

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. *Michael Freund* Fundamentally Freund: The end of Palestine

"I never thought I would say this, but those of us on the Israeli right owe a debt of gratitude to Mahmoud Abbas"

2. *Ari Shavit* Milestones along the road to a new MidEast peace

This peace will not be a peace of yet another glittering ceremony on the White House lawn. This peace will be the end product of a long and exhausting process of ending the occupation.

3. *Uri Misgav* Imprisoned in the past

Most Israelis view the Holocaust through a prism that filters out everything else. That's easy to understand, in light of the trauma's dimensions, but the viewpoint occludes a large portion of reality.

4. *Mitchell D Silber* The Iranian threat to New York City

As the West's conflict with Iran over its nuclear programme heats up, New York City - with its large Jewish population - becomes an increasingly attractive target.

5. *Palestinian-Israeli impasse*

Obviously Tel Aviv does not consider the key deterrents that include the drawing of future borders, the division of East Jerusalem and the repatriation of millions of Palestinians refugees significant enough to render any peace initiative redundant.

Fundamentally Freund: The end of Palestine

Michael Freund, Jerusalem Post, 15 February 2012

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=258010>

I never thought I would say this, but those of us on the Israeli Right owe a debt of gratitude to Mahmoud Abbas.

By forging a unity agreement with Hamas earlier this month in Doha, Qatar, the Palestinian Authority president has inadvertently corroborated one of the central tenets of our political philosophy: the Palestinians cannot and must not be granted a state.

Ever since the signing of the Oslo Accords in September 1993, we have warned against the establishment of a Palestinian entity alongside Israel. Historical, military and geopolitical arguments have been made, numerous articles and papers have been written, and countless rallies and protests were organized, all with the aim of demonstrating just how foolhardy such a step would be.

Repeatedly, we have pleaded with the public to recognize the dangers inherent in dividing the land of Israel and placing the heart of the country within our foes' artillery range. Time after time, we have insisted that an independent Palestine would be swept up by the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism and become an outpost for Iranian-style extremism.

It has often been an uphill battle, as much of the media and the international community has prodded and pressed to give the Palestinians a state of their own, seemingly without regard for the consequences.

But earlier this month, Abbas delivered decisive and irrefutable corroboration of everything the Right has been saying for nearly 20 years.

When he sat down with Hamas thug Khaled Mashaal and Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani on February 6, smiled for the cameras and then formally agreed to joint Fatah-Hamas rule, Abbas validated the worst fears of every Israeli.

He embraced a terrorist movement committed to Israel's destruction, legitimized them by welcoming Hamas into the Palestinian political mainstream, and laid the groundwork for their possible takeover of the Palestinian Authority. Under the terms of the deal, Abbas will head a unity government that will oversee Palestinian presidential and parliamentary elections in Judea, Samaria and Gaza later this year.

And so, in one fell swoop, he has breathed new life into the Palestinian jihadist movement, raising their hopes to eventually seize the reins of power in Ramallah, just as they did in Gaza City. From a security point of view, this is a nightmare in the making.

Should Hamas prevail, it would mean that the same organization that has been busy firing rockets into southern Israel would suddenly gain a political and institutional foothold just 10 kilometers north of Jerusalem. And Hamas' Iranian backers would enjoy a clear and unmistakable boost by further tightening their ring of encirclement around the Jewish state.

Lest anyone doubt the significance that Hamas attaches to the deal, they should consider what Mashaal declared its primary goal as being: "to resist the enemy [Israel] and achieve our national goal."

Qatar's role in forging the Palestinian unity deal should not be underestimated.

The tiny Gulf state has played a significant part over the past year in helping to strengthen various Islamist forces throughout the region, from the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt to the Islamist Party Ennahda which came to power in Tunisia. The Qataris are now obviously trying to shepherd Hamas to power as well in order to further their own interests, and they will surely make a concerted effort to see that come to pass.

However dangerous this development might be on the ground, it does present a significant opportunity in terms of Israel's public diplomacy. Simply put, Abbas's embrace of Hamas should be used to make a strong case against the prevailing notion that a "two-state solution" can bring about peace.

After all, the mirage of moderation surrounding Fatah and the Palestinian Authority is now unambiguously on display as little more than a figment of the Left's imagination.

We must make the case that this is the end of Palestine, the death knell of the delusion that the Palestinian leadership was interested in reconciliation, compromise and peace. For if Abbas and his cohorts truly wished to see an end to the conflict, they would not have joined hands with those who advocate endless confrontation. By affixing his signature to the unity deal, Abbas has therefore settled the argument once and for all.

Faced with a choice, he discarded the possibility of an armistice with Israel, thereby closing the door on any chance of a resolution. Abbas chose Hamas over harmony. Now we must make sure he pays a price for doing so.

Milestones along the road to a new MidEast peace

Ari Shavit, Haaretz, 16 February 2012

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/milestones-along-the-road-to-a-new-mideast-peace-1.413212>

The first basic assumption of the new peace is that, in the coming years, no Israeli-Palestinian peace deal will be signed.

Of course, we must keep trying. Some secret diplomatic team must always be maintained to conduct hushed-up negotiations to check whether it is possible. But the working assumption is that, in the current strategic environment, there's no chance of resolving the problems of Jerusalem, the refugees or Hamas. Someday there will be peace, perhaps, but not in this decade.

The second basic assumption of the new peace is that the threat posed by the occupation is no less serious than any other threat. The occupation threatens Israel morally, demographically and politically, and skews its identity. Continuing the occupation corrupts the Jewish-democratic state. It slowly changes its identity and

threatens its essential existence. The status quo is cancerous, even if we don't feel it. If we don't end it, it will finish us off.

The third basic assumption of the new peace is that a unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank can't be immediate, one-dimensional or far-reaching. It still isn't clear how we will withstand the Iranian missile bases that were set up in the north and the south, in Lebanon and Gaza, following the previous unilateral withdrawals, but it's clear that we won't be able to withstand a third such missile base in the center of the country. A withdrawal to the Green Line that doesn't address the missile danger will be destabilizing and will threaten national security.

The fourth basic assumption of the new peace is that while the new Muslim-Arab world won't allow for the signing of the old types of peace agreements, it could pave the way for new types of opportunities, alliances and understandings. We've lost the chance for formal peace agreements with secular, corrupt Arab despots, but there is a chance of reaching some fascinating, mutually beneficial deals with some of our neighbors. At the same time, an opening has been created for deeper understandings between Israel and the western powers that up to now have resisted trying to understand us.

The fifth basic assumption of the new peace is that we must act. If David Ben-Gurion had been alive today, he would have jumped at the new regional situation as if he had found a treasure. He would be searching for new allies, new strategic arrangements and new diplomatic understandings. Ben-Gurion is no longer with us, but his way of working is more relevant than ever. Faced with a regional storm, Israel must take the initiative.

These five basic assumptions bring us to one conclusion - we need a new diplomatic paradigm. The Oslo Accords are no longer relevant, and the Camp David and Annapolis outlines are past their expiration date. Peace with Syria is no longer on the agenda for now. Those ossified, obsolete ideas must be replaced with creative ideas for a new peace.

The new-peaceniks will agree to the following: Israel is prepared to freeze construction in settlements that are beyond the new separation line; Israel is prepared to operate an evacuation-compensation program in settlements beyond the separation line; and Israel is prepared to evacuate some 20 whole settlements in the West Bank, whose abandonment will give the Palestinians a significant swath of contiguous territory.

In return, Israel demands that the international community recognize that the future peace will be peace between the Jewish-democratic state and the demilitarized Palestinian state. Israel demands that the international community recognize that the new separation line is a legitimate line of defense until peace is reached. Israel demands that the international community recognize that the Jordan Valley is a crucial security zone in which special security arrangements must be made, even if peace is reached. Israel demands that the international community sign treaties with it and grant it a security net, and it demands a guarantee that any territory it withdraws from will remain totally demilitarized.

And Israel suggests that the international community enter into a true partnership with it, so that together they can advance a controlled and careful plan for dividing the land.

It's time that we all raised our heads, opened our eyes and took a really good look at where it is we're living. This peace will not be a peace of yet another glittering ceremony on the White House lawn. This peace will be the end product of a long and exhausting process of ending the occupation.

The process will have to be gradual, creative and real. But it must begin now. A new peace, now!

Imprisoned in the past

Uri Misgav, Haaretz, 15 February 2012

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/imprisoned-in-the-past-1.412944>

The exaggerated, ecstatic coverage of Maj. Gen. Amir Eshel's appointment as commander of the Israel Air Force underscored his part in the F-15 squad flyover the Auschwitz concentration camp. Three state-of-the-art combat planes flew over the ruins of the death camp in this airborne show of strength led by Eshel in 2003. This showcase sortie was trumpeted as the highlight of his army service.

At first, this would appear to bear witness to the Jewish people's heightened consciousness of the past, a phenomenon attested to in a recent survey that found 98 percent of Jews in this country view the memory of the Holocaust as the most important foundation of the people's existence. But in actual fact the flyover was a grotesque and controversial historical masquerade. It reflected the fact that most Israelis view the Holocaust through a prism that filters out everything else. That's easy to understand, in light of the trauma's dimensions, but the viewpoint occludes a large portion of reality.

History texts this year will note not only the anniversary of the Wannsee Conference, which marked the start of the "Final Solution," the onset of systematic extermination: In 1942 Allied forces also stifled the Nazi army's momentum. From that point the tables were turned, and foundations were laid for a postwar reality that would govern Europe for decades to come. Perhaps these postwar arrangements are now passe, on the verge of final collapse. The flames that erupted this week in Athens are liable to spread to neighboring countries, in a "Greece first" sort of chain reaction.

A gloomy, though not inconceivable, scenario forecasts 2012 as a year of internal collapse in Europe, this time not due to military circumstances but as a result of socioeconomic trends. The gravest feelings of despair are felt on the European periphery, far from the media spotlight. Anyone who has visited Greece or Portugal recently can report on stagnation in urban locales, on ghost towns bereft of hope.

America was largely responsible for liberating the western part of the continent from the ravages of World War II, via the implementation of the ambitious Marshall Plan, officially known as the European Recovery Program. Its main idea was to replace military forces with an economic-democratic foundation, while providing incentives for collaboration and mutual aid. In financial terms adjusted to today's currency values, the United States

disbursed about \$100 billion to the continent. President Harry S. Truman and Secretary of State George Marshall had to deal with an isolationist-minded Congress led by a Republican majority. It wasn't until April 1948, three years after the war ended, that the Marshall Plan went into effect.

The problem is that the United States under President Barack Obama, assuming he is elected to a second term, cannot save Europe this time. The American public's patience for foreign intervention of any sort has worn thin, owing to the reckless adventures in Afghanistan and Iraq. America is mired in a crisis of its own.

In its day, the Marshall Plan's most important rehabilitative effects were felt in Germany. In an intriguing historical irony, Berlin is today considered the leader of efforts to save the continent. Over the last year, the Germans have been gnashing their teeth, hesitating to fully carry out the role of the savior. In Greece, Germany is already viewed as the real boss, as something between a nursery-school teacher and a repo agent for a bankrupt factory. This situation is fraught with tension. Last week I met in Jerusalem with jurists and other civilian experts, some of whom were from Germany and Greece. Tension between them was palpable.

A recent headline in Haaretz announced that "Germany lacks funds to go after Nazi war criminals." That is just as well. Last year's trial of John Demjanjuk was a farce. There's no point in Germany's chasing after 90-year-old war criminals, just as Israel's planes have no reason to fly over Auschwitz.

It's important to learn from the past, but the real challenges are to be found in the present and future.

The Iranian threat to New York City

Mitchell D Silber, Wall Street Journal, 14 February 2012

http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052970203824904577215592376556800.html?mod=googlenews_wsj

On Monday, Israeli embassy workers in the capital cities of India and Georgia were targeted in terrorist attacks that Israeli officials believe were planned and carried out by Iran and its client, the militant group Hezbollah. The bomb in Tbilisi was defused, but the bomb in New Delhi, planted in an embassy worker's car, exploded and injured at least two.

Iran's next target could well be on American soil. In Senate testimony last month, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper stated that Iranian officials "are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime."

As evidence, Mr. Clapper cited an alleged plot foiled last October in which a naturalized U.S. citizen of Iranian descent, directed by the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, hired a member of a Mexican drug cartel to assassinate the Saudi ambassador to the United States. The plan involved blowing up a Washington, D.C., restaurant—potentially killing hundreds of Americans in the process.

Iran has a proven record of using its official presence in a foreign city to coordinate attacks, which are then carried out by Hezbollah agents from abroad, often leveraging the local community—whether wittingly or not—as facilitators. Most notable are the 1992 and 1994 bombings of Israeli and Jewish targets in Argentina, which killed 29 and 85 people, respectively. The New York City Police Department, where I work as director of Intelligence Analysis, sent a team to Argentina to study the modus operandi of those attacks and to meet with Argentine security officials who worked the investigations. Coupled with open source information, this is what the NYPD learned:

Iranian agents were sent to Argentina years before the attacks, where they integrated into society and became Argentine nationals. Mohsen Rabbani is believed to have been in charge of coordinating the 1994 attack and is subject to an Interpol arrest warrant for his involvement. He first came to Argentina in 1983, where he subsequently became the main imam at At-Tauhid, an Iranian-funded mosque in Buenos Aires.

A bomb planted in a car belonging to the Israeli Embassy exploded in New Delhi, Feb. 13.

After traveling to Iran in August 1993 to participate in a meeting that allegedly gave the planned attack the green light, Mr. Rabbani returned to Argentina as a cultural attaché to the Iranian Embassy, conveniently providing him diplomatic immunity. Then, Hezbollah agents from abroad received logistical support from members of the local Lebanese-Shiite community and the Iranian Embassy to carry out the attack.

The Argentine attacks were by no means isolated incidents. Hezbollah has been tied to failed attacks in 2009 against Israeli and Jewish interests in Azerbaijan, Egypt and Turkey. Last month, Thai officials arrested a suspected Hezbollah militant for possibly planning attacks there or perhaps facilitating the movement of weapons through Bangkok.

The NYPD must assume that New York City could be targeted by Iran or Hezbollah. On Feb. 3, Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei threatened that Iran "had its own tools" to respond to sanctions and threats of military action against it. Indeed, as the West's conflict with Iran over its nuclear program continues to heat up, New York City—especially with its large Jewish population—becomes an increasingly attractive target.

This is neither an idle nor a new threat. As one example of Iranian agents acting in New York, in 2004 two security guards attached to the Iranian mission to the United Nations were sent home by the State Department after being caught conducting surveillance of city subways and landmarks. Iran's U.N. mission allows officials from Iran's Ministry of Intelligence to live and operate in New York with official diplomatic cover.

Iran also has a presence in New York via the Alavi Foundation, a nonprofit ostensibly devoted to charity works and promoting Islamic culture. In December 2009, Preet

Bharara, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, described Alavi as having "effectively been a front for the government of Iran." A contemporaneous complaint filed by Mr. Bharara's office led to the seizure of Alavi's assets—including the Islamic Institute of New York, the largest Shiite mosque in the city and the location most closely affiliated with Iran's U.N. mission. The NYPD Intelligence Division also played a role during the initial stages of the Alavi investigation.

Hezbollah and its supporters have a presence in New York and the surrounding area as well. In 2008, two Staten Island men pleaded guilty to providing material support to Hezbollah. Just down the road in Philadelphia, 26 people—including a former Brooklyn resident—were indicted in federal court in 2009 for conspiring to provide material support to the terrorist group.

Lebanese-linked businesses in the tri-state area and elsewhere have been implicated in a massive money-laundering scheme benefiting Hezbollah. This scheme was revealed in a civil suit filed against several Lebanese financial institutions last December by the Drug Enforcement Administration and the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York. Meanwhile, at least 18 other Hezbollah-related cases have been brought in federal courts across the United States since 2000.

Given the alleged plot against a foreign diplomat in Washington, Iran's increasingly bellicose rhetoric and its long history of sponsoring terror attacks abroad, the NYPD must remain vigilant in attempting to detect and disrupt any attack by Iran or its proxies. Anything less would be abdicating our duty to protect New York City and its residents.

Palestinian-Israeli impasse

Editorial, Khaleej Times Online, 14 February 2012

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2012/February/editorial_February26.xml§ion=editorial&col=

As expected the recent low-level talks between Palestinians and Israel in Jordan have come to a halt. On top of this the Israeli government has the gall to insist that the Palestinians should hold direct talks without preconditions.

Obviously, Tel Aviv does not consider the key deterrents that include the drawing of future borders, the division of East Jerusalem and the repatriation of millions of Palestinians refugees significant enough to render any peace initiative redundant.

At the core of the matter and the testing point for Israeli intent is the settlements issue — the same reason for the failure of the Washington talks that nosedived in its maiden flight. When such efforts have failed repeatedly, what good can a gathering of the international community do to reach some sort of comprehensive solution? This is the foremost thought that comes to mind on hearing about the Palestinians request for an international peace conference.

However, the important thing to bear in mind is that unless there is continued effort to highlight the need to arrive at a solution for the Mideast conflict, the Palestinian dream of an independent homeland will remain stifled. The longer the time taken to stall the implementation of a two-state solution on the lines of the 1967 borders, the more Israel is gaining by forcibly building settlements on greater tracts of occupied territories. Tel Aviv's long term plans, a clear reflection of Israeli national policy, is to redraw its territories and retain and integrate occupied territories by force till the time a Palestinian state comes into being. By then, citing security reasons amid professed inability to shift Israeli settlers, Tel Aviv would have effectively changed the geodynamics of the Palestinians, to its benefit.

The question is if an international peace conference at this juncture going to bring about an effective change? The world opinion is already with the Palestinians whose moral high ground is supported by international law. But with Israel enjoying the backing of the United States and other key European states with vetoing powers in the Security Council, this dream remains unfulfilled. It has also bolstered Israel's belligerent tendencies and given it a free hand in continuing to usurp international law and human rights. This must not be allowed any longer. Therefore the Arab League's ministerial council's support of holding this conference is timely. The international community must recognise the impact of delaying a solution to this crisis and must pressure Israel and its allies to reach a solution on the lines of previous agreements.

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

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