

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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This issue of the Middle East Notes highlights the continuing violence disrupting the lives of Israeli and Palestinian people with growing fear for the former and increasing hopelessness for the latter, the weakening Palestinian leadership, deteriorating democracy in Israel, the alienation and oppression of Arab citizens of Israel and the implications of a possible collapse of the Palestinian Authority.

Commentary: 2016 began with crucial challenges for both the Israelis and Palestinians. There are few signs of a possible reconciliation of the security needs of Israel with the demands of the Palestinian people for both political recognition and justice, especially for those Palestinians who are citizens of Israel and for those enduring a permanent occupation. A sense of hopelessness is increasing among the Palestinians, especially the young. A deepening disillusionment is evident among progressive Israelis who have been seeing the democratic roots of their country slowly dying. Israelis are being called to choose between being primarily a secular democratic State or a Religious Theocracy. Palestinian are being called to choose between continuing their struggle for a viable State of their own or accepting second class membership in a de facto bi-national Israel.

- Peter Beaumont writes in *The Guardian* that rising support among Palestinians for wave of attacks on Israelis comes amid growing vacuum of political leadership.
- Rami G. Khouri notes in Aljazeera – America that the National Security Council's Robert Malley offered an unusually sensible statement on Middle East issues. Malley, President Barack Obama's senior adviser on countering the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), said that the United States must resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to defeat ISIL and similar Islamist extremists.
- Gershon Gorenberg writes in Haaretz that Israelis cannot end the desecration such as the "hate wedding" clip celebrating of the Dewabsheh family's murder without ending the occupation.
- Miko Peled states in Intifada – Palestine that he believes that the Zionist state of Israel never intended to be democratic or tolerant. From its very inception it created racist laws and used terrorism to achieve its goals, giving its terrorist forces the benign name of "Israeli Defense Forces." Its goal was and remains genocide of the Palestinian people."
- Peter Beinart writes in Haaretz that Netanyahu fears the collapse of the Palestinian Authority which his policies are inducing since the PA is a narcotic for Israelis: allowing them to control millions of stateless, disenfranchised Palestinians without paying the cost.
- Gideon Levy also in Haaretz states that no Jew in the world, not even in 'anti-Semitic' France and probably not even in 'satanic' Iran, lives in such a regime of fear, deprivation and ostracism as the Arab citizens of Israel.

Note: The following are excerpts of each article. The full article can be found by clicking the link.

1) [West Bank risks being plunged into chaos in 2016, warn Palestinian officials](#), Peter Beaumont, The Guardian, December 25, 2015

“Palestinian officials are warning that the occupied West Bank risks being plunged into chaos next year, with no sign of three months of violence coming to an end and support growing among Palestinians for the current wave of attacks on Israelis. The warnings that the status quo is untenable follow recent comments by both senior US figures and the Israeli military that the risk of conflict between Israelis and Palestinians is in danger of increasing in the coming months.

“A growing vacuum of political leadership on both sides is prompting renewed discussion of a series of troubling scenarios, including a collapse of the Palestinian Authority and a sudden or more gradual escalation of violence. The PA’s potential collapse has been raised by the US secretary of state, John Kerry, and presidential hopeful Hillary Clinton, and was discussed recently at a special Israeli cabinet meeting.

“The risk is total chaos,” said one Palestinian official in a bleak assessment, suggesting that the path to further escalation appeared more obvious than international engagement to mediate an end to the recent bloodshed.”...

“Referring to the tensions between wider Palestinian society and the Palestinian leadership, he added: “The question for our leadership and for President Abbas is: how long can we maintain the situation on the ground?”

“It is a question that has been asked increasingly in recent months. At the heart of the problem for Abbas is the growing tension between the wider Palestinian society and the Palestinian leadership.”...

“And you may also have a crisis if they are implemented. People reject Oslo. But they also have to live. They want hospitals working and schools and the jobs provided by the Palestinian Authority even if they are bad jobs. Most people I know say they don’t like Oslo but they can’t describe an alternative.”

2) [To defeat ISIL, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be resolved](#), Rami G. Khouri, Aljazeera – America, December 27, 2015

“Last week the National Security Council’s Robert Malley offered an unusually sensible statement on Middle East issues. Malley, President Barack Obama’s senior adviser on countering the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), said that the United States must resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to defeat ISIL and similar Islamist extremists.”

“Acknowledging that resolving the conflict would not be a “magic wand” for resolving the host of other problems across the Middle East, Malley made the critical point that “the absence of a resolution is fueling extremism” and that “it stands to reason that resolving this conflict would at least help. It wouldn’t resolve, but it would be a major contribution to stemming the rise of extremism and to allow the kind of cooperation that is needed [to take on] what should be a common challenge, which is the challenge of [ISIL] and of other extremist organizations.”...

“The reason for this is not only that Palestinians, Israelis and all others in the Middle East deserve to enjoy the fruits of national self-determination, the rule of law and stable statehood but also that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been the single most radicalizing and destabilizing force in the Middle East for nearly a century. Resolving it would contribute immeasurably to a more peaceful Middle East — just as leaving it unresolved for decades has contributed to the sort of mass frustration, humiliation and radicalization that ultimately spawned ISIL.”

3) [We Can't End the Desecration of Judaism Without Ending the Occupation](#), Gershom Gorenberg, Haaretz, December 30, 2015

"Seen from inside Israel, they look very far away, those young men dancing with rifles at a wedding or with their faces pixelated in pictures of terror suspects. Their thick peyot make them look members of a distant tribe. They are not us, think mainstream Israelis looking at the clip of the "hate wedding" on their phablets in secular Tel Aviv.

"The distance is an illusion. Physically, it's little more than an hour's drive from Tel Aviv to some of the most radical outposts on the West Bank's mountain ridge. In terms of responsibility, the distance is even smaller. Mainstream Israel created the settlement project and the endless occupation. And the nightmare spectacle we see now exists because of occupation and settlement."...

"One implication of this history is that the occupation has not only corrupted the State of Israel, it has corrupted Judaism. It has become a constant defamation of God's good name. Those of us who believe in a different Judaism, rooted in the overwhelming recognition of the divine image in every human being, must denounce, yet again, violence committed in the name of religion. But that's not enough. We cannot hope to end the desecration without ending the occupation."...

4) [Zionism is racism: Notes from Tel-Rumeida, Hebron, El-Khalil, Miko Peled, Intifada – Palestine](#), December 27, 2015

"There are some aspects of life in Palestine that are simply impossible to describe. No words can do them justice, no picture or cartoon is strong enough to illustrate them, not even a video can faithfully demonstrate them. Forty years ago, on November 10, 1975 the United Nations stated correctly that "Zionism is a form of racism and racist discrimination" and it called upon all countries to "oppose this racist and imperialist ideology." Life for Palestinians in Hebron, is one example of this indescribable, horrifying racism."...

"At a session in the UN commemorating resolution 3379, which equates Zionism with racism, UN Secretary General congratulated the organization for revoking the resolution and called the countries of the world "to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbors." U.S. Secretary of State, John Kerry who also spoke at the event said: "The Zionist dream embraces the concept of Israel as a Jewish democracy, a beacon of light to all nations."

"The Zionist state never intended to be democratic or tolerant. From its very inception it created racist laws and used terrorism to achieve its goals, giving its terrorist forces the benign name of "Israeli Defense Forces." Its goal was and remains genocide of the Palestinian people and a complete ethnic cleansing of Palestine, and Israel has been dedicatedly practicing that for seven decades."...

5) [Netanyahu Fears Palestinian Authority Collapse That He Helped Induce](#), Peter Beinart, Haaretz, January 6, 2016

"Benjamin Netanyahu is worried that the Palestinian Authority may collapse. According to Barak Ravid, he's twice convened Israel's security cabinet to discuss the prospect since late December."...

"By the time Benjamin Netanyahu first became prime minister in 1996 that trust had already frayed. For Israelis, the suicide bombings of the mid-1990s constituted a betrayal of the Palestinian side of the bargain. For Palestinians, settlement growth constituted a betrayal of the Israeli side. All this weakened the Palestinian Authority.

“But before Netanyahu’s election, 44 percent of Palestinians still believed that the PA would become a state. Within a year of his taking office, according to the Palestinian pollster Khalil Shikaki, that figure had dropped to thirty percent. It fell because, in the words of the late Ron Pundak, one of Oslo’s architects, “Netanyahu sabotaged the peace process relentlessly, and made every effort to delegitimize his Palestinian partners.”

“Bibi is not considering any of this. He’s already made his choice: one state, from river to sea, in which Jews enjoys citizenship and West Bank Palestinians don’t. He just doesn’t want to face the consequences of that choice. He’d rather peer up at the darkening sky and say, “shit, it’s raining.”

6) [Wake Up, Arab Citizens of Israel](#), Gideon Levy, Haaretz, January 6, 2016

“Imagine what it’s like to be an Arab citizen in Israel today – only dread and despair. No Jew in the world, not even in “anti-Semitic” France and probably not even in “satanic” Iran, lives in such a regime of fear, deprivation and ostracism. You walk around Tel Aviv streets accompanied by fear and humiliation. In Jerusalem you might also get shot. In Afula you’ll be banished. Better not speak in your tongue, it’s inadvisable to dress like an Arab. Be a Jew on the street and an Arab at home.”...

“But paradoxically, the key to saving Israeli democracy is in the hands of this trampled minority. If Palestinian citizens of Israel – “Israeli Arabs,” in the name forced on them, choose surrender and groveling, Israeli democracy is doomed to destruction. The more they submit, the more they’ll be trampled, and democracy will be trampled with them. It will not be saved by the Jewish majority – which is indifferent to democracy’s fate or even sees it a danger – but by this minority, whose war for democracy is the war for its home and destiny.”

Other articles of interest:

A) [Israeli officials fear a looming disaster: the collapse of the Palestinian Authority](#), Jennifer Williams, Vox, January 4, 2016

Israeli security officials and political leaders are increasingly worried that the Palestinian Authority — which along with Israeli security forces is responsible for governance and security in the West Bank — is on the verge of collapse.

B) [Abbas to Netanyahu: Only Replacement to PA Is a Palestinian State](#), Jack Khoury and Barak Ravid, Haaretz, Jan 6, 2016

Palestinian president rejects idea of possible collapse of Palestinian leadership body that sparked Israeli cabinet meet, as reported by Haaretz, and called on international community to intervene: 'Our hand is extended in peace.'

C) [Israel's Once-temporary Occupation Is Now Permanent](#), Amira Hass, Haaretz, January 6, 2016

The Oslo Accords allow Israel to evade its responsibility for the Palestinian population and pretend to be the side that's being attacked.

D) [2015: A Dangerous Escalation at Al-Aqsa Mosque](#), IMEMC News & Agencies, January 09, 2016

Wadi Hilweh Information Center has issued their 2015 yearly report and monitored the main events in the city of Jerusalem, with special attention given to Israeli violations against Jerusalemites and their properties.

E) [Netanyahu's Speech at Scene of Tel Aviv Shooting: A Shameful, Fear-spreading Horror Show](#), Yossi Verter, Haaretz, January 3, 2016

The prime minister proved that he has not lost his penchant for hatred and inciting against minorities, for seizing every tragedy to make political hay. It was low, even by his own standards.

- F) [UN Special Rapporteur on Occupied Palestinian Territory resigns due to continued lack of access to OPT, January 4, 2016](#)
The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, Makarim Wibisono, today submitted his resignation to the President of the Human Rights Council, effective as of 31 March 2016.
- G) [Israel Attempts To Push UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights to Resign, IMEMC, January 5, 2016](#)
The United Nations Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Palestinian territories, Makarim Wibisono, yesterday submitted his resignation to the President of the Human Rights Council after Israel had repeatedly denied him access to the occupied Palestinian territory (oPt).
- H) [Washington Post: 'Transparency Bill' Is a Danger to Israeli Democracy, Haaretz, January 3, 2016](#)
A Washington Post editorial says bill, which seeks to 'out' foreign-funded NGOs, 'reflects the kind of tactic that Russia and China have employed to squelch dissent.'
- I) [Lehava Leader Again Calls for Torching Jerusalem Churches, IMEMC News & Agencies, January 3, 2016](#)
The leader of the extremist anti-assimilation group, Lehava, recently renewed his calls to torch churches in occupied Jerusalem, Israeli media sources revealed.
- J) [Israel 2015: This Is What a Trump Presidency Looks Like, Asher Schechter, Haaretz, Dec 30, 2015](#)
Israel is a troubling example of what happens when outlandish proposals by joke candidates are translated into reality.
- K) [Does America Really "Share Values" With Today's Israel?, Henry Siegman, Haaretz, December 30, 2015](#)
Netanyahu and his far-right government have not only been indifferent to the danger of an unbridled nationalism that sanctifies the nation and its land, they have actively encouraged it.