

# Middle East Notes

## Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

### January 31, 2013



[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

*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 features articles on the recent Israeli elections, continuing settlement activity, the hope for and viability of the two state solutions, and sources for international news on Palestine.

- The **January 18 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin** highlights continued settlement growth, the Israeli elections, the relationship between Obama and Netanyahu, and other issues.
- The **January 25 CMEP Bulletin** notes that John Kerry expects to be engaged in a peace process between the Israelis and Palestinians while Church leaders see a twilight in the two state peace solution; also included is information and background on the recent Israeli elections.
- **Obama: "Israel doesn't know what its best interests are":** In Bloomberg news Jeffrey Goldberg states that Israel doesn't seem to know what its best interests are. He writes what Obama wants is recognition by Netanyahu that Israel's settlement policies are foreclosing on the possibility of a two-state solution.
- **Compassion for Israelis in 2013?** Ilan Pappé writes in the Electric Intifada of his compassion for Israelis after a recent visit to Haifa during which he met a few of his acquaintances who in the past deemed him at best as deluded and at worst as a traitor.
- **U.S. protests "State of Palestine" placard in UN:** The Associated Press reports that the U.S. has protested the use of the "State of Palestine" placard in UN. Susan Rice said that the United States does not recognize the General Assembly vote in November "as bestowing Palestinian 'statehood' or recognition."
- **U.S.: Two-state solution cannot wait:** Yitzak Benhorin writes in the Israel News that though officially waiting for Israeli coalition to form, the U.S. is implying that the two-state solution cannot wait; negotiations must resume.
- **Palestinians: Apartheid state if Netanyahu wins:** Mohammed Daragmeh writes in the Associated Press that the Palestinians face an apartheid state if Netanyahu wins the election (which he did.) The Palestinian president warns that Benjamin Netanyahu's victory in the election could lead to an Arab-majority country in the Holy Land that will eventually replace what is now Israel—unless he pursues a more moderate path of a two state solution to the conflict.
- **Real democracy – a Palestinian-Israeli vote share:** Jews for Justice for Palestinians post three articles featuring stories of Israelis sharing their votes in the recent elections with Palestinians.

**Plus:** Check out the latest [NGO Action News from the UN Department of Political Affairs](#) -- it lists activities and publications by NGOs around the world that are active on the question of Palestine.

## 1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin for January 18, 2013

**Record settlement growth met with dramatic protest:** As election forecasts show Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cruising to a new term, Peace Now has released a review of his government's settlement policies since 2009. The anti-settlement watchdog group says facts point to a leader whose has "used settlements as a tool to systematically undermine the chances of achieving a viable, realistic two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict..." With Netanyahu encountering little meaningful opposition to his plans from leaders at home and abroad, Palestinian nonviolent protestors took dramatic action last Friday, January 11 that some say could be a "turning point."

According to Peace Now's figures, in 2012 the Netanyahu government approved 3,148 bids on new settlement construction, the highest in a decade. Since 2009 almost 40 percent of the new building sites were in what the organization calls "isolated settlements," and not the existing built-up blocs that the Israeli government says will be a part of Israel in any deal to create a Palestinian state. In "past years," the number was closer to 20 percent.

Last year, the Netanyahu government also became the first since the Yitzhak Shamir government in 1988-1990 to establish new settlements in the West Bank when it declared four previously illegal outposts to be official settlements. Six other illegal outposts were incorporated into "neighborhoods" of existing settlements. In East Jerusalem, the Netanyahu government approved the establishment of Givat Hamatos, the first new settlement in the aspirational Palestinian capital since Netanyahu's first term as prime minister in 1997.

Last Friday, 200 Palestinians took action to protest the unrepentant settlement construction by descending on a hill in the controversial occupied E-1 area and pitching tents, "a tactic more commonly employed by Jewish settlers who establish wildcat outposts in the West Bank." The activists established the village, Bab al-Shams (Gate of the Sun), on privately owned Palestinian land with the full permission of the landowners. The protest came six weeks after the Netanyahu government announced plans to build on E-1, the area east of Jerusalem that many analysts say would threaten the contiguity of a future Palestinian state.

The leaders of the movement say they organized in secret knowing that the Israeli security forces monitor social media accounts. They had announced there would be event in Jericho on Jan. 10-13 and did not reveal the real destination and purpose to supporters until the last minute. Mahmoud Zawahra, one of the protest leaders, described the tent village as "constructive resistance. He said, "We are part of a non-violent resistance movement. For us, this is occupied land so we created a village to stop the Israeli plan to build a settlement here...We will resist evacuation in a non-violent way."

One Open Zion writer points out, "The Palestinian activists last week hoped to receive the same gentle treatment as the founders of the Migron outpost east of Ramallah, who were allowed to remain on private Palestinian land for more than ten years by indulgent Israeli governments, despite repeated High Court rulings demanding their removal. But no such luck." ...

[Read the entire Bulletin on CMEP's website.](#)

## 2) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin for January 25, 2013

**Kerry expects to be engaged in peace process:** Secretary of State nominee John Kerry told senators at his confirmation hearing on Thursday: “I pray that maybe this will be a moment that will allow us to renew the effort to bring the parties to the negotiating table and go down a different path than the one they were on in the last few years. I would like to try and do that.”

Israeli officials say that they expect Kerry to be engaged personally. Ha’aretz reports that “Kerry will not appoint a special envoy for the peace process and will instead come personally to visit and evaluate the situation.” The paper reports that Kerry will likely visit some time next month.

One official told the paper, “President Obama does not intend to deal with the Israeli-Palestinian issue personally, and will give Kerry full authority, independence and support on the matter ... If Kerry thinks there is a chance for progress in the peace process he will invest personal effort in it and will come to the region frequently. But if he sees after a few visits that there is no will from the parties to progress, he will go and deal with other issues such as Africa or relations with China and Russia.”

**Israeli election results are in:** Israelis went to the polls on Tuesday, January 22 to determine the makeup of the new Knesset and the prime minister’s coalition. Experts predict that Israeli President Shimon Peres will select Benjamin Netanyahu to form the next government and in the coming weeks, we will be able to see what it will look like.

A quick recap of how the Israeli election system works: voters pick one party to vote for and every party that gets above two percent can get at least one seat in the Knesset. The proportion of the popular vote determines the number of seats each party receives. Shimon Peres, the president, picks the party leader most likely to create a 61-seat majority in the Knesset. He or she then has 42 days to finalize a coalition.

The selected leader courts other parties to convince them to join and vote for a coalition. The election almost resulted in a tie between the right-religious parties and the center-left and Arab parties. Netanyahu will still be the prime minister, though he received less support than was previously projected. Former journalist Yair Lapid of the centrist Yesh Atid party was unexpectedly successful, and right wing Jewish Home party leader Naftali Bennett was less popular than anticipated.

Though Lapid’s platform appeared to support a two-state solution, the occupation in general was more of a sidebar in his campaign. Domestic issues such as taxes and affordable housing were the primary focus of his campaign. Lapid has stated that he is disinterested in engaging with a government that is not seriously invested in pursuing peace with the Palestinians. Lapid was quoted October, saying that “We are not looking for a happy marriage with the Palestinians, but for a divorce agreement we can live with.” On Thursday, Netanyahu offered Lapid the choice between Finance Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs. Lapid seems hesitant to take on foreign affairs, and others have pointed out that, based on his platform, his should be more interested in the finance role. ...

[Read the entire Bulletin on CMEP’s website.](#)

### 3) Obama: "Israel doesn't know what its best interests are"

Jeffrey Goldberg, Bloomberg, January 14, 2013

Shortly after the United Nations General Assembly voted in late November to upgrade the status of the Palestinians, the government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced that it would advance plans to establish a settlement in an area of the West Bank known as E-1, and that it would build 3,000 additional housing units in east Jerusalem and the West Bank.

A large settlement in E-1, an empty zone between Jerusalem and the Jewish settlement city of Maaleh Adumim, would make the goal of politically moderate Palestinians -- the creation of a geographically contiguous state -- much harder to achieve.

The world reacted to the E-1 announcement in the usual manner: It condemned the plans as a provocation and an injustice. President Barack Obama's administration, too, criticized it. "We believe these actions are counterproductive and make it harder to resume direct negotiations or achieve a two-state solution," said Tommy Vietor, a spokesman for the National Security Council.

**"Best interests":** But what didn't happen in the White House after the announcement is actually more interesting than what did.

When informed about the Israeli decision, Obama, who has a famously contentious relationship with the prime minister, didn't even bother getting angry. He told several people that this sort of behavior on Netanyahu's part is what he has come to expect, and he suggested that he has become inured to what he sees as self-defeating policies of his Israeli counterpart.

In the weeks after the UN vote, Obama said privately and repeatedly, "Israel doesn't know what its own best interests are." With each new settlement announcement, in Obama's view, Netanyahu is moving his country down a path toward near-total isolation.

And if Israel, a small state in an inhospitable region, becomes more of a pariah -- one that alienates even the affections of the U.S., its last steadfast friend -- it won't survive. Iran poses a short-term threat to Israel's survival; Israel's own behavior poses a long-term one.

The dysfunctional relationship between Netanyahu and Obama is poised to enter a new phase. Next week, Israeli voters will probably return Netanyahu to power, this time at the head of a coalition even more intractably right-wing than the one he currently leads.

Obama has always had a complicated relationship with the prime minister. On matters of genuine security, Obama has been a reliable ally, encouraging close military cooperation, helping maintain Israel's qualitative military edge over its regional rivals and, most important, promising that he won't allow Iran to cross the nuclear-weapons threshold.

Yet even this support didn't keep Netanyahu from pulling for Republican candidate Mitt Romney in last year's presidential campaign. ...

[Read the entire piece on the Bloomberg News website.](#)

#### 4) Compassion for Israelis in 2013?

**Ilan Pappé, The Electric Intifada, January 4, 2013**

I have just spent the last few days of 2012 in the city of Haifa. Accidentally, I met a few of my acquaintances who in the past deemed me at best as deluded and at worst as a traitor. They seemed more embarrassed today — almost confessing that mine and my friends' worst predictions about Israel's future seemed to be materializing painfully in front of their very eyes.

In fact, our predictions came very late in the day. Already in 1950, with unsettling accuracy, Sir Thomas Rapp, the head of the British Middle East Office in Cairo, foresaw the future. He was the last person sent by London to decide whether or not Britain should establish diplomatic relations with Israel. He approved but warned his superiors in London:

"The younger generation is being brought up in an environment of militarism and thus a permanent threat to the Middle East tranquillity is thereby being created and Israel would thus tend to move away from the democratic way of life towards totalitarianisms of the right or the left" (Public Record Office, Foreign Office Files 371/82179, E1015/119, a letter to Ernest Bevin the Foreign Secretary, 15 December 1950).

It is the totalitarianism of the right which is going to be the hallmark of the Jewish state in 2013. And some of the liberal Zionists who were once willing to devour me and like-minded Jews in Israel now realize we, like Sir Thomas before us, may have been right. And maybe because of their more benign attitude I would like to reciprocate by attempting, for a very short while, a different approach in 2013.

**Compassion towards Israelis?** Those of us who write frequently for the Electronic Intifada have shown in the past — and will undoubtedly continue to do so in the future — our utmost solidarity with the Palestinian victims of Israel's existence and policies. But can we, and should we, show compassion to the Israelis themselves? Obviously, one cannot ask the Palestinians to do this while the dispossession continues in full force. But maybe we who belong, ethnically at least, to the victimizers can ponder for a moment in the beginning of the New Year about our compatriots.

Let me begin with a more personal touch. During this visit I had the opportunity to watch my former colleague, the historian Benny Morris on television and to read some of his interviews. His anti-Arab and anti-Islamic racism is now of the rawest kind possible: a naked and rude discourse of hate, venomously spat out in the most disgusting way possible. So why show any empathy? Because his first book on the refugees was an eye-opener for me and others. It was not a great history book, but it was an eloquent survey of the truth to be found in the state archives about the 1948 Israeli crimes.

Yet his transmutation into an arch-racist is not surprising — it follows the same trajectory of many of the so-called liberal Zionists in Israel. He and his friends had an epiphany in the 1990s: discovering the immoral foundations of the state. This could have opened the way to a genuine reconciliation but it was also a frightening moment that demanded brave personal decisions. ...

[Read the entire piece here.](#)

## **5) U.S. protests "State of Palestine" placard in UN**

### **The Associated Press, January 24, 2013**

Ambassador Susan Rice objected Wednesday to the Palestinians' latest bid to capitalize on their upgraded UN status when their foreign minister spoke at Security Council while seated behind a nameplate that read "State of Palestine."

It was the first Palestinian address to the Security Council since the UN General Assembly voted overwhelmingly on November 29 to upgrade the Palestinians from UN observer to non-voting member state.

Rice said that the United States does not recognize the General Assembly vote in November "as bestowing Palestinian 'statehood' or recognition."

"Only direct negotiations to settle final status issues will lead to this outcome," Rice said. "Therefore, in our view, any reference to the 'State of Palestine' in the United Nations, including the use of the term 'State of Palestine' on the placard in the Security Council or the use of the term 'State of Palestine' in the invitation to this meeting or other arrangements for participation in this meeting, do not reflect acquiescence that 'Palestine' is a state," she added.

The UN General Assembly vote to upgrade the Palestinians' status was important because it gave sweeping international backing to their demands for sovereignty over lands Israel occupied in 1967, including east Jerusalem. But it did not actually grant independence to the 4.3 million Palestinians who live in the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip.

In his speech to the Security Council, Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki reiterated the Palestinian position that a two-state solution be based on the pre-1967 borders.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas took another symbolic step to capitalize on the UN status two weeks ago, proclaiming that letterhead and signs would bear the name "State of Palestine."

Robert Serry, the UN special coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process, told reporters that the nameplate read "state of Palestine" because the UN Secretariat "is guided by the membership, which has pronounced itself on this issue" in the November General Assembly vote.

"At the same time, member-states have their rights to reserve their opinion" on UN decisions, he said. "That resolution does not diminish the need for negotiations to actually arrive at a two-state solution."

Israeli UN Ambassador Ron Prosor told the council that "the major obstacle to the two-state solution is the Palestinian leadership's refusal to speak to their own people about the true parameters of a two-state solution."

## 6) [U.S.: Two-state solution cannot wait](#)

Yitzhak Benhorin, Israel News, January 26, 2013

The U.S. is patiently waiting until an Israeli coalition is formed, but is nonetheless sending out a clear message to Israel: Do not neglect the Palestinian issue. U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland stressed Friday that the U.S. intended to work on bringing the Israelis and the Palestinians back to the negotiating table.

"We are at the stage now... where we're going to have to wait and see what the makeup of the Israeli government is going to be and how it approaches the longstanding critical issues that we share," Nuland said.

"We know where we want to go and we know where we believe they also want to go. If we can be helpful, we will continue to try."

While hoping for a moderate Israeli government that will renew talks with the Palestinians, Washington stresses its support of Israel. Nuland stated that "Israel continues to be a democratic beacon out there in the world and to have a very vibrant system and process for ensuring that the people's voices are heard in the political process."

"But how that's going to translate in terms of either government formation or government policy," she added, "is to be determined."

Nuland's statement joins a Thursday statement by U.S. Secretary of State nominee John Kerry, who also expressed hope that Israeli-Palestinian peace talks be renewed.

"My hope is that perhaps this can be a moment where we can renew some kind of effort to get the parties into a discussion to have a different track than we have been on over the last couple of years," Kerry said. Kerry insisted that President Barack Obama was determined to resolve the conflict and grant Israel the security it deserves and the Palestinians the independence they deserve.

Robert Serry, U.S. Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process stated last week, "We are entering a critical period ahead, in which concerted action will be vital if we are to salvage the two-State solution."

"Israeli and Palestinian leaders have stated, like us, that they are convinced the two-State solution is the only path toward a durable peace. But they should realize that absent serious engagement, the peace process will remain on life-support and stability on the ground will be put at risk even further," Serry said. "The consequences for inaction could be dire for everyone," he warned.

Jordan's King Abdullah reflected U.S. sentiments Friday, saying "If we're not too late... the two-state solution will only last as long as Obama's term; if it doesn't happen by then I don't think it will happen." Speaking in front of the World Economic Forum in Davos, Abdullah said that in order to achieve security in the Middle East, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must end and that regardless of Israel's election results, peace and security must be a top priority for Israelis. Abdullah's speech was quoted in Jordan's Petra news agency.



## **7) Palestinians: Apartheid state if Netanyahu wins**

**Mohammed Daragmeh, Associated Press, January 18, 2013**

RAMALLAH, West Bank—The Palestinians have long complained that Israel's right-wing government is killing peace prospects by settling the West Bank with Jews, but now there is something new. The Palestinian president is warning that Benjamin Netanyahu's expected victory in next week's election could lead to an Arab-majority country in the Holy Land that will eventually replace what is now Israel—unless he pursues a more moderate path of a two state solution to the conflict.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has been careful not to intervene in Tuesday's Israeli election, but it is no secret that the Palestinians hope that Netanyahu will either be ousted or at least soften his position in a new term. He has shown no sign of doing so, and opinion polls showing hard-line, pro-settlement parties well ahead days ahead of the vote have led to a sense of despair among the Palestinians.

During Netanyahu's current term, the Israeli leader has pressed forward with construction of Jewish settlements in the West Bank and east Jerusalem, which along with the Gaza Strip were captured by Israel in the 1967 war from Jordan. Abbas says he wants to set up a state in the territories that would exist peacefully next to Israel.

The international community considers settlement construction illegal or illegitimate. And the Palestinians have refused to negotiate with Netanyahu while he continues to allow settlements to be built, saying it is a sign of bad faith. Israeli backers of creation of a Palestinian state say relinquishing control of the Palestinian territories and its residents is the only way to ensure Israel's future as a democracy with a Jewish majority.

Mohammed Ishtayeh, a top aide to Abbas, told The Associated Press on Friday that his boss has been warning that won't be possible if settlement building continues and Israel could end up with a Jewish minority ruling over an Arab majority. He warned Israel could end up with "an apartheid style state, similar to the one of former South Africa." "In the long run it will be against the Israeli interests because ... we Palestinians will be the majority and will struggle for equality," he said, adding that Abbas had met repeated this message in meetings with several Israeli leaders in the past year.

Abbas "told them frankly there are Palestinians who are now calling for the one-state solution, because they no longer see the two-state solution viable," Ishtayeh said. Abbas's office said the Palestinian president spoke with multiple leaders in 2012 from Israel's centrist opposition, including lawmakers from the Labor, Kadima and Meretz parties, along with mayors, university professors and social activists. He said a mayor from Netanyahu's Likud Party was among them.

Labor parliamentarian Daniel Ben-Simon told the AP he met with Abbas in Ramallah recently and was warned that time is running out for a two-state solution. "Abbas said the two state solution benefits both nations but he warned that if there is no two state solution within the next two or three years then it won't be practical anymore," Ben-Simon said. "Abbas told me explicitly ... the idea of a one state solution is escalating among Palestinians." ...

**[Read the entire piece here.](#)**



## **8) Real Democracy – A Palestinian-Israeli vote share**

### **Jews for Justice for Palestinians**

From BBC News: “When Israelis go to the polls on Tuesday, many will be voting for policies on dealing with the Palestinians. For some though, it is an opportunity to reach out to Palestinians themselves to let them have a say in Israeli politics, and they are doing this by donating their vote.” Following are three stories that each provide an example of the vote-share.

#### **a) An Israeli university student discusses the process that led him to give his vote to a Palestinian friend without one**

**Liel Maghen, +972, January 22, 2013**

... Although the Palestinian population of East Jerusalem and the West Bank is highly affected by the Israeli government, its members do not have the ability to shape the decisions that shape their lives.

The two democratic solutions for this distorted situation would be to either build a totally independent system Palestinians or to share with them the right to vote enjoyed by Israelis. But for now, until one of these proposed solutions is formally chosen, the only direct action I can take, as a supporter of the basic idea of electoral democracy, would be to give my right to vote to a Palestinian friend and by thus bring a slight balance to the general condition of discrimination. ... [Read the entire piece here.](#)

#### **b) The Israelis who give their vote to Palestinians**

**By Yuval Ben-Ami, BBC news, Middle East, January 18, 2013**

Aya Shoshan does not look like the kind of person who would give up her right to vote. Besides being a politics student at Ben Gurion University, she is a member of an organisation helping struggling Palestinian communities in the South Hebron hills benefit from renewable energy sources. In short, she is an informed, concerned Israeli citizen.

At some point, however, her concerns made her doubt Israel’s very idea of democracy. “I believe that that the act of voting is far less important than that of creating public awareness.” She says “There are almost four million Palestinians living under Israeli rule with no civil rights and in a state of shocking inequality.” ... [Read the entire piece here.](#)

#### **c) 2,000 Israelis volunteer to vote for Palestinians**

**Ilene Prusher, Ha’aretz, January 22, 2013**

Ofer Neiman planned to cast a ballot in Jerusalem on Tuesday, but not for a party of his choosing. Rather, he decided to “give up” his ballot, as he put it, for an East Jerusalem Palestinian – a man who doesn’t have the right to vote in elections for the government under whose laws he lives, and which has the power to determine his fate.

That man is Bassam Aramin, who, like Neiman, is a peace activist. The two are part of a new initiative called Real Democracy, inspired by a similar movement that sprang up in the UK in 2010. There, supporters were asked to donate as it were their votes to people in countries such as Afghanistan and Bangladesh. In just 10 days, the group says, about 2,000 Israelis have volunteered to give up their votes by being paired up with Palestinians in Jerusalem, the West Bank or Gaza. ... [Read the entire piece here.](#)