

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
October 1, 2015



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The six featured articles of this issue of Middle East Notes cover a number of concerns: President Obama and the leaders of the European Union, with the Iran Nuclear deal now a fact, possibly refocusing on the Israel/Palestine conflict; Israel's persistent assaults and escalating incursions and violence on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound; the challenges posed by the continuing decrease of secular Jews in Israel; the weakening of AIPAC; and the unrealism of a "One State Solution."

Commentary: The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns supports Pope Francis' call to collaboration and peacemaking in his recent addresses to the U.N. and the U.S. Congress. Pope Francis and Prime Minister Netanyahu have been the most recent speakers to the U.S. Congress. Both were well received by Congress. Both spoke of peace; the former for the world; the latter for Israel and the Middle East. One reminded us of the poor and forgotten; the other of power and enemies. Their messages were dialectically different: one calling for dialog and diplomacy and the other promoting confrontation and continuing sanctions. Francis was as a brother and bridge-builder both by U.S. Catholics and the general population. Netanyahu left U.S. Jews and Israel supporters divided and confused.

The repression and suppression of the Palestinian people continues to increase alongside the fears and anxieties of the Israeli leaders who continue to support policies that have failed to resolve this decades-old conflict. Justice, mutual respect and the common good of all the Palestinian and Israeli people are the only viable foundation for lasting peace. Pope Francis has promoted this foundation for all people. It is time for Israelis, Palestinians, and all people of good will to continue building on that foundation.

- Sam Bahour writes in Talking Points Memo that President Obama promised, as soon as the Iran nuclear deal closes, to refocus on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Given this shift of focus is now in sight, Obama should grant U.S. recognition of Palestine as an independent state, albeit a militarily occupied one.
- IMEMC (International Middle East Media Center) reports that Dr. Hanan Ashrawi stated that Israel is provoking a global holy war.
- Aluf Benn writes in Haaretz that Israel's core is crumbling and that this is more important than the Iran deal. The demographic changes in its population with more ultra-Orthodox, Arabs and religious Jews and fewer secular Jews will only increase.
- Ali Gharib in Loblog notes that the shifts happening in America's pro-Israel politics are not new. The Iran deal fight in Congress stands, so far, as a culminating example, but it was by no stretch the start of liberal and Democratic disillusionment with AIPAC—and, more importantly, with the policies of the Israel Government for whose interests the group consistently lobbies.
- Nehemia Shtrasler writes in Haaretz that the idea of a "one-state" solution is a romantic recipe for civil war which only appeals to those who don't have a clue about the way the human soul operates and who have not learned anything from history.
- Uri Savir notes in Al Monitor that the European Union is contemplating a three-pronged plan to resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict that includes curbing settlement expansion though labeling goods, advancing UN resolution and organizing a regional peace conference. It seems to them that President Barack Obama is not going to engage in a dynamic effort to revive peace talks.
- Other articles of interest.

1) [How Obama Can Save The Two-State Solution Before He Leaves Office](#)

Sam Bahour, Talking Points Memo, September 15, 2015

“President Obama promised that as soon as the Iran nuclear deal is closed he will refocus on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Given this shift of focus is now in sight, Obama should grant U.S. recognition of Palestine as an independent state, albeit a militarily occupied one. Such an elementary step is long overdue and may be the sole act that saves the two-state solution.

Palestine will never be a complete nation state if required to negotiate its statehood with its military occupier Israel. Without the immediate altering of the dynamics of the conflict, extremism is almost guaranteed to begin pouring into the Palestinian community and Israel. Any further deterioration of the situation on the ground could lead a future Republican president to send U.S. boots to protect Israel. That would be a colossal mistake.”...

2) [Ashrawi: "Israel is provoking a global holy war."](#)

International Middle East Media Center, September 16, 2015

“PLO Executive Committee Member Dr. Hanan Ashrawi met with Dr. Alastair McPhail at the PLO Headquarters in Ramallah. Both parties discussed the latest political developments, including Israel’s persistent assaults and escalating incursions and violence on the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound (Al-Haram Al-Sharif) and its Palestinian worshipers.

Dr. Ashrawi said, according to the PNN: “Israel is playing with fire. Clearly, Israel is deliberately creating and escalating a situation of instability, insecurity and violence, thereby incrementally assuring by force its power/security control in preparation for the total annexation and transformation of Al-Haram Al-Sharif.

"By imposing its own version of its concept of the Temple Mount on the third most holiest Islamic site, Israel is not only provoking the Palestinians, but the entire Muslim world.”...

3) [Israel’s core is crumbling – and it’s more important than the Iran deal](#)

Aluf Benn, Haaretz, September 17, 2015

“Someone who wants to know where Israel is headed need not listen to Prime Minister Netanyahu or analyze investor confidence in the capital markets. He can save time by going directly to chart 8.12 of Israel’s statistical yearbook forecasting the number of students and demand for primary school teachers. This table shows the number of first-grade pupils, divided by school system – state, state religious, ultra-Orthodox Jewish and Arab – and projecting numbers for the following five years.

The data and trends are clear. The secular core of Israeli society is shrinking, while the other groups are expanding.”...

4) [AIPAC’s Democrat Problems Go Beyond Obama](#)

Ali Gharib, Loblog, September 22, 2015

...“The shifts happening in America’s pro-Israel politics are not new. The Iran deal fight in Congress stands, so far, as a culminating example, but it was by no stretch the start of liberal and Democratic disillusionment with AIPAC—and, more importantly, with the country whose interests the group fights for. Netanyahu has moved right in the Israeli political context as his needs dictated—recall his disclaiming the two-state solution and bigoted warnings about Arab Israelis “voting in droves” during the last Israeli election cycle. But he also brought the rightward shift to America, a political terrain he knows well. Over the past several years, evidence of it is plainly available for anyone willing to look: the Prime Minister’s all-but-endorsement of Mitt Romney in the 2012 presidential race; his appointment of a close aide and former Republican operative, Ron Dermer, to Israel’s most important diplomatic post, its ambassador to Washington; and Dermer’s role in orchestrating the partisan effort to give his boss the most prestigious platform—the podium before a joint session of Congress—from which to try to sabotage the top foreign-policy priority of a sitting U.S. president.”...

5) [One State for Israelis and Palestinians? A Romantic Recipe for Civil War](#)

Nehemia Shtrasler, Haaretz, September 22, 2015

“What better time than Yom Kippur to do a little soul-searching. Perhaps the “two-state” idea really has gone bust and we ought to move ahead toward a better “one-state” solution? One state that is an exemplar of democracy, egalitarian and merciful, a state of all its citizens that treats all its inhabitants equally, without discrimination or prejudice, and is a global model for peace and tranquility — And the wolf shall live with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the goat.” ...

6) [EU has new plan for Israeli-Palestinian peace, but will it work?](#)

Uri Savir, Al Monitor, September 23, 2015

“While the leading European Union foreign ministers are primarily preoccupied with the refugee crisis and the implementation of the Iran agreement, there is growing pressure from some key players to be more assertive in advancing a two-state solution for Israel and Palestine. These key players include High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy Federica Mogherini and the foreign ministers of France, Spain and Italy (Laurent Fabius, Jose Manuel Garcia-Margallo y Marfil and Paolo Gentiloni).

A senior foreign policy source in the EU headquarters in Brussels told Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity that despite improving relations between the EU and the United States due to the Iran deal, there is a divide in policy outlook when it comes to the Israeli-Palestinian issue. It has been made clear to the EU leadership that President Barack Obama is not going to engage in a dynamic effort to revive peace talks. At most, the United States will be involved in efforts to prevent violence in and from the West Bank and Gaza.

The EU acts according to a different timeline and perceives an urgent need to strengthen the status of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to ensure his place in the moderate camp.” ...

Other articles of interest:

[Israel’s left is finally bringing its racism out of the closet, Jonathan Cook, The National , September 22, 2015](#) *(With the announcement that Barack Obama will soon host Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House, it is time to brace for the resumption of a tired debate about whether the Israeli prime minister seriously wishes to revive the peace process.)*

[AL-KHALIL \(HEBRON\): Palestinian teenager fatally shot at Shuhada Checkpoint, CPTnet, September 24, 2015](#) *(Hadil Hashlamoun (18), a first year student at Hebron University, was shot dead by Israeli forces at Shuhada checkpoint in Hebron on Tuesday morning (22.09.15). She and her family lived in Hebron.)*

[AL-KHALIL \(HEBRON\): Privilege in Palestine and Pennsylvania, Lowell Brown, CPTnet, September 24, 2015](#) *(A month ago I visited Israel and Palestine for the first time to learn about the Israel-Palestine conflict. Instead, I learned about the United States. The guns are different, the land is different, but the ideologies are the same. People with power—people like me—use any means to take what we want.)*

[How to neutralize stone throwers — without killing them, Lisa Goldman, +972, September 21, 2015](#) *(End the occupation, and extend full civil rights to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem. It’s that simple.)*

[Jerusalem's sickness runs deeper than the occupation, Amjad Iraqi, +972, September 22, 2015](#)

(Jerusalem's real problem is the nationalist and religious fervor in both Israeli and Palestinian societies that foment the greed, competitiveness, obsession, insecurity, and desire for control of the city and its narrative.)

[Regrets but never an apology: When the IDF makes 'mistakes', Noam Rotem, +972, September 22, 2015](#)

(For Jews, Yom Kippur is a time to ask forgiveness from those one has harmed during the course of the year. The Israeli army has a hard time with the concept of saying it is sorry or asking forgiveness. Regretful? Sure. Sorry? Not when the victim is Palestinian.)

[Most Palestinians Now Oppose Two-state Solution, New Research Reveals, Ali Sawafta, Haaretz,](#)

[September 21, 2015](#) *(A new poll overturns previous findings on the preferred Palestinian outcome to the conflict, and demonstrates widespread pessimism among those living in the West Bank and Gaza.)*

[Addressing the root of the Palestinian refugee problem, Natasha Roth, +972, September 24, 2015](#)

(Cash shortages at UNRWA distract from the wider issue: it is the lack of a diplomatic solution, not funding, that leaves Palestinian refugees vulnerable.)

[Rights group: More than 1,990 Palestinian children killed since 2000, Ma'an, September 21, 2015](#)

(At least 1,991 Palestinian children have been killed by Israeli forces and Jewish extremists since 2000, according to figures released by an international rights group.)

[Clashes on Jerusalem's Al Aqsa Compound as Jewish New Year Begins, CMEP Bulletin – September 18,](#)

[2015](#) *(Israeli police found pipe bombs at the entrance to Al Aqsa Mosque Sunday morning during what they described as a preemptive operation. Palestinian protestors who had barricaded themselves inside Al Aqsa Mosque responded to the Israeli police with stones and firecrackers.)*

[Christian School Strike Continues , CMEP Bulletin – September 25, 2015](#) *(On September 1st 47 Christian*

schools (3,000 teachers and 33,000 students) in Israel went on strike to protest budget cuts by the Israeli Ministry of Education.)

[Press Release – Americans for Peace Now to President Obama: On Heels of Iran Diplomatic Victory, Time](#)

[To Turn Back to Israel-Palestine, September 17, 2015](#) *(Following the last failed effort in the Senate today to kill the JCPOA before the end of the 60-day review period (which expires at midnight), APN President and CEO Debra DeLee issued the following statement.)*

[BDS In Perspective, Michael Plitnick, Foundation for Middle East Peace, September 15, 2015](#) *(In the ten*

years since it commenced, the global Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement (BDS) has slowly but steadily risen in visibility. Today, both the Israeli government and some in the U.S. are presenting it as an existential threat to Israel. Therefore, it is important to determine exactly what we're talking about when we discuss BDS and it is equally important that we take a critical look at what its real impact is.)

[Fear and loathing at the Temple Mount, Nahum Barnea, Ynetnews, September 19, 2015](#) *(As tensions*

continue to simmer in Jerusalem's Old City, Nahum Barnea goes to the Temple Mount and speaks with a sheikh, who explains the limits of reconciliation, and an Israeli former security commander, who explains the importance of the status quo.)