

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**

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The seven featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the occupation; Israel's "formalization law;" an accusation that Israel never had any intention of allowing a sovereign Palestinian state; the similarity between the illiberal policies of President Trump and the developments in and emanating from another increasingly illiberal democracy: Israel; Israeli opposition leader Isaac Herzog's ten-point Plan for Israeli-Palestinian Peace negotiations; the need for a partnership between the Zionist and Palestinian Arab Left to push back after 50 years of occupation; information about the Israeli/Palestinian peace film, "Disturbing the Peace;" and links to other articles of interest.

**Commentary:** The articles and links of this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the viability or demise of the "two-state solution." The majority of the Palestinian leaders and people would accept such a solution, even though they believe current the "fact of the ground" that settlers, settlements, the wall, access roads, and blockade have already made this solution impossible.

The majority of Israeli leaders and people prefer either the status quo or annexation of the occupied territories. It seems the Israeli people are choosing a "one-state" solution and are now facing the question of what kind of state that will be with almost numerically equal Israeli and Palestinian populations.

There seem to be three choices: to continue the untenable and ultimately unsustainable status quo of military domination of Palestinians; to foster full political rights and responsibilities for all Palestinians and Israelis alike in this one state which will slowly end the Zionist dream of a nation for and of Jews; or to deny political rights and responsibilities to Palestinians within the borders of this one apartheid state. In light of Israeli domination of the Palestinians, it is only Israel that has the power, challenge, and responsibility to make such a choice.

- Rogel Alpher writes in Haaretz that the occupation has defeated sanity, even that of Israeli President Reuven Rivlin. The president is calling for the country's annihilation.
- Haggai Matar states in +972 that anyone who condemns Israel's new law authorizing the theft of private Palestinian land, while forgetting the mass theft engendered by the settlement enterprise as a whole, is doing an injustice to the fight for equality in this land.
- Nadia Hijab writes in Al-Shabaka that the death of the two-state solution has been foretold for nearly 20 years, after it became clear that Israel had signed on to the Oslo peace process in 1993 with no intention of allowing a sovereign Palestinian state.
- Lara Friedman of Americans for Peace Now notes in the Huffington Post that as Americans come out in huge numbers to challenge the illiberal policies of President Donald J. Trump, they should be mindful of developments in and emanating from another increasingly illiberal democracy: Israel.

- Isaac Herzog Israeli opposition leader details his 10-point Plan for Israeli-Palestinian Peace negotiations in [Haaretz](#) during which both sides will agree on decade of calm, during which time West Bank will be a violence and incitement-free zone and settlement construction outside blocs will be frozen.
- Yaniv Sagee writes in [Haaretz](#) that the only way to create an alternative to push back against 50 years of occupation and mounting inequalities is for the Zionist and Palestinian-Arab left to form a real partnership.
- [CMEP](#) is sponsoring a DC viewing of the film “Disturbing the Peace.” The film follows former enemy combatants, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters, who have joined together to challenge the status quo and say “enough.” [More here >>](#)

#### Featured articles:

##### 1) [Opinion The Debate in Israel Is Over. Annexation It Is](#), Rogel Alpher, Haaretz, February 19, 2017

“So now we also have President Reuven Rivlin, ostensibly the bastion of sanity in this country, calling for the annexation of the territories. Contrary to the apartheidists, he supports granting citizenship and full rights to all the Palestinians in the territories where Israeli sovereignty would be applied. That is, he supports a binational state.” ...

“The occupation has defeated sanity; even Rivlin’s sanity. There is no political leader on the horizon among those who aspire to succeed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who can or wants to extricate Israel from the madness of the occupation and save it from oblivion.” ...

“When President Rivlin calls for annexation, he is calling for the annihilation of Israel. No less. The country’s president is calling for the country’s annihilation.

“Is Rivlin blind to the fact that the Jews of Israel will not grant full citizenship and voting rights to the millions of annexed Palestinians? This lapse of his is surprising, but it does not change reality. Annexation means deepening already existing apartheid. Annexation is a historic mistake and an act of political insanity. Pure self-destruction.” ...

“Israel has resolved to commit suicide. It is shooting itself in the head with the occupation, because it is afraid of a terror state. An irrational, baseless fear. It’s like a person hiding from a mouse in a stream of boiling water. The mountain is afraid of the molehill.” ...

##### 2) [Israel’s land theft law is just the tip of the settlement iceberg](#), Haggai Matar, +972, February 7, 2017

“The Knesset on Monday night (2/6/17) passed the ‘formalization law’ (also translated as the ‘normalization law’ [and regulation law]), which retroactively legalizes dozens of settlement outposts in the West Bank — almost 4,000 housing units. The law essentially formalizes settler theft of private Palestinian land, allowing the state to force compensation on Palestinians for land they own that has been taken over by settlers.” ...

“The law is also remarkable because the occupied Palestinian territories have never been annexed to Israel, which means that the laws within them are (supposed to be) determined by officers in the military regime, not by Israel’s parliament which has no jurisdiction.” ...

“Every Israeli government over the last 50 years has contributed to bringing more than 750,000 of its citizens into the territories Israel occupied in 1967. Establishing settlements in occupied territory is against international law, as the UN Security Council recently reminded us. No country in the world has ever recognized the legality of the settlements, even if the Israeli High Court of Justice has declined to do so.” ...

“The reality in the occupied territories proves these points: thanks to the settlements, the West Bank is home to Israeli citizens who live under the Israeli democracy and enjoy all the same rights as those who live inside Israel, and

alongside them Palestinians who live under an Israeli military regime. The latter group lacks basic rights, cannot choose who governs them, and their lives are determined by military laws issued by Israeli army officers.”...

“The fundamental problem with the settlements — what makes the occupation an occupation — is the military regime that implements two separate legal systems for Jews and Palestinians. A shared existence is possible in this land, whether in a single state whose subjects are all citizens with equal rights, or two states that live in peace side by side, or in a federation. The problem is the theft and unilateral policy making which arises from the perception of Jewish supremacy and exclusivity in every area, backed up by military force.”...

See also: [Opinion A Shadowy Edict of Israeli Occupation](#)

### **3) [Do Not Let Go of the Green Line: It Is Israel's Achilles Heel](#), Nadia Hijab, Al-Shabaka, February 15, 2017**

“The poet Dylan Thomas urged his father – and all those approaching death – ‘Do not go gentle into that good night’ but ‘rage, rage against the dying of the light.’ The death of the two-state solution has been foretold for nearly 20 years, after it became clear that Israel had signed on to the Oslo peace process in 1993 with no intention of allowing a sovereign Palestinian state.

“And yet the light has refused to die. It has been in every country’s interest, including Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization/Palestine (PLO/Palestine), to maintain flickers of life in the two-state possibility despite Israel’s relentless colonization of the occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) that has so far planted some 200 settlements and 600,000 settlers there, acts that constitute war crimes under international law.” ...

“The settler movement no longer wants to exist in the murkiness of the two-state scenario: It seeks the clarity of formal annexation of the rest of the OPT (Israel has already illegally annexed Jerusalem) or at least of Area C, which accounts for some 60% of the West Bank. This is the goal, for now, of Israeli right-wing leader and Education Minister Naftali Bennett, who gleefully announced that “the era of a Palestinian state is over” after Donald Trump won the American presidential elections.” ...

“The Green Line – the armistice line at the end of the fighting between the Arab and Israeli armies in 1949 – underpins the international community’s refusal to legalize Israel’s occupation because it demarcates what the world considers as the Israeli state from the territory it occupied in 1967 and its illegal acts therein.” ...

“This is why UN Security Council Resolution 2334, which passed on December 23, 2016, is not only significant for the Palestinians: It is significant for the entire post-war order because it reaffirms the illegality of settlements and the application of international law – including the laws governing military occupation – to occupied territory. And this is why Israel’s response to 2334 was so angry: Its ability to erase the Green Line took a major hit.”...

“It is important to make this case at the present time because more voices among Palestinians and in the Palestine solidarity movement are calling for a shift of the Palestinian political goal from a two-state to a one-state solution or toward a civil rights struggle. These voices are likely to grow stronger given the anniversary of the 50th year of the occupation this coming June, with the Palestinians both in Israel and the OPT facing some of the most draconian Israeli threats to their existence on their land since the occupation began.” ...

“The lack of definitive progress on the realization of rights for the foreseeable future leaves the Palestinians living under Israeli occupation and siege, the Palestinian citizens in Israel, and Palestinian refugees facing very bleak times. However, there are still reasons for hope, including the resilience of Palestinian civil society and the entry points the PLO/Palestine have secured at the ICC, among others areas. The Israeli right wing’s haste to take over power in Israel and to complete the annexation of Palestine will create more openings for action. As American civil society mobilizes against Trump, this is the time to hold fast, defend gains, exploit opportunities, and guard against concessions. And it is the time to hold on to that Green Line.”

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See also: [Opinion The Green Line Is Not Sacred](#)

[German leader: Israel, PA should 'keep working on 2-state solution'](#)

[Hollande iterates support for two-state solution](#)

[153 French lawmakers call on Hollande to officially recognize Palestinian state](#)

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**4) [Israeli Occupation Is Poisoning America's Democracy](#), Lara Friedman, Americans for Peace Now, Huffington Post, February 20, 2017**

"As Americans come out in huge numbers to challenge the illiberal policies of President Donald J. Trump, they should be mindful of developments in and emanating from another increasingly illiberal democracy: Israel.

"In power in Israel for nearly a decade, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his political partners have focused their energies on one goal above all others: expanding settlements and securing permanent Israeli control over territory occupied by Israel in 1967. In pursuing this 'Greater Israel' agenda, Netanyahu has governed according to a political ethos that has much in common with that of Trump, starting with the belief that political might makes right; that laws, courts, and public institutions exist solely to serve those in power; that the media and activists are the enemy; that *hasbara* (Hebrew for 'propaganda,' often akin to 'alt-facts') trumps facts; and that democratic norms like 'rule of law' and 'checks-and-balances' are for suckers." ...

"The rise of Trump has been a wake-up call to Americans about the need to stand up and defend democratic rights and values. It remains to be seen if it will likewise alert them to the dangers of allowing the 'Greater Israel' agenda to hijack U.S. law and undermine the Constitution. If not, many Americans who today are vociferously opposing Trump's illiberal policies may awaken soon to find that their support for Israel and concerns about anti-Semitism have been abused, and that they have allowed themselves to become the cat's paw in a broader assault on American democracy."

See also: [Muslim-led Campaign to Fix Vandalized Jewish Cemetery Triples Goal in Less Than One Day](#);

['This Is What Faith Teaches Us': How Muslim Americans Are Coming to Their Jewish Neighbors' Aid as Hate Crimes Spike](#)

[Muslim Activists Vow to Help After Second Act of Vandalism at Jewish Cemetery](#)

[Bernie Sanders: We Need to End the 50-year-long Israeli Occupation](#)

**5) [Opinion Isaac Herzog Details His 10-point Plan for Israeli-Palestinian Peace](#), Opinion: Isaac Herzog Details His 10-point Plan for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, Isaac Herzog, Haaretz, February 23, 2017**

"A few days ago a dramatic report by Barak Ravid appeared in this newspaper about a secret summit meeting, held about a year ago in Aqaba by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry, King Abdullah of Jordan and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi.

"It was on the basis of this meeting, whose occurrence the prime minister has confirmed, together with other steps taken at the same time that I was prepared to examine with Netanyahu a national unity government in the period March-May 2016.

"The information published in Haaretz on February 19 exposed a small part of the great opportunity Israel had to change the face of the entire Middle East, and which could have brought great hope to our people and to the nations

of the region. The historic move, which for obvious reasons was covert, was intended to prevent more rounds of violence and bloodshed.

“At the time I repeatedly maintained that Israel had a historic chance to make a promising, dramatic strategic move, which required courageous political decisions. My readiness to take a step that was seen as political suicide – after I said in the election campaign “It’s us or him” – stemmed from my uncompromising commitment to save Israel from the one-state disaster and prevent unnecessary additional fatalities on both sides. I felt it was my duty not to turn my back on the specter I saw before me.” ...

“At this moment, in view of the Netanyahu-Trump meeting, it’s clearer than ever that today, 50 years after the Six-Day War, Israel is at a crucial intersection. At this moment hard, penetrating truths must be voiced.

“One truth pertains to the Jewish settlements in the West Bank, whose dimensions now endanger Israel’s existence as a Jewish state. The rampant construction in all the settlements all the time will lead to replacing the Jewish majority state with an Arab majority state. The land confiscation law, the voices calling for annexation, including the annexation of Area C (which includes 60 percent of the West Bank), are the most tangible reflection of this threat. The large settlement blocs are part of the solution. Sweeping decisions about the continued construction in the West Bank are part of the problem.

“Another truth pertains to the ongoing rule over another nation. This has reached the danger point that today threatens Israel’s moral character and democracy.

“A third truth involves the need to recognize that the attempt to reach a viable peace in one move, in one conference or with a process consisting of agreed formulas and parameters for a permanent agreement, has failed. It has failed again and again – with Ehud Barak who tried it at Camp David, with Ehud Olmert who tried it at Annapolis, and with Benjamin Netanyahu who tried it with Kerry’s outline some years ago.” ...

“In contrast to the government’s inaction, I suggest an updated road map for a multi-stage process that would include the following 10 steps and components.” ...

“An updated process will first of all lead to calm, in which each side will receive its due at every stage. The Palestinians will receive recognition, authority, more territory, and hope for the future. The Israelis will receive security, regional recognition and hope for the future.”

See also:

[Opinion Israeli Opposition Leader's 10-point-plan for Peace Missing 11th Point](#)

[3 alternatives to two-state or one-state solution for Mideast peace](#)

## **6) [Opinion Can Jews and Arabs Be True Political Partners in Israel?](#) Yaniv Sagee, Haaretz, February 27, 2017**

“In four months, we will mark 50 years of Israel’s occupation of ‘the territories.’ Fifty years, during which the State of Israel has changed from top to bottom.

“From being a welfare state fulfilling the founding vision - both of a national homeland for the Jewish people and of an egalitarian state for the benefit of all its citizens - Israel has transformed into one of the worst of Western states in terms of social gaps. A state that discriminates against its Arab citizens and is incapable of connecting with world Jewry.

“From a ‘pursuer of peace,’ we have become a state that ‘manages the conflict’ through wars and operations where we kill and are killed, because we have become convinced that “there is no partner” for peace. Our actions are directed by the vision of the Prime Minister who told us last year, “We shall forever live by the sword.”

“This is our government - promoting ‘settlement’ laws and annexations that are meant to prepare us for the plunder led by the radical right wing, who seek to annex the conquered territories and create a state based on inequality between the Jewish minority and the Arab majority, from the river to the sea.” ...

“The only way to create an alternative left in Israel is by connecting the forces of the Zionist left and the Palestinian-Arab left, and for this both entities must change.” ...

“We need a partnership of Jews and Arabs, of religious and secular, veteran citizens and new citizens, a partnership that will advance economic and national equality in Israel. A partnership that will become a home for anyone who is harmed by the pro-settlement-right wing vision. For Jewish and Arab citizens, both of whom work hard and earn little, who see the state investing their taxes in territories beyond the Green Line and its capacity to continue controlling them, rather than in the people that live along the length and breadth of Israel within the ‘67 borders. A partnership of all the complex ethnicities and cultures that make up this country, whose voices are currently muted, while governing power and state resources are far from equally distributed among them.”

## 7) [What Does Peace Look Like](#), CMEP Bulletin, February 24, 2017

CMEP is sponsoring a DC viewing of the film “Disturbing the Peace.” The film follows former enemy combatants, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian fighters, who have joined together to challenge the status quo and say “enough.”

CMEP Links: [Egypt, Jordan: Solution Other Than Two States Dangerous for Middle East \[Ha’aretz\]](#)

[Taking Trump Literally and Seriously \[Israel Policy Forum\]](#)

[US Senator to Reintroduce Bill Cutting Funds to PA for Payouts to Terrorists \[The Times of Israel\]](#)

[Amona Evacuees: Netanyahu Still Committed to Building New Settlement \[The Jerusalem Post\]](#)

[A Prison Sentence that Tells the True Story of the Occupation \[+972\]](#)

[Report: Netanyahu Rejected Peace Plan Proposed by Kerry at Secret 2016 Meeting \[The Jerusalem Post\]](#)

[Trump’s Middle East ‘Deal’ Leaves Out One Vital Player: Palestinians \[The Nation\]](#)

[Beyond ‘One State’: Preliminary Conclusions from the Netanyahu Meeting \[The Washington Institute\]](#)

[‘Gaza - Sinai’ State Idea a Danger Under Trump, Warns Gaza Analyst \[The Jerusalem Post\]](#)

[A Chance for Israel and Palestinians \[The Washington Post\]](#)