

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
March 2019



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The seven featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East focus on the AIPAC-promoted attacks on U.S. Representative Ilhan Omar and this lobby's tactics of reward and retribution; the upcoming elections in Israel as a celebration of violence in light of that country's *undemocratic* endless military occupation; the 16 years of Israel's approval of just 4 percent of Palestinian building requests, while annually issuing 1,000 demolition orders; the history, effectiveness and future of the Palestinian non-violent BDS movement; the recently published UN Report stating that Israeli security forces may have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in its response to the Gaza "March of Return" weekly demonstrations; the use of anti-Semitic accusations to cloak the Israeli repression of Palestinians; a podcast discussing Khaled Elgindy new book "Blindspot: America and the Palestinians, from Balfour to Trump"; and a link to the latest CMEP Bulletin.

Commentary: Criticism of government policies, officials and their statements are expected in and of democratic countries. Such criticisms are seldom conflated to include all the people of the criticized country and their relatives and world-wide descendants, except when it is the government of Israel that is being criticized and held responsible for its policies and actions. Criticism of Israeli policies and actions towards the Palestinian people of East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza is not anti-Semitic but based on verifiable data. Labeling such criticisms as anti-Semitic has been an often and over-used tactic to avoid the factual content of such criticisms. Like a variation of the child seeing the King without clothes fable, more and more people in the United States are joining most peoples of the world in seeing through and beyond this conflation. They are seeing and criticizing the oppressive, violent, and repressive policies and actions of the Israeli government towards the Palestinians, who are de facto under its civil or military control. Israel continues to deny and ignore such criticisms and continues to lose support of the people of its strongest ally, the United States. The conflation tactic is losing its effectiveness and has become counterproductive.

- M.J. Rosenberg, an AIPAC and Capitol Hill veteran explains in *The Nation* this lobby's tactics of reward and retribution.
- Hagai El-Ad notes in *+972 Mag* that, In democratic countries, elections are conventionally described as 'a celebration.' But in an undemocratic reality of endless military occupation, they become an overt celebration of the violence of the powerful.
- Gideon Levy and Alex Levac note in *Haaretz* that, in 16 years, Israel approved just 4 percent of Palestinian building requests, while annually issuing 1,000 demolition orders. The High Court of Justice has never debated a Palestinian petition against such an order. The authors ask if this is not apartheid, what is?
- Stephen Zunes writes his reflections on BDS in *Tikkun* giving the history, effectiveness, and future of this Palestinian nonviolent movement.
- Stephanie Nebehay, and Dan Williams report in *Reuters* that UN investigators said Israeli security forces may have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in killing 189 Palestinians and wounding more than 6,100 at weekly protests in Gaza last year.

- B. Michael writes in Haaretz that for anti-Semitism hunters, preserving paranoia and blurring the line between Judaism and Zionism is the best way to handle criticism of the country's abominations.
- In FMEP podcast series "Occupied Thoughts," Peter Beinart interviews Khaled Elgindy about his new book "Blindspot: America and the Palestinians, from Balfour to Trump."

1) [This Is How AIPAC Really Works](#), The Nation, M.J. Rosenberg, February 4, 2019

"One thing that should be said about Representative Ilhan Omar's tweet about the power of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (more commonly known as AIPAC, or the 'Israel lobby') is that the hysterical reaction to it proved her main point: The power of AIPAC over members of Congress is literally awesome, although not in a good way. Has anyone ever seen so many members of Congress, of both parties, running to the microphones and sending out press releases to denounce one first-term member for criticizing the power of... a lobby?" ...

"What did Omar tweet that was so terrible, anyway? Actually it was two tweets that produced the unsettling but oh-so-telling coming together of President Donald Trump and House Speaker Nancy Pelosi in common denunciation of the first-term member of Congress. Omar's crime: daring to suggest that campaign contributions orchestrated by AIPAC play a large part in achieving bipartisan support for anything proposed by the Israeli government and/or its lobby, AIPAC." ...

See also:

[Ilhan Omar Apologizes for 'anti-Semitic' Tweet Following Backlash](#), Haaretz, February 11, 2019

Omar, who captioned her apology "Listening and learning, but standing strong," added: "At the same time, I reaffirm the problematic role of lobbyists in our politics, whether it be AIPAC, the NRA or the fossil fuel industry. It's gone on too long and we must be willing to address it."

[Opinion | No, Ilhan Omar Is Not Anti-Semitic For Calling Out AIPAC](#), Peter Field, The Forward, February. 11, 2019

Representative Ilhan Omar is being over-criticized for her legitimate criticisms of AIPAC. Anti-Semitism is not a part of it.

[This Is What the Beginning of a Real Israel Debate Looks Like](#), Ben Ehrenreich, The New Republic, February 15, 2019

Before Ilhan Omar came to the national stage, Stephen Walt and John Mearsheimer tried to discuss pro-Israel lobbying. They were shouted down.

2) [When we celebrate Israeli democracy, we celebrate the violence of occupation](#), Hagai El-Ad, +972 Mag, February 25, 2019

"In democratic countries, elections are conventionally described as 'a celebration.' But in an undemocratic reality of endless military occupation, they become an overt celebration of the violence of the powerful.

"So long as I do not firmly and irrevocably possess the right to vote I do not possess myself. I cannot make up my mind — it is made up for me. I cannot live as a democratic citizen, observing the laws I have helped to enact — I can only submit to the edict of others."

"Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. delivered these words in his 1957 "[Give Us the Ballot](#)" speech, part of his attempt to challenge the reality in America's Deep South, where Black people were citizens yet still denied the right to vote by

various ruses. For Palestinians who have lived under Israel's rule since 1967, the mere right to vote is not even an option." ...

See also:

[Democrats Echo Israel's Far-Right by Refusing to Even Use the Word "Occupation"](#), Robert Mackey, The Intercept, February 8, 2019

Here is a riddle: any Democrat hoping to be elected president at the crest of a progressive wave in 2020 should be able to solve: what do you call Israel's military rule over millions of disenfranchised Palestinians in the territories it seized by force in 1967?

[Israeli TV Journalist Reacts to Outcry After Saying Occupation Turns Soldiers Into 'Animals'](#), Itay Stern, Haaretz, February 24, 2019

Oshrat Kotler, who received death threats for her comment, says she can't ignore 'heavy price that we are paying through our children for ruling over another people'

3) [Israel Builds Settlements While Razing Palestinian Homes. If That's Not Apartheid, What Is?](#), Gideon Levy and Alex Levac, Haaretz, February 7, 2019

..."Between 1988 and 2017, the authorities issued 16,796 demolition orders for Palestinian houses, an average of 1,000 per year since 2009; 20 percent of them have been carried out, the rest are in the works. According to B'Tselem, between 2006 and 2018, Israel demolished at least 1,401 Palestinian residential units, leaving some 6,200 people, about half of them children, homeless." ...

"During the past 50 years, the state established close to 250 settlements, all of them illegal under international law, whereas in the same period it has established just one Palestinian community in the territories, to which Bedouin were moved who lived on land that Israel earmarked for settlement expansion. In parallel, Israel pursued a policy that doesn't allow the Palestinians to obtain legal building permits and that involves investing major effort in imposing and enforcing extreme restrictions on any construction designated for the Palestinian population. If that's not apartheid, what is?" ...

4) [Reflections on BDS](#), Stephen Zunes, Tikkun, February 11, 2019

"One concern which has been raised about the BDS campaign here in the United States and other nations, even by those who acknowledge ongoing Israeli violations of human rights and international law, is why the focus on Israel, the world's only Jewish state?

"One reason is that there are few cases where civil society organizations have come together so explicitly to call for such a campaign, as with the case in Palestine." ...

"In addition, Israel gets far more U.S. aid than any other country; the United States has used its veto power in the United Nations on scores of occasions to protect Israel from international accountability, as many times as on all other resolutions combined; and, many U.S. officials rationalize for human rights abuses and violations of international law committed by Israel that they would condemn if committed by many other countries. Using BDS to challenge Israeli policies is one way of attempting to redress the ways in which Israel is already being singled out by the U.S. government—for support." ...

5) [Israel security forces should face justice for Gaza killings: U.N.](#) **Stephanie Nebehay, Dan Williams, Reuters,**
February 28, 2019

“Israeli security forces may have committed war crimes and crimes against humanity in killing 189 Palestinians and wounding more than 6,100 at weekly protests in Gaza last year, United Nations investigators said on Thursday. (Feb. 28)

“The independent panel said it had confidential information about those it believes to be responsible for the unlawful killings, including Israeli army snipers and commanders. It called on Israel to prosecute them.”...

“The report, covering March 30-December 31 2018, was based on hundreds of interviews with victims and witnesses, as well as medical records, video and drone footage, and photographs.

“On May 14, Israeli forces killed 60 demonstrators, the highest one-day death toll in Gaza since a 2014 military assault, the report said.

“Amnesty International said in a statement: ‘Those responsible for these deplorable crimes must not go unpunished. The findings of this report must pave the way for justice for victims of war crimes.’”...

“‘Our investigation found that the demonstrators were overwhelmingly unarmed even if they were not at all times peaceful,’ he told a news briefing.

“Thirty-five children, two journalists and three ‘clearly-marked’ paramedics were among those killed by Israeli forces, in violation of international humanitarian law, it said.

“‘We are saying that they have intentionally shot children. They have intentionally shot people with disabilities, they have intentionally shot journalists,’ said panel member Sara Hossain, barrister at the Supreme Court of Bangladesh.

“‘We found that one person, a double amputee, was shot and killed as he sat in his wheelchair. On two separate days, two people visibly walking on crutches, were shot in the head. They were killed,’ she added.” ...

See also:

[Nikolay Mladenov Special Coordinator For The Middle East Peace Process Briefing To The Security Council On The Situation In The Middle East 20 February 2019](#)

[Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator, Ursula Mueller - Statement to the Security Council on the humanitarian situation in the oPt New York, 20 February 2019](#)

6) [Hate: An Israeli Love Story](#), **B. Michael , Haaretz, March 1, 2019**

“Israel’s relations with global anti-Semitism (both the real and the fake) long ago turned into a farce, but only recently have they become truly and absurdly grotesque. A ludicrous imbroglio of demagoguery and exploitation, deceit and victimization, disgust and attraction, loud condemnation and silent cooperation.

“Israeli anti-Semitism hunters are like the truffle hunters in the forest. Sniffing, searching, scratching, digging and never stopping until they find the longed-for fungus. And then, crying with joy, they rush to their master, place their treasure at his feet and earn a flattering caress. The fresh flakes of anti-Semitism are brought in a flash to the studios and that very same evening they are served to the audience, garnished with a befitting shocked tone of voice and an agitated facial expression.

“As far as they are concerned, it is unimportant to the anti-Semitism hunters whether it is a march of SS veterans saluting with the upraised hand and singing a Nazi anthem, or a stupid bully who wants to take out his frustrations by spray painting a swastika on a Jewish headstone. As far as they are concerned, both are the works of living Nazis. Both are worthy of bombastic marketing, as part of the effort to preserve the paranoia and blur the line between Judaism and Zionism.”...

7) [Occupied Thoughts: Failures of American Peacemaking](#), Peter Beinart and Khaled Elgindy, FMEP Podcast, February 27, 2019

“In this February 27th edition of FMEP’s podcast series ‘Occupied Thoughts’” Peter Beinart is joined by Khaled Elgindy to discuss the latter’s book (due out in April 2019), “[Blindspot: America and the Palestinians, from Balfour to Trump](#).” In discussion, Beinart and Elgindy discuss how American agency in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations – particularly the unwillingness of U.S. presidents to deal with the power imbalance between the two parties – complicated, and perhaps doomed, their fate.”

8) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin: [\[Bulletin\] February 2019](#)