

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
May 5, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the suffering of the Palestinian people due to the Israeli occupation; two book recommendations; one stating that the U.S. has undermined peace in the Middle East, and the other describing the path of an Israeli Jew to belief in peace between two peoples in the same land; Israeli rejection of the French initiative to convene an international peace conference, ahead of a foreign ministers' summit France has initiated and planned for May 30 in Paris; conflicting reports about the killing of a pregnant Palestinian young woman and her brother as they walked the wrong route while heading to the Qalandia terminal, and links to other articles of interest.

Commentary: According to Miko Peled in his new book, *The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine*, "At the first meeting of the General Staff after the 1967 Six-Day War General Matti Peled stated that 'Taking the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and Golan Heights was never part of any official plan.' He spoke of the unique chance the victory offered Israel to solve the Palestinian problem once and for all. . . [He said] for the first time in Israel's history, we are face to face with the Palestinians, without other Arab countries dividing us. Now we have a chance to offer the Palestinians a state of their own. . . He later also claimed with certainty that holding on to the West Bank and the people living in it was contrary to Israel's long term strategy of building a secure Jewish democracy with a stable Jewish majority. If we kept these lands, popular resistance to the occupation was sure to arise, and Israel's army would be used to quell that resistance, with disastrous and demoralizing results. He concluded that this would turn the Jewish state into an increasingly brutal occupying power and eventually into a bi-national state." (pages 59–60)

And so it has come to pass!

- The General Churches in America and the Holy Land Conference opened its sessions on April 19 at the Jimmy Carter Center in Atlanta under the title, "Devote Peace and Promote Resilience." The conference discussed a number of issues that shed light on the suffering of the Palestinian people with regards to the Israeli occupation practices as well the embarrassment experienced by the Palestinians at roadblocks and denying them the right to get to holy places in order to obliterate Christian and Muslim holy sites.
- Al-Shabaka Policy Advisor Rashid Khalidi in his 2013 book *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, identified three patterns that have characterized U.S. policy towards the conflict since 1948: a) the complaisance of Arab rulers that need U.S. support against their own peoples; b) presidential solicitude for domestic constituencies; and c) U.S. unconcern about the fate of the Palestinians.
- In *The General's Son*, Miko Peled writes about growing up in Jerusalem in the heart of the group that ruled the then-young country, Israel. He describes the path he took to his belief in peace between the two peoples living in the Holy Land. And he paints numerous touching portraits of Palestinian and Israeli peace activists he has worked with in recent years.
- Paul R. Pillar in National Interest states that U.S. aid is a subsidy for Israeli taxpayers, paid for by American taxpayers. American taxpayers have been very generous in this regard with the annual aid package to Israel exceeding \$3 billion in each of the last several years and with total U.S. aid to Israel, even by the most conservative tallies, topping \$120 billion.

- Barak Ravid reports in Haaretz that Israel officially rejected the French initiative to convene an international peace conference, ahead of a foreign ministers' summit France has initiated and planned for May 30 in Paris. Prime Minister Netanyahu's Office calls for direct talks, saying the Paris summit would distance the Palestinians from the negotiations table; U.S. says Kerry still undecided on attending the conference.
- Saed Bannoura writes in IMEMC that Palestinian medical sources confirmed that the Palestinian woman, who was killed by Israeli army fire, on Wednesday, (April 27) did not carry an explosive belt as the army claimed, but was instead five months pregnant, and "her only fault was walking the wrong route and not understanding Hebrew."

1) [Twal: "Do Not Await US Government To Find A Solution To Suffering Palestinians"](#), HCEF, April 25, 2016

"The General Churches in America and the Holy Land Conference opened its sessions on Tuesday, April 19, 2016 at the Jimmy Carter Center in Atlanta State under the title, 'Devote Peace and Promote Resilience.'

"The conference was attended by 22 heads of American churches, and six heads of Christian churches in the Holy Land. They are represented by Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Fouad Twal, Patriarch of the Orthodox Church of Jerusalem Theophilos III, Custodian of the Holy Land Father Ibrahim Faltas, Chancellor of the Latin Patriarchate Fr. George Ayoub, Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem Suhail Dawani, Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land Munib Younan, head of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the Holy Land, Rev. Mitri Raheb, director of Dar al- Kalima Model School, and Dr. Farzeen Aghakebian, member of the independent Commission for human rights in Palestine." . . .

"In an address Patriarch Twal said, "In light of the suffering experienced by the Palestinians, do not await the US government to find a solution; you should take the initiative and defend yourselves in the face of injustice." He added, "Siding with the parties that seek to reach solutions to all the problems that breed violence, conflicts and wars—such as settlement building which gradually eliminates any chance for peace— is one of the challenges we are facing. So, the Church leaders must have the courage to defend justice and freedom for the benefit of Arabs and Jews alike." The patriarch also drew attention that attaining this goal requires resorting to the approach that agrees with our Christian identity." . . .

"The peace statement calls for the end of continuing occupation of Palestinian lands beyond the 1967 borders. 'We need to focus on bringing an end to the many elements of occupation including second class citizenship that is an affront to Christ's message of love and inclusivity,' reads the document. 'The continuing expansion of illegal Israeli settlements on Palestinian lands increasingly dims the hopes and realistic prospects for a two-state solution and is a major threat to peace.'"

2) [The US Elections, Attacks on Activists, and a Changing Discourse](#), Rashid Khalidi, Al-Shabaka, April 25, 2016

"In his 2013 book *Brokers of Deceit: How the U.S. Has Undermined Peace in the Middle East*, Al-Shabaka Policy Advisor Rashid Khalidi identified three main patterns that have characterized United States policy towards the conflict since 1948: The complaisance of Arab rulers that need US support against their own peoples; presidential solicitude for domestic constituencies; and US unconcern about the fate of the Palestinians." . . .

"There is indeed an ongoing shift in discourse. It is partly generational and partly due to the move to new and alternative and social media. It is this shift that explains why you can now have BDS campaigns and a candidate like Bernie Sanders who can say the kinds of things he said in his Idaho speech – the speech he didn't deliver at AIPAC –

like talking about Israel controlling 80% of the water reserves in the West Bank, which injects a little bit of reality into the discourse. Sanders' core supporters are largely younger, more liberal people who are reflective of a growing part of the base of the Democratic Party.

"There is a mendacious construct focusing on Palestinian "terrorism" and Israeli "security" that is used to describe the situation in the Middle East, which most politicians mechanically repeat. The fact that people like Sanders or Senator Patrick Leahy are publicly – and that others are privately – beginning to throw away that false script is a function of broader change." . . .

"While some parts of US society are now more truth-based, nothing has changed in terms of the way in which US elites define this country's strategic interests in the Middle East, and therefore nothing has changed about the policy status quo." . . .

"Sanders' positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are intended to appeal to his base. He is immune to some of the attacks or smears against other politicians because he is Jewish and has lived in Israel. His hiring of the young Jewish anti-occupation activist Simone Zimmerman as his national Jewish outreach coordinator was in tune with the make-up of his base of supporters (Zimmerman has since been suspended because of comments on Facebook against Benjamin Netanyahu and Hillary Clinton).

"The reality is that the established Jewish community leadership does not represent its supposed constituency. Older, richer, conservatives dominate the local federations and most community organizations, but many American Jews are not old, rich or conservative. Leading establishment members such as Haim Saban and Sheldon Adelson are to the right even of Netanyahu; a large number of American Jews do not have such right-wing views on Palestine/Israel. Sanders has proven that amongst younger groups there is enormous openness to thinking about things differently."

See also Link A - [On Palestinian Human Rights, We in America Need to Move From Talk to Action, Wardah](#)

3) Miko Peled. [The General's Son: Journey of an Israeli in Palestine](#). Second edition. New York: Just World Books.

Miko Peled is an Israeli peace activist who spends his time between Jerusalem and San Diego, CA. Born into a strongly Zionist family in Jerusalem, as a young man he witnessed the transformation of his well-known father, Gen. Matti Peled, from a leader in Israel's military to a courageous peace activist. Later, he followed a somewhat similar path of his own, as traced in *The General's Son*. *The General's Son* has been translated into numerous other languages, and Peled has lectured around the world in his campaign to promote justice, democracy, and equal rights for Palestinians and Israelis.

In 1997, a tragedy struck his family. His beloved niece Smadar was killed by a suicide bomber in Jerusalem. That tragedy propelled Peled onto a journey of discovery. It pushed him to re-examine many of the beliefs he had grown up with, as the son and grandson of leading figures in Israel's political-military elite, and transformed him into a courageous and visionary activist in the struggle for human rights and a hopeful, lasting peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

In *The General's Son*, Peled writes about growing up in Jerusalem in the heart of the group that ruled the then-young country, Israel. He describes the path he took to his belief in peace between the two peoples living in the Holy Land. And he paints numerous touching portraits of Palestinian and Israeli peace activists he has worked with in recent years.

4) [The False Impasse Over Aid to Israel: Congress's bizarre struggle over how large a gift to give Jerusalem.](#) Paul R. Pillar, National Interest, April 30, 2016

“This is not a situation in which each country would have something to lose if no agreement is reached. Instead it is entirely a one-sided arrangement: a gift of money from the United States to Israel. There is nothing in any such aid package that carries a benefit for the United States and that the United States would not be getting in the absence of an agreement.” . . .

“The U.S. aid is a subsidy for Israeli taxpayers, paid for by American taxpayers. American taxpayers have been very generous in this regard (or made to be so by American politicians), with the annual aid package to Israel exceeding \$3 billion in each of the last several years and with total U.S. aid to Israel, even by the most conservative tallies, topping \$120 billion. With the Israeli government budget at around \$75 billion, the annual gift from American taxpayers is equivalent to about a four percent rebate to Israeli taxpayers.” . . .

“The only possible justification for increased largesse to Israel at this point would be as preparation for a serious effort in the remaining months of the Obama administration to get the Israeli government to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians involving a genuine two-state solution. To be seen bending over even farther backwards than before as a supporter of Israel could be a necessary part of any such effort, given political realities in both Israel and the United States. But whether the Obama administration will make such an effort remains to be seen.”

“The situation at hand is the equivalent of a nephew complaining about the amount of birthday gift money he got from an uncle and wanting uncle to agree to give more. Negotiation is not the appropriate response for uncle. Either walking or saying “take it or leave it” would be more appropriate, as would a stern reminder to the nephew about who in this relationship is the giver and who is the taker.”

See also Link F - [Exclusive: Large majority of U.S. Senate pushes Obama to boost Israel aid](#); Link G - [America's 83 Ignoramuses Are Enabling Destruction by Israel](#)

5) [Israel Rejects French Initiative to Convene International Peace Conference](#), Barak Ravid, Haaretz, April 28, 2016

“Prime Minister Neganyahu’s Office calls for direct talks, saying the Paris summit would distance the Palestinians from the negotiations table; U.S. says Kerry still undecided on attending the conference.

“Israel officially rejected the French initiative to convene an international peace conference on Thursday, ahead of a foreign ministers' summit France has initiated and planned for May 30 in Paris.

“‘Israel remains steadfast in its position that the best way to resolve the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians is by direct and bilateral negotiations,’ read a statement from the Prime Minister’s Office, a few hours before the start of the holiday.

“‘Israel is ready immediately to begin direct negotiations with the Palestinians without any preconditions. Any other diplomatic initiative distances the Palestinians from the table of direct negotiations.’”

See also Link E - [PLO slams Israel’s rejection of French initiative](#)

6) [The Woman, Who was Killed By Israeli Soldiers Along With Her Brother, Was Pregnant, Saed Bannoura, IMEMC, April 28, 2016](#)

“Palestinian medical sources confirmed that the Palestinian woman, who was killed by Israeli army fire, on Wednesday, (April 27) did not carry an explosive belt as the army claimed, but was instead five months pregnant, and ‘her only fault was walking the wrong route and not understanding Hebrew.’

“The Israeli police and army tried to come up with various allegations, including the usual claim of “carrying a knife,” and then tried to claim that she “was wearing an explosive belt,” while the only thing she “carried” was her fetus. The slain woman has been identified as Maram Saleh Abu Ismael, 24, a mother of two children; Sarah, 6, and Remas, 4. Her brother, Ibrahim Taha, only sixteen years of age, was also killed as he was walking with her, heading to Jerusalem, after she obtained for the first time, a permit to enter the city.

“In contrary to the Israeli allegation that Maram “carried a knife,” and the second allegation of “carrying an explosive,” eyewitnesses said the two victims walked the wrong route while heading to the Qalandia terminal, as they took the route that is only used for vehicles, instead of the pedestrian path.

“The soldiers then started shouting in Hebrew, a language neither Maram nor her brother understood, and the woman just froze from fear before the soldiers started firing at her, and when her brother rushed to rescue her, the soldiers shot him too, and both were left to bleed to death.”

See also Link B - [Brother and sister slain at checkpoint were executed, Palestinians say](#); Link C - [Abbas, Hamas slam Israel for 'execution' of Palestinian siblings](#); Link D - [Release the Qalandiyah Video](#)

Other items of interest:

A) [On Palestinian Human Rights, We in America Need to Move From Talk to Action, Wardah Khalid, Haaretz, April 19, 2016](#)

When Bernie Sanders, the State Department and U.S. senators all condemn Israel's human rights abuses of Palestinians in the space of a few weeks, is the American conversation about Israel-Palestine finally changing?

B) [Brother and sister slain at checkpoint were executed, Palestinians say, Maureen Clare Murphy, Electronic Intifada, April 27, 2016](#)

Israeli forces killed a young woman and her 16-year-old brother at a military checkpoint on Wednesday and denied emergency medics access to the siblings. Israel claimed the pair were killed during an attempted attack on soldiers, but eyewitnesses disputed this version of events.

C) [Abbas, Hamas slam Israel for 'execution' of Palestinian siblings, Ma'an News Agency, April 28, 2016](#)

The Palestinian leadership across the political spectrum on Thursday issued official condemnations of the “execution” of two Palestinian siblings shot dead by Israeli forces in Ramallah after an alleged stab attack the day prior.

D) [Release the Qalandiyah Video, Haaretz Editorial, May2, 2016](#)

The refusal of police to release footage of the incident only increases fear that a crime was committed when two Palestinians were shot by security guards.

E) [PLO slams Israel's rejection of French initiative, Ma'an News Service, April 28, 2016](#)

PLO Secretary General Saeb Erekat slammed Israel's rejection of the upcoming French initiative as a “reaffirmation of the Israeli government's decision to continue its crimes and violations,” in a press release published Thursday evening.”

- F) [Exclusive: Large majority of U.S. Senate pushes Obama to boost Israel aid, Patricia Zengerle, Reuters, April 25, 2016](#)
More than four-fifths of the U.S. Senate have signed a letter urging President Barack Obama to quickly reach an agreement on a new defense aid package for Israel worth more than the current \$3 billion per year. Eighty-three of the 100 senators signed the letter, led by Republican Lindsey Graham and Democrat Chris Coons. Senator Ted Cruz, a 2016 presidential candidate, was one of the 51 Republicans on board. The Senate's Democratic White House hopeful, Bernie Sanders, was not among the 32 Democrats.
- G) [America's 83 Ignoramuses Are Enabling Destruction by Israel, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, Apr 28, 2016](#)
The 83 U.S. senators who urged the president to increase military assistance to Israel are 83 ignoramuses and their letter is a disgrace. Israel of all countries? Military assistance of all needs? Your money, senators, is being spent on maintaining a brutal, illegal occupation that your country claims to oppose.
- H) [PASSOVER - 40 years of wandering to nearly 50 years of occupation, Yossi Alpher, APN, April 14, 2016](#)
Yossi Alpher writes that his latest book, No End of Conflict: Rethinking Israel-Palestine reflects a somber mood. One of the key points I make in the book is that the American Jewish community will increasingly feel the impact of the negative direction Israeli-Palestinian relations are taking. In other words, American Jews have to come to terms with some unpleasant Israeli realities.
- I) [A new era of anti-occupation Judaism, Leanne Gale, +972 Blog, April 20, 2016](#)
American Jews have long overwhelmingly supported an end to the occupation, but increasingly, we are building an organized critical mass who are also willing to push our institutions and politicians in the same direction. IfNotNow takes its Passover message of liberation to Hillel and AIPAC.
- J) [Statement on "Labour's problem with antisemitism", From the Jewish Socialists' Group \(UK\), April 28, 2016](#)
Antisemitism and anti-Zionism are not the same. Zionism is a political ideology which has always been contested within Jewish life since it emerged in 1897, and it is entirely legitimate for non-Jews as well as Jews to express opinions about it, whether positive or negative. Not all Jews are Zionists. Not all Zionists are Jews.
- K) [Israel Is Politicized. Tell Me Something New, Michael J. Koplow, Israel Policy Forum, April 22, 2016](#)
Two important events took place in the last seven days related to Israel's role in American political discourse. The first was last Thursday night's Democratic debate in Brooklyn, when Bernie Sanders and Hillary Clinton had one of the longest sustained exchanges on Israel that I can recall in any presidential primary debate. The second was the annual J Street conference, which hosted speeches by Joe Biden and John Kerry that were both critical of the current Israeli government to some degree.
- L) [Biden Laments 'Overwhelming Frustration' With Israeli Gov't at J Street Gala, Josh Lederman, Haaretz, April 19, 2016](#)
'There is at the moment no political will that I observed from either Israelis or Palestinians to go forward with serious negotiations,' says Biden in J Street address.
- M) [CMEP Bulletin – April 22, 2016 - French Peace Conference Moving Forward](#)
- N) [CMEP Bulletin – April 29, 2016 - US & Palestinian Churches Lay Groundwork for Peace](#)
- O) [Collective punishment of Gaza, Arab Digest, April 20, 2016](#)
Arab Digest Summary: Gaza still shattered following the last war in 2014. Pledges of aid not honored. Another

war? A cry for help from behind the blockade.

P) [Obama's Failed 'Hope' in Gaza, Mohammed Omer, Consortium News, April 17, 2016](#)

Eight years ago, President Obama offered "hope" for change in the world, but politics and pressures won out, with his failure nowhere more obvious than in Gaza, as Palestinian journalist Mohammed Omer explains in this open letter.

Q) [PCHR Publishes New Report In March 2016 As Part Of The Closure Reports' Series, IMEMC News, April 26, 2016 3:00 PM](#)

The Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) published a new report as part of the series of the monthly "Closure Reports" addressing the latest developments of the state of the Gaza Strip border crossings in March 2016. The report documents the impact of the ongoing Israel-imposed siege on Palestinian civilians, which affects their economic and social conditions. It also refutes Israel's claims that it has eased the closure of the Gaza Strip for the ninth consecutive year.

R) ["Learning From What Works: Strategic Analysis of the Achievements of the Israel-Palestine Human Rights Community, Jessica Montell, SIDA, September 2015](#)

Jessica Montell, former director of B'Tselem, recently" whose Executive Summary states, "Despite its many achievements, the human rights community has so far been powerless to influence the broader trends of entrenched occupation, settlement expansion and more bloody military operations.

S) [Israel's Nuclear Weapons Program and the Displacement of Palestinian Bedouins, IMEMC News, Fahwad Al-Khadoumi, April 7, 2016](#)

Lance Bartholomeus, Director of UNRWA Operations in the West Bank condemned Israel's latest round of large scale demolitions of homes in the Palestinian Bedouin refugee community Um al-Khair in the occupied Palestinian West Bank. Israel uses parts of the Negev desert for testing weapons with nuclear material and to dispose of nuclear waste from its not-IAEA monitored Dimona nuclear facility.

T) [Mandela's statue arrived in Palestine, but his legacy hasn't yet, Amer Zahr, The Civil Arab, April 30, 2016](#)

Five days ago, the Palestinian people received a gift from the people of South Africa. Last Tuesday, a massive 6-meter tall bronze statue of Nelson Mandela was unveiled in Ramallah. Many seek to compare the current situation in Palestine to the history of South Africa. And there are, for sure, many similarities. Israel acts in much the same fashion as the Afrikaner regime of South Africa did