

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
August 25, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the necessity of conditions on U.S. government financial support of Israel; a statement signed by 12 Church organizations defending their right to support BDS; the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America's resolution calling on the U.S. government to end aid to Israel until the latter freezes the construction of settlements on occupied Palestinian land; the effect of the occupation on Israel's global recognition; Israel's self-defeating efforts to counteract BDS; the government of Israel's negative reaction to the recognition by the "Black Lives Movement" of the oppression of Palestinians; and other articles of interest.

Commentary: European and Arab Nation voices condemning the Israeli occupation and oppression of Palestinians are now being amplified by U.S. voices from the "Black Lives Movement", progressive Jews, many Christian Churches and other justice and peace groups. Israeli efforts to weaken the BDS movement are in fact strengthening it by publicizing the Israeli-inflicted sufferings of the Palestinian people. Oppression and repression of Palestinians, settlement expansion, concessions to settlers and growing "religious" influence on Israeli government policies continue to weaken support from other nations of Israel as a democratic nation. Efforts to contain the "forest fire of criticism" are in fact increasing the heat and expanse of the fire. This "forest fire" would be quickly contained and extinguished with the "rain" of a just two-state solution, or a mutually acceptable bi-national state.

- Greg Slabodkin writes in *The Hill* that if American taxpayers are going to again foot the bill for financing the Israeli military, which continues to occupy 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, then conditions must be put on the deal to exact concessions from Israel such as progress in the peace process and respect for Palestinian human rights.
- Global Ministries has published the statement of twelve Church organizations affirming their support of employing economic measures (BDS) as nonviolent tools to promote justice in the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) passed a resolution calling on the U.S. government to end aid to Israel until the latter freezes the construction of settlements on occupied Palestinian land, which violate longstanding official US policy and international law, and are a major obstacle to peace in the Holy Land.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in *Haaretz* that recognizing Israel must be separated from recognizing its right to continue occupying the territories.
- Melanie Takefman in the *Times of Israel* suggests that Israelis and their supporters are doing the BDS a service by bringing their cause to the top of the public agenda in Israel, North America and elsewhere. In doing so, we are making the movement bigger than it is.
- Daniel May states in *The Tablet* that "A Vision for Black Lives," the extensive policy platform developed by more than 50 organizations affiliated with the Movement for Black Lives, has provoked a flurry of response across the Jewish community.

1) [Conditions should come with \\$40B aid package to Israel, Greg Slabodkin, The Hill, August 4, 2016](#)

“Despite the billions of dollars in foreign assistance that Israel already receives annually from the United States, the Obama administration is reportedly close to providing the Jewish state with up to \$40 billion in funding over 10 years, making it the biggest U.S. military aid package ever given to any country.

“However, if American taxpayers are going to again foot the bill for financing the Israeli military, which continues to occupy 2.7 million Palestinians in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, then conditions must be put on the deal to exact concessions from Israel. U.S. aid to the Jewish state should be tied to progress in the peace process and respect for Palestinian human rights.” . . .

“Under Netanyahu’s watch, Israel clearly has no intention of ending its occupation. Consequently, the United States should be exerting pressure on Israel to persuade the Netanyahu government to abandon its settlement activities, not rewarding the Jewish state with increased military aid.

“The Obama administration should make it clear that there are strings attached to U.S. aid and that Israel’s failure to comply with a settlement freeze will have financial penalties.” . . .

See also Link A - [Lawsuit Claims Aid to Nuclear Israel Illegal Under Symington Glenn Amendments](#)

2) [Employing Economic Measures as Nonviolent Tools for Justice In the Israeli-Palestinian Context, Global Ministries, August 22, 2016](#)

“The U.S. Congress and 22 states across the U.S. are considering, or have passed, laws that penalize or criminalize the use of economic measures to oppose Israeli policies towards Palestinians that many find unjust and discriminatory. The targets of these proposed laws are organizations and agencies that endorse, in full or in part, the Palestinian call for the use of boycott, divestment, and sanctions (BDS). Such actions are anti-democratic, suppress legitimate criticism, and restrict our freedom to determine our own investment and selective purchasing practices. We affirm and defend the right of churches and organizations to witness using economic measures in the specific case of Israel-Palestine.” . . .

“As churches and church-related organizations, we may not endorse all aspects of the Palestinian civil society BDS movement; nor do we all have similar policies on the use of economic leverage in the context of Israel-Palestine. However, we all share a hope and desire for an end to occupation, and we continue to advocate for that. If we choose, through debate and reflection, to employ our economic leverage to advance that policy objective, as we do many others, we understand it as our right to do so. It is an assertion of our right as stewards of our financial resources to spend and invest as we choose, and to do so responsibly, according to our theological and moral conviction, expressed in our denominational or organizational policies.”

. . . “Our choices to purchase and invest responsibly, and to advocate with corporations or governments, including our own, are motivated by our firm commitments to justice and peace for all people, without discrimination or exclusion. As churches and church-related organizations, we reject any efforts by the State to curtail these rights, and will continue to exercise them, as appropriate and in accordance with our faith and policies.”

3) [Evangelical Lutheran Church in America Urges End to US Aid to Israel Until Settlement Construction Ends, C-1 Passes! Here’s Our Press Release, Isaiah 58, August 12, 2016](#)

“Isaiah 58, a group of Lutherans working for peace and justice in the Holy Land, welcomes today’s overwhelming approval by the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) of a resolution calling on the US government to end aid to Israel until the latter freezes the construction of settlements on occupied Palestinian land, which violate longstanding official US policy and international law, and are a major obstacle to peace in the Holy Land.” . . .

“To reaffirm the commitment of this church to:

1. Continue its awareness-building, accompaniment, and advocacy on behalf of a peaceful resolution of the conflict between Israel and Palestine;
2. Take steps to assist the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land (ELCJHL) and other Christians in sustaining their endangered presence in the Holy Land;
3. Promote the economic empowerment of Palestinians, including investment in Palestinian projects and businesses;
4. Promote the protection of the human rights of Palestinians and Israelis and oppose all violence and actions which discriminate against or deny any people their basic freedom, dignity or human rights;
5. Embrace the principles of restorative justice as part of the ELCA's advocacy and engagement for the just resolution of the Israeli- Palestinian conflict and actively seek ways to support Palestinians and Israelis engaging in restorative justice dialogue and other projects; and
6. Continue to pray for the ELCJHL and the work of The Lutheran World Federation Jerusalem program."

See also Link B - [Evangelical Lutherans to US: End Israel aid if settlements stay](#); Link C - [In massive shift, Lutherans vote to halt US aid to Israel](#)

4) [Rejecting the Occupation Is Not the Same as Rejecting Israel's Right to Exist, Zvi Bar'el, Haaretz, August 10, 2016](#)

"Our goal is that in 2025 no one in the world will question Israel's right to exist,' Strategic Affairs Ministry Director General Sima Vaknin said this week, explaining her dream to the Knesset's Special Committee for the Transparency and Accessibility of Government Information. This vision comes with a price tag: 128 million shekels (\$34 million) this year.

"That's clearly a great deal, considering it's for therapy for a state suffering from anxiety over the loss of its international legitimacy. Even if that amount is spent in each of the next 10 years, after which the therapy is supposed to end, we can be satisfied with the deal." . .

"Vaknin presented an illusion according to which, 10 years down her road, her ministry will have succeeded in upending this view and convincing the world to recognize the legitimacy of the occupation. She thereby asserted that recognizing the occupation is an inseparable part of recognizing Israel's right to exist; that Israel's right to exist and national identity are dependent on recognition of the occupation.

"But she overlooked the ambush that she set up for Israel. According to the formula that she proposed, recognition of Israel cannot be separated from recognition of its right to continue occupying the territories. From this, it follows that Israel must continue the occupation, because the day the occupation ends Israel will also lose its legitimacy." . . .

See also Link D - [Occupation 101: An Insider's View of the Complexity of Palestinian Resistance](#)

5) [Get over the boycott, Melanie Takefman, Times of Israel, August 16, 2016](#)

"Stop talking about the boycott. I will too, once I finish writing this piece. Here's why:

"The BDS (Boycott Divestment Sanctions) movement has overtaken the public discourse in Israel and Jewish communities abroad. It's everywhere: in our media, our speeches, our tweets. Open any Jewish or Israeli newspaper or website, and you face a tsunami of BDS. It isn't worth the fuss.

“In fact, we Israelis and our supporters are doing the BDS crew a service by bringing their cause to the top of the public agenda in Israel, North America and elsewhere. In doing so, we are making the movement bigger than it is. What’s worse, we are sabotaging the good of Israel. That’s because this bad obsession takes our resources away from the more important mission: effecting much-needed change here.” . . .

“Let’s face it: BDS didn’t come out of nowhere. Regardless of whether the boycott is justified or not, Israel has major existential problems. Occupation has become a way of life; our leaders’ failure to achieve a just coexistence with the Palestinians means that a Jewish, democratic state will not exist in a few years. Combine that with massive brain drain, an impossibly high cost of living, and rampant racism, and the future looks bleak.

“People who care about this country have no choice but to work to change its course. It’s our duty to leverage what’s left of our shaky democracy to improve this predicament. BDS is like a big concrete barrier weighing on our collective conscience and obscuring the ultimate goal ahead.” . . .

“For those of us who do, there are productive ways to fight the occupation and to attempt to improve the many ills that handicap our society. We can support progressive organizations that work within Israel to strengthen our civil society and democracy. We can protest discrimination, racism, and harmful legislation. It’s an uphill battle, I know, but it’s a more efficient use of resources than boosting a movement with questionable intentions and so far, more bark than bite.

“If you really care about Israel, get over the boycott. Instead, join us in the movement to fix this place.”

6) [The Problem Isn’t Black Lives Matter. It’s the Occupation, Daniel May, The Tablet, August 15, 2016](#)

“The release early this month of “A Vision for Black Lives,” the extensive policy platform developed by more than 50 organizations affiliated with the Movement for Black Lives, provoked a flurry of response across the Jewish community. Multiple organizations from a diversity of political positions denounced the platform’s description of Israel as an “apartheid state” guilty of “genocide.” A great many were outraged at the language, some declaring that they could no longer support the movement. Others were outraged that some were so outraged.” . . .

. . . “When presidential candidates pander to Jews, they don’t talk about public housing or police brutality. For though the American Jewish community has built many institutions dedicated to social justice, its real political power has been directed, like most groups, in support of its own interests—which, over the last 50 years, has meant Israel. Any tension between the domestic and international program was reconciled by declaring that the values of democracy advanced at home are the same values protected in Israel—and where they were not (in the West Bank and Gaza) this was the fault of Palestinian leadership.

“This position has become untenable. The expansion of settlements, the rightward drift of Israeli politics, the biannual assaults on Gaza, and the festering and aggressive racism that permeates any society that administers a 50-year occupation has led many to conclude that Israel is engulfed in a moral crisis of its own. And despite the immense difference in context, to Americans who stand in a tradition of our own struggle for justice, the similarities are striking.”

“While American Jewish leaders will use the platform to distance themselves from Black Lives Matter, the movement provides a lesson for how we will eventually reconcile our commitments and rescue our moral integrity. For just as racial justice in this country is unimaginable without a more profound reckoning of the legacy of slavery than we have been able as a nation to summon, the conflict in Israel and Palestine will never advance so long as Jews deny the cost of Zionism. The Jewish nation’s independence was won only through the dispossession of another nation.”

See also Link E - [Black Lives Matter platform author defends Israel ‘genocide’ claim](#)

Other Articles of interest:

- A) [Lawsuit Claims Aid to Nuclear Israel Illegal Under Symington Glenn Amendments, Corporate Crime, Reporter, August 11, 2016](#)
A lawsuit filed in federal court in Washington, D.C. claims that United States aid to Israel is illegal under a law passed in the 1970s that prohibits aid to nuclear powers that don't sign the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). The lawsuit was filed by Grant Smith, director of the Institute for Research: Middle East Policy (IRMEP).
- B) [Evangelical Lutherans to US: End Israel aid if settlements stay, JTA, August 14, 2016](#)
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America approved a resolution calling on the US government to end all aid to Israel if Israel does not stop building settlements and "enable an independent Palestinian state."
- C) [In massive shift, Lutherans vote to halt US aid to Israel, Ryan Rodrick Beiler, Electronic Intifada, August 17, 2016](#)
The Evangelical Lutheran Church in America has become the latest US denomination to take economic action against the Israeli occupation. At its triennial assembly last week in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, the four million-member church, one of the largest in the US, voted on two separate resolutions targeting Israel's occupation and human rights abuses, passing each by a landslide.
- D) [Occupation 101: An Insider's View of the Complexity of Palestinian Resistance, Samuel Thrope, Haaretz, Aug 17, 2016](#)
Journalist Ben Ehrenreich's 'The Way to the Spring' offers a riveting - and admittedly one-sided - look at Palestinian society, its internal struggles and resistance against Israel.
- E) [Black Lives Matter platform author defends Israel 'genocide' claim, Ben Sales, Times of Israel, August 10, 2016](#)
The co-author of the Black Lives Matter platform passage accusing Israel of "genocide" defended the term, saying Israel's actions fit in its wider definition Ben Ndugga-Kabuye says there is a 'structure of violent deaths that are state sanctioned'; denies 'special connection' with Palestinians.
- F) [U.S. cautiously watches Israeli-Palestinian peace initiatives, Matthew Duss, The Arab Weekly, August 7, 2016](#)
As Obama nears the end of his presidency, he is widely assumed to be considering a last move on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in which he has invested so much time with so little success. Among those options could be supporting a UN Security Council resolution on settlements, a resolution laying out Obama's parameters for a final agreement or perhaps even US recognition of the state of Palestine.
- G) [Facing Anti-semitism and Assimilation on the Left: a Call to Rebellion, Yotam Marom, Tablet, August 12, 2016](#)
A veteran of anti-occupation activism speaks out on what it means to be Jewish and fight oppression—both of others and of Jews.
- H) [Israeli Border Police fire black sponge round at chest of 10-year-old boy in a-Ram, killing him, B'Tselem, August 3, 2016](#)
10-year-old Muhyi a-Din a-Tabakhi was critically injured by a black sponge round fired by Israeli Border Police officers in the town of a-Ram, al-Quds District. The Palestinian boy died shortly afterwards in hospital. B'Tselem's field research found that at the time of the incident, a small group of Palestinian youths were throwing stones at Border Police jeeps patrolling the area.
- I) [CMEP Bulletin - Questioning Aid to Gaza, August 11, 2016](#)

J) [CMEP Bulletin - It's the Occupation, August 19, 2016](#)

K) [Jordan's king: Israel 'blatantly' changing Jerusalem status quo, Dov Lieber, Times of Israel, August 15, 2016](#)

In interview, Abdullah also argues that Palestinian-Israeli conflict feeds extremism in the region. The Jordanian king accused Israel on Monday of “blatantly” changing the status quo at important landmarks and heritage sites in Jerusalem, and restricting the rights of the capital’s Arab residents. He also charged that the perpetuation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict fuels extremism in the region.

L) [What's really behind Israel's attack on Christian charity World Vision?, Ali Abunimah, Electronic Intifada, August 5, 2016](#)

Israel grabbed global headlines on Thursday with sensational allegations that tens of millions of dollars from the Christian relief and advocacy organization World Vision had been diverted to the military wing of the resistance group Hamas in Gaza. But a day later, the Israeli claims look more than ever like sloppy propaganda.

M) [Local Elections Could Open the Way to Palestinian Unity, Mohammad Arafat, Fosna Voice, August 14, 2016](#)

Finally, the first step of a promising reconciliation between the two main political parties in Palestine is about knock the rusty door of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The local elections will be that step, which will take place in Palestine on October 8.

N) [Encountering Peace: The democracy of Palestine, GERSHON BASKIN, The Jerusalem Post, August 17, 2016](#)

If there is one thing clear as day, it is that the Palestinian people in Gaza and the West Bank want to have their say on their leadership in a democratic way.