

**Middle East Notes,
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
February 24, 2017**



Please note: Opinions expressed in the following articles do not necessarily reflect the opinion of the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns.

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This special issue of Middle East Notes focuses responses to the content of the meeting of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Trump met at the White House in Washington, D.C on February 15; efforts by Palestinian municipalities in the West Bank and human rights groups to oppose the highly controversial Settlement Regularization Law; and U.S.-based opposition to the appointment of David Friedman as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel. The next issue of the Middle East Notes will be available on March 2.

- The Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and other members of the Faith Forum on Middle East Policy sent a briefing paper entitled "Toward Peace, Justice, and Equality in Israel and Palestine" to all members of Congress and the Trump Administration calling for U.S. policies that promote peace, justice and equality for all Palestinians and Israelis.
- Al Mezan Center For Human Rights published a press release by seventeen Palestinian municipalities and three human rights organizations from the West Bank, Israel, and Gaza Strip who jointly petitioned the Israeli Supreme Court on February 8 to cancel the highly controversial Settlement Regularization Law on the grounds that it violates international humanitarian law and is unconstitutional.
- Mazal Mualem wrote in Al-Monitor about the complex new reality and need for a fresh approach by Israel's center-left after the meeting between Netanyahu and Trump.
- Alaa Tartir and Tareq Baconi wrote in Al-Jazeera that the meeting between Netanyahu and Trump is turning point for the Palestinians, who for the first time since the beginning of the peace process have a U.S. president who publicly disposes of the notion that the two-state solution is the only viable framework for peace.
- Barak Ravid wrote in Haaretz that not only President Trump has bucked American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by declining to endorse the two-state solution, but he also called on the Israeli prime minister to restrain settlement construction and reiterated his intention to achieve a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as a wider agreement between Israel and the Arab world.
- Jack Khoury reported in Haaretz that the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said that President Trump's failure to endorse a two-state solution constitutes a 'dangerous shift' in the American position on the conflict.
- Judy Maltz reported in Haaretz that more than 600 American rabbis and cantors have signed a letter expressing their opposition to the appointment of David Friedman as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

1) [Toward Peace, Justice, and Equality in Israel and Palestine](#), Maryknoll Office for Global Concern, February 15, 2017.

"On February 15, 2017, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and fourteen other members of the Faith Forum on Middle East Policy sent a briefing paper entitled 'Toward Peace, Justice, and Equality in Israel and Palestine' to all members of Congress and the Trump Administration calling for U.S. policies that promote peace, justice and equality for all Palestinians and Israelis.

"The briefing paper reads as follows:

“As U.S.-based Christian churches, agencies, and organizations, we urge Congress and the Administration to take actions which will enhance the prospects for peace, justice, and equality in Israel and Palestine, and refrain from actions that would harm those prospects.

“2017 marks 50 years since Israel occupied the West Bank and Gaza and 24 years since the signing of the Oslo Accords. Over the last 50 years, but particularly since the signing of the Oslo accords in 1993, there have been significant changes on the ground in the occupied Palestinian territories that have a negative impact on efforts to achieve peace with justice. Violations of human rights and international law have continued without consequence and are enabled further by Israeli legislative actions.

“An example has been the continued and growing expansion of settlements, an approach long condemned by Republican and Democratic administrations alike as a violation of Israel’s obligations as an Occupying Power under the Fourth Geneva Convention. Settlement expansion forcibly takes property and resources from Palestinian landholders, many of whom have held legal title to their lands for generations.” ...

“The principle of equality is foundational to true democracies as well as to international law. It is necessary if a sustainable future is to be found for both Palestinians and Israelis. **Regardless of the underlying political governance structures, equal rights and opportunities must be assured for all people in the region – not someday based on an idea of future negotiations, but as a fundamental human right today. Yet the present situation and trajectory neither reflect nor promote equality, as demonstrated by these facts, among others” ...**

2) [JOINT PRESS RELEASE: 17 West Bank Palestinian municipalities, 3 human rights groups petition Israeli Supreme Court against Settlements Law](#), Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, February 10, 2017.

N.B. According to the Al Mezan Center for Human Rights, as of February 2017 there are around 120 settlements in the occupied West Bank including East Jerusalem, that are recognized as legal by Israel, and about 100 “outposts” that the Israeli government has accepted over the years. Approximately 600,000 Israeli Jewish settlers live in these occupied areas. Some 2.91 million Palestinians live in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, as of mid-2016.

3) [Trump leaves Israelis, Palestinians to own fate](#) , Mazal Mualem, Al-Monitor, February 17, 2017

“After the cheery [press conference](#) of U.S. President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on February 15, it took more than two hours for Zionist Camp and Israeli opposition leader [Isaac Herzog](#) to respond to the event. In media terms, it was an eternity, as evidenced by comments from political pundits and in the WhatsApp group of the Zionist Camp's spokesperson. Everyone wondered why Herzog's response was so late in coming. When it finally arrived, it was relatively short: ‘It was sad and embarrassing to see Netanyahu fidget and squirm, just so he could avoid the idea of separation from the Palestinians in the form of two states. Every Israeli should be worried by the very possibility of a single state between the Jordan River and the sea, since this means that there would be no Jewish state. That would be very dangerous, it would be a disaster.’

“It seemed as if the opposition chairman had had difficulty finding the right words for the moment. After all, it would be hard to [attack the prime minister](#) after seeing him received like royalty at the White House by the leader of the free world. Meanwhile, Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid simply dismissed requests for comment from journalists in the party's WhatsApp group. He may consider himself the real leader of the opposition, given his [success in the polls](#), but in this particular case, he seemed to prefer to ignore what was happening.

“Netanyahu's [first meeting](#) with Trump was a success by any standard. The long silences and measured responses by the leaders of the center-left were a sign of confusion in their camps. The eight years of the Barack Obama administration coincided with three Netanyahu terms, and during that time, Israeli political discourse followed a well-established pattern. The tense relationship between the two leaders over such diplomatic issues as Iran and the Palestinians would inevitably lead to attacks on Netanyahu from the center-left, which would accuse him of harming the relationship between Israel and the United States.” ...

“The meeting between Netanyahu and Trump has presented Israel's center-left with a [complex new reality](#) that will force it to recalibrate and seek a fresh approach. For more than two decades, since the signing of the Oslo Accord under the aegis of the United States, the two-state solution was the only US policy in regard to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. President Bill Clinton, a Democrat, was not alone in his efforts to advance this vision. His Republican successor, George W. Bush, did so as well, during the premierships of Ariel Sharon and Ehud Olmert. Obama followed it, too.” ...

“While the Netanyahu-Trump meeting signals the dawn of a new era, it is [too early](#) for the right to celebrate. This is not simply because Trump is likely to change his spots, as he is prone to do, but also because he has no intention of spearheading a solution to the conflict or imposing one on the region. In other words, Trump is leaving the future of Israel and the Palestinians to fate.

“Israeli leaders on the right and the left will now have to reconfigure their diplomatic visions. The center-left will be forced to adapt to a new political reality in which the two-state solution is not the only option, at least according to Trump.”

4) [How Palestinians should respond to Trump's 'one state', Alaa Tartir & Tareq Baconi, Al-Jazeera, February 19, 2017](#)

“The role of the U.S. administration as a dishonest broker for peace between the Palestinians and Israelis could not have been better illustrated than by last week's news [conference](#) with United States President Donald Trump and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“The meeting between these two leaders was a turning point for the Palestinians. According to The New York Times, it was the first time since the beginning of the peace process that an American president publicly disposed of the notion that the two-state solution was the only viable framework for peace.

“Within the space of a few minutes, President Trump did away with decades of carefully cultivated, albeit deeply flawed and biased, American diplomacy. Yet it is still to be seen if Trump's ‘new concept’ will actually mean shifting away from the flawed two-state solution formula over the course of his presidency.” ...

“In fact, the [only prerequisite](#) to peace, and the one that was most starkly absent from the news conference, is ending Israel's military occupation of another people, an act of war that is now entering its fifth decade.

“Whether the outcome is one state or two is irrelevant as long as it is based on ending Israel's military subjugation of the Palestinian people as the first step to fulfilling Palestinian rights. Any deviation from this prerequisite is a deviation from genuine and lasting peace.” ...

“Palestinians must not stand idly by while Netanyahu, encouraged by a pliable Trump administration, solidifies Israel's supremacist far-right vision over Palestinian land. Palestinians have a plethora of tools at their disposal in the international arena that can safeguard their rights and bring a cost to bear on Israel's violations of them.

“While doubling down on these international initiatives, Palestinians must make clear that the sole prerequisite that is actually needed for a lasting peace is justice on their lands, whatever political framework that takes.” ...

See also: [Palestinians Dismayed as U.S. Appears to Back Off Two-State Solution](#)

5) [Veering From U.S. Policy, Trump Says Could Live With Either Two-state or One-state Solution](#), Barak Ravid, Haaretz, February 15, 2017

“During his first press conference with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Washington on Wednesday, U.S. President Donald Trump bucked American policy regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by declining to endorse the two-state solution. The president also called on the Israeli premier to restrain settlement construction and reiterated his intention to achieve a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians, as well as a wider agreement between Israel and the Arab world.” ...

“The U.S. president stressed that he would like Israel to check settlement construction. Turning to Netanyahu, Trump said: ‘I’d like to see you hold back on settlements for a little bit.’

“Netanyahu sidestepped Trump’s remarks on settlement construction, stressing that he intends to reach understandings with the president to avoid friction between Israel and the U.S. The settlements are ‘not the core of the conflict,’ Netanyahu said, adding that the issue ought to be solved in the context of peace negotiations.

“Both Trump and Netanyahu avoided making an endorsement of the two-state solution. The American president surprisingly said that he would not rule out a one-state solution, and added that he is interested in a regional peace push involving several Arab countries, as a way toward a more comprehensive peace agreement.”

“‘I am looking at two states or one state, and I like the one that both parties like,’ Trump told reporters at the White House, though he noted that ‘the two states look like it could be the easier of the two.’” ...

“‘We will never forget what the Jewish people endured,’ Trump said, adding: ‘Your perseverance... is truly inspirational.’ On the UN, Trump said: ‘We reject unfair and one-sided actions against Israel in the United Nations which has treated Israel in my opinion, very very unfairly.’

“For his part, Netanyahu lauded the U.S.-Israel relationship. ‘Our alliance has been remarkably strong, but under your leadership I’m sure it will get remarkably stronger,’ Netanyahu said.

“‘I welcome your forthright call that Israel is treated fairly,’ Netanyahu said. ‘Our alliance is based on a deep bond of common values, interests that are under threat by one force; radical Islamic terrorists.’

“‘Under your leadership I believe we can reverse the rising tide of radical Islam. In this task, Israel stands with you and I stand with you,’ Netanyahu added.”

6) [Palestinians: U.S. Official's Two-state Remark Could Mean 'Dangerous Shift' in Policy](#), Jack Khoury, Haaretz, February 15, 2017

“The Palestinian Foreign Ministry on Wednesday said that the statement made by a White House official according to which U.S. President Donald Trump seeks Middle East peace but isn’t insistent on a two-state solution, constitutes a ‘dangerous shift’ in the American position on the conflict.” ...

“The ministry said that if the American position regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict had indeed changed, it might affect other countries in their attitude to the issue. However, it clarified that the Palestinians plan to act in the international community to preserve the two-state solution as the only solution to the conflict.

“‘We understand very well that there are forces in Israel, especially in the right-wing fascist coalition, that wish to destroy all chances for a two-state solution, and that those same forces are trying to influence decisions in the White House,’ the Palestinian ministry said.”

See also:

[Opinion Netanyahu’s Fawning Over Trump Is a Slap in the Face to American Jews;](#)
[Analysis Trump Is Delusional and Ignorant About Israel. His Meeting With Netanyahu Proved It;](#)
[Statement: Trump-Netanyahu Presser Dims Hopes for Peace; Undermines Decades of Diplomacy](#)

7) [Over 600 Rabbis and Cantors Sign Petition Opposing David Friedman as U.S. Ambassador to Israel](#), Judy Maltz, Haaretz, February 13, 2017

“More than 600 American rabbis and cantors have signed a letter expressing their opposition to the appointment of David Friedman as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.” ...

“In their letter, the rabbis and cantors ask that either President Donald Trump withdraw the nomination, or alternatively, that the Senate reject it. The letter expresses concern about Friedman’s ‘denigration of American Jews who believe differently from him and his policy positions that we believe run contrary to the interests of the United States and Israel.’

“The signatures were collected by a coalition of progressive organizations deeply opposed to Friedman’s appointment, including J Street, T’ruah, New Israel Fund, Ameinu, NCJW, Partners for Progressive Israel and Americans for Peace Now.

“The letter is signed by rabbis representing all the Jewish movements, among them well-known social activists.” ...

See also:

[Confirm Friedman: He Is the PERFECT Envoy to Israel in the Time of Trump](#)
[Editorial David Friedman Is Unfit to Serve as U.S. Envoy to Israel](#)
[In Unprecedented Step, Reform Jewish Movement Opposes Trump's Pick for Israel Envoy](#)
[David Friedman's Israel Connections - as Revealed in His Financial Disclosure Report,](#)