

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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The six featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on reactions to the newly passed Israel Regularization Law; opposition to this law in Israel and in U.S. Jewish communities; its implications on the nearly defunct two-state solution; opposition to the nomination of David Freedman to be U.S. Ambassador to Israel; the negative results of any annexation to Israel of the West Bank; and many links to other articles of interest.

Commentary: The six featured articles of this issue of the Middle East Notes are all from Haaretz, an Israeli daily paper. They illustrate the deep concern of the Israeli people concerning the Trump administration and its implications for Israel, its settlements, and its occupied West Bank territories. The leaders of both countries soon to meet in Washington, D.C. both emphasize terror and security as concerns of their supporters and foundations of their continued leadership. The purpose of acts of terror, actual or anticipated, is of course to “terrorize” people by exponentially increasing their effect of those actions as a weapon of fear and over reaction. Warring nations and authoritarian leaders have always used terrorist actions as strategies/weapons to enhance their chances of “victory” in military and political conflicts. It seems that both Netanyahu and Trump may, knowingly or accidentally, be in fact assisting the terrorists in their strategy by emphasizing and increasing fear (terror).

- Yossi Verter writes in Haaretz that Israel’s President Reuven Rivlin strongly opposes the 'Regularization Law,' which enables Israel to expropriate private Palestinian land where settlements have been built.
- Allison Kaplan Sommer notes in Haaretz that Rabbi Rick Jacobs, president of the Union for Reform Judaism, calls the Regularization Law a 'lose-lose' policy that 'significantly undermines Israeli democracy.'
- Gideon Levy writes in Haaretz that with the passage of the Regularization Law the die was cast. Israel was declared the second apartheid state. In London recently, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to support the two-state solution any longer.
- Barak Ravid also in Haaretz states that the White House statements makes one thing clear: Even if there's a shift from Obama's policy on Israel, it isn't dramatic.
- Judy Maltz notes in Haaretz that the U.S. Jewish group formerly singled out by Friedman encourages those opposed to his appointment to contact senators in protest.
- David Rosenberg writes in Haaretz that too much of Israel is poor and undereducated. Annexing the West Bank would make the problem many times worse.

1. Israel's President on Land-grab Law: We Will Look Like an Apartheid State, Yossi Verter, Haaretz, February 12, 2017

“President Reuven Rivlin strongly opposes a law, passed by the Knesset last week, allowing private Palestinian land to be expropriated in order to retroactively legalize settlements.

“The passage of the so---called “Regularization- Law” could cause Israel to look like an apartheid state, Rivlin said in a meeting he held last week, only two days after the law was passed.

“Israel has adopted international law. It does not allow a country acting according to it to apply and enforce its laws on territories that are not under its sovereignty. If it does so, it is a legal cacophony. It will cause Israel to be seen as an apartheid state, which it is not,” he said.

“There is no question here. The government of Israel is simply not allowed to apply the laws of the Knesset on territories that are not under the state’s sovereignty,” added Rivlin.” ...

See also: [Israel’s President Backs One-State Solution — With Equal Rights for Palestinians](#)

2. [U.S. Jewish Leaders Come Out Against Land-grab Law: 'This Isn't the Israel We Want to See'](#) Allison Kaplan Sommer, Haaretz, February 7, 2017.

“A long list of American Jewish organizations expressed disappointment and concern over Israel’s new land expropriation law soon after it was passed Monday, warning of its national and international legal repercussions and potential damage to Israel’s image around the world.” ...

“Jonathan Greenblatt, national director of the Anti-Defamation League called it ‘imperative that the Knesset recognizes that passing this law will be harmful to Israel’s image internationally and could undermine future efforts to achieving a two-state solution.’

“Daniel Sokatch, CEO of the New Israel Fund, said that the law represents ‘a terrible step towards ending Israel’s status as a democracy and erasing the Green Line.’ It’s no small thing that Israel’s Attorney General has indicated that he won’t defend the bill before the court.” ...

“In its statement, the American Jewish Committee said it was ‘deeply disappointed’ about the bill’s passage and called on Israel’s Supreme Court to ‘reverse this misguided legislation.’” ...

“B’Tselem, a watchdog monitoring human rights abuses in the settlements, slammed the bill. ‘The law passed by the Knesset today proves yet again that Israel has no intention of ending its control over the Palestinians or its theft of their land.’ ...

“Peace Now, a left-leaning group promoting the two-state solution, also criticized the passage. ‘By passing this law, Netanyahu makes theft an official Israeli policy and stains the Israeli law books,’

“J Street called the law ‘outrageous’ and ‘irresponsible,’ and ‘an unjust and illegal bill that could severely harm Israel’s reputation and the future of the two-state solution’ in order to ‘shamefully appease and placate his (Netanyahu’s) right-wing critics.’” ...

“Thus far, only Zionist Organization of America, which supports Israeli settlements, expressed support for the law, calling it ‘honorable and rational.’” ...

See also:

[Knesset passes controversial outpost regulation bill](#)

[IPF is gravely alarmed by Knesset passage of the Regulation Bill](#)

[Israel Passes Provocative Law to Retroactively Legalize Settlements](#)

[U.N. chief says Israel settlement bill goes against international law](#)

3. [Opinion Imagine Netanyahu Arrested in London](#), Gideon Levy, Haaretz, February 9, 2017

“On Monday this week the die was cast. Israel was declared the second apartheid state.

“At midday in London, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to support the two-state solution any longer, thus marking the end of this strategy. That evening the Knesset passed the confiscation bill, marking the new regime it was establishing in its stead.

“Israel has had its say, and it’s loud and clear: one state, from the sea to the Jordan River, and its regime – apartheid. Two peoples, one of them superior. The spit in one’s face can no longer be called rain. This spit requires a response, and the response must be action.” ...

“It is doubtful whether the legislation’s severity has penetrated fully in Israel. From now on it’s legal to steal from Arabs. For the time being, only land and only in the occupied territories. But there’s no reason for the law to stop there. Why is it permissible to steal land and not cars, jewelry or money? What’s the difference? Why is it permissible to kill Arabs only in the West Bank? They’re subhuman. And Israel yawns.” ...

“The right wing will argue that asking the world to act ‘isn’t democratic,’ and it will be difficult to think of a better joke. They’ll claim ‘the majority is what counts,’ and it will be hard to think of a sadder joke. Only the court in The Hague will show them how wrong they are. Only The Hague will stop them. And there’s still a long way to go in getting there.”

4. [Analysis Even Trump Can’t Stay Silent as Israel Runs Amok in Settlements](#) Barak Ravid, Haaretz, February 03, 2017

“For an entire week the White House mulled how to react to the torrent of announcements from Jerusalem on building thousands of housing units in the settlements. The Trump administration’s statement Thursday night – the team’s first significant comment on the issue – was crafted diplomatically and politely, but the bottom line was perfectly clear. Not only is the Iranian government on warning – so is the Israeli government.

“The White House’s statement also makes clear that even if at this stage there has been a change from Barack Obama’s policy, it isn’t dramatic. Trump is basically reverting to George W. Bush’s policy on the settlements. That is, Donald Trump’s final goal is an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement based on a two-state solution.” ...

“The meeting between Netanyahu and Trump on February 15 will be crucial for what happens next. The U.S. president is aiming for progress in the peace process and will wait to hear how Netanyahu proposes doing this.” ...

See also:

[Israeli Settlement Construction 'May Not Be Helpful' in Reaching Peace, White House Says;](#)

[EU: settlements law entrenches one state reality,](#)

[Ireland to Recognize Palestine Soon, Warns Israel’s Ambassador](#)

5. [Maligned by Trump's Pick for Israel Envoy, J Street Mobilizes to Block David Friedman's Appointment](#), Judy Maltz, Haaretz, February 12, 2017

“A Jewish-American organization viciously attacked by the U.S. ambassador designate to Israel is now spearheading a campaign to get his appointment blocked.

“The U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee is scheduled to begin hearings Thursday on the appointment of David Friedman – who supports Israeli settlement expansion and opposes the creation of an independent Palestinian state – to the position of ambassador to Israel. Ahead of these hearings, J Street, a pro-Israel anti-occupation organization, is urging all those who oppose Friedman’s appointment to write their senators and encourage them to reject his nomination.

“For their convenience, J Street has published on its website a sample letter, which summarizes the ambassador-designates controversial views and statements.

“‘As your constituent, I strongly urge you to reject Donald Trump’s choice to be the next U.S. ambassador to Israel, David Friedman,’ the letter says. ‘Mr. Friedman poses a threat to longstanding U.S. policies in the Middle East that have been supported by Democratic and Republican presidents alike.’” ...

“Other liberal Jewish organizations and movements opposed to Friedman’s appointment include Ameinu, Americans for Peace Now, Association of Reform Zionists of America, Central Conference of American Rabbis, Israel Policy Forum, National Council of Jewish Women, New Israel Fund and the Union for Reform Judaism.” ...

... “Last month, a group of 120 Jewish studies professors from across the United States opposed to Friedman’s appointment sent him a letter urging him to vote against.” ...

See also:

[Trump's pick for Israel envoy to undergo unprecedented Senate grilling](#)

[Ambassador Friedman, a man with no qualities](#)

[10 Questions U.S. Senators Should Ask David Friedman, Trump's Pick for Israel Envoy](#)

[Friedman, incoming U.S. Ambassador to Israel, reportedly behind new settler homes](#)

6. [Opinion Annexing the West Bank Would Be Economic Suicide](#), David Rosenberg, Haaretz, February 7, 2017

“It is hard to believe that the Israeli political mind has evolved backwards so far that the idea of annexing the West Bank, in whole or in part, is being seriously discussed in what used to pass for the pragmatic center right.

“Annexation was traditionally the fantasy of zealots, people who didn't appreciate the beauty of the occupation: a twilight zone where settlers have all the rights Israelis enjoy (and even a few more) living amid a Palestinian underclass that supplies it with cheap labor. Denying them equality was technically legal because, after all, they aren’t citizens of Israel.

“Let's leave aside the political, moral and human rights ramifications of absorbing a land populated by people who oppose the idea. We’ll ignore the risk of a Third Intifada that might ensue, or the world’s reaction to such an outrageous step.

“Let's instead look at the economic effects. Not that those will affect the thinking of annexation zealots who take the view of ‘settlements good, everything else irrelevant.’ But for the rest of us who would have to live an enlarged Israel, let’s consider the economic impact, because if the average Israeli is indifferent to the fate of the Palestinians in any meaningful way, he isn't indifferent to the fate of his wallet.

“Israel today is usually in the bottom tier of the world’s most developed countries in an array of socioeconomic indicators, like GDP per capita, educational performance, poverty and inequality, and labor productivity.

“What that mediocre ranking really represents is, however, the average of a First Israel – a hotbed of high tech, innovation and internationally competitive companies, the envy of the world – and a Second Israel, of poorly educated and unskilled workers with low incomes, who are a drag on Israel’s productivity growth and its standard of living.

“That Second Israel is getting bigger, over time, because of the growing percentage of ultra-Orthodox Jews and Israeli Arabs, two communities characterized inter alia by higher birthrates and big families, lower participation in the workforce, and higher poverty rates.

“Annexation will tip the balance heavily toward the Second Israel. Suddenly, Israel’s population will grow from 8.2 million to 10.9 million, and the Jewish majority will sink from 80% to 59%. In one fell swoop, Israel’s GDP per capita would fall more than 20%.” ...

“The annexationists, I suppose, have a fantasy that we’ll annex the land but not the people. It will be one state from the river to the sea, with a wall down the middle and millions of disenfranchised, impoverished people on one side of it. Far from a Zionist vision, it sounds more like the next installment of The Hunger Games.”

See also: [Senator Feinstein blasted Israel](#)

Some links from CMEP Bulletins:

(1) [CMEP Bulletin - Broader Middle East Bulletin Feb 03, 2017](#)

- a) [David Friedman is The Wrong Choice For US Ambassador to Israel \[The Hill, 1/26/2017\]](#)
- b) [Trump warns Israel that expanding West Bank settlements not ‘good for peace’](#)
- c) [Land law is final nail in the two-state solution coffin](#)
- d) [Israel Has Already Fallen Foul of a Pro-settlement Trump White House](#)

(2) [CMEP Bulletin - Settlements: Not the Problem? - February 10, 2017](#)

- a) [Knesset Speaker Pushes US Counterpart Ryan on Embassy Move \[The Times of Israel\]](#)
- b) [Trump Embraces Pillars of Obama’s Foreign Policy \[The New York Times\]](#)
- c) [EU Postpones Diplomatic Summit with Israel in Opposition to Settlement Expansion \[i24 News\]](#)
- d) [Settler Takeover Makes Life Hell for East Jerusalem Palestinians \[+972\]](#)