

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
December 6, 2012



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Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns. Also, starting this week, Middle East Notes will publish every other week. See you on December 20.

This week's Middle East Notes gives data and reflections on the recognition of Palestine as an Observer State of the United Nations, and the response of Israel to this reality.

- **December 1 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** The United Nations General Assembly recognition of the Palestinian State and Advent/Christmas reflections are the foci of this week's Bulletin.
- **The full text of PA President Mahmoud Abbas's address to the UN General Assembly:** An English translation of this text is presented on Ha'aretz's website.
- **Palestine granted UN Observer State status:** James Wall writes that history may well record what happened on November 29, 2012, as Mahmoud Abbas' "finest hour." This was the day the Palestinian Authority president announced to the world that he would no longer bow to blackmail from the West.
- **UN voting tabulation:** Ha'aretz records the names of the 138 countries voting in favor of recognition of the State of Palestine, of the nine who voted against, and the four that abstained. Also, read about **UN General Assembly Resolution 181**, which 56 member nations adopted on Nov. 29, 1947. The final vote was 33 UN members in favor of partition, 13 against, including 12 Muslim countries, with 10 abstentions.
- **Israel's punishment:** Ha'aretz opines that by the UN vote most of the world said yes to a two-state solution while Israel's government responded with a step that, first and foremost, punishes Israel itself.
- **The west's illusion: Netanyahu wants peace:** Robert Frisk reports on his conversation with Uri Averbach who is one of Israel's great leftist warriors wanting peace with Hamas and Gaza – but does the Knesset?
- **Europe threatens to withdraw support for Israel over settlement building plans:** Barak Ravid in +972 writes that Europe has been putting heavy diplomatic pressure on Israel to reverse its decision to proceed with development plans for a new neighborhood in the area between Ma'aleh Adumim and Jerusalem, known as the E1 corridor.
- **Still think Obama is going to "save Israel from itself"?** Larry Derfner writes in +972 that since winning reelection, Obama has championed Netanyahu's war in Gaza and rejectionism in the UN. Enough illusions about this U.S. administration.
- **Israel cannot achieve security by dominating Palestinians:** Rabbi Michael Lerner, writing on CNN.com, says the powerful should show more generosity to the relatively powerless; Israel, U.S. should support Palestinian move for nonmember state status at the UN.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin December 1, 2012

UNGA recognizes Palestinian statehood: On Thursday, November 29, the United Nations General Assembly voted overwhelmingly [to upgrade the Palestinian delegation's observer status](#) to a "non-member observer state." ... [T]he resolution was passed with the support of 138 nations and 41 abstentions. ...

The strong support for Palestinians by the European nations reflects their impatience with Israeli government's actions that contradict the peace process. The Israeli government maintains that it is willing to undertake in direct negotiations without preconditions at any time. Benjamin Netanyahu endorsed the creation of a Palestinian state in 2009 but set onerous conditions. His cabinet never endorsed the plan and his own Likud party remains opposed. He has refused to endorse the proposals put forward by previous Prime Minister Ehud Olmert that had brought the parties closer than ever and he rejected President Obama's 2011 proposal to restart negotiations based on the 1967 lines with agreed upon land swaps.

To emphasize its defiance Israeli government [announced after the vote that it plans to build 3,000 new housing units](#) in East Jerusalem West Bank settlements. The government also announced it will move forward with "preliminary zoning and planning preparations" for housing in the controversial area of E-1 in East Jerusalem. Building in this area ... could effectively cut off the Palestinian cities of Ramallah and Bethlehem from each other and from East Jerusalem, making a contiguous Palestinian state impossible to achieve.

The United States has strongly opposed building in E-1 for 20 years. However, so far the State Department has only repeated its low-key statement that it opposes construction of settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem and that they make it harder to resume direct negotiations and achieve a two-state outcome. It said, "We reiterate our longstanding opposition to settlements and East Jerusalem construction. We believe it is counterproductive and makes it harder to resume direct negotiations and achieve a two-state outcome."

It is uncertain whether the UN vote will have a lasting effect on the stalemated peace efforts. It clearly has given a political lift to President Abbas who is seen by Palestinians as ineffective in making progress toward ending the occupation despite close cooperation with the Israeli government on security matters. On the other hand, nothing has changed in the ground and Israel has shown it is determined to push ahead with settlements. ...

Advent and Christmas 2012 daily reflections: As Christians the season of Advent is a time of expectant waiting. We know God is with us. We believe God is with us. Yet, sometimes, especially when we think of the violence, pain, and sorrows of the people of Israel and Palestine, we may not necessarily feel God's presence with us. To help all of us during this season of Advent (December 1 in the Catholic and Protestant calendars) and through Christmas (January 7 in the Orthodox calendar), CMEP will be sending daily emails to encourage all of us to ponder and pray for peace.

If you would like to receive these emails, [please click here](#) and sign up.

[Read the entire CMEP Bulletin here.](#)

2) PA President Mahmoud Abbas's addresses UN General Assembly, November 29, 2012

Mr. President of the General Assembly, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Palestine comes today to the United Nations General Assembly at a time when it is still tending to its wounds and still burying its beloved martyrs of children, women and men who have fallen victim to the latest Israeli aggression, still searching for remnants of life amid the ruins of homes destroyed by Israeli bombs on the Gaza Strip, wiping out entire families, their men, women and children murdered along with their dreams, their hopes, their future and their longing to live an ordinary life and to live in freedom and peace.

Palestine comes today to the General Assembly because it believes in peace and because its people, as proven in past days, are in desperate need of it.

Palestine comes today to this prestigious international forum, representative and protector of international legitimacy, reaffirming our conviction that the international community now stands before the last chance to save the two-State solution.

Palestine comes to you today at a defining moment regionally and internationally, in order to reaffirm its presence and to try to protect the possibilities and the foundations of a just peace that is deeply hoped for in our region.

The Israeli aggression against our people in the Gaza Strip has confirmed once again the urgent and pressing need to end the Israeli occupation and for our people to gain their freedom and independence. This aggression also confirms the Israeli Government's adherence to the policy of occupation, brute force and war, which in turn obliges the international community to shoulder its responsibilities towards the Palestinian people and towards peace. This is why we are here today.

I say with great pain and sorrow... there was certainly no one in the world that required that tens of Palestinian children lose their lives in order to reaffirm the above-mentioned facts. There was no need for thousands of deadly raids and tons of explosives for the world to be reminded that there is an occupation that must come to an end and that there are a people that must be liberated. And, there was no need for a new, devastating war in order for us to be aware of the absence of peace. This is why we are here today.

The Palestinian people, who miraculously recovered from the ashes of Al-Nakba of 1948, which was intended to extinguish their being and to expel them in order to uproot and erase their presence, which was rooted in the depths of their land and depths of history. In those dark days, when hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were torn from their homes and displaced within and outside of their homeland, thrown from their beautiful, embracing, prosperous country to refugee camps in one of the most dreadful campaigns of ethnic cleansing and dispossession in modern history. In those dark days, our people had looked to the United Nations as a beacon of hope and appealed for ending the injustice and for achieving justice and peace, the realization of our rights, and our people still believe in this and continue to wait. This is why we are here today.

[Read the entire address on Ha'aretz's website.](#)

3) Palestine wins UN observer state status

James M. Wall, November 29, 2012

History may well record what happened on November 29, 2012, as Mahmoud Abbas' "finest hour." This was the day the Palestinian Authority president announced to the world that he would no longer bow to blackmail from the West.

A familiar political threat by Israel to withhold tax funds due the Authority, did not deter him. Nor was he moved by the insulting British tactic that a pledge not to haul Israel before the world's criminal court, would buy the Crown's yes vote.

The U.S. State Department's most recent contribution to the effort to force Abbas back onto the U.S.-Israeli reservation, was both naive and arrogant. Bill Burns, the U.S. deputy secretary of state, was sent on a last-ditch begging mission to Mahmoud Abbas' New York hotel room to persuade the PA president to "reconsider" his request for statehood status.

Abbas ignored them all. As a result of President Abbas' persistence, the resolution passed, granting Palestine a "nonmember observer state" status in the United Nations. The word "state" in that resolution is huge. It opens doors for Palestine and it represents a step up into international status which is, as of 11/29/12, [65 years overdue](#).

The UN General Assembly (UNGA) approved the Palestinian resolution by an overwhelming majority, 138 in support with only nine in opposition. There were 41 abstentions. (The vote was an improvement over the [October 2011 vote](#) that admitted Palestine to membership in UNESCO). At present, the [Vatican](#) is the only other state that carries the designation of a "nonmember observer state status." Switzerland held the status in 2002, prior to its achieving full membership.

President Abbas made his case for an upgraded status to the UN General Assembly. He delivered a passionate speech in which he centered on a theme he reiterated throughout his speech, ["this is why we are here."](#) Thursday night, the UNGA continued in session. Until adjournment Thursday, live proceedings may [be accessed here](#). Later this same [web address](#) will have the proceedings in its archive. ...

Reporting from the UN, the BBC's Barbara Plett pointed out that Palestine's new status as a nonmember observer state, will allow the Palestinians to participate in debates at the UN and also open the way for Palestine to become members of other UN agencies. The new status will also make it possible for Palestine to have access to a body like the [International Criminal Court](#), an independent agency established in 2002 "to address gross abuses of human rights anywhere in the world." ...

[Read entire piece on Wall's website.](#)

4) [Who voted for the Palestinian upgrade at the UN? Who against?](#)

Use [this link](#) to Ha'aretz's website to see a world map of the countries that voted for or against the Palestinian upgrade at the UN. The page also lists the countries alphabetically.

The Palestinian question in 1947

The UN took up the Palestine question in February 1947. It agreed to the termination of the Mandate granted by the League of Nations, and to independence for Palestine with special concern for the plight of European Jews who had survived the death camps.

[The United Nations Special Commission on Palestine \(UNSCOP\)](#) recommended that Palestine be partitioned into an Arab state and a Jewish state. The commission called for Jerusalem to be put under international administration. The UN General Assembly of 56 member nations adopted this plan on Nov. 29, 1947 as [UN Resolution \(GA 181\)](#), owing to the special support of both the US and the Soviet Union, and in particular, the personal support of U.S. **President Harry S. Truman**.

The final vote was 33 UN members in favor of partition, 13 against, including 12 Muslim countries, with 10 abstentions, including the UK. In November 1947 Jews owned seven percent of the land and constituted 33 percent of the population.

By the Partition arrangement they were given 57.6 percent of the land, and the Palestinians 42.3 percent. Bethlehem and Jerusalem were to be a "corpus separatum" area governed by an international body.

In favor, (33 countries, 72 percent of voting): Bolivia, Brazil, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, Venezuela, Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, United States, Byelorussian SSR, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Ukrainian SSR, Soviet Union, Liberia, South Africa, Philippines

Against (13 countries, 28 percent of voting): Afghanistan, India, Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Yemen, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, Cuba

Abstentions (10 countries): Argentina, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Republic of China, Ethiopia, United Kingdom, Yugoslavia.

Absent (one country): Thailand

5) Israel's punishment

Ha'aretz editorial, December 2, 2012

The government decided this weekend to build another 3,000 housing units in East Jerusalem and the West Bank, and also to move ahead with planning and building procedures for the E1 area, located between Jerusalem and the West Bank settlement of Ma'aleh Adumim. That is how the government responded to the UN General Assembly's decision to recognize Palestine as a nonmember observer state; that is how the government decided to punish the Palestinians and the world.

The latter said its piece loud and clear: Yes to a two-state solution. But Israel's government responded with a step that, first and foremost, punishes Israel. The only positive aspect of this decision is the fact that Israel has recognized that the settlements are indeed a punishment. This is a particularly grave and dangerous decision. Instead of internalizing the fact that a sweeping majority of nations are sick of the Israeli occupation and want a Palestinian state, Israel is entrenching itself even further in its own rejectionism, and deepening its isolation and the disconnect between itself and the international reality. Instead of drawing the necessary conclusions from its resounding failure, the government is dragging Israel into additional diplomatic disasters. And instead of embarking on sincere, genuine negotiations with the new observer state, Israel is turning its back on it, and on the world.

The government's decision is the last nail in the coffin of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Bar-Ilan University speech in 2009. It is proof positive that this speech, in which he ostensibly accepted the principle of two states, was merely a deception. What is particularly astounding, however, is the violation of Israel's commitment to the United States not to build in E1, given that construction there would preclude the establishment of a contiguous Palestinian state in the West Bank. After America was left as virtually the last supporter of Israel's position at the United Nations, Israel is repaying it with a resounding slap in the face.

Israel's decision is also a slap in the face to another loyal friend, German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who explained Germany's abstention in the vote as stemming from Israel's refusal to stop construction in the territories. So, even before the next election, in which the joint "Likud-Beiteinu" ticket is presenting an especially right-wing, extremist slate, Netanyahu has already signaled where he is heading: toward extremism, diplomatic isolation, denunciation and ostracism by the world.

The world - even including the United States this time - can't allow Israel's arrogant response to pass quietly. This very government decision might serve as a spur to those who want to transfer the settlements issue to the International Criminal Court in The Hague, as punishment for the "punishment" imposed by Israel. And the next time Israel needs the world's help, on the Iranian issue or on any other, the world will remember this decision.

6) The West's illusion: Netanyahu wants peace

Robert Frisk, *The Independent* (posted on *Jews for Justice for Palestinians*)

November 23, 2012

Old Uri Avnery is 89 but he's still a fighter. In fact, the famed writer is still one of the great old leftist warriors of Israel, still demanding peace with the Palestinians, peace with Hamas and a Palestinian state on the old '67 borders – give or take a few square miles. He still believes Israel could have peace tomorrow or next week. If Netanyahu wanted it. "The misfortune of being an incorrigible optimist," is how he describes his predicament. Or perhaps an illusionist?

He's still the same guy I last came across 30 years ago, playing chess with Yasser Arafat in the ruins of Beirut. White hair and white beard now, and roaring his words – he's a wee bit deaf these days – with the same rage and humour as ever. I ask Avnery what Netanyahu and his government are doing. What was this Gaza war meant to achieve? The eyes sparkle and he spits out his reply.

"You are presuming you know what they want and you presume they want peace – and therefore that their policy is stupid or insane. But if you assume they don't give a damn for peace but want a Jewish state from the Mediterranean to the Jordan river, then what they are doing makes sense up to a point. The trouble is that what they do want is leading into a cul de sac – because we already have now one state in all of historic Palestine, three quarters of it the Jewish state of Israel and one quarter the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip."

Apartheid in Israel: Avnery speaks in perfect sentences and my pen skids over the page until it runs out of ink and I have to steal one of his.

"If they annex the West Bank as they have annexed East Jerusalem," he says. "It doesn't make much of a difference. The trouble is that in this territory which is now dominated by Israel, there are about 49 percent Jews and 51 percent Arabs – and this balance will become larger every year because the natural increase on the Arab side is far greater than the natural increase on our side. So the real question is: if this policy goes on, what kind of state will it be? As it is today, it is an Apartheid state, a full apartheid in the occupied territories and a growing apartheid in Israel – and if this goes on, it will be full apartheid throughout the country, incontestably."

The Avnery argument goes bleakly on. If the Arab inhabitants are granted civil rights, there will be an Arab majority in the Knesset and the first thing they will do is change the name Israel and name the state Palestine, "and the whole exercise of the past 130 years has come to naught." Mass ethnic cleansing is impossible in the 21st century, he says – or hopes – but there is no discussion about the demography.

"There is a suppression. We are supposed to push this out of our consciousness. Not one single political party speaks about this problem. The word 'peace' does not appear in any election manifesto, except for the little Meretz party – neither the Opposition nor the Coalition. The word 'peace' has completely disappeared. ..."

[Read the entire piece on the Jews for Justice for Palestinians' website.](#)

7) Europe threatens to withdraw support for Israel over settlement building plans

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz

December 2, 2012

Europe has been putting heavy diplomatic pressure on Israel to reverse its decision to proceed with development plans for a new neighborhood in the area between Ma'aleh Adumim and Jerusalem, known as the E1 corridor. Since Friday, five senior European ambassadors have communicated strong words of protest to the Foreign Ministry in Jerusalem, all bearing the same main message: the European Union's demand that Israel reverse its decision.

British Ambassador to Israel Matthew Gould and French Ambassador to Israel Christophe Bigot called Israeli Foreign Ministry Director General Rafi Barak and other senior officials at the Prime Minister's Office on Friday, a senior European diplomat said a short while after Israel announced it was going to accelerate the construction plans on the E1 corridor as a response to Palestinian push for UN recognition.

On Sunday morning, the Netherlands' Ambassador to Israel, Caspar Veldkamp, European Union Ambassador Andrew Standley, and the German deputy ambassador all called the Prime Minister's office. The British, French, and Dutch letters of protest were very strongly worded. Both the French and British ambassadors stressed their call to Israel to go back on its plans to erect 3,000 housing units and not proceed any further with any plans for the E1 corridor. "London is furious with the decision over the E1 corridor," a British diplomat told Haaretz.

The Dutch ambassador, whose country abstained from last week's vote by the United Nations' General Assembly to give Palestine observer status, warned that if Israel moves forward with its construction plans in the E1 corridor, his country will be unable to help Israel and to support its policies in future votes at the UN and other international organizations. The deputy German ambassador had a similar message. A German diplomat said that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is likely to hear serious objections to the plan from Chancellor Angela Merkel when he visits Berlin on Thursday.

EU Ambassador Standley asked officials at the Prime Minister's Office for clarifications concerning the decision, adding that the move contradicts the statements made by Israel before the UN vote. Moreover, it ignores the explicit requests of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Catherine Ashton to refrain from making any moves that would further escalate the situation.

Despite the protests from Europe, a source in the Prime Minister's Office said that Israel is planning to take more steps against the Palestinian Authority. "The Palestinians will soon come to understand that they made a mistake when they took unilateral action and breached their treaties with Israel," the source at the PMO said.

8) Still think Obama is going to “save Israel from Itself”?

Larry Derfner, +972, November 30, 2012

Since winning reelection, Obama has championed Netanyahu’s war in Gaza and rejectionism in the UN. Enough illusions about this U.S. administration.

It’s hard to see how Mitt Romney could have been any more pro-occupation or anti-Palestinian than Obama’s been since getting reelected three and a half weeks ago. (That’s all it was!) First Rashid Khalidi’s old friend supports Operation Pillar of Defense as an exercise of Israel’s “right to self-defense,” without any mention of the people in Gaza (or the West Bank) living under Israel’s thumb for nearly half a century, or, God forbid, that they may have a right to self-defense, too.

And now this at the UN. The “good guys” did it again. The Obama administration actually lobbied the world not to recognize a Palestinian state, arguing that the way to go is for Abbas to negotiate with Netanyahu – on Netanyahu’s terms, without preconditions. The U.S. line remains identical to Bibi’s. (And Obama’s most influential domestic supporter, the New York Times, made the same case – no to Palestine at the UN, yes to peace talks without preconditions – in an [editorial](#).) The president and his people warned and are still warning the Palestinians not to use their new status to take Israel to The Hague. About the only downgrading in the administration’s UN performance from the first time around, in September of last year, is that instead of Obama himself flacking for Bibi at the podium, [UN Ambassador Susan Rice did it from her seat](#).

What’s going on? Obama and the rest of them can’t really believe this crap. They can’t believe Netanyahu wants to negotiate a deal with Abbas, or that the Palestinians were being rash (!) in going to the UN – they know that if Abbas accepts their advice, he and the Palestinians will get nothing but more Israeli contempt for their weakness. The folks in Washington aren’t stupid, they don’t like Bibi one bit, and they don’t have Likud in their blood, either. Everything Obama, Rice, Clinton and the rest of them have been saying since November 6 on Israel and Palestine is, for them, a lie. So why, when they don’t have to worry about Jewish voters in Florida or any other electoral consideration, are they still slinging it for Israel’s No. 1 Republican?

Any number of possible reasons – they don’t want to go back on their “strong for Israel” campaign rhetoric so soon and alienate a lot of supporters; they don’t want to admit, even to themselves, that they were bullied for the last four years; they’re saving their political capital to stop Bibi from bombing Iran – who knows? But the why of it, while interesting, doesn’t matter – the important thing is that Obama, freed of pre-election restraints, and with a long list of offenses from Netanyahu that he would be expected to want to avenge, is not only not avenging, he’s continuing to do this Republican hero’s bidding.

As for the why, my guess is that the administration has decided that it’s futile and self-destructive to try to play Middle East peacemaker again, so why not try to reap some benefit at home by playing Israel’s defender? But whatever the reason, the reelected Obama administration’s support for Israeli aggression in Gaza and rejectionism in the UN shows that it is not going to do a 180 one of these days and commit itself to getting Israel off the Palestinians’ necks. ...

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)

9) Why U.S., Israel should welcome Palestinian move at UN
Rabbi Michael Lerner, CNN, November 28, 2012

***CNN editor's note:** Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun, chair of the interfaith Network of Spiritual Progressives and rabbi of Beyt Tikkun synagogue in Berkeley, CA.*

Israel's security can only be assured when its neighbors believe that it is no longer oppressing the Palestinian people but instead living in peace and harmony with them.

The de facto strategy of past and present Israeli governments of seeking security through domination and by pushing Palestinians out of their homes, or allowing right-wing religious fanatics to create settlements throughout the West Bank to ensure that no Palestinian state could have contiguous parts, has not and cannot work to provide safety for Israel.

Israel's fate and its well-being are intrinsically linked to the well-being of the Palestinian people. It's time for the powerful to show generosity to the relatively powerless.

So those in the U.S. and Israel who want Israel to be secure should welcome the Palestinian Authority's decision to seek observer status as a nonmember state in the United Nations. The authority has agreed to return to negotiations with Israel without conditions once that status has been granted. The goal is creation of a state living in peace with Israel in borders roughly approximating those of the before than 1967 war, with minor border changes mutually agreeable through negotiations.

So who opposes this? [Hamas](#), Israel and the U.S.

Why Hamas? Because Hamas' strategy is to keep their area so powerless that the Palestinian people will turn away from support for the secular and peace-oriented and nonviolence-committed Palestinian Authority. So the last thing Hamas wants is for the Palestinian Authority to win popular esteem by being seen as having "delivered" a real tangible accomplishment to the Palestinian people in the form of statehood.

To the extent that even observer status is a step in that direction, powerful elements in Hamas want to undermine it. In fact, Hamas consistently tries to undermine the Palestinian Authority. That explains why it has been so unwilling in the past years to stop its war crimes against Israeli civilians by sending (thankfully, mostly inefficient) missiles toward Sderot and other parts of southern Israel. But even as they fall short of their targets, Hamas manages to create fear and trauma for millions of Israelis.

Why Israel? Because the Likud-Beiteinu dominated government does not want a Palestinian state to emerge that would limit the ability of the Israeli settlers to expand their hold on much of the West Bank. So while they sometimes talk about a two-state solution, they have in mind a tiny state that would not be economically or politically viable.

Its strategy: Insist that it cannot negotiate seriously with the Palestinian Authority on creation of a state because the authority cannot control Hamas. With that reasoning, they ask how can Israel be expected to work with the authority on terms for a peace treaty that would actually be viable? And then simultaneously, Israel strengthens Hamas in various predictable ways. ...

[Read the entire piece on CNN's website here.](#)