

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
March 10, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes highlight increasing criticism of and disillusionment with the Israeli leadership's repressive policies towards the Palestinians by both younger and older U.S. Jews, questions about US military aid being used for settlements, greater involvement of European countries in the two-state process, Israeli response to deepening despair in Gaza with indication of approaching violence, and other important issues.

Commentary: The founding dream of a homeland for the Jewish people and a Jewish and democratic state, and the progress made over decades in making this dream a reality are being challenged by the policies of present-day Israel and its elected leadership. There is growing concern that today's Israel may be changing this dream into a de-legitimizing nightmare. This nightmare is being prolonged and deepened in many ways: e.g. religious and social divisions among Israeli citizens and their U.S. supporters, the government's continuing and growing repression of its "Arab Israeli" citizens, unrelenting blockade pressure on the Gaza civilian population, support of settlements, tightening occupation and de-facto annexation of the West Bank, neglect and isolation of Jerusalem Palestinians, increasing restrictions on internal criticism by its citizens, expanding influence on Government of some religious factions, and its hasbara attempts to stifle criticism especially in the U.S. and Europe.

- Rabbi David Gordis writes in Tikkun Magazine that present day Israel has discarded the rational, the universal and the visionary. These values have been subordinated to a cruel and oppressive occupation, an emphatic materialism, severe inequalities rivaling the worst in the western world and distorted by a fanatic, obscurantist and fundamentalist religion which encourages the worst behaviors rather than the best.
 - Simone Zimmerman says in Haaretz that U.S. Jewish millennials are angry and do not need any more multi-million dollar ventures, like the 'Jewish Peace Corps' to save us. We need the Jewish community to wake up to the disastrous reality of the occupation.
 - Peter Beinart in Haaretz asks that America's Military aid to Israel be stopped from subsidizing settlements.
 - Uri Savir writes in Al-Monitor that Egypt, the Palestinians and even the United States itself favor greater involvement by Quartet members in restarting a more even-handed, two-state solution process.
 - Alex Fishman notes in Ynetnews that the IDF is preparing for the next round of fighting with Hamas in Gaza, which is expected to be much more intense than in previous operations. The Gazan population is at its boiling point, and when it explodes, the entire region will feel it.
 - Herzl Halevi, the IDF intelligence chief, warns in the Times of Israel that despair in Gaza could explode toward Israel and that the Gaza economy must be strengthened to avoid new conflict. He agrees with UN report that Strip could be uninhabitable by 2020.
1. [An Amazing Turn for a Major Leader of the American Jewish mainstream: Rabbi David Gordis Rethinking Israel, Michael Lerner, Tikkun, February, 2016](#)

. . . "David Gordis is President Emeritus of Hebrew College where he served as President and Professor of Rabbis for fifteen years. He is currently Visiting Senior Scholar at the University at Albany of the State University of New

York. Here is the article he submitted to Tikkun. He joined Tikkun's editorial advisory board. We publish it with the same sadness that Gordis expresses at the end of this article, because many of us at Tikkun magazine shared the same hopes he expresses below for an Israel that would make Jews proud by becoming an embodiment of what is best in Jewish tradition, history, and ethics, rather than a manifestation of all the psychological and spiritual damage that has been done to our people, which now acts as an oppressor to the Palestinian people. For those of us who continue to love Judaism and the wisdom of our Jewish culture and traditions, pointing out Israel's current distortions gives us no pleasure, but only makes us deeply unhappy, frustrated, and re-energized to support peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and around the world

"The Israel of today is very far from anything I dreamed of and worked for throughout my career." . . . "What happened? We can debate the reasons but the bottom line for me is that it has gone terribly wrong. Present day Israel has discarded the rational, the universal and the visionary. These values have been subordinated to a cruel and oppressive occupation, an emphatic materialism, severe inequalities rivaling the worst in the western world and distorted by a fanatic, obscurantist and fundamentalist religion which encourages the worst behaviors rather than the best.

"And most depressing of all for me, is that I see no way out, no way forward which will reverse the current reality. Right wing control in Israel is stronger and more entrenched than ever. The establishment leadership in the American Jewish community is silent in the face of this dismal situation, and there are no recognizable trends that can move Israel out of this quagmire.

"So, sadly, after a life and career devoted to Jewish community and Israel, I conclude that in every important way Israel has failed to realize its promise for me. A noble experiment, but a failure."

2. [American Jewish Millennials Aren't Disengaged From Israel, We're Angry](#), Simone Zimmerman, Haaretz, February 29, 2016

"The anxiety in the American Jewish establishment over "what is happening to our young people" is reaching a fever pitch of absurdity, as communal leaders and spokespeople frantically try to remedy the symptoms while refusing to acknowledge the true root of the problem: We're not disengaging from Israel, in fact we're paying attention to what's happening in Israel - and we are angry."

. . . "My peers and I don't need any more multi-million dollar ventures to save us. What we need is for the community to wake up.

"What we need is for the community to stop willfully blinding itself to the disastrous reality of holding millions of Palestinians under military occupation.

"We need the community to stop justifying policies that deny Palestinians the ability to move freely, to sleep safely in their homes without the fear of a military raid, to access water and resources, to live without terror that their homes could be bombed to rubble, and to protest the unjust conditions of their lives nonviolently. None of these policies are moral, and none of these policies make Jews safer."

. . . "No public relations trick can save Israel's image. The problem isn't with the hasbara. The problem is nearly 50 years of occupation. The problem is rampant racism in Israeli society. The problem is attacks on human rights defenders by extremists and by the state. The problem is a Jewish establishment that ignores or justifies all of this."

See also Link E - [U.S. Reform Rabbis Warn of Growing Alienation From Israel](#) and Link F - [Not All Jewish Millennials Are Angry With Israel. Some of Us Are Proud](#) and Link G - [Reform Jews losing their love for Israel](#)

3. [Stop America's Military Aid to Israel From Subsidizing the Settlements](#), Peter Beinart, Haaretz, February 24, 2016

“Should the United States give Israel \$4 billion a year without asking it to do anything to keep the two state solution alive? It’s a timely question. America’s current agreement with Israel, which expires in 2018, grants the Jewish state \$3 billion per year in military aid. (The real figure is hundreds of millions of dollars higher because in recent years Congress has given Israel additional aid for anti-missile defense systems like Iron Dome.)

“According to press reports, the Obama and Netanyahu governments are weeks away from replacing the current aid deal with a new, substantially larger, one. The United States has reportedly offered \$3.7 billion per year. Israel has reportedly requested as much as \$5 billion. Whatever the final figure, Israel will continue receiving more than half of America’s overall military aid.”

. . . “Giving the Israeli government \$4 billion per year in security assistance while it continues policies that its own security officials say endangers Israel’s survival is not true friendship, no matter what AIPAC says.

“So here’s a modest proposal: Condition the aid package on an end to settlement subsidies. Right now, Israel doesn’t merely allow its Jewish citizens to move into the West Bank settlements that undermine a viable Palestinian state. It pays them to.”

. . . “Asking Israel to end these subsidies in return for a \$4 billion annual aid package that would constitute roughly 20 percent of Israel’s defense budget is a pretty modest request. After all, the United States wouldn’t be demanding that Israel sign a two state agreement right away. It wouldn’t even be demanding that Israel stop settlement growth, as George H.W. famously did a quarter-century ago. It would simply be asking Israel not to offer a financial incentive for it.”

See also Link H - [Aid subversion report makes for shocking reading](#)

4. [Why Israel supports US monopoly on peace talks](#), Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, March 2, 2016

“The Middle East Quartet’s decision to prepare a joint report on the obstacles to a two-state solution with recommendations for how to renew a Middle East peace process is probably a turning point in the international community’s diplomacy on the matter. The United States is gradually moving away from being the sole mediator in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

. . . “The Palestinian leadership is very much in favor of eroding the US monopoly on mediating a two-state solution. A senior Palestinian official who has been involved in virtually all previous Israeli-Palestinian peace efforts expressed to Al-Monitor on condition of anonymity great frustration about American attitudes toward a two-state solution, saying, “The US administration, in all its diplomatic peace efforts, is not an honest broker, but mostly represents Israel’s interests.

“Every administration is influenced by the powerful Jewish lobby.” He sharply criticized Kerry, who during the 2013-14 peace talks mostly presented to Abbas Netanyahu’s positions and not those of the United States, explaining, “It has always been the American approach, even during the Oslo process, to first explore what the Israeli side is ready for and then to exert pressure on the Palestinian side to accept these positions. With this type of mediation, Israel will always have the upper hand.”

5. [No hope for Gazans](#), Alex Fishman, Ynetnews, February 23, 2016

“Op-ed: The IDF is preparing for the next round of fighting with Hamas, which is expected to be much more intense than in previous operations. Yet, the spark which may start the fighting this time will be different. The Gazan population is at its boiling point, and when it explodes, the entire region will feel it.

“Just like every year, the IDF is getting ready for another violent round of conflict in Gaza this summer. The IDF chief of staff has created a deadline for the IDF to be prepared, focusing on equipment updates and training. No one knows the timing or what will be the direct cause of the next flare up, but it is clear that this near-yearly ritual illustrates the inescapable reality. Yet, this is not only the Israeli mindset. “

. . . “Gaza has turned into a human transit camp which every day tests the limits of its population. In Israel, we often see the infrastructure crisis in Gaza - electricity and water shortages, and broken sewage systems. But that only scratches the surface: Gazan society has started to disintegrate.

The number of suicides has reached unprecedented levels. The number of instances of murder within the family has grown: for instance, there is a phenomenon whereby women are stabbing their unemployed husbands. Every third person is on anti-depressants. There has been an increase in drug use and the overall scope of crime has increased, mainly prostitution, as well as the phenomenon of teenagers marrying much older men who are able to support them as a second or third wife. On the other hand, there is no money, young people aren't getting married, and the average age of marriage is rising.

6. [IDF intel chief warns despair in Gaza could explode toward Israel](#), Times of Israel Staff, February 24, 2016

“The Gaza Strip’s worsening humanitarian situation could lead to a conflagration with Israel, the Israeli military’s intelligence chief warned Tuesday. IDF Military Intelligence chief Herzl Halevi told the Knesset’s Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee: “The humanitarian condition in Gaza is progressively deteriorating, and if it blows up, it’ll be in Israel’s direction.” Halevi said the reconstruction of Gaza following 2014’s war between Hamas and Israel was moving very slowly.

“The Strip’s rehabilitation, he said, was a key factor in preventing further conflict. He agreed with a 2015 UN report that said Gaza could be uninhabitable by 2020 if its economy is not quickly strengthened. That report placed much of the blame for the situation on Israel’s blockade on the enclave. He noted that despite the difficult situation in Gaza, Hamas continues to be uninterested in war with Israel at this time, and is making efforts to control other factions in the territory to prevent them from heating up the border.”

See also Link A. [Prolonging Gaza's suffering isn't only unwise, it's just plain wrong](#); Link B. [What Israel must understand about Gaza](#); Link C - [Israeli group in south appeals to Ban: End Gaza blockade](#); Link D - [An Open Letter to President Barack Obama, Mohammed Omer](#)

Other articles of interest:

A) [Prolonging Gaza's suffering isn't only unwise, it's just plain wrong](#), Tania Hary,+972 Blog, February 25, 2016

Israeli policymakers recognize that they control the situation in Gaza. If their sense of moral obligation doesn't compel them to correct it, at the very least their interests should.

B) [What Israel must understand about Gaza](#), Shlomi Eldar, Al-Monitor, February 25, 2016

If not for the food banks run by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, the Gaza Strip would have already become a humanitarian catastrophe and many of its residents could have

died of starvation. Israel is oblivious to warnings by the United Nations and the IDF intelligence directorate over the ever-desperate situation of Gaza residents.

- C) [Israeli group in south appeals to Ban: End Gaza blockade, Times of Israel Staff, March 4, 2016](#)
Residents near border said to urge UN chief to push PM into adopting 'humanitarian and moral policy' for both sides; TV report does not specify how much support group has.
- D) [An Open Letter to President Barack Obama, Mohammed Omer, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, March/April 2016, pp. 14-15](#)
Dear Mr. President: As president of the most powerful country on the planet; the loving and protective father of two children; and a man fully aware of the human struggles of so many in the down-trodden communities of many lands, including your own, your eyes must have been opened during the last three—of many—Israeli assaults on besieged Gaza, where I live with my wife and young son...
- E) [U.S. Reform Rabbis Warn of Growing Alienation From Israel, The Associated Press March 1, 2016](#)
For decades, American Jewry has served as a bedrock of support for Israel. But there are signs of that support eroding, particularly among younger and more liberal Jews.
- F) [Not All Jewish Millennials Are Angry With Israel. Some of Us Are Proud, Jason Langsner , Haaretz, March 3, 2016](#)
Simone Zimmerman's fiery op-ed assumes we Jewish millennials speak with one voice on Israel and 'the occupation.' But when she avoids speaking about Palestinian terror, and of Israel's desire for peace, she doesn't speak for me.
- G) [Reform Jews losing their love for Israel, Tia Goldenberg, Associated Press, JFJFP, March 1, 2016](#)
American Reform rabbis warn of alienation from Israel after Israeli officials belittle their movement.
- H) [Aid subversion report makes for shocking reading, Jonathan Cook, The National, March 7, 2016](#)
What the international community has done over the past 20 years of the Oslo process – inadvertently or otherwise – is offer Israel financial incentives to stabilize and entrench its rule over the Palestinians. It can do so relatively cost-free.
- I) [US writer Kristian Davis Bailey is racially profiled, arrested, strip-searched, detained, silenced, traumatized on trip to Palestine, Philip Weiss, Mondoweiss, February 25, 2016](#)
Detroit writer Kristian Davis Bailey, who is active in the Black Lives Matter movement and Palestinian solidarity work, gives a full account of being detained for more than a day when he entered Palestine from Jordan.
- J) [Israel is on the brink of a tyranny of the majority, The National, February 23, 2016](#)
By discrediting and disenfranchising Palestinian parliament members, Israel's democracy is being exposed as a façade
- K) [CMEP Bulletin - Movement Toward Peace? - March 4, 2016](#)
- L) [Netanyahu takes a shot at UK prime minister, Shlomi Eldar, Veooz News, February 29, 2016](#)
British Prime Minister David Cameron is a true and committed friend of Israel, but Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has still lashed out at him for daring to criticize Israeli policy in East Jerusalem.
- M) [Rights Groups Reveal Systemic Torture of Palestinian Detainees, Emily Mulder, Ma'an News Agency February 24, 2016](#)
A joint investigation launched by Israeli rights groups, into practices in Israel's Shikma prison, has revealed -- once

again -- that "systemic" violations are taking place against Palestinian detainees.

N) [Pope Francis, American Churches, and Palestinian Rights, Grace Said, Joanna Springer , Al-Shabaka, September 21, 2015](#)

Pope Francis' September 2015 visit to the US will doubtless reinforce his reach to the new audiences he has attracted beyond the Catholic Church with his strong positions on such issues as the environment, poverty, migrants – and Palestinian rights to freedom and equality. Yet the Catholic Church is among a handful of establishment US churches – the Episcopal and Lutheran churches are two others – that has yet to endorse divesting from companies profiting from Israel's occupation of Palestine or boycotting products made in the illegal Israeli settlements.

O) [Full-page Ad in Los Angeles Times calls on Oscar nominees to #skipthetrip offered by Israeli Government, Naomi Dann, JVP, February 24, 2016](#)

A full-page color ad calling on Oscar nominees to #SkipTheTrip being offered by the Israeli government in swag bags was published in the Calendars section of today's Los Angeles Times. The ad, which is sponsored by Jewish Voice for Peace (JVP) and the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation, urges nominees not to endorse Israeli apartheid by participating in a government-sponsored junket.

P) [A satirical You Tube on Israel's free trip to Oscar nominees](#)

Q) [Israel's claims of Palestinian incitement forget reality, Ashraf Al-Ajrami , Al-Monitor, March 3, 2016](#)

We must show our suffering and true pain every time we lose a Palestinian soul, and we must not portray ourselves as being happy that we have added to the number of our martyrs. We must be portrayed in our true light, i.e. a nation suffering under occupation that want to get rid of this occupation and live in freedom, security and peace. We are a nation who wants life and sanctifies it, not a nation who wants death for themselves and others.

R) [The right to own property — for Jews alone, Yossi Gurvitz, +972 Blog, March 4, 2016](#)

The Israeli government never authorized the wholesale annexation of the West Bank. That's why it's doing it behind everyone's backs.

S) [Israel accused of trickery to snatch refugee lands, Jonathan Cook, Middle East Eye, February 25, 2016](#)

Palestinian families warned of subterfuge designed to pressure them into signing over to Israel their rights to 1948 property

T) [The NY Times, Netanyahu's Stenographer, Barbara Erickson, Times Warp, February 27, 2016](#)

The New York Times serves as Benjamin Netanyahu's stenographer in a story this week that reports his latest rant against critics of Israeli policy, repeating his claims at length but making no attempt to verify or even question the distortions in his response.