

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
February 11, 2016



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

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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the increasing civilian suffering due to the Gaza blockade, Ban Ki-moon for his criticism of Israeli occupation and settlement-building, the failure yet the continuing need of the two-state solution or something like it, the hopelessness effect of military rule on Palestinian youth, and other issues.

Commentary: The civilian suffering of the almost two million people of Gaza, especially the women, children and aged due to the Israeli blockade, seems to be forgotten in the Israeli, U.S. and world media. Gaza is identified with Hamas rather than with its oppressed population and the situation continues to deteriorate. The two-state solution has failed as a possibility due to settlement activity and political opposition in Israel and the U.S. The status quo while acceptable to the Israel government is a source of hopelessness for the Palestinian people especially the young. The policies of the Israeli Government towards the Palestinians in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza continue to lose international support, and the support of younger Jews in the U.S.

- Fr. Peter-John Pearson, a South African priest who is the Chairperson of the African Forum for Catholic Social Teaching, Parliamentary Liaison for the South African Bishops Conference and a member of the Vatican Commission on Gaza writes of his January visit to Gaza.
- Tom Suarez writes in Mondoweiss that Ban Ki-moon inherited the United Nation's Original Sin, i.e. General Assembly Resolution 181, the Partition Plan for Palestine, followed by seven decades of failure to hold Israel accountable. Yet for all his evident frustration in the face of Israel's ever-bolder intransigence, in the final analysis he has merely reinforced the lies through which the 'conflict' endures.
- Samuel Throp reports in the BBC News that as support for a two-state solution to their conflict declines among Israelis and Palestinians, a different approach to finding a peaceful settlement is being proposed.
- Uri Savir notes in Al-Monitor that with one year left in office, President Barack Obama should hurry up and join the French in promoting an international conference on a two-state solution.
- Robert Olso reflects in Lobelog on "The fading two-state solution", the caption of the lead editorial of The New York Times on Jan. 23, emphasizing there was no or little chance of any two-state solution in which a Palestinian state would come into existence in the West Bank.
- Amira Hass writes in Haaretz that Israelis are being killed and injured by young Palestinians because the Israeli government keeps believing in the sustainability of military rule.

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

1) [Greetings from Gaza. – Fr. Pete-John Pearson - January, 2016](#)

"These greetings are never unemotional. They come from a place deep in me, a place of anger, a place that pushes me to a very turbulent edge and makes me want to cry out and rail against injustice like an OT prophet. I snuck away for a few hours in Jordan to visit the Dead Sea, a place I had never been to. On the way the taxi driver pointed to a

sign that said we were descending into the lowest point on earth. Geographically or geologically, that might be true (although there is a place in Ethiopia that makes the same claim, and I am generally biased towards African claims, but that's another discussion!). Be that as it may, in terms of injustice and the inhumanity metered out on people by people, this little strip of land must be the lowest point on earth.

At least this time we crossed the border easily. Last year with no other people to cross into this huge prison and four people on duty at the border, it took us over seven hours to get our passports stamped and for some like Archbishop Brislin it took even longer! Clearly last year the authorities did not want us to see first hand the raw aftermath of the 51 days of bombardment of this area nor hear the stories of the weary people who endured bomb after bomb with no place to take refuge. Clearly they had hoped that we would tire and return to Jerusalem. Instead we sat there, prayed, drank not very good coffee and claimed a protest space alongside the rolls of barbed wire." . . .

"It just boggles the mind that 1.8m people live in this mostly desolate strip of land 41kms in length and between 6-12kms wide, people with no possibility of any movement outside of its borders. Israel controls the land, sea and air space, the water, the electricity. It has absolute control over any imports and exports, leaving the people in total captivity. Gaza is known by all, even the UK Prime Minister, David Cameron as 'the biggest open air prison in the world.'" . . .

. . . "I find it hard to get my head around the fact that Israel holds this population in this stretch of land in total captivity and is at the same time, is the only importer and exporter of any and everything. So this population lives in captivity and then pays Israel for it's survival in captivity. Indeed on top of the price of goods of which it is the sole supplier, Israel places an additional tax as if to add insult to injury. It is as if one is being taxed for the pleasure of incarceration." . . .

"We worry about the future of a place where 70% of the population is under 30 years of age and 80% of that number is unemployed and together with the rest of the population have no way of leaving this strip of land. The official narrative holds that its Hamas' terrorist practices that keep these people captive. The people we spoke to over the past three visits seem to think differently." . . .

N.B. see also "other articles of interest" Link A – [Israelis Ignore the Gaza Ghetto Until the War Drums Are Heard](#), and Link B - [A Decade of Siege on Gaza](#).

2) [Secretary General Ban Ki-moon and the ghost of U.N. past](#), Tom Suarez , Mondoweiss, February 2, 2016

"Israeli spokespeople have sharply denounced UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon for his criticism of Israeli occupation and settlement-building, and in particular for his suggestion that Palestinian violence is born out of desperation and hopelessness. The Secretary General, the Israeli response has it, was defending terrorism. Mr. Ban's op-ed in the NY Times defending his criticism of Israel, however, betrays either a profound ignorance of the so-called 'conflict', or insufficient courage to speak the truth." . . .

"With a single word — "stalemate" — the Secretary General obfuscates the entire situation to his audience. It is no stalemate: Israel holds all the cards. All the aggression is Israeli. No Palestinian occupies, controls, or lays siege to Israel. Nor is it a 'conflict', which means two roughly equal 'sides', each with a means of defense and offense, each with a valid legal position to its claims, each with the ability to bring its side of a 'dispute' to the media. Israel is entitled to a vast, modern military machine, the unquestioning acquiescence of the world's most powerful nations, and the political perks that come with the status of nation-state.

"The Palestinians are denied any normal political and military means of self-defense. Palestinian peaceful resistance is consistently rewarded with bullets and a media vacuum. Mr. Ban tells the Palestinians that they 'must make

political compromises to bring Gaza and the West Bank under a single, democratic governing authority ... This also means consistently and firmly denouncing terrorism and taking preventive action to end attacks on Israelis, including an immediate stop to Gaza tunnel construction.'

"This pronouncement is so problematic that one hardly knows where to begin." . . .

"The Secretary General inherited the United Nation's Original Sin, General Assembly Resolution 181, the Partition Plan for Palestine, followed by seven decades of failure to hold Israel accountable. His is not an easy job. Yet for all his evident frustration in the face of Israel's ever-bolder intransigence, in the final analysis he has merely reinforced the lies through which the 'conflict' endures."

N.B. see also "other articles of interest" Link C - [Don't Shoot the Messenger, Israel](#), Link D - [UN's Ban on Palestinian Violence: It Is 'Human Nature' to React to Occupation](#), and Link E - [UN chief rejects criticism from Israel: 'Nothing justifies terrorism](#).

3) [Israel-Palestinian conflict: Is one homeland the solution?](#), Samuel Throp, Jerusalem, BBC News, January 28, 2016

"Called "Two States - One Homeland", the group, led by Israeli journalist Meron Rapoport and Palestinian politician Awni Almashni, is advocating the creation of an Israeli-Palestinian confederation. They say that their plan, now picking up public and official backing, can solve the difficult issues - Israeli settlements, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the fate of Jerusalem - that have scuttled past negotiations.

The "clinical death" of the Oslo Peace process, inaugurated by Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat in 1993, and increasing violence "bring fertile ground for new ideas," said Mr Rapoport, a veteran journalist based in Tel Aviv. The new proposal can succeed because "it reflects reality and the deep desires of both sides", he says." . . .

4) [Obama's Israeli-Palestinian failure](#), Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, February 3, 2016

"President Barack Obama is leaving office in one year's time. On his record he can include changing the rules of the game in current international relations toward an assertive collective diplomacy in coordination with major world powers — Russia, China and the European Union — leaving the use of force as a last resort. Obama has put an end to the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, achieved a historic agreement curbing Iran's nuclear capacity and, it seems, is making progress on arranging the sharing of power in Syria.

"But there is one area in which the Obama administration failed to make progress: resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. His efforts were blocked by the Israeli settlement policy and by the weakness of the Palestinian Authority (PA). In his recent foreign policy review on Jan. 22 at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, Secretary of State John Kerry did not say a single word about this issue.

"This leaves the Israeli-Palestinian relationship in a volatile situation. Violence and terror are rampant, and so are the rumors in the West Bank concerning a possible breakdown of the PA and an eventual armed intifada. The question is: Should Obama, in his last year in office, give up on the two-state solution? In a Jan. 21 press conference with Israeli correspondents at the Muqata, President Mahmoud Abbas called on the international community to convene an international peace conference on a two-state solution based on the Arab Peace "Initiative of 2002. He also asked for a freeze of Israeli settlement construction and the release of 36 pre-Oslo Palestinian prisoners incarcerated in Israel. These ideas became the basis for the French initiative of Jan. 29 in favor of convening of an international conference. French and Palestinian diplomats held close consultations on the initiative over the course of January." . . .

“It's too late for Washington to agonize over these dilemmas, given the despair in the PA and the violence on the ground. Washington would be well-advised to hurry up and convene the proposed international conference based on both the Arab Peace Initiative and Israel's security needs.”

N.B. see also “other articles of interest” Link F - [France to Recognize Palestine if talks fail](#)

5) [The Demise of the Two-State Solution and Israel's Culpability](#), Robert Olso, Lobelog, February 4, 2016

“The fading two-state solution.’

“This was the caption of the lead editorial of The New York Times on Jan. 23, emphasizing there was no or little chance of any two-state solution in which a Palestinian state would come into existence in the West Bank. To be sure, such a state, even if had a chance to materialize, would be a truncated entity, consisting at most of some 40 percent of the 2,200-square-mile West Bank . Implicitly unmentioned in the Times editorial was the fact that even if such a truncated entity were to be created, it would not include Area C of the 1993 Oslo Accords, which comprises 60 percent of the West Bank.

“Most scholars and analysts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict determined at least three or four years ago there would be no two-state solution to the conflict. The reasons are clear: No US administration would ever demand that any of the 250,000 Jewish settlers be removed from the 10 percent of the West Bank ensconced between the 1967 cease-fire line and the barrier wall. It is also highly unlikely that any of the 400,000 Jews in the West Bank settlements will be removed. This would mean that only 80,000 to 90,000 Jewish settlers in “outposts” would be removed in any two-state solution.” . . .

“The Obama administration's relations with Israel have cooled a bit since Israel, Netanyahu and pro-Israel and Jewish lobbyists, with a good deal of help from the US Congress, tried to sabotage the P5+1 nuclear agreement with Iran in July 2015. Despite Netanyahu's personal humiliation of Obama, pro-Israel sentiments are still high among members of Congress and the American public. Even before the July 14 agreement was signed, Israeli military and security representatives were in Washington asking for substantial additions to US aid. The current U.S. foreign aid to Israel is \$3.3 billion annually, but total aid to Israel probably is around \$5 billion. Israel wants to raise the foreign aid itself to \$5 billion. The current agreement runs out in 2017. Israel is asking that the total aid during the period 2017 to 2027 should be in the range of \$50 billion, or about \$5 billion a year. This amount should also contribute significantly to Israel's ability to complete its annexation of the West Bank.

“Israel is already a wealthy country, with an average per capita income of around \$32,000, as compared to about \$2,000 in the West Bank. Since 20 percent of Israel's population is Palestinian, who have much lower incomes than Israeli Jews, the Jewish Israeli per capita income could be well above \$35,000.

“In addition, in 2015 Israel's income from cyber war exports was between \$3 to \$4 billion, second only to that of the US. Much of Israel's cyber war capabilities are also a result of its collaboration with Silicon Valley. There is no doubt that this collaboration will continue. Israel also produces the wings for the F-35 fighter jet under a \$5 billion contract with Lockheed Martin. It is rumored that upon sale, Israel will receive a substantially lower price than the current estimated selling price of \$100 million. Israel also produces some avionics and electronics used in the F-35.” . . .

N.B. see also “other articles of interest” Link G - [The Fading Two-State Solution](#) and Link H - [A Two-state solution: Israel should take the lead](#)

6) [Otherwise Occupied With Gaza as Their Model, Palestinian Youth Only See the Steadily Shrinking Horizon, Amira Hass, Haaretz, February 8, 2016](#)

“The prevailing assumption is failing on a daily basis. The assumption that our regime is normal, as is our life, and that our subjects are getting adjusted, or will become adjusted and will even say, ‘Thank you, Sir.’ In each and every generation and day, we rise up to subjugate and trample them, and they’re almost there – trampled and submissive and normalized, and then they rock the boat.” . . .

“There is a basic failure of intelligence in defining the unorganized wave of attacks as “terror,” and stone-throwing at demonstrations as “popular terror.” The military experts and the various groups in charge of espionage and of foiling attacks are missing the data and conclusions that are right under their noses. Indeed, Reuters, The New York Times and Haaretz don’t call a spade a spade, or our perpetual military rule terror, because the definitions and classifications are the private property of the winners, or at least so the winners believe. But the stench remains, even if we don’t know the Latin name of the skunk. And the leaders – and along with them the Israeli public, loyal, obedient and disciplined – hold their breath and declare that these are fragrant spices.” . . .

“Let us not seek mercy and consideration among the knife-wielding young people, when all we have shown and are showing them and their parents and their parents’ parents is cruelty and more sophisticated means of killing, tricks, self-righteousness and military orders for confiscation, demolition, expulsion, arrest, seizure. The loss of life and dreams, another vacuum in the lives of tens of thousands of families, the stolen lands, are heartbreaking. Every Palestinian was and is a target of Israeli weapons and the orders of the Civil Administration. And now such Palestinian targets (a miniscule minority among them) see every Israeli as a target. What’s the big surprise?” . . .

Other Articles of Interest:

A) [Israelis Ignore the Gaza Ghetto Until the War Drums Are Heard, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, February 4, 2016](#)

Two million human beings, some of whom worked here for years, some of them even have friends here, live in abject poverty and petrifying despair, mainly because of Israel's blockade.

B) [A Decade of Siege on Gaza, by IMEMC News, January 23, 2016](#)

With a decade of Israeli-imposed economic siege on Gaza and three devastating wars which accompanied it, the Strip now suffers from an acute housing deficit, with a need of more than 70,000 housing units. Israeli occupation authorities have imposed a complete blockade on the Gaza Strip.

C) [Don’t shoot the messenger, Israel, New York Times, January 31, 2016](#)

Ban Ki-moon says Lashing out at critics will not resolve an untenable occupation

D) [UN's Ban on Palestinian Violence: It Is 'Human Nature' to React to Occupation, Haaretz, January 26, 2016](#)

Ban Ki-moon says settlements are 'affront to Palestinian people' while Israel's UN ambassador uses 'terror dolls' to prove Palestinian incitement.

E) [UN chief rejects criticism from Israel: 'Nothing justifies terrorism', Itamar Eichner, Ynetnews, January 27, 2016](#)

After PM Netanyahu accused him of 'giving terror a tailwind,' Ban Ki-moon's spokesman says the UN secretary-general stands behind remarks to the UN Security Council that 'it is human nature to react to occupation.'

F) [France to Recognize Palestine if talks fail, Aljazeera, January 29, 2016](#)

Foreign minister says Israeli "colonization continues" and if renewed efforts collapse, France will recognize Palestine.

- G) [The Fading Two-State Solution, New York Times, January 22, 2016](#)**
Israel is moving quickly to establish facts on the ground that preclude a Palestinian state, leaving Palestinians increasingly marginalized and despairing. “It is starting to look like a de facto annexation,”
- H) [A Two-state solution: Israel should take the lead, Susie Gelman and Peter Joseph, Newsweek, February 3, 2016](#)**
The Israeli government has been confronted by a recent spate of speeches and statements by American officials, including Secretary of State John Kerry and Ambassador Dan Shapiro, urging it to acknowledge that the two-state solution is on life support.
- I) [Letter to Senator Bernie Sanders, January, 2016](#)**
Cathi Grosso, and Stephen Gasteyer, professors at Michigan State, lived in East Jerusalem and Ramallah for several years. While on sabbatical in Palestine, they sent this letter the Bernie Sanders presidential campaign in Iowa. They encourage individuals or groups to send a similar request to Sanders. Please feel free to adapt the letter if you’d like. A similar letter could be sent to other candidates, but Cathi and Stephen are hopeful that Bernie Sanders might listen and shift his perspective on the reality in Israel and Palestine, thus having an impact on the overall discourse.
- J) [Occupation Inc., Dimi Reider, LRB Blog, February 4, 2016](#)**
Seventeen European states have issued guidelines advising companies against investment in the Occupied Territories, and the European Union’s mounting frustration with the occupation – half a century old next year, with no end in sight – is gradually putting an operational edge on its rhetoric.
- K) [CMEP Bulletin - Settlement Growth Undermines Peace, January 29, 2016](#)**
- L) [CMEP Bulletin - Stirrings of 2016 – February 5, 2016](#)**
- M) [Israeli Army Expects Escalation in West Bank in Absence of Calming Efforts, Gili Cohen, Haaretz, January 26, 2016](#)**
Economic improvement or close cooperation with Palestinian forces could help ease tensions, IDF says. Israel's chief-of-staff shows more statesmanship than its elected officials
- N) [The end of normalcy for Israeli settlements? Michael Schaeffer Omer-Man, 972 Mag, January 9, 2016](#)**
Stricter trade guidelines, harsher rhetoric and corporate responsibility campaigns all send a clear message: Israel’s closest allies are no longer willing to passively accept the occupation, and the only consensus on settlements is that they are illegal.
- O) [Will Israeli Palestinians join their West Bank brethren? Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, January 31, 2016](#)**
Arab-Jewish relations within sovereign Israel have reached an unprecedented crisis. Discrimination against Arabs and the lack of any hope for a two-state solution have pushed Arab-Israelis into the arms of their brethren east of the Green Line, fighting for independence. In some ways, this could provoke a return to the pre-Israeli statehood situation.
- P) [Otherwise Occupied With Gaza as Their Model, Palestinian Youth Only See the Steadily Shrinking Horizon, Amira Hass, Haaretz, February 8, 2016](#)**
Israelis are being killed because their government keeps believing in the sustainability of military rule.