

Middle East Notes

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

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

This week's Middle East Notes give priority to the speeches of Mahmoud Abbas and Benjamin Netanyahu to the UN, the viability of the "two-state solution," and the continuing loss of land by the Palestinians.

- **September 28, 2012 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** This week's Bulletin examines the Palestinian Authority's past, present and future, gives a recap of the speeches to the UN by Abbas and Netanyahu, along with other pertinent readings.
- **Abbas delivers speech at UN:** Saed Bannoura of the International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC) reports on Mahmoud Abbas' speech at the UN calling on the international community to act and help the Palestinians establish their independent state.
- **Netanyahu's hypocritical sermon:** Ha'aretz writer Yitzhak Laoh speaks of Benjamin Netanyahu as the leader of the last colonialist country on earth, who preached progress in New York to nations that have freed themselves of it, while at home there is an apartheid regime.
- **The "non-state" solution:** Khaleb Diab of Ha'aretz writes that with the two-state solution effectively relegated to the dustbin of history, the time has arrived to consider full and equal citizenship for Palestinians and Israelis - in one state.
- **Maps explain loss of Palestinian land:** Portland OR has become the latest municipality to have city buses display maps that explain the loss of Palestinian land.
- **Resource:** Sign up for News Nosh, a free daily news service from Americans for Peace Now.

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin September 28, 2012

Examining the PA's past, present and future: After last year's failed attempt at becoming a full member of the UN by going through the Security Council, [Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud] Abbas announced he would [submit an application for non-member state observer status](#) to the General Assembly. This requires a simple majority of the 193 UN General Assembly members and is a near certainty since the PLO counts 130 nations that already recognize Palestine as a state. This could be a small victory for Abbas as the economic crisis facing the Palestinian Authority is causing more cracks to appear in the façade of its already limited self-governance that began in 1994 after the Oslo Accords.

Amidst a wave of optimism, Yasser Arafat and Yitzhak Rabin [signed the Oslo Accords](#) in the White House Rose Garden in September 1993. In the agreement, Israel committed itself to withdrawing from portions of the West Bank and Gaza and allowing a Palestinian government in its place. The arrangement was intended to be temporary while the parties negotiated a permanent settlement. Israel first gave the newly formed Palestinian Authority control of Jericho and the Gaza Strip (excluding Israeli settlements) in May 1994 and by January 1997 all major Palestinian cities were in PA control. Today, the PA only fully functions in parts of the West Bank and it governs 55 percent of the Palestinians in the West Bank but only 18 percent of the land. Israel is in complete control of 60 percent.

The Oslo process was a series of agreements signed over several years. One of them is the [Paris Protocol](#) that [regulates the economic relationship](#) between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. The protocol says that the Palestinian Authority must match Israel's price of gasoline and its value added tax (VAT). When Israel raised its VAT by one percent recently, Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad raised it in the West Bank as well. This set off scores of demonstrations by Palestinians already unhappy with the high cost of living.

The PA is now facing a financial crisis that has already constrained its ability to pay wages to its large workforce. The World Bank report released on September 19 [gives its take on the problem](#). Simply put, international donors are giving less than promised and the PA is still spending and running up a large deficit. One major expense is the salaries for public sector workers. The government employs 14 percent of Palestinians in the West Bank and 54 percent of its budget goes to paying their wages. Despite the financial problems, the PA continues to hire, most notably adding 484 employees to the security sector in the first six months of 2012.

The World Bank urges the PA to institute a hiring freeze as a short-term measure and to restructure the civil service sector. With 17 percent of West Bank Palestinians unemployed including 26 percent of youth (ages 15-29), the employment provided by the PA is important politically and socially. The World Bank acknowledges that, "cutting some of its basic spending such as wages, which could have severe social impacts."

The report also mentions the role it believes Israel plays in the current economic situation. They [highlight the significance of Area C](#), the 60 percent of the West Bank that remains under full Israeli control. This area holds most of the land for agriculture and natural resources that could create an "economic foundation for growth in important sectors of the economy." The country director for the West Bank and Gaza urged the international community to increase aid to the PA but underscores the economic impact of the Israeli occupation and control of the land. She states that "even with this financial support, sustainable economic growth cannot be achieved without a removal of the barriers preventing private sector development, particularly in Area C." She also commented that, "The most important message of this report is that economic cohesion is not achievable when the areas in which people have to operate and go about their business are crisscrossed by impediments."

Israeli leaders told a conference of donor countries on September 21 that it was [taking steps to help ease the financial crisis](#). They cited the regular transfer of taxes collected on behalf of the PA to help pay Palestinian salaries, the approval of 14 USAID projects in Area C, an increase in work permits for Palestinians in the West Bank to work within the Green Line and the easing of movement restrictions within the West Bank. Ha'aretz also reports that Israel is approaching European countries to up their financial aid to compensate for \$300 million pledged by Arab countries that have not yet paid.

Many attribute the high prices and poor economy to the Oslo agreement and [some are calling for the PA to abandon it](#). Mustafa Barghouti, former candidate for president, says, "People are no longer able to tolerate a situation in which they are under occupation but are also forced to pay for the cost of the occupation. Israel controls more than 60 percent of the land [in the West Bank], more than 90 percent of the water resources and it obliges the Palestinians to pay the same prices as in Israel, while GDP per head in Israel is 25 times as high as in Palestine."

Between 1967 and the Oslo agreements, Israel was in charge of all civil services in the West Bank and Gaza including infrastructure, electricity and water, sustained health services, education, transportation, public order, policing and the courts. Now, the PA has that responsibility and it is footing the bill, largely thanks to international donors. Some argue that the PA is [making the occupation sustainable for Israel](#)

but [supporters of the PA](#) maintain that it is building institutions that will pave the way to financial independence and preparing for eventual statehood.

Many Palestinians and their supporters see a host of other issues with the agreement. While Oslo was intended to be temporary, it has given Israel almost two decades to expand settlements in the West Bank. Despite a clause that states, “Neither side shall initiate or take any step that will change the status of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip pending the outcome of the permanent status negotiations,” settlement growth has continued and now takes up over 42 percent of the West Bank according to Israeli human rights group B’Tselem. ...

UN General Assembly speech recap: All eyes were on the General Assembly podium on Thursday as President Abbas and Prime Minister Netanyahu spoke hours apart. Abbas gave an impassioned speech about Palestinian suffering under Israel and their desire for peace while Netanyahu focused predominantly on Iran. Here are some excerpts:

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas:

Despite our real feelings of anger, we, in the name of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, reaffirm, without hesitation, that we as committed to peace and international legitimacy and its covenants and its resolutions as we are adherent to our inalienable national rights and aspirations, and we reaffirm that we are committed to non-violence and reject terrorism in all its forms, particularly State terrorism.

Despite our feelings of disappointment and loss of hope, we continue to sincerely extend our hands to the Israeli people to make peace. We realize that ultimately the two peoples must live and coexist, each in their respective State, in the Holy Land. Further, we realize that progress towards making peace is through negotiations between the PLO and Israel. [[See full text](#)]

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu:

President Abbas just spoke here. I say to him and I say to you: We won't solve our conflict with libelous speeches at the UN. That's not the way to solve it. We won't solve our conflict with unilateral declarations of statehood. We have to sit together, negotiate together, and reach a mutual compromise, in which a demilitarized Palestinian state recognizes the one and only Jewish State. Israel wants to see a Middle East of progress and peace. We want to see the three great religions that sprang forth from our region – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – coexist in peace and in mutual respect. [[See full text](#)]

Further reading

- Zvika Krieger of the Atlantic gives his take on the recent [political developments within Hamas](#) after its leader Khaled Mishaal announced his resignation in the wake of internal divisions.
- Amira Hass writes a new feature for Ha'aretz on the [unequal distribution of water](#) in the West Bank. Palestinians get far less water than the settlers and often the amount does not meet the standard set by the World Health Organization. (Ha'aretz premium article).
- Former President Bill Clinton tells Fareed Zakaria the [importance of finding a solution](#) to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the role the U.S. plays in the process.
- Emily Hauser of the Daily Beast's Open Zion sections presents some examples of Israelis and Palestinians [working together and engaging in dialogue](#). She writes, “As someone who has declared more than once that she is done hoping for anything good in Israel/Palestine, stories like these serve to remind me that the people on the ground, living with the violence and the fear, have not yet given up, and so I may not either.”

2) Abbas delivers speech at the United Nations

Saed Bannoura, International Middle East Media Center (IMEMC)

September 28, 2012

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas delivered Thursday a speech at the United Nations in New York calling on the international community to act and help the Palestinians establish their independent state.

Abbas said that attacks carried out by extremist Israeli settlers against the Palestinians, their property and their holy sites are witnessing a serious escalation, and added that these escalated attacks are “the natural outcome of the ongoing Israeli occupation of Palestine.”

He also stated that Israel’s ongoing settlement construction and expansion activities are serious threats to stability and peace in the region, and called on the International Community to act on ensuring that Israel respects, and abides by, International Law and the Fourth Geneva Convention.

As for the thousands of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, Abbas stated that the detainees are freedom fighters, and must be released.

The president said that he represents the Palestinian people and is speaking on their behalf, adding that “the Palestinians are angry, they adopted and are engaged in nonviolent resistance against the occupation, but are still suffering under occupation and facing constant attacks by the soldiers and the settlers.”

He added that Israel is acting on keeping East Jerusalem under its occupation, is annexing large areas on the occupied West Bank, and refuses to hold talks on core issues, including the issue of Palestinian refugees. “Yet, Israel is being rewarded for its ongoing occupation, for its ongoing settlement policies,” Abbas said.

Abbas also warned that the current Israeli political rhetoric is leading the region into the deadly paths of religious conflicts, and added that Israel is ethnically cleansing the Palestinians from their lands.

The President further stated that Israel’s current policy is aimed at sabotaging the work of the Palestinian National Authority, in order to weaken and topple it.

He said that the Israeli policy and the stances of the current government of Benjamin Netanyahu reject the two-state solution, while Israel is ongoing with the illegal construction of settlements and the illegal confiscation of Palestinian lands in order to build and expand settlements.

[Read the entire piece on the IMEMC website.](#)

3) Netanyahu’s hypocritical sermon

Yitzhak Laor, Ha’aretz

October 2, 2012

What will future historians say about Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s speech at the United Nations General Assembly last week? Not clear. This is the risk he took on - to turn himself into a laughing stock but to be remembered as part of a tragedy. ...

In his arrogant description of Islam (only the militant Islam, of course) he pointed to its many branches “from the rulers of Iran with their Revolutionary Guards to Al-Qaida terrorists to the radical cells” that

lie in wait in all corners of the globe. "But despite their differences," said the rewriter of the "protocols," "they are all rooted in the same bitter soil of intolerance."

The danger to our existence in our ghetto has become even greater, our national life has become more fragile, and over the course of the speech the Palestinians have gradually become the spearhead of this very Islam. In short, an Israeli leader has again managed to describe his pitiable, nebech country with Popeye-like megalomania.

And as if this were not a speech to those who boycott Darwin's theories throughout the United States, the history lesson continued: "Some 500 years ago, the printing press helped pry a cloistered Europe out of a dark age. Eventually, ignorance gave way to enlightenment."

True, this was war propaganda and election propaganda, but it was also shamelessness. The printing press and ignorance did not merely make way for enlightenment, and enlightenment was not merely the technological revolution that we heard about, of course, later in the speech - as befits the leader of a technological power that is preaching morality to the savages.

But let's set aside these details. Here is the breakdown: The leader of the last colonialist country on earth speaks to the representatives of the nations that have freed themselves of the "Western heritage." Who needed to hear about this? The victims of the English, French, Belgians, Dutch and Italians? Are they the ones who have to hear what was done to them in the name of enlightenment?

If there is something which is central to the "enlightenment" that Netanyahu represented, it was the possibility of standing in New York and talking rubbish in its name while at home there is an apartheid regime and his army is continuing to trample on the Palestinians' hope for freedom, to knock down doors every night, to send people to jail through a ridiculous military judicial system and with weapons of the 21st century, all controlled by the enlightened heirs of King David.

A second generation of Palestinians has been born into oppression, poverty and humiliation, and a leader from the margins of the West speaks about the darkness of the Middle Ages and enlightenment? By the way, where are the detention camps of Interior Minister Eli Yishai in this puzzle of progress?

Israelis go wild over their leaders who can speak English with a good accent. Our country is altogether a strange place that cannot differentiate between good English and intelligence. However an historical difference can be discerned between the speech-makers at the UN over the years. Abba Eban excited the Jews of America. Netanyahu excites the Christians there who are anxiously awaiting the Battle of Armageddon. In 1843, a century before Hitler brought the "Western heritage" to one of its technological high points, Karl Marx wrote in a letter to his co-editor, Arnold Ruge:

"It is a truth which, at least, teaches us to recognize the emptiness of our patriotism ... and makes us hide our faces in shame. You look at me with a smile and ask: What is gained by that? No revolution is made out of shame. I reply: Shame is already revolution ... Shame is a kind of anger which is turned inward. ... I admit that in Germany even shame is not yet felt; on the contrary, these miserable people are still patriots. ... A ship full of fools could perhaps be allowed to drift for quite a time at the mercy of the wind, but it would be driven to meet its fate precisely because the fools would not believe this. This fate is the impending revolution."

Marx, of course, was also mistaken with regard to German patriotism.

4) The “non-state” solution

Khaled Diab, Ha’aretz

October 2, 2012

With the two-state solution effectively relegated to the dustbin of history, the time has arrived to consider full and equal citizenship for Palestinians and Israelis - in one state. Just as the ultimate value of the Palestinian struggle is the Palestinians people itself, it is the Israeli people who make Israel Jewish and so emancipating the millions of disenfranchised Palestinians will not make the state any less Jewish than it is today - only fairer and more just.

If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then Benjamin “Bibi” Netanyahu has sincerely flattered none other than himself. When he surreally [pulled out the cartoon bomb](#) to illustrate the apparent threat from the alleged Iranian program to build a nuclear weapon, he succeeded in becoming a parody of himself, triggering a proliferation of viral caricatures, such as the one mocking him as a [“Looney Tunes” villain](#).

Netanyahu’s rhetoric was just as two-dimensional, casting Iran and its presumed allies in the role of the ultimate bloodthirsty, suicidal enemy bent on destroying civilization as we know it.

“At stake is not merely the future of my own country. At stake is the future of the world,” he claimed rather implausibly, given that there is no concrete evidence to suggest that the Iranian regime, despite its ill-informed and dangerous grandstanding, is developing a nuclear weapons program, that it would be successful even if it were pursuing one, or that it would actually be stupid and suicidal enough to deploy said WMD. Meanwhile, Israel, despite its policy of ambiguity, is widely understood to sit on the Middle East’s only known nuclear arsenal.

Netanyahu drew “red lines” all over the General Assembly, while conveniently overlooking the far more significant green line, upon which the future of his country truly rests. In fact, judging by the evasive passing reference to negotiations and “mutual compromise,” Bibi seems to rate Iran’s non-existent nukes as a greater threat to Israel than the ticking time bomb of the unresolved Palestinian question.

Cold-shouldered by Netanyahu and facing mounting unrest among his own people, PA President Mahmoud Abbas continued, for want of more imaginative ideas, his disastrous quest for UN recognition, as if the non-membership of a non-state would somehow help the Palestinian struggle for statehood.

“There can only be one understanding of the Israeli government’s actions,” [Abbas told the assembly](#), suggesting that “the Israeli government rejects the two-state solution.”

Judging by Israel’s deeds, which have left no more space to negotiate over, it seems safe to conclude that the idea of an independent Palestinian state existing beside Israel on the pre-1967 borders lies somewhere in the dustbin of history. While the Israeli leadership is content to “manage the conflict,” the PA is powerless to breathe new life into a defunct process.

So, what’s the answer? According to Abbas, a “new approach” is required. However, the new approach he outlined sounded suspiciously like the old one: that the ineffective and ineffectual international community can somehow be prevailed upon finally to rise from its lethargy and force Israel to commit to the pre-1967 borders.

He mentioned but did not elaborate on a far more promising and powerful track. “Our people are also determined to continue peaceful popular resistance, consistent with international humanitarian law,

against the occupation and the settlements and for the sake of freedom, independence and peace,” Abbas concluded.

Personally, I believe we need to take this “new approach” to its logical conclusion. Rather than continue the decades-old futile efforts to accommodate two conflicting nationalisms in such a tiny space, it is high time for everyone involved to recognize that all attempts to partition and repartition this land simply have not worked and are unlikely to in the future.

Instead of fixating on borders and territory, as if soil is so much thicker than blood, the focus must shift to the people, whom for too many generations have been sacrificed in the cause of this holy land, as if it has more rights than they do.

Prioritising the people will necessitate transforming the Palestinian struggle into a mass, non-violent civil rights movement, in which Palestinians deploy all the tools of peaceful resistance at their disposal, and Israeli sympathisers force emancipation platforms on their political parties. In this context, the “land for peace” formula will be replaced by a “rights for peace” one in which full emancipation will be the central demand.

We need to form a Popular Front for the Liberation of the Palestinians, to pursue the various civil rights Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza are currently denied, deprived of or have restricted access to. These include the freedom to travel and to work everywhere, not just in Palestine but also in Israel, the removal of roadblocks and checkpoints, the dismantling of the wall, and the opening up of Israeli-only settlements to Palestinians.

But, first and foremost, all 4.5 million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza must seek full Israeli citizenship. For differing reasons, this bold proposal is bound to be anathema both to Palestinians and Israelis, as it will be seen to be sounding the death knell to their dreams.

For Israelis it sounds suspiciously like the one-state solution which, to the minds of many, though there are a growing number of supporters, spells the demise of the century-long Zionist dream and the end of the Jewish state. For many Palestinians, though more of them support the one-state option than in Israel, the idea of becoming Israelis is tantamount not only to admitting the death of their beloved Palestine, but to asking for the privilege to drive the final nail into the coffin.

Such worries reflect historical and psychological anxieties, heightened by the maximalist visions of extremists on both sides, rather than the glaring realities on the ground: that Palestinians and Israelis are effectively living in a single state, albeit one that is largely segregated and in which millions are disenfranchised.

To my mind, despite all the poetry of the land that has marked the Palestinian struggle, “Palestine” is far more than its olive and orange groves, it is, above all else, the sum total of its people. What better way is there to preserve what’s left than to protect the right of the Palestinians to continue to live there in full equality?

If maintaining a clear Jewish majority is truly the overarching aim of the Zionist project, then Israel should have allowed the emergence of an independent Palestine many years ago. Just as the ultimate value of the Palestinian struggle is the Palestinians people itself, likewise it is the Israeli people who make Israel Jewish and so emancipating the millions of disenfranchised Palestinians will not make the state any less Jewish than it is today - only fairer and more just.

Personally, I am an advocate of a single, bi-national federation of Israel-Palestine because it allows both sides to have unfettered access to the land they hold so dear, while preserving their social and cultural identities and rights through, for example, elected community governments, one representing Jews and one representing Arabs wherever they may live on the land (and perhaps a third representing those anti-nationalists who wish to be defined as neither). Above this, an elected federal government would be responsible for common issues, such as the economy, defense, foreign relations and water resources.

But what I am proposing here is not a one-state solution *per se*. If anything, you could say it is the “non-state” solution: an ideologically neutral means of improving the reality on the ground.

Once everyone is emancipated, then the real work begins and a true conversation of equals can take place to determine democratically the future of the two peoples: whether they will continue together in a single, democratic state or opt for a magnanimous divorce brokered, not by outsiders, but one people to another.

5) Maps explain loss of Palestinian land

Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights

September 26, 2012

Beginning on September 30, on the exteriors of [city buses in Portland, OR], a series of four maps will powerfully portray an important aspect of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict - the battle for control of land.

The first map (1946), approximately a year before Israel was created, shows that Jewish communities owned no more than six percent of historic Palestine and represented 30 percent of the population. The second map spells out the United Nations partition plan of 1947, which awarded the Jewish community a state on 55 percent of the land alongside a much reduced Palestine even though Palestinians were the strong majority of the land’s inhabitants. The third map (1948-67) displays the armistice lines from the 1948 Arab-Israeli war. In this map Israel controls 78 percent of the land.

The fourth map is where we are today. In the 1967 war, Israel took control of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. The Israeli occupation – now in its 45th year – of the West Bank is being made permanent as Israel systematically takes more and more Palestinian land to accommodate Israel’s massive settlement project to establish irreversible “facts on the ground.” Over half a million Israeli settlers now live in the occupied West Bank. Under international law, it is illegal for Israel to move Israeli settlers into the occupied Palestinian territories. Israel is on the verge of annexing 60 percent of the West Bank. ...

These maps are part of a campaign to educate [people in the U.S.] about what’s really going on in Israel-Palestine and are sponsored by individuals and three organizations: Friends of Sabeel/North America, Americans United for Palestinian Human Rights and Jewish Voice for Peace/Portland. ... “Israel’s expansionist policies and occupation of Palestinian land,” said Maxine Fookson of Jewish Voice for Peace “is supported by virtually no country in the world except the U.S. It is our hope that these ads will promote informed dialogue and challenge American policy makers to replace their blind support for Israel with a commitment to justice and equality for all peoples of the region.”

The maps will run on 20 trains and nine buses for at least a month.

6) Resource: News Nosh

Americans for Peace Now (APN) offers a new free service: the News Nosh. It is a daily review of the Israeli Hebrew press, comprehensive yet concise, emailed to your inbox to read with your morning coffee, absolutely free. [Contact APN to sign up.](http://peacenow.org) (<http://peacenow.org>)