



OPINION and ANALYSIS

Vol 1, Number 50: 16 January 2014

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

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Opinion and Analysis, Week ending 16 January 2014

1. Israel's dilemma: who can be an Israeli?

Daniel Sokatch and David Myers, LA Times, 14 January 2014

Rights of residence and freedom in personal status issues should be the same for all citizens, whether they are Jewish according to religious law, Jewish only by citizenship or non-Jewish.

<http://www.latimes.com/opinion/commentary/la-oe-myers-israel-citizenship-arabs-20140114,0,2281095.story#axzz2qPF0ZFfK>

2. The US needs a deal with Iran, not détente

Ray Takeyh, Washington Post, 13 January 2014

The challenge for Washington today is to defy its history and reach a nuclear agreement with Iran while negating the Islamic Republic's regional ambitions.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-us-needs-a-deal-with-iran-not-detente/2014/01/12/9f7d1c46-7a44-11e3-b1c5-739e63e9c9a7_story.html

3. Why is Hamas courting Iran and the Palestinian Authority?

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 13 January 2014

Hamas does not recognize Israel's right to exist and is vehemently opposed to the current U.S.-sponsored peace talks. Hamas wants unity with the Palestinian Authority ... to bring [the peace process] to a halt. Hamas is desperate for cash and the only two parties that could help rid it of its crisis are Iran and the PA. Abbas told Jordanian parliamentarians during a meeting in his office that 58% of the PA budget goes to the Gaza Strip.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4128/hamas-iran-palestinian-authority>

4. How to fight academic bigotry

Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post, 10 January 2014

The American Studies Association has now made a name for itself by voting to boycott Israeli universities, accusing them of denying academic and human rights to Palestinians.

http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/charles-krauthammer-how-to-fight-academic-bigotry/2014/01/09/64f482ee-795e-11e3-af7f-13bf0e9965f6_story.html

5. Israel kills fewer innocents than any other nation involved in a conflict
Ben-Dror Yemini, i24News, 10 January 2014

In other conflicts it is estimated that between 60 and 90 percent of fatalities are innocents. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are a minority.

<http://www.i24news.tv/en/opinion/140109-israel-kills-fewer-innocents-than-any-nation-involved-in-a-conflict>

6. Creating 'Independent Arab and Jewish states'
Michael Zantovsky, World Affairs Journal, 9 January 2014

An official recognition of the Jewish character of Israel by the United States would go a long way to make most (though not all) Israelis feel a bit more secure in their identity.

http://worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/michael-zantovsky/creating-independent-arab-and-jewish-states?utm_source=World+Affairs+Newsletter&utm_campaign=755ad6fda7-January_10_2014_Zantovsky_Chang_Flamini&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_f83b38c5c7-755ad6fda7-294565225

7. Doing the migrants a disservice
David Horowitz, The Times of Israel, 7 January 2014

Drawing masses of African asylum-seekers to demonstrate in central Tel Aviv or march to Jerusalem is not going to help their cause

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/doing-the-migrants-a-disservice/>

8. Recognise Israel to achieve peace
Steve Huntley, Chicago Sun, 6 January 2014

It's only when it comes to making peace that Abbas and the Palestinians have a problem admitting that Israel is the Jewish state. The reason is simple: Abbas hasn't given up the Arab dream of wiping "the Zionist entity" off the map.

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/huntley/24796376-452/recognize-israel-to-achieve-peace.html>

1. Israel's dilemma: who can be an Israeli?

Recently, Israel has been beset by a pair of controversies relating to its Arab minority: first, the proposal over whether to resettle Bedouin Arabs against their will in state-sponsored towns, and second, the renewed call by Israel's foreign minister to "transfer" Arab residents of northern Israel to a new state of Palestine should one be established.

At issue here is not only the status of Israel's Arab population but the concept of citizenship in Israel. If threats to the status of Israeli citizenship continue unchecked, Israel's very democracy is imperiled.

Israeli citizenship is designed very differently from the American model. Here, if you are born in the country or become an American citizen, you retain your citizenship unless you seek to renounce it. U.S. citizenship is not conditioned on ethnic or religious

origin, and every citizen has the same rights and responsibilities.

In Israel, it's more complicated, with a variety of pathways to different categories of citizenship. All Jews in the world are eligible, under Israel's 1950 Law of Return, to be fast-tracked to Israeli citizenship. And yet even citizenship for Jews is not simple.

Those born to a Jewish father rather than mother or converted to Judaism by non-Orthodox rabbis may qualify for citizenship according to the Law of Return, but do not qualify as Jews in the eyes of Israel's Ministry of Religious Affairs. Accordingly, they are precluded from marrying those registered by the ministry as Jewish because marriage in Israel is controlled by religious authorities. In fact, these Jews are, in some respects, accorded second-class citizenship in terms of their personal status.

Palestinian Arabs and Druze born in Israel are citizens by birth. But residents of East Jerusalem, which Israel annexed after the 1967 Six-Day War, are not. They are conditional residents, not citizens — conditional on living in East Jerusalem continuously or, for those able to travel abroad for the purposes of study or work, maintaining a regular return schedule to ensure their residency is not endangered.

East Jerusalem Palestinians may apply for Israeli citizenship (with no guarantee of success), but the number who have had their permanent residency revoked by the Israeli government since 1967 is as large as the number who have been successful in attaining citizenship. For this reason, Palestinians in East Jerusalem live in constant fear of losing the right to live in their homes.

Similarly grim are the prospects of citizenship for migrant workers in Israel, who come from places like Thailand and the Philippines. Often, their children speak Hebrew as their first language, attend Israeli schools and even do military service. But this does not qualify them for citizenship. Nor do the thousands of African refugees in Israel have a path to citizenship, or even access to social benefits such as healthcare and work permits, under a government that seeks to expel them as "infiltrators."

The situation of the Bedouin may be the most poignant, especially since they have lived in Israel's Negev since long before the state was founded. They have Israeli citizenship, but their nomadic way of life has not blended easily with the norms of a modern state. Although the ancestral lands to which they claim ownership amount to less than 5% of the Negev, many in Israel oppose granting the Bedouin rights to these lands, on which they have dwelt for centuries. Alternatively, they seek to settle them into a few pre-designed townships. Their citizenship is unquestionably second class, especially when one compares their claims to land with those of Jewish settlers, who have established illegal outposts in the West Bank that frequently gain official sanction after the fact.

Denying Bedouin Arabs full realization of the rights of citizenship has alienated them and pushed them away from membership in the Israeli polity. As recently as 10 years ago, many Bedouin volunteered for military service; their allegiance to Israel was unquestionable. But this loyalty was not rewarded. And now many Bedouin feel like foreigners in their own land.

As if the growing confrontation with the Bedouin were not enough, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman has revived the idea of drawing the boundaries of a new Palestinian state in a way that Palestinian townships currently part of Israel would overnight become part of the new state, thereby stripping residents of their Israeli citizenship. This would be part of a land swap for settlement blocs that Israel wishes to

keep. By the foreign minister's reasoning, transferring this land and all of its Israeli citizens to a future Palestinian state would help ensure a large Jewish majority in Israel.

The problem is that Arab Israeli citizens overwhelmingly oppose such a move. They understand that citizenship that can be taken away by government fiat is not really citizenship at all. Some 60 years ago, the prescient Jewish thinker Simon Rawidowicz declared that it is not only Jews who dwell on the land by right, not sufferance, but also the Palestinian Arab population of Israel. That principle is one consistent with the vision of Israel's Declaration of Independence, which calls for equal rights for all of the country's citizens and is the bedrock of Israel's claim to democracy.

It's time to apply that standard uniformly. Simply put, citizenship should not be divided into classes. Israel must begin to construct a meaningful sense of Israeli identity and confer an equal stake in the well-being of the society on all those entitled to call themselves citizens. Rights of residence and freedom in personal status issues should be the same for all citizens, whether they are Jewish according to religious law, Jewish only by citizenship or non-Jewish.

Let the conversation begin.

2. The US needs a deal with Iran, not détente

An unusual fear is gripping the Arab world, namely that nuclear diplomacy may yet bring Iran and the United States into a close regional embrace. This may seem comical given the legacy of mistrust separating the two nations. Yet this concern among Arab rulers, fueled by progress toward a final agreement on Tehran's nuclear program, may have some justification in history. The United States has never been able to pursue arms control without delusion and has always insisted on sanctifying its negotiating partners, conjuring up moderates and searching for common ground. The challenge for Washington today is to defy its history and reach a nuclear agreement with Iran while negating the Islamic Republic's regional ambitions.

During the heydays of detente in the 1970s, nuclear accords between the United States and Soviet Union were inevitably followed by commerce and diplomatic recognition. Successive U.S. administrations were seduced by the notion that a nuclear agreement could pave the way for grander geopolitical convergence. If the thorny nuclear issues could be resolved through cool-headed dialogue, the thinking went, then why not other areas of superpower contention? This proved a fools' errand, as the Kremlin saw no contradiction between negotiating a treaty on arms limitation and invading Afghanistan. U.S. adversaries have always been more practical about arms control and have seldom forfeited their ideological claims for the sake of trade and reconciliation

On the surface, the chimera of bringing Iran in from the cold could prove equally alluring. After all, the resurgence of al-Qaeda, a radical Sunni movement, argues for cooperation with an alarmed Shiite state. The United States is seeking to leave its war-torn charge in Afghanistan and may yet need Tehran's assistance for such a withdrawal. Perhaps once the two sides have agreed on the nuclear file, they could move toward a larger canvass of cooperation. These sober strategic arguments are seemingly buttressed by the rise of pragmatists led by President Hassan Rouhani. As such, a concerted U.S. effort at engagement might foster Iranian moderation in its

foreign policy as well as strengthen the forces of progressive change domestically.

Like their Soviet predecessors, the guardians of Iranian theocracy are far less sentimental than Americans about their diplomacy. Whatever confidence-building measures Iranian diplomats may be negotiating in Geneva, supreme leader Ali Khamenei insisted as recently as late November that Iran is “challenging the influence of America in the region and is extending its own influence.” In Khamenei’s telling, the United States is a crestfallen imperial power unable to impose discipline on a recalcitrant Middle East. It is not his burden to salvage the wreckage of the United States but merely to fill the vacuums left by its abdication.

The key actors defining Iran’s regional policy are not its urbane diplomats mingling with their Western counterparts in Geneva but the Revolutionary Guard Corps, particularly the famed Quds Force. For the force’s commander, Qassem Suleimani, the struggle to evict the United States from the Middle East began in Iraq, as Suleimani proclaimed in September. The struggle has moved on to Syria. The survival and success of the Assad dynasty is now a central element of Iran’s foreign policy.

The U.S. task remains imposing stringent limits on Iran’s nuclear program through negotiations while restraining Tehran’s regional ambitions through pressure. This latter goal will require mending the United States’ battered alliances in the Middle East. Strategic dialogues and arms sales can go only so far. The United States cannot reclaim its allies’ confidence without being an active player in the Syria saga. To be sure, Syria’s opposition is fragmented and the rise of Islamist radicals is a troubling sign, but many are still committed to displacing Assad and taming Islamist militancy — and they are worthy of Western embrace and support. As long as the United States exempts itself from this conflict, its other pledges ring hollow to a skeptical Arab audience.

Too often tensions between the United States and Iran have been attributed to technical disagreements over the scope of Tehran’s nuclear program. For decades, diplomats have struggled to define just the right balance between centrifuges and sanctions relief. Those negotiations have taken place while Iran’s presidency has changed hands from reformers to hard-liners and now, finally, to pragmatists. At the core this conflict is ideological: Iran does not want us to succeed, and we should not want Tehran to prevail. Iran’s assault on the Arab order will define the parameters of Middle East politics for some time to come. The first step toward a sensible Iran policy is to dispense with the illusion of detente that too often accompanies arms control diplomacy.

3. Why is Hamas courting Iran and the Palestinian Authority?

Israel and the US have good reason to be worried about Hamas's latest moves, which are likely to have a negative impact on John Kerry's efforts to reach a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In recent weeks, Hamas leaders have been working to restore their relations separately with Iran and the Palestinian Authority.

At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction in Hamas's policy. As the saying goes, "Tell me who your friends are and I'll tell you who you are."

Any rapprochement between Hamas and Iran would mean that the Islamist movement has chosen to throw itself into the arms of Iran, a country that, like Hamas, does not recognize Israel's right to exist and is vehemently opposed to the current U.S.-sponsored peace talks.

At the same time, any rapprochement between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority could be interpreted a sign of "moderation" and "pragmatism" on the part of the Islamist movement. But this interpretation is far from true: Hamas continues to oppose the peace talks and refuses to recognize Israel's right to exist.

So what are Hamas's real motives behind this new policy?

Hamas has been passing through difficult times over the past three years as a result of events in Syria and Egypt. Hamas's refusal to support Syrian dictator Bashar Assad in his fight against his opponents has damaged its ties with Iran, whose leaders continue to back the Syrian regime.

Hamas received a second blow with the ouster of Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood President Mohamed Morsi seven months ago. Egypt's new rulers view Hamas as an enemy and threat to their national security.

Hamas's growing isolation has prompted its leaders to reconsider their policy. For Hamas, the name of the game these days is survival. Hamas is also desperate for cash and the only two parties that could help rid it of its crisis are Iran and the PA.

Hazem Balousha, a Palestinian journalist based in Gaza City, revealed that prominent figures in the Iranian government have contacted leaders in Hamas to hold meetings, with the goal of healing the rift between the two sides. This outreach "has led to a series of preliminary understandings that have tentatively revived ties between the two parties once again."

Balousha pointed out that Hamas used to receive \$23 million per month from Iran before Tehran cut its ties to the movement in the Gaza Strip. Now, he said, Iran has restored its financial aid to Hamas and part of the funding has reached the Gaza Strip during the past three months.

Hamas leader Mahmoud Zahar confirmed last month that his movement has resumed relations with Iran.

In a surprise move, Hamas announced last week a number of "positive measures" aimed at restoring ties with Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority.

Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh said that the measures include the release of Fatah prisoners from Hamas jails seven years after Hamas seized control over the area in the summer of 2007, as well as allowing others who fled the Gaza Strip to return to their homes and families.

A few days later, Hamas fulfilled its promise by releasing seven Fatah prisoners.

In response, Fatah announced that it would dispatch its senior representative, Azzam Ahmed, to the Gaza Strip shortly, to pursue efforts to end the dispute with Hamas. The decision to send Ahmed to the Gaza Strip came after Haniyeh phoned Abbas and

expressed his desire to achieve "national unity" between the two rival parties.

Hamas, however, is not chasing Abbas because it supports his policies, including the peace talks with Israel. Nor is Hamas seeking reconciliation with the Palestinian Authority because it has decided to renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist. Hamas remains strongly opposed to any peace talks with Israel, as its leaders continue to declare day and night.

Hamas's representative in Lebanon, Ali Baraka, last week condemned the peace talks as a "scheme to liquidate the Palestinian cause."

Hamas wants unity with the Palestinian Authority not because it wants to boost the peace process, but bring it to a halt.

If Hamas is so strongly opposed to the peace talks, why are its leaders saying that they are prepared to join forces with the PA? The answer is obvious: Hamas wants the PA to continue channelling funds to the Gaza Strip.

More than half of the Palestinian Authority's annual budget goes to pay salaries and support various projects in the Gaza Strip despite the rivalry between the two sides. Abbas told Jordanian parliamentarians during a meeting in his office that 58% of the PA budget goes to the Gaza Strip.

Hamas's efforts to restore ties with Iran and the Palestinian Authority are nothing but a ploy to ensure its continued presence in power. Hamas is definitely not headed toward any change. Now that it is back on the payroll of Iran, Hamas will feel more confident than ever to pursue its efforts to foil any agreement between the PA and Israel.

4. How to fight academic bigotry

For decades, the American Studies Association labored in well-deserved obscurity. No longer. It has now made a name for itself by voting to boycott Israeli universities, accusing them of denying academic and human rights to Palestinians.

Given that Israel has a profoundly democratic political system, the freest press in the Middle East, a fiercely independent judiciary and astonishing religious and racial diversity within its universities, including affirmative action for Arab students, the charge is rather strange.

Made more so when you consider the state of human rights in Israel's neighborhood. As we speak, Syria's government is dropping 'barrel bombs' filled with nails, shrapnel and other instruments of terror on its own cities. Where is the ASA boycott of Syria?

And of Iran, which hangs political, religious and even sexual dissidents and has no academic freedom at all? Or Egypt, where Christians are being openly persecuted? Or Turkey, Saudi Arabia or, for that matter, massively repressive China and Russia?

Which makes obvious that the ASA boycott has nothing to do with human rights. It's an exercise in radical chic, giving marginalized academics a frisson of pretend anti-colonialism, seasoned with a dose of edgy anti-Semitism.

And don't tell me this is merely about Zionism. The ruse is transparent. Israel is the

world's only Jewish state. To apply to the state of the Jews a double standard that you apply to none other, to judge one people in a way you judge no other, to single out that one people for condemnation and isolation — is to engage in a gross act of discrimination.

And discrimination against Jews has a name. It's called anti-Semitism.

Former Harvard president Larry Summers called the ASA actions "anti-Semitic in their effect if not necessarily in their intent." I choose to be less polite. The intent is clear: to incite hatred for the largest — and only sovereign — Jewish community on Earth.

What to do? Facing a similar (British) academic boycott of Israelis seven years ago, Alan Dershowitz and Nobel Prize-winning physicist Steven Weinberg wrote an open letter declaring that, for the purposes of any anti-Israel boycott, they are to be considered Israelis..

Meaning: You discriminate against Israelis? Fine. Include us out. We will have nothing to do with you.

Thousands of other academics added their signatures to the Dershowitz/Weinberg letter. It was the perfect in-kind response. Boycott the boycotters, with contempt.

But academia isn't the only home for such prejudice. Throughout the cultural world, the Israel boycott movement is growing. It's become fashionable for musicians, actors, writers and performers of all kinds to ostentatiously cleanse themselves of Israel and Israelis.

The example of the tuxedoed set has spread to the more coarse and unkempt anti-Semites, such as the thugs who a few years ago disrupted London performances of the Jerusalem Quartet and the Israeli Philharmonic.

Five years ago in Sweden, Israel's Davis Cup team had to play its matches in an empty tennis stadium because the authorities could not guarantee the Israelis' safety from the mob. The most brazen display of rising anti-Semitism today is the spread of the "quenelle", a reverse Nazi salute, popularized by the openly anti-semitic French entertainer, Dieudonné M'Bala M'Bala.

In this sea of easy and open bigotry, an unusual man has made an unusual statement. Russian by birth, European by residence, Evgeny Kissin is arguably the world's greatest piano virtuoso. He is also a Jew of conviction. Deeply distressed by Israel's treatment in the cultural world around him, Kissin went beyond the Dershowitz/Weinberg stance of asking to be considered an Israeli. On Dec. 7, he became one, defiantly.

Upon taking the oath of citizenship in Jerusalem, he declared: "I am a Jew, Israel is a Jewish state. . . . Israel's case is my case, Israel's enemies are my enemies, and I do not want to be spared the troubles which Israeli musicians encounter when they represent the Jewish state beyond its borders."

Full disclosure: I have a personal connection with Kissin. For the past two years I've worked to bring him to Washington to perform for Pro Musica Hebraica, a nonprofit organization (founded by my wife and me) dedicated to reviving lost and forgotten Jewish classical music. We succeeded. On Feb. 24, Kissin will perform at the Kennedy Centre Concert Hall masterpieces of Eastern European Jewish music, his first U.S. appearance as an Israeli.

The persistence of anti-Semitism, that most ancient of poisons, is one of history's great mysteries. Even the shame of the Holocaust proved no antidote. It provided but a temporary respite. Anti-Semitism is back. Alas, a new generation must learn to confront it.

How? How to answer the thugs, physical and intellectual, who single out Jews for attack? The best way, the most dignified way, is to do like Dershowitz, Weinberg or Kissin.

Express your solidarity. Sign the open letter or write your own. Don the yellow star and wear it proudly.

5. Israel kills fewer innocents than any other nation involved in a conflict

Professor Richard Falk is a top UN official. Recently he declared that Israel wreaks carnage upon the Palestinians, harboring what he termed "genocidal intent." If we want to understand the relationship between the industry of lies and the discourse of human rights, we could do worse than examine the case of this bad man, perhaps a Jew, who is an embodiment of this link.

Let us gauge the genocide claim. In 2013, 36 Palestinians were killed, according to the human rights organization B'Tselem. At least 30 of those were either involved in clashes with IDF soldiers or were members of terrorist organizations. Only a few innocents were killed. The death of each one of them is to be deeply regretted. Yet one should add that there isn't another conflict in the world where the fatality rate among civilians is as low as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In other conflicts it is estimated that between 60 and 90 percent of fatalities are innocents. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, they are a minority.

In fact, the annual fatality count in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is lower than a daily terror casualty toll in Iraq, Somalia, Syria, Yemen, and other countries, where 1,153 people died as a result of terror attacks. This does not include the daily toll from the massacre perpetrated by the Syrian regime.

Most of the victims are Muslims killed by radical Islamists. In Pakistan in the course of last year alone, 5,366 people were killed in acts of terrorism. Almost 3,000 of them were civilians. In Iraq in 2013 alone, 8,868 were killed in terror acts, including 7,818 civilians. The war on terrorism waged by coalition forces claimed between 227 and 300 thousand lives in Iraq and Afghanistan, most of them innocents.

Even if the number of casualties of Israeli operations was 10 or 20 times higher, this would still not constitute genocide. A broad historical examination supports this view. Since 1967, less than 10,000 Palestinians have been killed. Most of them were terrorists. You can call it many things, but genocide it ain't.

But in all the other conflicts, there is no Professor Falk hovering in the background and spreading blood libel, no UN Human Rights Council to pass countless resolutions, no rights organizations cranking out an increasing number of hostile and biased publications, and no million dollar subsidies from Europe to bankroll NGOs whose aim is to spin yarns of war crimes and crimes against humanity.

The only one being singled out is Israel, which kills less people than any other party involved in a conflict, both in absolute and relative terms. And it has to deal with organizations such as Islamic Jihad and Hamas, which blatantly declares that its goal is the destruction of Israel and the extermination of Jews and the killing of Christians and communists "until the last remaining one."

But groups that spread lies, sometimes also called rights organizations, will continue to spread lies. And as long as someone like Richard Falk is a senior adviser to the Human Rights Council, and as long as human rights organizations cooperate with that body and its anti-Semitic adviser, they are complicit in the crime.

To be clear, human rights and human rights organizations are a vital and important component of any democratic society. But those who obsessively cooperate with conspiracies against only one nation deserve to be called racists - not human rights advocates.

6. Creating 'Independent Arab and Jewish states'

Diplomacy is inherently ill-equipped to handle identity. It excels at obfuscating issues, deals in constructive ambiguities, and fudges sharp divisions. Its product, when it succeeds, is invariably some kind of a document that no one is happy with but everybody can live with. Identity, on the other hand, requires clarity, which serves to reaffirm the image people have of themselves and their position in the world. Identity without clarity is no good because instead of reaffirming, it reinforces doubts about the image people have of themselves, and even more so, about the image other people have of them.

Diplomats, myself included, are sometimes thought of as idle, conniving, and pompous dandies, not of much use in today's world. In fact, we are wonderful people, capable of "deeds quite impossible for Man," like moving mountains (by drawing the borderline of a country on their north slope, instead of the south slope where it had been previously), creating new countries where they never existed with a stroke of the pen, and drafting agreements that can be neither upheld nor violated since no one quite understands what they mean. Symbolic issues, though, make us run for cover.

I have recently incurred the wrath of some - I am sure otherwise perfectly nice - Ukrainians by innocently referring to their country as "the Ukraine" instead of discarding the wretched article. It has been explained to me in no uncertain terms that Ukraine (no article) refers to a country while *the* Ukraine would denote a mere region. Without really comprehending, I have taken the hint and pledged henceforth always to refer to the country (or just country?) as Ukraine, although I am slightly concerned I could get into trouble with the Dutch by referring to their country as simply Netherlands (no article). Go figure.

At least I had the noun right. I would have no such luck with the name of a country in south-eastern Europe, a member of the United Nations, which has been recognized since 1991 by more than one hundred other countries as the Republic of Macedonia, but which the United Nations and some other international organizations refer to, for reasons I would rather not go into, as The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, or for brevity (and I'm sure the lovely sound of it) FYROM. Indeed, when it came to its being seated in the hallowed halls at East River, some countries vetoed the suggestion that it be seated under "M" for "Macedonia" with Madagascar and Malawi, whereas it itself understandably balked at being seated under "F" for "Former" between Finland

and France. The compromise solution turned out to be seating it under “T” for “The” between Thailand and Timor-Leste, a typical example of the diplomatic genius.

I thought about these and other cases in point this morning when I learned that the talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians (a.k.a. MEPP) are (a) making progress, (b) may collapse over the refusal of the Palestinians to recognize Israel as a “Jewish state.” Now, having spent six years there as ambassador, I totally understand why Israel wishes to be recognized as such. Anyone who has read the wonderful biography of Theodore Herzl by Shlomo Avineri, will appreciate that it is the very *raison d’être* for Israel’s existence and that its need to reaffirm this identity is indeed an *existential* need. By the same token, though, no one familiar with the history of the conflict will expect the Palestinians ever to accede to this demand, any more than they would expect Serbs to ever recognize Kosovo as an Albanian state. Insisting on such kind of a demand as a precondition for a deal is one way (there are many) of assuring there will be no deal.

Is there any way to resolve the quandary? There might be. One does not necessarily seek the reaffirmation of one’s own identity from people who are the least likely to oblige. An official recognition of the Jewish character of Israel by the United States would go a long way to make most (though not all) Israelis feel a bit more secure in their identity. It would not have to be a *bianco cheque*, but could rather come simultaneously with the signing of a framework agreement, and along with the recognition of the Arab and independent character of the future Palestinian state as a reward to both sides for negotiating in good faith and in keeping with the UN General Assembly resolution No. 181/1947, which provides for the creation of “Independent Arab and Jewish States.” An acknowledgement to the same effect by the Middle East Quartet or by the five permanent members of the UN Security Council would be even better. A UN General Assembly resolution would be better still. Could any of this happen? I don’t know. But at least something like seating the country under “J” seems to be within the realm of the diplomatically achievable.

7. Doing the migrants a disservice

Whoever is advising and coordinating the current migrant protests is doing its constituency a huge disservice.

Israelis are deeply torn about the plight of the tens of thousands of Africans who crossed into Israel via Egypt before Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu belatedly sealed the border fence. This was a country founded too late to save millions of Jews from Nazi genocide, but a country that since 1948 has been able to serve as a place of refuge for persecuted Jews the world over, and its citizens know all too well the pitiful situation of oppressed masses turned coldly away at closed borders.

So long as the majority of the migrants were largely congregated in a limited area of south Tel Aviv, most Israelis allowed themselves to feel that the country had done the right thing in letting them stay, and could afford not to internalize the potential impact that a large influx could have on the wider country. Go to the areas around Levinsky Park and the appalling site that is Tel Aviv’s “new” bus station, and you cannot ignore the fact of a part of Israel that has become alien and downright scary, albeit not solely because of the new arrivals. Stay away, and you need never empathize with the outraged veteran residents of that area.

By massing tens of thousands of migrants shouting for their rights in Rabin Square on Sunday, drawing thousands in protesting throngs around the US Embassy on Monday, and preparing now for a march on Jerusalem, however, those who conceived of this campaign have placed Israel's new migrant reality front and center. And while some Israelis will have been moved by their pleas, by their insistence that they are not criminals and ought to be accorded refugee status, it's a fair bet that many more Israelis will have been a little shaken by the sight of the throngs and influenced by Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar's talk of millions more Africans looking to get out of their countries — with Israel as the only developed nation to which they can contemplate gaining access over land.

International hypocrisy

The international attention being given to Israel's migrant crisis, meanwhile, smacks of hypocrisy — not for the first time on an issue where Israel can be made to look racist and inhumane.

Europe is deep in crisis over the movement across the continent of citizens from relatively impoverished new European Union member nations. One need only read the coverage in some of Britain's more xenophobic newspapers, for instance, to recognize the hostility to the influx of Poles and, most recently, Romanians — purportedly changing the face of Britain, putting Brits out of work, begging in the streets, spreading disease, turning neighborhoods into no-go areas. But Israel, a country of eight million people, being disinclined to keep open its borders and grant general refugee status to a potentially vast influx, oh, that's just further proof of our country's lost morality.

Best of all is the hyping of the crisis in countries, such as Iran, to which no African, no matter how endangered his or her life, is likely to voluntarily run for refuge.

If we're that awful, one might ask, why would so many people from the continent to our south want to try to rebuild their lives here?

Among other things, one might then answer, because here they get to march in safety, and demonstrate with police protection, and have their demands freely and accurately reported, and castigate the policy of the very government to which they are appealing. Just as protesters can in Iran. (Not.)

A transparent process

Where Israel might help itself, however, is in maintaining a more transparent process for dealing with refugee claims. The widespread assertion that Israel's bureaucracy does not deal openly and efficiently with the issue has not been credibly disproved. Attorneys working for the relevant government bureaucracies have only underlined the concerns by indicating, in interviews in recent days, that a certain unwritten policy applies when it comes to employing migrants: that employers have been given to understand that an asylum-seeker who has registered with the authorities can be semi-legitimately employed even if any official paperwork says the opposite.

Like any sovereign nation, Israel has the right to determine its policies on granting refugee and residency and citizenship and employment rights, in accordance with its own laws and the relevant international frameworks to which it has bound itself. The process should be clear and coherent — so that everybody involved knows where they stand.

A (just about) manageable dilemma

Before Israel moved to seal off its border fence with Egypt in the last couple of years,

the rate of the illegal influx had reached 2,000 people and more per month.

If that border had been closed sooner — as you might have expected it would be, for basic security reasons, not because of the unexpected flow of asylum-seekers/economic migrants — the scale of the crisis would have been far more manageable today.

Just imagine, though, if the inflow was still continuing. A 50-60,000-strong community would have been double the size and more, with exponential birthrate consequences. At which point claims by Netanyahu and his former interior minister, Eli Yishai of Shas, that the very essence of the Jewish state was threatened, would start to look a little less fanciful.

8. Recognise Israel to achieve peace

The Palestinians, no doubt with the support of their Arab allies, are refusing in peace negotiations to recognize Israel as the Jewish state. Hmm. They never seem to have an issue with the Jewish nature of Israel when denouncing it. The term “Zionist entity” comes to mind.

During the current round of American-sponsored peace talks, Secretary of State John Kerry, to his credit, has pressed Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas to recognize Israel as the Jewish homeland. In an interview with a London-based Arabic newspaper, the chief Palestinian negotiator revealed that Abbas had written President Barack Obama declaring that “we will not be able to accept Israel as a Jewish state.”

In an interview last year with a Jordanian newspaper reported by a Hezbollah news service, Abbas referred to Israel as “the Zionist entity.” It certainly wasn’t the first time Abbas or other Palestinian leaders had used the word Zionist, an expression of Jewish nationalism. His ambassador to Egypt repeated the term in a lecture a few months ago in which he also called Israel “the real and clear enemy.”

The phrase “Zionist entity” is a staple of Palestinian, Arab and Muslim media and propaganda. And this is when they are being, by their standards, diplomatic. Most Palestinian propaganda is abhorrent. For example, on the November anniversary of Yassar Arafat’s death, a Palestinian TV children’s program had a young girl saying, “The Jews poisoned him and I hate them very much.” Out of the mouths of babes comes lying Palestinian sewage.

Nor do Palestinians have any trouble acknowledging the Jewish heart of Israel in their terrorism. Rockets are aimed at Jewish towns like Sderot. You don’t hear about Hamas and other terrorist groups picking Arab villages in Israel as targets for their crude missiles.

The murderers and thugs who waged Arafat’s terror war during the last decade against Israeli civilians, including women, children and the elderly, made sure their victims were Jewish. They exploded a bomb at a disco frequented by Jewish teenagers. No known hangout for Arab Israeli youth was attacked. A Jewish religious feast, not a Muslim one, was the occasion for one notable bloodbath. Bombs were detonated on buses on routes carrying Jewish commuters.

No, it's only when it comes to making peace that Abbas and the Palestinians have a problem admitting that Israel is the Jewish state. The reason is simple: Abbas hasn't given up the Arab dream of wiping "the Zionist entity" off the map.

In his letter to Obama, Abbas repeats the Palestinian demand for a "right of return" to Israel of Palestinians who left the country during the 1948 war and of their descendants. That would be a deluge of millions of Palestinians that would indeed mean Israel would not be a Jewish state. This demographic bomb would be Abbas' way of waging war by other means.

I've said it before and I'll say it again, the Palestinian-Israeli conflict will end only when the Arab and Muslim world truly wants it to end and recognizes the permanence of the Jewish homeland.

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

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