



Opinion and Analysis, Week ending 26 March 2014

1. Today's Israeli leaders lack the very qualities that made its founders great *Daniel Gordis, Tablet Magazine, 25 March 2014*

And none embodied the biblical worldview more, or had more political agility, than Menachem Begin, who has no real heirs.

http://www.tabletmag.com/jewish-news-and-politics/167114/can-israels-leaders-be-great?utm_source=tabletmagazinelist&utm_campaign=5aa9f0ef4e-3_25_2014&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_c308bf8edb-5aa9f0ef4e-206684373

2. Palestinian travel start-up bypasses credit cards *Matthew Kalman, Tech-Hub, 24 March 2014*

A Palestinian online travel start-up that hopes to be Ramallah's first major high-tech success believes it has cracked a major cultural barrier to e-commerce in the Middle East: the vast majority of people in the region do not use credit cards.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ccf16232-b341-11e3-b09d-00144feabdc0.html?ftcamp=crm/email/2014325/nbe/MiddleEast/product&siteedition=intl#axzz2rJOvKcWd>

3. Abbas's triumph? *Editorial, Jerusalem Post, 23 March 2014*

The US-orchestrated peace talks seem on the verge of falling apart. Can the relative stability that we have grown accustomed to in the West Bank no longer be taken for granted?

<http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Abbass-triumph-346257>

4. Is Hamas finally losing its grip on Gaza? *Daniella Peled, The Spectator, 22 March 2014*

With Egypt closing the tunnels, its economy is in trouble.

<http://www.spectator.co.uk/features/9162621/is-hamas-finally-losing-its-grip-on-gaza-2/>

5. West Bank violence and Gaza rockets could spark a wider conflict *Matthew Levitt, Washington Institute, 20 March 2014*

There is no guarantee that a peace deal will be reached within the current timeline, but a Palestinian return to armed struggle would be a far greater political, economic, and humanitarian disaster than any short-term frustration with the negotiations.

<http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/west-bank-violence-and-gaza-rockets-could-spark-wider-conflict>

6. Europe's alarming push to isolate Israel
Interview with Alan Dershowitz, Newsmax, 20 March 2014

When President Barack Obama warned of "international fallout" if Israel fails to embrace the latest U.S. Middle East peace proposal, Newsmax asked noted author and Harvard Law professor Alan Dershowitz to comment on the growing talk of a European boycott against Israel.

<http://www.newsmax.com/Newsfront/Alan-Dershowitz-Nazis-Europe-Israel/2014/03/11/id/558976/>

7. Dear Mr Mandela
Michelle Rojas-Tal, The Times of Israel, 19 March 2014

Sadly, the world continues to become a more frightening place as you know and sometimes, I wonder, what it must be like watching this all take place above the clouds, rather than here on the ground.

<http://blogs.timesofisrael.com/dear-mr-mandela/>

8. The failure of the Mideast "Peace Process"
Melanie Philips, Wall Street Journal, 19 March 2014

While the U.S. and Britain present themselves as Israel's friends. Israel doesn't quite see it like that.

<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304256404579448883861131714?mq=reno64-wsj&url=http%3A%2F%2Fonline.wsj.com%2Farticle%2FSB10001424052702304256404579448883861131714.html>

9. We must divide the land
Isaac Herzog, Fathom, 30 January 2014

The newly elected Labour leader Isaac Herzog sat down with Fathom to discuss what the Britain-Israel relationship means to him, the golden opportunity he sees in the current peace process, and the challenge of building Israel as a multi-cultural society.

<http://www.fathomjournal.org/conversation/we-must-divide-the-land/>

1. Today's Israeli leaders lack the very qualities that made its founders great

Israel's founding generation is disappearing. In January, Ariel Sharon, who left an indelible mark on Israel's map and history, finally passed away after eight years in a coma. Earlier this month, Meir Har-Zion, the fearless and controversial soldier who helped create the Sayeret Matkal, died at 80. And this coming summer, Shimon Peres, now 90 and the last surviving member of David Ben Gurion's inner circle, will retire from Israel's presidency and, presumably, begin to step back from public life.

Certainly there are politicians who can still claim direct connection to the founders' generation, most notably Isaac Herzog - known as Buji - whose grandfather Yitzhak HaLevi Herzog was Israel's first chief rabbi and whose father Chaim Herzog, a disciple of Ben

Gurion, was the country's sixth president. But in a sense, we are already living in a post-founder era: There is no meaningful way in which Israel's current prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, head of the Likud, can be called an heir to the party's founder, Menachem Begin.

The inexorable disappearance of those who lived through - and shaped - the heroic period of Israel's establishment virtually begs us to ask: Why is it that no one in today's generation of leaders, who of course are all deeply committed to the state of Israel and to the Jewish people, can truly claim the mantle of those who went before?

The answer lies, perhaps, in the difference between how the members of the Independence generation perceived their Jewishness. These were men who came out of a Europe whose sons were educated as Jews. They embodied a biblical sort of statesmanship, in which their stewardship of the new state was crucial to the rebirth of the Jewish people in their ancestral homeland.

This was true of no one so much as Begin, who saw the world through utterly biblical lenses. The Bible, he believed, was actually the Jews' deed to the land. The Tanach fed his adoration of Jewish fighters. And it gave context to Begin's sense of time and purpose - in a way that has been true of none of Israel's leaders either before or since. Devoted to the Jews, he believed with all his heart that those of other faiths were no less created in God's image. A man of great faith, he understood the difference between a biblical worldview and a narrow ideology.

In Israel, it is rare to find leaders who couple such profound conviction to such generosity of spirit and nimbleness of mind. But Israel's leadership no longer thinks of itself so consciously and unabashedly in biblical terms; Israel no longer produces people with the authority of biblical fluency, let alone conviction, at the core of their politics.

Begin was not "observant" in today's sense, but he was always a person of deep Jewish faith, for whom the Tanach was the roadmap of life. He often related the tradition of his parents' house, in which the children would play a game with their father: They would recite the beginning of a biblical verse, and their father would have to complete it. It was almost impossible to stump him, Begin would later recall. The Bible was *the* text, *the* book.

When he was elected in 1977 - a surprise not only to the nation but to him, as well - Begin was confronted by a group of reporters and asked if he had anything that he wanted to say to anyone. Begin reached into his pocket and took out a *kippah*, with a casualness unimaginable on the part of any non-Orthodox leader today, and replied that yes, he wanted to say something to Aliza, his wife and the love of his life: "I recall with favour, the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride - How you followed me into the wilderness, in a land sown with mines." It was, of course, a conscious misquote of the famous verse from Jeremiah 2:2, in which God says to the Jewish people:

I recall with favour the devotion of your youth
Your love as a bride -
as you followed Me in the wilderness
In a land not sown.

Faced with cameras and the surprise of his election, Begin did the only thing he knew how to do: He drew his inspiration from the biblical well that he always nourished him. Much the same transpired in June 1981, when eight Israeli warplanes prepared to take off from an

airfield in the Sinai to head to Iraq, where they destroyed the nuclear reactor at Osirak. Israeli Intelligence had prepared copious amounts of material for Begin to review, as part of an assessment of what Saddam Hussein might do in response to the attack. But as the planes took off, made their way eastward, bombed the reactor, and then raced home, Begin did not so much as crack one of the binders. Rather, he paced to and fro across his office, mumbling softly, apparently - according to Yehuda Avner, who was present and who related the story to me - reciting psalms. It was the height of tension, a moment of grave danger for the Jewish State. Rather than burying himself in classified data, Begin drew his calm from the Book of Books.

It wasn't simply a question of faith. The Bible, after all, is a book with a majestic sweep and a grand view of history. It opens even before the world is created and imagines a re-perfected reality at the End of Days. The events related in the Tanach - the beginnings of the Jewish people as a small family and then clan, Egyptian slavery and freedom, the march to the land, conquest, kingship, and loss of the kingdoms - were, though central to Jewish history, reflective of just a small slice of time in the unfolding of the cosmos. Begin saw the world that way.

When negotiations between Israel and Egypt stalled in late 1978, U.S. President Jimmy Carter tried to press Begin, then physically ailing, into making concessions. It was, Carter entreated the Israeli leader, "an opportunity that may never come again." But Begin's view of the world was too biblical, too vast, too grounded in a sense of endless possibility of Jewish rebirth for that warning to strike a chord. Responding to Carter on Israeli television, Begin evoked a biblical perspective when he retorted, "Our people lived thousands of years before Camp David, and we will live thousands of years after Camp David. ... If we are told that this is the last chance to arrive at peace, we shall not agree: There are no 'last chances' in life."

If Begin was uncowed by American or international pressure, it was because he had inherited a biblical notion that it was the role of the Jew to be utterly alone. Reagan could pressure him; the world could hate him. Carter could lean on him and, when Begin refused to budge, call him a "psycho." *Time* magazine could write of him, upon his election, "Begin, rhymes with Fagin." But none of that got to him. For how was that different from the hatred and dismissiveness to which the Jews had always been subjected? "There is a nation that dwells apart, not reckoned among the nations," said Balaam when he was dispatched to curse the Israelites (Numbers 23). And there was Ahasuerus, to whom Haman famously said, "There is a certain people, scattered and dispersed among the other peoples ... whose laws are different ... and who do not obey the king's laws; and it is not in your majesty's interest to tolerate them." (Esther 3). Yet Balaam, in the end, did not curse the Israelites, and the Jews hanged Haman on the very tree that he had prepared for Mordecai. To be in the business of Jewish leadership, Begin understood, was to be treated as marginal. Either one was up to it, or one was not - and he was.

Yet Begin invoked theological certainty with relative infrequency. When the air force planes returned from their mission to Osirak, he deftly side-stepped the question of whether the accomplishment was a miracle, or "only" an extraordinary military feat. "Thank God we have pilots like these," he said, neatly covering his bases.

He believed in irredeemable evil, and that the Jews were the rightful owners of the Land of Israel. But for all that seeming theological certainty, he was a much more nimble thinker and deft actor than most ideologically driven political personalities today, in Israel and beyond. He illustrated the difference between dogma and belief. And thus, over the course of his career, his keen adherence to one overarching purpose - the safety and security of the

Jewish people - led him to take actions that have made him anathema to both sides of the Israeli political divide ever since.

When the British controlled Palestine and sealed its borders, there was no place to which the Jews of Europe could escape. So, the British had to be dislodged; Jews needed to be saved. Begin led the Irgun, bombed the King David Hotel and - along with the Haganah and Lechi - did what was needed to open the shores. He thus became anathema to Ben Gurion's Mapai and, later, to the entire Israeli political left. But decades later, when he saw the opportunity to save Jewish lives by making a deal with Anwar Sadat, he gave up the Sinai, enraging the right. In his own mind, he was being entirely consistent. In the eyes of lesser and more ideological players, he violated sacred principles of both the left and the right - an unforgivable betrayal in today's increasingly partisan, increasingly polarized politics.

Menachem Begin was undoubtedly a man of the political right. But he also inherited the Bible's universalism and, with it, a respect for the gentile world far too rarely found, especially on today's Israeli right. It was Begin who welcomed the Vietnamese refugees who were found without food and water on the South China Sea; the Bible insisted that one could not ignore the plight of the stranger, because the Israelites, too, had been strangers, and he knew what he had to do. Compare that with Israel's deportation of Sudanese refugees today and the derision with which too many of Israel's contemporary leaders speak about them.

Begin believed that God had given the Jews Judea and Samaria, so he unabashedly supported the settlement movement. But when Israel's Supreme Court ruled in 1979 that Elon Moreh had been built on land illegally expropriated, Begin relented immediately. "There are judges in Jerusalem," he said, in an almost biblical syntax, channelling the Tanach's insistence that law and judges must be at the core of society - and reflecting the fact that he took the law and judges of the State of Israel seriously. Compare that commitment to law with both the Haredim in Israel today, with their willingness to use violence against the state, or the more radical settlers on the West Bank, and their burning of mosques and uprooting of Palestinian-owned olive trees. That anyone could do such things and invoke the name of the Jewish people, would have left Begin utterly confused and dejected.

But Begin himself resisted cultivating protégés. In 1983, when he resigned his position to Yitzhak Shamir, Shamir's inner circle begged Begin to give the new prime minister his public blessing. "I'm not a king," Begin replied as he refused. "I have no heirs."

2. Palestinian travel start-up bypasses credit cards

A Palestinian online travel start-up that hopes to be Ramallah's first major high-tech success believes it has cracked a major cultural barrier to e-commerce in the Middle East: the vast majority of people in the region do not use credit cards.

Yamsafer ("Hey, Traveller"), a travel site founded in Ramallah in 2011, has doubled its web traffic each month since December by introducing card-less bookings and a new algorithm that rewards trustworthy customers who complete booking transactions at the hotel.

Faris Zaher, chief executive, said Yamsafer is the only online booking site offering cardless transactions. Travel booking sites typically require users to pay by credit card in advance to guard against no-shows.

Yamsafer's no-shows are less than 10%, in line with the industry standard in the Middle East. Mr Zaher said this was achieved partly by rewarding reliable customers with cardless bookings at a wider range of destinations.

Yamsafer also markets hotels' empty capacity midweek and off season for free in exchange for the hotels bearing the risk of a no-show. This allows Yamsafer to offer cardless and pay-upon-arrival bookings, while still benefiting the hotels, Mr Zaher said.

Mr Zaher did not disclose Yamsafer's financials, but he did say that the company was still lossmaking.

"In the Middle East, 90% of e-commerce transactions are being processed with cash-on-delivery payments," said Mr Zaher. While the UAE has the highest credit card penetration in the world with an average of two cards per person, the emirate is an outlier for the region where average penetration is less than 15%.

"It's a local problem. But this is something we can potentially take global," he added

Mr Zaher said that when Yamsafer initially tried to make people pay by credit cards, the dropout rate on its final checkout page was more than 90%. "We called them up and asked them: Why didn't you guys check out? You liked the price. What was the reason? The overwhelming majority said: 'We'd love to book, but we don't have a credit card.'"

Only 2% of the \$16bn of annual hotel bookings in the Middle East are processed online, compared with more than three-fifths in the US and Europe. None of Yamsafer's bigger competitors, including Travel Sheikh in Jordan and TravelerVIP in Dubai, have options for cardless bookings.

"It's a huge, huge opportunity. Right now we are the leading player within the region," said Mr Zaher.

Yamsafer, which has 11 employees, began in 2011 with \$12,000 of seed funding from the three co-founders. In October 2012, the company received \$1m from Sadara Ventures – the first investment by the only Palestinian venture capital fund.

It is concentrating on the local market, offering Middle Eastern travellers access to destinations on partner sites Booking.com and Expedia, plus its own inventory of small and medium-sized hotels that have no other web presence, but plans to expand after the recent growth in traffic.

"We want to become the leading online hotel booking engine for the Middle East. We're going to offer destinations worldwide," said Mr Zaher.

3. Abbas's triumph?

Last week, an exultant Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas returned from Washington to Ramallah and was received by cheering crowds. He came carrying a decidedly rejectionist, triumphalist message.

"I have honoured my pledge and kept my promise," Abbas declared to the thousands who had gathered at his Mukata headquarters.

It quickly became clear what the celebrating was all about. After eight months of negotiations, Abbas was proud to announce that he had not budged on any of the divisive issues preventing the creation of a Palestinian state.

The rally at the Mukata had been carefully planned with PA employees and schoolchildren bussed in for the event.

It seemed to be, like the rallies that take place under other autocratic regimes in the region and elsewhere, more a testament to Abbas's ability to mobilize those Palestinians dependent on the PA's power and money than a genuine show of support.

This is not to say that there are within Palestinian society voices calling on its leaders to be more flexible and accommodating to Israeli demands. Eight months ago, Abbas had almost no support inside his Fatah party and among other political parties for his decision to renew negotiations with Israel. The situation has not changed since.

For most Palestinians, anything less than a Palestinian state established in the West Bank along the 1949 armistice lines with east Jerusalem as its capital; the removal of all Jewish settlements except for a few close to the Green Line; an equitable solution to the Palestinian "refugee" issue that includes the right of return for thousands; and complete Palestinian control of borders and airspace with no Israeli troops on the ground, would be essentially a continuation of the "occupation." No Palestinian politician has managed to convince Palestinians otherwise.

It is difficult not to be pessimistic about the prospects for a peace agreement. A gaping chasm separates Israelis and Palestinians on everything from Jerusalem and Palestinian "refugees" to security arrangements in the Jordan Valley and the recognition of Israel as the state of the Jewish people. Abbas refused to budge on all of these issues. And due to the inner dynamics of Palestinian politics, he is presenting his rejectionism as a heroic act, as though to have the guts to say no to US President Barack Obama can be leveraged by Abbas to increase his popularity on the Palestinian street.

There are other developments that also do not bode well for the future of Israeli-Palestinian relations. Gen. Jibril Rajoub, a senior member of the Fatah Central Committee, told *The Jerusalem Post's* Editorial Page Editor Mati Wagner in an in-depth interview that appeared on Sunday that "all the cards are on the table" for Palestinians, including violence.

The killing of three Palestinian terrorists in Jenin early on Saturday was yet another reminder that there are Hamas, Islamic Jihad and Fatah activists operating in the West Bank who continue to support an armed struggle.

PA security forces have almost no control in refugee camps in Jenin and Nablus.

Leading Palestinians seriously contemplating the possibility that the PA will fall apart or be dismantled. Just last month, the Palestinian Centre for Policy and Survey Research published a 250-page report summing up the opinions of some 200 leading Palestinians about the chances that the PA will soon cease to exist and the ramifications thereof. Obviously, though, Israelis, many Palestinians and the international community have a strong mutual interest in preventing the PA's collapse.

The US-orchestrated peace talks seem on the verge of falling apart. Can the relative stability that we have grown accustomed to in the West Bank no longer be taken for granted? Unfortunately, a Palestinian political leadership capable of making the sorts of concessions necessary for a peace agreement has failed to materialize. As a result, we are fast approaching a dead-end.

With little chance of a breakthrough in talks – unless there is a significant change in the Palestinian leadership's approach – it makes little sense to move ahead with the release of the fourth and final batch of imprisoned terrorists.

The release of these terrorists was in any event originally conditioned on a sincere intention by the Palestinians to achieve peace through dialogue, an intention that is sorely lacking judging from Abbas's reception in Ramallah.

4. Is Hamas finally losing its grip on Gaza?

Tattered green Hamas flags still flap above the streets in central Gaza and posters of its martyrs hang in public spaces. But these are tough times for the Hamas government, and not just due to the recent flare-up in tensions with Israel.

In December last year, they cancelled rallies planned for the 26th anniversary of their founding, an occasion celebrated ever since they seized power here in 2007, and though usually secretive about their financial affairs, they revealed a 2014 budget of \$589 million, with a gigantic 75 per cent deficit.

So, what's gone wrong for Hamas? Just a year ago, it seemed to be enjoying a honeymoon here. It had not only survived the second major Israeli assault in four years, but had the backing of the Arab world's largest state, Egypt. There was a rift with Iran over the Syrian civil war, but oil-rich Qatar was vying with Turkey over who could best boost the Gazan economy.

In a matter of months, all of this has been swept away. History has taken several unfortunate turns, as far as Hamas is concerned: Qatar's leadership has changed, with a far less friendly new emir, and Ankara is stalling over Hamas requests to move their political bureau to Turkey. While relations with Iran are on the mend, they are not yet back to their previous warmth (of before the Syrian civil war), and Hamas still supports the rights of their Sunni brethren, the Syrian rebels, to depose Bashar al-Assad.

But the biggest problem for Hamas stems from Egypt's military takeover last June. Cairo's current administration makes no secret of its antipathy towards Muslim Brotherhood-allied Hamas and has set to work severing Gaza's lifeline — the tunnels between Gaza and Egypt.

'They accused us of everything, assassinations, shooting, releasing prisoners, committing great operations everywhere, yallah, they made Hamas like a superpower,' says Hamas's deputy foreign minister, Ghazi Hamed. 'They started closing the Rafah crossing and preventing people from travelling — and also they destroy the tunnels.'

The tunnels are vital to Hamas, who tax the smuggling industry; closed tunnels are costing its economy \$230 million a month. But luxuries are, as ever, available for those who can afford them, and this makes for a very surreal city. High-end cars driven by the political elite share the streets with the jalopies and donkey carts. The smattering of fancy hotels along Gaza City's so-called cornice look on to a beach silted with rubbish, but they offer fillet steak and sea bass.

Hamas members have become very fat, says one opposition activist, but ordinary Gazans are suffering as never before. At the food market in Gaza's Old City, only a scattering of shoppers pick their way through the stalls selling old vegetables, spices and raggedy

chickens. 'No one has money,' says one stallholder glumly. 'Every time someone spends even one shekel it is like they are ripping it out of their own flesh.'

Nearby, gold vendors fill an ancient alleyway by the Omari mosque, but the joke here is that whatever jewellery is bought for a wedding gets sold again a week later.

If you want more than the daily allotment of eight hours of electricity, you need a generator in Gaza. This wasn't so much of a problem when a million litres of smuggled Egyptian fuel arrived through the tunnels every day, costing less than half that supplied via Israel. Since last June, there's been no Egyptian fuel and Gazans have been growing desperate — even turning on Hamas.

There were attempts by a group calling themselves Tamarod Gaza — modelled on the Egyptian protest movement — to organise mass demonstrations against Hamas on 11 November. But Hamas was all too clear about what would happen to anyone who turned up. It launched its own social media campaign against Tamarod Gaza, warning in one Facebook skit: 'Come to the demonstration and get your free coffin or wheelchair. Our representatives will be waiting to assist you.'

This was not a joke. Sama Ahmed, a 33-year-old Fatah member, has personal experience of how Hamas treats its opponents. During the March 2011 demonstrations (which demanded Hamas and Fatah repair their political split), she was stabbed by a Hamas security officer. Even now, she says she is occasionally tracked by government agents. She flicks them the V for victory sign: 'It means I know and don't care if they follow me,' she says.

Sama's attitude is undoubtedly brave, but it also reflects a growing realisation amongst Gazans that Hamas is weak and growing weaker. 'Nowadays we don't document many violations,' says Khalid Abu Shamala, the director of the al-Dameer human rights organisation. This is not because of a new Hamas policy of openness, he emphasises, 'but because they have little power, and they know it'.

Any domestic strategy has dissolved, he adds. 'Hamas live day by day, because of the lack of support, the lack of resources and as a result of the international community boycott.'

In the past, Hamas tried to justify the harsh conditions as the price of resistance to the Israeli occupation. It has PR-ed itself as the only political faction with the infrastructure to launch spectacular attacks and it's true that in the last major round of hostilities, Hamas missiles reached as far as the Tel Aviv periphery.

But despite the recent skirmish, the ceasefire agreed with Israel in November 2012 has mostly held; last year saw the lowest number of casualties within Gaza since the beginning of the second intifada in 2000.

'We have an understanding with all Palestinian factions to respect the ceasefire,' says deputy foreign minister Hamed. 'The situation here is fragile, there is no stability and from time to time you will find clashes. Israel will come and target people - you will find sometimes a missile fired from Gaza - but in general we are interested in keeping the situation calm and quiet.' So now Hamas now finds itself in the peculiar position of outsourcing Israel's security work, and it's clear that its leaders miss the days of resistance. Hamed almost admits it. 'Hamas first of all identifies itself as a resistance movement, and our only goal is to liberate our homeland and to end the occupation and to establish our state. Now, to be in power, in authority - it's not easy.'

Could Hamas succumb to its perilous circumstances and fall? Before we get too excited about that, consider that many in Gaza, even those who detest the current regime, shudder at the thought of what would happen if one of the other armed groups took over. 'If Islamic Jihad controlled Gaza, Hamas rule would seem like a paradise,' says one resident.

Then there are the Salafists, with whom Hamas has battled with varying degrees of brutality. They are a growing threat over the border in the Sinai peninsula; and much as Israelis detest Hamas, they dread the prospect of global jihadists penetrating Gaza.

Gazans say they see no political solution and no prospect of a Hamas-Fatah reconciliation, or of genuine elections any time soon. Hope lies in escape. As one of Gaza's most successful businessmen says: 'When they stamp my passport to leave I feel 20 years younger'.

5. West Bank violence and Gaza rockets could spark a wider conflict

Peace processes are rarely peaceful processes, and the current U.S.-led effort to reach an Israeli-Palestinian "framework agreement" is no exception. As the tempo of negotiations between the main parties picks up speed, more radical actors have re-emerged to violently oppose the process, from Palestinian Islamic Jihad (PIJ) and the Popular Resistance Committees, to Salafi jihadist groups, to Marxist factions such as the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP).

Many observers have focused on the sharp increase in rockets fired at Israel from Gaza in the past few weeks and the prospect of another Gaza war. But that issue, while crucial, has drawn media attention away from two equally troubling trends: the increase in violence across the West Bank, and new signs that some officials from the Palestinian Authority and its leading party, Fatah, may be hedging their bets and preparing for wider violence if the peace process fails.

West Bank Instability

The growth of West Bank violence in recent months raises several concerns. First, while overall Israeli deaths from terrorist attacks declined from 2012 to 2013, none of the fatal 2012 attacks originated from the West Bank. But this flipped in 2013, with five of that year's six Israeli fatalities stemming from the West Bank. Second, Israeli and Palestinian sources agree that PA security forces have been weak in the face of recent unrest. Residents of West Bank refugee camps in particular are becoming increasingly hostile, and the PA has been pulling back as a result. The Israel Defence Forces have taken up some of the slack -- IDF arrests in the West Bank went up by a third from 2012 to 2013. Yet as violent activity intensifies, successful attacks will become ever more likely.

A number of factors have contributed to the deteriorating security situation. The PA suffered a serious blow when Prime Minister Salam Fayyad resigned in April 2013, and the territories are in dire economic straits. Meanwhile, Hamas appears to be expanding its presence in the West Bank from its Gaza stronghold. A spate of recent reports have mentioned the presence of various group members in the West Bank, indicating an intent to take advantage of the PA's declining capabilities. In January, for example, newspaper reports noted that Israel had arrested sixteen men in Jerusalem over the previous several weeks on suspicion of running a Hamas headquarters in the city. A February story mentioned fifteen West Bank arrests in connection with fire bombings and rock attacks on Israeli vehicles. And last week, a Hamas operative in east Jerusalem was arrested on suspicion of cutting gas pipes in residential buildings as part of a one-man terrorist campaign.

Unsurprisingly, these developments have led some Fatah officials to hedge their bets by either looking the other way when certain incidents occur or publicly warning of greater violence to come. For instance, during a January service held in Jenin to memorialize a slain PIJ operative, a member of Hamas's military "wing," the Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades, showed up in full militant garb despite a PA ban on such displays. Far from being arrested, however, he was flanked by members of PIJ as well as Fatah's own military wing, the al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades. That same month, Fatah Central Committee member Tawfiq al-Tirawi supported the resumption of armed resistance to Israel during an interview with Lebanese media. According to a *Times of Israel* account of his remarks, he declared, "We, all Palestinian factions, must return to the cycle of action...There must be something on the ground as well...The big explosion in Palestine is coming. All of Israel's actions have placed the Palestinian public under immense pressure. They have no choice but to explode in the face of occupation."

Escalation from Gaza

Palestinian leaders have blamed Israel for the escalation that began last week, during which an estimated eighty rockets were launched from Gaza within a three-day period. Yet even before that spate of launches, Gaza militants had reportedly fired twenty-eight rockets into southern Israel since the beginning of the year, twenty in the first three weeks of January alone -- compared to about forty in all of 2013. Of these, five were headed toward the city of Ashkelon and were intercepted by Israel's Iron Dome missile defense system. Several others were launched toward the January 13 funeral of former prime minister Ariel Sharon. In both cases -- one strike aimed at a major Israeli population center, another at a state funeral attended by foreign dignitaries -- Hamas risked massive retaliation had any of the rockets hit their intended targets, whether it launched them itself or permitted others to do so. The group also claimed to have test-fired an anti-aircraft missile in mid-January, though it missed its target and the incident went unreported by Israeli media.

Hamas has allowed the Gaza situation to escalate due to the increasing pressure it feels. Egypt's July 2013 ouster of the Morsi government, a key Hamas supporter, was a disaster for the group. Cairo's subsequent crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood was also directed at Hamas, leading the Egyptian military to close most of the tunnels into Gaza. And last week, Cairo reportedly sidestepped Hamas and negotiated a truce directly with PIJ after the salvo of rocket strikes on Israel.

Unable to tax goods flowing through the tunnels from Egypt, and lacking any significant support from Iran, Hamas is also facing an acute financial crisis. According to some reports, the group's leadership recently passed a budget covering a mere 25 percent of expected expenditures in Gaza. Therefore, a major military confrontation with Israel is not in Hamas's interest at the moment -- its overarching objective of late has been to remain in power, not open a new conflict. Following Israel's retaliatory strikes in January, for example, Hamas military commanders reportedly wanted to strike back, but the group's political leaders limited their response to temporarily redeploying rocket-prevention forces away from the border in early February.

Even so, Hamas continues to lay the groundwork for a future battle with Israel. In addition to steady weapons production, radicalization efforts continue unabated, as highlighted by remarks that Hamas officials delivered to an audience of thousands attending a January 13 graduation ceremony for a "jihadi education" youth camp. "This generation, Allah willing, will vanquish Israel," Interior Minister Fathi Hamad predicted.

Meanwhile, the mounting pressure on Hamas has benefited smaller, more militant groups who are not constrained by the reins of power and receive financial incentives from Iran to continue bombarding Israel. Some factions reportedly receive thousands of dollars from Iran for each rocket launched at Israel. The latest salvos were launched not by Hamas, but by PIJ, while other groups such as the PFLP and Salafi jihadist factions have fired heavy mortars or short-range Qassam and Grad rockets. Moreover, evidence suggests that the Iranian weapons seized aboard the Klos C smuggling ship earlier this month were primarily intended for PIJ, not Hamas.

Conclusion

President Mahmoud Abbas's White House meeting with President Obama this week was intended to spark support for the peace process among Palestinians and a sense of urgency among all parties. There is no guarantee that a deal will be reached within the current timeline. Yet as frustrating as the current lack of progress is, a return to armed struggle -- by Fatah, Hamas, or others -- would be a disaster for Palestinians. Even apart from the diplomatic setback and potential loss of life, a wider armed struggle would destroy the Palestinian economy at a time when traditional donors are occupied by the more pressing disaster in Syria, the Ukraine crisis, and Iranian nuclear negotiations.

6. Europe's alarming push to isolate Israel

Why are so many of the grandchildren of Nazis and Nazi collaborators who brought us the Holocaust once again declaring war on the Jews?

Why have we seen such an increase in anti-Semitism and irrationally virulent anti-Zionism in western Europe?

To answer these questions, a myth must first be exposed. That myth is the one perpetrated by the French, the Dutch, the Norwegians, the Swiss, the Belgians, the Austrians, and many other western Europeans: namely that the Holocaust was solely the work of German Nazis aided perhaps by some Polish, Ukrainian, Latvian, Lithuanian, and Estonian collaborators.

False.

The Holocaust was perpetrated by Europeans — by Nazi sympathizers and collaborators among the French, Dutch, Norwegians, Swiss, Belgians, Austrians and other Europeans, both Western and Eastern.

If the French government had not deported to the death camps more Jews than their German occupiers asked for; if so many Dutch and Belgian citizens and government officials had not cooperated in the roundup of Jews; if so many Norwegians had not supported Quisling; if Swiss government officials and bankers had not exploited Jews; if Austria had not been more Nazi than the Nazis, the Holocaust would not have had so many Jewish victims.

In light of the widespread European complicity in the destruction of European Jewry, the pervasive anti-Semitism and irrationally hateful anti-Zionism that has recently surfaced throughout western Europe toward Israel should surprise no one.

"Oh no," we hear from European apologists. "This is different. We don't hate the Jews. We only hate their nation-state. Moreover, the Nazis were right-wing. We're left-wing, so we can't be anti-Semites."

Nonsense.

The hard left has a history of anti-Semitism as deep and enduring as the hard right. The line from Voltaire, to Karl Marx, to Levrenti Beria, to Robert Faurisson, to today's hard-left Israel bashers is as straight as the line from Wilhelm Mars to the persecutors of Alfred Dreyfus to Hitler.

The Jews of Europe have always been crushed between the Black and the Red — victims of extremism whether it be the ultra-nationalism of Khmel'nitsky to the ultra-anti-Semitism of Stalin.

"But some of the most strident anti-Zionists are Jews, such as Norman Finkelstein and even Israelis such as Gilad Atzmon. Surely they can't be anti-Semites."

Why not? Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas collaborated with the Gestapo. Atzmon, a hard leftist, describes himself as a proud self-hating Jew and admits that his ideas derive from a notorious anti-Semite.

He denies that the Holocaust is historically proved but he believes that Jews may well have killed Christian children to use their blood to bake Passover matzah. And he thinks it's

"rational" to burn down synagogues.

Finkelstein believes in an international Jewish conspiracy that includes Steven Spielberg, Leon Uris, Eli Wiesel, and Andrew Lloyd Webber!

"But Israel is doing bad things to the Palestinians," the European apologists insist, "and we are sensitive to the plight of the underdog."

No, you're not! Where are your demonstrations on behalf of the oppressed Tibetans, Georgians, Syrians, Armenians, Kurds, or even Ukrainians? Where are your BDS movements against the Chinese, the Russians, the Cubans, the Turks, or the Assad regime?

Only the Palestinians, only Israel? Why? Not because the Palestinians are more oppressed than these and other groups.

Only because their alleged oppressors are Jews and the nation-state of the Jews. Would there be demonstrations and BDS campaigns on behalf of the Palestinians if they were oppressed by Jordan or Egypt?

Oh, wait! The Palestinians were oppressed by Egypt and Jordan. Gaza was an open-air prison between 1948 and 1967, when Egypt was the occupying power. And remember Black September, when Jordan killed more Palestinians than Israel did in a century? I don't remember any demonstration or BDS campaigns -- because there weren't any.

When Arabs occupy or kill Arabs, Europeans go ho-hum. But when Israel opens a soda factory in Ma'ale Adumim, which even the Palestinian leadership acknowledges will remain part of Israel in any peace deal, Oxfam parts ways with Scarlett Johansson for advertising a soda company that employs hundreds of Palestinians.

Keep in mind that Oxfam has provided "aid and material support" to two anti-Israel terrorist groups, according to the Tel Aviv-based Israeli Law Group.

The hypocrisy of so many hard-left western Europeans would be staggering if it were not so predictable based on the sordid history of Western Europe's treatment of the Jews.

Even England, which was on the right side of the war against Nazism, has a long history of anti-Semitism, beginning with the expulsion of the Jews in 1290 to the notorious White Paper of 1939, which prevented the Jews of Europe from seeking asylum from the Nazis in British-mandated Palestine. And Ireland, which vacillated in the war against Hitler, boasts some of the most virulent anti-Israel rhetoric.

The simple reality is that one cannot understand the current western European left-wing war against the nation-state of the Jewish people without first acknowledging the long-term European war against the Jewish people themselves.

Theodore Herzl understood the pervasiveness and irrationality of European anti-Semitism, which led him to the conclusion that the only solution to Europe's Jewish problem was for European Jews to leave that bastion of Jew hatred and return to their original homeland, which is now the state of Israel.

None of this is to deny Israel's imperfections or the criticism it justly deserves for some of its policies. But these imperfections and deserved criticism cannot even begin to explain, much less justify, the disproportionate hatred directed against the only nation-state of the Jewish people and the disproportionate silence regarding the far greater imperfections and

deserved criticism of other nations and groups — including the Palestinians.

Nor is this to deny that many western European individuals and some western European countries have refused to succumb to the hatred against the Jews or their state. The Czech Republic comes to mind. But far too many western Europeans are as irrational in their hatred toward Israel as their forbearers were in their hatred toward their Jewish neighbours.

As author Amos Oz once aptly observed: the walls of his grandparents' Europe were covered with graffiti saying, "Jews, go to Palestine." Now they say, "Jews, get out of Palestine" — by which is meant Israel.

Who do these western European bigots think they're fooling? Only fools who want to be fooled in the interest of denying that they are manifesting new variations on their grandparents' old biases.

Any objective person with an open mind, open eyes, and an open heart must see the double standard being applied to the nation-state of the Jewish people. Many doing so are the grandchildren of those who lethally applied a double standard to the Jews of Europe in the 1930s and 1940s.

For shame!

7. Dear Mr Mandela

I hope this note finds you in a peaceful rest. Your loss was felt across the globe and the impression you left on mankind is truly inspiring. Sadly, the world continues to become a more frightening place as you know and sometimes, I wonder, what it must be like watching this all take place above the clouds, rather than here on the ground.

When I was a little girl, I remember learning about you in school. Growing up in New York, it was so hard for me to understand that there was a place on earth where people were still separated and judged based on the color of their skin; a concept that was so ancient and unheard of for me. I learned of your fight for equality and justice. I remember asking my teacher if I would be considered a "colored" person in South Africa because I was half-Hispanic. I was sad for you. I was young, innocent and quite naïve.

Two decades since the fall of the Apartheid regime in South Africa, the terror of experiencing 9/11, losing my father, being married and becoming a mother, I can now say, most of the innocence has been lost. Lost, but not forgotten.

I have visited your beautiful country on a number of occasions. I have learned of its tragedy and triumph. I have been touched by the warm and welcoming nature of your countrymen. I have enjoyed the delicious South African cuisine! But more than anything, I listened. I listened for as much as it would have been simple for me to judge, it wasn't my place. I needed to learn, try to understand and absorb all around me. But sadly, Mr. Mandela, the respect I afforded to your nation, is not one being afforded to mine.

During this month, a horrific event took place in your beautiful country. It hijacked the memory of your great and unique struggle and all in the same breath, painted a false and vicious picture of the place I call home. Israel Apartheid Week. How could anyone even fathom the thought? How could one diminish what happened in South Africa and in a bigoted attempt try to label Israel as such? I wanted to go back to my elementary school

teacher and ask her why. I wanted someone to assure me it would pass and everything would be well once again. But then I realized, I was now the teacher, and there are people looking to me for the answers. Looking to be assured that everything would be fine...

In response to IAW in South Africa, **StandWithUs** sent a delegation of Israeli students to campuses in Johannesburg, Cape Town and Rhodes. Partnering with our allies on the ground, we wanted to ensure that Israel's side of the story be told by the very people who are writing the chapters. The alumni of the StandWithUs Israel Fellowship were the exact people to do just that. They represent the beauty of Israel in all of its diversity. Their experiences offer the most in-depth look into Israel's narrative and their eternal optimism emanates the core of Israeli society and our nation's ever-lasting struggle for peace.

Mr. Mandela, these young men and women came to your country with open hearts and minds. They came to share the truth beyond the headlines. They came to strengthen those who support the only true democracy in the Middle East, asking, as Professor Allan Dershowitz best stated, not to be a democracy judged on its perfection but rather one judged on how well it deals with its imperfections. They are the very people dedicating their lives to bettering the nation they love so dearly. They are volunteers. They are peace activists. They are educators. They are officers of the IDF. They are the faces of Israel. An Israel, sadly, many in your country do not understand nor care to.

"You were taught to target Palestinian children." "What the Nazis did to you, you are now doing to the Palestinians." "I will not speak to you because you are Israeli. I do not recognize your right to exist". "I know for a fact that Palestinian women are raped systematically by Israeli soldiers as punishment for not obeying their orders". During far too many instances they were met with hate. These are direct remarks that they recorded. Not criticism or debate. Not difficult questions or dissenting voices; but pure hate. They were threatened with arrest. They were harassed and shouted at. They were made to feel a segregated and hated minority in a country which should have zero tolerance for such

Mr. Mandela, the acts of the anti-Israel groups in South Africa are abusing what you fought your entire life for. They have taken your quotes and doctored them and are using your tremendous memory as a platform for their modern-day anti-Semitism. They are not interested in dialogue, or fair debate, the very structures that make democracies great. These groups are biased and hateful. There is no logic or fact in their speech. There is demonization and xenophobia.

Mr. Mandela, I would also like to tell you about the wonderful people of your country. Who listened to these young people and respected what they had to say. The students and community members who wanted to learn and engage. Who received their open hearts and minds and gave back the same sentiment. They are fighting to ensure that South Africa remains the beautiful and open nation you fought so tirelessly for it to become.

Mr. Mandela, you taught the world not to be silent in the face of oppression. You taught us to stand up to lies, even if they are told a million times and demand they not be propagandized as truths. You taught us to try and heal the world each and every day. It is what Israel strives for. It is what StandWithUs was created to do. And it is the reason why Matan, Shachar, Emily, Pino, Eyal and Ido were so determined to represent their country, even in the most adverse of scenarios and make the case for their nation.

I am asking for your help. And I apologize for interrupting your rest. All I need is your whisper. Whisper into the ears of those who still dream of a better future. Whisper the truth to them. Remind them that you supported the rights of the Israelis to live safely and securely in their Jewish homeland so much as you supported the Palestinian people. Tell them to

stop the madness that is overtaking the conversation about Israel. Tell them to stand up for those who have no voice. To fight back against the worlds human rights abusers. To lend their protest to the 140,000 Syrians who have been murdered or the modern-day slaves tortured in some of our neighbouring countries.

Remind them that Israel has the obligation to defend its citizens; many of whom have history in some of the most oppressive nations of the Middle East and Africa. Tell them not to abuse or distort what you stood for. Let them know that we will not be deterred in our effort and will continue to bring young public diplomats in the future. Whisper to them while they dream at night for they will listen much better. Whisper to them that hatred against any group in South Africa will not be tolerated. Whisper the truth as you now see so clearly. May your star continue to shine brightly and help shed light onto the darkness.

Rest well Mr. Mandela.

8. The failure of the Mideast "Peace Process"

The Middle East peace process seems all but doomed. Although U.S. President Barack Obama said he remained "convinced" it could still succeed when he met Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas this week, Secretary of State John Kerry has said trust between the Israelis and the Palestinians has reached a "nadir."

David Cameron visited Jerusalem and Bethlehem last week, his first visit to the region after four years as British Prime Minister. His government has kept the Middle East at arm's length. It is Secretary Kerry who has made all the running in this latest peace process, endlessly shuttling between the two sides.

Ostensibly, both the U.S. and the U.K. are urging both sides equally to take "tough political risks," as Mr. Obama put it, for peace. Alas, such exhortations seem to elicit merely disdain from both Jews and Arabs.

A poll by the Israel Democracy Institute and Tel Aviv University revealed last week that 64% of Israelis do not trust Mr. Kerry to treat Israel's security as a "crucial factor" in the framework peace proposal, while 53% of Israeli Arabs don't trust him either.

Both the U.S. and Britain present themselves as Israel's candid friends. Israel doesn't quite see it like that.

For all his well-received remarks in the Knesset, where he declared his "unbreakable" belief in Israel and "rock solid" commitment to its security, Mr. Cameron's government is widely viewed there with suspicion. Last year, the U.K. played a key role in the EU's provocative decision to label goods made in the disputed territories, and even issued an explicit warning to British companies over the risks of doing business there - initiatives the Israelis regarded as gratuitous acts of aggression.

More important, there is also deep shock within Israel at what it sees as bullying by the U.S. When President Obama met Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu earlier this month, he issued a veiled threat that if Israel did not accept the Kerry framework, the U.S. would no longer defend Israel against its enemies at the U.N. and elsewhere. This followed Mr. Kerry's remark last year that if Israel stymied the peace process, it might soon be facing an international delegitimization campaign "on steroids."

In Israel, there is bewilderment that it alone is being held responsible for the absence of peace. After all, while Mr. Netanyahu has accepted the prospect of a Palestinian state alongside Israel, Mr. Abbas has said repeatedly that the Palestinians will never accept that Israel is a Jewish state.

He also continues to insist on the right of every Palestinian "refugee" to immigrate not just to Palestine but also to Israel, which would destroy it as the Jewish national home.

In addition, despite President Obama's statement this week that Mr. Abbas has "consistently renounced violence," the Palestinian Authority continues to incite hatred against Israel through its educational materials and regime-controlled media, and permits and glorifies acts of terrorism by the al Aqsa brigades and others.

Yet the U.S. and U.K. hold only Israel's feet to the fire. Why? An important part of the answer lies in the inherent nature of the "peace process" itself.

This rests on two premises. The first is the Western fallacy that everyone in the world is governed by reason and material self-interest, whereas in fact some have non-negotiable agendas. The second is the current liberal belief that trans-national instruments such as international law can transcend the grievances of nation states.

War thus becomes a primitive throwback. It must be replaced by conflict resolution, negotiation and the "peace process."

This then becomes a deeply problematic end in itself. Based on an amoral equivalence in such negotiations between aggressor and victim, the peace process has to be kept going at all costs if war is to be avoided.

That means ignoring the fact that the aggressor in the dispute may still be violent or threatening. For if that is acknowledged, the "peace process" becomes something unconscionable: an enforced surrender to violence.

If the victims protest at this free pass to murderous aggression and refuse to submit, it is they who get the blame for derailing the peace process. That process is therefore innately inimical to justice, and biased in favour of the aggressor in a conflict.

This is what happened in the Northern Ireland peace process. Widely viewed as a triumph in creating a power-sharing administration between the hitherto warring Catholic Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Protestant Unionists, this is the template for the Middle East negotiations and Mr. Kerry's last stand.

The U.K. government first under John Major and then Tony Blair is credited with having turned IRA terrorists into statesmen by bringing them into this peace process. In fact, the IRA came in only because they were in effect beaten by the British army and British intelligence. They realized they could never win by military means. So they put their weapons "beyond use" and were given a share in the government of the province.

But to keep the peace process on track, the Unionists were denied knowledge of certain facts, such as deals being made to not prosecute IRA terrorists. When these secret deals recently became public, Mr. Cameron had to move swiftly to stop the Unionists from destroying Northern Ireland's power-sharing administration, which brought the risk of a return of IRA terrorism.

Not so much a true peaceful democracy, therefore, as an institutionalized protection racket. For Northern Ireland, the peace process was a Faustian pact in one U.K. province. For Israel, the stakes are rather higher.

9. We must divide the land

Part 1: Britain and Israel – a special relationship?

Toby Greene: *Your father served in the British Army. Does that affect the way you look at the UK? How important is Britain for Israel today?*

Isaac Herzog: I have a special affinity and respect for Britain and its history, not least its heroic role in the defeat of Nazism in World War Two. I take special pride in the fact that my late father, Chaim Herzog, served as an officer in the worst of battles in the war against the Nazis and was one of the liberators of Holland. Prior to becoming chairman of the Labour Party and Head of the Opposition, I served as the chairman of the UK-Israel Parliamentary friendship group. Lastly, I've been watching *The Politician's Husband*, which is a British TV series!

TG: *You're more up to date with British TV than we are!*

IH: And of course we respect British football. There are a lot of good things that come from Britain. To be more serious, Britain is a very important player in the region and globally, not only because of its historic role, not only because it is part of the P5+1, but due to its leadership role with the United States and other Western powers in dealing with the Iranian nuclear program and promoting peace in the region.

Part 2: The peace process

Richard Pater: *At the next election you will be a candidate for Prime Minister. How will you convince a sceptical Israeli public that peace is possible and worth the risks?*

IH: It is not only that peace is possible, but I need to convince the Israeli public to see me as somebody able to lead in a responsible manner and protect the interests of the nation. I believe that my political record, my record as a minister, as a member of the Security Cabinet and as a member of the Knesset stands for me. I enjoy a certain good will in the public that I need to transform into political support.

I speak in a very frank and open manner. I believe Israel must move for peace. We must move towards the division of the land between the Palestinians and us in order to maintain the future of Israel as a Jewish democratic state. I say this very bluntly.

For example, on the issue of Jerusalem, I don't rule out the possibility that as part of a political solution there will be government institutions of the Palestinian state in one of the Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem. I don't think that violates our loyalty, love and affection for Jerusalem. In the eastern Arab neighbourhoods of Jerusalem there reside over 300,000 Palestinians. They are not seen as part of Israel, and rightly so. I think that we need to be innovative and bold and tell the truth to the people. Part of the truth is that in order for Zionism to prevail and to succeed we must make sure that Gush Etzion and Maaleh Adumim will be part of Israel for ever. This needs to be done by way of a swap of land with the

Palestinians. If we reach an agreement to separate from the Palestinians, this will be a victory for Zionism.

RP: *If I could push you on the Jerusalem issue, what do you see as the solution for the Holy Basin of the Old City?*

IH: That needs to be left open. I think the Clinton formula should be a point of reference. However, the Holy Basin is a complicated issue; we are dealing with the most difficult and sensitive beliefs, prayers and wishes of generations. Three things must be clear and unequivocal: the Kotel [the Western or 'Wailing' Wall] must stay in Israeli sovereignty under any circumstances, no right of return for the Palestinians to Israel in any way, and Israeli security needs must be met.

RP: *As leader of the opposition you now meet regularly with the Prime Minister Netanyahu. How do you assess his seriousness in the current peace process?*

IH: Well, I'm following it closely. Like many in Israel, we in the Labour Party have questions. I believe the Prime Minister understands the necessity and urgency of moving towards peace, but I'm not sure he has the guts to do it. I hope that he and Abbas meet, look each other in the eye and don't blink. They have a golden, historic opportunity of moving towards peace. John Kerry is making a major effort in moving the sides towards a joint formula in the framework agreement; they need to accept it. They also need to speak to their people, speak in each other's parliament and speak frankly. I think there is a moment here where most of the desires of both sides can be met, in spite of all the disappointments and pain that this entails.

RP: *As leader of the opposition you are the leader of a disparate group of parties including not only Labour but the ultra-Orthodox parties and the Israeli Arab parties. How can you be a viable opposition?*

IH: The opposition has a large common denominator – social issues are the top priority of all our parties. Dealing with the social gaps, privatisation and social justice are major elements in Labour's agenda, especially emanating from the massive social protests of 2011. I want to bring the whole opposition to support the peace process as well. The only dissenting voice in the opposition is from the ultra-Orthodox, but if you listen to them carefully, for quite a while, they've been much more accommodating about the process with the Palestinians. Of course, there are thorny issues amongst us – civil rights, religious issues and others. There are conflicting views in this realm in the opposition, but that's only natural.

Part 3: Building multi-cultural societies

TG: *Let's talk about the challenge of integrating the two marginalised sectors in Israeli society – ultra-Orthodox Jews and Israel's Arab citizens. This is one of the big social challenges facing Israel. How do you think it should be addressed?*

IH: Israel is a multi-cultural society. My policy is based on four legs: a Zionist approach to preserving the Zionist legacy and the Zionist spirit in our nation, promoting democracy and liberalism, advocating social justice in all forms, and recognising the multi-cultural change that has taken place in Israel. We must attend to all those groups. In my speech at the party conference I said we're fed up of one group fighting the other; we all chose to live here and we must all maintain the unique fabric of our society, which is a mosaic.

I have been heavily involved in dealing with both the Haredi (ultra-Orthodox) and the Arabs, and in both groups there are major social changes taking place; more social mobility, more

empowerment of women, more inclusion in the workforce, more learning. But it's an uphill battle.

There is a process of inclusion and 'Israelisation' of the Arabs in Israel. With all the problems that are still there, it is an impressive process. My intention is to hug all those groups with affection, with warmth, with a welcoming spirit that will include them and strengthen them, and mould society into a more prosperous, successful and equal place.

TG: *This week we have seen demonstrations for African migrants. How would your policy differ from the current government's approach?*

IH: That is a very complicated issue. There is no clear answer. I believe that Israel must negotiate with Eritrea. There are tens of thousands of Eritreans here, and Eritrea has diplomatic relations with Israel, so we must commence a process with the Eritrean leadership to ensure that whoever returns to Eritrea does so safely. In the mean time we must make sure that those who cannot go back to their country should have a basic ability to earn for a provisional period. It's complicated because one doesn't want to create a precedent which could affect the equilibrium of the nation. There are millions out there who may want to come to Israel.

This complex situation is the subject of a major public debate in Israel today and we are crafting our message on it. It's a question that many social democratic parties confront. On the one hand social democratic parties are more liberal towards immigrants, and on the other hand there are social issues that lead to a certain objection to an influx of migrants; certainly in a state like Israel.

TG: *Another thorny issue which has got a lot of international attention is the legislation that was proceeding through the Knesset to address the long-standing land claims of the Bedouin in the Negev. Where do you stand on the government's attempts to resolve this question?*

IH: I think that there is a false campaign of diatribe and baseless claims against Israel and the way it is dealing with the Negev Bedouin. The Labour party had reservations about the Bedouin legislation because we thought that it needed to be dealt with differently; namely the manner of the review of the land claims needed to be done through a different process. The government chose to try to introduce legislation to ensure a good quality of life for the Bedouin, while – parallel to that – also resolving the land claims. It has turned into a political battle.

Yesterday, we met with the government agency that deals with this issue and we heard their side of the story. They say that many Bedouins are eager to resolve the issue because in Bedouin society there are a large number of polygamous families that have no income. There is a lot of poverty, which I can confirm as a former Minister of Welfare. There is no adequate infrastructure because of the unresolved land claims, which does not allow correct zoning and planning until you have determined who the owner of the land is. The government are trying to find a way. It has allotted a substantial amount of money towards this project. I hope that there will be a formula devised that will enable swifter negotiations between the government and those who claim ownership of the land. Separate from the land issue, Labour demands a much larger investment by the government in infrastructure for Bedouin society.

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