

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
April 2, 2015



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Most of this issue's articles focus on reactions to the reelection of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu; his present and future relationship with the White House; the possible end of the two-state solution; the reality that Israel seems to have already chosen a one-state solution by expanding its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem; the weakening of unquestioned support of Israeli policies by U.S. Jews and Christian Evangelicals; acknowledgement of Israel's nuclear weapons; and other issues.

Commentary: *Although the U.S. continues to support a two-state solution, the "facts on the ground" indicate that the present, past and most likely future Netanyahu government of Israel is in fact ruling over a combined population of almost equal numbers of Israeli Jews and Palestinians living between the Mediterranean Sea and Jordan River. Only Israeli Jews have full rights and privileges. The Israeli Arabs have some restricted political, social and economic rights as Israeli citizens. The Palestinian inhabitants of East Jerusalem have less; those on the West Bank have practically none, while the Palestinian people of Gaza have nothing but confinement and isolation. It is clear that this inequality cannot peacefully continue. It is also clear that without a successful two-state solution, Palestinian, Arab, European, U.S. and world movements will be increasing pressure on Israel through boycott-divestment-sanctions (BDS) and other nonviolent means for a one person/one vote solution.*

- Matthew Duss and Michael Cohen write in the Washington Post that the Israeli-Palestinian peace process — the one that is supposed to end with a two-state solution — is on life support.
- Ha'aretz reports that the White House has called on Israel to end its "50-year occupation" of the West Bank and East al-Quds (Jerusalem), criticizing Tel Aviv over its continued settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories.
- Karen DeYoung writes in the Washington Post that President Obama has said that it's difficult to envision how a Palestinian state could be formed following Netanyahu's negative comments during his re-election campaign.
- Gideon Levy writes in Ha'aretz that the first conclusion to be taken from the Netanyahu reelection was particularly discouraging. He comments that the Israel nation must be replaced.
- Peter Beinart writes in Ha'aretz that if Israelis have the right to vote for permanent occupation of Palestinian territories with the reelection of Netanyahu, then Jews in the Diaspora have the right to resist it.
- Michael Lerner writes that the Israeli elections, and subsequent support for Prime Minister Netanyahu's open racism and obstinate refusal to help create a Palestinian state, is not playing well with many younger Jews, and they will be challenging their elders to rethink their blind support for Israeli policies.
- Other articles of interest.

1) The United States should recognize the state of Palestine

Matthew Duss and Michael A. Cohen, Washington Post, March 27, 2015

Matthew Duss is president of the Foundation for Middle East Peace. Michael A. Cohen is a fellow at the Century Foundation.

The Israeli-Palestinian peace process — the one that is supposed to end with a two-state solution — is on life support. Both sides in the conflict have made their share of missteps, but Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, all but pulled the plug earlier this month by pledging during his reelection campaign that Palestine would never become a state on his watch. He reaffirmed the sentiment even as he dialed back the rhetoric after the vote. This position runs directly counter to U.S. national security goals. ...

Recognizing Palestine would also address a persistent foreign policy problem: the divide between America's official policy of support for Palestinian statehood and its continued support for an Israeli government that deliberately impedes that goal.

Netanyahu, while paying lip service to the two-state solution, has relentlessly worked to undermine it during his three terms as prime minister — and not just by expanding settlements, violently suppressing unarmed protests and exacerbating the divisions between the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. He has offered no hope to the Palestinians. No wonder Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas began asking other countries, and the United Nations, to recognize Palestine after a previous round of talks collapsed in 2010. Now that Netanyahu has admitted publicly what many already believed — that he'll never play midwife to Palestine — it's clear that if Washington wants to achieve this goal, it must seek another route. ...

In the end, recognizing Palestine would be both good for U.S. national security and consistent with basic American foreign policy values: support for self-determination and independence. Indeed, it was precisely these values that informed the U.S. decision to recognize Israel as an independent state in 1948. The past few years have seen millions of Arab citizens demonstrating, and sometimes giving their lives, for their rights and freedoms. We should join the 130 countries that already recognize Palestine, signaling that we share and support those goals for everyone, everywhere.

2) White House: Israel's "50-year occupation" must end now

Ha'aretz, March 24, 2015

In a speech to an American Jewish advocacy group in Washington on Monday, White House Chief of Staff Denis McDonough said, "An occupation that has lasted for almost 50 years must end, and the Palestinian people must have the right to live in and govern themselves in their own sovereign state."

"Israel cannot maintain military control of another people indefinitely, that's the truth," McDonough said at the final event of J Street's 2015 conference, a three-day gathering of American Jewish students, activists and lobbyists.

"Palestinian children deserve the same right to be free in their own land as Israeli children in their land," he said. "A two-state solution will finally bring Israelis the security and normalcy to which they are entitled, and Palestinians the sovereignty and dignity they deserve." ...

In his speech, McDonough also condemned Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his dismissal of a two-state solution for Israelis and Palestinians. "The United States will never stop working for a two-state solution and a lasting peace that Israelis and Palestinians so richly deserve," he said.

He said Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestine state as well as his approval of illegal settlements in the occupied territories for the strategic purpose of changing the borders are "so very troubling". He censured Israel for its settlement activities in the occupied Palestinian territories, warning that it "would only contribute to Israel's further isolation." ...

3) Obama says the prospect of Israeli Palestinian peace seems very dim

Karen DeYoung, Washington Post, March 24, 2015

President Obama said Tuesday that the prospect of Israeli-Palestinian peace "seems very dim" in the wake of pre-election remarks last week by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and that he is evaluating "how we manage Israeli-Palestinian relations over the next several years."

"What we can't do is pretend there's a possibility of something that's not there," Obama said during a news conference with visiting Afghan President Ashraf Ghani. "For the sake of our own credibility, I guess we have to be honest about this."

His remarks were the sharpest in a series of U.S. expressions of barely concealed anger since Netanyahu, appealing to the far-right Israeli vote, said there would be no Palestinian state while he was prime minister. ...

Relations between Obama and Netanyahu have never been warm, although Obama took pains at his news conference to say that the United States and Israel remain close allies and that their military and intelligence cooperation would continue unabated.

As for the president and the Israeli prime minister, Obama described the relationship as "very businesslike."

He did not deny the strains, but said there was a tendency to frame U.S.-Israeli relations as a personality issue between him and Netanyahu. "The notion is, well, if we'd all just get along, everybody cools down, then somehow the problem goes away."

Netanyahu, Obama said, "is representing his country's interests the way he thinks he needs to, and I'm doing the same. ... We believe two states is the best way forward for Israeli security and for Palestinian aspirations and for regional stability. That's our view."

"The prime minister," he said, "has a different approach, and so this can't be reduced to a matter of somehow let's all hold hands and sing 'Kumbaya.'"

William Booth in Jerusalem and Greg Miller in Washington contributed to this report.

4) Netanyahu deserves the Israeli people, and they deserve him

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, March 18, 2015

If after everything, the Israeli phoenix succeeded in rising from the ashes and getting reelected, something is truly broken, possibly beyond repair.

The first conclusion that arose just minutes after the announcement of the exit polls was particularly discouraging: The nation must be replaced. Not another election for the country's leadership, but general elections to choose a new Israeli people – immediately. The country urgently needs that. It won't be able to stand another term for Benjamin Netanyahu, who emerged last night as the man who will form the next government.

If after six years of nothing, if after six years of sowing fear and anxiety, hatred and despair, this is the nation's choice, then it is very ill indeed. If after everything that has been revealed in recent months, if after everything that has been written and said, if after all this, the Israeli phoenix succeeded in rising from the ashes and getting reelected, if after all this the Israeli people chose him to lead for another four years, something is truly broken, possibly beyond repair.

Netanyahu deserves the Israeli people and they deserve him. The results are indicative of the direction the country is headed: A significant proportion of Israelis has finally grown detached from reality. This is the result of years' worth of brainwashing and incitement. These Israelis voted for the man who will lead the United States to adopt harsh measures against Israel, for the man whom the world long ago grew sick of. They voted for the man who admitted to having duped half the world during his Bar-Ilan speech; now he has torn off his mask and disavowed those words once and for all. Israel said "yes" to the man who said "no" to a Palestinian state. Dear Likud voters, what the hell do you say "yes" to? Another 50 years of occupation and ostracism? Do you really believe in that? ...

5) With Netanyahu's reelection, the peace process is over and the pressure process must begin

Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, March 19, 2015

My entire adult life, American Jewish leaders have been telling Americans that Israel can save itself. Just wait until Israel gains a respite from terror, they said; then its silent, two-state majority will roar. ...

The American Jewish establishment will never admit that its theory of change has been discredited. It will go on insisting, no matter how laughable that insistence becomes, that Israel is serious about creating a Palestinian state. The establishment's disconnection from reality will gradually make it irrelevant. Already, the trend is clear: AIPAC, which claims Israel will end the occupation, is being supplanted by Sheldon Adelson, who celebrates Israel for entrenching the occupation. Adelson is not taking over the institutions of American Jewish life only because of his money. He's taking over because he looks reality in the eye. ...

Our principle should be this: Support any pressure that is nonviolent and consistent with Israel's right to exist. That means backing Palestinian bids at the United Nations. It means labeling and boycotting settlement goods. It means joining and amplifying nonviolent Palestinian protest in the West Bank. It means denying visas to, and freezing the assets of, Naftali Bennett and other

pro-settler leaders. It means pushing the Obama administration to present out its own peace plan, and to punish — yes, punish — the Israeli government for rejecting it. It means making sure that every time Benjamin Netanyahu and the members of his cabinet walk into a Jewish event outside Israel, they see Diaspora Jews protesting outside. It means loving Israel more than ever, and opposing its government more than ever. It means accepting that, for now at least, the peace process is over and the pressure process must begin. ...

6) [“Let the Palestinian people go”: What younger Jews will be asking of Israel at Passover Seder this year](#)

Michael Lerner, Tikkun, March 27, 2015

What makes this year’s Passover Seders unlike any others is that a majority of American Jews have been forced to face the fact that Palestinians today are asking Jews what Moses asked Pharaoh: “Let my people go.” The Israeli elections, and subsequent support for Prime Minister Netanyahu’s open racism and obstinate refusal to help create a Palestinian state, is not playing well with many younger Jews, and they will be challenging their elders to rethink their blind support for Israeli policies.

Increasingly, young Jews are on the Moses side, and see Netanyahu as the contemporary Pharaoh. So at the Seder more and more Jews will be asking Israel to “let the Palestinian people go.” ...

Though Prime Minister Netanyahu has now sought to back away from his unequivocal election commitment in mid-March that he would never allow Palestinians to have a separate state, it is clear to most American Jews that he was telling the truth to his own community when he made that commitment. Only a fully unambiguous embrace of a detailed plan for ending the Occupation of the West Bank and the blockade of Gaza, and major unilateral acts on Israel’s part to begin to implement the creation of a Palestinian state, would be believed by any Palestinians at this point. And who can blame them? ...

The call for “One Person, One Vote” has a strong resonance with the American people and with most people on the planet. It may even resonate with many Israelis who have memories of what it was like to live in societies that did not give Jews equal rights. ... The Palestinian Authority might find that adopting the demand for “One Person, One Vote” might be the most powerful way to get the two states they’ve unsuccessfully sought up till now. In my view, two states are preferable to trying a forced marriage between two peoples that have so much mutual suspicion — they need a clean divorce, not a shotgun wedding! ...

Other articles of interest:

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 20, 2015](#)

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, March 26, 2015](#)

[Right Wing Nation, Jerry Haber, The Magnes Zionist, March 17, 2015](#)

[Erekat: International community to blame for Netanyahu reelection, Jack Khoury, Ha'aretz, March 18, 2015](#)

[The State of Two States, Week of March 15, 2015](#)

[UN officials accused of bowing to Israeli pressure over children's rights list, Harriet Sherwood, The Guardian, March 17, 2015](#)

[PLO: Israel voters chose "occupation," not talks, Ma'an Staff, March 18, 2015](#)

[White House antagonism toward Netanyahu grows, Julie Hirschfeld Davis, The New York Times, March 20, 2015](#)

[Surviving without the Palestinian Authority, Alaa Tartir, Huffington Post, March 21, 2015](#)

[Netanyahu tactics anger many U.S. Jews, deepening a divide, Laurie Goodstein, The New York Times, March 20, 2015](#)

[American Jews are taking back their power from Israel, Philip Weiss, Mondoweiss, March 24, 2015](#)

[Netanyahu deserves the Israeli people, and they deserve him, Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, March 18, 2015](#)

[West sees Palestinians as Israel's problem, Aviad Kleinberg, Ynetnews, March 25, 2015](#)

[Netanyahu will be remembered for speaking Israel's truth, Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, March 22, 2015](#)

[When theology is so pro-Israel that it becomes anti-Christian, Benjamin Cory, Patheos, March 18, 2015](#)

[To evangelicals, Zionism an increasingly tough sell, Ryan Rodrick Beiler, The Electric Intifada, March 19, 2015](#)

[The militarists and haters win in Israeli elections, Huffington Post, Michael Lerner, March 18, 2015](#)

[It's official: The Pentagon finally admitted that Israel has nuclear weapons, too, William Greider, The Nation, March 20, 2015](#)

[It's time for a one-state solution, Yonatan Amir +972 Blog, March 23, 2015](#)