

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
April 7, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on Israel's influence on the United States, call for boycott of illegal settlements in Palestine, a request to American Jews look on AIPAC's works, especially the speeches of Presidential candidates to its most recent conference, a report of the Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights to the International Criminal Court, a Rabbi's statement that over the past 40 years, the Torah, Judaism, Zionism, and at times even God Himself have been hijacked both in Israel and around the world, both by friends and foes, by religious Jews and evangelical Christians, the Netanyahu response to U.S. Senator Leahy's seeking to investigate alleged Israeli abuses, and other issues of interest.

Commentary: As the Israeli government continues trying to slow internal criticism by Israelis, and as the majority of the Israeli people continue to live comfortably with little awareness of or concern for their Palestinian neighbors, external criticism from US Jews, peace activists, some members of Congress, and proponents of BDS is increasing in both the U.S. and the EU. This growing criticism has been deepened in light of IDF treatment of Palestinians and the seeming extra-judicial execution of a wounded "terrorist" by an IDF soldier. In the words of an Israeli journalist and critic, there seems to be three governments in Israel: a fully democratic government for Israeli Jews, a semi-democratic, restrictive government for Israeli Arabs, and a military government for Palestinians in East Jerusalem, the Occupied Territories and Gaza. It seems that only the first of these governments is truly democratic and accountable to its people. Israeli Arabs have little influence on the policies and actions of the Israeli government; Palestinians have no positive influence at all. These three "governments" are in fact governing the lives of all Israelis and Palestinians living between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River.

- The Washington Report on Middle East Affairs has provided an audio/video link to Gideon Levy's Keynote Address to the "Israel's Influence" Conference.
- Eli McCarthy presents the "Call for Boycott of Illegal Settlements in Palestine" issued by the Conference of Major Superiors of Men.
- Lara Friedman in the Huffington Post comments on the speeches of the Presidential candidates to the members of the AIPAC recent conference.
- IMEMC reports that BADIL (The Resource Center for Palestinian Residency and Refugee Rights) has announced the release of "No Safe Place"; a report based its formal submission to the International Criminal Court, delivered to the Office of the Prosecutor, in February of 2016.
- Rabbi Michael Melchior writes in APN writes that over the past 40 years, the Torah, Judaism, Zionism, and at times even God Himself have been hijacked both in Israel and around the world, both by friends and foes, by religious Jews and evangelical Christians. They have been hijacked by an extreme messianic ideology, in order to advance a specific political agenda.
- Haaretz writes of Senator Leahy's response to Netanyahu that seeking to investigate alleged Israeli abuses is 'Only Fair to U.S. Taxpayers' who have been paying for US financial support of Israel.

1) [Official Transcript of Gideon Levy's Keynote Address to "Israel's Influence" Conference Now Available](#), Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, March 18, 2016 (Watch the [video](#) of the address)

In his keynote address to the March 18 "Israel's Influence: Good or Bad for America?" conference, Israeli journalist Gideon Levy described where he would take, and what he would say to, a U.S. congressional delegation to Israel.

Days later and blocks away, members of Congress and three of the four remaining presidential candidates were professing their undying allegiance to Israel at the yearly policy conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), Israel's Washington, DC lobby.

Aware of this annual parade of elected U.S. officials, Levy knew that, in his remarks at the National Press Club, he was describing a "virtual tour of those congressmen who would never come to listen to me and will never let me take them around."

Levy's presentation at the 2015 conference "The Israel Lobby: Is It Good for the U.S.? Is It Good for Israel?" went viral, and has so far been watched by more than 400,000 people. As a result, the organizers of that conference and this year's "Israel's Influence" conference—the American Educational Trust, publisher of the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs, and the Institute for Research: Middle Eastern Policy (IRmep)—were more than happy to bow to popular demand and invite Levy to be a keynote speaker this year. Once again, he was a highlight.

2) [Call for Boycott of Illegal Settlements in Palestine](#) , Conference of Major Superiors of Men, Contact Person, Eli McCarthy, March 30, 2016

As Catholic men religious leaders in the U.S., we are disciples of Jesus Christ who calls us to offer mercy by entering into chaos to cultivate transformation and healing. The injustice and violence in the Holy Land has gone on for far too long. The Vatican and Pope Francis took steps in June 2014 by bringing Israeli and Palestinian leaders to Rome for prayer and dialogue, as well as later formally recognizing Palestine as a state. After a recent CMSM visit to the region, key *Catholic religious leaders living in the conflict* identified the need for U.S. Catholic organizations to become more aware of and engaged in the issue of illegal settlements in the occupied territories of Palestine and participate in the efforts to boycott and/or divest from such settlement products/companies.

Therefore, CMSM is calling on its members and other Catholics to join the boycott of settlement products and companies profiting from settlements.

Not a boycott against the people of Israel or against the existence of Israel as a state, this action intends to directly respond to a call from our Catholic brothers and sisters in the Holy Land for concrete solidarity in the face of ongoing injustice and violence in this lasting conflict.

3) [Look on AIPAC's Works, American Jews](#), Huffington Post, Lara Friedman, March 22, 2016

I talk about AIPAC not because I hold any personal animus against the organization and its supporters, or because I believe in some right-wing conspiracy. I know there are good people working at and supporting AIPAC. And I know from experience - most recently with the successful Iran nuclear deal - that AIPAC is by no means omnipotent.

I also know, however, that for decades AIPAC has been actively promoting a Middle East agenda that is anathema to the values of most American Jews, to the real interests of Israel, and to peace. And I know well, from personal experience working in Washington and around the country, the enormous power AIPAC brings to bear on American Jews, members of Congress, and the U.S. political system to see its agenda enacted. That is why I cannot talk about U.S. policy and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without talking about AIPAC.

I was seeing what happens when year after year, AIPAC is permitted to manipulate the still-potent existential fears of American Jews and lie to them about what it means to be pro-Israel. Trump's triumphant reception at AIPAC is what happens when American Jews have drunk the AIPAC Kool-Aid for decades and convinced themselves that their progressive Jewish values can and must be disconnected from their support for Israel, and that when their values conflict with Israeli policies - as has been more and more the case since a series of right-wing governments have held power in Israel - blind support for Israel, as defined by AIPAC, trumps all.

Yesterday was a *shonda* - a disgrace - for American Jewry. But the problem isn't Trump. The problem is, and has long been, AIPAC and the raft of American Jewish groups that follow its lead. If any good can come of the disgraceful display of American Jews boisterously applauding Donald Trump as candidate for president, it is that our community may finally recognize, talk openly about, and reject what AIPAC has wrought.

See also Link A - [Hillary, Bernie, AIPAC: A Stone Cries Out](#); Link B - [Forget About the U.S.: The Next President Won't Help Israel's Moderates](#); Link C - [How Donald Trump Exposed AIPAC](#); Link D - [Straight Talk From Bernie Sanders on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict](#)

4) [No Safe Place: BADIL Releases Public ICC Submission](#), IMEMC News & Agencies, March 23, 2016

No Safe Place provides a damning indictment of Israeli acts and policies employed during 'Operation Protective Edge'; and concludes that high-level Israeli officials were culpable for both war crimes and crimes against humanity in the context of this operation. Protective Edge -- a 50-day military assault directed by Israel against the Gaza Strip and its population -- left more than 2,250 Palestinians dead and almost 170,000 Palestinian homes destroyed or damaged, leaving 108,000 Palestinians homeless.

The Gaza Strip's sole power plant ceased operation following Israeli airstrikes. 17 out of 32 hospitals were damaged, with six closed down as a result.

Out of 97 primary health centers monitored for damage and closures by UN bodies, four were completely destroyed, while 45 sustained damage. Palestinian agricultural infrastructure suffered damage to the tune of \$550m.

This staggering level of death, injury and destruction naturally produced mass forced displacement of Palestinian civilians on a vast scale, and at the height of the violence roughly half a million Palestinians were internally displaced inside the Gaza Strip, accounting for 28% of the enclave's total population.

5) [Clear Jewish Priorities](#), Rabbi Michael Melchior, APN, March 30, 2016

On one of my visits on Capitol Hill, I was invited to a debate with US legislators regarding the future of the Middle East. After having presented my case, one of the senators expressed his utter surprise that somebody who is an Orthodox rabbi, a staunch Zionist, and one who even looks like I look, could express views which he had always been told were a betrayal of "Judaism."

The truth is I should not have been shocked by his reaction. Over the past 40 years, the Torah, Judaism, Zionism, and at times even God Himself have been hijacked both in Israel and around the world, both by friends and foes, by religious Jews and evangelical Christians. They have been hijacked by an extreme messianic ideology, in order to advance a specific political agenda, which, if successful, I fear will mark the end of the Zionist dream and the Jewish State. My deep disagreement with these people is not about Eretz Yisrael (the Land of Israel), the love of the land and the concern for its future (although I do not always understand why this love only concerns borders and not the environment inside these borders, or the dignity of the human beings living in this environment). Like them, I have a deep affiliation with, and affection for, all parts of the land. And like them, part of me will feel grief and sorrow the day we will have to give up Judea and Samaria.

We have reached a tragic situation where the dream of the great messianic peace has become the main threat to pragmatic and necessary agreements, which at least have the potential of providing a measure of peace and a future, which both sides deserve and which can certainly save many precious human lives.

I believe that if religion has a redeeming force for humankind, then religious teachers and leaders must be on the frontlines of the struggle to transform our conflicts and to work together for the greater good of our communities. The good news is that there actually are a growing number of impressive and courageous people, including Jewish, Christian, and Moslem leaders, who believe likewise - although their voices may still not be heard as loudly or as distinctly as the voices of the totalitarian extremists. These are leaders who, like me, will feel a profound measure of grief at having to give up and compromise on land that they believe is theirs. And yet this grief will be overridden by the joy of hope: The hope of building a future together, dominated not by fear and hatred but by optimism and commitment to the peace of Jerusalem.

See also Link E - Chosen People? The Break-Up of American Jewish Identity

6) [Senator Leahy to Netanyahu: Investigating Alleged Israeli Abuses 'Only Fair to U.S. Taxpayers'](#), Haaretz, March 31, 2016

U.S. Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) on Thursday rejected Prime Minister Netanyahu's criticism and said that American law requires that the State Department investigate allegations of abuses by security forces in countries that receive U.S. aid, such as Israel. "This is only fair to U.S. taxpayers, and it is necessary in upholding the law that our country stands for," Leahy said in a statement.

Earlier, Netanyahu on Wednesday attacked Senator Leahy for a letter asking U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry to investigate reports that Israeli forces may have committed ex-judicial public executions of Palestinians.

Responding to Netanyahu's criticism, Leahy said that Israel, unlike Hamas, is subjected to scrutiny due to the fact that it is a recipient of U.S. military aid.

"The prime minister of Israel knows – and it should go without saying – that the United States does not provide weapons or other aid to Hamas or any other terrorist group," the statement said. "One reason Israel is the largest recipient of U.S. military aid is to help defend against terrorist attacks."

Leahy stressed that American law says no country is exempt from scrutiny when it comes to security aid. He noted that the law applies to military units and personnel, and not to a security force as a whole, and would only apply when the government has failed to act.

The letter to Kerry, first reported in Politico, asserts that "[t]here have been a disturbing number of reports of possible gross violations of human rights by security forces in Israel and Egypt. [These] incidents that may have involved recipients, or potential recipients, of U.S. military assistance. We urge you to determine if these reports are credible and to inform us on your findings."

Leahy, head of the U.S. Senate Appropriations Subcommittee of Defense, is considered one of the most senior senators in Congress. The Leahy Law, enacted in 1997, prohibits U.S. funding from equipping or training foreign military forces suspected of human rights abuses or war crimes.

See also Link F - [Shooting of Wounded Palestinian Is Watershed in Battle Over Israeli Army's Rules of Engagement](#); Link G - [Never Have So Many Cheered Such a Vile Murderer](#); Link H - [Israel Is Reborn Into a Monster - and No One Is Going Stop It](#).

Other articles of interest:

- A) [Hillary, Bernie, AIPAC: A Stone Cries Out, James Wall, Wall Writings, March 23, 2016](#)
Hillary Clinton and Bernie Sanders were among the invitees to the 2016 American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) meeting. In contrast to the Clinton embrace of all things Israeli, Bernie Sanders' message to AIPAC sounds less like a lover and more like a friend admonishing a friend.
- B) [Forget About the U.S.: The Next President Won't Help Israel's Moderates, Haaretz Editorial, March 25, 2016](#)
All the presidential candidates who spoke at AIPAC's policy conference did little more than to pay lip-service to Israel's right wing; they won't offer any help when considering peace with the Palestinians.
- C) [How Donald Trump Exposed AIPAC, MITCHELL PLITNICK, New Republic, March 24, 2016](#)
The rapturous reception for the Republican frontrunner revealed the gap between AIPAC and the majority of American Jews.
- D) [Straight Talk From Bernie Sanders on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, CAROL GIACOMO, New York Times, March 22, 2016](#)
The only presidential candidate who spoke any real truth about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on Monday was the one who did not attend the annual conference of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, the country's largest pro-Israel group.
- E) [Chosen People? The Break-Up of American Jewish Identity, Todd Gitlin, The Tablet, March 27, 2016](#)
Repeatedly asked to uphold value systems they no longer share, Diaspora Jewry may soon hit unsubscribe
- F) [Shooting of Wounded Palestinian Is Watershed in Battle Over Israeli Army's Rules of Engagement, Amos Harel, Haaretz, March 27, 2016](#)
The right's defense of an IDF soldier who shot a supine Palestinian is part of a larger campaign to set a new standard, under which anything a soldier does in the struggle against Palestinians is legitimate.
- G) [Never Have So Many Cheered Such a Vile Murderer, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, March 31, 2016](#)
It's doubtful there's another Western society whose racism is accompanied by such bloodlust.
- H) [Israel Is Reborn Into a Monster - and No One Is Going Stop It, Gideon Levy, Haaretz, April 3, 2016](#)
The soldier from Hebron and those who back his 'values' are our future, the next generation. Who will stop this decline? The media? The IDF? Game-changing politicians? Don't make me laugh.
- I) [Why Breaking the Silence is prime target for Israeli right, Akiva Eldar, Al-Monitor, March 24, 2016](#)
The Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence draws more fire than any other anti-occupation organization because it defies an Israeli taboo: discussing the activities of the military.
- J) [The Jewish Republic of Israel Is Doomed. Get Used to It, Rogel Alpher, Haaretz, March 26, 2016](#)
Democracy for Jews alone will not let anything interfere with the occupation. No U.S. president will force Israel to halt the occupation. Obama didn't; Clinton or Trump won't either.
- K) [Why is a popular uprising yet to take off?, Ramzy Baroud, Ma'an News, March 28, 2016](#)
Whether history moves in a straight or cyclical line, it matters little. The uncontested fact is that it is in constant motion. Thus, the current situation in Palestine is particularly frustrating to a generation that has grown up after the Oslo Peace Accord because they have been brought up within a strange historical phenomenon: where the earth below their feet keeps shrinking and when time stands still.

- L) [Dear U.S. Jews: Israel's Sending You the Apartheid Choice for N.Y. Envoy. Send It Back, Bradley Burston, Haaretz, March 28, 2016](#)
If you are an American Jew who wants to foster the values of democracy, equality, self-determination and human rights in Israel, now is the time to stand up and raise your voice against the appointment of Dani Dayan.
- M) [Don't Shoot the Messenger: Dayan Is an All-too-perfect Israeli Envoy for N.Y Chemi Shalev, Haaretz, March 28, 2016.](#)
The Consul General designate will accurately reflect the current government's devotion to settlements and annexation, albeit in a kinder and gentler way.
- N) [CMEP Bulletin - Land Day – April 1, 2016](#)
- O) [PCBS: "As Palestinians Mark Land Day, Israeli Illegally Controls More Than 85% Of Palestine", Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistic \(PCBS\), March 30, 2016](#)
Israeli Occupation Authorities laid hand over more than 85% of the total area of historical land of Palestine which totals about 27,000 km². Arabs comprise 48% of the total population but utilize only 15% of the land.
- P) [Palestinian Authority on 'brink of collapse': Abbas, Middle East Eye, March 31, 2016](#)
President warns of 'bloody intifada' unless Israel halts military operations in West Bank and says he will meet Netanyahu 'anywhere, anytime'
- Q) [Why We Should Care About the Suicide Note of a Palestinian Teenage Knife Attacker, David Sarna Galdi, Haaretz, March 27, 2016](#)
Ahmad Amer approached Israeli soldiers at a West Bank checkpoint with a knife and was immediately killed. His short goodbye letter might ironically contain a message of hope.