



Opinion and Analysis, Week ending 19 February 2014

1. *Israel and Palestine: Shifting paradigms*

Massoud al Derhappy , Al Jazeera, 17 February 2014

It's time for Israelis and Palestinians to reconsider how they view the conflict and their own aspirations.

<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/02/israel-palestine-shifting-parad-201421671916362633.html>

2. *Handing the Middle East to Russia*

Amir Taheri, New York Post, 16 February 2014

After five years of seizing every opportunity to underline his lack of interest in projecting US leadership, Obama seems to have succeeded in persuading many across the region that America's absence is no longer just a theoretical possibility, but a reality.

<http://nypost.com/2014/02/16/handing-the-middle-east-to-russia/>

3. *The key to Mideast peace, neglected by the world*

Raphael Ahren , The Times of Israel, 14 February 2014

Recognition of the Jewish state is Netanyahu's 'first and most unshakable demand,' but the Palestinians say they'll never accept it — and the international community is clueless

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/the-key-to-mideast-peace-neglected-by-the-world/>

4. *Palestine has every right to proclaim its status*

Editorial Gulf News, 14 February 2014

It is fully legitimate on its part to oppose unlawful occupation and uphold recognition as observer state.

<http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/palestine-has-every-right-to-proclaim-its-status-1.1290544>

5. *Suppressing the urge to survive*

Wesley Pruden, Washington Post, 13 February 2014

Self-preservation is the strongest human urge, but only the Israelis, alone in the world, are expected to suppress the urge and die without making a lot of unseemly fuss and noise about it. You don't have to be Jewish to share the outrage

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2014/feb/13/pruden-suppressing-the-urge-to-survive/?page=all>

6. *10 reasons why the BDS movement is immoral and hinders peace*

Alan Dershowitz, Gatestone Institute, 12 February 2014

As a strong supporter of the two state solution and a critic of Israel's settlement policies, I am particularly appalled at efforts to impose divestment, boycotts and sanctions against Israel, and Israel alone, because BDS makes it *more difficult* to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Mid-East conflict that requires compromise on all sides.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4171/bds-immoral>

7. BDS on a roll? Not so fast

Evelyn Gordon, Commentary Magazine, 12 February 2014

One of the BDS movement's greatest assets is the fact that its every success gets massive media coverage while its failures are largely ignored. That's why anyone following the news in recent weeks would probably conclude that boycott, divestment, and sanctions were rapidly gaining ground. Yet in reality, BDS has suffered several major failures lately - and some of these failures bode ill for its future.

<http://www.commentarymagazine.com/2014/02/12/bds-on-a-roll-not-so-fast/>

8. Presbyterian Church Group: Zionism is the problem

Lazar Berman, The Times of Israel, 11 February 2014

'Zionism Unsettled,' a new study guide by the PC(USA) Israel Palestine Mission Network, calls the movement Jewish supremacism

<http://www.timesofisrael.com/presbyterian-church-group-zionism-is-the-problem/>

9. Future EU Sanctions Against Israel? Real, Imagined, and Somewhere in Between *Jerusalem Centre for Public Affairs, 11 February 2014*

Is the scenario of a full-scale EU boycott of Israel at all realistic? This study is designed to provide policy-makers with a "Brussels insiders" perspective on the prospects for future sanctions by the European Union against the State of Israel. <http://icpa.org/article/future-eu-sanctions-against-israel/#sthash.mLuaGaem.dpuf>

10. Arab, Muslim and pro-Israel

Abdul Bioud, The Times of Israel, 11 February 2014

Why does a guy who's born in a country that does not even recognize Israel come to support it? Below is the case for Israel from the perspective of someone who grew up and lived in a self-proclaimed Arab and Muslim country.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/moslem-arab-and-pro-israel/>

1. Israel and Palestine: Shifting paradigms

"I knew that people expected me to harbour anger towards whites," Nelson Mandela wrote in the Long Walk to Freedom, recalling the morning after his release from 27 years in jail. "But I had none. In prison, my anger towards whites decreased, but my hatred for the system grew. I wanted South Africa to see that I loved even my enemies while I hated the system that turned us against one another."

The late South African president chose the path of truth, justice and reconciliation. Just as blacks and whites drafted a new constitution for a united South Africa, so too can Israelis and Palestinians if they choose to live as equal citizens of one state. Segregation would end, political prisoners released, Palestinian refugees in exile allowed to return, loss and dispossession addressed through compensation, a truth and reconciliation commission formed, democratic elections held. Talk of existentialism and boycotts will be irrelevant.

A transformational point

Israel doesn't like the parallels being drawn between it and the South African apartheid system. But equivalences exist. Israel has in place a formal system that undeniably privileges Israeli Jews while it legalises discrimination against Palestinians (Christian and Muslim) through dozens of checkpoints, segregated roads, arbitrary arrests, house demolitions, land confiscations, collective punishment and forced deportation. Israeli legislation bans Palestinians (and no other ethnic group) from living in Israel after marrying an Israeli citizen.

Just as South Africa was at a transformational point when apartheid ended and Mandela gained his freedom, Israel today in the face of a growing boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement, is also at an important juncture. Nearly 66 years after Palestinians were forced out of their homes and 20 years after the Oslo Declaration of Principles was signed, there is little one can point to that shows any measure of success from the so-called peace process.

Since the 1993 Oslo agreement, Israel has paid lip service to the two-state solution, using the cover of "peace talks" to pursue a policy of containment that manages the conflict while in tandem spearheading an expansionary settlement agenda. The settlement enterprise with its segregated roads, security checkpoints, eight-metre wall that is double the size of the Berlin wall (projected to reach 403 miles), contravenes the spirit of peace talks and coexistence. Settlements are an intrinsic and systematic tool of every Israeli government to establish a fait-accompli on the ground that accentuates the marginalisation of Palestinians.

In violation of the Fourth Geneva Convention the number of Israeli settlers across the West Bank has surged from 262,500 in 1993 to more than 520 000, with more than 200,000 in East Jerusalem (the intended capital of a Palestinian state), according to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Earlier this month, Israel announced further settlement construction in occupied Palestinian land, even as US Secretary of State John Kerry presses on with a controversial and flawed peace deal that would, according to Israeli media, leave 80 percent of Israel settlers in place and negate the rights of Palestinian refugees.

While Israel's economy has thrived in tandem with the growth of settlements, Palestinian lives have regressed. The Palestinian Authority which loses about \$300 million a year in fiscal revenue retained by Israel is constantly cash-strapped, unable to pay the wages of civil servants, dependent on donations from international organisations and pledges from countries that seldom materialise or are partially met.

About 36 percent of the West Bank's 2.9 million Palestinians suffer from clinical depression, higher than rates in the US, the UK, China and Australia, according to Mohammad M Herzallah, founder of the Palestinian Neuroscience Initiative and a doctoral candidate at Rutgers University.

Meanwhile, nearly 2 million Palestinians in Gaza remain under siege, in one of the most densely populated strips of land in the world with 50% youth unemployment.

Given these grim realities, and in the face of ethical and legal obligations, it's not by chance that countries and private enterprises are divesting from Israeli companies. PGGM, the largest Dutch pension fund, divested from Israel's five biggest banks last month because of their involvement in financing illegal settlements. Norway's sovereign fund followed suit, blacklisting two Israeli companies because of their involvement in settlement construction. Danske Bank, Denmark's biggest bank, has also divested from Israel's largest lender Bank Hapoalim.

An outcry that forced actress Scarlett Johansson to give up her ambassadorial role with the Oxfam international charity over her involvement with Israel's SodaStream company, which operates in the occupied West Bank, cast light on the moral implications of doing business in illegally annexed land.

As in South Africa, more entities will come to refuse doing business with Israel, trade relations will deteriorate and as the rand was undermined, confidence in the shekel too will erode. Military occupations just aren't palatable.

The BDS movement "is approaching the turning point...in which the civic action from below will meet the official policies of governments and parliaments from above, and sanctions against Israel will become a fait accompli", Avraham Burg, a former speaker of Israel's Knesset assembly, wrote in Haaretz this month. Israel "will remain helpless when confronted by a civil rebellion that moves the discourse from who's stronger/tougher/more resilient to a discourse on rights and values", he added.

Is the two-state solution still viable?

The clock is ticking. Just as the apartheid regime in South Africa had a choice, so too does Israel. President F. W. de Klerk once thought the solution in South Africa would be separate states for blacks and whites. He realised however that was not tenable and took unilateral moves recognising the African National Congress, releasing Mandela from prison and held elections.

There was a time that a two-state solution may have worked. By virtue of Israel's doing, the realities on the ground make it increasingly unlikely. A secular democratic state, however, for both peoples is not a mirage. It requires sacrifice and compromise, foremost that both people forego their obsession with nationalism and its illusions, in exchange for a stake in one nation as equal citizens. That ultimately will be instrumental to true reconciliation among Israelis and Palestinians. Inherently, it is the fundamental reason why "peace talks" have been unfruitful.

It's time for a real paradigm shift in the way Israelis and Palestinians think about the conflict, their aspirations and a lasting solution. More than being an idealistic aspiration, a one-state solution for two people is the realistic choice.

The alternative won't just mean more violence, but also a far larger and different intifada or uprising than the previous two Israel suppressed militarily. It will extend beyond its geography and cast Israel into isolation, ostracising it as a pariah state so long as apartheid continues. No injustice can last forever.

2. Handing the Middle East to Russia

Some 40 years ago, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat ended his regime's alliance with, and reliance on, the Soviet Union, and, in one of the Cold war's most dramatic turnabouts, joined the Middle Eastern bloc of nations close to the United States. The switch led to the Camp

David peace accords, the defeat of a Soviet-sponsored rebellion in the Arabian Peninsula, the taming of the Communist regime in South Yemen and the containment of the Ba'athist regimes of Syria and Iraq.

Since the modern Middle East emerged from the debris of the Ottoman Empire after World War I, the region has needed an outside power to ensure stability by curbing internal and external ambitions, and acting as an honest broker.

Through the 1950s, Britain played that role. Then, until the late 1960s, the region was divided into Soviet and British spheres of influence, with the United States getting a cameo role every now and then. But by 1980, despite the fall of the pro-West regime in Iran, America was the principal guarantor of stability in the region.

Then came President Obama, anxious to move US foreign policy away from what he regards as imperialism. And indeed, after five years of seizing every opportunity to underline his lack of interest in projecting US leadership, Obama seems to have succeeded in persuading many across the region that America's absence is no longer just a theoretical possibility, but a reality.

That fact - temporarily hidden by Hillary Clinton's energetic but ultimately unproductive activism - is highlighted by John Kerry's delusional dance on the margins.

The trouble is that, with the US absence, the Middle East faces a power vacuum that could tear it apart with unforeseeable consequences for regional peace and stability. The search for a new power capable of acting as a balancing force has intensified. Some in the region think Russia could and should assume that role.

On Syria, Obama made it clear that he's given Russia a permanent veto over US policy. Arab sources tell me that Kerry has advised them not to press on with a new UN resolution seeking greater pressure on Syrian despot Bashar al-Assad so as not to antagonize "our Russian partners."

Washington's new stance was reconfirmed with the "nuclear deal" with the mullahs in Tehran. Obama adopted a Russian "fudge formula" rejected by the Bush administration in 2006. Under it, Iran will continue its nuclear program while offering "robust" inspection of select sites.

Suddenly, all roads seem to lead to Moscow.

Last month, even Saudi Arabia, Washington's close ally since the '40s, seemed interested in probing closer ties to Russia. Prince Bandar bin Sultan, the Saudi intelligence and security head, flew to Moscow on an unprecedented visit for extensive talks with Vladimir Putin. Arab sources say he evoked the prospect of giving Russia a share of the kingdom's huge arms imports and joint ventures in oil and gas projects.

Iran instantly reacted by offering Russia "preferential conditions" in developing oilfields in the Caspian sea and the Persian Gulf. President Hassan Rouhani even spoke of a Tehran-Moscow "strategic partnership" to rid "our region from the influence of distant powers," i.e., the United States. Rouhani has invited Putin to Tehran for the first state visit to the Islamic Republic by a Russian president.

Over the past six months, Moscow has played host to delegations from the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Iraq, all worried about Obama's decision to script the

United States out of international leadership. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif even led a delegation to Moscow to seek, believe it or not, a Russian role in “ensuring the future of Afghanistan.” Turkey, although a NATO member, has opened negotiations to purchase Russian arms.

The Syrian pro-democracy groups have also concluded that Russia may be the new “balancing power.” This month, Ahmad Jarba of the Syrian National Coalition led a delegation to Moscow to discuss a deal where “the basic structures” of the Syrian state would remain intact while Russia plays an “oversight role” in a transition period. The upshot is that Russia would impose its policy of maintaining the Assad regime, with a few changes of personnel.

The latest pilgrim is Egypt’s new military dictator, Abdul-Fattah el-Sissi, who last week flew to Moscow, the only foreign capital he has visited since his coup d’état last July, for a photo-op with Putin.

Moscow authorized the publication of a news item according to which Putin wished Sissi “success in your presidential bid.” In exchange, the Egyptians announced that Sissi had discussed buying \$2.2 billion in Russian arms — restoring the position Russia lost in the 1970s.

3. The key to Mideast peace, neglected by the world

A lot has changed in the Middle East since the Arab League passed the 1967 Khartoum resolution, which established the “main principles by which the Arab States abide”: **no** peace with Israel, **no** recognition of Israel, **no** negotiations. The infamous “three no’s” of Khartoum have been replaced by a much less belligerent call for the establishment of a Palestinian state. But the original “no recognition of Israel” has evolved into “no recognition of Israel as a Jewish state,” and what just a few years ago was an absolute non-issue now might threaten the success of the entire peace process.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has elevated a Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, or as the nation-state of the Jewish people (he has been using both phrases interchangeably), to a non-negotiable precondition to any agreement.

“Our first and most unshakable demand is recognition,” he said recently at a conference in Tel Aviv. “I would say that this is the first foundation for peace between us and the Palestinians.” Palestinian leaders, on the other hand, are adamant that they “will never accept under any circumstances” such a demand. “It’s our right not to recognize the Jewish state,” Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas insisted in a speech earlier this month.

Thus, Netanyahu’s requirement, possibly a key to peace in the Middle East, raises a plethora of questions - the answers of which are unknown even to many people who have dealt with the conflict for a long time: Why does Netanyahu insist on it? What is implied by labelling Israel a “Jewish state,” especially for the country’s non-Jewish minorities? Was Netanyahu the first one to add this issue to the equation? Do Israel’s citizens support his all-or-nothing approach? And what does the world think of it all?

Since the Oslo Accords in 1995, the international community has formed somewhat of a consensus over the core issues. Following the Geneva Initiative, the Clinton parameters and

George W. Bush's Road Map, the contours of Middle East peace seem more or less obvious: a Palestinian state within adjusted pre-1967 lines, East Jerusalem as capital and a "just and agreed upon" solution to the refugee question. But somehow Netanyahu's demand for recognition as a Jewish state hasn't really been seriously discussed by world leaders, and the international community doesn't seem sure about how to deal with this issue.

Some, hoping to nip the discussion in the bud, will simply point out that the United Nations' 1947 Partition Plan explicitly mentioned a "Jewish state." A case in point is Russia's ambassador to Israel, Sergey Yakovlev, who said recently, "Why should we again recognize the Jewish state of Israel? We did it in '48." (Former Mossad chief Meir Dagan this week called Netanyahu's demand for Palestinian recognition "nonsense". After all, the UN already recognized a Jewish state, he said, "and now we're going to ask for such recognition from the Palestinian state? We're asking for a recognition of our state's nature from a state that doesn't even exist?")

Still, given the important, nay, central role this issue has assumed in the current peace talks, it is somewhat surprising that no serious public discussion has taken place on how to deal with Netanyahu's request. Is it justified because genuine peace requires the acceptance of the Jewish state, or merely a stalling tactic on the prime minister's part, intended to obstruct negotiations and deflect blame toward the Palestinians' ostensible intransigence and anti-Semitism?

Over the last two years or so, I have asked foreign ministers, diplomats and other senior officials from many different countries what they think about pressuring the Palestinians into recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. Few were able or willing to express a clear, principled stance on the issue, either in favour or against.

"I don't think we have any clear position on that because we're not 100% sure what is meant by this concept of a Jewish state," said the European Union's ambassador to Israel, Lars Faaborg-Andersen. I asked him why the EU does not formulate an official position on an issue Netanyahu has declared to be a prerequisite to any peace agreement. He replied: "All I can say is that this is for the parties to discuss. And I'm not a party to these [Israeli-Palestinian peace] talks."

A short while later, Faaborg-Andersen's spokesperson clarified in a statement that "the EU has not pronounced a position on the question of recognition of Israel as a Jewish state among other reasons because we're not sure about the implications of this on other final status issues. Therefore, we think that this is an issue to be discussed between the parties."

This week, I posed the same question to the president of the European Parliament, Martin Schulz, who was on an official visit to Israel. It's a "delicate and complicated" issue, he said, refusing to make a definite statement. "I will not interfere, as a representative of a European institution, in this debate. Not to escape from your question — I think that this is first of all not my duty, being here, to interfere."

The idea of recognition was actually invented by Israeli leftists

Israel's desire to be recognized a Jewish state is much older than the current round of US-brokered peace talks. Ever since Netanyahu accepted, in principle, the creation of a Palestinian state, during his 2009 Bar-Ilan University speech, he has made recognition a key element. "If the Palestinians recognize Israel as the State of the Jewish people, then we will be ready in a future peace agreement to reach a solution where a demilitarized Palestinian state exists alongside the Jewish state," he said at the time.

But the issue came up even under Netanyahu's predecessor Ehud Olmert. On November

13, 2007, right before the Annapolis peace conference, then foreign minister (and current justice minister and chief peace negotiator) Tzipi Livni raised the issue in a meeting with senior Palestinian Authority officials.

"Israel the state of the Jewish people - and I would like to emphasize the meaning of 'its people' is the Jewish people," Livni said, according to minutes of the meeting leaked to Al Jazeera. "I didn't ask for recognizing something that is the internal decision of Israel. Israel can do so, it is a sovereign state. [We want you to recognize it.] The whole idea of the conflict is ... the entire point is the establishment of the Jewish state."

The idea even predates the 2007 talks, and its significance was originally perceived by Israeli left-wingers, as journalist Yair Rosenberg recently pointed out. Rosenberg quotes Yaacov Lozowick, who in his book "Right to Exist: A Moral Defence of Israel's Wars" tells the story of some two dozen Israeli and Palestinian intellectuals - "there was not a hard-line militant among them" - who in July 2001, when Ariel Sharon was prime minister, "convened to build a bridge over the ruins of peace."

Their idea was to issue a joint declaration calling on the two sides to resume negotiations. "The Palestinians were willing to join in stating that there should be two independent states alongside one another, but the Israelis, alerted by the fiascos of Camp David and Taba to a nuance they had previously overlooked, demanded that the statement clearly say that Israel would be a Jewish State and Palestine an Arab one," wrote Lozowick. "The Palestinians refused. Jews, they said, are a religion, not a nationality, and neither need nor deserve their own state. They were welcome to live in Israel, but the Palestinian refugees would come back, and perhaps she would cease to be a Jewish State."

Stymieing calls for a Palestinian "right of return" is, of course, one main reason behind Netanyahu's insistence for recognition. "Recognizing Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people means completely abandoning the 'right of return' and ending any other national demands over the land and sovereignty of the State of Israel," he said last October. "This is a crucial component for a genuine reconciliation and stable and durable peace."

More than three-quarters of Israeli Jews believe it is important that the Palestinians recognize Israel as a Jewish state

The prime minister's critics argue that he has created an artificial obstacle to peace, because he knows the Palestinians will never concede this point.

"Do you think that any Palestinian leader in his right mind can ever accept this?" senior Palestinian official and former peace negotiator Nabil Shaath recently asked rhetorically. "Or is this simply intended to make it impossible to sign a peace agreement with Israel?"

But the right of return is only secondary in importance. Netanyahu's declared main reason for the insistence on recognition is what he sees as the Arab refusal to accept a Jewish presence in the Holy Land. This is "at the root of the conflict," he said in late January.

"This conflict has gone on for nearly 100 years," he elaborated, telling the story of how a Jewish immigration office was attacked by rioting Palestinians in 1921. "There were no settlers there... There were no territories. There was a basic objection to any Jewish presence." This sentiment has continued to fester in the Palestinian heads ever since, Netanyahu suggested, leading to a struggle "against the very existence of the Jewish state, against Zionism or any geographic expression of it, any State of Israel in any border."

The Zionist movement and various Israeli governments agreed to recognize a Palestinian state, "but this conflict has gone on because of one reason: the stubborn opposition to recognize the Jewish state, the nation-state of the Jewish people," he said. "To end the conflict, they must recognize that in our land, this land, in the Jewish homeland, there are two peoples."

The Israeli public seems to back Netanyahu's position. According to a poll published earlier this month by the Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University, more than three-quarters of Israeli Jews believe "it is important that the Palestinians recognize Israel as the state of the Jewish people" as part of an agreement. Only 21% said it was not important.

"Among those who believe recognition is important, 41% believe it is important because it is a recognition of the basic principle of Zionism, 29% because it would help Israel counter a demand that it become a 'state of all its citizens,' and 19% because it would be compensation for Israel recognizing the Palestinian state as the state of the Palestinian people," the Israel Democracy Institute stated in a press release.

According to the poll, a large majority (63%) of Israeli Jews who describe themselves as left-wing support Netanyahu's demand for recognition. Indeed, even Yossi Beilin - a former cabinet minister and icon of the Israeli left - recently joined those who advocate for a Palestinian recognition of Israel's Jewish nature.

"I believe Israeli leaders will be willing to pay a high price in exchange for such recognition," he wrote in the NY Times a few months ago. "Both sides should embrace the formula proposed 10 years ago by the Geneva Initiative, which recognized the right of both parties to statehood and 'Palestine and Israel as the homelands of their respective peoples.'"

President Shimon Peres - Beilin's former boss - on the other hand, reportedly considers Netanyahu's insistence on recognition "unnecessary". According to media reports, Peres recently called it an impediment to the current US-led peace negotiations.

Washington itself, however, clearly deems Netanyahu's demand reasonable. "Palestinians must recognize that Israel will be a Jewish state," President Barack Obama said in Jerusalem during his March 2013 visit. A so-called framework agreement, which the US is expected to present in the near future to advance the talks, is said to describe Israel as the "nation-state of the Jewish people."

Other states - mostly Israel's staunchest allies - accept this notion as well. "Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state is absolute and non-negotiable," Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper said last month in the Knesset. He used the phrase "Jewish state" no fewer than seven times during that speech.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said in December 2012 that she "would like to see a Jewish state - Israel - and a Palestinian state," and even enshrined her country's responsibility toward Israel "as a Jewish and democratic state" in her latest coalition contract. Romanian President Traian Basescu, too, supported Netanyahu's demand, saying in January that "if [the Palestinians] want peace, they must follow the request of the Israeli people."

But unequivocally clear statements such as these are rare. Many officials, especially European ones, are caught off guard when asked whether they support the demand for Palestinian recognition of Israel as a Jewish state. This is mainly because their respective governments have never formulated a position on so nebulous an issue. They have a clear stance on the legality or illegality of West Bank settlements, and oppose incitement, but

haven't bothered to think about the legitimacy of Israel's desire to be recognized as a Jewish state.

Some prominent Western politicians apparently do not accept Netanyahu's argument about the Palestinian refusal to accept any Jewish sovereign presence in the Land of Israel.

"I don't think that after all, on the Palestinian side, this would be a non-negotiable obstacle," former Dutch foreign minister Uri Rosenthal, for instance, told me last year. Abbas "could easily say" that Israel is a Jewish state, Rosenthal asserted; the PA president's current refusal to do was understood, the ex-minister indicated, as a case of holding on to an high-priced bargaining chip in the negotiations. Other Western officials have also indicated that they do not believe the idea of recognizing a Jewish state in the Middle East could be unacceptable to Palestinians for deeply ingrained ideological reasons.

Yet the Palestinian leadership is outspoken about its reasons for rejecting the Jewish state definition Netanyahu insists they endorse. "It would be dangerous to recognize this because this would mean our acceptance of the dissolution of our own history and ties and our historic right to Palestine. This is something we'll never accept under any circumstances," Palestinian Foreign Minister Riyad Al-Maliki said last month.

Accepting Israel as a Jewish state would also "raise fears" about the fate of Israel's Arab citizens, Al-Maliki said. "They are already second-class citizens, so how will they be affected by the Judaization of the state?"

Concern for Israel's Arab minority is the most widely quoted reason why Western political and civil rights groups view Netanyahu's demand with skepticism. But the prime minister insists that enshrining the state's Jewish character will do no harm to anyone.

"We're not asking them to change their religion and they have full civic rights," Netanyahu said earlier this year in an interview with Canada's CTV News, referring to Israel's non-Jewish minority. "Arab citizens of Israel serve in the Knesset, our parliament, they serve in the government, they serve on the Supreme Court. It's full civic equality. But what we say is that this state, with its flag, with its symbols, its national holidays and the ability to accept Jews from around the world - that's the nation-state of the Jewish people, with full civic rights to those who are non-Jews."

The Palestinians appear uncompromising vis-à-vis a possible recognition of the Jewish state. "This is out of the question," Abbas told the NY Times last week. Egypt and Jordan did not have to do this prior to signing peace agreements with Israel, he explained, so why should Palestine?

To some, this argumentation appears reasonable - the Palestinians recognized the State of Israel, so why should they be forced to make declarations about Israel's Jewish character, especially if that would ostensibly mean negating their own historical narrative. As senior PLO official and top peace negotiator Saeb Erekat said, today's Palestinians consider themselves the descendent of the Canaanites who lived in the area 5,500 years before the Jews arrived.

Furthermore, why should Israelis care about the Palestinians making declarative statements about the Jewish state? "I don't feel we need a declaration from the Palestinians that they recognize Israel as a Jewish state," Finance Minister Yair Lapid said. "My father didn't come to Haifa from the Budapest ghetto in order to get recognition from Abu Mazen [Abbas]."

But Jordanians and Egyptians making peace with Israel without recognition is not the same as the Palestinians not doing so, according to Dennis Ross, a former top US diplomat with extensive experience in Israeli-Arab peace negotiations. "The difference is that these are two national movements competing for the same space," he told me last week. Recognizing Israel as a Jewish state would not necessarily destroy the Palestinians' national narrative, he said. "They know who they are; [recognition] doesn't deny that."

"At the end of the day, Israel as Jewish state is another way of having everyone in the region accept the legitimacy of Israel's presence," Ross continued. "And that's a sine qua non for peace and reconciliation. So I think it is essential. But I also think it's one of the things that gets resolved during the course of the negotiations."

Others argue that peace is not the same as reconciliation, and that a treaty to establish two states for two peoples is not necessarily dependent on a full convergence of historical narratives that have been competing for decades.

One thing is certain: Failure to achieve a final-status agreement will decrease the chances for a two-state solution and set Israelis and Palestinians on the path to a binational state, to the delight of extremists on both sides.

4. Palestine has every right to proclaim its status

There is a prevailing arrogance among Israeli authorities that smacks of high-handed bigotry, cronyism and sheer ignorance when it comes to dealing with the Palestinian National Authority (PNA). The latest example of this inexcusable intolerance comes from authorities who have blocked 70 patients from the Gaza Strip from entering into Israel. Why? Because the Gazans carried transfer documents that were marked "State of Palestine".

This change in stationery replaces the previous "Palestinian Territories" carried on official documents. But this simple change in words is enough to bring Israel's deep-seated and simmering bigotry to the fore. The documents were changed in mid-December to reflect the fact that a year ago, Palestinians had won recognition as an observer state from the United Nations General Assembly. Truth be told, Israeli proposals to expand the Jewish state into illegal colonies are only backed at the UN General Assembly by a coalition of the immoral forged by Tel Aviv with the US and the Marshall Islands! But the fact that Palestine has been rightfully granted observer status - and has the audacity to change its stationery - is enough to cause administrative palpitations in Israel's bureaucracy.

Let us be clear - Palestine has every right to change its stationery to reflect UN observer status. Just as it has every right to continue its opposition to the unlawful occupation of its territories, to the destruction of its homes, the razing of its olive trees and the imprisonment of its sons and daughters.

5. Suppressing the urge to survive

We've heard this song before. John Kerry has offered the latest new and improved peace plan, to settle once and for all the wars and rumours of war between Israel and the Palestinians and their enablers.

The secretary of state's dreamy scheme would be nice work if peaceful folk could get it, but reality grades on a steep curve. The Israelis have this unreasonable itch to survive.

Self-preservation is the strongest human urge, but only the Israelis, alone in the world, are expected to suppress the urge and die without making a lot of unseemly fuss and noise about it. You don't have to be Jewish to share the outrage.

Mr Kerry,, with more or less good will for the Jews, has devised a formula that might look good on a State Department white paper — or even on pink or blue stock — but it assumes that everyone will be nice. Too bad, but Israel's critics and tormentors don't do nice.

Israel is expected to overlook gritty reality, and let someone else worry about the nation's survival. There's a strong whiff of mendacity about this, but everyone is expected to get a clothespin and not notice the stench.

When Mr Kerry observed, at a recent conference in Munich (a nice irony there for anyone with an acquaintance with history), that "there's an increasing delegitimization campaign that's been building up [against Israel]. People are very sensitive about it. There are talks of boycotts and other kinds of things."

This is a not-so-subtle reminder, as if the Israelis don't read newspapers, that other kinds of things include "a BDS Movement" to pressure Israel to give in and go gentle into the terror of the Arabian nights.

"Boycotts, divestment and sanctions" are the order of the day, promoted by academics, pundits of bad will, certain diplomats of no will and "goodness activists" in the name of the phony "peace" that requires a gentle world to make it actually work.

The usual suspects swoon. Writes Tom Friedman in The New York Times: "[Mr.] Kerry and President Obama are trying to build Israelis a secure off-ramp from the highway they're hurtling down in the West Bank that only ends in some really bad places for Israel and the Jewish people."

Given the ineptitude of the architects and the obliviousness of the engineers designing it, that off-ramp leads to disaster, but that's a risk Mr Friedman and his like-minded fans are willing to take.

Certain Israeli intellectuals, weary of war and yearning for a little relief from the endless stress and strife and threat of extinction, keep looking for a way to blame Israel for the intransigence, since putting the blame where it belongs hasn't worked.

Jaw-jaw, as Winston Churchill famously said, is better than war-war. But when Britain's survival was hanging in the balance, he didn't flinch, and neither did Britain.

Shorn of self-righteous rhetoric and diplomatic play-acting, the bottom line in the Middle East is that the Palestinians could have their state on the West Bank if they would give up the fantasy of destroying the Israelis and getting it all.

The Israelis would be pleased in the event to help the Palestinians make a success of nationhood, if not from good will then from the reality that peace - the real thing, and not the processed stuff - is ultimately cheaper than making war, however necessary it can be.

At the insistence of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Mr Kerry inserted in the guidelines for the talks that are scheduled to last through April the common-sensical requirement that the Palestinians recognize the obvious fact, so simple that a caveman would see it, that Israel is a state for the Jewish people. Even this was too much reality for the Palestinians.

"They know the Palestinians would not be able to accept that," Yusef Munayyer, executive director of the Jerusalem Fund, which raises money for Palestinian causes, tells Al Jazeera, the Middle Eastern television network. "It's an effort to torpedo any progress on the creation of a Palestinian state."

If the peace talks fail, certain Palestinian red-hots warn that armed conflict may follow, as if that would be anything new. "Now we are engaged in negotiations," says Jibril Rajoub, an official of the Palestinian Authority. "We hope this will lead us to our national goals. But if talks fail or collapse, the Israelis will not keep behaving as the bully in the neighbourhood ... while humiliating Palestinians."

But humiliation is self-inflicted in that miserable part of the world. Like the Bourbons of old, the aggrieved learn nothing and forget nothing.

6. 10 reasons why the BDS movement is immoral and hinders peace

The BDS movement is highly immoral, threatens the peace process and discourages the Palestinians from agreeing to any reasonable peace offer. Here are ten compelling reasons why the BDS movement is immoral and incompatible with current efforts to arrive at a compromise peace.

1. The BDS movement immorally imposes the entire blame for the continuing Israeli occupation and settlement policy on the Israelis. It refuses to acknowledge the historical reality that on at least three occasions, Israel offered to end the occupation and all three times, the Palestinian leadership, supported by its people, refused to accept these offers. In 1967, I played a small role in drafting UN Security Council Resolution 242 that set out the formula for ending the occupation in exchange for recognition of Israel's right to exist in peace. Israel accepted that Resolution, while the Palestinians, along with all the Arab nations, gathered in Khartoum and issued their three famous "no's:" No peace, no negotiation, no recognition. There were no efforts to boycott, sanction or divest from these Arab naysayers. In 2000-2001, Israel's liberal Prime Minister Ehud Barak, along with American President Bill Clinton, offered the Palestinians statehood, and the end of the occupation. Yasser Arafat rejected this offer - a rejection that many Arab leaders considered a crime against the Palestinian people. In 2007, Israel's Prime Minister Ehud Olmert offered the Palestinians an even better deal, an offer to which they failed to respond. There were no BDS threats against those who rejected Israel's peace offers. Now there are ongoing peace negotiations in which both parties are making offers and imposing conditions. Under these circumstances, it is immoral to impose blame only on Israel and to direct a BDS movement only against the nation state of the Jewish people, that has thrice offered to end the occupation in exchange for peace.

2. The current BDS movement, especially in Europe and on some American university campuses, emboldens the Palestinians to reject compromise solutions to the conflict. Some within the Palestinian leadership have told me that the longer they hold out against making peace, the more powerful will be the BDS movement against Israel. Why not wait until the BDS strengthens their bargaining position so that they won't have to compromise by giving up the right of return, by agreeing to a demilitarized state and by making other

concessions that are necessary to peace but difficult for some Palestinians to accept? The BDS movement is making a peaceful resolution harder.

3. The BDS movement is immoral because its leaders will never be satisfied with the kind of two state solution that is acceptable to Israel. Many of its leaders do not believe in the concept of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people. (The major leader of the BDS movement, Marwan Barghouti, has repeatedly expressed his opposition to Israel's right to exist as the nation state of the Jewish people, even within the 1967 borders.) At bottom, therefore, the leadership of the BDS movement is opposed not only to Israel's occupation and settlement policy but to its very existence.

4. The BDS movement is immoral because it violates the core principle of human rights: namely, "the worst first." Israel is among the freest and most democratic nations in the world. It is certainly the freest and most democratic nation in the Middle East. Its Arab citizens enjoy more rights than Arabs anywhere else in the world. They serve in the Knesset, in the Judiciary, in the Foreign Service, in the academy and in business. They are free to criticize Israel and to support its enemies. Israeli universities are hot beds of anti-Israel rhetoric, advocacy and even teaching. Israel has a superb record on women's rights, gay rights, environmental rights and other rights that barely exist in most parts of the world. Moreover, Israel's record of avoiding civilian casualties, while fighting enemies who hide their soldiers among civilians, is unparalleled in the world today. The situation on the West Bank is obviously different because of the occupation, but even the Arabs of Ramallah, Bethlehem and Tulkarm have more human and political rights than the vast majority of Arabs in the world today. Moreover, anyone - Jew, Muslim or Christian - dissatisfied with Israeli actions can express that dissatisfaction in the courts, and in the media, both at home and abroad. That freedom does not exist in any Arab country, nor in many non-Arab countries. Yet Israel is the only country in the world today being threatened with BDS. When a sanction is directed against only a state with one of the best records of human rights, and that nation happens to be the state of the Jewish people, the suspicion of bigotry must be considered.

5. The BDS movement is immoral because it would hurt the wrong people: it would hurt Palestinian workers who will lose their jobs if economic sanctions are directed against firms that employ them. It would hurt artists and academics, many of whom are the strongest voices for peace and an end to the occupation. It would hurt those suffering from illnesses all around the world who would be helped by Israeli medicine and the collaboration between Israeli scientists and other scientists. It would hurt the high tech industry around the world because Israel contributes disproportionately to the development of such life enhancing technology.

6. The BDS movement is immoral because it would encourage Iran - the world's leading facilitator of international terrorism - **to unleash its surrogates**, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, **against Israel**, in the expectation that if Israel were to respond to rocket attacks, the pressure for BDS against Israel would increase, as it did when Israel responded to thousands of rockets from Gaza in 2008-2009.

7. The BDS movement is immoral because it focuses the world's attention away from far greater injustices, including genocide. By focusing disproportionately on Israel, the human rights community pays disproportionately less attention to the other occupations, such as those by China, Russia and Turkey, and to other humanitarian disasters such as that occurring in Syria.

8. The BDS movement is immoral because it promotes false views regarding the nation state of the Jewish people, exaggerates its flaws and thereby promotes a new variation on

the world's oldest prejudice, namely anti-Semitism. It is not surprising therefore that the BDS movement is featured on neo-Nazi, Holocaust denial and other overtly anti-Semitic websites and is promoted by some of the world's most notorious haters such as David Duke.

9. The BDS movement is immoral because it reflects and encourages a double standard of judgment and response regarding human rights violations. By demanding more of Israel, the nation state of the Jewish people, it expects *less* of other states, people, cultures and religions, thereby reifying a form of colonial racism and reverse bigotry that hurts the victims of human rights violations inflicted by others.

10. The BDS movement will never achieve its goals. Neither the Israeli government nor the Israeli people will ever capitulate to the extortionate means implicit in BDS. They will not and should not make important decisions regarding national security and the safety of their citizens on the basis of immoral threats. Moreover, were Israel to compromise its security in the face of such threats, the result would be more wars, more death and more suffering.

All decent people who seek peace in the Middle East should join together in opposing the immoral BDS movement. Use your moral voices to demand that both the Israeli government and the Palestinian Authority accept a compromise peace that assures the security of Israel and the viability of a peaceful and democratic Palestinian state. The way forward is not by immoral extortionate threats that do more harm than good, but rather by negotiations, compromise and good will.

7. BDS on a roll? Not so fast

One of the BDS movement's greatest assets is the fact that its every success gets massive media coverage while its failures are largely ignored. That's why anyone following the news in recent weeks would probably conclude that boycott, divestment, and sanctions were rapidly gaining ground. Yet in reality, BDS has suffered several major failures lately - and some of these failures bode ill for its future.

Just last week, for instance, Britain's Supreme Court issued a major ruling against BDS when it upheld a trespassing conviction against four activists who chained themselves in an Ahava shop in London to protest the Israeli cosmetics firm's West Bank plant. Far from being a narrow decision about trespassing, the ruling tackled the activists' allegations against Ahava head-on.

First, the court rejected the claim that Ahava was "aiding and abetting the transfer of Israeli citizens to the OPT [Occupied Palestinian Territories]," and thereby violating the Geneva Convention. The company was doing no such thing, it said, but even if it were, "this could not amount to an offense by Ahava's retailing arm." That precedent will clearly be valuable for other Israeli companies fighting BDS.

Second, the court rejected the claim that Ahava had mislabelled its goods by labelling them "made in Israel" when they were made in the West Bank - another precedent of obvious value. Moreover, its reasoning demonstrated a remarkably clear understanding of what BDS is about: The label isn't misleading, it said, because "a consumer willing to buy Israeli products would be very unlikely not to buy Israeli products because they were produced in the OPT." In short, the court understood that most boycotters aren't just "anti-occupation"; they have a problem with Israel, period. That understanding is crucial to unmasking BDS for what it is.

Also last week, Holland's largest pension fund - and the world's third largest - took the unusual step of issuing a press statement announcing that it had no intention of divesting from Israeli banks, having "concluded that these banks themselves do not act in breach of international laws and regulations, and that there are no judicial rulings that should lead to their exclusion." ABP's statement was a direct challenge to Holland's second largest pension fund, PGGM, which last month announced plans to divest from Israeli banks because of their involvement in financing the settlements. PGGM had claimed such activity was problematic from the standpoint of international law. Now its larger crosstown rival has just publicly termed that nonsense. Such a rebuttal from a major European financial institution is far more convincing than anything Israel could say.

Two weeks earlier, BDS suffered another loss in a French court. The French distributor for the Israeli firm SodaStream, which also has a West Bank plant, had sued a local pro-boycott group for claiming that SodaStream products were being sold fraudulently because they were labelled "made in Israel." The court found the claim that the distributor was deceiving or defrauding customers to be baseless. It therefore fined the group and ordered it to halt its campaign. As with the British ruling, this precedent will be very useful to other Israeli companies.

Moreover, many recent BDS "victories" are actually optical illusions. Take, for instance, the announcement by Denmark's largest bank that it's divesting from Bank Hapoalim. But as Hapoalim pointed out, "Denmark's Danske Bank has no investments, of any kind, with Bank Hapoalim." Similarly, the Norwegian Finance Ministry recently ordered its sovereign wealth fund to divest from two other Israeli companies - but again, the fund had no investments in those companies.

Such "faux boycotts" are obviously still damaging, because they create the illusion that BDS is gathering steam. Nevertheless, they're a far cry from real boycotts that do real economic damage.

In short, despite John Kerry's warnings that if peace talks fail, anti-Israel boycotts will metastasize, BDS remains a fringe movement that can still be thwarted. It will grow to threatening proportions only if Israel and its allies make no effort to challenge it.

8. Presbyterian Church Group: Zionism is the problem

For years, scholars have debated the complex causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but for the Israel Palestine Mission Network of Presbyterian Church (USA), the problem stems from a single cause: Zionism.

In "*Zionism Unsettled*", a new study guide on Israel released in January for the PC(USA)'s 2.4 million members, the IPMN states its case clearly: Zionism is the problem, destroying both indigenous Palestinian lives and rich Jewish communities across the globe in a supremacist misinterpretation of God's word on par with "Christian exceptionalist beliefs [that] contributed to the Nazi Holocaust, the genocide of Native Americans, and countless other instances of tragic brutality."

Moreover, IPMN's book argues, the American Jewish community actively stifles dissent against the Zionist narrative, taking advantage of the "ignorance and passivity of many liberal American Jews."

The IPMN is a PC(USA) working group established in 2011 to explore the history and doctrine of Zionism. It has worked closely with official partner Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre, a Palestinian Christian organization that pushes divestment from Israel and promotes the idea that the “suffering of Jesus Christ at the hands of evil political and religious powers two thousand years ago is lived out again in Palestine” as a result of Israel’s policies.

The IPMN advises the PC(USA) but does not necessarily speak for the church, according to mission network’s website.

According to the IPMN website, the 68-page pamphlet and accompanying CD is “an invaluable guide to deeper understanding” about steps that “can be taken to bring peace, reconciliation, and justice to the homeland that Palestinians and Israelis share.”

The guide was released ahead of the church’s biennial General Assembly, taking place this June in Detroit. The gathering will once again consider recommendations that it divest from companies that deal with Israel’s military. Similar resolutions have been narrowly defeated in the past.

In July 2012, the Presbyterian Church (USA) narrowly rejected a proposal to divest from three companies that do business with Israel. The motion, which targeted Caterpillar Inc., Hewlett-Packard Co. and Motorola, was defeated by the very slim margin of 333-331, with two abstentions.

“Zionism Unsettled” praises Jews who speak out against Zionism, and claims that a growing wave of Jewish criticism is underway: “Contemporary voices are breaking the taboos that have stigmatized and punished critical examination of Zionism and its consequences.”

To do so, the report argues, these brave Jews, including Peter Beinart, Ilan Pappé, and Philip Weiss, must withstand a concerted effort to silence them from the 51 member groups associated with the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations, who are “committed to the suppression of any criticism of Israel in the mainstream American media, in American civil society, and even within their own organizations.”

“Zionism Unsettled” strives to paint Zionism as an ideology foisted initially upon an unsupportive Jewish public, and increasingly outside of the authentic Jewish mainstream today. Most Jews, it claims, reject Zionism with their feet, choosing to live outside of Israel. Were it not for Zionism, Jewish life would be thriving across the Middle East. One graphic presents Jewish life in Iran as “alive and well,” a model of ancient coexistence shattered by the intrusion of Zionism into the region.

It blames the expulsion of Jews from Arab lands as “blowback” from the “perceived injustice of the enforced partition of Palestine, the creation of a Jewish state, the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1947-48, and the Sinai War of 1956.”

Zionism has done far worse to Palestinians, according to the study guide. It accuses Israel of intentionally depopulating Palestinian villages in 1948, a process that continues to this day. “Now, 65 years later, the Zionist quest for demographic control of the land is still underway – not only in the occupied territories, but within Israel itself. State planners pursue the goal of ensuring a ‘contiguous Jewish presence’ in every area within Israel.”

Moreover, the book argues, Israel is entirely uninterested in peace, and does not negotiate in good faith. “It is hard to find any evidence,” the authors write, “that recent Israeli governments have any intention of negotiating a just peace with Palestinians.”

In *"Zionism Unsettled,"* Edward Said, Rashid Khalidi, and other anti-Zionist authors are treated as authoritative, with no critical examination of their positions. The chapter, "A Palestinian Muslim Experience with Zionism," features several pages on Mustafa Abu Sway of Al-Quds University's argument that while the Quran is inclusive and peaceful, Zionism is inherently racist.

The authors implicitly compare the Palestinian treatment at the hands of Israel to the Nazi treatment of Jews in World War II. After a paragraph on Abu Sway denouncing the Holocaust in speeches at Yad Vashem, *"Zionism Unsettled"* continues, "In like manner, the Nakba (catastrophe) that befell the Palestinian people in the late 1940s should never have taken place. The Palestinian story is one of suffering at the hands of the international community, which authorized the division of Palestine in 1947, and at the hands of the Zionists who planned, organized, and implemented systematic ethnic cleansing...They slaughtered untold numbers of Palestinian men, women, and children."

The work could even be seen to justify some violence against Israel. "International law allows resistance to military occupation and dispossession," reads one of the discussion questions. "What kinds of Palestinian resistance to Jewish expansionism and oppression do you feel are justified?"

In fact, apart from one brief timeline mention of a suicide bombing, Palestinian terrorism is absent from the book. The only group labelled 'terrorist' by the authors is a Jewish one, the Irgun.

"Zionism Unsettled" trips over itself at times. It criticizes Israel for ignoring UN resolutions it should accept as authoritative, then decries the UN for giving the Jews a "disproportionate share of territory" in the 1947 partition plan.

The misuse of quotations is more egregious. A figure in a Haaretz article calls Israel's discourse fanatic and illiberal. *"Zionism Unsettled"* attributes the quotation to "Haaretz writers."

And at times, the guide moves closer to something far worse. It claims that liberal Orthodox educator Rabbi David Hartman advocated the wholesale slaughter of Palestinians: "'Let's really let them understand what the implication of their action is,' he said of the Palestinians. 'Very simply, wipe them out. Level them.'"

But a glance at the 2002 Washington Post article from which the quote was taken makes it obvious that Hartman was talking about Palestinian terrorists, not the civilian population at large, as *"Zionism Unsettled"* wrote.

The preceding paragraph in the Post article reads, "A number of senior military officials have also been pressing for tougher action on the ground, including deep invasions of Palestinian-held territory, to arrest suspected militants and break up what Israelis call the 'terrorist infrastructure.' The assaults Thursday on refugee camps in Jenin and Nablus fit into that perspective. Backing for such a strategy is widespread among not only hawkish politicians but also some of Israel's leading intellectuals."

The word tricks run throughout the work. No indication is given of an aggressor in the 1967 or 1973 wars, but it makes clear that "Israel invades Lebanon" in 1982.

"Zionism Unsettled" is not only an attack on Israel and its Jewish supporters. It criticizes the Catholic Church's landmark 1965 Nostra Aetate, which opened the door for a new relationship between Jews and Catholics, saying that the declaration "raises as many

questions as it answers.” It features an entire chapter panning Evangelical Christian support for Israel, lamenting the community’s “uncritical endorsement of Israel’s occupation and settlement of Palestinian lands.”

‘A hit-piece outside all norms of interfaith dialogue’

Not surprisingly, Jewish communal organizations did not look favourably upon “Zionism Unsettled.”

The work “promotes virulent hatred of Israel, as well as animosity toward the historic rights and fundamental sensibilities of Jews across the religious and political spectrum.” said B’nai Brith International in a statement recently.

“The seemingly balanced approach is a façade,” said Rabbi Noam Marans, AJC’s director of Intergroup and Interreligious Relations. “The study guide is reminiscent of medieval Christian polemics against Judaism, with the authors claiming to know better than the Jewish community how Jews define themselves. This is another example of the ongoing effort to demonize Israel by a cadre of people who want to see the dismantlement of the Jewish state.”

“This outrageous screed is the theological twin of the infamous 1975 UN ‘Zionism is Racism’ resolution,” charged Rabbi Abraham Cooper, associate dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre. “‘*Zionism Unsettled*’ is a hit-piece outside all norms of interfaith dialogue. It is a compendium of distortions, ignorance and outright lies – that tragically has emanated too often from elites within this church.”

“To be clear, this publication isn’t an attack on particular Israeli policies but on the very idea of a Jewish return to Zion,” he continued.

The PC(USA) refused repeated requests for comment on “*Zionism Unsettled*.” Rev. Walt Davis, co-chair of the IPMN’s education committee, said he would only agree to talk to someone who has read the entire book and watched the DVD, on the condition questions were submitted 24 hours in advance. “Some who already have commented on ZU have clearly not read or tried to understand what it is and what it is intended to achieve,” he lamented in an email, but would not expand on his comments.

Identifying with the ‘powerless’ against the ‘chosen’

Why would an American church take such firm positions on a conflict half the world away, and why has it accepted the Palestinian narrative so completely?

In an email interview with The Times of Israel, Christian-Jewish relations scholar Murray Watson identified three reasons behind positions taken by mainline Protestant churches against Israel.

The first, he said, is “a deep rootedness in liberation theology, a stream of theological thinking and analysis that emerged from Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Central to liberation theology is the Biblical assertion that God seeks freedom and justice for all His people, and is actively on the side of the poor, the oppressed, the powerless and the marginalized - and, conversely, against those who oppress His people and deprive them of their legitimate rights.”

For many Western Christians, continued Murray, co-founder of the Centre for Jewish-Catholic-Muslim Learning at King’s University College, University of Western Ontario, Palestinians are seen as the poor, the weak, the oppressed, while Israel is seen as

the powerful, oppressive force. "Therefore, the Palestinian narrative deserves to be given a privileged place in theological analysis, since God is 'on their side.'"

The second reason, said Watson, is that many Western Protestant churches either have Palestinian counterpart churches, or have a formal form of affiliation with Palestinian Christian churches. "Sometimes this results in a very uncritical acceptance of anything that any Palestinian Christian group proposes."

The final reason lies in a Christian misinterpretation of the Jewish idea of "chosen-ness."

"To a generation that has grown up with the idea of radical equality - that all people are fundamentally equal, and certainly equal in terms of God's love and care - the idea that any particular group could claim to be 'chosen' in a way which makes them qualitatively different from others, strikes some Christians as arrogant, as if 'chosen-ness' was to be equated with 'moral superiority,'" Watson explained. "I have said for a long time that this interpretation of chosen-ness is actually a Christian caricature, and doesn't correspond to Jewish thinking or theology, which speaks of that 'chosen-ness' as something of a burden or a responsibility that is borne, often at great expense, for the sake of God's love."

"The term 'chosen people' grates on the ears of some Christians, and so they react against it and, by reacting against it, feel the need to 'put down' Jews, whom they perceive to have used 'chosen-ness' to 'lift themselves up' above others."

9. Future EU sanctions against Israel? Real, imagined, and somewhere inbetween

Introduction

According to recent newspaper reports, the movement to wage economic warfare against Israel for its policies regarding the Palestinian issue, known as BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanctions), is gaining steam. Indeed, a recent article by the movement's founder on the BDS website asks if it is reaching "a turning point."

Some senior Israeli officials join in predicting that the measures taken by the EU recently against cooperation with any Israeli economic activity over the pre-1967 lines could get worse, predicting that the boycott against settlements might be applied to all of Israel. Even Secretary of State John Kerry has warned that international action might be taken against Israel if progress in the peace process is not achieved.

While Israel has had difficulties making its case in Europe in recent years, especially after military clashes like Operation Cast Lead in Gaza in 2008-9 or its interception of the lead ship in the Gaza Flotilla in 2010, is this scenario of a full-scale EU boycott of Israel at all realistic in the context of a diplomatic scenario? Say Israeli-Palestinian negotiations reach an impasse; might EU economic sanctions be applied? Much of the discourse about this scenario is being conducted with little awareness about how the EU actually makes decisions in foreign policy.

Insiders note that the EU's use of sanctions has grown in recent years. While 22 such decisions were taken in 2010, some 69 decisions to impose EU sanctions were adopted in 2011. Yet a recent study of EU sanctions cases showed that their success rate remained low. In late 2013, observers noted that there was "no appetite" for a high-profile decision at the EU level for new sanctions against Ukraine.

This study is designed to provide policy-makers with a “Brussels insiders” perspective on the prospects for future sanctions by the European Union against the State of Israel with this political context in mind. It addresses the key questions of the mechanisms by which sanctions are imposed by the European Union. Though not prepared by lawyers, extensive consultation was undertaken with people of substance who actually work in the EU’s institutions. This study:

- attempts to simplify accurately the complex issue of the overlapping institutions which come together to make EU foreign policy, in general, and sanctions policies, in particular.
- addresses the ambiguities of EU foreign policy and how they can be exploited by both friends and enemies of Israel, with particular reference to how sanctions proposals get on the agenda in the first place.

How Is EU foreign policy decided: Unanimity or majority voting?

At first sight, this aspect of the question may seem a strange place to start. After all, the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) is, by EU standards, reasonably clearly defined as the basis for EU general external policy relations with non-EU member states.

Decisions are made on the basis of unanimity in the meetings of the EU Council of Ministers, whereby foreign ministers of the 28 countries forge policy and then hand it over to other EU bodies to implement. Also known as the Council of the European Union, it plays a defining role in the formation of the CFSP along with the European Council, made up of the heads of state or government. For example, the EU decision to impose restrictive measures on Syria, which included export and import restrictions, was taken by the Council of Ministers on May 31, 2013.

Nonetheless, under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty (2009), the legal basis on which the European Union is currently constructed, the CFSP is where the biggest, strategic, broad policy direction decisions about European foreign policy, including sanctions, are made. A clear purpose behind the empowerment of European institutions in the Lisbon Treaty is to strengthen the EU’s role as a global actor.

In the meantime, it is useful to understand how EU decision-making operates. True, there is an effort underway to streamline the EU’s voting system which is being implemented in some policy areas between 2014 and 2017. The EU will introduce “qualified majority voting” based on 55% of the members of the European Council that represent 65% of the EU population. This new EU voting partly influences foreign and security policy. A report on the Lisbon Treaty prepared by the European Committee of the British House of Lords concluded:

The evidence is that the Lisbon Treaty has preserved the independence of the UK’s foreign and defence policy, subject to the constraints arising when unanimous agreement does not prove possible. The fundamental principles of the CFSP will not change under the new treaties. In particular, the principle of unanimity and the search for consensus in decision-making will continue to apply to the CFSP.

However, there are important exceptions. An action proposed by the European Commission “to interrupt or to reduce, in part or completely, economic relations with one or more third countries” may be taken by the European Council by a “qualified majority,” according to the language of the Lisbon Treaty (Article 301). That may be easier to obtain than a full consensus, but it is still a higher bar than a simple majority.

All member states participate in the Political and Security Committee (PSC). This is the permanent body which provides a place for each member state's ambassadors to discuss the serious matters of foreign policy among each other as often as they like. It is here that the waters are tested.

One country may want to impose a full trade embargo on Israel proper. Another may want visa restrictions for Israeli officials accused of "war crimes." Still others may completely oppose such measures. On the contrary, they may wish to enhance relations with Israel.

The PSC is the forum where the member states get an idea as to what is worth proceeding with and what is pointless. They then report back to their respective foreign ministries.

The key, routine, operational decisions are then made by the EU Council of Ministers, whereby foreign ministers gather once a month. Sometimes, very sensitive strategic matters are even taken up at the level of the quarterly European Council summit meetings of heads of state and government (chaired by the President of the EU Council Herman Van Rompuy) which is the EU's supreme decision-making body and can instruct the EU Commission on policy matters.

Sanctions against Israel would almost undoubtedly be first referred to the European Council for a strategic review before going any further, and **here unanimity would be required.**

The meetings of the foreign ministers are chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, currently Catherine Ashton (who will be replaced later in 2014). The High Representative can initiate an agenda item in her own right, though she does not do this often. She cannot vote; that privilege belongs to the member states alone on a weighted basis according to size, or unanimity depending on the issue at stake.

However, her presence in the meetings and her ability to make proposals should immediately alert one to the overlapping institutions – in her capacity as High Representative she is also a vice president and voting member of the European Commission – involved in all foreign policy and related matters.

But in terms of the CFSP itself, in theory, they can only forge policy on the basis of unanimity, meaning that a single member state can block anything. In practice, if one or two relatively small member states opposed something which was desired by all the rest, it would be leaned on heavily – using a carrot-and-stick approach – so as to get them to back down.

Ultimately, major issues of foreign policy do not go through unless the "Big Three" – Britain, France, and Germany – want them to, or at least have no objections to them.

Should a policy be agreed upon, it is then referred for implementation and (crucially) interpretation to the External Action Service, which does not operate under unanimity, but under Council of Ministers' qualified majority voting.

In other words, even if a sanctions policy is formally agreed upon, there may be much to-ing and fro-ing about what actually happens in practice unless the Council has been extremely specific, which it often is not.

All sources contacted for this study agree that nothing as substantial as a significant new sanctions regime against Israel could happen at the top level unless Britain, France, and Germany all wanted it to happen and were prepared to devote considerable energy to

overcoming the differences they all have on Israel themselves, as well as the multiple objections that would likely be raised by several other medium-sized and smaller member states, such as, for example, the Czech Republic.

They also agree that on such a sensitive matter as Israel, the External Action Service would not in practice be able to manipulate CFSP decisions taken by the Council of Ministers to the significant detriment of Israel.

What form can sanctions take?

Restrictive measures can take a variety of forms including diplomatic measures – the severing of diplomatic ties; suspension of cooperation; sporting or cultural boycotts; trade sanctions; arms embargoes; financial sanctions such as the freezing of government or targeted individuals' funds or restrictions on investment or export credits; flight bans; and visa bans for officials regarded as *persona non grata*.

Sanctions are in place against a whole range of countries from Iran (where they have just been changed in accordance with recent initiatives) to Belarus.

They can also take the form of something being withdrawn, such as was the case with Sri Lanka, which lost its GSP+ status giving it privileged trade access to EU markets.

Sanctions are defined in terms of a specific duration, which is sometimes referred to as a "sunset clause."

A good recent example of this in action was the case of the ban on arms to Syrian rebels. Once the six-month ban expired, Britain and France ceased to renew their commitment and the arms embargo to Syria thus lapsed, opening the way to arm the rebels if the member states so chose.

It is also important to note that once a common position is adopted, member states are obliged to ensure that their domestic, national policies conform to, and do not contradict, that common position.

Foreign policy and sanctions outside the framework of the CFSP

The fact that other bodies, like the European Commission, **which do not need unanimity to make decisions**, are involved in implementing foreign policy is important to bear in mind. CFSP is a high-profile matter and attracts much media attention, especially on highly charged matters such as Israel. But much can be done below the radar, which can yet have a significant effect.

An example is trade policy or the EU's single market. In these areas, the European Commission is the EU's executive body which implements policies previously adopted by the European Council of Ministers. If a positive set of actions can be taken in favour of Israel under qualified majority voting outside of the CFSP, a negative one could be taken too. Access to the single market could be rescinded or suspended, for example, though a decision of this magnitude would probably need the assent of the heads of government. Ministries of trade, aid, or the economy would be the relevant bodies in these cases; they operate with qualified majority voting.

Again, it is well worth noting that **even under qualified majority voting** in these cases, sensitive matters are overwhelmingly dominated by the wishes of the Big Three. Having instituted enhanced trade relations with Israel, it would require the energetic and united efforts of Britain, France, and Germany to curtail them.

Unless there is a dramatic downturn in EU-Israel relations and/or relations between Israel and Britain, France, and Germany, respectively, this is unlikely to happen.

However, and here we come to the real risk factor for Israel, what could happen much more easily is the extension of existing measures against Israel through tighter and tighter interpretations of the guidelines from the Commission on Horizon 2020, as well as its role as a possible precedent. We will come to that matter shortly.

Agenda setting and lobbying

Before doing so and in order to give greater substance to what has already been said, as well as to help better understand the real processes at work in the EU, it is useful to recognize how we get to the policy level from below.

Policies do not appear out of a vacuum. First, there is an idea or a proposal, then there is an official who takes it up, and only then do we get to EU policies and practices.

All of our sources have emphasized that lobbying by NGOs is increasingly widespread and takes many different forms. Given the multi-layered and overlapping nature of the EU institutions and everything related to them, this should be obvious, yet it is easy to miss the forest for the trees.

The first point to stress is that no person or institution need set foot in Brussels at all to start a process in motion. Any NGO – the BDS movement, for example – can approach a member of their country's parliament or a group of parliamentarians who can then lobby a domestic ministry to raise a matter such as sanctions against Israel in Brussels.

This could be the foreign ministry, the trade or aid ministry, or any other ministry that has dealings in Brussels, which to some degree or other is most of them.

As noted above, at Council of Ministers meetings – the monthly meetings of EU ministers looking after many different competencies – a single member state through their member state's permanent representative (ambassador), and supported by the rotating President in Office, can ask for an item to be put on the agenda.

This is important to recognize since it emphasizes that Israel's relationship with the EU is intimately bound up with domestic, member state politics, too. If BDS groups are lobbying foreign or aid or trade ministries in countries such as Britain, Germany, and France (as well as elsewhere, of course), pro-Israel groups need to be doing the same but in the opposite direction.

If a member state ministry sees no push back against BDS movements at this stage of the process, it is that much more likely that a BDS-inspired proposal will work its way through to the policy-makers and institutions in Brussels.

There will still be a long way to go from there, of course, but “nothing will come of nothing.” Without someone starting the process in motion, nothing will happen. Nipping it in the bud at the member state level is an essential element of a multi-track policy that Israel must engage in.

Pushing it back even further, domestic policy-making on sensitive issues such as Israel is heavily impacted by the domestic media. Helping get a positive and informed message across about Israel and/or a message questioning Palestinian integrity and credibility is also essential. Nothing can be overlooked.

Returning to Brussels, there are formal and informal ways in which issues such as sanctions can be put on the agenda. Ministers and their delegations from member states can get items on to the agendas of high-level forums.

There is nothing whatsoever to stop BDS groups or other such NGOs from writing letters or petitioning embassies in Brussels. As an MEP told us: "Increasingly, the secretariat is lobbied. For example, ambassadors and envoys can be lobbied to have a quiet word with Catherine Ashton [or anyone else on the Commission] so as to place an issue on the agenda. There are multi-pronged ways of lobbying.

The rotating presidency, for example, which does not have many competencies, but does run the neighbourhood policy of which Israel is a part, can be lobbied. It controls a lot of funds."

Also, an MEP can submit a question in the European Parliament to the High Representative, the Council of Ministers, or to anyone on the European Commission. MEPs can directly address the rotating President in Office, or the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) Commissioner Stephan Fule or Baroness Ashton herself in their regular appearances before the European parliament. Any of them can start something in motion.

MEPs can, of course, be lobbied by constituents at home, by BDS groups in Brussels, or can act entirely of their own initiative.

Horizon 2020 – The issue at hand

Horizon 2020 is a framework within which the EU has a research project for science and technology. The EU wanted Israel to participate because Israel is perceived as a hi-tech country which could add significant value. Horizon's original purpose was to improve European productivity and competitiveness in the world economy. Israel was the only non-European country invited to participate in the Horizon 2020 program. In this context, European sanctions against Israel could be enormously self-defeating for European industry and labour.

In December 2012, the EU's foreign ministers, acting in the framework of the Foreign Affairs Council, came together under the CFSP and resolved that all agreements henceforth with Israel must "unequivocally and explicitly indicate their inapplicability" to the "occupied territories" and that they would not be relevant to the West Bank, Golan, and Gaza.

But the European Commission took this a step further. EU officials and civil servants in Brussels prepared specifics for the European Commission of how the earlier decision of the EU foreign ministers was to be applied. Using the vagueness of the December 2012 decision, it unilaterally issued guidelines in mid-2013 which were much tougher than had hitherto been issued or envisaged.

The Commission published guidelines with respect to Israel that barred institutions based beyond the 1967 lines from receiving grants. It falls within the Commission's competence to define such guidelines and it was given a mandate from the Council of Ministers to do so.

But such definitions must be based on EU policies (which is the case here – the EU has considered the West Bank and east Jerusalem as occupied territories since 1980 and reiterated it many times. However, in this case, until the guidelines were adopted, this had not had any practical effect.) **The guidelines episode demonstrates how EU officials can direct an EU decision away from the European Council to an EU body which has less stringent voting requirements like the EU Commission.** This same procedure could be followed with respect to the labeling of West Bank products as well.

But the biggest problem with the Horizon guidelines and the way they are being interpreted by some member states is that, practically speaking, they have broadened the question of settlements and the pre-1967 lines to the whole of Israel.

Any company or institution that has a branch in east Jerusalem, the West Bank, or Gaza is subject to the Horizon proscriptive guidelines. This means that, for example, Israeli banks with branches all over Israel could be subject to sanctions for having a single branch office in the neighbourhoods of Gilo or Ramot in southern or northern Jerusalem. The ban would not apply to that branch office alone but to the entire company and all its branch offices all over Israel.

As one Brussels insider put it: "Horizon is actually big because it broadens the settlement issue to Israel proper. And it thus establishes a precedent. The member states must take Horizon into account for Horizon-related issues, but there is already evidence they are using it as a precedent more broadly. The Dutch Foreign Ministry has advised its companies not to have ties with companies in the West Bank."

And this has been broadened already. PGGM, the huge Dutch pension fund, acted on the Horizon precedent and set a new precedent itself by divesting from five Israeli banks operating in the whole of Israel. It is already a proven point that the sanctions issue is moving to Israel proper.

Similarly, at the behest of the senior PA leadership, the Dutch government recently instructed the Dutch water management and project planning company Royal Haskoning DHV to revoke a project planning contract with Jerusalem Wastewater and Purification Enterprises Ltd. for a wastewater project along the Kidron Valley in the area of Jerusalem.

It is this question of precedent that Israel must now guard against. The danger from Horizon is there and it gains momentum as BDS groups lobby member states to adopt an ever harsher interpretation of what are still only guidelines.

Yet another layer to this is that BDS groups are lobbying companies directly, using Horizon as the precedent, for the companies to have nothing to do with any Israeli company that has branch offices in what they term "occupied territories."

Horizon provides companies an "excuse," as one source put it, to give in to BDS on the grounds that they are only acting in line with the European Union as any respectable company should. However lame an excuse this may be, it should not be underestimated as the above-mentioned momentum gathers pace.

However, should Israel get the full blame for a breakdown in peace talks, the ultimate risk is that Horizon is used as a precedent within the framework of the CFSP to up the ante against Israeli "occupation" by adopting measures which punish any Israeli company, university, or institution of any kind that has branches in the disputed territories. Since Israeli law obliges Israeli companies not to discriminate against Israelis living in the territories, this would provoke a full-blown crisis in relations between the EU and Israel.

Conclusion and recommendations

- It remains unlikely, and would require extraordinary and unexpected new developments, for the European Union to adopt a formal, new sanctions regime against Israel through its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), regardless of the precedent set by Horizon and

the Commission's guidelines on it. In this arena, the EU uses a mixture of unanimous voting and "qualified majorities," which still keep the bar of approval relatively high.

- It should not be forgotten that the relationship is a two-way process. Clearly, the EU is by far the larger partner in economic terms, but, for example, Israeli technology and products are highly valued in Europe and sanctions would hurt Europe too if it really came to it.
 - Attempts in 2010 to prevent Israel from receiving the right to certify pharmaceutical products exported to the EU which required a co-decision by the European Parliament failed after much heated parliamentary debate about the theoretical provenance of possibly including the settlements, although there were actually no such manufacturing capabilities located there.
- Economically, sanctions already called for by European institutions and taken up by European governments vis-à-vis their private sector companies and banks which have commercial relations in Israel inevitably affect the private sector. This resultant effect on private sector companies could potentially become a serious factor to be considered by each individual state.
- Diplomatically, the EU would risk writing itself out of the Middle East peace process for good, reducing its influence in the world at a time when it is nervous about its international credibility, and for no obvious result since, as Brussels well knows, Israel will never bend to an agenda that it believes has been defined with Palestinian interests at heart.
- One cannot rule out an international backlash to a European decision to initiate sanctions. For example, at the height of the Arab boycott against Israel, the U.S. adopted laws to counteract it that primarily influenced U.S. companies. U.S. sanctions on Iran, years later, affected non-American companies as well.
- It should not be beyond the capability of the State of Israel to mount a multi-tiered counter-offensive. In practice, this will not happen unless someone is assigned responsibility for coordinating it in the form of an all-European organization with the requisite resources and committed manpower that would devote itself to a pro-active countering of Palestinian, BDS, and other European anti-Israel propaganda and lobbying events. With elections for the European Parliament to be held in late May 2014, Israel must be prepared for many new parliamentarians coming to Brussels.
- As part of this effort, BDS needs to be unmasked. It is not about Palestinian rights or statehood, but rather the elimination of Israel as the historic homeland of the Jewish people.⁸ Greater attention needs to be given to focusing advocacy efforts on Brussels in light of the strengthening of certain EU institutions in the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty.

The expectations regarding the present peace negotiations are very low in any case. A breakdown of the talks, therefore, need not provoke a serious problem at the level of CFSP unless Israel allowed itself to be cast as the party solely responsible for their failure.

If Secretary of State Kerry's initiative does break down, it is at the lower levels of the EU decision-making process on sanctions that Israel is most likely to encounter problems.

10. Arab, Muslim and pro-Israel

I know, I know, I know what you're already thinking: "oh God, not another piece on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with the same old arguments regurgitated over and over again, for the last 60 years". You couldn't be more wrong. Bear with me.

I'm Abdel. I was born in Algeria and lived there for a little over a decade. During that time, I had the distinct pleasure to go through a brutal civil war where Islamists (supported financially and morally by Hamas, Iran and Saudi Arabia) were trying to take over the country to impose their worldview on everyone else. Friends and family members of mine were killed and the country almost went down the drain. My parents, who were executives at the time, were also involved politically. Specifically, they were leading political parties who're trying to get religion out of politics - in the midst of an Islamic insurgency. You can only imagine how more problematic their personal and familial situation became: regular death threats, bullet proof door in our home, different itineraries and time to get to work, et cetera. In sum, it was a living hell. Oh, did I mention that I'm the VP communication for McGill Students for Israel?

Now, why? Why does a guy who's born in a country that does not even recognize Israel come to support it? Below is the case for Israel from the perspective of someone who grew up and lived in a self-proclaimed Arab and Muslim country.

As a libertarian, individual liberty and freedom are values that I cherish very dearly. So, in order for me to understand a situation, I use those two values as guiding principles to shed some light on what is really happening. By applying that freedom filter to the Israeli-Arab conflict, you get the following:

All Arab countries are dictatorships. That is, you have ruling gangster families on top, who use their monopoly of violence (via the military) to kill/imprison anyone who questions their business plan. The business plan is the following:

1. Use force to maintain power and keep disarmed humans living in fear.
2. Send kids to government controlled schools so they can get indoctrinated with four things:
 - The ruling family is great (à la Kim Jung II).
 - Their country is the greatest.
 - The Palestinian cause is something that is part of their identity.
 - Force feed them Islam so it can be used as a tool to control (I use the term force feed because I was force fed Islam in the Algerian government school since day one).
3. While people are brainwashed and live in fear, negotiate a percentage on those resource/construction contracts (SNC-Lavalin anyone?).
4. Profit: It comes as no surprise that the output of such a disastrous mix can only be chaos. On one hand you have the insane families in power who are trying to steal as much money as possible, while using violence against their own people. On the other hand, you have the by-product of this insanity- the Islamists. That is, confused people who had their vision of reality completely distorted by the system they were born in. This vicious cycle has been going on for decades, the result of which was the so-called Arab spring or Arab winter (i.e. the by-product of the system, the Islamists, is taking over). Clearly, this circus will go on for another decade if not more.

Now, what about Israel? If you're a citizen there, your basic freedoms are respected. You can live peacefully, raise a family, and send your kids to competitive and globally recognized universities. This simple basic respect for human dignity put them light-years ahead of any Arab state. As a human being who seeks to improve himself, Israel is a logical choice. It is the only place in the Middle East where your potential can be fully expressed. Based on the values it stands for and the principles that it was founded on, Israel is a force of good for that region and for the world. And remember, this is not coming from a Jewish or an Israeli individual. It's coming from someone with a Muslim name and an Arab face (which looks pretty good by the way), who actually lived and was raised in an Arab country. It's not like I don't know what I'm talking about and I'm just fantasizing from 5,000 miles away, like most people do.

From an individual and rational perspective, it is hard to argue against what I've said above. But even then, even if you drop any rational judgement and go tribal on this issue, the Jewish people are the Arabs' cousins! If your cousins were being slaughtered and discriminated against all over the world (remember the MS St. Louis, the ship filled with Jewish refugees during WWII, that was turned away by Canada and the U.S. to go back to Europe?), wouldn't you welcome them with your arms wide open?

Jewish people have suffered greatly and the only people in the world that should have welcomed and protected them were their cousins, the Arabs. And it's not like they had an option to flee to a "Jewish" country like you have for so-called Muslim and Christian ones. They were not welcome anywhere on planet earth. Do you fully realize the magnitude of this?

The bottom line is this: this is a historical opportunity to start over but on the right foot this time. An opportunity to write history as it should have been from the beginning. Don't let this opportunity go to waste; you might not have another one.

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