

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
March 1, 2018

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

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The seven featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on Mahmoud Abba's speech to the UN Security Council; the loss of U.S. influence on the resolution of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; the planned move of the US Embassy to Jerusalem; the responsibility of all Israelis for their government's repressive Palestinian policies and oppressive actions; the blockade and destruction of Gaza; questions about the objectivity and reliability of the Associated Press (AP) reporting of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; a joint letter to Congress by faith-based groups on the militarization of the Middle East, and links to CMEP Bulletins.

Commentary: A story – There was once a collision when an 18 wheeler truck swerved and hit a bicycle travelling in a designated lane on the same road. The media reporting on this collision focused on the trauma to the truck driver, damage to the truck, criticism of the cyclist and reasons why the bicycle should not have been on the road with only a passing reference to the smashing of the bike and the hospitalization of the seriously injured cyclist.

Thus we have U.S. media coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict with more concern it seems about the effect of this conflict on the Israeli people than on the effect of Israeli policies on the Palestinian people. Somehow it is conveyed that the Palestinians who suffer from these policies of the occupation, expanding settlements, military law in the territories, imprisonment without charge even of minors, Gaza blockade, juridical executions, are more responsible for them than the Israelis who implement these policies. Most of the world knows there is something wrong with this story and its presentation in much of the U.S. media. But the people of the U.S. are beginning to hear another story.

- *Ynet, Reuters, and Associated Press* present a translation of Mahmoud Abbas' speech to the UN with an accompanying article.
- Stephen Robert writes in *Haaretz* that the US has always acted as a brake on the Israeli right wing's more destructive moves to sabotage peace. Trump has ended that and Israel is fast becoming a rogue state.
- An editorial by *Haaretz* states that a US Embassy move to Jerusalem in May is not a cause for celebration and that instead the relocation should cap negotiations leading to a Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem its capital, alongside Israel, with its capital in West Jerusalem.
- Michael Sfard states in *Haaretz* that he and all Israelis are responsible for the injustice of our occupation of the Palestinians, even if we do not man the checkpoints, live in settlements, or hand out permits: it is an Israeli project.
- The *Times of Israel* reported that Qatar's point man for Gaza recently urged the world to send critically needed humanitarian aid to the territory, warning that the war-ravaged coastal strip is "on the verge of collapsing," and could plunge into a new round of fighting with Israel if conditions do not improve.
- Kathryn Shihadah, Alison Weir and Josef Federman of *If Americans Knew* state that Associated Press is one of those news sources we expect to be objective and reliable. But when it comes to the subject of Israel-Palestine, things are not always as they seem.
- The Faith Forum on Middle East Policy will send a letter to Congress on or around March 6 on the Militarization of the Middle East.
- Film Recommendation:
- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins

1) [Abbas calls for int'l peace conference by mid-2018](#), Ynet, Reuters and Associated press, February 20, 2018

“Seventy years have passed since Palestine’s Nakba, from which 6 million Palestine refugees continue to suffer from the cruelty of exile and loss of human security. They continue to wander the world after the loss of their peaceful and stable lives in their homeland. They are part of the 13 million Palestinians, whose country has not yet been recognized as full Member State of the United Nations, despite the numerous resolutions reaffirming their right to self-determination and statehood on their national land.” ...

“Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, Is it logical that, despite the adoption of 705 General Assembly resolutions and 86 Security Council resolutions in our favor, none of them have been implemented? Is it logical that Israel violates its obligation to implement resolutions 181 (II) and 194 (III), the implementation of which Israel’s admission to the UN was conditioned upon, as pledged in writing by its Foreign Minister Moshe Sharett at that time?

“Israel is acting as a State above the law. It has transformed the occupation from a temporary situation as per international law into a situation of permanent settlement colonization and has imposed a one-State reality of Apartheid. It has closed all doors to realizing the two-State solution on the basis of the 1967 borders” ...

“Driven by our conviction in a just, lasting and comprehensive peace, which is our strategic choice for the sake of the coming generations in our region, including the Palestinians and Israelis, I present to this august Council a peace plan that addresses the core problems that have undermined peace efforts across the decades. Our plan includes the following:

“First: We call for the convening of an international peace conference by mid-2018, based on international law and the relevant UN resolutions” ...

“Second: During the period of negotiations, all parties must refrain from unilateral actions, particularly those that would prejudice the outcome of a final solution, as set forth in Article 31 of the Oslo Accords of 1993. Foremost must be the cessation of settlement activities in the territory occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem, and suspension of the decision regarding Jerusalem and halting transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, in compliance with the relevant Security Council resolutions,”

“Third: Implementation of the Arab Peace Initiative, as adopted and endorsed, and the conclusion of a regional agreement upon achievement of a peace agreement between the Palestinians and Israelis.”

“This Security Council is the highest entity to which the peoples of the world seek sanctuary and protection; after this Council, we rest our issue to the Almighty. For, if justice for our people cannot be attained here, then to where should we go?” ...

“Ynet article on the speech: Addressing UN Security Council, PA president slams US 'illegal' decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital, demands UN recognize 'State of Palestine as a full UN member'; Israel's Envoy Danny Danon: 'Mr. Abbas, you are not part of the solution. You are the problem.'”

2) [Israel Is Fast Becoming a Rogue State. And Trump Is Complicit in That Downfall](#), Stephen Robert, Haaretz, February 22, 2018

“Many, including myself, fight ferociously for a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. We give of our voices, time, money and risk our standing in our communities.

“Now, however, Israel’s extreme right-wing government and the cynically political calculations of the current American administration have driven a stake through our goal of a sustainable future for both Israelis and Palestinians.

“What has been lost? Israel will be neither a democratic nor Jewish state. It will eventually have an Arab majority, ruled by a Jewish minority. The Arab population will not have equal rights, opportunity or a sovereign government by the consent of the governed.

“Israel will be undisputedly an apartheid state, a rogue state in the eyes of much of the world. Like Iraq under Saddam Hussein, Syria under both Assads and South Africa before Nelson Mandela, a very large or majority societal group will be deprived of its rights.” ...

“Donald Trump declares Jerusalem the capital of Israel, taking it off the negotiating table. Netanyahu pre-emptively declared that the Holy Sites will be forever be under Israeli control, enraging many Muslims and Christians (while stating on the record: "Fifty years ago, we didn't occupy, we liberated.") His patron in Washington threatens to cut off aid to Palestine if they continue to shun now-hopeless negotiations.” ...

“But Trump pampers his powerful constituency among our country’s 40 million Evangelical Christians. Tortuously complex Biblical interpretations cause many Evangelicals to believe Israel must control all the land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River before the second Messiah can arrive. Some interpretations suggest the Jews would then be eliminated, but that isn’t causing Netanyahu to lose sleep.

“Moreover, the Republicans receive enormous contributions from the conservative sector of American Jewry. One such donor, casino magnate Sheldon Adelson, declared years ago that not only are Palestinians a made-up nation existing solely to attempt to destroy Israel, but that Israel need not be a democracy: "So Israel won't be a democratic state, so what?"” ...

3) U.S. Embassy Move to Jerusalem Is No Cause for Celebration, Haaretz Editorial, February 25, 2018

“The State Department announced Friday that the U.S. Embassy in Israel will move to Jerusalem in May, coinciding with the 70th anniversary of Israeli independence. “This is a great moment for the State of Israel,” Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in response, adding that the decision “will make our Independence Day celebration even happier.”

“There’s no doubt that the government will turn the occasion into a giant event, even though in practice it merely means carving out office space for the ambassador and a small staff in the U.S. Consulate building in Jerusalem’s Arnona neighborhood. But in light of the nadir in relations between Israel and the Palestinians, there is absolutely no reason to celebrate.

“Moving the embassy to Jerusalem could have been a cause for great celebration, had it come at the end of successful negotiations, as a symbol of the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the start of a new era in the Middle East. Moving the embassy to Jerusalem should have been the cherry on top, a successful conclusion of the efforts of international diplomacy, which produced a peace agreement based on territorial partition and the establishment of a Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem, alongside Israel whose capital is West Jerusalem.

“After an agreement is reached between Israelis and Palestinians, Israel could celebrate the moving of the U.S. Embassy to its capital, together with that of many other embassies, the natural outcome of international recognition of West Jerusalem as the capital of Israel.” ...

“The American move gives off a bad smell; reports that American-Jewish businessman Sheldon Adelson, a patron of Netanyahu, has offered to pay for part of the cost of building the new embassy do not sweeten the air. It is very doubtful that such a move would be good for Israel. It will certainly not contribute to the United States’ image as a “honest broker.” If Trump cares about Israel’s welfare, a better 70th birthday present would be a peace plan that does right by both nations.”

See also:

[Jerusalem for Dummies: Why the World Doesn't Recognize It as Israel's Capital](#)

And why the possibility that Trump might do just that, seven decades after Israel's establishment, is such a source of apprehension worldwide

[Jerusalem for dummies, part 2: What the Palestinians want](#)

Jerusalem is holy to three religions. Jerusalem is a powder keg, and the smallest wrong move there could set off a religious war. The Arab-Israeli conflict will never be solved until the Jerusalem question is resolved.

[Palestinians rip into Trump over U.S. embassy move to Jerusalem: A win for the occupation](#)

[Turkey blasts U.S. decision to open Jerusalem embassy as damaging to peace](#)

[U.S. plans to move embassy to Jerusalem on Israel's 70th Independence Day](#)

4) [It's Every Israeli's Moral Duty to Resist the Occupation](#), Michael Sfard, Haaretz, February 8, 2018

“The fight against the occupation is the critical struggle for activists of our generation. As Israelis, we bear collective responsibility for everything that happens in the Occupied Territories.” ...

“As Israelis, we are all responsible for the realm of occupation, even if we do not man the checkpoints, live in settlements, or hand out permits, because our society, its institutions, and its governing bodies make their discriminatory decisions in partnership with us and implement their discriminatory policies in our name; and, inasmuch as this injustice yields profits (financial profits, for instance), Israeli society benefits as a whole.

“The occupation is an Israeli project, not only the project of those who support it. The Israeli government draws the resources to sustain the occupation from all the country’s citizens, not just those who support its continuation, and the benefits of the occupation to the country’s economy are enjoyed by all its citizens, whether directly or indirectly.

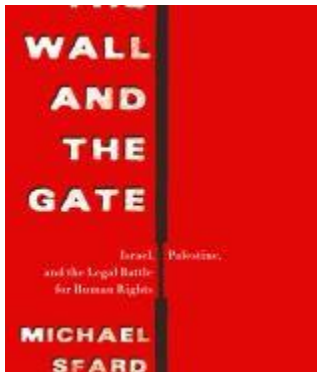


Image: The cover of Michael Sfard's book, "The Wall and the Gate."

“That is our situation as Israelis, even for those who oppose the occupation. We are responsible. To take Heschel’s words, some are guilty of the occupation but all are responsible for it, and this responsibility can-not be erased. It is with us wherever we go as Israelis. But our responsibility is not guilt. Guilt is personal. It stems from a wrongful act committed by an individual, and the acts of others cannot be attributed to that individual.

“Nonetheless, responsibility creates a moral duty that is incumbent on members of the collective, even if they themselves carry no guilt. And the primary moral duty is to fight to end the injustice. It is the duty to resist.

“Michael Sfard is the author of *"The Wall and the Gate: Israel, Palestine and the Legal Battle for Human Rights"*, just published by Metropolitan Books, of which this is an excerpt.”

5) [Qatari envoy calls for emergency aid to Gaza](#), Times of Israel, February 22, 2018

“In a wide-ranging interview with the Associated Press in his Jerusalem hotel suite, al-Emadi said it is the international community’s responsibility to come to Gaza’s aid. He called on Israel and Gaza’s Hamas terror group leaders to take steps to improve conditions, and he criticized the recent US decision to cut aid to the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, calling it ‘devastating.’

“The people of the world should be awakened to save Gaza and to prevent a new war,’ he said. He said the cost of helping Gaza is ‘nothing’ compared to the cost of another war. ‘Then the costs will be tremendous, and nobody can bear those costs,’ he said.” ...

“He said the Trump administration’s decision to withhold some \$65 million from UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees and their descendants, was especially painful. More than half of Gaza’s 2 million people rely on UNWRA aid.

““This is devastating,’ he said. ‘Any cut of any international organization or UN bodies working there will affect the lives of the people.’”

... “He called on Hamas to preserve the quiet, and to prevent Gazans from clashing with Israeli soldiers along the territory’s border fence with Israel.

“He urged Israel to pressure Egypt to open its border with Gaza to allow people to travel in and out, and said Israel should also increase the number of travel permits it gives to Gazans. Both countries severely restrict movement, saying it is a necessary security measure.

““Without improvement and given the lack of options for Hamas, al-Emadi said he fears the sides will head to another war. “If the international community helps Gaza, this will prevent the war,’ he said. ‘This is our aim, to prevent a war.’”

See also:

[UN gets report on what Palestinians say is Gaza catastrophe](#)

The Bolivian ambassador blamed Israel for 'the catastrophic situation in Gaza,' which includes water shortages, closed hospitals and doctors who stopped performing surgeries; Israeli Ambassador Danon: 'Hamas has been holding the people of Gaza hostage in pursuit of its own nefarious goals, ignoring their most basic needs.'

<https://www.haaretz.com/opinion/editorial/the-risk-of-war-in-gaza-1.5790990>

Israel must immediately initiate a major change in policy concerning Gazans. Otherwise, it will be directly responsible for the next war

6) [Associated Press Double Standard in Israel-Palestine Reporting](#), Kathryn Shihadah and Alison Weir, Associated Press, Josef Federman

“More than half the world’s population reads Associated Press content every day. But a study of news reports so far in 2018 indicates that this trusted news source has been presenting the deaths of Israelis at the hands of Palestinians, and of Palestinians at the hands of Israelis, in two completely different ways.

“This pattern may be a factor in how readers perceive the players in this decades-old issue. It is also, quite likely, a factor in how editors all over the U.S., who read AP stories daily, view the conflict.” ...

“Basic information that would give the reader an understanding of the context of the hostility is absent.

“Nowhere in any of the articles does the word ‘occupation’ occur, although the illegal Israeli occupation is a 50-year-old fact of life that affects every aspect of Palestinian life. Omitting the fact that Palestinians are living under Israeli military control leaves readers ignorant of one of the most significant aspects of the conflict.

“Nowhere in these reports does AP note that many Palestinian families in where in these reports does AP note that many Palestinian families in the West Bank the West Bank and Gaza were pushed out by Israel during the 1948 war that created the Jewish state, their properties confiscated by Israel. These refugees have not been allowed to return and reclaim their homes, a violation of international law. This, too, is essential information.

“Nowhere does AP use the word ‘resistance,’ the usual term for people fighting against military occupation. Instead, Palestinians are always ‘militants,’ ‘gunmen,’ ‘stone throwers,’ etc. Americans fighting against the British in the 18th century, French fighting against the German occupation in the 20th century, etc. were resistance forces. So are Palestinians.

“The word ‘settlement’ is used 19 times in the AP reports. According to international law these settlements are illegal. However, only once does AP mention this fact, and even here it does so in a somewhat diluted manner: “most of the international community considers settlements illegal.”

“Nowhere in these reports does AP inform readers that Israel is steadily stealing Palestinian land and imprisoning Palestinians who object to this. Nowhere do these report that Palestinians have virtually no freedom of movement, that some 70 percent of Palestinian families have had one or more family members serve time in an Israeli prison, that hundreds of Palestinian children are in prison, and that Israel is known for its physical abuse of prisoners. Without these and other critical details, it is impossible for readers to have a clear picture of the basis of the conflict and the context of the deaths.” ...

“AP’s main bureau for Israel-Palestine is in Israel. Reports from Gaza and the West Bank are phoned in to this bureau, where its editors choose and write the news stories that are sent out.

Many (possibly most) of the journalists in this main bureau are Israeli citizens or have partners who are. Some (possibly most) have served in the Israeli military and/or have relatives that have done so. While this doesn’t guarantee pro-Israel bias (some Israeli journalists for Ha’aretz, for example, are excellent, accurate writers on this issue) it does suggest the possibility of partiality influencing their work, either consciously or unconsciously.

“It is essential that AP be transparent about its reporting on this extremely important issue.” ...

7) "["Militaryization in the Middle East" letter to Congress by the Faith Forum on Middle East Policy.](#)

"As Christian denominations and faith-based organizations working in and concerned about the Middle East, we write to express our serious concern regarding increasing U.S. arms sales and military aid to the Middle East.

"In FY2017 the amount of U.S. arms sales approved worldwide was a record-high \$75.9 billion, doubling that of the previous year. Of these approved sales, \$52 billion were to countries in the Middle East. A Congressional Research Service report notes that 'the United States is the single largest arms supplier to the Middle East and has been for decades.'

"These sales are lucrative for U.S. defense corporations, and purportedly promote U.S. security interests, but they come at a steep cost. As a result of our organizations’ long-term relationships and engagement throughout the Middle East, and our longstanding commitment to justice, peace, and security for all, we know all too well the price that the people, especially civilians, have paid and continue to pay for the ongoing conflicts that are fueled by these arms sales."...

Film Recommendation: "The Occupation of the American Mind: Israel’s Public Relations War in the United States."

Gideon Levy, a *Haaretz* columnist, wrote: “I wish every American would watch this powerful documentary. Not only every person of conscience, but every taxpayer, must see it — and then ask themselves if the status quo is acceptable and can continue deep into the 21st century.”

To view the Democracy Now Program that includes an interview with the producer of “The Occupation of the American Mind”, go to https://www.democracynow.org/2017/9/14/the_occupation_of_the_american_mind

Churches for Middle East Bulletins:

Feb 23, 2018 - [Bulletin: Verbal Salvos and a Long Shot for Peace at the United Nations](#)

Feb 16, 2018 - [Bulletin: Jerusalem Quarrels with Churches as Lent Begins](#)

Feb 09, 2018 - [Bulletin: Tax Threat to Jerusalem Churches](#)

Feb 02, 2018 - [\[Bulletin\] The US-Israel Relationship: 'It's Complicated'](#)

Suggested Reading: On 20 February, [the Palestine-Israel Journal](#) published an issue with many articles of interest on “Jerusalem: The Key to Peace”. To read this issue, click: <http://www.pij.org/current.php?id=94>