

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
February 25, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus the continued occupation/annexation/settlement expansion of and in land that would have been a future Palestinian state, the violent response of Palestinian youth with little or no hope for their future, the apartheid “citizen rights” of Palestinians between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan, the sabotaging of the Israeli/Palestinian peace process, the unnecessary U.S. multi-billion dollar support of a wealthy Israel, the inevitability of another Gaza Hamas Israel war, with links to other issues of note.

Commentary: Even as world opinion and criticism of the oppressive policies of the government of Israel toward the Palestinians increases, there has been no decrease in the implementation of these policies by Israeli leaders nor in the support of the majority of Israelis. The occupation of territory taken in the 1967 war is now being given a more appropriate name by critics of Israel: Annexation. The necessity and purpose of U.S. multi-billion dollar support of Israel is being reviewed and questioned as a financial issue. The possibility of another Hamas Israel “war” in Gaza will only lessen as Israel takes practical steps to allow for the improvement of life for Gaza’s two million people.

- Over the weekend, Israel’s Peace Now movement published its annual report on West Bank settlement planning and construction in the past year which reveals that in 2015 construction continued throughout the West Bank settlements, and especially in isolated settlements.
- Rami Younis writes in 972 Mag. that Israelis refuse to understand what drives Palestinians to violence. After all, it is far more convenient to dehumanize them than face reality.
- Oren Yiftachel notes in Haaretz that Israeli citizenship is reminiscent of South Africa's in the past: Jews are “white” citizens, Arabs in Israel have “colored” (in other words, partial) citizenship; and Palestinians in the territories have “black” citizenship, without political rights.
- Uri Avnery writes in JFJFP that in daring to criticize the Israeli government as well as the Palestinian Authority, for sabotaging the peace process, and thereby making Israeli-Palestinian peace almost impossible, Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the UN is being named an anti-Semite by some.
- Doug Bandow writes in Forbes Magazine that although America is practically bankrupt, Israel remains a multi-billion dollar dependent. The U.S. can’t afford to continue subsidizing well-off nations, no matter how friendly. And Israel, which spends heavily both to expand state regulation and occupy Palestinian lands, doesn’t need American support.
- Michael J. Koplow writes in Foreign Affairs that while Israelis focus on the violence emanating from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Hamas in Gaza has been quietly gearing up for its own next round of fighting . The next war thus seems inevitable, a question of when rather than if.

1) [Peace Now Settlement Watch: 2015 In the Settlements: No Freeze At All Settlement Watch Annual Construction Report](#), APN, February 15, 2016

Peace Now's annual construction report reveals that in 2015 construction continued throughout the West Bank settlements, and especially in isolated settlements. These findings refute the argument that a "silent freeze" is currently in place. While earlier this year Netanyahu argued in English that he is the Prime Minister who has built the least in the settlements, in Hebrew he proudly demonstrated to Likud members the increase in settlement construction during his time in office. It is clear that in 2015 as well, Netanyahu's statements in Hebrew are more representative of the reality on the ground than his statements in English.

2) [Palestinians don't need incitement to know they are occupied](#), Rami Younis, 972 Mag., February 8, 2016

There's something self-righteous about calling Palestinians who violently resist occupation "terrorists," while referring to the ones occupying them, also violently, as mere "soldiers." It becomes even more grotesque when the people committing these desperate acts are minors, or even children. Even at the tender age of 11 and 13 they are still terrorists, even in so-called "liberal" newspapers like *Haaretz*. The fact that minors that cannot be held criminally responsible for their actions is suddenly no longer relevant to these alleged liberals.

Nobody wants to understand the motives of people resorting to violence. It is far more convenient to call them names and dehumanize them — it makes facing reality much easier. Everything is easier to handle when you don't see the other side as human, like you.

It becomes even easier if you convince yourself you are liberal enough because you object to the occupation (of the West Bank and Gaza, of course not the lands occupied in 1948). But such liberalism is not at all progressive or liberal, since it enables believers to ignore their own side's wrongdoings, all the while blaming the other side for how free-thinking individuals choose to resist.

Until the so-called liberals fully understand the daily humiliations these people go through, and until they understand what these Palestinian "terrorists" have endured, they should stop dehumanizing them with convenient labels just to make it easier for them to sleep at night.

N.B. see also "Other articles of interest" B – [Friedman of the NY Times surrenders to One-State Solution, sees ME Apocalypse](#); C - [Welcome to the One-state Club, Thomas Friedman](#); D - [Why the Israeli debate on the occupation misses the point](#); E - [The Israeli Occupation Will End Suddenly](#); F - [Don't Celebrate the Israeli Occupation's Impending Demise Just Yet](#); G - [From Occupation to Annexation](#)

3) [Call Apartheid in Israel by Its Name](#), Oren Yiftachel, Haaretz, February 11, 2016

Citizenship here is reminiscent of South Africa's in the past: Jews are 'white' citizens, Arabs in Israel have 'colored' (in other words, partial) citizenship; and Palestinians in the territories have 'black' citizenship, without political rights.

Only international pressure will end Israeli apartheid. Recently, an interesting argument was held in Haaretz between Michael Sfard and Gideon Levy. Sfard claims that "One day the occupation will end suddenly" (Haaretz.com, January 22), while Levy suggests that "the occupation won't end" (January 24) and that Israel "can continue with the occupation as long as it likes, so why should it end?"

Maybe both are wrong. An analysis of the geopolitical situation on the West Bank shows the occupation hasn't been an occupation for a long time. It has not been defeated or liquidated, but rather has developed into the next stage: civil colonial control, accompanied by a creeping process of apartheid into the entire area controlled by Israel between the Jordan and the sea.

These processes caused the creation of different types of citizenship, which remind one of South Africa in the past: Jews between the Jordan and the sea are "white" citizens, Arabs in Israel have "colored" (in other words, partial) citizenship, and Palestinians in the territories have "black" citizenship, without political rights.

Whatever the solution, Israeli society must stop hiding its head in the sand and understand that the apartheid process is the most serious security threat facing the residents of this entire land – "white," "colored" and "black."

4) [Critics of Israel are anti-Semitic by definition](#), Uri Avnery, JFJFP, February 6, 2016

So now we have another anti-Semite. Mazal Tov ("good luck") as we say in Hebrew. In daring to criticize the Israeli government as well as the Palestinian Authority, for sabotaging the peace process, and thereby making Israeli-Palestinian peace almost impossible, Ban Ki-moon, the Secretary General of the UN is being named an anti-Semite by some.

He has dared to criticize the Israeli government. He emphasized that there is a world-wide consensus about the "Two-state Solution" being the only possible one.

The formulation sounded neutral, but Ban made it quite clear that almost the entire fault lies with the Israeli side. Since the Palestinians are living under a hostile occupation, there is not much they can do one way or the other.

BAN IS not the only antisemite who has been unmasked lately. Another one is Laurent Fabius, Foreign Minister of France. How come? Fabius has lately floated the idea of convening (in Paris, of course) an international conference for Israeli-Palestinian peace. He declared in advance that if this idea is not accepted, France will officially recognize the State of Palestine, opening the gates of Europe for others to follow.

This raises a semantic question. In Zionist parlance, only a non-Jew can be an antisemite. A Jew who says exactly the same is a "Jewish self-hater".

Fabius belongs to a Jewish family that converted to Catholicism. Under Jewish religious law (the Halakha) a Jew who has sinned remains a Jew. Converting is a sin. So is Fabius a non-Jew and therefore an antisemite, or a Jewish sinner, a self-hater? How, exactly, should we curse him?

5) [U.S. Should Stop Subsidizing Bad Israeli Economic And Occupation Policies](#), Doug Bandow, Forbes, February 16, 2016

America is practically bankrupt yet Israel remains a multi-billion dollar dependent. The U.S. can't afford to continue subsidizing well-off nations, no matter how friendly. And Israel, which spends heavily both to expand state regulation and occupy Palestinian lands, doesn't need American support.

Nevertheless, there may be no more politically sacrosanct expenditure in Washington than the annual payment of \$3.1 billion to Israel. That's more than \$350 to every Israeli man, woman, and child. As of last year total U.S. aid came to \$124.3 billion. There have been billions of dollars in loan guarantees as well. But few on Capitol Hill worry about the aid's purpose or efficacy. Even many avowed fiscal conservatives want to appear to embrace Israel while seeking the Christian Zionist vote.

But America's annual payment soon may run as high as \$5 billion a year, with the extra dollars offered to pacify Benjamin Netanyahu, who attempted to block the nuclear accord with Iran

Even worse, U.S. cash effectively underwrites Israel's occupation of the West Bank and attempt to colonize that area through settlements. Had Israel seized empty land in the 1967 war keeping the territories would have been understandable. But Israel also conquered people. Subjecting them to almost a half century of rule without economic or political rights could not help but result in injustice and resentment. The settlements greatly exacerbate this problem, creating a privileged class in the West Bank with preferred access to land, water, roads, and subsidies.

6) [Gaza Prepares for the Next War](#), Michael J. Koplrow, Foreign Affairs, February 12, 2016

While Israelis focus on the violence emanating from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, Hamas has been quietly gearing up for its own next round of fighting . It is rebuilding its tunnel network while replenishing its rocket caches and improving its intelligence capabilities. Israel was caught off guard by Hamas' attack tunnels during the 2014 war, and Hamas is trying to ensure that they penetrate further into Israel during the next effort. The group is working nearly around the clock to dig and reinforce a maze that lies as much as 100 feet below the ground. For Israel , larger conventional threats from Iran and Hezbollah might be a bigger problem, but Hamas is a more combustible one. The next war thus seems inevitable, a question of when rather than if—at least as judged by the matter-of-fact way in which politicians such as Yesh Atid leader Yair Lapid already discuss the causes of fighting that is yet to break out.

As much as the die feels cast, this is a war that Israel's energies should be channeled into avoiding. It goes without saying that another war will bring with it a tragically high number of Palestinian civilian casualties given Hamas' purposeful entrenchment in civilian areas. The Israeli side will not be spared either. The last rounds of fighting in Gaza—Cast Lead in 2008, Pillar of Defense in 2012, and the more recent Protective Edge in 2014 —did not lead to high Israeli civilian casualty counts, but the psychological toll should not be discounted. Israelis were justifiably shaken by the constant running to air raid shelters and the heavy reliance on the Iron Dome anti-missile system during the last round of fighting. On both sides, psychological trauma contributes to hardened attitudes that make the Israeli–Palestinian conflict more difficult to resolve. To assume that another round of fighting with Hamas and other groups in Gaza will be relatively cost-free for Israel, then, is to ignore how the recent wars have harmed Israel in real ways.

Hamas is engaged in a battle in the West Bank with the Palestinian Authority (PA) for the hearts and minds of Palestinians, and the PA is losing badly. The latest Palestinian poll shows that PA President Mahmoud Abbas would lose in a head-to-head election with Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh; that Hamas would beat Abbas' Fatah in legislative elections in the West Bank; and that two-thirds of Palestinians support the current wave of knife attacks on Israelis and believe that an armed intifada would be more beneficial than negotiations. Given these numbers, should Hamas be at the forefront of another fight with Israel in Gaza.

There is no perfect answer for Israel. Hamas' very reason for being is resistance, and it is naive to think that the group will change. Nevertheless, Hamas has indicated an interest in maintaining ceasefires before when Israel has taken steps to make the reconstruction of Gaza easier and when Hamas has felt that it can maintain the upper hand against even harder line groups without resorting to an inevitable military loss against the Israeli Defense Forces. The damage that another Gaza war will cause makes it worth doing everything possible to keep the current ceasefire going. Anything that Israel does to avoid an outbreak of fighting will empower Hamas in some way, but the alternative is far worse.

N.B. see also "other articles of interest" Link A - [Israel Must Rebuild Gaza, Big-time](#)

Other Articles of Interest:

A) [Israel Must Rebuild Gaza, Big-time, Ari Shavit, Haaretz, February 11, 2016](#)

For both moral and political reasons, we cannot be indifferent to the fate of our Palestinian neighbors in the Strip.

B) [Friedman of the NY Times surrenders to One-State Solution, sees ME Apocalypse, Juan Cole, Juancole.com, February 11, 2016](#)

Tom Friedman of the New York Times has completely given up on a two-state solution, forthrightly abandoning the polite fiction that there will ever be a Palestinian state alongside Israel. In fact, he proclaims, with an eye for the glaringly obvious, the peace process is dead.

C) [Welcome to the One-state Club, Thomas Friedman, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, February 13, 2016](#)

The most famous columnist in the world, who always reflects and shapes the mood in Washington, has finally realized that the two-state solution is dead. The single-state solution is already here.

D) [Why the Israeli debate on the occupation misses the point, Noam Sheizaf, 972 Mag., February 1, 2016](#)

In the eyes of most Israelis, democracy consists of two Jews arguing over the fate of the Palestinian.

E) [The Israeli Occupation Will End Suddenly, Michael Sfard, Haaretz, January 23, 2016](#)

The strength of organizations working to end the occupation and their supporters is greater than we think.

F) [Don't Celebrate the Israeli Occupation's Impending Demise Just Yet, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, January 24, 2016](#)

The world will continue to pay hollow lip service in the form of absurd steps, like marking products from the settlements, for which it doesn't stop apologizing.

G) [From Occupation to Annexation: the silent adoption of the levy report on retroactive authorization of illegal construction in the west bank, Yesh Din, February 12, 2016](#)

A new position paper by "Yesh Din" describes how the government of Israel unofficially adopted the Levy Report and is working towards implementing its recommendations and legal doctrine. This is a policy of de-facto annexation, while Israel refrains from officially annexing the West Bank, a step which would require granting Palestinian residents of the West Bank citizenship and equal rights.

- H) [Until I Came to Live in Israel, I Was Sure That Jews Were Smart, Bradley Burston, Haaretz, February 16, 2016](#)
Detaining the Washington Post for 'incitement': Unable to stem the terror attacks that now number as many as eight per day, the government has clearly decided that incitement, its declared mortal enemy, can now be its best friend.
- I) [CMEP Bulletin - Does Area C = Israel?, February 12, 2016](#)
- J) [CMEP Bulletin - Peace Out of Reach?, February 19, 2016](#)
- K) [France Presents Middle East Peace Initiative to Israel, Barak Ravid, Haaretz, February 16, 2016](#)
French official presented three-step French peace initiative at Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem. France has already begun informing world powers of the plan's details.
- L) [Security ties between Palestinians and Israel begin to Fray, Jonathan Cook, OpEdNews, February 4, 2016](#)
Attack on Israeli soldiers by PA guard exposes split between Netanyahu and army over how to respond.
- M) [EU Delegation Barred from Entering Gaza, IMEMC, February 11, 2016](#)
A delegation from the European parliament was blocked by Israeli authorities from entering Gaza on Tuesday, the EU said in a statement.
- N) [Palestinian journalist detained without charge by Israel has not eaten for three months, William Booth, The Washington Post, February 18, 2016](#)
Mohammed al-Qeq is a Palestinian journalist being held under "administrative detention" in Israel. In protest of his incarceration without trial or charge, al-Qeq has refused food, including salt and vitamins, for almost three months.