he would propose a new timetable for peace talks to the UN this week, he emphasized that “the key is to agree on a map to delineate the borders of each country. I say to Prime Minister Netanyahu, end the occupation, make peace.”

[Watch Abbas’ speech here.](#)

Hamas and Fatah reach agreement: Following weeks of tension, Palestinian factions Hamas and Fatah reached an agreement to transfer control of the Gaza Strip to the Palestinian Authority (PA) September 25. Hassin Alsheikh, a Fatah negotiator, told reporters that Hamas agreed to support Abbas’ plan to establish a Palestinian state within the ’67 lines. This agreement comes one day before Abbas addresses the UN General Assembly and just weeks of ahead of an international donor conference on the reconstruction in Gaza.

Transfer of control of the Gaza strip to the PA will allow them to manage construction material and humanitarian moving through Gaza’s crossings. This addresses some of the concerns international donors had regarding participation the participation of Hamas in the rebuilding of Gaza.

Join CMEP for the speaking of truth to power! CMEP calls on the U.S. State Department to say forthrightly now that Israeli settlements in the West Bank are illegal under international law. [Click here for more.](#)

Show your support for a peaceful resolution to the conflict in the Middle East. Display a banner in front of your house of worship that proclaims, “We Support Peace with Justice between Palestinians and Israelis.” [For more information click here.](#)

[Read the entire Bulletin here.](#)