

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
October 20, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus mainly on the presentations given at the October 14th special session of the UN Security Council on Israeli settlements as obstacles to peace; the statements of Lara Friedman of APN and Hagai El, the head of B'Tselem are made available; other issues of importance are the possible action in the UN by President Obama before the end of his term and continued defense of settlement activity by the government of Israel.

Commentary: World attention to the Israeli settlements in the West Bank/Occupied Territories as obstacles to peace between the Israeli and Palestinian people and to any implementation of a “two state solution” was again attained by the recent meeting of the UN Security Council. All 15 members of the Security Council, including the US, agreed that these obstacles have been in place for too long (50 years in 2017) and must end. The present government of Israel stands alone in its denial of and continued creation of these obstacles. The security and future growth of the State of Israel and the just aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State of their own are now challenging the international community, the UN, the U.S., the EU, Israelis and Palestinians to act decisively in the coming months or risk ever increasing and unsustainable conflict and violence.

- Barak Ravid in Haaretz reports on the UN Security Council’s October 14th special session on Israeli settlements as 'obstacle to peace during which Russia stated that without a two-state solution, threat to Israel will grow.
- Itamar Eichner, Elior Levy & J. S. Herzog in state in Ynetnews that the Palestinian delegation to the United Nations successfully initiated an informal meeting of the Security Council on Israeli settlements in the West Bank.
- Americans for Peace Now (APN) present Statement by Lara Friedman delivered at the United Nations Security Council – October 14, 2016
- Barak Ravid writes in Haaretz that the US State Department criticized Netanyahu's attack on B'Tselem and Americans for Peace Now for participating in UN Security Council session on settlements.
- Uri Savir writes in Al-Monitor that both Israelis and Palestinians object to a diplomatic move by US President Barack Obama: the Palestinians object to a presidential speech, while the Israelis object to a UN General Assembly resolution.
- Mitchell Plitnick in The Third Way notes that in the wake of Israel’s announcement of hundreds of more units in West Bank settlements, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a page on its website articulating its view that building in the occupied West Bank is legal under international law and is not, as many critics claim, an impediment to peace.

1. [U.S. Tells UN Security Council: Israeli Activities in West Bank Creating One-state Reality, Baak Ravid, October 14, 2016](#)

“Israeli policies in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, and particularly continued settlement construction were severely criticized in a special UN Security Council session on Friday. The meeting, titled ‘Illegal Israeli Settlements: Obstacles to Peace and the Two-State Solution,’ did not involve a vote. It was held at the behest of member states Egypt, Venezuela, Malaysia, Senegal and Angola, with a push from the Palestinians. The initiators made use of the Arria Formula clause, allowing them to call for debates on subjects of specific interest to them. Attendance is not mandatory.

“The U.S. representative to the session said that the U.S. is ‘deeply concerned and strongly opposes settlements which are corrosive to peace.’ He said that Israeli activities in the West Bank, primarily settlement construction, ‘creates a one state reality on the ground.’

“Deputy U.S. Ambassador to the UN David Pressman noted that there is dramatic rise in the demolition of Palestinian homes, primarily in Area C of the West Bank. The U.S. calls on both sides to adopt policies and take immediate steps toward ‘implementing the two-state solution,’ he said. Pressman further condemned Palestinian terror attacks on Israelis, and said that Palestinian figures who incite violence are sending a message to the international community that they aren't interested in peace.

“The Russian representative said that the conflict is approaching ‘the moment of truth.’ He noted that there is a consensus about the illegality of Israeli settlement construction, house demolitions and violence. ‘Settlement construction must stop,’ he said, asserting that it creates ‘Palestinian enclaves’ that are disconnected from the outside world. ‘Israel needs security, but without the two-state solution, the threat to Israel will grow,’ he said. The Russian envoy said his country is promoting a meeting between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Moscow. The sides have expressed willingness to meet, but no date has been set, he said.” . . .

“Opening the session, Egyptian ambassador to the UN said that Israeli policy includes the destruction of Palestinian homes, forced transfer of Palestinians and appropriation of their land in the West Bank. ‘There are generations of Palestinians who only know fear and dare not dream of a better future,’ Amr Abdellatif Aboulatta said.

“Lara Friedman, director of policy at Americans for Peace Now, the sister organization of the Israeli-based Peace Now, noted at the session that while the meeting deals with human rights, some of the participating states are human rights violators themselves. She added that she has agreed to participate because of how harsh the climate is in Israel for rights groups. These groups' work is too important to be silenced, she said.” . . .

“The executive director of Israeli NGO B'Tselem, Hagai El-Ad, said at the session that the occupation controls all aspects of Palestinians' daily life, and that the Israeli legal system condones the injustice. El-Ad accused Israel of using the peace process to buy time to take over West Bank territories through settlement construction. He said it is the Security Council's moral imperative to send a message to Israel that ‘it can't occupy another people for 50 years and call itself a democracy.’ He further asserted that words have no effect on Israel, calling on the Council to take action to end the occupation.” . . .

“Jerusalem officials have expressed concern the atmosphere from the informal meeting could affect the Security Council's monthly meeting on the Middle East on October 28, as well as set the stage for for an anti-settlement resolution in the Security Council after the U.S. election in November.” . . .

“Senior Israeli officials and Western diplomats believe the Palestinians are unlikely to push seriously for a Security Council resolution on the settlements until after the November 8 U.S. election.

“The meeting is held a day after the UN's education, science and culture agency, UNESCO, adopted an anti-Israel resolution that disregards Judaism's historic connection to the Temple Mount and casts doubt on the link between Judaism and the Western Wall.”

See also link A - [UNESCO's mistake on Jerusalem](#)

2. [B'Tselem to address UN Security Council's informal meeting on West Bank settlements, Itamar Eichner, Elior Levy & J. S. Herzog, Ynetnews, October 13, 2016](#)

“The Palestinian delegation to the United Nations successfully initiated an informal meeting of the Security Council on Israeli settlements in the West Bank that is to be held on Friday and to be attended by representatives of B'Tselem.

“According to the UN's website, the ‘Arria-Formula meeting,’ which is how Friday's discussion has been defined, is a ‘very informal, confidential’ meeting that enables ‘Security Council members to have a frank and private exchange of views.’ It is believed that this meeting is the Palestinian delegation's first step in a plan to have the Security Council issue a resolution against Israel regarding the settlements. Friday's meeting will take place at 10am EDT (5pm Israel time) and will be co-chaired by Angola, Egypt, Malaysia, Senegal and Venezuela. The meeting's title is ‘illegal Israeli Settlements: Obstacles to Peace and Two-State Solution.’

“B'Tselem's executive director, Hagai El-Ad, will present an up-to-date summary of West Bank settlements to the 15 countries that sit on the Security Council. ‘This is the most important international forum that deals with the occupation and perhaps the only one that can promote significant action on the matter,’ he said. ‘This will be one of the most important diplomatic opportunities in the history of B'Tselem,’ El-Ad added. He explained that he would repeat on Friday that ‘the occupation is not an internal Israeli matter, and the Israeli public is not authorized to decide if it wants it to continue. It is a clear international matter.’

“Israel's permanent representative to the UN, Amb. Danny Danon, criticized the meeting, saying, ‘The Palestinians continue to look for a way to bypass direct negotiations and are generating diplomatic terrorism against Israel. It's sad and disappointing that precisely on days of self evaluation and prayers for the unity of the people of Israel, Israeli organizations are giving moral cover to the persecution of Israel at the UN.’”

See also Link B - [B'Tselem Head: Why I Spoke Against the Occupation at the UN](#); link C - [Hagai El-Ad's address in a special discussion about settlements at the United Nations Security Council](#)

3. [APN at the UNSC October 14 - full statement, APN, October 13, 2016](#)

“Statement by Lara Friedman, Americans for Peace Now, Delivered at the United Nations Security Council – October 14, 2016

“Distinguished members of the Security Council, As a representative of Americans for Peace Now – an organization that is committed to Israel’s existence and its future – it is not easy for me to speak before this body today. It is not easy because while this forum will focus in large part on human rights violations by Israel, there are states represented here whose own human rights records are abysmal. There are even states in this forum that still do not recognize the existence of Israel, 70 years after that nation’s birth and despite its membership in the UN’s General Assembly.” . . .

“Above and beyond all of that, I come here today because I know the facts – facts about trends and developments that we and our colleagues in Peace Now have been documenting for more than two decades. Facts that disclose both the intent and impact of the Israeli government’s settlement policies. Facts that are alarming.

“The Palestinian people have lived under Israeli military occupation for nearly 50 years. That is a fact. This occupation involves increasingly harsh violations of Palestinian rights, as individuals and as a collective. That, too, is a fact. And the settlement policies of the Israeli government are unilaterally expanding and entrenching this occupation.

“Here is another fact: This occupation is a threat to Israel’s security and to Israel’s very existence. Israel has the military capability to address any of its external security threats, which indeed exist. It has no effective or moral answer to the security challenges imposed by perpetual occupation, as chillingly embodied by the ongoing wave of attacks against Israelis, in many cases by Palestinian children effectively committing suicide by Israeli soldier.

“If these policies are not rolled back, they will destroy the possibility of ever reaching a political agreement between Israel and Palestine.

“If these policies do not end, they will lead inevitably to permanent occupation, and with it, the end of Israel as a democracy and as a state grounded in the Jewish values so proudly expressed in Israel’s Declaration of Independence. Values that are already being undermined today by Israel’s settlement policies.” . . .

“The numbers – and these are official Israeli numbers – tell the story.

“Twenty-three years ago, in 1993, Israel and the PLO signed the Declaration of Principles, also known as the Oslo Accords. Back then, the settler population in the West Bank, excluding East Jerusalem, was around 116,000. At the end of 2015, that number was nearly 390,000. Looking just at East Jerusalem, in 1993 the Jewish Israeli population was approximately 146,000. Today it is over 210,000.” . . .

“Speaking as someone who cares deeply about Israel, I say to you today: I do not give up hope. Nor do I forget that the two-state solution is not a goal in itself. Rather, it is a political compromise to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is a solution that has consistently been embraced by majorities of both Israelis and Palestinians and their political leaderships. And it is the only solution that offers Israelis and Palestinians alike the hope for a normal life – a better life – for their children and their children’s children.

“But with every day that passes, Israeli settlement policies further cement a one-state reality on the ground, making the two-state solution harder to imagine, let alone achieve.” . . .

“That is why I come before you today – someone who proudly and unapologetically cares about Israel and defends its existence. Someone who, along with my organization Americans for Peace Now and our American and Israeli friends and supporters, cares about Israel too much to stop challenging its self-defeating settlement policies.

“And that is why, on behalf of Americans for Peace Now, I urge you here today to finally take action in the Security Council to send a clear message to Israel that the international community stands by the two-state solution and unambiguously rejects policies that undermine it – including Israeli settlement policies. Thank you.”

See also link D - [U.S. Defends Israeli Anti-occupation Group, Says 'Freedom of Expression' Must Be Protected](#)

[4. U.S. Defends Israeli Anti-occupation Group, Says 'Freedom of Expression' Must Be Protected, Barak Ravid, Haaretz, October 17, 2016](#)

“The U.S. criticized Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s verbal assault on anti-occupation and human rights groups B’Tselem and Americans for Peace Now over their participation in a UN Security Council session on the settlements Friday. State Department spokesman John Kirby told Haaretz on Monday that the administration values the information published by the two nonprofits about the situation in the West Bank and stressed that governments should defend freedom of speech.” . . .

“B’Tselem director explains: Why I spoke against the occupation at the UN:

“The UN Security Council’s session on Friday was held at the behest of member states Egypt, Venezuela, Malaysia, Senegal and Angola, with a push from the Palestinians. Israel boycotted the proceedings. The executive director of B’Tselem, Hagai El-Ad, and Lara Friedman, director of policy at Americans for Peace Now, the sister organization of the Israeli-based Peace Now, took part in the meeting.

“The State Department spokesman’s comments came following a statement released by Netanyahu on Saturday against B’Tselem and Americans for Peace Now. “In a session of the UN Security Council, B’Tselem and Americans for Peace

Now joined the chorus of slander against Israel, and recycled the false claim that the 'occupation and the settlements' are the reason for the conflict," Netanyahu posted on his official Facebook page.

"Netanyahu wrote that B'Tselem's director Hagai El-Ad had urged the Security Council to act against Israel. 'What these organizations cannot achieve through democratic elections in Israel, they try to achieve by international coercion. This is an unworthy act,' he said."

"U.S. Deputy Ambassador David Pressman said at the Security Council session that the United States was 'deeply concerned about continued settlement activity' and that the United States 'strongly opposes settlements which are corrosive to peace.'

"Pressman said Israel's activities in the West Bank, particularly settlement-building 'creates a one-state solution on the ground.' He called on both sides to pursue steps "to start implementing the two-state solution right now."

5. Obama's three diplomatic options for Mideast peace, Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, October 16, 2016

"Both Israeli and Palestinian leaderships are opposed to policy moves by US President Barack Obama on a two-state solution. Obama is apparently going to make an announcement on US Middle East policy after the Nov. 8 elections, Al-Monitor has learned from a senior American diplomat in Tel Aviv.

"Currently, Obama is fully engaged in the election campaign on the side of Democrat candidate Hillary Clinton. He will do very little on the Middle East front, so as not to damage her chances among American Jewry.

"Suspicious that Obama will make a policy move on the region, 88 senators have signed a letter to the president asking him to veto any UN Security Council resolution that is not balanced. That letter was advanced by the pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC with some help by Democrat activists and by the pro-Israel pro-peace J Street lobbying organization. A senior official at J Street told Al-Monitor on the condition of anonymity that the organization conditioned its support of the letter on the wording 'an unbalanced resolution.' Hence, the door is left open for a balanced US-sponsored Security Council resolution in the future." . . .

"According to the US diplomat in Tel Aviv, the White House and the State Department are weighing which policy measure to take, out of three possibilities.

"The first is a presidential speech outlining a framework for a two-state solution along the lines of Secretary of State John Kerry's framework.

"The second possibility is a presidential speech outlining a more regional approach, linking the coordination on the fight against the Islamic State together with Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia to a two-state solution process.

"A third possibility would be a US-sponsored Security Council resolution based on the US-proposed framework of spring 2015.

"The senior U.S. diplomat told Al-Monitor that the preferred option right now is for the president to outline a regional plan, with the Arab Peace Initiative and anti-regional terror as a basis.

"Obviously, the nature of Obama's actions will depend on the outcome of the elections. In the case of a Clinton victory, he will consult her and opt for a more cautious approach. The opposite is true for a Trump victory." . . .

"According to Abbas' entourage, the Palestinian president objects to an Obama declaration, as he fears that most of its outline would be close to the Israeli positions. Abbas is especially concerned about possible American demands on Palestinian recognition of the Jewish state and American positions on the Palestinian refugees' issues. He wants

something more binding at the UN Security Council with a reasonable timeline to Palestinian statehood based on the 1967 lines.” . . .

“But it’s still very possible that both sides will miss Obama. He is a fervent supporter of a fair two-state solution for both strategic and moral considerations. Strategically, he believes that this is the key for Israel to maintain its democratic character and its long-term security; morally, because he is opposed to the occupation of another people.”

See also link E - [Is a new West Bank settlement Obama's red line?](#), link F - [The U.S. isn't going to do a damn thing to end the occupation](#); link G - [United States Criticizes Israel Over West Bank Settlement Plan](#); link H - [EU joins the US in condemning Israel's new settlement plans in Palestinian territory](#)

6. The Settlements vs. the Peace Process, Mitchell Plitnick, The Third Way, October 7, 2016

“On Wednesday (Oct. 5), in the wake of Israel’s announcement of hundreds of more units in West Bank settlements, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs posted a page on its website articulating its view that building in the occupied West Bank is legal under international law and is not, as many critics claim, an impediment to peace. The fact that the MFA felt the need to make such a case indicates that rising international criticism, particularly from the U.S., is having an impact, and that case bears an examination of its key claims.” . . .

“The vast majority of legal opinions, including those of the High Court of Justice in Israel and the US State Department (which consistently refers to the West Bank as “occupied territory”), directly contradict this claim. As recently as 2004, the High Court in Israel ruled ‘...that Israel holds the (West Bank) in belligerent occupation,’ and that its authority over the Palestinians ‘... flows from the provisions of public international law regarding belligerent occupation.’ No ruling since has superseded this view.

“Indeed, in an analysis requested by the Israeli Prime Minister’s office in 1967 regarding the potential legality of settlements in the then-newly occupied territories, Israeli Foreign Ministry legal adviser Theodor Meron wrote, ‘My conclusion is that civilian settlement in the administered territories contravenes the explicit provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention.’ This is the overwhelming consensus view of international legal opinion, and contradicts Israel’s claim that Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention applies only to forcible transfers, rather than voluntary ones like those of Israeli settlers.” . . .

“Finally, the settlement blocs themselves govern territory far larger than their built-up areas, and this territory has been steadily expanding. Many of the blocs have grown to the point where they already threaten the contiguity, and thus the economic viability, of any potential Palestinian state in the West Bank. There are now well over 400,000 Israeli settlers in the West Bank in 123 settlements and 100 outposts. As that population grows and spreads, the possibility of creating a Palestinian state with land swaps to accommodate them becomes ever more remote.” . . .

“While the issue of Jewish refugees from Arab lands is a serious and legitimate one for Israel, it has nothing to do with the Palestinians. Jewish refugees from Arab lands have legitimate claims against those countries from which they were expelled or fled. Attempting to pair this with Palestinian refugees who were driven out or fled from Israel in 1948 and 1967 needlessly complicates an already complicated problem and sends a message that Israel is not serious about resolving this vexing issue.

“Conclusion: It is true that the settlements are only one of a number of issues to be addressed in resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But they are the one issue through which Israel tangibly and unilaterally raises the costs of achieving that resolution, brick by brick, day by day. Supporters of peace do neither side any favors by denying the settlements’ provocative nature or downplaying the threat they pose to a final agreement.”

Other articles of interest:

A. [UNESCO's mistake on Jerusalem, Dahlia Scheindlin, 962 Magazine, October 15, 2016](#)

The resolution was yet another shallow attack on identity elements, the same type I reject every time Israel does it to Palestinians. It was also a setback to the kind of UN action that could actually move the bar in a region that desperately needs it.

B. [B'Tselem Head: Why I Spoke Against the Occupation at the UN, Hagai El-Ad, Haaretz, Oct 16, 2016](#)

There is no chance Israeli society, of its own volition and without any help, will end the nightmare. Too many mechanisms insulate the violence we conduct in order to control the Palestinians.

C. [Hagai El-Ad's address in a special discussion about settlements at the United](#)

D. [U.S. Defends Israeli Anti-occupation Group, Says 'Freedom of Expression' Must Be Protected, Barak Ravid, Haaretz, October 17, 2016](#)

State Department criticizes Netanyahu's attack on B'Tselem and Americans for Peace Now for participating in UN Security Council session on settlements.

E. [Is a new West Bank settlement Obama's red line?, Akiva Eldar, Al-Monitor, October 11, 2016](#) Summary: If Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu insists on defying the US president and building a new West Bank settlement, Barack Obama could respond by abstaining in a UN Security Council vote on Palestinian Statehood.

F. [The U.S. isn't going to do a damn thing to end the occupation](#)

As long as Washington views ending the occupation as an Israeli problem instead of a Palestinian problem, it will never even consider using its leverage to do so. The United States issued an unusually sharp rebuke on Wednesday to news that Israel is building a brand new settlement in the West Bank. The State Department sounded mad. The White House sounded mad. Nobody is going to do anything about it.

G. [United States Criticizes Israel Over West Bank Settlement Plan, New York Times, Mark Landler Oct. 5, 2016](#)

The Obama administration on Wednesday castigated the Israeli government for approving plans to create a new Jewish settlement on the West Bank, three weeks after it signed a lucrative military aid package with the United States and just as President Obama was traveling to Jerusalem for the funeral of Shimon Peres.

H. [EU joins the US in condemning Israel's new settlement plans in Palestinian territory, Ma'an News Agency, October 7, 2016](#)

The spokesperson for the European Union strongly condemned on Friday Israel's plans to construct 98 new housing units in occupied Palestinian territory in the northern West Bank for the establishment of a new Israeli settlement. The condemnation came two days following notably harsh criticisms by the United States over Israel's illegal settlement enterprise.

I. [Why Israeli occupation of the West Bank is reversible, Akiva Elda, Al-monitor, October 13, 2016](#)

New data shows that the settlements in the West Bank are not an irreversible situation, and that most of the population growth in settlements is due to births — not immigration of Israelis into the settlements.

J. [Opinion Yes, Benny Morris, Israel Did Perpetrate Ethnic Cleansing in 1948, Daniel Blatman, Haaretz, October 14, 2016](#)

The Israeli historian is right about one thing: The understandings that the Arabs should be expelled in 1948 were not carried out in full. Benny Morris at the start of his career, determined that Israel is responsible for the mass flight of the Palestinians in 1948 and later changed his views until he became the darling of the settler right.

K. [The Peacemaker Who Wasn't, Hanan Ashrawi, New York Times, Oct. 3, 2016](#)

While many remember Shimon Peres as a courageous and tireless advocate for peace, Palestinians recall a different man — one who was very good at talking peace but not so good at walking the walk.

L. [Israel: Strong Words Must Be Followed by Strong Action, October 8, 2016, James J. Zogby, Common Dreams, October 10, 2016](#)

In the last three months of this administration, President Obama has an opportunity to set things right. He can, for example, restate the 1970's State Department finding (which has never been overturned) that all settlement activity is illegal. He can allow the United Nations Security Council to pass a resolution declaring the illegality of settlements and imposing international sanctions against Israel for its violations of international law. And he can refuse to block an Arab effort to refer the issue to the International Criminal Court.

M. [Yom Kippur Eve: Gaza's 2 millionth resident is born, Elinor Levy, Ynetnews, October 13, 2016](#)

The Gaza Strip is one of the most densely populated places on Earth, and on the eve of Yom Kippur on Tuesday, its two millionth resident was born in a Rafah hospital. Passing two-million-persons mark, Gaza has 4,661 inhabitants per square kilometer. In the West Bank, by comparison, which is 16 times larger than the Gaza Strip, there are about 2.5 million Palestinians.

N. [CMEP Bulletin - Settlement Showdown – October 7, 2016](#)

O. [CMEP Bulletin - Tensions Soaring in The Holy Land – October 14, 2016](#)

P. [Editorial The Cities of Israel Are Not Safe, Haaretz Editorial October 10, 2016](#)

Instead of understanding that only bold moves to end the occupation are likely to reduce the violence, Netanyahu is turning Israel into a hopeless place that endangers the lives of its people.

Q. [From northern Israel to Jerusalem: 2,000 women march for peace, Ynet News Ahiya Raved, October 5, 2016](#)

Around 2,000 women on October 4th embarked on what's being called the Hope March, from Rosh Hanikra to Jerusalem. Behind this project stands an organization of activists called Women Wage Peace (WWP), which seeks to find avenues for peaceful dialogue through women's cooperation.