

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
June 2, 2016

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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes highlight the concerns that Israel is moving from occupation to annexation of the West Bank; the uproar caused by General Ya'ir Golan's Holocaust Memorial Day speech; the announcement by B'Tselem that it will stop filing Palestinians' complaints against IDF soldiers with the military justice system; an historical piece on the secret Sykes/Picot secret deal in which England and France carved up the Middle East; the Holocaust as a large component of Jewish Israelis' national identity and in service to the right's proto-fascist, racist, victim-centered discourse; discussions of solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict outside of Israel rather than within Israel itself; and other articles of interest.

Commentary: Recent political developments in Israel give indication that the occupation, settlement construction and Gaza encirclement policies remain and are becoming more entrenched as part of the "status quo" relationship of the Israeli government with the Palestinians. In response, the hope for peace and an autonomous State of their own continues to diminish among the Palestinians and among promoters of justice, human rights and peace. An "addiction to occupation" metaphor on the part of successive Israeli governments, enabled by US Jewish and evangelical friends along with other "enablers" in the U.S. Congress is perhaps becoming a more appropriate lens to explain the present stalemate. Like every addiction, the 'status quo' requires increased "dosage"; in this case possible annexation of the territories already controlled. Increasing addiction also slowly and painfully destroys its host while causing immense pain to those "paying" for the addiction, in this case the Palestinians. However, as this "addiction" is becoming more obvious to many Israelis, friends of Israel and the Palestinians, the possibility of "withdrawal" health and hope is more than possible for all.

- Uri Savir writes in AL-MONITOR that according to a Palestinian Authority official, the PA notified Egypt, the European Union and the United States that, without international activity to stop Israel's annexation policies and guarantee Palestinian statehood, it will have to take measures to solidify its position within its people.
- Uri Avnery reports in Antiwar.com that General Ya'ir Golan, the deputy Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, in his speech on Holocaust Memorial Day, triggered an uproar when he said: "If there is something that frightens me about the memories of the Holocaust, it is the knowledge of the awful processes which happened in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular, 70, 80, 90 years ago, and finding traces of them here in our midst, today, in 2016."
- Gili Cohen notes in Haaretz that the Israeli human rights group, B'Tselem has announced that it will stop filing Palestinians' complaints against IDF soldiers with the military justice system, contending that these petitions cause the plaintiffs more harm than good.
- John Hilary, the Executive Director of War on Want Palestine and Jordan, writes in JFJFP that just 100 years ago, a secret deal was concluded between Britain and France that plunged the Middle East into a century of bloodshed. Two colonial negotiators, Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, agreed to carve up the Middle East between their respective countries in order to secure European control of the failing Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War.
- Daniel Blatman notes in Haaretz that the Holocaust is a large component of Jewish Israelis' national identity. It serves the right's proto-fascist, racist, victim-centered discourse, meant to whitewash the ongoing crime against the Palestinians and to put the Christian world in a position of eternal apology.

- Gideon Levy asks in Haaretz why the rest of the world is more interested in discussing solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than Israelis. The debate over Israel's future is not taking place in Israel. It is taking place everywhere but Israel. Israel is not dealing with its future – it is dealing with its present and, mainly, its past.

1) Will Israel move from occupation to annexation?, Uri Savir , AL-MONITOR, May 29, 2016

"Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's surprising turn in appointing Avigdor Liberman, head of the right-wing Yisrael Beiteinu party, as defense minister May 25 caught the international community off-guard. In the days before the appointment, intense deliberations took place about the upcoming Quartet report on obstacles in the way of a two-state solution and the Paris conference to relaunch a two-state process. The deliberations were based on the assumption that Netanyahu was on his way to enlarging his government with the moderate center-left Zionist Camp and Isaac Herzog as foreign minister in charge of peace negotiations." . . .

"The horizon darkened again when instead of Herzog's appointment as foreign minister, Liberman was appointed defense minister.

"Expressing European disappointment over the appointment, the EU official analyzed for Al-Monitor its ramifications in the eyes of Brussels. The way Europe sees it, Netanyahu has made a final decision to avoid at all costs a two-state solution. Liberman is an extreme hawk; he is greatly hostile to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and has expressed interest to wipe out Hamas. Hence, the move is likely to weaken the pragmatic Palestinian leadership in Ramallah. EU leaders fear that an armed intifada is now more likely. Instead of a settlement freeze, a settlement expansion is probable as well as an Israeli strong fist policy vis-a-vis the Palestinians of the West Bank. Occupation will only deepen. Israel's relations with Egypt, Jordan and Turkey could also suffer severely." . . .

"According to the official, the PA notified Egypt, the European Union and the United States that, without international activity to stop Israel's annexation policies and guarantee Palestinian statehood, it will have to take measures to solidify its position within its people. These measures would include halting the security cooperation with Israel (with the exception of the passages on the Jordan River), asking Egypt and the Arab League for a UN Security Council resolution on Palestinian statehood on the 1967 lines with East Jerusalem as the capital, halting all civilian and economic cooperation with Israel, and enhancing unity and cooperation between Fatah and Hamas."

2) Parallels Between Israel and 1930s Germany, Antiwar.com. Uri Avnery, May 21, 2016

"'I Was There' – Uri Avnery on Israel's new 'Defense' Minister Avigdor Lieberman

"'Please don't write about Ya'ir Golan!' a friend begged me, 'Anything a leftist like you writes will only harm him!' So I abstained for some weeks. But I can't keep quiet any longer. General Ya'ir Golan, the deputy Chief of Staff of the Israeli army, made a speech on Holocaust Memorial Day. Wearing his uniform, he read a prepared, well-considered text that triggered an uproar which has not yet died down. Dozens of articles have been published in its wake, some condemning him, some lauding him. Seems that nobody could stay indifferent.

"The main sentence was: 'If there is something that frightens me about the memories of the Holocaust, it is the knowledge of the awful processes which happened in Europe in general, and in Germany in particular, 70, 80, 90 years ago, and finding traces of them here in our midst, today, in 2016.'

"All hell broke loose. What!!! Traces of Nazism in Israel? A resemblance between what the Nazis did to us with what we are doing to the Palestinians? 90 years ago was 1926, one of the last years of the German republic. 80 years ago was 1936, three years after the Nazis came to power. 70 years ago was 1946, on the morrow of Hitler's suicide and the end of the Nazi Reich." . . .

"The dangers threatening us are of a quite different nature. They stem from our victories, not from our defeats.

Indeed, the differences between Israel today and Germany then are far greater than the similarities. But those similarities do exist, and the general was right to point them out.

"The discrimination against the Palestinians in practically all spheres of life can be compared to the treatment of the Jews in the first phase of Nazi Germany. (The oppression of the Palestinians in the occupied territories resembles more the treatment of the Czechs in the "protectorate" after the Munich betrayal.)

"The rain of racist bills in the Knesset, those already adopted and those in the works, strongly resembles the laws adopted by the Reichstag in the early days of the Nazi regime. Some rabbis call for a boycott of Arab shops. Like then. The call 'Death to the Arabs' ('Judah verrecke') is regularly heard at soccer matches. A member of parliament has called for the separation between Jewish and Arab newborns in hospital. A Chief Rabbi has declared that Goyim (non-Jews) were created by God to serve the Jews. Our Ministers of Education and Culture are busy subduing the schools, theater and arts to the extreme rightist line, something known in German as Gleichschaltung. The Supreme Court, the pride of Israel, is being relentlessly attacked by the Minister of Justice. The Gaza Strip is a huge ghetto." . . .

"It seems that Golan is not only a courageous officer, but a prophet, too. The inclusion of Lieberman's party in the government coalition confirms Golan's blackest fears. This is another fatal blow to the Israeli democracy. Am I condemned to witness the same process for the second time in my life?"

See also [Link A - Israeli Prime Minister replaces Defense Minister with Rightwing Zealot](#); [Link B - Avigdor Liberman's new job: Control over four million Palestinians](#); [Link C - Israel's new defense minister is a cause for concern](#); [Link D - Ten Reasons Benjamin Netanyahu Was This Week's Top anti-Zionist](#),

3) [Citing IDF Failure to Bring Soldiers to Justice, B'Tselem Stops Filing Complaints on Abuse of Palestinians, Gili Cohen, Haaretz, May 25, 2016](#)

"B'Tselem has announced that it will stop filing Palestinians' complaints against IDF soldiers with the military justice system, contending that these petitions cause the plaintiffs more harm than good.

"In a report (see letter below) published by the Israeli human rights group, it claims that its filing petitions for investigating incidents in which soldiers harm Palestinians, and of assisting military police in collecting testimony or in submission of medical documents, has not brought justice to affected Palestinians.

"The organization does not wish to assist authorities in their attempts to create a false picture of justice being served. B'Tselem has decided to no longer approach the military law enforcement system. This also applies to cases in which soldiers are suspected of violating the law, even with the understanding that Palestinian victims have no other recourse for filing a complaint against those who harm them,' reads the NGO's statement." . . .

"B'Tselem activists say that since the group's founding in 1989, they have approached military legal authorities with requests to investigate hundreds of cases in which soldiers allegedly broke the law. According to figures published in a report called "A Fig Leaf for the Occupation," B'Tselem filed 739 such requests since 2000. In 75 percent of these cases investigations were opened, but only in 25 percent were indictments filed against the soldiers involved. The actual number of soldiers prosecuted for transgressions against Palestinians is higher, since the report only refers to indictments made after a petition by B'Tselem." . . .

See also [Link G - Leading Israeli rights group to stop cooperating with the IDF](#); [Link H - Why B'Tselem's latest report is ground breaking](#)

- 4) [An imperialist genocidal disaster: The Sykes-Picot Legacy 100 years On](#), Iraq, John Hilary, Executive Director, War on Want Palestine and Jordan, JFJFP, May 11, 2016

"One hundred years ago this week, a secret deal was concluded between Britain and France that plunged the Middle East into a century of bloodshed. Two colonial negotiators, Mark Sykes and François Georges-Picot, agreed to carve up the Middle East between their respective countries in order to secure European control of the failing Ottoman Empire at the end of the First World War. Promises of self-determination that had been made to the Arab peoples by the British in order to secure their help in defeating the Turkish occupying forces were swiftly brushed aside. Instead of national liberation, there would just be a changing of the imperial guard.

"The treachery was brutally simple. France and Britain would divide up the Middle East between them by means of a 'line in the sand' drawn on the map between Acre on the Mediterranean coast and Kirkuk in northern Iraq. Everything to the north of that line would be controlled by the French, and everything to the south by the British. France would get Syria and Lebanon, while Britain would have Iraq and Transjordan. "Even by the standards of the time," writes the leading historian of Anglo-French rivalry during the inter-war years, "it was a shamelessly self-interested pact."

"The question of who would rule Palestine remained unresolved in the Sykes-Picot agreement, so the British government turned to another stratagem to ensure that Britain, not France, would secure that mandate at the end of the First World War. Through a series of guarantees to leading figures in the burgeoning Zionist movement, the British government was able to secure international backing for its control of Palestine on the pretext of more than just imperial self-interest." . . .

See also Link – F: [You Don't Know Sykes-Picot](#)

- 5) [Yad Vashem Is Derelict in Its Duty to Free the Shoah From Its Jewish Ghetto](#), Daniel Blatman, Haaretz, May 19, 2016

"The Holocaust is a large component of Jewish Israelis' national identity. It serves the right's proto-fascist, racist, victim-centered discourse, meant to whitewash the ongoing crime against the Palestinians and to put the Christian world in a position of eternal apology.

"In June, some 120 international and 30 Israeli scholars will come to Jerusalem for the 5th Global Conference on Genocide of the International Network of Genocide Scholars, at the Hebrew University and Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. The keynote speaker will be UN Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide Adama Dieng. Additional co-organizers include Germany's Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and many foreign universities. Glaringly absent is Yad Vashem. None of its senior researchers even submitted a paper to the conference.

"None of the hundreds of scientific events organized by Yad Vashem has been dedicated to the Holocaust and genocide. Yad Vashem has not offered research scholarships on the 1915 Armenian genocide, or on the annihilation of the Tutsis in Rwanda in 1994. You have to look hard to find any reference to the destruction of other populations in the Holocaust, and its chief aim seems to be to silence criticism. Similar museums in Paris and Washington hold regular activities on these topics. They recently held events marking the 100th and 20th anniversaries of the Armenian and Tutsi genocides, respectively.

"Holocaust researchers mostly stay away from conferences on genocide. A 50-year-old axiom says the Holocaust belongs to a separate category, even though it was obviously a case of genocide. "The uniqueness of the Holocaust," they call it. This distinction, which stems solely from a desire to entrench a separate Jewish victimhood, must be rooted out." . . .

"The Holocaust is a large component of Jewish Israelis' national identity. It serves the right's proto-fascist, racist, victim-centered discourse, meant to whitewash the ongoing crime against the Palestinians and to put the Christian world in a position of eternal apology. Elkana wrote: "The very existence of democracy is endangered when the memory of the dead participates actively in the democratic process. Fascist regimes understood this very well and acted on it." A generation later, his words seem prophetic." . . .

See also Link E - [A rare opportunity to put Jewish universalism on a pedestal](#)

6) [Traveling to Oxford to Debate the Two-state Solution](#), Gideon Levy, Haaretz, May 29, 2016

"Why is the rest of the world more interested in discussing solutions for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than Israelis are? The debate over Israel's future is not taking place in Israel. It is taking place everywhere but Israel. Israel is not dealing with its future – it is dealing with its present and, mainly, its past. People don't talk about the future here. Nobody knows where we are going and, even more amazingly, where we want to go. What will we be in another 10 or 20 years? What about after that? And what do we want there to be here besides "peace and security," blah, blah, blah? The world is more preoccupied with this than we are." . . .

"But Israeli chutzpah knows no bounds, and neither does the temerity of its propagandists. The fact is, they won once again at the Oxford debate. The fact is, they continue to spread fear about anti-Semitism within the British Labour Party, even though it does not really existent - certainly not as it is portrayed here in Israel. But propaganda is propaganda.

"Almost all Israelis are against the one-state solution, which the Zionist movement fears above all, and that is their right. Many of them continue to mumble "two states," as if talking in their sleep, and that, too, is their right. Only a few ask themselves if this solution is still attainable; whether Israel ever intended to implement it and what prevented its implementation. And they never discuss the alternatives. Such is inconceivable Israeli escapism." . . .

Other articles of interest:

A) [Israeli Prime Minister replaces Defense Minister with Rightwing Zealot, Celine Hagbard, IMEMC News, May 20, 2016](#)

Following a shake-up in the Israeli Defense Ministry which included a statement by the military's Chief of Staff that the current trends in Israeli society were reminiscent of pre-World War II Germany, the Israeli Prime Minister, Binyamin Netanyahu, decided to replace his Defense Minister with an extreme right-wing ideologue, Avigdor Lieberman.

B) [Avigdor Liberman's new job: Control over four million Palestinians, Noam Sheizaf, 972 Magazine, May 19, 2016](#)

Netanyahu may have found an opportunity to take revenge on the old IDF elites, but in doing so has put one of Israel's most hawkish politicians in charge of the occupation.

C) [Israel's new defense minister is a cause for concern, Mitchell Plitnick, FMEP, May 18, 2016](#)

Earlier today, it was reported that Avigdor Lieberman, the head of Israel's right wing Yisrael Beiteinu party, has agreed to join the government of Benjamin Netanyahu in the post of Defense Minister. This is a concerning development for a number of reasons.

D) [Ten Reasons Benjamin Netanyahu Was This Week's Top anti-Zionist, Chemi Shalev, Haaretz, May 22, 2016](#)

From tarnishing Israel's image to sowing demoralization and distrust, the prime minister's machinations are like a BDS dream come true.

- E) [**A rare opportunity to put Jewish universalism on a pedestal, Rabbi Arik Ascherman, +972 Blog, May 5, 2016**](#)

On this Holocaust Memorial Day, I'd like to seize the opportunity and honor the memory of my teacher, Auschwitz survivor Rabbi Ben-Zion Gold, by remembering an important lesson: A universal vision is an essential part of Jewish particularism.

- F) [**You Don't Know Sykes-Picot, Garrett Khoury, Matzav Blog, MAY 18, 2016**](#)

Sykes-Picot is a cliché. Yet, what is Sykes-Picot if not a false narrative, a story written by a combination of base intellectual dishonesty and moral cowardice? How often is the story of Sykes-Picot decontextualized, stripped of the realities and dynamics of the day, to become a "shorthand explanation for the latest upheaval in the Middle East that rolls easily off every tongue," as Sean McMeekin complained in his book on the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Ottoman Endgame.

- G) [**Leading Israeli rights group to stop cooperating with the IDF, Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, +972 Magazine, May 25, 2016**](#)

The Israeli military justice system acts only to 'cover up unlawful acts and protect perpetrators,' B'Tselem says, citing 25 years of experience working with the military. Palestinian rights expert welcomes the move.

- H) [**Why B'Tselem's latest report is groundbreaking, Middle East Monitor, May 28, 2016**](#)

The reality, the report concludes is that the human rights group's "cooperation with the military investigation and enforcement systems has not achieved justice, instead lending legitimacy to the occupation regime and aiding to whitewash it.

- I) [**Sanders' Challenge to Clinton and Democrats: Palestinian Lives Matter, Peter Beinart, Haaretz, May 25, 2016**](#)

The US Democratic party currently supports a two-state solution because it serves Israel's interests, but not because Palestinians have the right to live as free citizens of their own country.

- J) [**Over 350 European representatives call on EU to support the right to Boycott Israel, PNN \(Palestine News Network, May 19, 2016**](#)

More than 300 human rights and aid organizations, faith groups, trade unions and political parties from across Europe have called on the EU to uphold its legal responsibilities and hold Israel accountable for its violations of international law and to defend the right of individuals and institutions to take part in the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement for justice and equality.

- K) [**CMEP Bulletin: IDF Gets More Hawkish?, May 20, 2016**](#)

- L) [**CMEP Bulletin: French Plan Peace, Israel Goes Hawkish, May 26, 2016**](#)

- M) [**PCHR Weekly Report: 7 Palestinian civilians, including 2 children, wounded this week, IMEMC News, May 20, 2016**](#)

In its Weekly Report On Israeli Human Rights Violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories for the week of 12 – 18 May 2016, the Palestinian Center for Human Rights (PCHR) found that Israeli forces continued to use excessive force in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. 7 Palestinian civilians, including 2 children, were wounded in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

- N) [**The worse Israel behaves the more the charges of antisemitism are hurled, Avi Shlaim and Gwyn Daniel, JFJP May, 7, 2016**](#)

The (British) Labour Party, Israel, and antisemitism: The key question, given that antisemitism along with other forms of racism has had a continuing presence in British political life, is why now? Much hangs on this. Last week the Labour Party came under ferocious political and media attack for allegedly harbouring

antisemites in its midst. In the course of this, the accusers often blurred the distinction between anti-Zionism and antisemitism, between legitimate criticisms of the state of Israel and hatred of Jews in general.

- O) [Video of the book signing reflections on April 19, 2016 and Q & A afterwards for Miko Peled's "The General's Son," Second Edition, published by Just World Books](#). Recommended in the May 5 issue of Middle East Notes. Video made available by Just World Books and the Presbyterian Ministry at the United Nations.
- P) [Of the Three Alternatives Facing Israel, the Likeliest One Is Also the Bloodiest, Shaul Arieli, Haaretz, May 24, 2016](#)
It's time to dispel the hypothesis: The conflict will not necessarily end with a decision between the one-state or two-state solutions. As things look now, indecision will shape a third, violent, solution.
- Q) [A Window Into the West Bank's 'Wildest, Most Violent' Areas, JAMES GLANZ, New York Times, MAY 23, 2016](#)
Hanamel Dorfman, a radical young Israeli settler, explains matter-of-factly how hilltop settlement outposts like his own will continue to proliferate across the West Bank. From there, he says bluntly, Israelis will cross the Jordan River and start building on the other side. Reminded that beyond the river there is another sovereign nation, Jordan, Mr. Dorfman says with an unwavering gaze, "Everything is temporary."