



OPINION and ANALYSIS

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A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East

<http://www.sazionfed.co.za>

**(1) "Islamophobia Dictionaries" and New Mega-Mosques: A Survey of Islam in Europe:
September 2013**

Soeren Kern, Gatestone Institute, 9 October 2013

In Denmark, construction crews raised the first-ever minaret on September 3 that will alter Copenhagen's low-rise skyline in a colossal project to build the biggest mega-mosque in Scandinavia. The so-called Grand Mosque was made possible through a grant of 150 million kroner (\$26 million) from Qatar. This gift has led critics voice concern that the mosque will become a mouthpiece for radical Islam in Denmark.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4004/islamophobia-dictionaries>

(2) Israel's final warning on Iran

Yaakov Lappin, Gatestone Institute, 7 October 2013

With no military threat, Iran has no incentive to stop its nuclear progress. Iran might well conclude that the sanctions could disappear in the course of endless rounds of diplomacy. No one in Israel seeks war, but a central tenet of its own defence doctrine is that it cannot depend on any external power to deal with existential security threats.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4007/israel-warning-iran>

(3) The importance of self-doubt

Maj. Gen. Aviv Kochavi, Israel Hayom, 6 October 2013

The gigantic discrepancy between the facts and their analysis can be explained in many ways, but the most striking and important of them all was the sense of exaggerated overconfidence and the lack of doubt about what the enemy was planning to do, and under what conditions.

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_opinion.php?id=5883

(4) Arab leaders wary of potential US Iran thaw

Avi Issacharoff, The Times of Israel, 4 October 2013

Certain countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE, have good reason to lack faith in the credibility of Tehran's new media-based outreach strategy. Iran's potential nuclear capabilities are not the only threat these Arab leaders face. The persistent efforts made by Iran's Revolutionary Guards to induce instability among the Shiite populations in their countries are cause for constant concern.

http://www.timesofisrael.com/arab-leaders-wary-of-potential-us-iran-thaw/?utm_source=The+Times+of+Israel+Daily+Edition&utm_campaign=57222a3555-2013_10_05&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_adb46cec92-57222a3555-54389993

(5) If needed, Israel will stand alone
Isi Leibler, Jerusalem Post, 3 October 2013

Netanyahu must continue on his mission and penetrate the American psyche until they accept that the threat Iran poses is real and immediate, and if left unchecked will allow history to repeat itself in a most terrible way

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Candidly-Speaking-If-needed-Israel-will-stand-alone-327842>

(6) What Abbas missed in his UN speech
Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 2 October 2013

Abbas is more concerned about Jews visiting the Temple Mount than thousands of Palestinians who are being butchered and expelled from their homes in Arab countries; he sees evil only in the actions of Israel and Jewish settlers.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4001/abbas-un-speech>

(7) Netanyahu's Iran obsession is a diversion from Palestine
Daoud Kuttab, Al Monitor Palestine Pulse, 2 October 2013

Netanyahu's obsession with Iran runs counter to the current US and global position, which has settled on giving the Rouhani administration the benefit of the doubt. Instead of joining his own allies in the "trust but verify" contingent, Netanyahu chose one-upmanship.

<http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/10/netanyahu-iran-red-line.html>

(8) Funds from European governments support an "erase Israel" conference
Yitzhak Santis, Jerusalem Post, 30 September 2013

That two refugee populations resulted from the Arab-Israeli conflict, one Jewish, one Arab, is ignored by this conference's organizers and funders. With all their moralistic rhetoric of refugee rights being "of utmost importance" "in any context," these Christian groups are mute about the rights of nearly a million Jewish refugees from Arab states, and millions of their descendants.

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Op-Ed-Contributors/Funds-from-European-governments-support-an-erase-Israel-conference-327506>

1) "Islamophobia Dictionaries" and New Mega-Mosques: A Survey of Islam in Europe (September 2013)

From Britain to Greece, and Spain to Slovenia, Muslim immigration and the accompanying

rise of Islam are transforming the European way of life in ways unimaginable only a few years ago. What follows is a brief survey of 20 noteworthy stories involving Islam in Europe during just the month of September 2013.

In Britain, the Department of Education revealed that it is recruiting former agents of the British secret service, MI5, to investigate the alleged infiltration of British schools by Islamic extremists. The agents will form part of a new counter-extremism unit, established to investigate schools in which radical activity has been suspected. Speaking to the *Sunday Times* on September 29, Education Secretary Michael Gove said some schools are being "taken over" by Muslim hardliners in the hope of radicalizing pupils and staff. He also said he was determined to "weed out" schools whose practices do not conform to British values.

A survey published by the BBC on September 25 revealed that more than a quarter of young British people distrust Muslims and feel Britain would be better off if there were fewer of them in the country. Of the 1,000 young people questioned in the survey conducted by ComRes, a leading market research agency, 27% of 18-to-24-year-olds said they did not trust Muslims, while 28% said Britain would be better off with fewer Muslims. It also emerged that 60% thought the British public had a negative image of Muslims, and 44% said Muslims do not have the same values as the rest of the population.

A separate survey published by Lord Ashcroft Polls on September 1, showed that six in ten Britons thought immigration had produced more disadvantages than advantages for their country; only 17% thought the pros outweighed the cons. The biggest concerns were about migrants claiming benefits or using public services without having contributed in return.

Elsewhere in Britain, a judge on September 16 ordered a Muslim defendant to take off her full-face veil to give evidence in court. But -- in a case that made legal history -- he said the woman could retain the veil for all other parts of her trial. Judge Peter Murphy said the court should recognize "freedom of religious expression," but that allowing her to retain the niqab during her evidence, as she wanted, would "drive a coach and horses through justice administered in England and Wales for centuries." Murphy said "the niqab has become the elephant in the courtroom" and there was widespread anxiety among judges over how to tackle the issue. He added that he hoped "Parliament or a higher court will provide a definite answer to the issue soon;" and that "If judges in different cases in different places took differing approaches [to the niqab] the result would be judicial anarchy."

In other news, a total of 186 Muslim inmates at three different prisons are suing the British government, claiming their human rights were violated after tests confirmed that halal food being served to them contained pork meat. A total of 11,248 Muslim prisoners make up 13.1% of the jail population in Britain. The legal cases come amid fears of a growing "culture-of-being-compensated" among prisoners. More than £60 million (\$97 million) was paid to criminals, prison staff and visitors to British jails over the past four years for prison-related incidents.

On September 12, the Birmingham Metropolitan College reversed a ban on Islamic veils after Muslim students complained of discrimination, and launched an online petition drive that gathered more than 8,000 signatures in just two days. The college backed away from its ban just hours before a mass demonstration by hundreds of Muslim students threatened to disrupt the normal functioning of the college.

In Denmark, construction crews in Copenhagen raised the country's first-ever minaret on September 3. The 20-meter (65-foot) tower-like structure that will alter Copenhagen's low-rise skyline is the finishing touch on a colossal project to build the biggest mega-mosque in Scandinavia. The so-called Grand Mosque, which will cater to Sunni Muslims, was made

possible thanks to a 150 million kroner (\$26 million) donation from the Persian Gulf Emirate of Qatar. This gift has led critics to voice concerns that the mosque will become a mouthpiece for radical Islam in Denmark.

In France, a new "Dictionary of Islamophobia" published on September 13 systematically takes the words and expressions spoken by politicians, journalists, intellectuals, artists and writers in France and claims to show how "Islamophobia is becoming commonplace today." Each entry in the 366-page dictionary provides the context and an explanation of the offending words. The book calls for vigilance to advance the concept of "living together."

In Germany, the state of Lower Saxony on September 30 signed a preliminary "state treaty" with local Muslim representatives to recognize Islam as an official religion. The document addresses 30 specific grievances presented by the Muslim community, which constitutes around 7% of the overall population of the state. According to the minister-president of Lower Saxony, Stephen Weil, "A mutual skepticism has occurred in the past and our government wishes to show its respect to the Muslims with this treaty." Similar "treaties" have recently been signed in Bremen and Hamburg.

Also in Germany, judges at the Federal Administrative Court in Leipzig on September 11 ordered a Muslim schoolgirl to take part in mixed-sex swimming lessons. Her parents had insisted that the girl, 13, not take part in swimming lessons at her school in Frankfurt because she felt "uncomfortable" going swimming with "bare chested" boys near her. She either wanted to be allowed to skip the lessons or be given special instruction on her own. The court ruled that the "social reality of life in Germany came above her religious beliefs," and ordered her to attend swimming lessons wearing a full-body-covering garment known as a "burkini," in order to accommodate her beliefs.

Meanwhile, a dispute in Berlin over efforts by multiculturalists to ban Christmas was resolved on September 19 after Mayor Klaus Wowereit stepped in to declare that Christmas is still legal. A row erupted after the left-leaning Green Party in the Kreuzberg district of Berlin announced that the traditional Christmas markets that have taken place in the neighborhood for generations would henceforth be held under the religiously-neutral term, "Winterfest." Muslims make up roughly one-third of the population in Kreuzberg. Wowereit said he had received complaints about the ban from angry people all across Germany and said the dispute had harmed Berlin's reputation.

In Greece, Infrastructure Minister Michalis Chrysochoidis on September 17 announced the fourth auctioning of the project for the construction of a taxpayer-funded mega-mosque in Athens. The three previous competitions to build the mosque in the Votanikos area of Athens took place on July 9, 18 and 26 but failed to attract suitable bids after some companies say they had received threats from groups opposed to the mosque. Critics of the mosque say Athens, which is being kept afloat by an international bailout, cannot spare the one million euros (\$1.4 million) it will cost, considering that Greece is in a sixth year of recession, with record high unemployment and sinking living standards.

In Iceland, the Reykjavík City Council on September 19 approved a building permit for the construction of the first mosque in the country. Members of the city council -- which is led by Reykjavík Mayor Jón Gnarr, who identifies himself as an anarchist -- say they hope the prime location will make the mosque a prominent landmark in the city. Critics of the mosque, however, say the project is being financed by donors in the Middle East who are seeking to exert control over -- and radicalize -- the growing Muslim community in Iceland.

In Italy, Mohammed is now the most common name among small business entrepreneurs in Milan, the country's main industrial, commercial and financial center. According to a new

report published by the Milan Chamber of Commerce on September 3, more companies were established over the past twelve months by men named Mohammed than by those named Joseph (second place) and Marco (third place). Mohammed also outnumbered other traditional Italian names such as Giuseppe, Luca, Andrea, Roberto and Antonio. This development -- a reflection of the broad changes taking place in Italian society due to mass immigration -- marks the first time that Muslim business owners have displaced native Italians from the top spot of the annual list of company startups.

Meanwhile, the United Nations Refugee Agency said, on September 13, that nearly 6,000 Syrians have arrived in Italy so far this year, a massive spike from 369 refugees in 2012. On September 25, three boats carrying more than 700 asylum-seekers landed on the Mediterranean island of Lampedusa, the southernmost point of Italy and a major gateway for illegal immigration into the European Union. On September 14, the Italian Coast Guard said it rescued 800 migrants in three different vessels off the coast of Sicily. On September 7, the Italian Coast Guard intercepted another 700 asylum-seekers off the coast of Syracuse.

In Slovenia, Muslims laid the foundation stone of the country's first mosque in the capital Ljubljana on September 14. Construction of the mosque is expected to begin in earnest in November and is projected to take three years at a cost of some €12 million (\$16 million). Around 70% of the construction costs are being paid for by, again, Qatar. Slovenia, a mostly Catholic country of two million people, has a Muslim population of 50,000.

In Spain, an annual report published by the Attorney General's Office on September 19 says that radical Islam is gaining in strength in Spain, and warns of a "high risk" of jihadist-inspired terrorist attacks. The report says Spain is repeatedly mentioned in online jihadist websites, and is the focus of irredentist claims to Al Andalus, the Arabic name given to those parts of Spain, Portugal and France that were occupied by Muslim conquerors (also known as the Moors) from 711 to 1492.

Also in Spain, police on September 16 arrested Yassin Ahmed Laarbi, the alleged ringleader of an Al-Qaeda jihadist network recruiting fighters for the war in Syria. Laarbi, alias Pistu, was arrested in Ceuta, a Spanish exclave in northern Africa. He is believed to be the head of a cell of eight men who were arrested in a police operation on June 21. At the time, Laarbi successfully eluded police. The network was engaged in recruiting, indoctrinating and facilitating the movement of dozens of Islamists to training camps and war zones, particularly in Syria. Spanish police say they have evidence that dozens of jihadists traveled from Ceuta and Morocco to Syria with the help of this network.

Meanwhile, hundreds of migrants stormed the Spanish border with Morocco on September 17, in the latest in a wave of thousands of migrants trying to reach Spain. Around 300 migrants tore down part of the six-meter (20-foot) high fence around Melilla, a Spanish exclave bordering northern Morocco, and about 100 made it through. In a separate incident, another 350 migrants tried to reach Spain's other North African territory, Ceuta, by swimming to one of its beaches from a nearby Moroccan shore.

In Switzerland, Ticino became the first Swiss canton to approve a ban on face-covering headgear in public places, following a vote on September 22. Just over 65% of voters in the Italian-speaking canton voted in favor of the change to the law. The Ticino initiative did not explicitly target Muslims -- the phrasing voted on was, "nobody in public streets or squares may veil or hide their face" -- but in practice it means women in Islamic burkas and niqabs.

(2) Israel's final warning on Iran

The coming weeks probably represent the last opportunity for Iran and the international community to reach an enforceable deal that will dismantle Tehran's nuclear weapons program, before Israel concludes that time has run out, that Iran has gotten too close to creating its first atomic bombs, and that the time for a military strike has arrived.

Despite Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's well-planned and deceptive charm offensive at the United Nations last week, so far not a single uranium-enriching centrifuge has stopped spinning in the underground nuclear facilities in Natanz and Qom. The heavy water plutonium facility at Arak is moving forward, and Iran has already amassed enough low-enriched uranium for the production of seven to nine atomic bombs.

The speech given by Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu at the United Nations last week, in which he warned that Israel would act alone against Iran if it needed to, is an authentic warning, and serves a dual purpose.

First, the speech reintroduces a credible military threat and aims it squarely at the Islamic Republic.

This notice is important as deterrence against Iran has waned significantly since August, when President Barack Obama hesitantly climbed down from his commitment to carry out a military strike on Iran's ally, the Syrian regime, over its use of chemical weapons to massacre civilians.

A diminished threat of military force leaves diplomatic efforts with Iran almost no chance of success: it leaves Iran with virtually no incentive to stop its nuclear progress, despite the painful economic sanctions it faces.

With no military threat, Iran might well conclude that the sanctions could disappear in the course of endless rounds of diplomacy, in which skilled Iranian negotiators would succeed in getting some of the sanctions lifted while giving up very little in return.

Many of America's allies in the Middle East are very concerned about the lack of deterrence; and Netanyahu, keen to ensure that he has given talks with Iran all possible opportunities before taking matters into his own hands, has placed the military threat firmly back on the table, lest Iran forget that even if the U.S. will not act militarily any time soon, Israel most certainly will if it must.

The second purpose of Netanyahu's speech was to put the international community on notice regarding the urgency of the situation, and to send the message that even if many in the West have fallen for Iran's "campaign of smiles," Israel has not, and if Israeli concerns are neglected, action will be taken.

Should the international community continue to allow Iran to buy more time for its nuclear program, as it has done for more than a decade, after Netanyahu's warning, it will not be able to respond with surprise when Israel attacks Iran's nuclear sites.

Israel's leadership has long since concluded that a nuclear-armed Iranian regime -- a regime that is doctrinally and theologically committed to Israel's destruction, and that controls a state-sponsored terrorist network, active worldwide -- is an outcome many times more dangerous than any military attack.

Israel's defence establishment recognizes that stringent U.S.-led economic sanctions have forced Iran to the negotiating table. But senior officials, such as Israel's Defence Minister Moshe Ya'alon, have warned that merely arriving for negotiations and offering "sweet talk" is no reason to reward Iran by easing sanctions. On the contrary, easing sanctions now would *guarantee* that talks will fail.

Similarly, any agreement that allows Iran to continue to enrich uranium under the guise of a civilian energy program will simply enshrine Iran's position as a nuclear breakout state. Only tangible, verifiable steps that will ensure Iran is pushed back by years from its current progress could be considered an accomplishment.

Against the background of these developments, it is worth bearing in mind that the core of Jerusalem's defence doctrine holds that Israel cannot depend on any foreign power -- even its most trusted ally, the United States -- to deal with an existential security threat.

Israel's clock, which gauges Iranian nuclear progress, ticks faster than that of America's, due to Israel's lesser strike capabilities, its smaller size, its closer proximity to Iran, and ultimately, because Israel is the openly and repeatedly declared number one target of Iran's ambition to destroy it.

If Israel misses its window of opportunity to act, such a lapse would violate a central tenet of its own defense doctrine -- that Israel cannot depend on any external power to deal with existential security threats -- thereby making that option unthinkable. Once Israeli intelligence agencies and senior military command levels conclude that the clock has struck one minute to midnight, no amount of pressure from allies will succeed in dissuading it from acting in self-preservation.

A military strike would not be a goal in itself, as Iran could go right back to reactivating its program, but it would be a last resort designed to accomplish what years of talks could not: to push Iran back from the nuclear brink.

Israel's strike capabilities remain a closely guarded secret, but according to international media reports, the Israel Air Force has more than 100 F15i and F16i fighter jets that can fly to Iran and return without the need to refuel, as well as, for other jets, advanced midair refuelling capabilities that would allow them to strike multiple Iranian targets. According to the reports, Israel also possesses long-range Jericho ground-to-ground missiles.

Any strike, moreover, would be unimaginable without the Israel Defence Force's advanced electronic warfare units.

In the event that Iran orders its Lebanese proxy, Hezbollah to retaliate with tens of thousands of rockets and missiles on the Israeli home front, Israel could respond with devastating air force strikes using new weapons systems, and a lightning ground invasion of southern Lebanon to extinguish quickly the rocket attacks and leave Hezbollah on the ropes.

No one in Israel seeks war, and few dispute that a diplomatic solution that can really freeze the threat from Tehran is the most desired outcome.

But so far, beyond empty gestures, Iran has given no indication that it is prepared to give up its program, and time is running out.

(3) The importance of self-doubt

On the eve of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, an intelligence overview was presented to the government, which included 37 articles describing the enemy's intensive preparations on all fronts. The pinnacle of the overview was "Article 40" -- which has since become synonymous with a severe intelligence failure. It stated that, "The probability that the Egyptians intend to go to war is low."

The problem was not with the information, rather with how it was interpreted and how the Israel Defence Forces prepared as a result. The gigantic discrepancy between the facts and their analysis can be explained in many ways, but the most striking and important of them all was the sense of exaggerated overconfidence and the lack of doubt about what the enemy was planning to do, and under what conditions. This overconfidence, among other factors, stemmed from a series of prior successes.

An organization that has won a number of successes, which alongside the pride in its accomplishments does not ask itself if those same successes could not have been achieved faster, more efficiently, or with greater accuracy -- inches closer to sliding down a slippery slope; an organization that is content and does not promote the constant presence of doubt and unease -- is paving its way toward failure.

Military Intelligence has known extraordinary accomplishments in recent years. The breadth of information is enormous, of a high quality, and the technology and operations that make it possible improves on a daily basis. The quality of analysis and assessment is good, and even if it is not devoid of mistakes the analysis is even-keeled and in-depth.

All these factors contribute to a sense of self-confidence but at the same time create dangers. There is nothing wrong with being self-confident, but with two caveats: that it does not become overconfidence; and that alongside this feeling of self-assurance, and in a balanced manner, doubt will be harvested and consistently maintained. Confidence is not the opposite of doubt. Confidence is required to act with free instead of cramped thought, and confidence is a precondition for flexibility and daring. However, true self-questioning is the profound understanding that the scope of knowledge is limited, that another interpretation is possible, that other operational, technological or intelligence options exist. Doubt creates an atmosphere of unease, which invites constant re-clarification and the desire to learn and improve. Experience, though, has taught us that doubt is a cumbersome beast, sleepy and lazy and not easily stirred from its slumber.

The key to maintaining organizational sharpness is to cultivate self-questioning and positioning it at the forefront of the mind in any decision we make, particularly when it comes to important matters. We must make constant use of the tools and organizational systems at our disposal that highlight doubt and facilitate debate, questioning and looking at reality from different angles.

Simultaneously, doubt cannot be allowed to paralyze the system! It cannot foster ambiguity or lack of opinion. Military Intelligence must be a relevant and effective organization; it must be innovative and forge new paths.

Cultivating doubt will spur breakthroughs in new directions; self-confidence will foster decision making and action, and the risks that come with innovation will place our self-doubt, if we have the wisdom to develop it, as a safety barrier on both sides of the road.

Self-doubt and self-confidence need to be intertwined. They must both spark action and motivate, and doubt can also function as a safeguard.

Our scriptures teach, "Happy is the man who feareth always" (Proverbs 28:14). We should say, "Happy is the intelligence officer who worryeth always."

(4) Arab leaders wary of potential US Iran thaw

Most leaders in the Arab world have been cautious, some to an extreme, when discussing the recent thaw in US-Iran relations.

Some have even appeared to fall in line with Israel's worried position on the issue. After all, countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the UAE, have good reason to lack faith in the credibility of Tehran's new media-based outreach strategy.

Iran's potential nuclear capabilities are not the only threat these Arab leaders face. The persistent efforts made by Iran's Revolutionary Guards to induce instability among the Shiite populations in their countries are cause for constant concern.

At this point, though, Arab states have shown a preference not to directly condemn Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, or his new "clear-eyed" American negotiating partner President Barack Obama.

In an interview this week for the London-based Al-Hayat newspaper, the foreign minister of Bahrain, Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammad Al Khalifa, said that US Secretary of State John Kerry assured the Gulf Cooperation Council that the US would not make a single move in the region without first consulting with its local allies.

He said that the only difference in Iran so far is the type of speeches and declarations being made, but that Bahrain would welcome any real actions and stability that may stem from those declarations.

The leaders of the majority of the Sunni Arab countries seem willing to wait for October 15th - the date of the next scheduled meeting between Iran and the P5+1 in Geneva - to decide whether the Iranians are just trying to buy time once again, or if they really intend to present a proposal that will pave the way toward an agreement with the international community regarding their nuclear program.

Ekmeleddin Ihsanoglu, Secretary General of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation - one of the most important organizations in the Muslim world - said that it is still too soon to be optimistic about a solution to the Iranian nuclear crisis.

Ihsanoglu attended the UN General Assembly in New York, where he also criticized the international community and particularly the Obama administration over Syria - specifically for focusing solely on the agreement between Russia and the US, dealing with the Assad regime's chemical weapons, rather than the ongoing bloody civil war there.

And indeed, a special team arrived in Syria this week to supervise the process as the regime relinquishes its chemical weapons, while indiscriminate murder continues undisturbed throughout the country, and with little comment from the international community.

According to the latest reports from Syria, the death toll has exceeded 115,000. Infighting among the various factions within the opposition threatens to weaken the military capabilities of the Free Syrian Army and other opponents of Assad.

Whereas last month saw vicious battles between Al-Qaeda supporters and several “battalions” affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood, particularly in the Azaz region near the Turkish border, this week there was an escalation in the violence between the two groups affiliated with al-Qaeda: the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham (ISIS) and the Al-Nusra Front. The latter recently joined forces with nine other Islamist groups and signed a collaboration agreement to work together to establish a Muslim state in Syria.

A key objective of the agreement was to isolate ISIS, though so far ISIS combatants, most of whom arrived from Iraq and other countries, seem unconcerned by the merger. ISIS fighters have violated the cease fire in Azaz, waged battles against the Free Syrian Army there (with a death toll of 20 people on both sides) and in Raqqah, and looted the headquarters of other opposition groups.

According to soldiers from the more moderate opposition groups, ISIS has taken over regions that have already been liberated from the Assad regime, exploiting the sparse presence of the Free Syrian Army, as its soldiers are engaged in battles elsewhere.

Opposition soldiers claim that ISIS uses terror and intimidation to force their ideology on the residents of the areas that they conquer. One of the battalions in the Free Syrian Army proclaimed this week that ISIS is actually working for Assad. The battalion, known as Northern Storm, wrote on its Facebook page that “just as we transformed Azaz into a burial ground for Bashar Assad’s tanks and soldiers, we will transform it into a burial ground for ISIS soldiers as well.”

ISIS does not currently appear to aspire to conquer all of Syria, at least not in the near future. But they do aspire to expand the territory under their control in order to maximize their access to food stores and military equipment. This would explain why the majority of their battles are held near the Iraqi and Turkish borders.

As well, the organization has been working to establish a new education system in the “liberated areas” of Syria to replace the system that has, in effect, been shut down. While some other groups have already succeeded in restoring studies, and begun to teach English and math to children and teens (though not history or geography, as all of the textbooks on these subjects were written by Assad’s regime and their content perpetuates his leadership), the ISIS schools teach only Sharia and Islam.

ISIS has also taken responsibility this week for 12 car bombs that exploded in Bagdad, killing 25 people - part of the war between the Sunnis and the Shiites in Iraq. The intra-Islamic conflict is presumably far from over.

(5) If needed, Israel will stand alone

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu did us proud when he addressed the UN General Assembly this week. True to form, he again employed his extraordinary communication skills to superbly present the case for Israel.

He was focused, factual, logical and persuasive as he implored the US administration and world leaders not to be deluded by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's charm campaign.

He interspersed his address with sensitive Jewish historical and biblical references – citing the Maccabees, the prophets, Jewish powerlessness and pogroms and the determination of Jews to live in their own land. As a Jew and as an Israeli, I was proud to be represented by a leader presenting our case with such dignity and eloquence.

Netanyahu neutralized the critics who accused him of opposing or “spoiling” diplomatic efforts. But he warned of the dangers of letting the duplicitous Iranians off the hook unless they genuinely abandoned their nuclear ambitions.

He declared that the fate of the Jewish state would not replicate that of Czechoslovakia in 1938. In his words, Israel would “never acquiesce to nuclear arms in the hands of a rogue regime that repeatedly promises to wipe us off the map. Israel will not allow Iran to get nuclear weapons. If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone.” His speech may well prove as prophetic as Churchill's warnings about the Nazis.

Unfortunately, but not surprisingly – other than to Israelis, Diaspora Jews and our close friends – Netanyahu's words appear to have fallen on deaf ears. The applause at the conclusion of his address was noticeably muted, a predictable response from an international body which only hours after Netanyahu's speech elected Iran as rapporteur for its Disarmament and International Security Committee.

The attention of the US Congress is centered on the federal government lockdown.

Besides, most Americans are weary of wars and have lost confidence in Obama's leadership qualities, especially after his appalling handling of the Syrian issue.

In general, world leaders are in denial and seek to avoid facing the Iranian nuclear threat and to resist the possible need to resort to military action. In this as in many other issues, Israel remains “a nation that dwells alone.”

In contrast, President Rouhani was practically embraced at the General Assembly and by the global media. He smiled and talked about diplomacy, with global leaders grasping his empty gestures and hailing his purported moderation, despite his public record of cheating and his blatant lies from the UN podium denying that Iran had ever sought to obtain the nuclear bomb. Aside from sweet words, Rouhani made no concessions. The response to his glib assurances of Iran's peaceful intentions was chillingly reminiscent to the behavior of world leaders following Neville Chamberlain's 1938 “peace in our time.”

If only those world leaders were right.

Israel, the nation on the front lines, which Iran repeatedly describes as a cancer to be eliminated, would have the greatest cause to celebrate if diplomacy could persuade Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to abort his country's nuclear ambitions.

But as Netanyahu has so well-articulated at both the UN and elsewhere over the past several years, diplomacy alone will not suffice to stop the Iranians. Netanyahu can claim the credit for having persisted in a global campaign to warn the world of the dangers of Iran becoming a nuclear power.

He has not been “warmongering,” as his critics accused, but facing reality as he urged world leaders to impose sanctions and threaten military action unless the centrifuges stop spinning.

Netanyahu has left the door open to diplomacy. He simply reminded the US and the world of Rouhani’s duplicitous record, referring to him as “a wolf in sheep’s clothing.”

He recalled that when Rouhani was Iran’s chief national security adviser and head nuclear negotiator between 2003 and 2005, he lied and stalled, and subsequently even boasted about his success in “creating a calm environment.” Rouhani occupied the role when Iran orchestrated the terrorist bombings of the Jewish Community Center in Buenos Aires.

Netanyahu has appropriately warned that unless there is a dramatic turnabout (which Rouhani has never intimated he would make), the Iranian strategy is to procrastinate with negotiations and con the US and euphoric global leaders into providing them the time required to achieve their objectives.

As it now stands, the US has yet to receive an Iranian response to Obama’s efforts to “engage” and the delays could take us into 2014.

Netanyahu reminded world leaders that this was precisely the route successfully traveled by the North Koreans who delayed and duped the US until they achieved their goal. He warned that a nuclear Iran would be like “another 50 North Koreas.”

Netanyahu also cautioned against “partial solutions” which Israel would not accept. He urged that until such time as an agreement is set in stone and implemented, there should not be the slightest easing of sanctions which, if prematurely lifted, would be almost impossible to re-apply in the current climate.

He also called for the imposition of strict deadlines and demands for total transparency in terms of implementation.

President Obama has, in a sense, given a nod to Netanyahu’s demands. In a joint press conference prior to Netanyahu’s UN address, both parties took care to avoid recriminations or display tensions. In fact, Obama told Netanyahu what he sought to hear. He gave assurances that he was “very clear-eyed” and that Rouhani’s charm offensive and nice words would not bring about an end to sanctions.

He promised to implement “the highest standards of verification in order to provide the sort of sanctions relief they are looking for.” However, he declined to provide any assurance not to ease sanctions until the Iranians demonstrated that they had fully dismantled their nuclear weapons program. Yet, he made it clear that “as president of the United States... we take no options off the table including military options” – expressions he had not used in the course of his UN General Assembly address.

Nevertheless, in light of Obama’s behavior over the past month and the virtual groveling to Rouhani, many will view his statement about the military option remaining on the table as yet another hollow threat. However, should Obama achieve a genuine resolution of the problem by diplomacy, Netanyahu and the people of Israel will be cheering him all the way. But we should not hold our breath. The odds of this happening are exceedingly remote.

Netanyahu is also painfully aware that the Israeli military option is off the agenda as long as the US is engaged in diplomacy with the Iranians.

Israel therefore faces a daunting diplomatic and political challenge over the next few months. Our prime minister will once again be walking a tightrope and facing increasing pressures to make further unilateral concessions toward the Palestinians – posing security risks for our future.

Netanyahu's challenge is to convey his message directly to Congress and the American people. He must continue on his mission and penetrate the American psyche until they accept that the threat Iran poses is real and immediate, and if left unchecked will allow history to repeat itself in a most terrible way.

(6) What Abbas missed in his UN speech

As Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas was delivering his speech at the General Assembly of the United Nations last week, one of his officials in Ramallah revealed that 250,000 out of the approximately 600,000 Palestinians in Syria have been forced to flee their homes since the beginning of the conflict there.

The official, Mohamed Shtayyeh, a member of the Fatah Central Committee, said that 93,000 of the displaced Palestinians fled to Lebanon, Egypt, Jordan and Turkey.

He added that those who fled to the neighbouring Arab countries were living in harsh conditions.

Yet in his speech, Abbas largely ignored the plight of these Palestinians. Instead, he chose to direct his criticism toward Israel and the settlers.

Abbas saw no need to criticize the warring Syrian parties for killing Palestinians and driving them out of their homes. Nor did he utter a word about Lebanon's mistreatment of the Palestinian refugees or the fact that the Egyptians have been mistreating Palestinian refugees.

The only time Abbas referred to the plight of the refugees was toward the end of his speech, when he stated, "In the past few years and this year, Palestinian refugees have paid -- and continue to pay -- a heavy price for the conflicts and unrest in the region despite their neutrality. Tens of thousands of refugees have been forced to search for new places to live in."

Abbas, of course, also ignored the fact that nearly 2,000 Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured in Syria in the past two years.

He did not, however, forget to mention in his speech that 27 Palestinians were killed by the Israel Defence Forces since the beginning of the year.

Abbas's speech shows that the Palestinian Authority leadership considers construction of new housing units in settlements and neighbourhoods of Jerusalem as being more serious than the displacement of a quarter million Palestinians.

For the Palestinian Authority leadership, the security fence in the West Bank, which has put an end to suicide bombings, is more problematic than the killing and displacement of thousands of Palestinians in Syria.

Not surprisingly, Abbas did not condemn any of the Arab countries for mistreating and humiliating Palestinians, especially in recent years.

So what if the Egyptian authorities are shooting and killing Palestinian refugees fleeing Syria? So what if the Lebanese authorities are imposing severe restrictions on the entry of Palestinian refugees? So what if Palestinians are being killed every day in Syria by the forces of Bashar al-Assad and the "rebels?"

Abbas does not seem to have time to talk about the suffering of his people at the hands of Arab governments and terror groups.

As he was speaking, thousands of Palestinians were stranded on both sides of the Gaza Strip-Egypt border due to the closure of the terminal by the Egyptian authorities. Abbas saw no need to refer in his speech to the Egyptian blockade on the Gaza Strip, which is hurting not only Hamas, but also the entire population.

As his speech has shown, he is more concerned about Jews visiting the Temple Mount than thousands of Palestinians who are being butchered and expelled from their homes in Arab countries. That hundreds of mosques and churches have been destroyed in Syria and Egypt is of no concern to Abbas, who sees evil only in the actions of Israel and Jewish settlers.

(7) Netanyahu's Iran obsession is a diversion from Palestine

It seems that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu began attacking Iran and its newly elected president, Hassan Rouhani, even before the microphone at the UN General Assembly was turned on in New York. Without a proper introduction, except for recalling millennia-old Persian-Jewish relations, the Israeli leader launched into a blistering, take-no-prisoners attack on the Islamic Republic of Iran.

A content analysis of Netanyahu's speech brings home his obsession with Iran and Rouhani. In his 3,124-word speech, Netanyahu mentioned "Iran" or "Iranian" 70 times. The word "Rouhani," uttered 25 times, even topped the word "Israel," mentioned 24 times.

The Likud prime minister used multiple arguments against Iran and Rouhani. He pulled out the card about Iran's human rights record. He referred to a 2005 quote by Rouhani about nuclear weapons capability to illustrate what he hinted at was a worldwide trick to convince the international community that the current president of Iran is anything but a moderate. He called his "favourite" Iranian president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, a "wolf in wolf's clothing" while dubbing Rouhani a "wolf in sheep's clothing."

Netanyahu went back to the 19th century in citing a case of anti-Semitism against his grandfather, while not forgetting to give his due to Christian Zionists by recalling the prophecies of the Old Testament prophet Amos about Jews never again being uprooted.

Netanyahu's obsession with Iran runs counter to the current US and global position, which has settled on giving the Rouhani administration the benefit of the doubt. Instead of joining his own allies in the "trust but verify" contingent, Netanyahu chose one-upmanship. The Israeli leader referred to the darling of US Republicans, the late Ronald Reagan, and then went two steps beyond the popular American president: "Three decades ago, President

Ronald Reagan famously advised, 'trust but verify.' When it comes to Iran's nuclear weapons program, here's my advice: Distrust, dismantle and verify."

The obsession was so overwhelming that he spent the bulk of his time discussing the Iranian issue, with token mentions of its relations with Arabs and the Palestinians. His speech this year was more hawkish than last year's, although this time he refrained from using the cardboard illustration of a bomb, which drew worldwide ridicule.

A comparative word count analysis makes this point very clear. In 2012, Netanyahu used the word "Iran" or "Iranian" 55 times, 15 fewer than this year. And on the issue of peace last year, the Israeli leader used the word "peace" 11 times compared with only six times in this year's UN speech.

On the surface, Israeli apologists might argue that the heightened emphasis on Iran is an existential issue due to the fear that Iran is on the verge of developing a nuclear bomb, an assertion the Iranians flatly reject. The new Iranian foreign minister, Mohammed Javad Zarif, mocked Netanyahu, noting that Israelis have been claiming for 22 years that Iran is six months away from developing nuclear military capabilities.

A more logical explanation is that the obsession of Israeli leaders with Iran is a clever attempt at diverting attention from the Palestinian issue, where negotiations are not moving and where his right-wing government is reluctant to make any serious concessions.

Despite Netanyahu's claim that all six prime ministers since the Oslo Accords as well as himself are willing to make "painful concessions," the reality on the ground is quite different. The fact that the number of settlers has doubled since the Oslo Accords were signed is the most obvious sign that Israeli leaders actions speak much louder than their own words.

(8) Funds from European governments support an "erase Israel" conference

It has become axiomatic in some circles that the sole cause of the Arab- Israeli conflict is Israel, by which is really meant Israel's existence. For many holding this view the "solution" is a single "bi-national" state as opposed to the two-state solution favored by the international community. These "one state" proponents also insist on a "right of return" for 1948 Palestinian refugees and their millions of descendants, amounting to a call for the elimination of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

A conference promoting this vision, funded mostly by Protestant and Catholic groups, is being held this week in Tel Aviv. These Christian groups are themselves largely funded by European governments that officially support the two-state solution. The conference, then, undermines these governments' own policies.

The event, "From Truth to Redress: Realizing the Return of Palestinian Refugees," is organized by Zochrot, a tiny Israeli fringe group.

Israeli one-state advocates are so few that they have neither a constituency nor influence in Israel. For Zochrot, foreign funding is their lifeline; the conference was "made possible thanks to the generous support of: Misereor, Christian Aid, HEKS-EPER, CCFD, Finn Church Aid, Broederlijk Delen, AFSC, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, Mennonite Central Committee, Trócaire, St. Het Solidariteitsfonds, Oxfam GB and private donors."

NGO Monitor wrote each of the sponsors, and we received several replies.

France's CCFD and Germany's Misereor (both Catholic) wrote identical messages – including the same grammatical mistakes. They affirmed they are a “funding partner of Zochrot” and declared “refugee issues and refugee rights all over the world are of utmost importance to us.” But regarding funding they opted for foggiess: “Our privacy policies do not allow to disclose (sic) the amounts given to recipients.”

Belgium's Broederlijk Delen, also Catholic, wrote a similar response: “We support the work of Zochrot as we believe refugee rights are important in any context and should be openly discussed.”

But regarding funding, they also chose murkiness: “With regard to details on funding, we wish to respect our partners' privacy.”

What seems to be lost on these Christian groups is they are supported by public funds.

In 2012 Misereor received 114 million euros from the German government, CCFD received 1.1 million euros from the EU and another 368,000 euros from France, the Swiss government gave \$12.7 million to HEKS and Broederlijk Delen received 6,891,347 euros from Belgium taxpayers.

As for the one-state formula itself, the onus for proving that this “solution” is workable is on the shoulders of its advocates. In Europe bi-national states have an unhappy history.

Czechoslovakia was one state, now it is two. Yugoslavia's multi-national experiment ended in a horrific war that gave the world the term “ethnic cleansing.” Belgium, Spain and the UK each have strong national separatist movements (Flemish, Basque and Scottish respectively).

In the Middle East, the region most relevant to this discussion, concrete models of bi-national entities do not exist. The rights of non-Arab and non-Muslim minorities in Arab states are severely repressed, sectarianism is rending Syria, Iraq and Lebanon asunder, and the upsurge of violence against the region's Christians should serve as a warning. Israel is the only Middle East country where democratic institutions are strong and minorities enjoy by right the full protection of the law.

Yet, these Christian funders are targeting Israel, and appear to be utterly unaware of the plight of their Middle Eastern co-religionists. What makes them think that Jews would fare better as a minority once Israel is forced to be a Muslim-majority state than do Christians today in Egypt, Syria or Iraq? This point is all the more pertinent considering the ethnic cleansing by Arab governments of 99 percent of their Jewish citizens after 1948. After Arab governments stripped them of their citizenship and property most Jewish refugees fled to Israel.

That two refugee populations resulted from the Arab-Israeli conflict, one Jewish, one Arab, is ignored by this conference's organizers and funders. With all their moralistic rhetoric of refugee rights being “of utmost importance” “in any context,” these Christian groups are mute about the rights of nearly a million Jewish refugees from Arab states, and millions of their descendants.

Peacemakers, which is how these Christian aid groups view themselves, do not support efforts to erase one side of a conflict, which is what support for this conference means. The one-state formula is a recipe for war, and its proponents are exposed as uncompromising supporters of permanent conflict.

By dressing up as “peacemakers” the Christian aid societies supporting Israel’s demise bear truth to George Orwell who wrote, “Political language... is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind.”

Is that how public funds ought to be spent?

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF