



Opinion and Analysis, Week ending 28 May 2014

1. *Pope Francis's visit to Israel highlights the plight of Christians elsewhere*

Daniel Taub (Israeli Ambassador), Daily Telegraph, 26 May 2014

Our country is one of the few havens in the Middle East for an increasingly persecuted faith.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/the-pope/10856993/Pope-Franciss-visit-to-Israel-highlights-the-plight-of-Christians-elsewhere.html>

2. *Jerusalem is a mixed city*

Nadav Shragai, Israel Hayom, 24 May 2014

In practice, Jerusalem has taken the shape of a bi-national city in recent years. Time will tell how this will impact a future political arrangement.

http://www.israelhayom.com/site/newsletter_article.php?id=17701

3. *The Pope bonds with Israel*

Editorial, New York Daily News, 24 May 2014

What the papal visit means to the Middle East

<http://www.nydailynews.com/opinion/pope-bonds-israel-article-1.1803889>

4. *Hamas: We'll use unity accord to move terrorism to West Bank*

Khaled Abu Toameh, Gatestone Institute, 23 May 2014

The international community does not seem to be listening to what Hamas is saying. Hamas is telling everyone not to believe Abbas when he says that the Palestinian Unity Government will renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist.

"The reconciliation will actually consolidate the resistance ... from one intifada to another until the liberation of Palestine." (Khaled Mashaal, leader of the Hamas political bureau).

"Who is this crazy guy who would be able to go to the resistance groups and ask them to hand over their weapons?" (Mahmoud Zahhar, senior representative of Hamas).

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4324/hamas-unity-terrorism-west-bank>

5. *Iran: The psychology of sanctions*

Mark Dubowitz, Foundation for Defence of Democracies, 22 May

Economic sanctions are Washington's preferred instrument of coercive statecraft for confronting challenges to the international order, including from Iran's revolutionary regime. While there is an understandable focus on the legal architecture of sanctions, their psychological impact should never be underestimated.

<http://www.defenddemocracy.org/media-hit/iran-the-psychology-of-sanctions/>

6. Britain, Lawfare and the ICC
Col Richard Kemp, Gatestone Institute, 21 May 2014

The British government should deny its enemies the opportunities for exploitation presented by the International Criminal Court and withdraw now from the process. Any other course would represent an unprecedented and historic betrayal.

<http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/4322/britain-lawfare-icc>

7. Israel has little to fear from the International Criminal Court
Anshel Pfeffer, Haaretz, 20 May 2014

The ICC's former chief prosecutor says the Palestinians wouldn't have much of a case against Israel.

<http://www.haaretz.com/weekend/jerusalem-babylon/1.591596>

8. How the media conditions people to be anti-Israel
Steve Apfel, Jerusalem Post, 19 May 2014

Words can have real time repercussions. Some can even kill. Terrorist is one such word. Out of fear and safety, on top of deep bias, a sub-editor or bureau chief will fall back on a simile – anyone will do as long as it avoids irking terrorists. Ramallah and Gaza City are not for sissy journalists, not even when the people you're writing about make no bones about being terrorists, and are idolized for it.

<http://blogs.jpost.com/content/how-media-conditions-people-be-anti-israel>

1. Pope Francis's visit to Israel highlights the plight of Christians elsewhere

The Pope's visit to Israel, which concludes today, has been full of historical significance. As the centrepiece of his stay, Pope Francis met with Patriarch Bartholomew in Jerusalem to mark the 50th anniversary of the historic meeting between Pope Pius VI and Patriarch Athenagoras, which established relations between the Western and Eastern Churches for the first time since the Great Schism of 1054.

But alongside the historic importance of the visit, it has a contemporary significance as well. In particular, it highlights two critical lessons for the region at this time.

First, the visit brings into sharp focus the troubling situation in which Christians are finding themselves across the Middle East. The Christian share of the Middle East's population declined from 10 per cent in 1900 to only 5 per cent in 2010, and the situation has only worsened since. The "Arab Spring" has provoked a major Christian exodus, with 100,000 Christians leaving Egypt and 450,000 fleeing Syria.

At the same time, Christianity is facing an existential crisis in Iraq, as over a million Christians have been driven from their homes over the last decade. Those Christians who remain are suffering persecution and discrimination to an unprecedented degree, while Christian holy sites are being plundered and destroyed.

Sadly, in visiting Israel, Pope Francis is visiting the only country in the Middle East with a growing Christian population. Israel's Christian community has increased from 34,000 in 1948 to 140,000 today, owing in large part to the religious freedoms enshrined since the Declaration of Independence.

Today, Christians are among Israel's foremost figures in every sector of society, from the Knesset, to the Supreme Court, to the elite group of outstanding individuals to be awarded the Israel Prize, Israel's highest civic honour. The remarkable contribution that Israel's Christian citizens have made and continue to make to Israeli society should serve as a reminder of the positive role the Christian community has the potential to play, if permitted to flourish, throughout the region.

The Pope's visit carries with it a second lesson: an inspiring example of how far conflicting narratives can be reconciled through tolerance and understanding. This is exemplified not only in the relationship between Western and Eastern Christianity, but also in the newfound friendship between the Vatican and the State of Israel.

It is barely two decades since the establishment of formal diplomatic relations, yet today Israel works with the Roman Catholic Church on a host of different issues, and is hosting its third official papal visit in 15 years. More remarkable still is the transformation in the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and the Jewish people. Next year will mark the 50th anniversary of the publication of *Nostra Aetate*, the declaration that provided a new theological paradigm for dialogue between Christians and Jews and enabled the celebration of a shared cultural patrimony.

Indeed, Pope Francis himself epitomises the spirit of interfaith cooperation and partnership. He is the first pope to be accompanied on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land by a delegation representing the other Abrahamic faiths, consisting two old friends from Argentina: Islamic studies professor Omar Abboud and Rabbi Abraham Skorka. He has consistently condemned anti-Semitism, declaring that "a Christian cannot be anti-Semitic", and has spoken movingly of his admiration for and close relationship with the Jewish community: "Through the awful trial of these last centuries, the Jews have preserved their faith in God," he said last year, "and for this, we, the Church and the whole human family, can never be sufficiently grateful to them."

In a region which, for many faith minorities, is characterised by disadvantage and despair, the Papal visit highlights the importance of ensuring protection and respect for Christian and all other minorities, and the need to be vigilant and persistent in holding out hands for reconciliation. The friendship that has begun between Roman Catholics and Jews - after two millennia - demonstrates that there is always hope for peace, even if it requires a little patience.

2. Jerusalem is a mixed city

One morning a few days ago, a young Jewish woman wearing a head covering sat on a stool in the center of the butchers' market in the Muslim Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. Large slabs of meat hanging from hooks were swinging at the entrance to the row of butcher stands. The shop owners were busy at that hour, sharpening their knives in preparation for another day of work.

Standing behind her was her husband, a young man with a large knitted skullcap. The long tzitzit, the tassels on the prayer shawl religious men wear under their clothes, protruded from his clothing. He was carrying a small infant.

The couple stood and watched with great interest as an industrious Arab youth working at a stand repairing flat tires fixed their bicycle. Everything seemed to be matter-of-fact, normal.

The skullcap-wearing Jew shook the Arab's hand after he finished fixing his bike, thanked him for his work, paid him, and parted ways amicably.

Nearby, a group of ultra-Orthodox Jews who had concluded prayers at the Western Wall, were returning to their homes in the Beit Yisrael neighborhood. A few of them stopped at the vegetable stands near Damascus Gate, where they could pick up tomatoes, cucumbers, and small radishes. There, too, just like in the butcher shop, everything seemed quiet, calm, and normal, at least on the surface.

Just a few meters away, near the entrance to Herod's Gate, there was a completely different scene: Jewish passers-by again pelted with stones; Border Police officers and policemen either disinclined to enter or prevented from entering the Bab al-Huta neighborhood, the source of the disturbances; the shooting of fireworks and flairs directly at the police.

There were also nationalistic demonstrations and processions with participants waving the flags of the Palestine Liberation Organization and Hamas while chanting slogans vowing to riot against the Jews. In the neighborhood of Silwan, assailants repeatedly threw bricks and firebombs at Beit Yonatan, "the forward post" of Jewish settlement in the City of David, which has emerged as a tourist hub.

Then there was the incident involving the post office in the neighborhood of Isawiya, which continues to make headlines due to the rioting and disturbances that have emanated from there. This incident (which was first reported by Nir Hasson of Haaretz) accurately reflects the conflicting trends that are prevalent today in east Jerusalem.

For years, residents of Isawiya, with the assistance of the Association for Civil Rights in Israel, have begged the municipality and the Israel Postal Service to build a branch in the neighborhood so that mail can be distributed. But on the night before the branch was to be inaugurated in a festive ceremony, unidentified assailants set the new branch on fire and spray-painted graffiti on the building denouncing any attempts at normalizing relations and cooperating with the municipality.

The residents of the neighborhood who woke up the next day and saw what happened refused to capitulate, nor were they deterred by the violence. They cleaned up the remnants of the fire, repaired the damage, and opened the branch quickly. This episode offers a microcosm of present-day Jerusalem. On the one hand, there are violent clashes, a growing Hamas presence and a radicalization of public opinion, all of which have been repeatedly chronicled by the news media. On the other hand, there's a surprising wholesale integration of Jerusalem Arabs into the daily life of the city, an aspect that is almost never reported by the press.

To be, or not to be, together: Normalcy is a relative concept. As opposed to that hackneyed question asked even today as we approach the 47th anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem (this coming Wednesday) -- is the city divided or united? -- it is much easier to notice and document the many tiny signs of normalcy and cooperation between the two populations, which are part of the everyday reality here.

Unlike the "divided or united" question, it is much easier to also note the numerous signs of abnormalcy, separation, alienation, isolation, and, at times, violence between the two peoples. The fact that these two contradictory states exist does not mean that they invalidate one another. The divisive aspects of separation and alienation are part and parcel of the political dispute over the city's future. The images of cooperation and normalcy offer a picture of two nationalities living side by side for 47 years.

An absolute majority of Jerusalem's Jewish and Arab residents -- 85 percent of Arabs and 85 percent of Jews -- do not even remember what the city looked like when it was divided. They were born into the reality of a unified Jerusalem. This fundamental fact explains the tendency of many of the Arabs of east Jerusalem to prefer maintaining the status quo rather than accepting life under Palestinian sovereignty.

Another key element that would explain the nearly wall-to-wall sentiment among the Arabs of Jerusalem in favor of remaining under Israeli control is their residency status. This status gives them access to a number of material benefits (like stipends from the National Insurance Institute) that those living under Palestinian Authority rule simply do not enjoy.

The Arabs of Jerusalem earn four times the salary of their brethren living under the PA. They have more stable jobs as well as social benefits. They also derive benefits from the Israeli health care system, while never taking for granted the freedom that is afforded them to express themselves, to move freely around the city, and to worship as they choose, all rights that are granted to all Jerusalemites.

The Arabs of Jerusalem are also more exposed to Israeli and Western culture than their Palestinian brothers. This has essentially created what veteran journalist and east Jerusalem expert Danny Rubinstein, who these days gives lectures at Ben-Gurion University, calls "the Israeli-Arab orientation of the Arabs of east Jerusalem."

"They today bear a greater similarity to [MK] Ahmed Tibi (Raam-Ta'al) than they do to [PA President Mahmoud Abbas]," Rubinstein observed.

"Psychologically, they are closer to Israeli Arabs than they are to the Arabs of the West Bank. They are unwilling to even conceive of a re-division of the city, and they want to find a political arrangement that would fulfill their nationalistic ambitions while at the same time maintaining the framework of a united city."

Even Abbas has accepted this approach. "He is demanding a Palestinian capital in Jerusalem, but he has stopped talking about dividing the city. He recognizes the need to keep the city open."

Dr. Yisrael Kimchi, who heads the Jerusalem research department at the Jerusalem Institute for Israel Studies, has been monitoring both populations of the city for years. In discussing the sense of community, relations between neighborhoods and the integration of populations, Kimchi makes clear that "the city was never united."

"There have always been different groups and communities that went about their lives, mostly without interfering with each other," he said. "This is how the secular and the religious live. This was how it was in Jerusalem during the Mandate period before it was divided in 1948."

"On the other hand, the city is connected by means of joint infrastructure," he said. "In all of these areas, there is a tight connection between those providing the service and those receiving the service. When the residents of east Jerusalem refer to Hadassah Mount Scopus as 'Hadassah Isawiya,' this gives an indication as to their bond with the institution. The hospital is there to provide for their health needs, and as such it employs a large number of Arab doctors, nurses and staff members alongside a very large Jewish staff."

A process of engagement: Indeed, those who live in Jerusalem as well as those who have researched the day-to-day fabric of the city, like Kimchi and this writer (in the interests of full

disclosure, I compiled data for a report that I authored for the Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs on the subject of Jewish-Arab cooperation in the city), discover similar incidents.

It would suffice one to simply ride the public transportation lines in the city to immediately notice that many of the drivers are Arab. Similarly, many of the taxi drivers and tourist bus drivers who ferry visitors around all parts of the city are Arab.

There are also some surprising instances of Jewish-Arab cooperation in other fields like business and commerce. In the Mahane Yehuda open-air market, a significant number of stands and shops are managed and operated by Arabs. Even some of the salespeople are Arabs. In the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, some of the store owners are Arabs who employ Jews. The Atarot industrial zone, which was hard hit during the years of the Second Intifada, is home to companies that employ Jews and Arabs in the metals, steel, construction, carpentry and auto repair industries.

Both the Malha and the Achim L'Yisrael malls in Talpiot are bustling with shoppers, both Jews and Arabs. The serene coexistence is even more evident along the upscale shopping promenade that stretches between Jaffa Gate and the Mamilla neighborhood. It has become quite commonplace to see Jews (including ultra-Orthodox) sit alongside Arabs in coffee shops.

This promenade is unique in that "the mixture" can also be found inside the stores. In many of them, including the clothing and shoe stores, not only are there customers from both sides of the city, but also salespeople. There are Jewish customer representatives as well as Arab ones who offer the respective clientele a sense of comfort and convenience.

Customers and employees from both populations can also be seen at the Rami Levi supermarket chain outlets that dot Jerusalem's periphery. There are branches in Mishor Adumim, the Binyamin region and Gush Etzion.

The integration of Jews and Arabs is also on display at the various playgrounds and recreational facilities within the city. There is the Gan Hapa'amon garden, where young Arabs flock to because there are almost no recreational facilities in their neighborhoods. Arabs also patronize the Biblical Zoo as well as Ein Yael spring. They also send their young kids to these places which often host kindergartens and youth activities.

Perhaps the most integrated field is pharmaceuticals. The Jewish population gets its pharmacy services from pharmacists who are primarily Arab.

What is even more fascinating is the integration in the housing market. Discrimination in the housing sector has resulted in newspaper headlines and friction that has rekindled the nationalist conflict. But the facts and figures that have been compiled by Yair Gabbay, an attorney and a former city council member in the Jerusalem municipality, are quite interesting.

It turns out that the number of Arabs living in predominantly Jewish neighborhoods in Jerusalem is higher than the number of Jews living in predominantly Arab areas. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics, 2,537 Jews live in neighborhoods with an Arab majority, like the City of David near Silwan or the Muslim Quarter in the Old City. On the other hand, in neighborhoods with a predominantly Jewish population -- like French Hill or Armon Hanatziv -- 3,378 Arabs have taken up residence.

The festival of light: According to Rubinstein, the process of "Israelization" of the Arabs of east Jerusalem was sped up even further following the building of the separation fence along the boundary of the capital's perimeter.

"Young Arabs who had previously traveled to Bir Zeit [University] to get a college degree are instead now opting for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem or colleges within the city," he said. "There's an increase in the number of students taking the Israeli high-school matriculation exam, and in east Jerusalem there are more and more technical schools opening up similar to ulpanes or pre-college preparatory courses. These are aimed at making it easier [for Arabs] to integrate into the Israeli system of higher education."

Rubinstein added that all manual labor performed in western Jerusalem depends on Arab manpower "in all institutions -- Hadassah, Hebrew University, the Angel bakeries." Rubinstein is exaggerating, but only by a bit. There are also Jewish manual laborers, but whoever walks into the Great Synagogue in Jerusalem, the crown jewel of Orthodox Jewry, will notice that nearly all of the maintenance and cleaning workers are Arabs.

On the whole, many more Arabs visit predominantly Jewish residential areas to work and to consume services than vice versa. Thousands of Jews and Arabs jointly commute to work every morning on the light rail, which passes by both Jewish and Arab neighborhoods, making the light rail one of the more visible symbols of municipal co-existence.

The Old City is perhaps exceptional in this regard. There the cross-cultural, inter-ethnic interaction is more evident, from housing to commerce to routine human communication. Jewish shoppers from Neve Yaakov and Pisgat Zeev frequent the new mall in the north Jerusalem neighborhood of Beit Hanina. There are also "Arab" dental facilities, like in Isawiya, that service Jewish clients (who like the cheaper costs). On the whole, however, the closeness that is seen in the Old City dwarfs that of any other neighborhood.

The clearest manifestation of this reality has been the circumstances that have taken shape in recent years as they relate to the Festival of Light. The first year of the event -- in the Jewish Quarter -- attracted 100,000 spectators. In the second year the event expanded into the Christian Quarter, drawing 200,000 people. Last year it expanded even further into the Muslim and Armenian Quarters, drawing an audience of 300,000.

Initially, the merchants were threatened not to open up their shops and cooperate with the spectacle. Today, "they're making a killing" and waiting with anticipation for the fourth festival which is scheduled for next month. The physical renovation of Hagai Street, the artery which connects the Western Wall and Damascus Gate, was initially met by the merchants with skepticism and suspicion. The renovation was recently completed without a hitch.

Discrimination in the east: Despite the infrastructure of coexistence that has been building for 47 years, Israel must still grapple with the enormous socio-economic gaps that separate the eastern and the western parts of the city. These gaps are evident in terms of the quality of infrastructure and municipal services, although it should be noted that there has been improvement in recent years.

While it is perfectly legitimate for anyone to stake out a position for or against any sort of political arrangement over the city's future, nobody can honestly deny the abject neglect evident on the Arab side of the Green Line. This is still the most glaring issue that continues to drive a wedge between the two populations. All one needs to do is walk the streets of the eastern half in order to see the piles of waste and debris, the utter lack of public parks, nurseries, and clinics, the decrepit state of the roads, the antiquated schools and

playgrounds. By nearly every measure, the Jewish half of the capital is light years ahead of the Arab portion.

These gaps have been well-documented by the municipality as well as rights groups and think tanks. The most recent report was issued by Jerusalem city councilman Meir Margalit (Meretz), who needed 50 pages to analyze the division of resources allocated to the Jewish and Arab sectors in the 2011 municipal budget.

Margalit found that in the best case scenario, just 13.7 percent of the municipal budget is devoted to 38 percent of the Arab population. That is almost double the amount of money allocated compared to the days when Teddy Kollek was mayor, and a 40 percent increase from when Ehud Olmert and Uri Lupoliansky presided over the city. By all appearances, it seems that many years will pass until the Arab population receives the same amount of government and municipal resources that the Jews of Jerusalem enjoy.

It has only been in the health field that a real turnaround has taken place in the eastern part of the city. A few of the clinics in the east, like in Jabal Mukaber, are operated by a franchisee. It is one of the most efficiently operated establishments in town. The first health fund to head eastward was Leumit. The others soon followed.

The universal health care law which reimburses health funds according to the number of patients they treat makes it a worthy "business" from their standpoint. The health funds profit, and the residents receive the best treatment available.

Water service has also been vastly improved thanks to the Hagihon municipal water corporation. Although there is still much work to be done, there has been gradual, steady improvement in the provision of water services in the eastern part of the city.

Those who are suffering most from the socioeconomic gaps are the 70,000 east Jerusalemites who reside beyond the separation fence. These are areas the municipality has failed to reach. The police have barely made their presence felt there as well. This has left a vacuum in the streets, where Hamas gangs have encroached, even though this area lies within Israel's sovereign boundaries. It is the wild east, which is run primarily by criminals. The political future of this no-man's land is unclear, even to Israel, which a decade ago enacted a kind of de facto disengagement from the region.

Facts on the ground: The question that arouses the most curiosity as it relates to east Jerusalem is -- who is winning? Will the socio-economic gaps, which have shrunk in recent years due to the efforts made to narrow them, trump the process of Israelization the Arabs of east Jerusalem are undergoing? It seems as if the latter is coming out ahead, though only on points, not by a knockout. Every year, an additional 800 residents of east Jerusalem seek Israeli citizenship. Half of those requests are accepted.

Kimchi believes that the population of east Jerusalem is becoming progressively more moderate: "It recognizes the current situation. It has reconciled with it. They live their daily routines, they seek to enhance their economic well-being, to look out for their children's educations, to make sure there is a playground for them nearby. On the other hand, the Jewish population meets the Arab side on an almost daily basis in a number of areas."

Will the political echelon ask the Arabs of east Jerusalem to state their opinions on a division of the city if and when the time comes to discuss a solution? That is highly doubtful. Nonetheless, as time goes by, the reality on the ground and the coexistence that has taken root will assume a momentum of its own, and it could even translate into developments on the political and national level.

Just as Jewish construction beyond the Green Line is a fact on the ground, and just as tens of thousands of housing units in the eastern party of the city -- most of them built without permits -- are also facts on the ground, the jointly woven municipal fabric and the Israelization process are also facts on the ground. In practice, Jerusalem has taken the shape of a bi-national city in recent years. Time will tell how this will impact a future arrangement.

3. The Pope bonds with Israel

With the world's goodwill at his back, Pope Francis is set to start a three-day pilgrimage to the globe's most religiously contentious region: the Middle East. Godspeed to him.

The pontiff's visit, first to Jordan, then to Palestinian-controlled territory, then to Jerusalem, will have its share of firsts that reflect Francis' winning tendency to extend a hand to others.

He will include in his official retinue a rabbi and a Muslim leader who are good friends from the Pope's years as archbishop of Buenos Aires.

He plans to travel without the protection of a bulletproof Popemobile, to demonstrate that he is not afraid of the people who will throng to see him.

With leading clerics from other Christian sects that have often been at odds with the Vatican, he will participate in a prayer service at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, where the faithful believe Jesus was crucified and resurrected.

The stated purpose of Francis' journey is to commemorate a papal trip that took place 50 years ago, when Pope Paul VI met the leader of the Orthodox Christian religion in a first step toward healing a schism that dated to the year 1054.

It comes as population trends have combined with religious hostility to reduce the Christian presence in the Mideast. According to the Pew Research Centre, the Christian population in the region increased from 1.6 million to 7.5 million from 1900 to 2010 but has been swamped by faster growth among non-Christians.

At the same time, Christians have suffered more religious harassment in the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East and North Africa than anywhere else.

For the Pope, the matter is of grave concern. "We will not resign ourselves to imagining a Middle East without Christians," he has declared.

All of that said, Francis' show of brotherhood with Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople Bartholomew I will likely be overshadowed by his words and actions in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

When Pope Paul VI met Patriarch Athenagoras I in 1964, he touched off resentment by staying in Israel for all of 11 hours and never mentioning the country by name. Two years later, however, at the Second Vatican Council, the church condemned anti-Semitism.

The next Pope to visit, the recently canonized John Paul, made great strides toward harmonizing Catholic-Jewish relations, while Pope Benedict returned from his own visit to

Israel trailed by criticism that he had referred to the Holocaust as a "tragedy" rather than as mass murder.

Now, Francis' every word and gesture will be intensely parsed for signs about his attitude toward either the Palestinians or the Israelis.

While much of it will likely be meaningless, one event on the Pope's itinerary will be profound. He plans to lay a wreath at the tomb in Jerusalem of Theodore Herzl, founder of the Zionist movement that led to the establishment of the state of Israel.

In 1904, Pope Pius X rejected Herzl's plea for help in establishing a Jewish state. Francis' wreath-laying will be an act of atonement and, more important, a powerful and welcome statement about the legitimacy of the Jewish state at a time when so many in the world are attacking its right to exist.

4. Hamas: We'll use unity accord to move terrorism to West Bank

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas is busy these days trying to persuade the West to accept his recent unity accord with Hamas.

Abbas is especially interested in winning the backing of the US and EU for the deal with the Islamist movement because his Palestinian Authority is almost entirely dependent on American and European financial aid.

Abbas's main argument is that the "reconciliation" deal with Hamas, signed last month in the Gaza Strip, would not affect the peace process with Israel.

Abbas was quoted as saying that there is "no contradiction" between the unity deal and the peace talks with Israel and that he remains committed to a "just peace on the basis of a two-state solution in accordance with international legitimacy."

Earlier, Abbas, in the context of his efforts to calm the US Administration and EU governments over the unity accord, declared that the new Palestinian government would recognize Israel and reject violence. His remarks, however, have been strongly denied by Hamas leaders, who say their movement intends to pursue "jihad" against Israel.

Musa Abu Marzouk, deputy chairman of Hamas's political bureau, announced that his movement would never recognise Israel. "This is a red line that cannot be crossed," he said.

In other words, Hamas is telling everyone not to believe Abbas when he says that the Palestinian unity government will renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist.

This week, further evidence emerged that Hamas has no intention of changing its ideology in the wake of the unity agreement with Abbas's Fatah faction.

Hamas's two most senior representatives, Khaled Mashaal and Mahmoud Zahar, have both made it clear that their movement is planning to continue "resistance" actions against Israel even after the formation of the unity government. They also emphasized that Hamas has no intention of dismantling its military wing, Izaddin al-Kassam, as part of the unity accord.

Asked about the possibility that Hamas would disarm, Zahar said: "Who is this crazy guy who would be able to go to the resistance groups and ask them to hand over their weapons? Who would dare to do so?"

Zahar also disclosed that Hamas is planning to take advantage of the unity deal to move its terror attacks against Israel to the West Bank. Worse, he declared that after its men set foot in the West Bank, Hamas will target Palestinians who "collaborate" with Israel. "Who said that those who are conducting security coordination with Israel would remain forever?" he asked, referring to the Fatah-dominated security forces in the West Bank.

Zahar, who also said that Hamas would pursue the fight against Israel until the "liberation of all Palestine," is in fact sending a warning message to the Western-funded Palestinian Authority security forces in the West Bank. "We believe in what was mentioned in the Quran: that Palestine, all of Palestine, will be liberated," he added. "The Israeli entity should expect more from Hamas after our rockets reached Tel Aviv."

His remarks may also be seen as a direct and personal threat to Abbas, who has repeatedly vowed to continue security coordination with Israel.

Mashaal, for his part, also vowed that Hamas will never abandon the armed struggle against Israel. Like Zahar, he sees the "reconciliation" as an opportunity for Hamas and all Palestinians to "solidify the resistance" against Israel.

"The reconciliation and politics are not an alternative to resistance," he said. The reconciliation will actually consolidate the resistance. Our steadfast people are continuing to move from one revolution to another and from one intifada to another until the liberation of Palestine."

Abbas says that the unity agreement with Hamas is a chance to bolster the peace process and achieve the two-state solution. This is the message that Abbas is trying to relay to the international community, above all, to American and European donors.

Hamas, on the other hand, considers the unity agreement with Fatah an opportunity to extend its control beyond the Gaza Strip and use the West Bank as a launching pad for more terror attacks against Israel.

The international community does not seem to be listening to what Hamas is saying.

Ignoring Hamas's declared intentions will pave the way for the movement to use the unity agreement to seize control over the Palestinian Authority and many parts of the West Bank. It will also facilitate Hamas's plans to launch terror attacks from the West Bank against Israel.

It now remains to be seen whether the U.S. Administration and EU governments, by blindly endorsing the new unity government, will help Hamas to achieve its goals.

5. Iran: The psychology of sanctions

Despite the current impasse in negotiations with the Islamic Republic of Iran over the fate of its once-clandestine military-nuclear program, U.S. officials remain hopeful that a final accord is within reach. An agreement that is verifiable, enforceable and that prevents Iran

from pursuing both a uranium and a plutonium pathway to a nuclear weapon would be a tremendous achievement. But we may not get there if American negotiators continue to insist upon weakening their leverage.

Economic sanctions are Washington's preferred instrument of coercive statecraft for confronting challenges to the international order, including from Iran's revolutionary regime. While there is an understandable focus on the legal architecture of sanctions, their psychological impact should never be underestimated. Too rapid a shift from fear to greed in the international business community, and from despair to hope in the Iranian market, can blunt the effectiveness of sanctions. And, unfortunately, the sanctions environment for Iran has changed in the past year.

Tehran has been on a modest recovery path since its annus horribilis of 2012 and the first half of 2013, when the Islamic Republic's economy was hit with an asymmetric shock from sanctions, including those targeting the Central Bank of Iran, Iranian oil exports, access to the SWIFT international banking system, and trade in precious metals. The poor economic management of the economy by the Mahmoud Ahmadinejad government had further exacerbated these sanctions-induced shocks.

Western sanctions pressure has de-escalated since the last U.S. congressional sanctions came into effect in mid-2013, and when, last fall, President Obama threatened to veto a "sanctions-in-waiting" bill with sixty Senate cosponsors. This legislation would have imposed new sanctions only if the Islamic Republic violated the Joint Plan of Action (JPOA) reached between the P5+1 and Iran in November 2013, failed to conclude a nuclear agreement that met specific parameters by January 2015, or supported terrorism against America. This decision to de-escalate the economic pressure reduced the once overwhelming Iranian and international fear of sanctions and buoyed hopes of an Iranian economic recovery.

The election of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani in June 2013, the optimism fuelled by the announcement of the JPOA, and the provision of direct sanctions relief as part of the JPOA, also appear to be improving market sentiment, both domestically and internationally. This sentiment appears to be directly contributing to the Islamic Republic's modest albeit fragile economic growth.

A new quantitative sentiment indicator developed by Roubini Global Economics, working with the Foundation for Defence of Democracies, suggests that there is a connection between this change in sentiment and economic gains by Iran. This sentiment was tracked using proprietary software from RavenPack News Analytics, which provided real-time sentiment, relevance, and novelty scores to all news articles on Iran sanctions published in over 22,000 traditional and social-media sites globally.

This analysis demonstrates that, as positive sentiment has risen since the de-escalation of sanctions and the election of President Rouhani last year, both the value of the Iranian rial (black market) and Iranian GDP growth (both overall and nonoil) have stabilized and begun to increase. The relationship between an improvement in sentiment and the Iranian exchange rate appears to be contemporaneous, while positive changes in sentiment actually appeared to lead GDP growth.

In this relatively more positive climate, Iranians appear to be more confident holding domestic assets rather than hoarding dollars or fuelling domestic-asset bubbles. This, in turn, has given breathing space to the Iranian government to stabilize its economy by tightening fiscal and monetary policies to restrain inflation.

International companies, meanwhile, are lining up to re-enter the Iranian market. Even when these companies are not finalizing deals, Tehran has been adept at turning the sharp increase in trade delegations visiting Iran and other indicators of renewed interest in the Iranian economy into news stories that improve market sentiment. This has translated into economic gains: According to recent reports from the IMF and World Bank, Iran has nearly halved its 40 percent plus inflation rate, is stabilizing its previously plummeting currency, and is projected for positive growth after losing 6-7 percent in GDP between 2012 and 2014.

In these high stakes nuclear negotiations, this recovery is bad news for the West. Positive shifts in the perceptions of the Islamic Republic globally - as well as inside the country itself - are fuelling a recovery beyond what the JPOA intended. Put differently, by changing the sanctions environment, Western negotiators may have inadvertently triggered indirect economic relief to Tehran that is much greater than the U.S. government estimate of \$7 billion in direct sanctions relief provided as part of the JPOA - and decreased pressure on the regime in the process.

This may be reducing the odds of success. Indeed, as the easing sanctions environment turns down the heat on Iran's leaders, they will have less incentive to come to a comprehensive, long-term and verifiable deal that ends their illicit military-nuclear program. Even if there is a deal, and Iran's economy continues to recover, it will be more difficult for the West to maintain many of the international sanctions that will need to stay in place in order to enforce the verification and inspections regime that will be so critical to preventing Tehran from cheating on any nuclear deal.

A good nuclear deal with the Islamic Republic is still possible. But if President Obama believes that no deal is better than a bad deal, he should lead the effort to temper market enthusiasm about Iran's economy. One way of doing that is to ensure that a healthy fear of sanctions - both in Iran and abroad - remains. Indeed, now may be the time to pass bipartisan congressional legislation that imposes a serious economic cost on Tehran if it doesn't come to a comprehensive agreement by January 2015. This will give U.S. negotiators critical leverage as summer diplomacy risks turning into a lengthy fall.

6. Britain, Lawfare and the ICC

Today the United Kingdom sits alongside Libya, Darfur and Sudan as the International Criminal Court [ICC] launches an investigation into alleged war crimes by the British Army in Iraq.

This perversion brings to mind German Pastor Martin Niemöller's powerful words at the end of the Second World War:

"Then they came for the Jews, and I did not speak out— because I was not a Jew. Then they came for me— and there was no one left to speak for me."

It was not long before they came again for the Jews – this time in the newly established Jewish state. And over the years, Israel's enemies, unable to destroy her in battle, have used "lawfare" – the abuse of Western laws and judicial systems – to try to undermine and delegitimize her.

A leading player in this unremitting assault has been the UN Human Rights Council [UNHRC], which has passed resolution after spurious resolution against Israel while ignoring

horrific human rights abuses around the world. The fundamentally flawed Goldstone Report, which concluded that Israel had been guilty of war crimes and crimes against humanity during the IDF's defensive operation in Gaza in 2008-09, is an example of the UNHRC's distortions of reality.

To their credit, the United States and five European countries opposed the UNHRC's resolution to endorse Judge Goldstone's assault on the Jewish state. Predictably, the United Kingdom declined to vote. This is characteristic of Britain's refusal to speak out when Israel, one of the West's staunchest allies, comes under attack, whether by rockets from Gaza directed against her civilian population or by lawfare, directed against her government and armed forces.

And now another instrument of the "international community" is coming for Britain. In the latest of a barrage of legal attacks against British forces in recent months, ICC prosecutor Fatou Bensouda's preliminary examination will look into allegations that British troops abused detainees during the Iraq conflict between 2003 and 2008.

Bensouda will decide whether or not Britain is making genuine investigations into these allegations and whether prosecutions are likely to be brought against individuals if the evidence warrants it. If Bensouda is satisfied, she will then lay down standards to be followed by the British judicial system and monitor progress and performance against those standards.

But if Bensouda is not satisfied, she will then order a move to the next stage, which is a formal ICC investigation. Legal experts believe that this is unlikely. But it remains a possibility, and one that could lead to the preposterous spectacle of British soldiers being sent to The Hague for trial by the ICC.

The allegations in front of Bensouda are contained in a 250-page file of supposed evidence of the "systematic use of brutal violence, that at times resulted in the death of detainees, while in the custody of UK Services personnel." British troops are accused of "brutality combined with cruelty and forms of sadism, including sexual abuse and religious humiliation."

These allegations have been made jointly by Phil Shiner of the British law firm Public Interest Lawyers and the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights [ECCHR], a pressure group that has in the past sought to indict American politicians for war crimes, including President George W Bush.

Shiner has made a career of lawfare against British forces. With tiresome predictability, he has also had Israel in his sights. In 2009 he failed in a lawsuit in Britain intended to impose a judicial ban on all aid and assistance to Israel. He cited "the United Kingdom's ongoing failure to meet its obligations under customary international law in respect of Israel's actions since the launch of Operation Cast Lead in Gaza on 27 December 2008."

Most recently he represented Iraqi families during a public inquiry, known as the Al Sweady inquiry, into allegations that British troops murdered and mutilated prisoners of war. Although the central allegations in the inquiry collapsed last month due to lack of evidence, Shiner's firm will pocket at least \$4.7 million of the estimated \$52 million that the inquiry is likely to cost the British taxpayer.

Shiner now seems to be under the illusion that the head of the British Army, General Sir Peter Wall, whom he names in his complaint to the ICC, is some sort of small-time modern-day Heinrich Himmler. His allegations are not just against fighting troops but also against

their commanders and political leaders in London, who he claims ordered systematic war crimes by British soldiers.

Yet Shiner, Public Interest Lawyers and ECCHR are not in reality the problem here. In many ways they are an irrelevance, small people trying to exploit for their own financial and political purposes the very real failings of the British government.

By failings I do not mean that Britain's judicial process has failed or that the alleged war crimes actually took place. In fact, the Ministry of Defence's Iraq Historic Allegations Team is already in the process of investigating every one of Shiner's accusations of unlawful death and mistreatment. If there is sufficient evidence, service members are liable for trial by court martial.

On the basis of thirty years' service with the British armed forces, I very much doubt that there was systematic abuse of prisoners by British soldiers in Iraq. And the idea that generals or politicians in London would have sanctioned any such abuse is equally improbable. If anything, the UK Ministry of Defence has usually erred too far on the side of caution and the rigid application of human rights law in its direction of military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan – sometimes to the extent that British troops have felt their own lives to be at undue risk.

As for the detailed allegations, I cannot judge whether there is substance in any of them. Shiner's Iraqi witnesses at the Al Sweady inquiry have been accused by the British government of repeatedly lying and engaging in a criminal conspiracy in their false allegations against British forces for financial gain.

But sometimes prisoners have in reality been abused by British troops, as sometimes have prisoners of all armies. All armies have bad soldiers who break the rules, good soldiers who make mistakes and soldiers who succumb to the unbearable pressures of combat. As a commander, I once had to intervene to prevent abuse of prisoners in Afghanistan – in that case the mistreatment would have been inadvertent, the result of ignorance rather than malignance.

It is of course right that soldiers face justice for their transgressions. It is what separates us from our enemies, especially enemies such as Al Qaida, the Taliban, Hamas and the Mahdi Army in Iraq. Their only interest in the laws of war is the extent to which they can exploit our adherence to those laws for their own baleful ends.

But British soldiers must only face British justice. Here lies a serious failing of the UK government. The US and Israel did not ratify the Rome Statute which brought the ICC into being in 2002. Both countries knew only too well that accepting the jurisdiction of the ICC would expose their armed forces to widespread political prosecutions.

Britain's Labour government on the other hand enthusiastically embraced the Rome Statute, and successive governments have continued to do so, despite many warnings of the inevitable consequences. There is no denying that an international system for bringing perpetrators of war crimes to justice is needed – primarily as a deterrent. But it is needed for countries that lack the means or the will to do so themselves. It is not needed for liberal democracies such as Britain, which has one of the most highly regarded and independent judiciaries in the world, the product of 1,000 years of legal evolution.

Of course countries such as Britain, the US and Israel should hold themselves at least to the same standards as are expected by the ICC. In practice these countries do just that, but under the established and proven auspices of their own judicial systems.

Sending its armed forces to fight and die in the defence of its country is the most awesome responsibility that any government has. And with that responsibility come unique duties to its soldiers. These include defending them against legal assault from overseas. Soldiers are sent into battle in the name of their country and should be judged only by the countrymen for whom they fight. For Britain, any other course would represent an unprecedented and historic betrayal.

To allow a nation's armed forces to be undermined in this way is also to undermine the state itself and its core values. This of course is the primary objective of lawfare, together with using the legal process to deter or hamper Western nations from fighting to defend themselves. The US and Israel refused to sign up to the ICC not only to protect their forces but also because they recognized that it would expose their countries to the wider depredations of lawfare.

This hazard is of little concern to many nations in Europe who are no longer even prepared to send their armies to fight. If the UK is to retain its position, along with the US and Israel, as one of the few countries ready to fight for Western values, it will continue to be very much a target for lawfare. The British government should deny its enemies the opportunities for exploitation presented by the ICC and withdraw now from the process. Britain should also remember Niemoeller. When it acquiesces – even by silence – in attacks on its allies, it lays itself open to the same forms of attack.

7. Israel has little to fear from the International Criminal Court

In the dysfunctional state of Israeli-Palestinian relations, the “nuclear option” for the Palestinians would be joining the International Criminal Court as a member state and exercising that membership to launch war crimes investigations against Israel. At least, that’s the view of many in Israel, which, like the USA, is not a member of the ICC.

But to judge by comments made by the ICC’s former chief prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo — who, even two years after leaving his post in The Hague, remains the controversial court’s most persuasive advocate — Israel has little to worry about.

Earlier this month, on his first visit to Israel, Moreno-Ocampo was full of praise for the local legal system and eager to point out that joining the ICC could backfire for the Palestinians. “Being here in Israel is not liking talking about international justice in Boston or Sweden,” said Moreno-Ocampo, who was here as a guest of the Fried-Gal Transitional Justice Initiative at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem’s law school. “The issues here are not academic.”

But he isn’t at all sure that if the Palestinian Authority were to join the ICC — or if Israel were to join, for that matter — the international court would actually play an active role in the conflict.

The ICC’s job is to investigate and prosecute only in cases in which the local legal system is not performing. “In a dictatorship they can make you disappear and kill you,” said Moreno-Ocampo. “But here, even if the situation is awful, you cannot disappear; you have the rule of law.”

He is wary of being yet another foreigner who “comes here and says I can solve your problems.” Saying Israel has “great lawyers here,” the former chief prosecutor said if Israel’s Supreme Court could find a way to win the Palestinians’ trust, perhaps it could adjudicate

claims the Palestinians want to bring before the ICC. For the ICC to rule on Israel's activities, he said, "the Palestinians have to prove that the [Israeli court's] decision was to shield the defendants. They would have to prove that it wasn't a fair proceeding."

Moreno-Ocampo rejected a Palestinian request that the ICC launch a war crimes investigation against Israel after its May 2010 raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla, which ended in the deaths of nine Turkish nationals. "I told them that I can't offer you success because you are not considered a state," the former chief prosecutor recalled. "First go to the United Nations and when they recognize you, come back."

The Palestinian Authority did go to the United Nations, and its status has since been upgraded to non-member observer state, making it eligible to join the court. All the same, Moreno-Ocampo said ICC membership could be a double-edged sword for the Palestinians, since it would also open them up to investigation for alleged war crimes, such as rocket fire and bombings targeting Israeli civilians.

"The ICC could help the Palestinians, but it could also increase the conflict," said Moreno-Ocampo. "And the Palestinians should ask themselves how they would do it, because if you want to include everything since 2002 [when the ICC was established], that could include things done by the Palestinians. Another alternative is to start from 2015, not investigate past events and now that Hamas is part of the government, that would prevent them from committing more crimes."

Moreno-Ocampo's warnings may seem strange to those who see the ICC as an interventionist organization of busybodies, but he doesn't see the international court as an institution that should necessarily be conducting many global investigations.

Twelve years after the international court was founded, it is hard to find many supporters. In addition to Israel, the United States, Russia, China and India have not signed or ratified the treaty that established the ICC. The small number of indictments that have led to trials have all been focused on Africa, leading to accusations of bias. There are also indications that the court has not been particularly effective.

Sudanese President Omar Bashir, who in 2008 became the first sitting head of state to be indicted of war crimes and genocide, has become the ICC's most high-profile case, but he seems no closer to trial five years after the court issued a warrant for his arrest. Likewise, the ICC's attempts to participate in the prosecution of senior members of the former Libyan regime have been rebuffed by the new rulers in Tripoli, and the court has not taken any substantive steps toward involvement in prosecuting Syrian President Bashar Assad, though he is directing the murder of tens of thousands of civilians in Syria's civil war.

Moreno-Ocampo has no doubt that "Bashar will face a court" one day. "Who thought that one day Gadhafi would be brought down, or that his son or [Muammar Gadhafi's intelligence chief Abdullah] Senoussi would be put on trial." When I remind him that Gadhafi was brutally lynched and that the ICC has been kept out of the Libyan trials, he replies that the international court served its role by launching an investigation and issuing a warrant for Senoussi's arrest.

"They [the Libyans] were grateful for what we did because we showed them the world didn't accept him and they want to show that they can do better themselves," said Moreno-Ocampo. "We are changing the world in that sense. We didn't prosecute a case in Colombia, for example, but they changed the way they do things and prosecuted cases themselves because of the ICC. The world needs different tools to manage conflicts."

The former chief prosecutor is certain the ICC's impact will be felt over decades, not necessarily because of the cases that actually go through the court but because it is drawing a line between war crimes that can only be prosecuted by an international forum and cases that will be increasingly dealt with by the countries where the war crimes took place.

"Law enforcement is national, but acts of terror need global investigations," said Moreno-Ocampo. "We're living in a new age when people under 25 from Argentina, Italy and Russia are communicating around the world with each other and are very similar. This is the global community which will demand common standards." The best outcome of for the ICC, he said, is that "there will be zero cases. That is the best because it means we are having an effect. The law is not for judges; it's for people."

The success of the ICC, maintains Moreno-Ocampo, should not be measured by the number of its successful prosecutions, but by the change its very existence is making in the way governments investigate their own security forces. He is certain that even the Israel Defence Forces "changed its orders just because of the ICC."

8. How the media conditions people to be anti-Israel

(Very long article so the link needs to be opened for it to be read in full)

Consider a lofty statement on media conduct from the editor of a Sunday paper.

"Credibility is the lifeblood of our profession. Without it we are nothing. Without it, not one person will believe a single word that we write. One of the basic tenets of our profession is to ensure that the credibility of the information we gather . . . is unquestionable."

If you follow a clutch of titles hostile to Israel, including Guardian, Independent, New York Times, and BBC, you will know that the statement is wrong. Their Middle East reporters and correspondents care not a jot for credibility of information. Yet they are believed. What accounts for this anomaly?

The answer lies in something the statement failed to consider. Journalists not only report news, they also make news, or they participate in making news. Before illustrating how they do that, we have to understand that a journalist can function in two different ways:

1. He can faithfully report what he observed and heard.
2. Alternatively, he can insert "attitude" in the report, allowing it to color, embellish or even create a story.

The first journalist is the one the editor's statement had in mind—the reporter with no attitude. There are no personal judgments in his report, no inclination to share feelings, no desire to influence readers to share his feelings. The second journalist would do all of those things.

To illustrate both types, here are two reports on war. They are different wars in different periods, one in Afghanistan, the other in Libya. But we are interested in contrasting reporting styles, not their contexts. The first report was filed by Christian Lowe of Reuters.

"The pattern of Nato airstrikes on Tripoli indicates that the alliance is trying to reduce Gaddafi's ability to defend himself at the moment when his opponents, who for the time being are underground, decide to rise up."

The credibility of the information is unquestionable, and the report meets the lofty statement of conduct.

Here is the second report, again from a war zone, filed by Robert Fisk of the Independent.

"Sure it was a bad place for a car to break down. But what happened to us was symbolic of the hatred and fury and hypocrisy of this filthy war."

We at once know that we're reading no observational report. Whatever purpose the writer may have, it's not to report news. He conveys a personal attitude while not admitting to his attitude. He could equally have written, "I hate this war," which would be stating a bald fact, not about events, but concerning his attitude toward events. We would know that he personally disapproved of the war, while not finding ourselves drawn into sharing his disapproval. That's clearly not the case here. The reporter, in the grip of strong emotion, gives us the benefit of his judgment and forces us to share that judgment. He hates war and so must we. The purpose of journalism of this type is quite different from journalism intended to relay a story.

The cases to follow might not be so obviously and nakedly emotional, yet all belong to the second type of journalism. They want us to share the writer's feelings. More than reporting news, they make the news.

The case of grammar

Two Reuters' reports, on the same day, deal quite differently with an act by Islamic pirates on the one hand and a US military operation on the other. We may call the first the passive case and the other the active case. Under the headline "Achille Lauro mastermind in custody," we read:

"Abu Abbas is the leader of the Palestine Liberation Front, which high jacked the Achille Lauro in the Mediterranean, resulting in the death of a disabled elderly American man, Leon Klinghoffer."

Observe the passive case: "resulting in the death" as if by some regrettable accident. In the film "The Pianist," there's a scene where Nazi troops storm into a Jewish apartment and order the family to its feet. The wheelchair-bound grandfather is unable to rise, so the Nazis carry him in the chair out to the balcony and dump both into the street far below. Change the apartment into a ship and the street into the sea and you have what took place on board the Achille Lauro. Abu Abbas (not to be confused with PA President Mahmoud Abbas) and his band carried the elderly man in his wheelchair to the ship's side and dumped both overboard.

Reuters not only omits these facts but alludes to a regrettable and unintended accident. And there is a further attempt to influence our opinions. The victim was "an elderly American man." In fact he was an elderly Jew, the very reason that Abbas and his band selected him to be murdered. They identified him as a Jew. Reuters did not want us to know this.

In the same wire service we read: *"A senior US military officer said . . . he would launch an investigation into the killing by US soldiers of an Iraqi boy."* We may observe here the active case, "killing by American soldiers." While the Islamic act leads (softly) to the death of a man, the act of Americans is a violent one, to kill.

The case of chocolate-bar man

What would it take for news of someone killed by a bulldozer to make the front page; not of a tabloid but of a paper for the serious-reader? And what would be the chance of this event

making the front page if it happened in a distant country? To lengthen the odds, what if the story had no corpse to show for it? To make the odds even longer, what if the victim was no celebrity or VIP, but an ordinary citizen? Yet it all came together, in the Independent. Justin Huggler's story was about how citizen Salem met his end.

Why was Mr. Salem front-page news? For one thing, he was a Palestinian. For another, he was a victim of Israel. Who was it who told Justin Huggler the story? The dead man's son and daughter. "Old"—that was the first adjective to stir emotions for the dead man. He was old. While on this tack, what more to wring out of the tragedy, what deeper emotion to plumb? On top of being old, the victim was deaf. Who said so? No less than the son, Maher Salem, and the daughter. Deeply stirred, the reporter would have pushed for more. "What else can you tell me about your old and deaf father?" At this point Salem Jr. disclosed a poetic turn of mind in relating how his father's head had been flattened to the thickness of a chocolate bar. He even gave measurements; the head was no more than two centimetres thick, after Israeli bulldozers had flattened the father.

Here was a story to evoke outrage, told by the victim's children, verified by neither mortuary nor grave with the father's remains; without so much as a document to prove there'd been a father, in human or chocolate-bar form

Media events

The media was not happy when Israel considered banning reporters who hitched a ride on the flotilla to Gaza. Journalists took to the high seas with activists and celebrities to "break Israel's blockade" of Gaza. The Foreign Press Association (FPA) reacted:

"This sends a chilling message to the international media and raises serious questions about Israel's commitment to freedom of the press. Journalists covering a legitimate news event should be allowed to do their jobs without threats and intimidation."

Note, the flotilla was newsworthy only because the media covered it. If the media did not cover it, the flotilla would not have sailed. The media creates the news event through its coverage, and then demands the right to cover the story it created.

And that is how the media, whether they report the news or make it, condition us.
