

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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The six featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on similarities between Netanyahu and Trump; the latter's stirring up anti-American propaganda by banning Syrian refugees and Muslim immigrants; a Trump administration whose policies are not yet known; Palestinian alarm that this administration will end the possibility of any two-state solution; concern that Trump's voice will echo throughout the world and will become a source of inspiration and legitimacy for the extreme right, from Europe to Israel; and Israeli intelligence agencies finding that the Iran nuclear agreement is holding.

Commentary: The executive orders of the initial days of the Trump administration are causing a mixture of fear, concern and uncertainty for many of the leaders and people of the US, Israel, the Moslem nations and most of the world. It is as if a great river has suddenly changed its course, depth and banks causing the river boats to slow or stop, and the people of the towns along the river bank to be concerned about their future and even survival. The Israeli right wing is elated and is challenging Netanyahu's leadership (which is too moderate in their opinion) even while he is facing corruption accusations. The TV, radio and print media of both Israel and the US that expresses disapproval of and "fact checks" its elected leaders is experiencing increasing criticism by these same leaders in what has become a contest between observable realities, "facts of the ground" and "post truth" and "alternate reality."

- Chemi Shalev in *Haaretz* compares Netanyahu with Trump when he says that Israelis are used to leaders who attack the media, feel like victims, lie through their teeth and pay no price for corruption.
- Chemi Shalev writes again in *Haaretz* that Trump is a hero now for Muslim-haters who, in some countries, might even be the majority and that banning Syrian refugees and Muslim immigrants will help anti-American propaganda more than U.S. national security.
- Mazal Mualem states in *Al-Monitor* Netanyahu must cope with a Trump administration whose policies are not yet known while facing pressures from the far right to annex settlement blocs and other pressures from Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman.
- Hanan Ashraw writes in *Newsweek* that as Trump assumes power in Washington D.C., many in occupied Palestine are deeply alarmed about what the future holds for them. They fear for the two-state solution that for decades has been the internationally accepted framework for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and an end to Israel's military occupation of our lands, which is now in its 50th year.
- Gideon Levy writes in *Haaretz* that Trump's voice will echo throughout the world and will become a source of inspiration and legitimacy for the extreme right, from Europe to Israel. He notes that if his inauguration speech were to be translated into German, it would have the same spirit and the same intention as "Deutschland uber Alles."
- Amos Harel writes that a former Military Intelligence chief told *Haaretz* that Israeli intelligence agencies have found that the nuclear agreement is holding, that Iran complies to its terms and that if the U.S. goes back on this deal with conflict developing with Iran, other powers would leave Israel hanging,

1) [Analysis Israel's Enthusiastic Embrace of President Trump - and Why It Might Be Dangerous, Chemi Shalev, Haaretz, January 27, 2017](#)

"I met some worried American Jewish acquaintances at the Institute for National Security Studies conference in Tel Aviv this week. They seemed troubled. These are people who visit Israel frequently, who know it well and support it, who are well acquainted with the political situation and who understand, or at least thought they did, the local mood. Nonetheless, they were astonished by the intensity of support for Donald Trump they encountered, in random conversations and in meetings with high officials. Israelis love Trump, they said, way more than Americans." ...

"Israelis are more accustomed than other people to politicians whose limited vocabulary stands in inverse proportion to the intensity of the insults they hurl at rivals, which is par for the course on Israeli talk shows on television and in debates in Knesset committees. Trump's obsession with the media, his hysterical gripes about not getting respect and his insane sensitivity to what he perceives as personal slights are all terra cognita for anyone who has lived with Netanyahu as prime minister for so long. The same is true of Trump's incomprehensible combination of a l'état c'est moi, only-I-can-save-you attitude and his pathetic sense of eternal victimhood. The same mix was on vivid display in Netanyahu's extraordinary speech in the Knesset this week about his own problems with the police, in which he said he did nothing wrong and that everyone, from the opposition through the media to the legal authorities, was conspiring against him." ...

"In an article in Foreign Policy, Harvard professor Stephen Walt, the renowned international relations neo-realist, had a much harder time piecing together a coherent worldview that can be ascribed to Trump: "America's New President is not a Rational Player," was its title. If one must find a common thread in the new administration's approach, Walt wrote: "Trump and some of his advisors (most notably Stephen Bannon) may be operating from a broad, Huntingtonian 'clash of civilizations' framework that informs both their aversion to multiculturalism at home and their identification of friends and foes abroad. In this essentially cultural, borderline racist worldview, the (mostly white) Judeo-Christian world is under siege from various 'other' forces, especially Muslims." ...

"But what puzzled my friends most of all was that Israelis seem unmoved by, if not completely ignorant of, Trump's erratic and problematic behavior. In the U.S., concerns about his emotional handicaps and incompetence to handle the presidency have not abated since his inauguration, but on the contrary. Trump's first extensive interview with ABC News, broadcast on Wednesday night, did nothing to allay the suspicion that the American Commander in Chief lives in his own La La Land." ...

"You're playing with fire, my frustrated interlocutors warned, clearly despondent by now. The same message was conveyed inside the INSS conference auditorium by noted political scientist and brilliant thinker Walter Russell Mead, who warned Israel not to embrace Trump too strongly lest it is irrevocably stained in the eyes of American public opinion. Former U.S. Ambassador Martin Indyk was bleaker by far: For the first time in my life, he said, I am concerned about the future of the Jewish people, in America and in Israel. The Jewish people, he explained, have prospered and thrived within the established Western order that has existed since the end of World War II. Trump is coming to the White House just as that order is under threat, for a variety of reasons, and he may bring the entire structure crashing down."

2) [Analysis Netanyahu's anti-Jewish Support for Trump's anti-Muslim Decree, Chemi Shalev, Haaretz, January 29, 2017](#)

"U.S President Donald Trump is a hero now for Muslim-haters who, in some countries, might even be the majority. He is being lauded by the hard-right in America, extolled as a man's man in Vladimir Putin's Russia, glorified as a god among racist parties in Europe and enjoys wall-to-wall support from his groupies in Israel, who are now being led, unabashedly, by Benjamin Netanyahu.

“On Saturday, the Israeli prime minister applauded Trump’s decision to set up a wall with Mexico, with the disputable claim, phrased in Trump-style syntax, “I built a wall along Israel's southern border. It stopped all illegal immigration. Great success. Great idea.” Netanyahu’s intervention on a topic that is in sharp political dispute in the U.S. is questionable enough, but the timing of his decision to identify so strongly with Trump, just after the president issued his executive order on Syrian refugees and Muslim immigrants - a move viewed widely as a declaration of hate against Muslims - is a reckless gamble. For no discernible rhyme, reason or political imperative, Netanyahu has placed himself - and Israel, by extension - solidly behind a morally dubious move and a leader who could soon become the world’s most hated.” ...

“Much of Muslim public opinion is likely to be outraged by Trump’s actions - and they will be aided and abetted by hostile governments and jihadist groups eager to stoke the flames of hate. Friendly regimes, in places such as Jordan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, will be under pressure to distance themselves from Washington. Preachers of radical Islam will be able to use the photo of Trump signing the order as proof of their age-old claim that America and the West are on a crusade against Islam. ISIS, which has been on the defensive for the past year and, according to some experts, on the verge of collapse, has been handed a propaganda victory and a new slogan for attracting new recruits.” ...

“Trump’s decision is also bound to increase tensions in the American Jewish community, between the right wing that has adopted and compounded their Israeli counterparts’ anti-Muslim narrative and the more centrist and moderate elements - including most of the Jewish establishment - that remains loyal to the community’s traditional liberal values. Most Jews still view themselves as a vulnerable minority, just like Muslims. Most are deeply committed to the values of immigration and sanctuary. Most still carry the traumatized memories of their parents and grandparents of an America that locked its gates for Jewish refugees fleeing the Nazis. Netanyahu’s imprudent encouragement of Trump, along with the overzealous welcome that Trump has received from the Israeli government, further expand the growing divide between the Jewish State and the world’s biggest Jewish diaspora.” ...

“Photos of Likud lawmakers who have been similarly struck dumb when asked about Netanyahu’s corruption charges and other shady shenanigans also deserve a place of honor in the same gallery of cowards. They and their patrons, Trump and Netanyahu, are the proverbial birds of a feather that mock us together.”

See also:

- a) [Opinion Trump's Refugee Ban Dishonors the Memory of the Jewish Holocaust Victims He Failed to Acknowledge](#)
- b) [Opinion A Stain on America's Conscience That Can Never Be Erased - and Should Never Be Forgotten](#)
- c) [Opinion Trump Has No Idea What a Syrian Refugee Camp Is Like. This Is What I Saw](#)
- d) [Analysis 'Great Success': The Sad, Historical Irony of Netanyahu's Support for Trump's Wall](#)
- e) [Hundreds of Jewish Studies Scholars Urge Congress to Block Trump's Muslim Ban](#)

3) [Is Trump really Netanyahu’s ‘dream president’?, Mazal Mualem, Al-Monitor, January 23, 2017](#)

“Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu also has taken advantage of this dynamic ever since returning to power in 2009. Whenever the Obama administration applied pressure on him, he cited his political constraints at home to show that he had limited space to maneuver politically. The more extreme the Likud Party grew, the more he could use this as an excuse.” ...

“Paradoxically, it is the Trump administration that presents Netanyahu with an unusually complex political and diplomatic challenge. Ostensibly, Netanyahu was just given the ‘president of his dreams’ on a platter. He could now fulfill all the deepest desires of the Israeli right. But since the Trump inauguration Jan. 20, Netanyahu has instead found himself trying to ward off a barrage of pressure from the right.” ...

“Suddenly, Netanyahu found himself in a position that he is not used to, one that could cause him serious harm among his power base on the right. He must now be the voice of moderation in his government and block any initiatives proposed by its more right-wing members.” ... “Furthermore, Trump is unpredictable, and Netanyahu does not know what his policy will be. For instance, will he really move the US Embassy to Jerusalem, or will he renege on his promise?” ...

“The question now is where things are headed in terms of the new administration’s policies. Furthermore, how long will Netanyahu be able to maneuver between the various diplomatic constraints and his personal struggle against his rivals, both in general and in the Likud?”

“This latter question is especially important now that the prime minister has a new rival in the coalition, the leader of Yisrael Beitenu, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman.” ... “He has also come out against Bennett, which is something that Netanyahu cannot allow himself to do right now.

“Caught between these pincer movements, with the criminal investigations into his dealings bearing down even harder on him, Netanyahu is vulnerable from every possible political angle. If his hard-core voting bloc starts trickling toward Bennett, he could find himself dragged toward extreme political initiatives, regardless of their ramifications in the international arena.”

4) [Donald Trump and the World Must Decide Where They Stand On Jerusalem: Justice or Occupation, Hanan Ashrawi, Newsweek, January 24, 2017](#)

“As President Donald Trump assumes power in Washington D.C., many in occupied Palestine are deeply alarmed about what the future holds for them. They fear for the two-state solution that for decades has been the internationally accepted framework for an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and an end to Israel’s military occupation of our lands, which is now in its 50th year.

“Some of Trump’s top advisors, including Jared Kushner, who has been named point person for Middle East peace, and David Friedman, his nominee for ambassador to Israel, have close ties to Israel’s settler movement and army, and have provided them with financial assistance. In effect, they have been aiding and abetting Israeli war crimes. In this context, repeated declarations that Trump will in fact move the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem, reversing nearly 70 years of American policy, are seen as an extreme act of provocation and aggression.

“The ramifications of such a move would be disastrous. It would be seen by many as evidence of U.S. involvement in an Israeli-defined religious war that risks turning the conflict into one between Jews on one side and Christians and Muslims on the other.” ...

“The same reactionary currents that propelled populist, misogynist, xenophobic, and racist leaders into power in the West have been ascendant for more than a decade in Israel. Each of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s coalitions has been more extremist, right-wing and dominated by settler interests than the last. Members of the current Israeli government see in Trump a partner for their oppressive, expansionist policies, believing he will provide additional impunity and cover for their lawlessness and criminality.” ...

“The U.S. and the world must decide where they stand. They can move immediately towards the two-state solution based on relevant U.N. resolutions and international law by applying pressure to bring Israel into compliance, including in regards to Jerusalem.

“Alternately, they can acknowledge that Israel is determined to perpetuate its occupation forever, in which case they should press Israel to grant equal rights for all the peoples who live under its control, including the right to citizenship,

regardless of their religion or race. It is a test of the international community's integrity and commitment to peace and justice."

See also:

- a) [France Condemns Israeli Housing Plans for East Jerusalem](#)
- b) [How the Surge in East Jerusalem Construction Plans Could Spell End of Two-state Solution](#)
- c) [Chinese President Calls for East Jerusalem as Capital of Palestinian State](#)
- d) [Has Trump come to his senses on moving the U.S. embassy to Jerusalem?](#)
- e) [Which Jerusalem will Trump recognize?](#)

5) [Opinion America Uber Alles, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, Jan 22, 2017](#)

"Just translate the inauguration speech into German and you've got 'Deutschland uber Alles.' The same spirit, the same intention. 'Germany, Germany above all,' just as 'it's going to be only America first, America first.' 'German women, German loyalty / German wine and German song,' just like 'American hands and American labor.' 'Towards these let us all strive / Brotherly with heart and hand!' Just like 'When America is united, America is totally unstoppable.'" ...

"Populism poured from his every remark, fascism — without violence, as yet — from every sentence. Anyone who says 'one heart, one home, and one glorious destiny,' is speaking fascism. Anyone who talks about 'the red blood of patriots' and 'the great American flag' cannot but evoke unbearable memories. Anyone who promises power to the people while appointing mainly disconnected billionaires and not a single regular person to the highest positions, is a dangerous pretender." ...

"A new era, he promised. His voice will echo throughout the world and will become a source of inspiration and legitimacy for the extreme right, from Marine Le Pen and Narendra Modi to the Sweden Democrats and the freedom parties of Austria and Netherlands to our very own Bezalel Smotrich of Habayit Hayehudi. They will all grow stronger now, aided by the tailwind from America. Ultranationalists of the world, unite. All of the xenophobes, the racists, the anti-minority and anti-Arab people — and the anti-Semites as well — will lift up their heads and say: Look at Washington, from there the law goes forth." ...

"But it is impossible to ignore Trump's remark that the United States has 'subsidized the armies of other countries ... and spent trillions and trillions of dollars overseas. ... But that is the past.' If that does not apply to Israel, then to whom does it apply?

"'[W]e are protected, and we will always be protected. We will be protected by the great men and women of our military and law enforcement and, most importantly, we are protected by God,' said No. 45. And who will protect us from someone who speaks like that?"

See also:

- a) [Analysis Best-case Scenario? Trump Is Just a Dangerous Demagogue](#)
- b) [Analysis On Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, Trump Switches From Bravado to Cautious Diplomacy](#)
- c) [Inside the religious West Bank settlement that forged President Trump's Israel policy](#)

6) [Israeli Intel Warns Netanyahu Against Pushing Trump to Undo Iran Deal, Amos Harel, Haaretz, January 20, 2017](#)

"Fasten your seat belts, it's going to be a bumpy ride. Donald Trump, who will be sworn in as the 45th president of the United States on Friday, seems set to transform the global agenda, as well as the style in which decisions are made and

implemented in Washington. When Trump promises the American people an ‘unprecedented’ presidency, we have to believe him — even if the term or two he spends in office develop in unanticipated directions.

“During his election campaign, Trump promised that after he takes office he will tear up the Vienna agreement on limiting Iran’s nuclear program that Tehran signed with the six powers in July 2015. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on CBS’ ‘60 Minutes’ last month that he has ‘at least five ideas in mind’ for how Trump could undo the agreement and that he would reveal them when the two meet. Netanyahu is expected to be one of the first foreign leaders to meet with the new president.

“Some figures in Israel’s defense establishment think differently. According to one intelligence assessment that was presented to Netanyahu recently, a U.S. decision to revoke the Vienna agreement could be a serious error.

“Israeli intelligence organizations had a lot of criticism for what they saw as gaps and errors in the agreement when it was signed, but in the year and a half since then they seem to have concluded that it is quite stable and that Iran is in compliance with it, over all.” ...

“It is possible to persuade the incoming president to act to curb Iran’s activity in the production of ballistic missiles, its regional subversion and its aid to terror organizations. But precisely the act of cancelling the agreement will negate the legitimacy of our positions in the international community. When a conflict with Iran develops, the other powers will blame us for dragging Trump into doing this. They will not come to our aid,’ Yadlin said.” ...

Links to recent CMEP Bulletins:

- a) [CMEP Bulletin - “Peace = 2-States,” says World at Paris Conference. January 20, 2017](#)

[Paris Peace Conference Urges Israel, Palestinians To Recommit To Two-State Solution \[BICOM\]](#)

[World Leaders Push Israel and Trump to Forge a 2-State Deal \[The New York Times\]](#)

[Read Full Concluding Statement of Paris Peace Conference \[Haaretz\]](#)

[For the first time, Democrats are about as pro-Palestinian as pro-Israel \[The Washington Post\]](#)

[Why Security Council Resolution 2334 Matters a Lot More Than We Think \[Tikkun\]](#)

[Mattis Sticks With US Policy: The Capital of Israel is Tel Aviv \[CNN\]](#).

- b) [CMEP Bulletin – Is the US Embassy Moving to Jerusalem? – January 27, 2017](#)

[Trump Said Set To Halt Funding For UN Agencies, Other Groups That Give PA, PLO Full Membership \[The Times of Israel\]](#)

[A One-State Solution Would Bring Economic Disaster \[+972\]](#)