

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
December 31, 2015



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Peace and Wonder in the New Year to all our readers!

The articles and links for the last day of 2016 highlight the challenge of Jewish extremists to the future of Israel, the continuing support of Israel by the U.S. despite fears of its becoming a “unitary state” impossible to function, deteriorating global support for and criticism of occupation actions, reactions to the “breaking the silence” movement, signs of weakening support of the occupation by some U.S. evangelical Christians, and other items of *interest*.

Commentary: *The growing influence of religious “extremists” in government and the IDF is alarming secular Israelis and many global supporters. Efforts by some Knesset members to control and restrict criticism of government and IDF activities by the media and the “breaking the silence” veterans have increased in the past months. The worldwide non-violent BDS movement continues to expand despite government’s efforts to contain it. In the face of expanding settlements and the collapse of a two state solution, many young, hopeless Palestinians continue to resort to suicidal knife attacks on Israelis. 2015 has not been a good year for Israelis and Palestinians.*

- Moshe Arens writes in Haaretz that the Jewish extremists who are running amok in Israel have far more in common with the Islamic State than they realize. Both groups need to be confronted and destroyed.
- Barak Ravid reports in Haaretz that President Obama in a video address told the 1000 participants in the recent HaaretzQ and New Israel Fund conference that bonds between U.S. and Israel, commitment to Israel's security, are unbreakable.
- Yitzhak Benhorin states in Ynetnews that the US Secretary of State criticized the Israeli government in an interview with the New Yorker Magazine. Israel risks becoming “a unitary state that is impossible to manage,” said Kerry.
- Ynetnews believes that 2015 was a bad year for Israel: Israel reached a high in technological strength and a low in global sympathy. The conflict with the Palestinians worsened, and the boycott movement spread to the heart of the U.S. higher education system. Even the economy, our bright side, took a step back.
- Zeev Sternhell writes in Haaretz that Israelis don’t want to confront the ugly truth about the occupation and reject the reports and testimonies collected by the “Breaking the Silence” veterans; none of whose testimonies have been proved wrong or inaccurate.
- Sarah Pulliam Bailey, writes in the Washington Post that a small number of influential evangelicals are challenging decades of blanket evangelical support for Israel’s government and are making efforts to build bridges between Palestinians and Israelis.

Note: The following are excerpts of each article. The full article can be found by clicking the link.

1) [The Jewish Equivalent of ISIS](#), Moshe Arens, Haaretz, December 27, 2015

“Yes, there is a Jewish equivalent of the Islamic State, the radical terrorist organization that prides itself on decapitating anyone who does not follow the Islamic religious commandments as it interprets them. It is a small group of Jewish rowdies who go around murdering Arabs and celebrating their own barbaric activities. They are on the margins of Israel’s Jewish community, but the effect of their nefarious actions is far from marginal. They constitute a mortal danger to the victims they target, and a danger to the State of Israel. Like ISIS, they believe they are following God’s commands, and disregard the law of the land and the moral standards of the society in which they live.” ...

“It is to our religious leaders in Judea and Samaria, as well as in the rest of Israel, that we must turn and demand that they take it upon themselves to rein in this aberration among religious youngsters. It is up to the security services to apprehend the perpetrators and bring them to trial.

“They are like the followers of the Islamic State with their belief that God has commanded them to kill. ISIS kills the “infidels,” and they kill Arabs. But they and the followers of ISIS are brothers under the skin.” ...

2) [Obama at Haaretz Conference: Israel Must Bring Those Who Attack Palestinians to Justice](#), Barak Ravid, Haaretz, December 13, 2015

“In a video address to the HaaretzQ: with NIF conference in New York, U.S. President Barack Obama said that peace is the only way that Israel can remain a Jewish and democratic state. Obama condemned the recent spate of terrorist attacks against Israelis, and urged the Israeli government to bring to justice anyone who commits acts of violence against Palestinians.” ...

“In his speech, Obama highlighted the special relationship between Israel and the United States and his administration's commitment to Israel's security, saying that both are unshakable. He added that security and military cooperation with Israel are currently at an unprecedented level.

"We are at a critical moment," Obama said. "Inexcusable violence has taken to many lives – Israelis, Palestinian and Americans. I have been clear that the Palestinian leaders have to condemn the ongoing attacks [against Israelis] and stop incitement. Individuals responsible for violence including violence against Palestinian must be brought to justice."

“Obama added that the United States ‘call[s] on both sides to work to defuse tensions exercise restraint and prevent more loss of life and restore calm.’ ‘The best way to reduce tensions and ensure Israel's security is to continue working in concrete ways towards a two-state solution,’ he added.” ...

“Obama went on to say that, ‘Peace is just because the two-state solution will finally bring Israelis the normalcy to which they are entitled and Palestinians the sovereign state and dignity they deserve. And peace is possible if leaders and people are willing to summon the will and courage to break free from the patterns of the past and forge a new future.’”

3) [Kerry: Building settlements and demolishing Palestinians' homes not a solution](#), Yitzhak Benhorin, Ynetnews, December 15, 2015

“Becoming ‘one big fortress’ is not a way for Israelis to live, US Secretary of State John Kerry has cautioned in a new interview with the New Yorker magazine. The interview focuses on Kerry's foreign policy towards the

Middle East. He believes that Israel, with regard to the territories, is on the way to becoming a 'unitary state that is impossible to manage.'" ...

"Will it (Israel) be a democracy? Will it be a Jewish state? Or will it be a unitary state with two systems, or some draconian treatment of Palestinians, because to let them vote would be to dilute the Jewish state? I don't know. I have no answer to that. But the problem is, neither do they. Neither do the people who are supposed to be providing answers to this," Kerry continued.

"It is not an answer to simply continue to build in the West Bank and to destroy the homes of the other folks you're trying to make peace with and pretend that that's a solution." What Kerry didn't say is filled in by his associates off the record. In their eyes, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's actions are no deviation from the party line, because most of his ministers publicly oppose the two-state solution." ...

4) [Why 2015 was a bad year for Israel](#), Ynetnews, December 16, 2015

"As Israel enters the year 2016, it is carrying on its back the same sack of fundamental problems it carried when it entered 2015. But the sack is much heavier, and the problems are more burdensome. Here's a short list:

- "The conflict with the Palestinians has worsened, and the connections with their leadership have almost entirely burned. There is no shadow of an agreement, partial or partial-partial, in the horizon." ...
- "The social networks have broken through the gates of hell with fanaticism, violence, foolishness, xenophobia and pure demagoguery." ...
- "The Muslim world has deteriorated to jihad and all-out wars." ...
- "The Israeli thinking has shut itself up. In a supreme effort to bury their heads in the sand and escape from the important to the marginal ... have been occupying themselves with featherweight issues.
- "The Zionist Left has wrapped the gas deal around its neck and sank into the depth of populism along with it." ...
- "The Israeli Right has conformed to the right, marching independently towards the suicidal messianic horizon." ...
- "The year 2015 was also the year in which Israel lost to Iran. Iran of the ayatollah regime has become the West and the East's likable ally, while Israel has become unlikable." ...
- "The boycott movement against Zionism and the Jewish state has spread to the very heart of the higher education system in the United States - and the opponents' voice is not being heard." ...

"Even an optimist like myself must admit that 2015 was a bad year for Israel. We cannot afford such years."

5) [Israelis Don't Want to Confront the Ugly Truth About the Occupation](#), Zeev Sternhell, Haaretz, December 27, 2015

... "This truth undermines the foundations of democracy and casts doubt on its rationale. People don't want to confront the ugly truth. Thus immense courage and endless devotion and love for this country, despite all its ills, are required to carry on with the mission undertaken by Breaking the Silence.

“These people deserve great respect, as do their supporters such as Maj. Gen. (res.) Amiram Levin, who once led the elite Sayeret Matkal commando unit. Another example of ethical reflection during war was provided by Col. Eli Geva, a commander of a tank brigade who resigned during the first Lebanon war rather than open fire on a civilian area.

“If there’s one thing I regret as a citizen it’s that I and my generation, as well as the one before us, the War of Independence generation, were party to a conspiracy of silence surrounding the Israel Defense Forces in this country’s first 20 years.” ...

“In not one case have reports and testimonies collected by Breaking the Silence been proved wrong. The persecution of this organization and others such as B’Tselem and Peace Now by Im Tirtzu, a group whose ideology resembles an incipient fascist movement, only adds to the credibility of Breaking the Silence’s reports.” ...

6) [Some evangelicals bring a new angle on peace in the Mideast](#), Sarah Pulliam Bailey, Washington Post, December 19, 2015

“Lynne Hybels is revered for her work helping the impoverished around the world, but some people view her as dangerous. Hybels, co-founder with her husband of one of the nation’s largest churches, has been called a heretic and an anti-Semite for her efforts to build bridges between Palestinians and Israelis in the Middle East. Hybels is among a small number of influential evangelicals who are challenging decades of blanket evangelical support for Israel’s government.” ...

“Efforts by Hybels and others to educate evangelicals about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has begun to upend evangelical attitudes about Israel, said Dale Hanson Bourke, who has written a primer for evangelicals on the conflict. Bourke’s research for her book began on a trip with Hybels in 2011. “In the past, something would happen in Israel, Christians would jump on board and say, ‘Palestinians are wrong; Israelis have a right to defend themselves,’ ” Bourke said. “Now you see evangelicals who are saying: ‘Wait a minute. Why is this happening? What are both sides to this?’” ...

...“They toured many of the sites that any Christian might be expected to visit during a trip to the Holy Lands, including the place where Christians believe that Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount.

“But they also heard the stories of Israelis and Palestinians, many of them women, who faced personal losses as a result of the conflict. The trip focused mostly on Israel as a modern state, rather than Israel as a biblical land. Several of the evangelical women cried as they heard from women in the Parents Circle, a group of Israeli and Palestinian parents who have lost children in the conflict and who come together to cook.” ...

Other Articles of Interest:

A) [Hooray for the Snitches of Breaking the Silence](#), Gideon Levy, Haaretz, December 16, 2015

The Israeli soldiers who expose the crimes of the occupation are much braver than the cowards who shoot to death Palestinian girls wielding scissors.

B) [Why do so many Israelis hate Breaking the Silence?](#), Haggai Matar, 972 Magazine, December 14, 2015

The organization of former Israeli soldiers is coming under attack from every direction these days — from the Israel’s president to the defense minister to the police. So what’s the deal?

- C) [**Christmas as Protest, John de Gruchy, Kairos USA, December 19, 2015**](#)
 John de Gruchy is a South African theologian and one of the authors of the South Africa Kairos “Challenge to the Church” of 1985. His weekly meditations are offered at Volmoed community, an intentional community and retreat center near Hermanus, South Africa. This meditation is from December 10, 2015.
- D) [**Thinking on the Side of Those who Hope, Mark Braverman, Kairos-USA, December 22, 2015**](#)
 Kairos USA Executive Director Mark Braverman shares reflections and reports on the recent Kairos USA Leadership Summit convened in Estes Park, CO last October.
- E) [**Who Pays for Israel's Settlements? It Could Be You, Bradley Burston, Haaretz, December 8, 2015**](#)
 Funneling monies to settlements is the most successful sustained smuggling operation in Israel's history. The Haaretz probe of tax deductible private U.S. donations is part of a nascent, widening campaign for transparency.
- F) [**Israel Is Already a Binational State, and Has Been for a Long Time, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, December 13, 2015**](#)
 The debate must begin to shift now. No more proclaiming 'two states' and 'Jewish state.' The task now is to make it just.
- G) [**Israel Gets a Raise Despite Insults to Obama, 50 Years of Violence to Palestinians, Rachele Marshall, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, January/February 2016, pp. 8-10**](#)
 National pride and respect for international law are no match for political expediency when it comes to America’s “special relationship” with Israel. This was demonstrated again in November, when President Barack Obama and Congress agreed to consider \$50 billion in military aid to Israel over the next 10 years—a hefty increase of \$2 billion a year.
- H) [**Zionism on the Edge: What I Saw at HaaretzQ, Miko Zeldes-Roth, Haaretz, December 18, 2015**](#)
 The occupation is not the singular beast gnawing away at the foundations of Israeli democracy. It is a byproduct of more fundamental issues embedded within the legacy of Zionism.
- I) [**UN adopts resolution on Palestinian sovereignty over natural resources, Ma’an News Agency, December 24, 2015**](#)
 The United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday adopted a resolution demanding Palestinian sovereignty over natural resources under Israeli occupation with 164 votes in favor and five against (Canada, Federated States of Micronesia, Israel, Marshall Islands, and the United States) and 10 abstentions.
- J) [**Religious Ultrnationalist Zionists Have Taken Over Israel, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, December 25, 2015**](#)
 First they built the settlements, then they killed off the two-state solution, now they are free to turn to their next target their next target: taking control of the public debate in Israel on the road to changing its power structure, character and substance.