

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



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

This week's Middle East Notes contains articles on the continuing peace negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, comments on Ian Lustick's New York Times article, the impossibility of a "Jewish State," implications of the reality that it seems that Jews are now a minority in Israel and the Occupied Territories combined, failure of the Oslo Accords, Israel's relationship to Syria's civil war, and more.

- The Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins for September 18 and September 28 deal with Kerry visits with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, the emphasis on peace at the UN by both the U.S. and the Palestinians, and other items of special interest.
- Jimmy Carter writes in Ha'aretz that both the Israeli and Palestinian peoples should bring any peace deal negotiated by their leaders to national vote - while the U.S. must act as an honest broker.
- Noam Chomsky in an interview for Ceasefire talks about the current situation in the Middle East, the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and the role of U.S. power in the region.
- Mark Braverman shares a bit about his invitation to speak at Greenbelt, and the Festival's hosting of the Kairos Britain launch.
- David A. Halperin and Danielle Spiegel-Feld in Israel Policy Forum state that Ian Lustick's article "Two-State Illusion" (which was included in the last issue of the Middle East Notes) was a pitiful illustration of the absurdity of arguments for a one-state "solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Laura Friedman in APN also disagrees with Lustick's words, stating that although he cannot be faulted for having lost faith in the two-state solution, he and others like him can and should be challenged for advocating replacing the two-state paradigm with a dangerous fantasy.
- Noam Sheizaf writes in +972 that he opposes recognizing Israel as a Jewish state because although a country can, at least in theory, be "Israeli and democratic." It cannot and will never be "Jewish and democratic."
- A Ha'aretz editorial states that laws mandated destruction, occupation, the demolition of the villages, and the prevention of humanitarian aid from reaching the villagers are inhumane.
- JJ Goldberg in the Jewish Forward notes that Jews are now a minority in Israel and the Occupied Territories combined; he sees this as a "ticking demographic time bomb" and questions how Israel will govern its majority of non-Jews in Israel and the Occupied Territories.
- Nadia Ben-Youssef, Suhad Bishara and Rina Rosenberg write in Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP) that the forced displacement of Palestinians and Israeli rule over them always breaches their human rights.
- Haim Bresheeth writes in Ahramonline that after 20 years it is now clear that the Oslo Accords accelerated the disappearance of Palestine, with disastrous results.
- AFP and Ma'an News report that President Mahmoud Abbas demanded that any peace deal with Israel be permanent, calling new U.S.-brokered talks a "last chance."
- Saed Bannoura in IMEMC reports that Palestinian legislator, Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Initiative Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi, stated that the Oslo peace agreement is a big failure, and that Israel is the only party the benefits from this treaty.
- Jonathan Cook writes in the Majalla Blog that Michael Oren, Israel's outgoing ambassador to the United Nations, has added to the already significant confusion about the country's goals in the civil war raging across the border in Syria. According to Oren, contrary to appearances, Israel has been far from ambivalent about who emerges victorious from the fighting between Bashar Assad's regime and the rebels.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins

Kerry visits with Israeli and Palestinian leaders: As the direct negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians continue under media blackout, some information is emerging. Reports last week suggested Palestinian negotiators were not pleased with the infrequency of the meetings and lack of substantive progress. Now, Ha'aretz reports that after meeting with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in London on September 9, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry promised, "the United States will take a more active role in Israeli-Palestinian peace talks if the negotiations continue to tread water."

So far, according to Ha'aretz, "Both sides have agreed to meet twice a week and to focus initially on borders and security, but there are deep disagreements about everything beyond that. Israel has rejected the Palestinians' demand that the 1967 lines, with land swaps, be the basis for the talks."

On September 15, Secretary Kerry met with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in what Kerry said was a follow up to the "very productive meeting" he had with Abbas in London. After the three hour meeting, he told the media that "We are convinced that the best way to try to work through the difficult choices that have to be made is to do so privately ... We will not discuss the substance of what we are working on." ...

Days after Kerry left the region, chief Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat led a tour of the Jordan Valley and dismissed rumored Israeli demands to stay in the fertile valley for 40 years after a peace agreement. Erekat said, "Mr. Netanyahu says he needs to stay another 40 years, in any (peace) settlement, in the Jordan Valley ... It's not about security. It's about stealing land and profiting." ...

[Read the entire September 18 Bulletin here.](#)

U.S., Palestinians emphasize peace at UN: Most of the attention in New York at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly was on Syria and the thawing U.S.-Iranian relations. Secretary of State John Kerry dissuaded the Palestinian officials from making moves in the General Assembly, as they did last year when the UNGA recognized Palestine as a "nonmember observer state," in order to continue the negotiations.

However, the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was near the top of the U.S. agenda. In President Barack Obama's speech to the General Assembly ... he reiterated a commitment to a two-state solution. He said, "In the near term, America's diplomatic efforts will focus on two particular issues: Iran's pursuit of nuclear weapons, and the Arab-Israeli conflict." He continued, "I have made clear that the United States will never compromise our commitment to Israel's security, nor our support for its existence as a Jewish state ... Likewise, the United States remains committed to the belief that the Palestinian people have a right to live with security and dignity in their own sovereign state." ...

In an important statement the following day, Secretary John Kerry said that the United States would be playing a bigger role in the negotiations "to intensify these talks." He also expressed his commitment to a final agreement --not an interim one-- by saying one of the lessons he's learned from failed attempts is, "if you leave things out there, hanging out there unresolved, people who don't want things to happen can make them not happen. And so we have to try to find a way to get a resolution of the fundamental choices here." ...

[Read the entire September 28 Bulletin here.](#)

2) Legitimizing Middle East peace through referendum

Jimmy Carter, Ha'aretz, September 15, 2013

I was at the White House 20 years ago today when the Oslo Accords were signed. The success of the Norwegian negotiators gave hope to millions of Israelis and Palestinians that peace would finally prevail. Tragically, there has been no real progress since 1993 and many setbacks, but the new round of talks being brokered by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry is encouraging.

After several members of The Elders met in July with John Kerry and later with key Palestinian leaders, we were cautiously optimistic but had questions about whether the U.S. and parties to the talks are willing to make the hard decisions and pay the political price. Will Israel give up settlements in Palestinian territory, including East Jerusalem? Will Palestinians accept compensation in lieu of returning to Israel? Will the U.S. be an honest broker instead of an advocate for Israel? Will Palestinian factions be encouraged to unite and have elections?

Understandably cautious negotiators cannot answer these questions by making final decisions on their own volition, but submission of an agreement to their own people in a referendum will make it easier for them to make necessary concessions. We observed this in our previous meetings with Hamas leaders, who affirmed publicly that they would accept an agreement negotiated by the PLO leader, provided their people then approved it in a free and fair vote. It is encouraging that both Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Abbas promise to submit any agreement reached to a popular vote. I am confident that both sides would approve a balanced peace agreement.

Both Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu need a referendum if they are to have the flexibility and legitimacy required to conclude a potential agreement. Prime Minister Netanyahu is in a minority in his own conservative coalition by agreeing to peace talks, with the understanding that territorial boundaries will have to be based on the 1967 borders. President Abbas is in a minority within the Palestinian leadership in choosing to enter peace talks while Israeli settlement construction, illegal under international law, has continued at an accelerated rate.

Another important factor is that Secretary Kerry has made a crucially important move by supporting the Arab Peace Initiative – proposed by then-Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia and endorsed by the 22-member Arab League in 2002 and later by the other 35 members of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, including Iran. The current Arab Peace Initiative offers a normalization of relations between Israel and the Arab world in exchange for a withdrawal from territories conquered in 1967, modified by minor negotiated land swaps.

For Israel, this represents at least a promise of peace and normal commercial relations with the nations that have endorsed it. Polls show that the basic provisions of the Arab proposal are not well known among the Israeli population, but they reveal that, once informed of its principles, a majority of Israelis would welcome an agreement according to its terms. This could provide encouragement to Prime Minister Netanyahu, who spoke about the need for a deal to be subjected to the people's assent. In his words, "peace with our neighbors requires peace among ourselves, and that is achieved through a referendum."

Past leaders of Israel have established valuable precedents towards an eventual peace agreement with the Palestinians – even those who may not have been expected to do so, such as Menachem Begin, Yitzhak Rabin, Ehud Olmert, and even Ariel Sharon. When I brokered the Camp David Accords between Israel and Egypt in 1978, I felt that the Israeli delegation on the whole was more willing to agree to a deal than was Prime Minister Menachem Begin. I believe it was a phone call to Ariel Sharon, then a powerful right-wing figure in his government, that convinced Begin to accept the peace proposal. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

3) While Syria descends into suicide, Israel and the U.S. are enjoying the spectacle

Noam Chomsky, Ceasefire, September 7, 2013

In an exclusive interview for Ceasefire, renowned scholar Noam Chomsky talks to Frank Barat about the current situation in the Middle East, notably the crisis in Syria, the peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians, and the role of U.S. power in the region.

Ceasefire (Frank Barat): What is the definition of negotiations in Israel-U.S. language and why is the Palestinian Authority playing along?

Noam Chomsky: From the U.S. point of view, negotiations are, in effect, a way for Israel to continue its policies of systematically taking over whatever it wants in the West Bank, maintaining the brutal siege on Gaza, separating Gaza from the West Bank and, of course, occupying the Syrian Golan heights, all with full U.S. support. And the framework of negotiations, as in the past twenty years of the Oslo experience, has simply provided a cover for this.

In your opinion, why is the PA playing along with this and going to negotiations time after time?

It's probably partly out of desperation. You can ask whether it's the right choice or not but they don't have many alternatives.

So it's pretty much to survive that they indeed accept the framework? If they were refuse to join the U.S.-run negotiations, their basis for support would collapse. They survive on donations essentially. Israel has made sure that it's not a productive economy. They're a kind of what would be called in Yiddish a "Schnorrer Society": you just borrow and live on what you can get. Whether they have an alternative to that is not so clear, but if they were to refuse the U.S. demand for negotiations on completely unacceptable terms, their basis for support would erode. And they do have support – external support – enough so that the Palestinian elite can live in a fairly decent – often lavish – lifestyle, while the society around them collapses.

So would the crumbling and disappearance of the PA be a bad thing after all? It depends on what would replace it. If, say, Marwan Barghouti were permitted to join the society the way, say, Nelson Mandela was finally, that could have a revitalising effect in organising a Palestinian society that might press for more substantial demands. But remember: they don't have a lot of choices. In fact, go back to the beginning of the Oslo Agreements, now 20 years old. There were negotiations under way, the Madrid negotiations, at which the Palestinian delegation was led by Haider Abdel-Shafi, a highly respected, Left-Nationalist figure in Palestine. He was refusing to agree to the U.S.-Israel terms, which required crucially that settlement expansion was allowed to continue. He refused, and therefore the negotiations stalled and got nowhere. Meanwhile Arafat and the external Palestinians went on the side-track through Oslo, gained control and Haider Abdel-Shafi was so opposed to this he didn't even show up to the dramatic and meaningless ceremony where Clinton beamed while Arafat and Rabin shook hands. He didn't show up because he realised it was a total sell-out. But he was principled and therefore could get nowhere, and we'll get nowhere unless there's substantial support from the European Union, the Gulf States and ultimately, from the United States.

In your opinion what is really at stake in what's unravelling in Syria at the moment, and what does it mean for the broader region? Well, Syria is descending into suicide. It's a horror story and getting worse and worse. There's no bright spot on the horizon. What will probably happen, if this continues, is that Syria will be partitioned into probably three regions; a Kurdish region – which is already forming – that could pull out and join in some fashion the semi-autonomous Iraqi Kurdistan, maybe with some kind of deal with Turkey. ...

[Read the entire interview here.](#)

4) Talking about Israel at the Greenbelt Festival in the UK – a Yom Kippur Meditation

Mark Braverman, Politics of Hope, September 6, 2013

I'll use this this posting to share a bit about the stir that was caused by Greenbelt's invitation of me and others (including Sami Awad of Holy Land Trust) to speak, and the Festival's hosting of the Kairos Britain launch. The Council of Christians and Jews, a UK advocacy group that, in close coordination with the Board of Jewish Deputies — a Jewish advocacy group that bears some resemblance to our Anti-Defamation League — created a lot of critical press in advance of the Greenbelt Festival, claiming that it presented a biased and unbalanced view of Israel. They also accused me, and by implication the Festival, of fostering anti-Semitic attitudes and speech. [The full statement is here.](#)

Very worthwhile reading is the excellent response by Robert Cohen [\[here\]](#), a British Jew who I had the pleasure to meet and hear speak at Greenbelt and who puts out a very fine blog.

Stay tuned for further postings. In the meantime, timed to coincide with the Jewish High Holy Days, here is my response to the CCJ's charge that in challenging Zionism I have committed a "sweeping rejection of traditional Jewish teaching" and revived "the oldest form of Christian anti-Judaism."

RESPONSE TO CCJ STATEMENT ON ISRAEL/PALESTINE PROGRAMMING BY GREENBELT

In its recent comments on my remarks at the 2013 Greenbelt Festival, Council of Christians and Jews has charged that in asserting that the actions of the State of Israel are immoral, I am laying "collective guilt" upon the Jewish people and as such I am committing "the oldest form of Christian anti-Judaism." (How as a Jew I can do such a thing is an interesting question. Is CCJ suggesting that I am no longer a Jew, the implied question being: can one say the things I am saying about Israel and still be a Jew? — but that is another discussion). The reference to collective guilt is of course an allusion to the historic deicide charge, the assignment to the entire Jewish people, in perpetuity, responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus. The evocation of the deicide charge in this context is something that gets my blood boiling. It's a particularly ugly bit of Christian-Jewish history, something that caused my people untold suffering over the ages. Furthermore, it is a distortion of history and indeed of Christian theology that is a great Christian sin, not only against the Jews but against the heart of the Gospels.

Apologists for the State of Israel's illegal and immoral acts invoke this particular bit of Jewish-Christian history when they want to bring out the heavy artillery against those who challenge the status quo of unconditional support for Israel. Do they do this cynically, knowing full well the logical absurdity of connecting criticism of Israel with blaming Jews for the crucifixion and choosing to play this card because they know the effect it will have on Christians, or do they actually believe this? The first option makes me angry. The second makes me deeply sad. The fact that apologists or "defenders" of the State of Israel, and this includes not only professional advocates like those at CCJ but also some Jewish academics and clergy, appear unable to make a distinction between taking responsibility for current Jewish sins and the charge that the Jews killed Jesus — or, by the way, between the Palestinian call for boycott divestment and sanctions and the Nazi anti-Jewish laws — is an indication of how stuck we are in our past suffering and how catastrophic this is for the Jewish people today.

Robert Cohen has done a superb job of responding to CCJ's charges, speaking for himself and — not officially but in my view very much in spirit — on behalf of the Greenbelt organizers, and I cannot add to or improve on what he has written in his blog, Micah's Paradigm Shift. I will however, point out that I have been misquoted and will offer a few words about that.

CCJ has misquoted me as saying the following at Greenbelt: "My people behind that wall — and I include Jews outside of Israel as well, because the wall is psychological and it is spiritual — have learned to hate."

...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

5) The One-State Irresolution

David A. Halperin and Danielle Spiegel-Feld, Israel Policy Forum

September 18, 2013

Ian Lustick's requiem for two-states, "Two-State Illusion," which was prominently featured in this weekend's New York Times, was a pitiful illustration of the absurdity of arguments for a one-state "solution" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

At the most basic level, it is important to recognize that what one-state advocates like Lustick are calling for is not actually a solution to the conflict. Instead, as Lustick makes clear, they hope that the absence of diplomacy will "set the stage" for an escalation in the conflict – "ruthless oppression, mass mobilization, riots, brutality, [and] terror" to be precise – which, in turn, "might be the route to Palestinian independence." Stated otherwise, Lustick's plan is to set aside diplomacy, stir up another violent explosion, and hope that with the help of some "blood and magic" a Palestinian state may someday emerge from the rubble. Plainly, this is a ridiculous proposal. Particularly given the sectarian civil wars broiling across the Middle East, it is unbelievably foolish to predict that Israelis and Palestinians would ever give up their independent national aspirations, or that a joint state would ever be peaceful.

In fact, Lustick's lopsided treatment of the right to self-determination perfectly illustrates why the one-state approach is all but guaranteed to produce perpetual strife. While Lustick shows an admirable concern for the idea of Palestinian self-determination, he attaches no importance whatsoever to the idea that Jewish residents of the area should enjoy the same right. Instead, he asks the reader to accept the fact that "Israel may no longer exist as a Jewish and democratic vision of its Zionist founders" and that this would not be "the end of the world." This double-standard makes no sense and would be greeted with the utmost hostility by Israel's Jewish inhabitants. There is simply no way to explain why Palestinian self-determination should be assigned the highest importance, while the Jewish right of self-determination is completely dismissed. If vindicating the right to self-determination is important -- which we strongly believe it is -- the one-state "solution" can never offer anything more than an unsatisfactory half-solution.

Lustick attempts to prove that the single state he and the others promote could potentially be harmonious, but he's far from convincing. The "strange bedfellows" he predicts will emerge "once the two-state fantasy blindfolds are off" are not merely strange, they are also virtually unimaginable. For instance, he posits that "secular Palestinians in Israel and the West Bank could ally with... non-Jewish Russian speaking immigrants," which, incidentally, is one of the most conservative demographic groups in Israel; he also predicts that "Israelis who came from Arab countries might find new reasons to think of themselves not as 'Eastern,' but as Arab." Given the fact that many of Israel's "Eastern" Jews either fled or were expelled from Arab states, it's ludicrous to forecast such an identity shift taking place.

Finally, Lustick's efforts to prove that the current peace negotiations are futile come up far short and only end up further illustrating just how illogical his arguments are. One of the key pieces of evidence he marshals to try to prove the futility of the talks is that both Israelis and Palestinians currently hold "contradictory fantasies" as to what two states would look like. But this line of reasoning completely overlooks the fact that the reason we need negotiations is because, while the parties agree that two-states is the desired outcome, they disagree as to what two-states would look like. If they agreed on both the fact that two-states were the ideal and how these states should look, we wouldn't need negotiations in the first place.

In short, proponents of one-state, such as Lustick, have a long way to go before they can make a persuasive case that a single state could ever offer a "non-catastrophic path into the future." ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

6) Israel, Palestine, and the dangers of magical thinking

Laura Friedman, Americans for Peace Now

September 18, 2013

It's easy to be dismissive of the idea that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will be solved through a negotiated two-state solution. Libraries are filled with books about failed peace efforts. The daily news is replete with reports of developments that undermine a two-state outcome. Those who oppose two states are growing more powerful on both sides. And the impotence of the United States and international community when it comes to getting serious about this issue is so self-evident as to be cliché.

It's harder, however, to come up with alternatives to the two-state paradigm that don't sound like the musings of fanatics or fantasists. If not two states, then what? Extremists on both sides have a compelling answer: an entirely Jewish or Palestinian state from the river to the sea. Others who reject such zero-sum agendas, or perhaps some who just want to seem like they do, offer answers predicated on a kind of magical thinking in which Israelis and Palestinians, freed from the two-state paradigm, are eventually willing to deal more fairly and kindly with the other.

The latter thinking is at the core of a recent and controversial New York Times article. The article's author, Professor Ian Lustick, argues that the time has come to renounce the two-state solution and that, by doing so, it may make possible a brighter future for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Lustick will no doubt reject my criticism of his arguments out of hand, because I am what he calls a member of the "peace process industry." The implication being that my very employment depends on perpetuating the belief in the two-state solution, and therefore, my arguments are suspect. The truth is, I spend every day immersed both in the political realities of Washington and the realities on the ground in the region, where my colleagues in Peace Now work indefatigably to track and challenge settlement expansion.

I'm probably more aware than most of the daunting challenges facing any peace effort. And as a person who cares deeply about both Israelis and Palestinians, and who has spent close to two decades working on this issue, I have wrestled mightily with my basic assumptions, including the question: If not the two-state solution, then what?

What Lustick's article illustrates, better than anything else, is the inability of two-state critics to come up with a compelling answer to this question - even when afforded the incredible luxury of more than 2000 words in the nation's newspaper of record.

What he offers instead is a fantastical scenario in which, with the two-state solution off the table, things on the ground go from bad to worse - so much worse that people on both sides who possess common sense and the financial means abandon ship. Only then, Lustick suggests, will Israelis and Palestinians who remain in this embattled land - whether because they are ideologically committed to their cause or because they are too impoverished to relocate - spontaneously and contemporaneously transform into enlightened humanists, realizing that they are better off coexisting than fighting for what, until now, have for each side been viewed as core existential needs.

In this scenario, Zionism and Palestinian nationalism simply evaporate and common cause is found between various groups across religious, ethnic, and national divides. Ideological right-wing settlers discover that they actually want to live in harmony with their Palestinian neighbors, and those neighbors realize that the resources settlers stole - land, water, trees - are better shared than recovered. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

7) Why I oppose recognizing Israel as a Jewish state

Noam Sheizaf, +972

September 11, 2013

Early into his second term as prime minister, as he was presenting his conditions for negotiations with the Palestinian Authority, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu issued a new demand for any final status agreement, one which was absent from every previous round of talks, both formal and informal. Unlike his predecessors, Netanyahu wasn't satisfied with Palestinian recognition of the State of Israel, something the PLO did in 1988, and once again as part of the Oslo Accords. He wants them to recognize it as a Jewish state.

Like many of Netanyahu's policies, this last step was treated by many as another trick designed to prevent the diplomatic process ever reaching a conclusion; and the suspicion wasn't unfounded. In the past, Netanyahu was caught on camera boasting to settlers about his success in finding loopholes in the Oslo Accords and using them to derail the process. The demand to recognize Israel as a Jewish state could have been another carefully planted mine bound to detonate if a serious prospect of a two-state solution were to ever appear.

However, even if Netanyahu's demand was genuine and not part of his (non)negotiation strategy, it should be opposed – not just by the Palestinians but also by Israelis. Because a “Jewish” state – as opposed to a state whose culture is Jewish or is “a national homeland” for Jews – will always be a racist, discriminatory state.

Most mainstream Zionists would argue that “a Jewish State” is no different than a German state or an Italian state, or any similar nation-state whose identity is not based on the melting pot of an immigrant society (like the America model).

The citizenship model in those countries is based on blood-relations within a well-defined community; occasionally, they also carry with them some religious symbolism, like a cross or a crescent. Why shouldn't the Jews – arguably one of the oldest, most persecuted nations on earth – enjoy their own nation-state too?

But this argument is only half true: modern-day nationalities, especially post-World War II, have an inclusive dimension to them. A person might not be of German origin, but once he assumes German (or Italian or British) citizenship, he or she becomes German (or Italian or British) for all intents and purposes. They enjoy both the same legal rights and symbolic status as every other citizen, no matter how far back in the nation's history his family lineage goes.

In other words, the state's implementation of the term German is broad and inclusive, even if the historic German nationality remains exclusive. A person can be German but he or she can also be Jewish and German or Muslim and German or Turkish and German.

Jewish identity cannot and does not wish to be inclusive (in my mind, that's part of the beauty of Judaism – that it never tried to convert the non-believers). A state that sees itself as “a Jewish State” is inherently an exclusive state, because a person cannot become Palestinian-Jewish or Muslim-Jewish. Almost 25 percent of Israeli citizens are not Jews. That's way more than blacks or Latinos in America. If Israel is a Jewish State, that means that every fourth person cannot – ever – assign themselves or be assigned the state's core identity. He or she will probably be discriminated against both formally and in practice, but more importantly, this person will be deprived of the symbolic meaning of citizenship in the nation-state model. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

8) [Legally mandated destruction](#)

Ha'aretz editorial, September 22, 2013

This law is the law of the occupation, and the demolition of the village and prevention of humanitarian aid from reaching the villagers are inhumane.

Early last week, Civil Administration forces destroyed another village in the Jordan Valley, Khirbet Makhoul. Arriving at the site shortly after the demolition, Ha'aretz reporters witnessed the approximately 100 shocked villagers, flocks without their pens or water, and dozens of ruined buildings. Since that time, the army has forcibly prevented the proffering of any humanitarian aid to the now-shelterless villagers and their flocks. The army immediately demolished two huts built by volunteers and prohibited the unloading of tents trucked to the site by the International Red Cross and the aid group ACTED. On Friday, Israel Defense Forces soldiers shot stun grenades at the women of the human rights group Machsom Watch - which is assisting the villagers - and at other volunteers, and also attacked a French diplomat. The inhabitants of Khirbet Makhoul have been left with nothing.

This act of destruction is part of the general policy of evicting Palestinian inhabitants from the Jordan Valley. Since the beginning of the year, Israel has destroyed 142 dwellings and a much larger number of agricultural buildings in the area. Earthen embankments have been placed along the Jordan Valley's roads, impeding the freedom of movement of the inhabitants - mainly shepherds - and hundreds of signs warning of IDF firing zones have been installed near every tent encampment. Needless to say, the huge areas around the settlements in the region have never been declared military firing zones. While Palestinian shepherds and Bedouin who live in the area are not entitled to any sort of infrastructure, electricity or water, the settlers of the valley enjoy them in abundance. The goal is clear: To make the lives of the inhabitants so bitter that they will leave.

The decision to demolish Khirbet Makhoul was approved through all the proper channels. Demolition orders were issued as long as four years ago and, at the end of last month, the High Court of Justice rejected the villagers' petition, which claims they have been living in the village for decades and that the land belongs to them. Israel does not recognize their land-ownership documents, because they were issued by the Palestinian Authority and not by the Civil Administration.

This law is the law of the occupation, and the demolition of the village and prevention of humanitarian aid from reaching the villagers are inhuman acts. At a time when Israel is celebrating Sukkot - the Festival of Booths - dozens of people and their flocks have no roof over their heads and have been left to their fate.

9) Jews now minority in Israel and Territories

JJ Goldberg, Jewish Forward

September 19, 2013

One of the most common arguments in favor of the two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is the so-called demographic threat or demographic time-bomb. Proponents worry that if Israel continues to control the Palestinian territories, with or without formal annexation, the different birthrates of Jews and Arabs will eventually result in Jews being a minority in the territory under Israeli control. At that point Israel will no longer be a Jewish state — or, alternatively, will be a Jewish state with a non-Jewish majority that is disenfranchised because of its ethnic identity. There's a word for that. I won't say it, but I'll note that it's Afrikaans in origin.

How far off such a situation might be is a topic of considerable debate. Some say the threshold will be crossed within a decade or less. Others suggest a longer timeline is possible. A few on the right believe there's no threat at all, either because Jewish and Arab fertility rates are converging or because Palestinian population figures are inflated. By and large, though, demography appears to be a very mainstream worry.

Well, worry no more. It turns out we're there already. Comparing the annual Rosh Hashanah population report from Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics, released September 2, with the midyear (July 1) population figures for the West Bank and Gaza in the CIA World Factbook, it turns out that Jews are now (as of Rosh Hashanah) outnumbered by Arabs under Israeli sovereignty by a grand total of 50,827. So the question is no longer whether or when the Jewish state will feature a minority ruling a majority. The question now is what to do about it.

Here are the numbers:

Palestinian Arabs, West Bank: 2,676,740

Palestinian Arabs, Gaza Strip: 1,763,387

(Total Palestinians, Israeli military-administered territories: 4,440,127)

Israeli Arabs (citizens): 1,666,800

Total Arabs under Israeli sovereign administration: 6,106,927

Israeli Jews: 6,056,100

A few notes on the figures: First, if you're checking sources, note that the new population report from the Israeli statistics bureau is in Hebrew only. The bureau's English site doesn't yet have this year's numbers. Here's the Jerusalem Post's English-language news report with rounded-off figures.

Second, the West Bank page in the CIA World Factbook states that the West Bank population includes two "ethnic groups," "Palestinian Arab and other 83%, Jewish 17%." It goes on to note that there were "approximately 325,000 Israeli settlers" living in the West Bank in 2011 (the figure is pretty close to the Israeli government's figure for that year; East Jerusalem is listed separately), which raises the question of whether or not the total West Bank population figure includes the settlers. That would bring the total Arab population down below the Jewish population and make this whole blog post moot.

However, Ha'aretz published a photo of the IDF West Bank civil administration's report on the Palestinian (Arab) population for May 2012 (2,657,029) and it was a pretty close match to the CIA's figure for that year (2,623,000). Neither one included Jewish settlers. ...

[Read the entire piece at Forward.com.](#)

10) Call it what you like, Israeli rule over Palestinians always breaches their human rights
Nadia Ben-Youssef, Suhad Bishara and Rina Rosenberg, Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP)
Open Democracy, September 19, 2013

Al-Araqib is a Palestinian Bedouin village in Israel whose residents are Israeli citizens. As of September 2013, Israel has destroyed the village 56 times to make way for two Jewish National Fund (JNF) forests. Susiya is a Palestinian village in Area C of the West Bank whose residents live under Israeli occupation. The majority of structures in Susiya are subject to demolition orders and Israel intends to forcibly displace the community to clear the land for Jewish settlement. Separated by mere kilometers and the notorious “Green Line,” the villages share a single story of struggle against forced displacement.

Regardless of their location and the geo-political and legal contexts, the Israeli authorities threaten the very existence of these communities through similar methods and policies.

By their continued presence, these communities directly challenge their displacement, and seek avenues to effectively affirm their right to remain. A human rights-based approach offers a conceptual framework that correctly focuses on the individuals and communities whose rights are being violated, wherever they are, and demands only that the violations cease. It is not rigid in terms of analyzing issues within separate legal contexts – one for Israel, one for the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT); as both are not only incapable of halting the violation of Palestinians’ rights, but have also long upheld a paradigm that is divorced from the facts on the ground.

Below, the stories of the villages of Al-Araqib and Susiya highlight the various methods used by Israel to forcibly displace Palestinians, wherever they are. Perhaps the most effective method is the complex matrix of laws and regulations that Israel has created in order to “legally” displace communities, in contravention of all existing human rights norms. It is only through a human rights-based approach that we can demand these protections for Palestinians, the victims and rights holders, and accountability from Israel, the perpetrator and duty-bearer, freed from political and strategic restraints.

Forced displacement involves the “involuntary removal of persons from their homes or land, directly or indirectly attributable to the State.” States are not permitted to forcibly displace people from their homes or land, except in strictly-defined and exceptional circumstances, and always with utmost respect for their rights. Today, Israel continues to displace Palestinian communities located within its sphere of control in Israel and in the OPT.

The story of Al-Araqib: Al-Araqib is an “unrecognized” Bedouin village located in the Naqab/Negev desert in southern Israel whose residents are Palestinian citizens of Israel who have been living in their ancestral village for over two centuries. Israel first displaced the people from their village in 1951, by appropriating their land for alleged “security purposes” under the Land Acquisition Law (Actions and Compensation) (1953). In 1998, around 45 families decided to return, fearing that the JNF planned to plant a forest on their land, establishing facts on the ground that would finally sever their historic ties. Since their return, the village has faced a barrage of direct and indirect methods of displacement.

As an “unrecognized village” the state denies Al-Araqib access to basic services and infrastructure including water, electricity, sewerage, roads, schools and health care. In 2003 and 2004, the ILA began aerially spraying the cultivated fields of Al-Araqib with a toxic chemical, causing harm to people, crops and livestock. The state and JNF began planting the “Ambassadors’ Forest” in 2006 on the southern part of Al-Araqib, and in 2009, the JNF and God-TV channel began planting a million trees on the western lands of the village. On 27 July 2010, the Israel Land Authority (ILA) and over 1,000 police razed the entire village, leaving over 300 villagers homeless and displacing most to a government-planned township. ...

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

11) The Oslo Accords 20 years on: Doesn't time fly when you're having fun?

Haim Bresheeth, Ahramonline, September 20, 2013

Amidst the press and media brouhaha in July about the “amazing success” (now all but forgotten) of John Kerry in “restarting” the longest-lasting and the least productive “peace process” known to man, it was easy to overlook the fact that two decades have passed since that fateful set of agreements were signed by Rabin, Arafat and Peres, leading them to the Nobel Peace Prize lectern, and Premier Rabin also to his death at the hand of an extremist Jewish assassin.

Had 20 years really passed? And what have we to show for it?

Well, not a lot, if you are a Palestinian. The agreements which, at best, could lead to a small Bantustan, the parts of which would be connected by tunnels and bridges, have led to a very large network of tiny mini-stans, connected not by roads but by the internet, in the main.

The Palestinian Authority, as Arafat once mused, was allowed only the killing of mosquitoes in its limited reign, now has the unenviable task of securing, not their own population, but the Israelis instead. They do not control much – certainly not the roads, airspace, territorial waters, water resources, electricity, ports and airports, or even their own border crossings. They have not got their own currency, and so cannot employ any financial machinery in the PA areas, let alone any serious attempt at rebuilding the Palestinian economy, which, before 1967, was the richer part of the Jordanian economy, and self-sufficient.

That the policemen controlling the Palestinian population are themselves Palestinians is certainly not impressive enough to stop Israeli snatch-and-kill squads from periodically entering the PA territories to carry out extra-judicial assassinations, or to stop Israel from bombing Gaza and its inhabitants on a constant basis.

To cross from one part of the West Bank to another may take not just many long hours, but sometimes days. Israel controls the whole of Palestine, as it did before the Accords were signed, but now it is able to seal off areas much more easily than before. Of course, Israel has never carried out the series of withdrawals which were intended, by those liberals who believed in the Accords, supposedly to lead to a two-state solution, itself never mentioned in the Accords.

It is safe to say we are as far away from such a solution as we always were, if not further. Palestine is a patchwork of local communities, separated by a Jews-only system of roads, roadblocks, and the army of occupation – the so-called IDF. There is no Palestinian state and nor is there likely to be one in the near future.

The PLO was allowed back from Tunis, yes – but only for the task of securitising the Israeli population. The armed struggle is ended, for all intents and purposes. Not a single settlement was vacated in the West Bank, and the ones in the Gaza Strip were abandoned in order to make the whole of the Strip more open for Israeli airstrikes and naval attacks as well as Israeli tanks. Well, it does not amount to much, does it?

What was achieved is more significant, if you are on the Israeli side of the apartheid fence. Israel, which had to fork out billions every year in order to securitize the continuation of its occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, has managed to outsource the cost, as a result of the Oslo Accords. This cost is now born by the U.S. and EU, instead. ...

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

12) [Abbas insists Mideast peace deal must be “permanent”](#)

AFP and Ma'an News, September 26, 2013

NEW YORK (AFP) -- President Mahmoud Abbas on [September 26] demanded that any peace deal with Israel be permanent, calling new U.S.-brokered talks a "last chance."

Speaking before the UN General Assembly, Abbas urged international pressure to stop Israeli settlement building on Palestinian land.

"Time is running out, and the window of peace is narrowing and the opportunities are diminishing," Abbas said.

"The current round of negotiations appears to be a last chance to realize a just peace," he said.

Abbas, who has frequently turned to the United Nations to build support, began his speech by voicing pride at being introduced as "president of the state of Palestine" -- following a UN vote in November to grant it observer status.

Abbas said that the peace process with Israel -- relaunched after exhaustive missions by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry -- needed to result in a permanent peace.

"We refuse to enter into a vortex of a new interim agreement that becomes externalized," Abbas said.

"Our objective is to achieve a permanent and comprehensive agreement and a peace treaty between the states of Palestine and Israel that resolves all outstanding issues and answers all questions," he said.

Abbas urged international action against Israeli settlements, praising the European Union decision to label products from the internationally condemned units.

"The international community is asked to remain alert to condemn and stop any actions on the ground that would undermine negotiations," Abbas said.

"I refer here, above all, to the continuation of settlement construction on our Palestinian land, particularly in Jerusalem," he said.

Read the transcript of President Mahmoud Abbas's September 26, 2013 address to the UNGA on the Mondoweiss website [here](#).

13) Barghouthi: "Israel used peace talks to implement apartheid"

Saed Bannoura, IMEMC, September 25, 2013

Palestinian legislator, Secretary-General of the Palestinian National Initiative Dr. Mustafa Barghouthi, stated that the Oslo peace agreement is a big failure, and that Israel is the only party the benefits from this treaty.

Marking the twentieth anniversary of signing the first Oslo peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Dr. Barghouthi said that agreement was transitional and partial, and did not carry any characteristics of the main goal of peace talks.

"This allowed Israel implement a system of apartheid, by significantly escalating its settlement activities, and the theft of Palestinian lands, Israel is using the peace deal as a cover-up for its violations," the Palestinian official added.

He also said that some of the failure aspects of this agreement is that it failed to include the release of all Palestinians held by Israel, and issue that kept all detainees, who were held before Oslo, behind bars for additional 20 years.

"The agreement was signed without any commitments from Israel to stop its settlement activities," Dr. Barghouthi stated, "This is why former chief negotiator, Dr. Haider Abdul-Shafi, and many others, quits talks; the number of Israeli settlers increased from 160,000 by the time Oslo was signed to 650,000."

Dr. Barghouthi said that the Oslo Agreement was not signed between two equal partners, forcing the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) to recognize Israel as a state, while Tel Aviv only recognized the PLO as the representative of the Palestinian People without recognize the Palestinian right to a state in the 1967 border.

"Those serious mistakes led to disastrous consequences allowing Israel to divide the occupied territories into areas A, B and C, giving it the change to build and expand settlements, and the Apartheid Wall," he said. "The wall was built 25 kilometers deep into the West Bank, isolating and confiscating large areas of lands and orchards, and isolated Jerusalem from its surrounding Arab areas."

Furthermore, the official said that Oslo divided the Palestinian people, and their national movements, in addition to causing dividing the refugees in exile, and weakening the role of the PLO by transforming it into a government instead of a liberation movement.

He also accused Israel of only implementing what is good for the state, and of obliging the Palestinians to remain committed to the agreements and all agreements that following, including the Paris Economic Agreement.

"All issues of this conflict were supposed to be resolved by 1999 through a final status agreement," Dr. Barghouthi said. "But what happened is that Israel transformed the temporary agreement into a permanent one, and enforced its social, political and economic apartheid policies on the Palestinians."

He said that the Palestinian leadership should adopt a new policy by increasing national resistance activities, by boycotting Israel, by working on the international level to boycott all Israeli products, and different institutions.

"The Palestinians must end all internal divisions, form a unified leadership that can place economic strategies that support the people, counter increasing living costs," the official said. "We need a compressive unity between all Palestinians in Palestine and in exile."

14) Far from ambivalent
Jonathan Cook, The Majalla Blog,
September 26, 2013

An interview last week with Michael Oren, Israel's outgoing ambassador to the United Nations, has added to the already significant confusion about the country's goals in the civil war raging across the border in Syria. And that is how Israel prefers it.

According to Oren, contrary to appearances, Israel has been far from ambivalent about who emerges victorious from the fighting between Bashar Assad's regime and the rebels — a ragbag of secular and Islamist groups, some of the latter allied with Al-Qaeda. Rather than preferring "the devil we know," as many Israeli officials have observed of Assad and his father ("devils" who kept the border with Israel remarkably quiet for decades) Oren says Israel has been quietly cheering on the rebels from the outset and that it was in fact hoping for Assad's downfall "well before the outbreak of hostilities."

In Oren's words, "[Israel] always preferred the bad guys who weren't backed by Iran to the bad guys who were backed by Iran." That suggests Israel prefers a Syria controlled by Sunni opposition groups — possibly including those aligned with Al-Qaeda — to the current Alawite-dominated Assad government. "The greatest danger to Israel is [from] the strategic arc that extends from Tehran, to Damascus to Beirut. And we saw the Assad regime as the keystone in that arc," Oren continued.

Although any public pronouncement by an Israeli official on this matter should be treated with caution, Oren's assessment usefully points to some of Israel's long-term thinking in its "battlefield diplomacy." Israel has viewed its regional policy primarily through the lens of an obsession with Iran since at least the early 1990s, after the first Gulf war and the U.S. sanctions regime started to erode neighbouring Iraq's countervailing influence.

In 1994 Aluf Benn, a young Israeli analyst — and today the editor-in-chief of Israel's most respected newspaper, Ha'aretz — noted Israel's most pressing concern: "Iran could aspire to regional hegemony and ruin the peace process by virtue of having nuclear weapons ... of exporting terrorism and revolution and of subverting Arab secular regimes."

Once the self-serving language is stripped away from this sentence, the logic driving Israel's policy for the past 20 years is laid bare: Israel fears that a genuine military rival in the region, one that challenges its nuclear monopoly, will undermine its position as the neighbourhood enforcer and erode its influence in the corridors of Washington. A weak Israel would not be able to drag out an endless and pointless "peace process," or receive billions of dollars in hand-outs from the U.S. each year. At some point Israel would have to hand over the occupied territories, or — still worse, from its point of view — abandon its ethnocratic character, designed to privilege Jews over the native Palestinian population.

Israel's concerns with Iran have only grown over the past decade. Back in 2003 Israel's ideological allies in Washington, the neo-conservatives, advanced the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq, finishing-off Saddam Hussein. At the time, Israel quietly cheered the break-up of Iraq, but only because it assumed this would be promptly followed by a similar strike against Iran. Instead, the Bush administration buckled in the face of strong opposition from the oil industry and much of the military. As a result, Iran's influence grew, forcing Israel to warn endlessly that Tehran was only months away from acquiring a "doomsday" nuclear weapon. Ten years later Israel is concerned that those mistakes are not repeated in Syria.

From Israel's perspective, there are key differences between Iraq in 2003 and Syria in 2013: Iraq was a counterweight to Iranian influence; Syria is an ally of Iran, even if not always the most enthusiastic one.

...

[Read the entire piece on Cook's blog.](#)