

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
September 27, 2012



[Find previous weeks' Middle East Notes here.](#)

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

This week's articles focus on the two-state/one-state debate; procrastination on a peace plan; the use of the Oslo Accords to promote apartheid; responses and reactions from Palestinian, Israeli, and U.S. American Jewish sources to the Romney video comments on the Palestinians; "warehousing;" a peace-less status quo; and other issues.

- **September 21, 2012 Churches for Middle East Bulletin:** This week's Bulletin gives attention to the 1967 borders, the two-state solution, the peace plan, and other issues.
- **In new video, Romney says Palestinians have no interest in peace with Israel:** In Ha'aretz, Natasha Mozgovaya and the Associated Press write that U.S. Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney was caught on video telling donors that the Palestinians have no interest in peace with Israel, and that they are committed to its destruction and elimination.
- **Palestinians condemn Romney for suggesting they aren't interested in peace:** Ha'aretz printed an article from the Associated Press and Reuters noting that Palestinians leaders have denounced Romney's remarks.
- **Americans for Peace Now (APN) calls on Romney to repudiate anti-Israel comments:** APN decries Romney's statements suggesting that peace is not possible and that therefore the U.S. should "kick the ball down the field and hope that ultimately, somehow, something will happen and resolve it."
- **"A message from Romnyahu":** In this recent column, Uri Averny notes that Romney stated that "the Palestinians" want to destroy Israel. According to him, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has no solution, it will go on forever.
- **Palestinian leaders call for "liberation" from Oslo Accords:** Maan News Agency reports that Palestinian National Initiative leader Mustafa Barghouti said these accords turned out to be "a transition to nothing," and had been used as a cover by Israel "to consolidate a system of apartheid."
- **Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD) endorses one-state solution, warns against "warehousing" of Palestinians:** Over the past 15 years, ICAHD has actively resisted the Israeli occupation. For almost that long ICAHD has argued that the two-state solution is dead and gone, based on its intimate knowledge both of Israeli politics and the massive "facts" that Israel has imposed on the Occupied Palestinian Territory.
- **Israel's idée fixe of a peace-less status quo is returning:** A Ha'aretz editorial reports that the idée fixe that preferred the status quo to a peace initiative already exacted a heavy price from Israel 39 years ago. Alarmingly, this destructive idée fixe is returning.

1) [Churches for Middle East Bulletin, September 21, 2012](#)

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict came up on the campaign trail this week thanks to the release of a [clandestinely recorded video](#) in a closed-door fundraiser in May for Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney. Romney spends over three minutes replying to a donor who asked the candidate how the "Palestinian problem" can be solved and his answer is providing plenty of fodder for columnists and

pundits. Many address his statements regarding the Palestinian desire for peace and the feasibility of the 1967 lines and a two state solution while others raise new questions about the role of the U.S. as a mediator in the conflict and how President Barack Obama has fared thus far.

No Palestinian interest in peace? Romney begins his answer saying, “I’m torn by two perspectives in this regard. One is the one which I’ve had for some time, which is that the Palestinians have no interest whatsoever in establishing peace, and that the pathway to peace is almost unthinkable to accomplish.” After presenting his case for the geographic infeasibility of Palestinian sovereignty, he tells the donors, “And I look at the Palestinians not wanting to see peace anyway, for political purposes, committed to the destruction and elimination of Israel, and these thorny issues, and I say, ‘There’s just no way.’”

The *Washington Post* [took Romney to task](#) for saying that Palestinians have no interest in peace and are committed to the destruction of Israel. The article remarks, “Romney’s comments could marginalize the more moderate Palestinians seeking peace negotiations with Israel and empower the armed groups, which argue that peace talks are futile.”

The same article goes on to provide some nuance regarding the different Palestinian factions that is missing in the candidates remarks. The article explains: “The armed Islamist party Hamas, which governs the Gaza Strip, has refused to acknowledge Israel’s right to exist and calls for its destruction in its founding charter. But the secular Fatah movement and the Palestine Liberation Organization, the main umbrella organization that excludes Hamas, recognized Israel in the early 1990s and continue to seek a two-state solution.” ...

1967 lines not secure? Romney also explains the infeasibility of a Palestinian state in his remarks: “Some might say, well, let’s let the Palestinians have the West Bank, and have security, and set up a separate nation for the Palestinians. And then come a couple of thorny questions. And I don’t have a map here to look at the geography, but the border between Israel and the West Bank is obviously right there, right next to Tel Aviv, which is the financial capital, the industrial capital of Israel, the center of Israel. It’s—what the border would be? Maybe seven miles from Tel Aviv to what would be the West Bank...”

“And of course the Iranians would want to do through the West Bank exactly what they did through Lebanon, what they did near Gaza. Which is that the Iranians would want to bring missiles and armament into the West Bank and potentially threaten Israel. So Israel of course would have to say, “That can’t happen. We’ve got to keep the Iranians from bringing weaponry into the West Bank.” Well, that means that—who? The Israelis are going to patrol the border between Jordan, Syria, and this new Palestinian nation? Well, the Palestinians would say, “Uh, no way! We’re an independent country. You can’t, you know, guard our border with other Arab nations.”

New York Times blogger Robert Mackey [gives some background](#) on these comments, writing: “Mr. Romney’s argument about the region’s geography also seemed to echo remarks made last year by Mr. Netanyahu, who told President Obama last year that Israel ‘cannot go back to the 1967 lines,’ because the country’s borders before it seized the West Bank and East Jerusalem that year were ‘indefensible.’ In an address to Congress the same week, Mr. Netanyahu insisted that, in any negotiated settlement, it would be ‘absolutely vital for Israel’s security that a Palestinian state be fully demilitarized. And it is vital that Israel maintain a long-term military presence along the Jordan River.’”

The two-state solution: No way? In addition to those comments, critics jumped on the conclusion that when it comes to a Palestinian state, “There’s just no way.” Ali Gharib writes for the *Daily Beast*, “It won’t happen. It’s a nice idea, but just impossible to do. [That’s about how Mitt Romney feels about the two-state solution](#) to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.”

In July, Romney told the Israeli paper *Ha'aretz* that [he supported two states](#), saying: “I believe in a two-state solution which suggests there will be two states, including a Jewish state. I respect Israel’s right to remain a Jewish state. The question is not whether the people of the region believe that there should be a Palestinian state. The question is if they believe there should be an Israeli state, a Jewish state.”

The day after the video clip was released, [more footage came to light](#) that picks up where the original leaves off. In the full clip, Romney does not rule out the possibility of a Palestinian state. He continues: “But I always keep open: the idea of pushing on the Israelis to give something up to get the Palestinians to act is the worst idea in the world. We have done that time and time again. It does not work. So the only answer is show them strength. American strength, American resolve, and the Palestinians will some day reach the point where they want peace more than we’re trying to force peace on them. Then it’s worth having the discussion. So until then, it’s just wistful thinking.”

Peace plan: Procrastinate: Another lightning-rod moment came as the video concludes with Romney saying: “And so what you do is you say, ‘You move things along the best way you can.’ You hope for some degree of stability, but you recognize that this is going to remain an unsolved problem...All right, we have a potentially volatile situation but we sort of live with it, and we kick the ball down the field and hope that ultimately, somehow, something will happen and resolve it. We don’t go to war to try and resolve it imminently.”

The comment divided the pundits and the [Huffington Post reports an array of perspectives](#). Dennis Ross, a former Middle East peace negotiator and policy adviser for President Barack Obama and former president Bill Clinton, disagrees with Romney’s “kick the ball down the field approach. He told the *Huffington Post*: “I’m a big believer in not creating a false set of expectations, but I’m also a believer in that if you think something is stuck, you come up with an approach and try to change the dynamic. If you basically just say it’s all hopeless, you just make hopelessness a self-fulfilling prophecy...I don’t think we would want to convey an approach that says there is nothing to be done. If you say there’s nothing to be done, you’re going to find it very difficult to sustain stability.”

Aaron David Miller, a former U.S. peace negotiator now a fellow at the Woodrow Wilson Center also told the *Huffington Post* that he found the comments accurate. “To me, the idea that an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement may not be possible is simply an acknowledgement of reality. In my view, the emperor has been seen to have no clothes on this issue for quite a number of years.”

Finally, Daniel Levy, former negotiator in the Ehud Barak government believes that while the statement is true, it is not in the United States’ interest to actually say it. He said: “Of course the peace process is dead -- totally dead. But if you officially declare the peace process is dead, you encourage what is already an existing if not growing part of the Palestinian side that says, well, forget it, let’s have equal rights, or one state, or a full-on boycott of Israel -- all of which might be wise from Palestinian perspective, but none are going to be helpful from an American perspective.” ...

Take action this election season: With the campaign season in full swing you have an opportunity to raise your concern for peace in the Holy Land. Incumbents and challengers are spending their time on the campaign trail talking with constituents like you. Asking questions now, when candidates are asking for your vote, can influence their actions when they come to Washington. In town hall meetings, meet and greets, letters-to-the editor and through individual correspondence you can let your candidates know your concerns about the role of the U.S. in ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

CMEP has prepared some [sample questions](#) for you to ask your candidates. You can email your incumbent [here](#) and find information for challengers [here](#).

Further reading: *The New York Times* continues coverage of the [deteriorating economic situation](#) in the West Bank. Palestinians are protesting the rising cost of living and recent austerity measures that aimed to mitigate the crisis.

A group of Palestinian women has [formed an all-female bloc](#) to run in Hebron's municipal elections slated for next month. They have ambitious election goals and are confident because, as one candidate says, "Women can make the impossible possible."

The *BBC* [investigates the criminals](#) behind the spate of "price tag" attacks in the West Bank and Israel.

Ynet reports that Defense Minister Ehud Barak made a [surprise decision to not impose a closure](#) on the West Bank over Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, in contrast to previous holidays in the last few years. Instead, Israeli authorities will remain on high alert with an increased presence.

[***Read the entire Bulletin here.***](#)

2) [In new video, Romney says Palestinians have no interest in peace with Israel](#)

Natasha Mozgovaya and the Associated Press

Ha'aretz, September 18, 2012

... In the video published on [September 18], Romney admitted that he has "two perspectives" on the [Israel-Palestine] issue. The first is that "the Palestinians have no interest whatsoever in establishing peace, and that the pathway to peace is almost unthinkable to accomplish."

"I look at the Palestinians not wanting to see peace anyway, for political purposes, committed to the destruction and elimination of Israel," he said.

The second perspective came from a former secretary of state, who Romney didn't name. "This individual said to me, you know, I think there's a prospect for a settlement between the Palestinians and the Israelis after the Palestinian elections. I said, "Really?"

Romney's answer was pretty lengthy, and didn't seem to favor this other perspective. He earlier vividly outlined to donors the threats posed by a future Palestinian state, particularly in view of Iran's presence in the region, lambasting a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict. ...

Later on Tuesday, the grandson of former U.S. President Jimmy Carter claimed he persuaded the source who secretly taped Romney to release the full video to the media.

James Carter IV said he was intrigued after seeing what he describes as a short, mysterious clip of Romney talking about Chinese factory conditions. He told The Associated Press that he tracked the source down on Twitter in August and convinced them to trust a journalist at Mother Jones magazine with the clips.

The Republican presidential candidate has never tried to position himself as a friend of the Palestinians or even as a fair intermediary. During his visit to Israel in August he did not visit Ramallah and [he angered Palestinians](#) a great deal when during a breakfast with wealthy donors in Jerusalem he explained that cultural differences were responsible for Israel's economic success, as opposed to the Palestinian's low GDP. When Palestinians called his remarks racist, he published an op-ed justifying them. ...

[***Read the entire article on Ha'aretz's website.***](#)

3) [Palestinians condemn Romney for suggesting they aren't interested in peace](#)

From the Associated Press and Reuters, reprinted on Ha'aretz, September 19, 2012

Another response to the Romney video: Palestinian leaders respond to Romney's remarks on the prospects for peace between Israel and the Palestinians. [Read it here.](#)

4) [Americans for Peace Now calls on Romney to repudiate anti-Israel comments](#)

September 19, 2012

Americans for Peace Now (APN) – established in 1981 to mobilize support for the Israeli peace movement, Shalom Achshav (Peace Now) – released the following statement by its president and CEO, Debra DeLee:

"We call on GOP presidential candidate Mitt Romney to repudiate his statements suggesting that peace is not possible and that therefore the U.S. should 'kick the ball down the field and hope that ultimately, somehow, something will happen and resolve it.'

"Such statements suggest that Romney is misinformed, that he has no understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or that he has adopted the misguided, dangerous views of some of his hardline, anti-peace, anti-two-state-solution backers in the U.S. and Israel. ..."

[Read the entire statement at APN's website.](#)

5) [A message from Romnyahu](#)

Uri Avnery, Gush-Shalom.org

September 22, 2012

Once upon a time, President Richard Nixon wanted to appoint a certain lawyer to the U.S. Supreme Court. "But the man is a complete moron!" one senator exclaimed. "So what," answered another, "There are a great many morons in the U.S., and they have a right to be represented in the court as much as any other sector of society."

Perhaps the United Morons of America have a right to elect Mitt Romney president. But for the sake of the U.S. and Israel, I hope that this will not happen. Some people say that Israel is the 51st state of the Union. Some say that it is the first among the 51. Whatever, our lives – and perhaps our deaths – depend to a great extent on the man in the White House. So, with all my misgivings (and I have a lot) about Barack Obama, I very much hope that he will be reelected.

In his latest seizure of wisdom, Romney did not only disclose that 47 percent of Americans are parasites, but also that "the Palestinians" want to destroy Israel. According to him, the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians has no solution, it will go on forever. I wonder where he got this last piece from.

In Nazi Germany there was a certain Herr Doktor Otto Dietrich, a functionary of the Ministry for Propaganda. Every day, he would gather the editors of the important newspapers in Berlin and tell them what their headline and editorial were going to be the next day. That was before the Internet and fax. Nowadays, the Prime Minister's office faxes a daily 'page of messages' to Netanyahu's ministers and other stooges, telling them what messages they are to spread.

I strongly suspect that Romney read this page of messages just before he met his audience, composed of billionaires (or mere millionaires). After all, he couldn't have invented these astounding pieces of insight all by himself, could he? ...

[Read the entire piece on Uri Avnery's website.](#)

6) Palestinian leaders call for “liberation” from Oslo Accords

Maan News Agency, September 13, 2012

Palestinian leaders ... called for release from the Oslo Accords, on the 19th anniversary of the signing of the agreements.

The accords, signed Sept. 13, 1993, were meant to be an interim agreement leading to a final peace agreement and an independent Palestinian state within five years.

Palestinian National Initiative leader Mustafa Barghouti said the accords turned out to be “a transition to nothing,” and had been used as a cover by Israel “to consolidate a system of apartheid.”

“We as Palestinians need to liberate ourselves from the terrible conditions of the agreement,” through popular resistance, national unity and boycott, divestment and sanctions, Barghouti told Ma'an.

The Palestinian side has committed to the agreement while Israel selectively implements the accords to its benefit, Barghouti said, adding that 19 years on the concept of the two-state solution was at risk due to Israeli settlement building.

Fatah leader Mahmoud al-Aloul on Thursday called on the PA to abolish the Oslo Accords as Israel had refused to commit to its obligations and instead continued land grabs and settlement expansion in the West Bank. Negotiations toward a final peace agreement won't succeed because Israel doesn't want peace, al-Aloul added.

The Oslo Accords have been the focus of demonstrations across the West Bank in September. Protesters angry at rising prices complained that the economic sections of the treaty have been implemented by Israel selectively and mostly to its benefit, a position shared by UN agencies and economists.

[Read the entire article here.](#)

7) In the name of justice: ICAHD raises key issues around a single state as a step towards resolving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Jeff Halper and Itay Epshtain, Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD)

September 13, 2012

Over the past 15 years, ICAHD has actively resisted the Israeli Occupation. For almost that long we have argued that the two-state solution is dead and gone, based on our intimate knowledge both of Israeli politics and the massive “facts” that Israel has imposed on the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), and constantly expands. However, ICAHD has refrained from advocating for any particular solution to the conflict, believing that is the Palestinians’ prerogative. We do not rule out the two-state solution in principle (although it is not fair or just), especially if the Palestinians nevertheless decide to go that way. ICAHD supports any solution – be it two-state, one-state or regional – which offers a just and inclusive peace and is acceptable to our Palestinian partners. In fact, because a workable resolution of the conflict must involve the entire region, we have long proposed a Middle East economic confederation including, at a minimum, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. From that perspective, the creation of a

single state in Palestine/Israel may represent only a stage, albeit an unavoidable stage, towards a more comprehensive solution.

But with the two-state solution gone, apartheid unacceptable and a Middle Eastern economic confederation a distant vision, it seems time to seriously consider the only alternative available to us at this time: the creation of a single state between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. To be sure, the idea has been raised before, but it remains ambiguous. There are fundamental variations and disagreements even among one-state proponents themselves. Political clarity is vital, especially if such a solution is – or is not – inclusive of Israelis. Indeed, does post-apartheid South Africa inspire our joint aspirations or is Algeria the model, whereby the Israeli “colonists” (if they are that) leave or are driven out when Palestine is liberated? If the state is to be inclusive, should it be a unitary democratic state, a bi-national one or a combination? Will the solution be one defined purely by politics, or will the rights and obligations of all parties be guided indeed by international law and human rights treaties?

[In brief, ICAHD believes that]:

1. A just peace and the process leading up to it must conform to human rights, international law and UN resolutions in respect to both the national and individual rights of both peoples.
2. A just peace must be inclusive.
3. A just peace requires that the refugee issue be addressed directly.
4. A just peace must address the security concerns of all in the region.
5. A just peace must be regional in scope.

[Read the entire lengthy piece – ICAHD’s attempt to kindle a searching and honest discussion over where this situation is headed – on the ICAHD website.](#)

[8\) Israel’s idée fixe of a peace-less status quo is returning](#)

Ha’aretz editorial, September 20, 2012

On the 19th anniversary of the Declaration of Principles (the Oslo I Accord) between Israel and the PLO, and on the 17th anniversary of the Interim Agreement (Oslo II), the Oslo process has hit rock bottom.

The Palestinian leaders warn about the danger of revoking the agreements and plan to ask the UN General Assembly to recognize a Palestinian state in the 1967 borders. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and chief negotiator Saeb Erekat have expressed the Palestinians’ growing disappointment with the occupation, settlement expansion and the standstill in the peace process. The frustration from the unripe fruit of peace is undermining the position of Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, who is trying to quash any attempt to renew the terror attacks against Israelis.

The Oslo Accords were intended to pave the way to the occupation’s end and the establishment of a Palestinian state in the 1990s. Giving Israel exclusive authority over Area C was meant to be a brief stage on the way to a permanent arrangement. The World Bank report released yesterday strengthens the Palestinians’ claim that driving them out of this area, which covers more than 60 percent of the West Bank, restricts the development of an independent Palestinian economy and harms the Palestinian Authority’s trade relations with countries around the world.

Hamas leaders objecting to the Oslo Accords have been joined by Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who described the agreements designed to end the conflict as “the most dismal failure in our history.” He called on Israel to reexamine them.

[Read the entire editorial on Ha’aretz’s website.](#)