

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
October 4, 2018



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

[Read previous issues of Middle East Notes](#)

The six featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on Mahmoud Abbas's and Benjamin Netanyahu's speeches on Thursday (9/27/2018) to the UN General Assembly; critique of the Oslo Accords; the Trump administration's policies that have abandoned the facade of neutrality in rubber-stamping the Israeli government's agenda; a brief history of the 1947 partition and the present Trump presidency's support for Israel; the growing number of older U.S. Jews who have become alienated from a present Israeli government that doesn't share their liberal values; a Pax Christi International statement in observance of the 2018 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel addressed to the situation of youth and children; links to recent CMEP Bulletins; and links to a podcast and book recommendations.

Commentary: The Oslo Accords were signed in Washington, D.C. on September 13, 1993, with great hopes that a process had begun to make it possible for two peoples, Israelis and Palestinians, to share to share one land with security and peace. However in the words of Amos Levi: *"The Oslo Accords have perpetuated the occupation. They have given Israel another 25 years at least of uncontrolled settlement activity and brutal occupation - maybe even another 50, maybe even 100, maybe the eternity of apartheid."* Much has changed, however, but not for the better: Israeli and U.S. governments have continued their support of ever-increasing settlement activity on the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, destroying any possibility of a viable "two state solution"; the present U.S. government has given up any pretense of being an "honest broker"; an equal number of Palestinians and Jews are now living between the Mediterranean and the Jordan; Israel has become an apartheid state overseeing the total population in this area with political and military control; the people of Gaza have become desperate and the leadership of the West Bank is increasingly ineffectual. The prospect of military violence, civilian casualties, and Middle East chaos is greater now than it was 25 years ago. The Oslo dream has become a nightmare.

- Noa Landau reports in Haaretz that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday that there would be no peace without a "an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital."
- The Editors of The Nation Magazine printed an article stating that a quarter-century after Oslo, Israel is consolidating its domination of the Palestinians, but the global resistance movement is growing.
- Dalia Hatuqa writes in Foreign Policy that the Trump administration's policies don't represent a radical shift. The White House has simply abandoned the facade of neutrality and rubber-stamped the Israeli government's agenda.
- Fathi Nemer in Mondoweiss provides a brief history of the 1947 partition while stating the Trump presidency has been very good for Israel. Settlement construction is booming, the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem has been legitimized, and even attempting to discuss Israel's obligations under international law is met with extreme hostility.
- Dina Kraft notes in Haaretz that the U.S. media may have focused on young American Jews' disconnect from Israel, but a growing number of older U.S. Jews have also become alienated from a government that doesn't share their liberal values.
- Pax Christi International in a statement in observance of the 2018 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel addressed the situation of youth and children, in keeping with their official theme, "Youth and Children: Raising Hope and Making Change."
- Links to recent Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins.
- Podcast & Book Recommendations

1) [Abbas to UN: No Peace Without Palestinian State With East Jerusalem as Its Capital, Including Holy Sites](#), Noa Landau, Haaretz, September 27, 2018

“Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas told the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday that there would be no peace without a ‘an independent Palestinian state, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and not some place in East Jerusalem as its capital, and with all of its holy sites.’

“Opening his speech by stating ‘Jerusalem is not for sale, and the rights of the Palestinian people are not up for bargaining,’ the Palestinian president said that Israel's ‘racist’ nation-state law nullifies the two-state solution, adding that it will lead to a single ‘racist, apartheid state.’ He said that Israel's ‘colonial occupation continues to suffocate us.’” ...

“Netanyahu's comment Wednesday was given during a press briefing to reporters in New York and was the first such overt expression of willingness to see a Palestinian state formed since the premier made his ‘Bar Ilan’ foreign policy speech in 2009.

“Netanyahu has refrained since then from clarifying his stance on a Palestinian state, but told Haaretz that ‘it is important to set what is inadmissible to us: Israel will not relinquish security control west of Jordan. This will not happen as long as I'm prime minister and I think the Americans understand that.’” ...

See also:

[Abbas' UN Address: A Speech Laced With Helplessness and Lack of Strategy](#), Jack Khoury, Haaretz, September 28, 2018
There were no surprises in Thursday's speech: As opposed to Arafat who always had a rabbit in his hat for better or worse, Abbas has long since given up the option of the gun or the threat of chaos.

[Netanyahu's UN Speech Was One of His Most Convincing and Effective Performances](#), Yossi Verter, Haaretz, September 28, 2018

Well equipped with Israeli intelligence achievements, the prime minister formulated a precise and credible indictment against Iran. Those expecting a statement of renewed negotiations with the Palestinians were disappointed.

2) [For Justice, Not Apartheid, in Palestine](#), Editors, *The Nation Magazine*, September 28, 2018

“This September marks the 25th anniversary of the Oslo Accords, which were heralded by many at the time of their signing as the dawn of a new era in the Middle East, one in which Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization would replace conflict with negotiations that would lead to peace and a Palestinian state.

“Some observers at the time—including Edward Said, in this magazine—pointed out the flaws in that 1993 declaration, among them that while the PLO recognized the state of Israel and renounced violence, the accords never mentioned Israel's occupation, never noted the illegality of Israeli settlements, and contained no promise—or, indeed, even any mention—of a Palestinian state as the end result of talks.

“Whatever its virtues or flaws, the Oslo ‘peace process,’ which has been on life support for years, is now dead. There have been no negotiations since the collapse in 2014 of the last set of talks, shepherded by Barack Obama's secretary of state, John Kerry, and there is no sign of serious talks in the foreseeable future. What we have seen, instead, is a shocking deterioration of Palestinian life under the most right-wing government in Israel's history.

“Benjamin Netanyahu, now Israel's longest-serving prime minister, is on the verge of achieving a long-cherished goal: not only the destruction of the Oslo process but the snuffing out of the last chance for a two-state solution to the conflict.” ...

“These days may seem bleak for the Palestinian cause, but the solidarity movement is growing, as more and more people recoil from an Israeli government that is steadily shedding its democratic and liberal elements. With the two-state solution fading away, a de facto one-state apartheid regime, in which half the population has little or no rights, is being born. In the long run, such a system cannot survive. Those who care about justice and believe, as we do, that Jews and Palestinians in Israel-Palestine can and must find a way to share the land in harmony, with equal rights for all, will have to redouble our efforts to end Israel’s oppression and find a just resolution of the conflict.”

See also:

[Report: Number of Israel settlers quadrupled since Oslo Accords](#)

[With Oslo, Israel’s Intention Was Never Peace or Palestinian Statehood](#), Amira Hass, Haaretz, September 14, 2018

The transformation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip into separate Bantustans was all part of the plan.

[A ‘gentleman’s agreement’: How Oslo worked out as planned for Israel](#), Jonathan Cook, Middle East Eye, September 13, 2018

Twenty-five years on, analysts say Oslo didn’t fail: it offered Israel a formula to block the emergence of a Palestinian state.

[I Believed in the Oslo Accords for Years. But It Was Merely a Deception](#), Gideon Levy, Haaretz, September 9, 2018

The Oslo Accords have given Israel another 25 years at least of uncontrolled settlement activity and brutal occupation.

3) [Palestinians, America Was Never an Honest Broker](#), Dalia Hatuqa, Foreign Policy, September 13, 2018

“For decades, Palestinian leaders have engaged in a rigged peace process, seeking to force the international community’s blueprint for a Palestinian state onto the population of the West Bank and Gaza. The United States, meanwhile, has sought to maintain the fiction that it is an honest broker and neutral mediator.

“The Trump administration has finally dropped that mask, revealing Washington’s true colors. As offensive as the pro-Israel mantras emanating from the White House may be for Palestinians, it is a clarifying moment.

“Since 1967, the Palestinians have tried everything to free themselves from Israel’s brutal occupation. They tried armed resistance, which got them exiled from Arab states, paving the way for the Oslo Accords; they tried unarmed resistance, which got them media coverage but also jail time; they tried neoliberal economics, which got them aid money and nice cafes in Ramallah; and they tried diplomacy, joining international organizations and United Nations bodies as a state, which got them threats from Israel and the United States.

“Washington has long brokered peace negotiations under the flawed premise of two equal sides vying for the same piece of land. When President Donald Trump came to power, many Palestinian officials viewed him with guarded eagerness, holding out hope that his unpredictable shoot-from-the-hip style could translate into a win for them. They could not have been more wrong.” ...

See also: [Trump's endgame in Palestine](#), Mitchell Plitnick, +972 Magazine, September 9, 2018

Washington defunding the Palestinian refugee agency is not merely an attack on UNRWA, as serious as that may be. It is an attempt to destroy the Palestinian national movement.

4) [Palestinians were right to reject partition](#), Fathi Nemer, Mondoweiss, September 24, 2018 [This article, includes a brief history of the 1947 partition.]

“The Trump presidency has been very good for Israel. Settlement construction is booming, the annexation of occupied East Jerusalem has been legitimized, and even attempting to discuss Israel’s obligations under international law is met with extreme hostility.

“Although previous U.S. administrations always provided cover for Israel, they still sometimes managed to slip in an ode to human rights and feigned ‘concern’ regarding Israel’s constant violation of international law. Naturally, this never really changed Israeli policy in any meaningful way. Even the Obama administration, which many absurdly labeled ‘anti-Israel,’ still managed to approve a whopping 38 billion dollar military aid package to Israel.

“Yet in today’s international climate, even these empty words or merely acknowledging the rights and dignity of Palestinians are deemed a step too far. Under such circumstances and complete impunity, Israel no longer needs to pretend. Gone are the days of Israel paying even lip service to the ‘peace process’, or pretending that it does not intend to annex and colonize even more occupied Palestinian land.

“Israel’s fig leaves are rapidly dropping, alienating even longtime supporters. The silver lining, perhaps, is that it is revealing the cracks and decay in long maintained myths surrounding the colonization of Palestine.

“Thanks to the meticulous scholarship, documentation and investigative research carried out by Palestinians and others, many myths have already been dispelled, such as the claim that Palestine was an empty, barren land upon the arrival of the Zionist settlers. Today, no impartial historian can seriously argue such a claim. Yet for the longest time, this falsehood stood tall and fast, it was the accepted ‘truth’ for millions, a crucial baseline for the Israeli narrative. Many more myths still remain in the mainstream to this day.” ...

See also: [Israel’s Stranglehold on Area C: Development as Resistance](#), Ahmad El-Atrash, Al Shabaka, September 27, 2018

Five decades of Israeli occupation – particularly since the Oslo Accords were signed in 1993 – have allowed Israel to continue its colonization of Palestinian land while rendering Palestinian development truncated, distorted, and even mythological. Nowhere is this more apparent than in Area C. This Israel-controlled area according to the Oslo framework makes up more than 60 percent of the West Bank.

5) [Not Just Millennials: These Older U.S. Jews Are Disillusioned by Israel Too](#), Dina Kraft, Haaretz, September 20, 2018

... “The focus of much hand-wringing in the Jewish establishment in recent years has been the mounting evidence that young American Jews don’t care as much about Israel as their elders. The Pew Research Center’s 2013 survey ‘A Portrait of Jewish Americans,’ for example, found that younger Jews were significantly less likely to feel emotionally attached to Israel than those 65 and older.

“But it is also the liberal parents and grandparents of these youngsters who appear to becoming more outspoken about the Israeli government and some of its policies. Even World Jewish Congress President Ronald S. Lauder, a leader of mainstream Jewish organizations, a Republican (and longtime friend of U.S. President Donald Trump) took to the pages of The New York Times in August to voice his dismay in an Op-Ed entitled ‘Israel, This is Not Who We Are.’ His list of complaints included the Netanyahu government’s nixing of a deal to create an egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall for non-Orthodox Jews; a new law that denies gay men equal surrogacy rights; and a nation-state law that damaged the ‘sense of equality and belonging’ of Israel’s Druze, Christian and Muslim communities.” ...

See also: [World Jewish Population on Eve of New Year – 14.7 Million](#), Judy Maltz, Haaretz, September 9, 2018

On the eve of Rosh Hashanah, the world Jewish population totals 14.7 million – hardly changed (an increase of 0.01 percent) from a year ago, according to figures published Sunday by the Jewish Agency. Of the total, 6.6 million Jews (45 percent) live in Israel, and among the 8.1 million Jews who live outside Israel, 5.7 million (70 percent) live in the United States.

6) [A statement in observance of the 2018 World Week for Peace in Palestine and Israel](#), Pax Christi International, September 17, 2018

The statement addresses the situation of youth and children, in keeping with the week's official theme, 'Youth and Children: Raising Hope and Making Change.'

The statement begins by asserting, "We believe that this year's theme, 'Youth and Children: Raising Hope and Making Change', could not be more important or timely as the well-being and rights of children and young people continue to be threatened by the violence and chaos caused by 70 years of conflict, 51 years of occupation and the on-going blockade of the Gaza Strip." ...

7) **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins**

August 31 – CMEP Bulletin - [UNRWA Uncertainty Continues as Schools Open in Palestine](#)

September 7 – CMEP Bulletin – [September 2018](#)

September 14 – CMEP Bulletin - [The Palestinian Liberation Organization Office in D.C. Closes](#)

September 21 - [Plans Arise for an Aramaean Christian Town in Israel](#)

8) **Podcast & Book Recommendations**

A) [Occupied Thoughts: Preventing Palestine w/ Peter Beinart & Seth Anziska](#), Kristin McCarthy, FMEP, September 14, 2018

In this edition of FMEP's podcast series 'Occupied Thoughts' Peter Beinart interviews author and historian Seth Anziska, whose recently published book "**Preventing Palestine: A Political History from Camp David to Oslo**" takes a fresh look at why the plan for a viable Palestinian state did not come to be – and how the events surround the Oslo accords continues to define the current prospects for the fulfillment of Palestinian national ambitions.

Seth Anziska is the Mohamed S. Farsi-Polonsky Lecturer in Jewish-Muslim Relations at University College London and a visiting fellow at the U.S./Middle East Project. His writing has appeared in the *New York Times*, *Foreign Policy*, and *Haaretz*. He lives in London.

B) [Book on Israel's deliberate maiming of Palestinians wins top academic prize](#), Middle East Monitor, September 17, 2018

A U.S. scholar has won a prestigious prize for a book which argues that Israel intentionally maims Palestinians under its control. Rutgers University Professor Jasbir Puar was awarded the National Women's Studies Association's Alison Piepmeier Book Prize for "**The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability.**" Puar, a professor of Women's and Gender Studies, is a supporter of the Palestinian-led Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) campaign. According to Puar, writing in the book, "a complementary logic long present in Israeli tactical calculations of settler colonial rule" is "that of creating injury and maintaining Palestinian populations as perpetually debilitated, and yet alive, in order to control them."

[Duke University Press](#), the book's publisher, says Puar presents "an interrogation of Israel's policies toward Palestine, in which she outlines how Israel brings Palestinians into biopolitical being by designating them available for injury." "Supplementing its right to kill with what Puar calls the right to maim, the Israeli state relies on liberal frameworks of disability to obscure and enable the mass debilitation of Palestinian bodies."

The Department of Women's and Gender Studies at Rutgers [congratulated](#) Puar on the prize, and quoted the award committee's praise for the book as "a major milestone...across multiple disciplines, with much to teach us about contemporary disability politics."

- C) "[Two States or One? Reappraising the Israeli-Palestinian Impasse](#)," by Edward P. Djerejian, Marwan Muasher, Nathan J. Brown, Samih Al-Abid, Tariq Dana, Dahlia Scheindlin, Gilead Sher, Khalil Shikaki, Carnegie, 2018

The Israeli and Palestinian communities are growing ever closer physically while remaining separated politically. Any solution must adequately address the needs of both sides.