



ISRAEL NEWS
A collection of the week's news from Israel
From the Bet El Twinning / Israel Action Committee of
Beth Avraham Yoseph of Toronto Congregation

referencing circumstances under which the Palestinians would persist in their refusing to come to the bargaining table, thus maintaining the status quo.

The Palestinians can end this untenable status quo by agreeing to compromise their absolutist claims, just as Israel will have to compromise its

absolutist claims. The virtue of Ambassador Friedman's statement is that it recognizes that both sides must give up their absolutist claims, and that the end result must be Israeli control over some, but not all, of the West Bank.

Ambassador Friedman's statement is not a barrier to peace or negotiations. It is a realistic recognition of what Israel will demand, and to what the Palestinians will ultimately have to agree, regarding territorial compromise. (Haaretz Jun 12)

Commentary...

Trump's Ambassador is Right on Israel's Annexation. His Posturing, Pro-Palestinian Critics are Wrong By Alan M. Dershowitz

The United States Ambassador to Israel, David Friedman has been criticized for making the following statement:

"Under certain circumstances, I think that Israel has the right to retain some, but not all, of the West Bank." His critics, including Haaretz, argue that Israel has no such right under international law because "this is occupied territory that cannot be annexed."

Friedman is correct and his critics are wrong.

I know, because I participated – albeit in a small way – in the drafting of United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 back in 1967, when Justice Arthur Goldberg was the United States Representative to the United Nations. I had been Justice Goldberg's law clerk, and was then teaching at Harvard Law School. Justice Goldberg asked me to come to New York to advise him on some of the legal issues surrounding the West Bank.

The major controversy was whether Israel had to return "all" the territories captured in its defensive war against Jordan, or only some of the territories.

The end result was that the binding English version of the United Nations Resolution deliberately omitted the crucial word "all," and substituted the word "territories," which both Justice Goldberg and British Ambassador Lord Caradon publicly stated meant that Israel was entitled to retain some of the West Bank.

Moreover, under Resolution 242, Israel was not required to return a single inch of captured territory unless its enemies recognized its right to live within secure boundaries.

Friedman is right, therefore, in these two respects: (1) Israel has no right to retain all of the West Bank, if its enemies recognize its right to live within secure borders; (2) Israel has "the right to retain some" of these territories. The specifics – the amount and location – are left to negotiation between the parties.

In the last month of the Obama administration, President Obama pushed through a Security Council Resolution that declared all of the captured territories - including the Western Wall, the Jewish Quarter and the access roads to Hebrew University and Hadassah Hospital – to be illegally occupied territories.

That benighted resolution was categorically and correctly rejected by Israel. It does not represent binding international law, and virtually no one believes that the Western Wall is being illegally occupied by Israel. Indeed, every world leader who has visited Israel - including Obama - have prayed at this illegally "occupied" sacred place.

The reality is that Israel will, under any circumstances, maintain control over these traditionally Jewish areas, as well as the settlement blocks close to the Green Line. How do I know this? Because Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has told me on more than one occasion when we have met.

Abbas wants this to occur as a result of negotiations, but he knows that any negotiation will produce Israeli sovereignty over these areas. The problem is that Abbas now refuses to accept the invitations by President Donald Trump and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to sit down and negotiate these issues.

The attack on Ambassador Friedman is mere posturing by the Palestinian leaders and their supporters. The realpolitik, recognized by all reasonable people, is that Israel does have a right to retain some, but not all, of the West Bank.

In 2000-2001 the Palestinians were offered a deal in which they would control more than 90 percent of the West Bank. In 2008, they were offered an even more generous deal. In both such deals, and most likely in the one now being drafted by the Trump administration, the Palestinians will get Israeli land equivalent to the West Bank land that Israel will annex. The Palestinians have either rejected or refused to negotiate over these offers.

So when Ambassador Friedman talks about "certain circumstances" that would lead Israel to "retain some" of the West Bank, he is likely

Israel and Trump: A Missed Opportunity By Ariel Bulshtein

The 1967 Six-Day War ended with what many people considered a miracle. It allowed Israel to do what it could not do during the War of Independence 19 years earlier: Liberate Jerusalem and unite the capital; take control over the ancient parts of our homeland in Judea and Samaria, and get defensible borders.

But the Cold War at the time, and the fact that Israel's stunning victory happened so fast, made it virtually impossible to translate the decisive military a new geopolitical reality that favors Israel.

It took dozens of years until the scope of the victory finally dawned on Israeli leaders, and only then did they start to harness the victory, with baby steps.

Israel annexed Jerusalem, then it extended sovereignty to the Golan Heights, and built communities in Judea and Samaria. But this has been a drawn-out process. In fact, even today, some on the Left think they can make Israel go back to the pre-1967 lines, or what former Foreign Minister Abba Eban referred to as "the Auschwitz borders."

The notion that Israel should withdraw from the West Bank was a folly that was promoted during the 1990s.

The rationale behind the Oslo Accords was that they were in Israel's interest. But the concessions only inflicted major casualties on Israel and undermined our right to the land in the eyes of the international community.

History proved to be stronger than the Left and international pressure. Thanks to the residents of Judea and Samaria and successive right-wing governments (and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's careful stewardship over the past decade), Israel managed to survive.

The eight years of President Barack Obama were particularly difficult. Had Netanyahu not been able to withstand his pressure with such skill, Israel could have been badly bruised.

Now Israel is once again at a historic crossroads. There is no daylight between Jerusalem and Washington on the cardinal issues.

With Donald Trump in the White House, we should harness this unique moment in history to cement the victory of 1967 and reap actual gains from that war.

How symbolic is it that the latest political drama that saw the Knesset dissolve and call early election happened close to the anniversary of the Six-Day War.

Let's not forget that the person who brought about this situation is none other than Yisrael Beytenu leader Avigdor Lieberman, who considers himself a champion of the land of Israel.

The fall of 2019 was supposed to present us with an unprecedented opportunity to apply Israeli sovereignty to Judea and Samaria, but instead, we will be bogged down by the new election over the coming months.

By the time a new government is sworn in the 2020 campaign will have already begun. With Trump fully consumed by the race, the likelihood of him agreeing to Israeli annexation during such a sensitive period will be significantly lower than it is today.

Lieberman decided to prefer his own political calculations to the nation's. Let's hope his successful thwarting of a new right-wing government will not result in a historic missed opportunity.

(Israel Hayom Jun 11)

Round 2: Let Common Sense Lead the Way By Haim Shine

Upon learning the result of the most recent general election, hundreds of thousands of voters from the religious Zionist camp felt an immense sense of frustration. Their ballots were chucked into the recycling bin and their choice wasn't counted at all. Beyond any personal frustration, the loss of mandates prevented the formation of a consolidated right-wing government, and Avigdor Lieberman managed to completely feed the appetites of those who wanted him to block Netanyahu from forming a coalition. In the near future, Israeli citizens will go to the polling stations again, this time wiser and more seasoned.

Ever since the dawn of mankind, and according to some since the Garden of Eden, there has been a conflict between emotion and common sense, wisdom and impulse, imagination and reality. Politics by nature is a place of emotion and impulse. People who lack the impulse to acquire power don't go near the political kitchen. With that, there are times it is appropriate to brush feelings of anger, resentment and outrage aside in favor of common sense. With so much hanging in the balance, it is necessary to forsake matters of prestige and portfolios in favor of responsibility to the vision and path.

The upcoming election is of utmost importance to the integrity of Israel and unity of Jerusalem; and beyond obviously important matters of security, diplomacy and economy, the election will be critical for the country's ability to define itself as Jewish. The Israeli Left, led by the Blue and White party, is trying to create the impression that the election is about Netanyahu's corruption allegations. It is very convenient for the Left to divert the discussion in this direction because on the real questions the four co-leaders of Blue and White really don't have much to offer, certainly not a unified message. The right-wing parties must not fall into this trap and forget for one moment what is really at stake.

The head-butting among right-wing party leaders is an expression of bitter, unnecessary and harmful sentiments. Anyone who thinks running alone this time will help them pass the electoral threshold is forgetting that wise people don't make the mistake twice. The question now isn't about who is right, but who is smart. Sadly, hospitals are filled with victims of traffic accidents who were right.

The only question that needs to be asked is which unified right-wing ticket can win the most mandates. The answer to this question cannot be provided by the candidates themselves, who are convinced of their own appeal, and certainly not by biased pollsters often prone to blatant inaccuracy. Not to mention those pollsters whose mistaken prognostications raised the price of cannabis stock. It is imperative to agree on a common path, whether through neutral pollsters or a constrictive summit of some sort. In the 21st century, other methods could very well emerge.

Israel will never forgive those who, in the critical days that lay ahead, put their own interests above the ability to realize the vision. (Israel Hayom Jun 13)

The Palestinians are Choosing to Fall Behind By Eyal Zisser

As they step even closer to the abyss, the Palestinians are trying to drag the entire Arab world down with them. They expect, and are essentially demanding, for Arab states to turn their backs on their ally, the United States, and join the Palestinian Authority in its quarrel with Washington, sever all contact with the Trump administration, and help the Palestinians torpedo efforts to advance Israeli-Palestinian peace.

In the past, the Palestinians simply had to nod in a certain direction for the Arab world to heed their desires and whims and dutifully follow the dictates of the PLO and its leaders. The glory days of Palestinian nationalism, however, are gone. Arab countries no longer fear saying no to the Palestinians. They also don't want to abandon their own interests anymore on the Palestinians' behalf; or more to the point, on behalf of their contrariety, caprice, and inability to make the courageous and often painful but necessary compromises for the sake of their own future.

The Arab world, by and large, no longer views Israel as the enemy – rather as a strategic ally in the fight against the extremism and terror espoused by Iran and its proxies. For many Arab countries – which can no longer neglect or jeopardize their futures in service of the Palestinian cause – this fight is imperative.

The decision by Egypt, Jordan, Morocco and Gulf States to attend the US-led economic summit in Bahrain, therefore, is a resounding slap in the face of the Palestinian Authority and expresses an utter lack of faith in its path and leadership. Consequently, Palestinian Authority leaders now find themselves without troops and without support. The Palestinian public is fed up with the PA and doesn't trust it anymore. Arab countries are following suit.

The Palestinians, true to their tradition, are choosing the path of rejection while dodging the tough decisions, but this time they are alone and lagging behind the pack. If they aren't careful they could lose more than their power to veto normalization of Israeli-Arab ties, which they essentially squandered a long time ago. What's really at stake now is their

ability to decide their own fate.

The United States and Israel have already made it clear they will not wait for the Palestinians, and Arab states are now signaling they won't let the Palestinians obstruct the Americans' effort to introduce a regional, and even an Israeli-Palestinian accord. (Israel Hayom Jun 12)

Peeking Through the Keyhole By Galit Distel Etebaryan

Both the Left and the Right seem to have lost their way in the current election campaign, as they are focused not on the peace process or other burning political questions, but rather on the judiciary, which seems to have taken center stage in the elections over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's legal troubles.

The Left understands Netanyahu better than the Right, which is also one of the main reasons why it attacks Netanyahu mercilessly – Netanyahu is a nightmare that is coming true before their very eyes.

This is also where the parties to the right of the Likud falter. They are too busy peeking through the keyhole to see the bigger picture.

These parties have their own political ideology, their own priorities and agenda, and they expect them all to be met, making them blind to the bigger picture – the one the Left sees very clearly, which illustrates that Netanyahu has all but lulled the peace process into an irreparable coma. Anyone who wants to understand why the Left loathes Netanyahu as more than any other right-wing leader should look to that fact.

The confusion is understandable. Netanyahu is a moderate right-wing leader, who is not gung-ho to go to war. In fact, his insistence on containing the security escalation on the Israel-Gaza border has prompted many politicians in the Left to slam what they called his "weak policies" there.

This seemingly served the Left's agenda: it wants to revive the peace process and therefore urged Netanyahu to topple Hamas' regime and reinstate Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas' rule in the enclave from which he was ousted in 2007. A wide-scale military campaign in Gaza could achieve this goal.

Netanyahu understands that well, which is why he is leaving Hamas exactly where it is – severely crippled but still viable. As long as Hamas rules Gaza, chances of anyone reigniting the peace process are slim.

Absent any extraneous remarks, fireworks or pathos-filled speeches, Netanyahu has completely defeated the Left's principal agenda. He proved that Israel could thrive without making "painful concessions." Furthermore, his policies have not led to Israel's diplomatic isolation but rather forged new ties with Sunni Arab states. And the economy is flourishing. All the while the Left hopes for the dystopia it knows is "sure to come" in the absence of painful diplomatic concessions.

Netanyahu has led the country forward, an achievement even more impressive given that he has succeeded in doing all of the above under the watchful eye of a hostile US administration under former President Barack Obama.

A renewed diplomatic process will lead to additional wars and the spilling of blood. Netanyahu saw this up front and that is why he invested all of his effort in thwarting such a process. They understand this full well on the Left. It's a shame that to the right of Netanyahu, they choose to peek through the peephole and as a result, are unable to see the full picture, which those on the Left are able to see: Netanyahu buried the diplomatic concession process. (Israel Hayom Jun 13)

How to Win Back the Squandered Gift of 1967 By Victor Rosenthal

I recently watched a short but very powerful video about Israel's victory in the 1967 Six-Day War. The film suggests the victory was literally miraculous. It may well have been, although such miracles only occur when divine intervention is combined with careful preparation, struggle and sacrifice.

The film made me enormously proud of the accomplishments of the Jewish people, state and army. And while I don't believe in direct divine intervention in human affairs, this victory – along with the survival of the Jewish people since biblical times – makes me wonder if I could be wrong about that.

So what's the problem?

It seems we have taken the gift given to us by God and the IDF and, little by little, through ignorance and weakness, squandered it.

The Sinai peninsula, conquered in 1967, is back in Egyptian hands. Yes, I know we gained "peace" in return, but actually the United States bribed the Egyptians to leave us alone with billions in aid, including military aid that translated into weapons that can only be useful against us.

Today Egypt has a government that sees an advantage in maintaining the cold peace – but if the Muslim Brotherhood government that came to power for a short time (2012-13) with the help of former U.S. President Barack Obama had been more competent, we would be facing hostility today no less bitter than we faced in the days of Egyptian President Gamal

Abdel Nasser.

In exchange for this peace, we gave up natural resources including oil, but more importantly, the one thing that Israel lacks above all else, and the one lack that is most difficult to compensate for with high-tech cleverness: strategic depth.

The Gaza Strip, too, has reverted to Arab control. It is now for all intents and purposes a sovereign state under control of Hamas, which bitterly oppresses the Arab population and uses it as a human shield in a permanent war of attrition against Israel. This came about as a result of Israel's voluntary, unilateral abandonment of its settlements and military installations there.

Gaza now serves as a base for Hamas military activities and an excuse for international condemnation of Israel, which from time to time must defend itself against rocket attacks, incendiary and explosive devices carried by kites and balloons, and attempted incursions by terrorists, either over the border fence or under it by way of tunnels.

And the holiest spot in the world for the Jewish people? The very day after the conquest of the Old City, Moshe Dayan ordered the Israeli flag removed from the Dome of the Rock and gave administrative control of the Temple Mount to the Arab Wakf. A "status quo" was created, in which Muslims and Jews would both be able to visit their sacred sites.

However, in practice, Jewish rights were eroded little by little. Today, Jews can visit only at restricted times, can enter through just one gate, are forbidden to pray, carry objects (even water bottles), or even use water faucets dedicated to Muslim hand-washing. They are often exposed to harassment from hostile Muslims.

There are few limitations on Muslims, and Arab children sometimes play football on the Mount, despite a court order forbidding it. The Wakf has built several mosques on and under the Mount, and in the process destroyed or lost irreplaceable, archaeologically valuable artifacts. Agreements call for archaeological supervision of construction work, but this requirement is ignored by the Wakf.

As far as the rest of Judea and Samaria is concerned, the "international community," in mortal fear of PLO terrorism and the Arab oil weapon, has been pushing and shoving at Israel ever since the 1967 war to abandon the territories that it liberated from Jordanian occupation.

But it took Israel's own Shimon Peres, in pursuit of a chimerical "New Middle East," to stupidly bring our worst enemy, Yasser Arafat, back from exile where his organization was growing old and feeble, and allow him to establish his terrorist base in the biblical heartland of the Jewish state. We even gave him money and guns!

We paid a steep price for this mistake during the Second Intifada, and we continue to pay today when Jews are murdered at random by the generation of young people raised under the educational system of Arafat and his successor, the porcine Mahmoud Abbas.

Although we can't blame anyone but ourselves for the Oslo Accords – even former U.S. President Bill Clinton was taken by surprise – the hostile European Union has made use of Oslo to advance its objective of forcing Israel out of the territories. In the guise of "humanitarian" aid to the Palestinian Authority, the E.U. today ignores Israeli zoning and building regulations and constructs public buildings to create facts on the ground in areas that, according to Oslo, are under Israeli control.

Why did we allow all this to happen?

There are multiple reasons. One is that we don't know how to negotiate. We like to think, "We are strong, we can afford to give up (whatever) in the interest of peace. The other side will appreciate our generosity." Wrong. Whatever we give up, the Arabs take, and then ask for more. They don't understand "generosity" – they see weakness. The negotiating process is like a ratchet: it can go in one direction – toward the Arabs – but not the other.

Another reason, often noted, is that we assume that everyone else is like us. We want peace, so Palestinian Arabs must want peace. We care about security, economic development, a good life for our children. So must Palestinian Arabs.

They, on the other hand, simply want to get rid of us; it doesn't matter to them if they would have a better life if they cooperate with us.

We want an independent nation-state, but they are strongly loyal to their clans. We look for win-win solutions, but it is always more important to them to hurt Jews than to help Arabs.

Finally, the Arabs are always ready to use the "heckler's veto," or more correctly in this case, the "terrorist's veto": give us what we want or there will be no peace. What Israeli politician wants to be accused of being responsible for the unrest that follows standing up for ourselves?

What can we do differently? Unfortunately, we need to become less generous. We need to become tougher. We need to set limits and stick to them.

The E.U. is funding illegal construction in Judea and Samaria? Demolish it. Start with Khan al-Ahmar, which even Israel's left-leaning Supreme Court agrees must go, and which Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu promised to remove months ago.

We need to take back what we have given up, little by little, and strike hard against the "terrorist's veto." We are not going to get the Sinai back – and at this stage, I doubt that we want it. But the situation in and around Gaza can and must change radically. There must be a price paid for incendiary balloons, a price so high that they won't want to pay it more than once.

The same goes for the Temple Mount. A bit at a time, the way we lost it, we must get it back. Of course, there will be a reaction (i.e., riots). But the reactions happen because the Arabs know they can get away with them. They know we will always back down, as we did with the metal detectors at the gates. They know we are afraid of confrontation, so they just push harder.

It's a long process, and it will be painful. The Arabs are in the habit of winning; it will be hard to get them used to losing. But there are no win-win solutions for the Middle East. In this neighborhood, all games are zero-sum. (JNS Jun 11)

Israel Needs American Jewry, Now More Than Ever By Shay Attias

The Jewish diaspora in the United States is becoming increasingly estranged from Israel. American Jewish youth are being pushed away from affiliation with the Jewish state, and some Jewish students are even forced to hide their religious identity or their support for Israel to stay safe on campus. A central issue hindering a solution to this problem is the continued, uncompromising political support of American Jewry for the Democratic Party, which is increasingly vocal in its disdain for Israel.

Though Israel urgently needs to maintain a healthy relationship with the American Jewish community, its foreign ministry suffers from a critical lack of human resources, budget and status. The ministry's relationship with the American Jewish community has been dominated for decades by an unwritten covenant regarding values, priorities and assumptions about behavior. However, powerful trends have undermined that covenant, to the point of rendering it obsolete.

The Jewish diaspora faces a great challenge: the rise of anti-Semitism in the United States. This can be seen in the relentless pressure of the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement on Jewish youth to turn their backs on their Jewish identity. Many young American Jews do, in fact, view Israel as a moral burden they no longer wish to carry.

American Jewish identity trends include a growing interest in relationships that do not require communal institutions, the rise of the concept of tikkun olam as a mobilizing cause, and an increasing difficulty in speaking with one voice.

Israel has morphed from a uniting issue to a source of tension and divisiveness for many Jewish communities, and there has been a decline of the notion of unqualified support for Israel, with an increase in criticism of Israel among ostensibly Zionist organizations.

Then there is the rise of the BDS movement, which directly targets American Jewry and works to turn students against Israel.

All these elements, as well as others, have deepened the schisms on the American Jewish center-left. It has been forced into a vise by the right on one side and the anti-Zionist left on the other. Some American liberal Zionists, struggling to find a stable position, accept the boycott of Israeli products from West Bank neighborhoods but not the boycott of the Israeli state as a whole. Those liberal Zionists who oppose non-violent forms of pressure on Israel feel compelled to justify that opposition. The onus is on them to defend whatever degree of support for Israel they might retain.

They are not expected to defend the abstract ideal of what they hope Israel might one day become, they are obliged to defend the Israel of today. That Israel is accused by the BDS movement of expropriating Palestinian land for Jewish settlement, detaining Palestinians without trial or charge, collectively punishing two million Gazans living under a more than decade-long blockade, institutionalizing inequality between Jewish and Palestinian citizens of Israel and denying Palestinian "refugees" the "right of return" to pre-1967 Israel.

BDS has deprived Israel's liberal supporters of the excuse that an aberrant "occupation" or right-wing government is to blame for the state's assorted sins. The problem isn't Israel's politics; the problem is Israel's very existence as a Jewish state.

The BDS movement has grown steadily since its 2005 launch and has taken root on campuses across the United States. In 2017, for example, the student governments at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and Pitzer College passed referenda demanding divestment from and boycott of companies that do business with Israel. These resolutions are usually either ignored or condemned by university officials, but they still cause damage to the bonds between Israel and the U.S. Jewish diaspora.

In the United States, thousands of campuses around the country mark "Israel Apartheid Week" every year, and have done so since 2001.

Boycotts of Israeli institutions of higher education are another BDS weapon. Unlike BDS resolutions against Israeli businesses, which are largely symbolic, academic boycotts have very real consequences for

American Jewish and Israeli scholars. According to the BDS website, more than 1,000 faculty members on hundreds of campuses around the world have endorsed this boycott, and many Israeli scholars have lost funding and research opportunities as a result. In the United States, BDS supporters have managed to ensure that some Jewish student groups are excluded from participation in social justice causes and events.

American Jewry is unquestionably moving away from Israel and Judaism. The Pew Research Center has shown that nearly 60 percent of American Jewish marriages since 2000 were mixed. A 2007 study found that around half of American Jews under 35 would not see Israel's destruction as a personal tragedy.

Of course, not all of this is solely due to BDS, but there is no doubt that BDS is exploiting and doing its best to maximize the gap between the Jewish diaspora and the State of Israel. Many Jewish students are being pushed to avoid any kind of identification with Israel. And when new ways of fighting BDS emerge (for example, the Canary Mission website, which was established to shame "people and groups that promote hatred of the USA, Israel, and Jews on North American college campuses"), many Jewish students decline to support it.

To many American Jews, the prophetic and messianic role of the Jewish people—defined as the obligation to make the world a better place, or *tikkun olam*—is central to their identity as Jews and as liberals. A Pew Research Center survey of American Jews in 2013 found that among the five million American Jews, most regarded "working for justice and equality" as a pillar of their Jewish identity.

The divide between Israel and American Jewry was clearly visible at the time of the Pittsburgh massacre, in which 11 Jews were killed. When U.S. President Donald Trump arrived at the scene of the attack, Israelis were heartened and American Jews were offended. Some of them even blamed him for the attack. Trump, who historically recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, is seen by many as the most pro-Israel president in American history, but that very status taints him in the eyes of many American Jews. As some of the most strongly liberal Democrats in the US, they oppose Trump as a matter of course.

Israeli diplomacy needs to prepare for the day which a liberal American president returns to the Oval Office. When that happens, he or she will be supported by a significant majority of US Jewry. This will deepen the divide between Israel and the U.S. diaspora, and the BDS movement will be ready to exploit that schism. That will be a dangerous day for Israel.

(JNS / BESA Centre Jun 12)

Blame Those Settlements! By David M. Weinberg

US Ambassador to Israel David Friedman set off some alarm bells last weekend by telling *The New York Times* that: "Under certain circumstances, I think Israel has the right to retain some, but unlikely all, of the West Bank."

It's not clear why this comment should raise eyebrows, since US policy and all previous rounds of Israeli-Palestinian negotiations have been based on this very possibility, indeed likelihood.

Perhaps some unfriendly types were upset because Friedman speaks not only of settlement realities that must be considered when calculating the possibilities for Israeli-Palestinian accommodation, but also of Jewish Israeli rights to live in the historic heartland of Israel. That is certainly a change of tone, and hopefully of US policy, too.

In fact, I would welcome an even clearer articulation of American policy in this regard, perhaps as part of US President Donald Trump's peace initiative: explicit recognition that Jews have an inalienable right stemming from Jewish history and tradition to live in Judea and Samaria. Enough of the nonsense that Jews in Judea are illegal colonialists!

In any case, the main reason that some went wild over Friedman's remarks is the fact that for much of the reflexively anti-Israeli diplomatic community, settlements in Judea and Samaria have become the ultimate bugaboo: a criminal enterprise responsible for all evils in the world.

Certainly, if you study the Middle East from United Nations publications, you discover that most global troubles can be quickly traced back to Israeli settlements.

If it wasn't for the settlements, you see, the Palestinians undoubtedly would recognize Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state. PA President Mahmoud Abbas would formally forgo the so-called "right" of return for Palestinian refugees. Hamas and Fatah would bury the hatchet. The BDS movement would stop seeking to demonize and delegitimize Israel.

If it wasn't for the settlements, Ayatollah Khamenei and Iranian President Hassan Rouhani would announce an end to Iranian nuclear enrichment activities and the dismantlement of all related nuclear facilities. The Iranians also would stop shipping missiles to Islamic Jihad and Hezbollah, and withdraw the IRGC from Syria.

If only settlements would be torn down, the barbaric civil war in Syria would truly end, and President Bashar Assad would allow millions of Syrian Sunni refugees to return and live happily ever after. The Egyptian

economy would stabilize. The disintegration of Libya and Yemen would be halted. Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan would recant his antisemitism and reconcile with Israel.

Russia would withdraw all its forces from Ukraine and Crimea. Bernie Sanders would embrace traditional Jewish religious practice, and tens of thousands of young American Jewish progressives would do *teshuva*, too.

If not for the supposedly out-of-control settlements, Avi Gabbay of the Labor Party would be prime minister, and *haredim* would be lining up to serve in the Sayeret Matkal commando unit.

In my mind, there is no question that the settlements are to blame for the traffic jams in Tel Aviv, the poverty in development towns across Israel, the high crime rate and more. I also think that settlements are to blame for Israel's failure to win the Eurovision contest in Tel Aviv this year, and for the fact that Israel has never won any Olympic gold medals in ice hockey.

Speaking seriously, I'm sure that readers recognize this litany of settlement wrongs as satirical nonsense.

However, I write this column only half in jest. Unfortunately, even some Israelis have outlandishly called settlements a criminal enterprise. Former attorney-general Michael Ben-Yair termed settlements "the most evil and immoral act since World War II" – worse, he said, than Pol Pot's regime in Cambodia, Stalin's crimes against his own people and the genocide in Darfur.

This is errant and irresponsible nonsense. Israel's control of the West Bank is neither criminal nor genocidal. Settlements may be a real bone of contention between Israel and the Palestinians, but they are not the root cause of the continuing conflict here or anywhere else.

Israeli settlements in Judea and Samaria neither explain Palestinian unwillingness to make peace with Israel, nor justify radical Islam's jihad on Jerusalem. Similarly, rolling back settlements will not bring peace with the Palestinians – it certainly didn't in Gaza – nor calm the convulsing Arab Middle East. Lambs will not lie down with lions.

In this context, it is worth reiterating some basic facts. Settlements haven't scuttled any previous negotiating effort; Palestinian obduracy and extremism has.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's "right-wing" governments – from 2009 until today – have applied a restrictive approach to settlement building; much more restrictive than the previous governments of Ehud Olmert, Ariel Sharon and Ehud Barak (over the years 2000-2008). Netanyahu even froze settlement construction all together for 10 months – the only Israeli leader ever to do so – yet the Palestinians spurned talks with Israel for most of that period, with no reciprocal concessions.

Furthermore, most Israeli housing starts over the past decade have been in cities within settlement "blobs" that Israel intends to keep under all circumstances (and "everybody knows" this): Gush Etzion, Ariel-Elkana-Karnei Shomron, Ma'aleh Adumim, Betar Illit and Modi'in Illit. In fact, almost all government-initiated building has been in the latter two *haredi* cities, which are stably situated in Israel's future.

In other words, there is no Israeli land grab underway, and nothing that would scuttle the establishment of an autonomous and prosperous Palestinian entity – if only there was a peaceful Palestinian leadership ready for genuine compromise with Israel.

There always will be a complicated mesh of West Bank populations, Arab and Jewish. Any Israeli-Palestinian arrangement in Judea and Samaria is going to involve blocs and bypasses, overpasses, underpasses and shared spaces.

But no Jewish or Arab towns need to be moved or throttled, and none should be delegitimized. There are multiple creative ways of creating livable contiguity and transportation contiguity – instead of territorial contiguity – for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

In the meantime, a sober assessment of the situation inevitably leads to the conclusion that renewed negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leadership are far off into future; especially with Mahmoud Abbas refusing to engage on the Trump initiative.

So when US Ambassador Friedman talks about "certain circumstances" that would lead Israel to "retain some" of the West Bank, he likely means circumstances where the Palestinians persist in refusing to negotiate, thus maintaining the status quo.

And then, sooner or later, Israel will unilaterally extend its rule of law to include Jewish communities in Judea and Samaria, solidifying the de facto territorial compromise that already is in place – perhaps with American blessing.

Keep the settlement issue in proportion. Settlements are not the bane of local or world peace, nor are they necessarily an obstacle to peace. Everybody should stop using them as a thinly veiled smokescreen for a great deal of anti-Israel sentiment. (Jerusalem Post Jun 13)