

# Middle East Notes

## Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

### September 20, 2012



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*Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.*

This week's Middle East Notes includes an article from the most recent issue of Cornerstone, Sabeel's newsletter, with subscription information. Also included are articles supporting the two state solution; Israel's part in the Mideast nuclear arms race; the role of the Oslo Accord in strengthening the occupation; rabbis decrying the Latrun Monastery desecration; and words about the recent hate driven anti-Muslim video.

- **September 17, 2012 Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin:** This week's Bulletin highlights continuing protests by Palestinians concerned about the deteriorating economic conditions in the West Bank under Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad; seven years of Gaza blockage; price tag update and other items.
- **Children in Israeli military detention:** In the lead article in Sabeel's Cornerstone magazine, Gerard Horton writes of the harsh and illegal detention of Palestinian children by the Israeli Defense Force. [Also included is a link to the entire issue #63 of Cornerstone, "Breaking a generation." Middle East Notes encourages its readers to become members of Friends of Sabeel-North America (FOSNA). An annual donation of any amount includes a one-year subscription to the Cornerstone, the quarterly publication of the Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Center in Jerusalem. For more information click [www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org) or [www.fosna.org](http://www.fosna.org).]
- **The defeatism of the Left:** Akiva Eldar in Ha'aretz writes that a binational state is not a solution, but rather a flight from reality and a recipe for perpetuating a duel between two nations. Anyone who gives up on a peace agreement between two states is gambling with the fate of the State of Israel.
- **If Israel wants to end the race, let it get rid of its nukes:** Larry Derfner writes in +972 that Iran didn't start the Mideast nuclear arms race – Israel did.
- **Rabbis: Monastery desecration "shocking":** Kobi Nahshoni in YnetNews relates that dozens of prominent Jewish religious leaders, including chief rabbis, sent a letter of sympathy to the Latrun Monastery abbot. "We deeply regret the disrespect you were shown by members of our religion and people," they write.
- **An agreement on indefinite occupation:** Oslo celebrates 19 years: Noam Sheizaf writes in +972 that regardless of the intentions of the people signing it, there is no denying what the Oslo Accords and the Paris Protocol have become: providers of the legal framework and international legitimacy for the oppression of millions.
- **How a hate-driven anti-Muslim film led to the death of four U.S. diplomats:** James Wall quotes extensively from Juan Cole who offered "the butterfly effect" as the metaphor which explains how a small film led to the deaths of four U.S. diplomats in Libya, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens.

#### 1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, September 17, 2012

**Palestinians protest PA:** Palestinians continued to take to the streets last week to protest the deteriorating economic conditions in the West Bank under Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud

Abbas and Prime Minister Salam Fayyad. The protests around the West Bank coincide with the 19<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Oslo Accords signing on September 13, 1993, an agreement that laid the groundwork for the PA and came with flaws and shortcomings that many believe are now harming the Palestinian economy and compromising a future viable state.

Fayyad is a renowned U.S.-educated economist, credited for attracting international donors, especially from the West, to invest in institutions that will provide the building blocks of a Palestinian state. However, many Palestinians have been critical of Palestinian reliance on foreign aid. Now that donors are scaling back or withholding pledged funds, the PA is [unable to pay the salaries](#) of nearly 150,000 people on the government payroll, many protestors blame Fayyad. The PA's recent decision to increase revenue by raising taxes is also a driving force behind the protestors' call to have him ousted. On Tuesday, Fayyad announced [he will reverse the tax hikes](#), but activists say that is not enough to solve the economic crisis that has contributed to a 19 percent unemployment rate in the West Bank.

In addition to citing the decrease in foreign aid, both Fayyad and Abbas say the Israeli occupation is hindering economic development by restricting movement and access to resources. Abbas [defended his government](#) by saying, "We are not free to bring in whatever we want, goods or people, or to export... So long as there is occupation, I cannot do what I want."

Another issue drawing the protestors' ire is the Oslo Accords. The first Oslo Agreement in 1993 established the Palestinian Authority and allowed it to set up limited self-government in parts of the West Bank for a period of five years while final status negotiations were to take place. Nineteen years later, the PA is still in control and negotiations have not progressed. Months after Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat signed Oslo Accords at the White House the parties added an annex called the [Paris Protocol](#) that determined customs and tax rates. Palestinian news agency [Ma'an News explains](#), "The Protocol gave Israel sole control over Palestine's external trade, and collection of customs duties... It also pegs VAT [Value Added Tax] to Israeli tax rates, currently at 17 percent, despite the huge disparity in average Palestinian and Israeli incomes."

This week officials in the PA inquired about reevaluating the protocol to find a better solution, but Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon went on Israeli radio and [rejected the idea](#) since there has been no progress on the diplomatic front and Palestinians are threatening to take unilateral steps in the UN.

However, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu [ordered a transfer of \\$63 million in tax revenues](#) that Israel has collected on behalf of the PA. He said, "We are working on several fronts in order to help the Palestinian (National) Authority cope with its economic problems. We have made several changes in the taxation agreements. We are advancing certain transfers... Of course, there is a global reality and it is also related to the internal management of every economy, but for our part we are making efforts to help the Palestinian (National) Authority survive this crisis. I hope that they will succeed in doing so; this is in our common interest."

**Seven years after Gaza disengagement:** On September 12, 2005, Israel completed the unilateral disengagement from Gaza. That day, Israeli Army Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Dan Halutz told the media, "We are leaving with our heads held high. The decision to leave Gaza was made out of strength, and with it comes a [hope for a better future](#)." The Palestinian Authority gained control of Gaza that day, marking the [first time that it had control of a defined territory](#). The *New York Times* reported that, "Gaza is seen as a testing ground for Palestinian aspirations of statehood."

Seven years later, the situation in Gaza has deteriorated. While the freedom of movement briefly eased inside the strip following the disengagement, after the 2006 elections that brought Hamas into the government Israel began a blockade that became even more severe after Hamas' forcible takeover of

the coastal enclave. Today, Israel has an ongoing aerial, land and sea blockade and total control over the movement of goods, people, water and electricity in the region.

A report released by the UN last month [highlights the severity of the humanitarian crisis](#) in Gaza. By 2020, estimates indicate that Gaza will have over half a million more people and if the infrastructure does not keep pace, the situation could become drastically worse. In 2011 the unemployment rate was 29 percent and 60 percent of households were food insecure or vulnerable to food insecurity. The report says to keep up with the population increase, 440 additional schools, 800 hospital beds and more than 1,000 doctors will be needed in the next eight years. ...

**Price tag update:** Last week there were more incidents of defacement and violence against Palestinians and their property by Israeli settlers. On September 12, vandals with suspected “nationalistic motives” [spray-painted a mosque](#) south of Hebron, scrawling “Price tag Migron” in reference to a recently dismantled settler outpost.

Last week in Jerusalem, an alleged racially motivated assault left one Arab man hospitalized after his car was surrounded and he was beaten. [Six Israeli teens were indicted](#) the crime on Wednesday and face aggravated battery charges; two of them are also accused of theft.

As a result of the rise of hate crimes and price tag incidents, Israeli Internal Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch announced this week that a [new police unit will be established](#) to combat the phenomenon. He said, “We must institute a zero tolerance policy against terror, the desecration of religious institutions, attacks on symbols of governance and attacks commonly known as ‘price tag.’”

**Further reading:** Timothy Cardinal Dolan, president of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, [sent a letter to Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal](#) in response to last week’s price tag attack on a monastery. He wrote, “We join in your call to Israeli authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice” and “to ensure a ‘teaching of respect’ in schools” so as to put an end to acts of discrimination, intimidation and violence.... Our prayers continue to be with you in this trying time as we continue to hope that dialogue and understanding involving all parties in the Holy Land will triumph over division and intolerance.”

*Reuters* explores the [challenges facing farmers](#) in the West Bank. The author cites a report that says, “The economy has lost access to 40 percent of West Bank land, 82 percent of its ground water, and more than two thirds of its grazing land.” The limited resources mean Palestinian farmers cannot match the quality or prices of Israeli produce.

Linda Gradstein writes about a group of Israeli and Palestinian women who have opened small businesses together to [sell jointly made craft projects](#). One woman said, “For the past three years, we have been meeting in homes in Israel and Palestine and learning about each other’s reality. We are trying to promote peace in our own small way.”

[Read the entire Bulletin at the CMEP website.](#)

## **2) Children in Israeli military detention**

Gerard Horton, Cornerstone  
Summer & Fall 2012

*The following article was printed in [Issue #63 of Cornerstone](#), the publication of Sabeel Ecumenical Liberation Theology Centre in Jerusalem.*

Immediately following the end of hostilities in June 1967, an Israeli military commander signed an order imposing military law on all Palestinians living in the recently occupied territory. At the time this order was legal under international law on the basis that it was a temporary measure and Israeli forces would shortly withdraw. Forty-five years later, 2.5 million Palestinian men, women and children continue to live under Israeli military law in the West Bank contrary to the most basic of democratic principles – a situation that can no longer claim any legitimacy in law.

This much is well known. What is perhaps less known is how this military legal system is used to control and dominate generation after generation of Palestinians living under occupation, and suppress the legitimate aspirations of a people seeking self-determination. Indeed, the importance of the military detention system in controlling the civilian population is perhaps best illustrated by the fact that since June 1967, more than 730,000 Palestinians have been detained and prosecuted in the military courts, including 500 to 700 children each year.

The journey to imprisonment for many Palestinian children begins at a friction point. These points of friction include: Israeli settlements built in violation of international law and located close to Palestinian villages; roads used by the Israeli army and settlers connecting the settlements; and the Wall, built for the most part, many kilometers on the Palestinian side of the 1967 border. At these points of friction, demonstrations, arrests and stone throwing frequently occur, as people vent their frustration against prolonged military occupation and the wholesale disregard for the rule of law.

The Israeli army's response to unrest at the friction points is to ensure that no incident of resistance, regardless of its seriousness, remains unpunished. The thinking behind this policy is that the Palestinian civilian population must be made to understand that all forms of resistance are futile, in the belief that this is the best way to ensure a life of calm and normalcy for the 500,000 Israeli civilians living in the illegal settlements. But what options does an army have when a stone is thrown at a vehicle in occupied territory and the perpetrator cannot be identified? If the incident goes unpunished, surely more stones will be thrown the following day leading quickly to a breakdown in military authority? The solution to this dilemma developed over the past 45 years is simple, if not legal.

The first stage in the response involves an assumption that the person throwing the stone came from the nearest Palestinian village. The next step involves compiling a list of young men and boys from the village who have either been arrested before, or whose names are given up by others during interrogation, or are obtained from informants. Several days later, and with a list of names compiled, a convoy of military vehicles will leave their bases, usually in the middle of the night, and converge on the unsuspecting village. Now the retaliatory arrests will begin.

*[Read the entire article in Issue #63 of Cornerstone, "Breaking a generation."](#)*

*A one-year membership in Friends of Sabeel-North America (FOSNA) costs just one donation during the year, of any amount. Membership includes a one-year subscription to the Cornerstone, Sabeel's quarterly publication. FOSNA members receive Cornerstone by regular mail but may "go green" by opting for a "no mail" PDF version, posted [here](#). If you want to go green, write [friends@fosna.org](mailto:friends@fosna.org).*

### **3) The defeatism of the left**

Akiva Eldar, Ha'aretz  
September 10, 2012

The settlers are right. Had today's Zionist left been leading the Jewish community here in the 1940s there is a good chance we never would have had a state. Had those who lay proud claim to being "the peace camp," who explain how "it's impossible to evict 300,000 settlers," been running the show in the

early '50s, the Yishuv – with its population of 600,000 – would never have taken in one million Jews. The word “irreversible” does not exist in the vocabulary of the settlers. They did not say that the Oslo Accords spelled the death knoll of their enterprise. The settlers adhere to their faith all the way to another outpost and another coalition government, and the left cries all the way to nowhere.

While the settlers build house after house and destroy the peace process stage after stage, the honorable members of the Zionist left announce one after another the capitulation to “the will of the people.” In exchange for the idea of partition, they propose, accompanied by heartrending sighs, that we begin to prepare for a binational state. It’s like a marriage counselor who advises a couple that has been making each other miserable for decades to go on living together in order to avoid divvying up their assets. Instead of helping them to separate amicably, co-parent successfully and build independent new lives, the counselor urges them to perpetuate their misery.

The desperate leftists propose joining together two hostile communities with a bloody feud between them and endless prejudices about each other. For 64 years the Jewish community realized the Zionist vision using discriminatory immigration and residential laws, unequal division of resources and hegemony over religious and national symbols. For 45 years a Jewish minority has deprived the Palestinian collective in the occupied territories of political rights and violated the dignity, property rights and freedom of movement of millions of human beings.

[\*Read the entire article on the Ha'aretz website.\*](#)

#### **4) If Israel wants to end the race, let it get rid of its nukes**

Larry Derfner - +972

September 9, 2012

Nearly all the frightening forecasts of what life would be like with a nuclear Iran strike me as being hollow. I’m not worried about Iran nuking Israel – because the Iranians don’t want to commit suicide. I’m not worried about Iran giving nukes to terror organizations that would nuke Israel – because Israel’s second-strike capacity, with its estimated 200 nuclear bombs, would devastate the Islamic world and the Islamic world knows it. I’m not worried that Iran’s “proxies,” such as Hezbollah and Hamas, would feel free under an Iranian “nuclear umbrella” to attack Israel at will – because, again, the Iranians don’t want to commit suicide. And I’m not worried that terrified Israelis or the money of terrified foreign investors would leave the country en masse – because this never happened in any of the many, many other countries of the world that have nuclear-armed enemies.

But I said “nearly” all the forecasts are hollow; one strikes me as being very realistic: that a nuclear Iran would set off a Middle East nuclear arms race, which would be highly destabilizing, escalate tensions and create the possibility that somebody would start a nuclear war simply out of fear of being attacked first.

If Iran gets nuclear weapons, it makes perfect sense to me that Egypt, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Syria and other countries around here would want to follow suit ASAP. In fact, even if Iran doesn’t get nuclear weapons, I see no reason why other ambitious countries, in the Middle East and elsewhere, wouldn’t want to build or otherwise acquire their own. All the best countries have them, don’t they? (Except Germany and Japan, but that could change one day.)

This is not good; nuclear proliferation is very dangerous, especially in a place like the Middle East, and it should be prevented if possible. So Israel and the U.S. do have one solid argument for why Iran must be prevented from going nuclear at all costs.

The problem is – who the hell is Israel or the U.S. to tell anyone not to go nuclear? Who is Israel or the U.S. to start a war with Iran for the sake of enforcing nuclear non-proliferation in the Middle East?

[Read the entire article on the +972 website.](#)

### **5) Rabbis: Monastery desecration “shocking”**

Kobi Nahshoni, YnetNews  
September 11, 2012

Dozens of prominent rabbis from [Israel](#) and Europe, including former and present chief rabbis, have written a letter of condemnation and sympathy to leaders of the Latrun Monastery, which was [desecrated by vandals](#).

This significant move was made in a bid to calm tensions with the Christian world following the suspected “price tag” attack by right-wing activists. On Sunday, following their morning prayers, the Latrun Monastery monks were addressed by Alon Goshen-Gottstein, director of the Elijah Interfaith Institute, who presented them with the rabbis’ letter.

“We would like to express our shock in light of the acts of vandalism directed at your monastery, the kind of which have been directed in recent months against other churches and mosques across the country,” they wrote. “We deeply regret the disrespect you were shown by members of our religion and people.”

In the letter, addressed to the monastery’s abbot, Father Rene, the rabbis wrote that Jews are compelled by the Torah to show respect to every single person, regardless of their faith. “We believe there is no room for expressions of hatred and hostility towards any person of a different faith... Our Torah’s ways are pleasant and peaceful.” ...

The letter’s signatories include former Sephardic Chief Rabbi Eliyahu Bakshi Doron; Rabbi She’ar Yashuv Hacohen, chair of the Council for Dialogue between Judaism and Islam; Rabbis Jonathan Sacks, Gilles Bernheim, Berel Lazar and Michael Schudrich – the chief rabbis of Britain, France, Russia and Poland (respectively); Rabbi Menachem of the settlement of Tekoa, Rabbi Yuval Sherlo of the Petah Tikvah Hesder Yeshiva and Rabbi Michael Melchior.

### **6) An agreement on indefinite occupation: Oslo celebrates 19 years**

Noam Sheizaf, +972  
September 13, 2012

Today, (September 13) 19 years ago, hours before the Oslo agreement was signed in Washington, I set foot for the first time in Gaza. Our unit was sent for a week of foot patrols and flying checkpoints. Our commanders, who had been to the West Bank and Gaza in the past, were shocked to see the PLO flags that marked the signing of the agreement hanging in the streets. Until that day, flying a Palestinian flag was forbidden. It was a sign – an important one – that the occupation was ending.

The night before our deployment was tense – we had many leftists in our ranks, and at least one considered refusing to serve in the occupied territories. He was met with fierce pressure and threats from our commanders; but no argument had as strong an effect as the feeling that the entire occupation was about to end anyway. It made sense for us to help bring this temporary situation to an end, many in our ranks rationalized.

A couple of years later, I was back in Gaza. This time, my unit was in charge of the busy road between Khan Yunis and Gaza City. At a moment's notice, we could cut the Strip in two. We often did. The pretext for our deployment there was the existence of – how surprising – a settlement. Unlike in the days before the Israeli withdrawal from Gazan cities under Oslo, Palestinians couldn't enter Israel anymore, so the effect of the entire agreement on the local population was [essentially a siege](#). So much for peace.

The same cycle of hope and disillusionment happened to me a year later in Hebron, after my unit transferred control over parts of the city to the Palestinian Authority. Since then, things have gotten much worse for the local population. Settlements in and around the city have expanded, and the IDF's Civil Administration began pushing the Palestinians in the areas under Israeli control, especially south of the Hebron, into the cities, and declaring their lands natural reserves, archaeological sites or military training zones. Israel didn't evacuate one settlement under this peace treaty. Instead, it began evacuating Palestinians.

A favourite intellectual exercise in progressive circles is the argument over the intentions behind the Oslo process. Some say it was an Israeli-American plot to deepen Israeli control of the Palestinian Territories; others view it as a noble effort gone wrong. Personally, I believe in the good intentions of Rabin, less so of Peres. It's also clear that the pro-Israel bias of the Americans allowed Jerusalem to avoid the removal of the settlements, which meant that the agreement was bound to fail from the start.

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)

## 7) [How a hate-driven anti-Muslim film led to the death of four U.S. diplomats](#)

James M. Wall, Wallwritings  
September 13, 2012

Leave it to [Juan Cole](#) to come up with just the right metaphor to interpret the events in Libya and Egypt this week. Cole knows the Middle East and he has the writing skills to clarify the complexities of the region and how they interact with U.S. politics as they unfold. Cole is a public intellectual, prominent blogger (*Informed Comment*) and essayist. He is also the Richard P. Mitchell Collegiate Professor of History at the University of Michigan.

After reflecting on the chaotic series of events that began with a clumsy, fraudulent YouTube preview of an anti-Muslim film produced in California, Cole offered "the butterfly effect" as the metaphor which explains how a small film led to the deaths of four U.S. diplomats in Libya, including the U.S. Ambassador to Libya J. Christopher Stevens.

Cole begins his blog posting:

*The late science fiction writer Ray Bradbury authored a short story about time travelers. They were careful, when they went back to the Jurassic, not to change anything, but one of them stepped on a butterfly. When they got back to the present, the world was slightly different.*

*When scientists studying complexity put forward the idea that small initial events could have large effects in non-linear, dynamic systems like the weather, they chose the term "butterfly effect." One of the images students of weather instanced was that a butterfly flapping its wings might set off minor turbulence that ultimately turned into a hurricane.*

Cole's butterfly metaphor begins this narrative describing the death of four U.S. diplomats, with a man initially known as "Sam Bacile", who claimed to have directed the film, *The Innocence of Muslims*. The Associated Press traced the history of this "Sam Bacile," and discovered that he most likely does not

exist. The false name is a persona used by a convicted Coptic Egyptian fraudster, [Nakoula Bassely Nakoula](#). ...

Cole suspects “that most of the Egyptian Copts involved are converts to American-style fundamentalism.” The Egyptian Coptic church has roundly condemned the film. Nor is this the first time that western anti-Islam sub-cultures have found ways to attack Islam and the Prophet Muhammad.

In a perceptive analysis of the effects of the trailer (apparently no one has even seen a longer version, which suggests it does not exist) for the hate-driven film on the politics of the Middle East and of the U.S. presidential race, the Cairo-based English-language web site, *Ahram Online*, made the connection between the dregs of western culture and the impact these dregs make on Islam. *Al-Ahram Online* is published by Al-Ahram Establishment, Egypt’s largest news organization.

[Chief Editor of Ahram Online, Hani Shukrallah](#), wrote after the Egypt and Libya uprisings: “We need only recall the 2005-6 Danish cartoons episode. The insignificant Danish newspaper that triggered the hullabaloo had been transparently out to trigger a reaction from Muslims, and a reaction it got. Nor do I have the least doubt that the [Florida] Christian fundamentalist preacher who publicly set a copy of the Qur’an on fire was also deliberately out to goad Muslims into a reaction.

“The obvious, outward motive of such attempts is not difficult to discern: to show Muslims as irrational, violent, intolerant and barbaric, all of which are attributes profoundly inscribed into the racist anti-Muslim discourse in the West. And, it’s a very safe bet that there will be among us those who will readily oblige.

“I can guess at two additional motives, one of an immediate, narrowly targeted nature, and the other considerably more general and strategic in nature.

“America is hurtling towards presidential elections in which Barak Hussein Obama is running for a second term. For large sections of the American Christian Right (closely allied to rightwing Zionism), Obama is, if not the anti-Christ, then at the very least a Muslim mole planted in the White House.

“For his part, Obama, from the very start of his presidency, had set out to douse the fires of the ‘clash of civilizations,’ then still raging courtesy of Messrs Bush and Bin Laden, among others. An editorial in the *New York Times* commenting on Obama’s famous address to the Muslim world from Cairo University, lauded him for having ‘steered away from the poisonous post-9/11 clash of civilizations mythology that drove so much of President George W. Bush’s rhetoric and disastrous policy.’

To reignite ‘the clash’ in some form serves to bolster the American Right as a whole, the American Christian Right (which is a mainstay of the Republican Party) in particular, while at the same time undermining Obama, who at best had acted to bring this clash to an end, and at worst is ‘a bloody Muslim’ himself.

A much broader motivation, which does not exclude Obama as target, is to tarnish, even to deny the very existence of an Arab Spring.”

[Read the entire piece on Wall’s website, Wallwritings.](#)