

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
April 21, 2016



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The six featured articles and the many related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the impact of Western media's distorted framework of the conflicts in the Middle East; the development of a draft resolution by the Palestinian Authority to UN Security Council members; the appointment of Dani Dayan, the former chair of the Yesha Council of settlements, to serve as the Israeli government's new minister of hasbara; the disenfranchisement of Palestinians with comparisons to an apartheid state; the discussion of Israel's occupation by the U.S. presidential candidates, the release of the U.S. State Department's annual human rights report, and other articles of interest.

Commentary: The statements made by candidates in the U.S. presidential race are educating voters, especially younger Jewish Americans, on the reality of the Palestinian experience in Israel, East Jerusalem, the Occupied Territories, and Gaza. Only Bernie Sanders has broken the political taboo of criticizing Israel's treatment of Palestinians. He is supported by many younger voters who are dissatisfied with the discriminatory policies of successive Israeli governments and the Jewish organizations supportive of such policies.

The U.S. State Department's annual human rights report accuses Israeli forces of "excessive use of force" in the Palestinian territories, and "arbitrary arrest and associated torture and abuse, often with impunity," by the IDF, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas. This report comes months after Senator Patrick Leahy and nine other U.S. lawmakers asked Secretary of State John Kerry to investigate instances of possible extrajudicial killings by Israeli forces and "gross violations of human rights" by Israel and Egypt. While denying such criticisms, the Israeli government continues its oppressive activities and settlement expansion. The words attributed to U.S. President Abraham Lincoln are appropriate: "You can fool all the people some of the time and some of the people all of the time, but you cannot fool all of the people all of the time." More of the U.S. people are no longer fooled; Israel like most countries of the world is being called to accountability for its actions.

- Rabbi Michael Lerner in Tikkun prints an article by Uri Avnery on the shifting alliances in the Middle East giving his readers a larger view of the conflicts.
- Barak Ravid in Haaretz writes of a draft resolution by the Palestinian Authority to UN Security Council stressing the urgent need to end the Israeli occupation and settler terror against Palestinians.
- Rogel Alpher notes in Haaretz that Dani Dayan, Israel's new minister of hasbara, who was recently appointed Israel's consul general in New York, believes the Palestinians have accepted the presence of settlers throughout the West Bank.
- Haaretz, Bradley Burston asks in Haaretz that if all the Israelis can expect in the light of terrible reality of occupation for the foreseeable future: One State, indivisible, under a Jewish God, with relative liberty for Jews, and injustice for all others. What happens to the dream, the goal, the value, of democracy in Israel?
- James M. Wall states in Wallwritings that U.S. media is so obsessed with the U.S. presidential election that they are not reporting on Israel's increase in settlement construction.
- The Times of Israel notes that the U.S. State Department's annual human rights report accuses Israel of using excessive force against Palestinians in that nearly half of Palestinians killed by Israel were not carrying out attacks, and many times did not pose a threat to life.

1) [Uri Avnery on the Shifting Alliances in the Middle East](#), Rabbi Michael Lerner, Tikkun, April 3, 2016

“One of the most famous lines in German poetry is “Don’t greet me under the lime trees.” The Jewish-German poet Heinrich Heine asks his sweetheart not to embarrass him in public by greeting him in the main street of Berlin, which is called “Unter den Linden” (“Under the Lime Trees”). Israel is in the position of this illicit sweetheart. Arab countries are having an affair with her, but don’t want to be seen with her in public. Too embarrassing.

THE MAIN Arab country in question is Saudi Arabia. For some time now, the oil kingdom has been a secret ally of Israel, and *vice versa*. In politics, national interests often trump ideological differences. This is so in this case.

The area referred to by Westerners as the “Middle East” is now polarized into two camps, led respectively by Saudi Arabia and Iran. The northern arc consists of Shiite Iran, present-day Iraq with its Shiite majority, the main Syrian territory controlled by the Alawite (close to Shiite) community and Shiite Hezbollah in Lebanon.” . . .

“Binyamin Netanyahu’s advisers boast that never has the geopolitical situation of Israel been better than it is now. The Arabs are busy with their quarrels. Many Arab countries want to strengthen their secret ties with Israel. The ties with Egypt are not even secret. The Egyptian military dictator openly cooperates with Israel in strangling the Gaza Strip with its close to two million Palestinian inhabitants. The Strip is ruled by Hamas, a movement that the Egyptian government claims is connected with its enemy, Daesh.” . . .

“THIS IS where we return to the lime trees. None of our secret Arab friends want us greet them openly. Egypt, with which we have an official peace treaty, does not welcome Israeli tourists anymore. They are advised not to go there.

“Saudi Arabia and its allies do not want any open and formal relations with Israel. On the contrary, they continue to speak about Israel as during the worst stages of Arab rejectionism.

“They all quote the same reason: the oppression of the Palestinian people. They all say the same: official relations with Israel will come only after the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The masses of the Arab peoples everywhere are far too emotionally involved with the plight of the Palestinians to tolerate official connections between their rulers and Israel.

“These rulers all embrace the same conditions, which were put forward by Yasser Arafat and included in the Saudi peace plan: a free Palestinian state side by side with Israel, mutually agreed borders based on the June 1967 lines with minor exchanges of territory, an “agreed” return of the refugees (“agreed” with Israel, meaning at most a symbolic return of a very limited number).

“Israeli governments have never responded to this plan. Today, under Binyamin Netanyahu, they are further from these peace conditions than ever. Almost every day our government enacts laws, enlarges settlements, takes measures and makes declarations that push Israel further away from any peace that Arab countries could accept.”

2) [Palestinian UN Draft Resolution Calls for Conclusion of Peace Talks Within a Year](#), Barak Ravid, Haaretz, April 8, 2016

“A draft resolution distributed by the Palestinian Authority to UN Security Council members asserts that Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem are illegal, calls to renew the peace talks and sets a timeframe of a year to reach a permanent solution to the conflict. A copy of the draft was posted on the blog UN Report.” . . .

“The draft resolution asserts ‘all Israeli settlement activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, are illegal and constitute a major obstacle to the achievement of peace on the basis of the two-state solution.’ It also condemns ‘all measures aimed at altering the demographic composition, character and status of the Territory, including, inter alia, construction and expansion of settlements, confiscation of land, demolition of homes and the forced transfer of Palestinian civilians.’”

“The draft further brings up the obligation under the Quartet Roadmap to freeze settlement construction, including 'natural growth,' and to dismantle all illegal settlement outposts.” . . .

“In the draft, the Security Council reiterates its vision of two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, living peacefully side by side, and stresses that there is an urgent need to end the Israeli occupation and reach just peace based on UN resolutions, the Arab Peace Initiative and the Roadmap.

“As per the draft, the Security Council would call on all sides to invest efforts to renew genuine negotiations on all core issues. Moreover, it urges the international community to advance the process and mentions the importance of the Arab Peace Initiative in this context.”

See also Link A - [Obama, Support Abbas' UN Resolution, No Matter What Netanyahu Says](#); Link B - [Israel's Unsung Protector: Obama](#); Link C - [Palestinians Circulating Draft UN Resolution Condemning Israeli Settlements](#); Link D - [To save his Middle East legacy, Obama must recognise a Palestinian state now](#),

3) [The Israeli Right's Monstrous Naiveté on the Occupation](#), Rogel Alpher, Haaretz, April 9, 2016

“The grand obsession of the Israeli right is hasbara, public diplomacy. Benjamin Netanyahu, Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman are all convinced that if they could only explain the situation with logic and vigor, the world would understand. If the world would only listen, it would open its eyes. The criticism of the occupation, and the foolish insistence on the two-state solution, would end.

“This obsession reveals the right's innocence. The right, of course, tends to accuse the left of naiveté. But the truth is that the extent of right-wing naiveté is monstrous. The right-wing government's new minister of hasbara is the former chairman of the Yesha Council of settlements, Dani Dayan, who was recently appointed Israel's consul general in New York. He has declared that his main job is hasbara. He knows how to do it right, he said. He'll tell them.” . . .

“He went so far in his utopia as to say that “Palestinians need to return to Israeli cities, and not only as blue-collar workers. Palestinian academics should be included in Israel's advanced industries: An engineer from Ramallah should be able to work in Tel Aviv, and a Palestinian doctor treating patients in an Israeli hospital should not be a rare sight.” He called for rehabilitating the refugee camps out of recognition that a two-state solution is obsolete. We can only conclude that this naive man is simply detached from reality, deluded. He doesn't know any settlers like Habayit Hayehudi MK Bezalel Smotrich. And he doesn't know any 15-year-old Palestinian boys.

“The problem is that his illusion, his utterly false picture of the world, is shared by everyone on the right. This hallucinatory, impossible vision is its vision. That's what the right has to offer. That's their explanation. And they call John Kerry messianic.”

4) [One Thing Which Could Change Everything: Give the Palestinians the Vote](#), Haaretz, Bradley Burston Apr 12, 2016

“This is a place where dreams come to die. We've all watched many of our dreams here die a violent death. Others, more tenacious perhaps, manage to expire of old age.

“And then there's the one about Two States. An immense number of people here, Arabs and Jews alike, along with a surprising number of supporters of BDS, and even some settlers, are in agreement about Two States. They will tell you:

1. "It's what I would like to see happen here." And also:

2. "It can't be done."

. . . "One State, indivisible, under a Jewish God, with relative liberty for Jews, and injustice for all others. What happens to the dream, the goal, the value, of democracy in Israel?"

"The One State reality certifies that there is no difference between Israel on the one hand, and, on the other, the parallel, separate and grossly unequal systems of law, human rights, social services, and self-determination under which Jews and Palestinians live in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. It is the One State reality which truly invites comparisons to an apartheid state. And more than any other single element, it is the disenfranchisement of Palestinians which clinches the comparison.

"Can anything be done to change this? There is one thing. One thing which could change everything:

"Give the Palestinians the vote. Offer Israeli citizenship and equal rights to all of the Palestinians of the West Bank. In a groundbreaking 2010 article, journalist Noam Sheizaf surveyed the many figures on the Israeli right who supported such a move. Prominent among them was President Reuven Rivlin, then speaker of the Knesset." . . .

5) [White House Campaign Shields Israel's Occupation Ferocity](#), James M. Wall, Wallwritings, on April 12, 2016

"So obsessed is U.S. media with this year's headlong dash for the White House, that Israel's increase in settlement construction has gone by us like a snake sliding into a back yard recycling bin.

"The Paris-based news agency, AFP reported from Jerusalem this week that "the number of West Bank settlements Israel plans to build" has more than tripled "in the first quarter of 2016 compared to the same period last year". Israeli-based Peace Now, a settlement watchdog, said in a statement "that between January and March, projects for 674 housing units passed at least one of the steps in the planning approval process, up from 194 in the first quarter of 2015".

"The absence of media attention to such a development is no surprise. The mainline media narrative on Israel/Palestine is already conditioned to treat Israel as a 51st U.S. state, surrounded by "terrorists". With attention directed more than usual to a domestic conflict between and within two political parties, what happens in Israel/Palestine stays in Israel/Palestine. Local U.S. conflicts are better copy especially if they involve name calling and ugly innuendos." . . .

"If it is wrong for a foreign power to buy loyalty from American politicians, is it not also wrong for American police chiefs and Christian pastors to accept Israel's free trips to a foreign nation? Are these freebie trips to Israel designed to educate? Of course they are not. They are a form of hashish which creates an addictive bond to a foreign power. For pastors it can mean slanted sermons. For police chiefs it can lead to massive purchases of military assault weapons to "keep the peace" in our cities." . . .

"The media knows what its subjects will read, watch and buy. Meanwhile, Israel's occupation ferocity, shielded from an indifferent American public, grows more oppressive by the day, and especially, by the night."

6) [U.S. accuses Israel of using excessive force against Palestinians](#), Times of Israel Staff, April 14, 2016

"The annual report by the State Department into human rights abuses around the world accused Israeli forces of "excessive use of force" in the Palestinian territories, and "arbitrary arrest and associated torture and abuse, often with impunity," by the IDF, the Palestinian Authority and Hamas.

"According to numbers cited in the report, 149 Palestinians were killed in 2015 by Israeli security forces, but only 77 were in the course of attacking Israelis.

“There were numerous reports of the ISF (Israel security forces) killing Palestinians during riots, demonstrations, at checkpoints, and during routine operations; in some cases they did not pose a threat to life,’ the report read.” . . .

“The State Department report said the biggest human rights violations in Israel were terror attacks against civilians, and “institutional and societal discrimination” against Arabs, Israelis of Ethiopian extraction, women, non-Orthodox Jews and migrants.

“In the Palestinian territories, the report singled out the PA for failing ‘to condemn incidents of anti-Semitic expression and embraced as ‘martyrs’ individuals who died while carrying out attacks on Israeli civilians.’

“ Hamas, it said, was guilty of a slew of human rights abuses in the Gaza Strip, including ‘security forces killing, torturing, arbitrarily detaining, and harassing opponents, including Fatah members, and other Palestinians with impunity. Terrorist organizations and militant factions in the Gaza Strip launched rocket and mortar attacks against civilian targets in Israel, and they did so at or near civilian locations in Gaza.’

“The report also pointed at Israeli legislation forcing foreign government-funded NGOs to take certain measures, which critics say would target groups critical of the government.” . . .

Other articles of interest:

- A) [Obama, Support Abbas' UN Resolution, No Matter What Netanyahu Says, Haaretz Editorial, April 9, 2016](#)
Security Council members, especially the United States, must adopt this peace-advancing move and ignore the denunciations of the prime minister.
- B) [Israel's Unsung Protector: Obama, Lara Friedman, New York Times, April 10, 2016](#)
With the Obama administration in its final year, several officials have said that the president has grown so frustrated with trying to revive Middle East peace talks that he may lay down his own outline for an Israeli-Palestinian two-state peace agreement, in the form of a resolution in the United Nations Security Council.
- C) [Palestinians Circulating Draft UN Resolution Condemning Israeli Settlements, Barak Ravid and Jack Khoury, Haaretz, April 7, 2016](#)
Abbas wants to bring the resolution to a Security Council vote during his visit in New York in about two weeks, but Netanyahu slams proposal as pushing peace further away.
- D) [To save his Middle East legacy, Obama must recognise a Palestinian state now, Ibrahim Fraihat, Middleeast Eye, April 13, 2016](#)
The time has come for Obama to shape his legacy in the Middle East the way he wants it, not the way Netanyahu lobbied to characterize it. Driven by the search for his legacy in the Middle East, it seems President Barack Obama has decided to spend additional political capital on reviving Israeli-Palestinian talks before the end of his second term in office.
- E) [From Israeli jail, 'nonviolent' bid to 'free Palestine' takes shape, Avi Issacharoff, Times of Israel, April 11, 2016](#)
Aiming to succeed Abbas, convicted murderer and Nobel-hopeful Marwan Barghouti said to coordinate campaign with Fatah, Hamas and Islamic Jihad.
- F) [Israel's dangerous new transfer tactic in Jerusalem, Munir Nuseibah, : Al-Shabaka Maanews, April 13, 2016](#)
Israel is adept at creating new Palestinian refugees and internally displaced persons, taking advantage of every opportunity to do so and exploiting temporary crises to promote permanent measures. Today it is using the recent violence in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to introduce a dangerous new twist to its long-standing residency revocation policy to force Palestinians out of East Jerusalem.

- G) [How Netanyahu sows fear among Israelis, Mazal Mualem, Al-Monitor, April 1, 2016](#)
 Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas talks with Israeli journalists and writers, while Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu uses rhetoric of fear, and keeps pointing an accusing finger at the Palestinians.
- H) [Will a two-state solution be announced in November?, Akiva Eldar, Al-Monitor, April 5, 2016](#)
 The US administration is discreetly testing Israeli and Palestinian reactions to three options it is currently contemplating to advance the two-state solution.
- I) [UN: Two-state solution 'in danger', MA'AN NEWS AGENCY, April 14, 2016](#)
 The viability of the internationally-backed two-state solution is "in danger," the UN said in a press release Thursday, citing culpability on both the Israeli and Palestinian sides. The press release was issued by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process (UNSCO) to announce their latest report to be presented next week to the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) at the bi-annual meeting in Brussels.
- J) [A Wake-up Call: Celebrating Half a Century of Israeli Occupation, Ari Shavit, Haaretz, April 7, 2016](#)
 At the end of 50 years, it will be clear what our revealed choice has been: We prefer the Land of Israel over the values of Israel.
- K) [Why Israel needs a two-state solution, Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, April 6, 2016](#)
 Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's view of Islamic State terror as a clash of civilizations paints Israel as the "good guy," absolving it of resolving the conflict with the Palestinians. This is not Obama's view.
- L) [CMEP Bulletin – April 8, 2016 - Moving Toward Peace?](#)
- M) [CMEP Bulletin – April 15, UNSC Resolution: Unilateral or Pro-Peace?](#)
- N) [Bernie Sanders Names Anti-occupation Activist as Jewish Outreach Coordinator, Uriel Heilman, Haaretz, Apr 13, 2016](#)
 Simone Zimmerman objects to Jewish federation funding for Israeli projects in the West Bank and wrote favorably of a pro-BDS group and protested the 2014 Gaza war. She is the Bernie Sanders campaign's newly hired national Jewish outreach coordinator, is quite familiar with the American Jewish establishment and is used to fighting against it.
- O) [Simone Zimmerman, the Latest Victim of the U.S. Jewish Right's Witch Hunt, M. Dove Kent, Haaretz, April 15, 2016](#)
 The vicious offensive by the Jewish Right and its mainstream collaborators against Simone Zimmerman is just part of their ongoing attempts to choke the justice-based Jewish politics she represents.
- P) [Bernie Sanders vs. the Out-of-touch American Jewish Establishment, Max Berger, Haaretz, April 16, 2016](#)
 Sanders' Jewish socialism, his recognition of the injustice of the occupation, is a rebuke to those in the U.S. and Israel who believe Jews should only care about other Jews' freedom and dignity. No wonder they're trying to marginalize him.
- Q) [Has Israeli army become defender of democracy?, Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, April 10, 2016](#)
 In the case of the IDF soldier who shot a Palestinian assailant on the ground, it was Chief of Staff Gadi Eizenkot who defended categorically the army ethics and values of democracy.
- R) ['The smell of death hangs everywhere': Blockade drives Gazans to suicide, Mohammed Omer, Middleeast Eye, April 11, 2016](#)
 Doctors and officials say devastating impact of Gaza war is to blame for growing numbers attempting to take their own lives

- S) [Corrupt Palestinian Officials Too Comfortable to Resist the Israeli Occupation, Haaretz, Amira Hass April 11, 2016](#)
Palestinians don't need the Panama Papers to expose what they see as corruption in the ranks of their leaders — there is visible concrete evidence of it everywhere
- T) [Israeli Soldiers Kidnap 31 Palestinians, Including 14 elderly Men, IMEMC News, April 14, 2016](#)
Israeli soldiers carried out, late at night Wednesday and on Thursday at dawn, massive invasions and searches of homes and property in different parts of the occupied West Bank, and kidnapped 31 Palestinians, including a child in Bethlehem, and 14 elderly men from Jerusalem.