

Middle East Notes

Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns

October 11, 2012



[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes](#)

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

This week's Middle East Notes includes copies of the Kairos USA newsletter and the UN NGO Action News, along with articles on apartheid, possible replacement of the Oslo Accords, and U.S.-Israeli opposition to a possible UN recognition of a Palestine as a non-member state.

- **October 5 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** This week's Bulletin includes responses to the UN speeches by Netanyahu and Abbas, warnings about delayed negotiations, vandalism of another Christian monastery, and other readings about the continuing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- **Christian leaders sign letter on U.S. military aid to Israel:** In a recent letter to Congress, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns and over a dozen other Christian groups urged the U.S. to investigate possible human rights and weapon violations by the government of Israel. The signers cited likely violations by Israel of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act and the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which exclude assistance to any country that engages in a consistent pattern of human rights abuse and limit the use of U.S. weapons to "internal security" or "legitimate self-defense."
- **Plan to replace Oslo Accord:** In this new plan, Israel would help Palestine be accepted as a UN member, and be the first country to recognize the new state.
- **Real leadership gave South Africa a new future. It can do the same in the Middle East:** Terence English, a retired surgeon working in Gaza, states in the Independent that as the two-state solution becomes progressively more problematic, a third option – a single democratic, pluralistic, bi-national state – requires serious consideration.
- **The hard word of apartheid:** Ami Kaufman wonders how much longer before all Israelis accept it the use of this word as applied to themselves in relation to the Palestinians; how many more Palestinian and Israeli lives will perish before the hardest word of them all sinks in?
- **Severe consequences against the Palestinian Authority:** Dr. Hanaan Ashrawi writes that the United States sent a memorandum to countries in the European Union warning of severe consequences against the Palestinian Authority should they go ahead with their plan to obtain UN recognition as a nonmember state.
- **Resource: Kairos USA newsletter:** Kairos USA works to unify and mobilize U.S. Christians, lay, academic and clergy to respond faithfully and boldly to the urgent situation in Israel and Palestine.
- **NGO Action News:** This is a project of the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations, and is intended to provide information on NGO activities relevant to the question of Palestine.

1) Churches for Middle East Bulletin

October 5, 2012

Addressing barriers to peace: The speeches by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to the UN General Assembly, just hours apart, left the

pundits ruminating this week about where to place blame for the moribund peace process. While some singled out one party, others were more helpful and provided a more complete picture of the diplomatic landscape.

In a series for *Ynet*, Ron Ben-Yishai lists a few myths that he says the Israeli government [uses to put off negotiations](#). They include: the Arab Spring makes the region unstable, Abbas is a worthless leader, Palestinians won't launch a third intifada, the economic situation in the West Bank has never been better and the Fatah-Hamas division makes an agreement impossible.

He agrees that Abbas is in a precarious domestic political situation and has “no real incentive to make the bold decisions that are needed in order to formulate a permanent agreement based on compromise.” However he writes, “Abbas has a clear interest in moving forward with the negotiations. The problem is that he does not trust Netanyahu and is afraid he will fall prey to the rage of the masses in the event that he makes even the smallest concession without receiving anything in return from the Israeli premier.”

In a column focused on Syria, Jeffery Goldberg briefly shares his thoughts on [Obama's mismanagement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict](#). Specifically, he points to the president drawing “a line in the sand over settlements.” When Netanyahu only “partially and temporarily complied” with a settlement freeze in 2010, Obama did nothing to follow up. Goldberg suggests that Israelis keep “embarrassing and undercutting” the president because he will not do anything about it. In turn, he says Arab governments have lost faith in Obama since he did not follow through on the matter. Because of this, “he managed to freeze the peace process.”

Peter Beinart responds to Goldberg in his Open Zion forum at the *Daily Beast*. He writes that Obama did not freeze the peace process and instead the problem was the [election of Benjamin Netanyahu](#). Beinart admits that Obama's settlement freeze strategy was ill-advised but says the death knell for negotiations came when Netanyahu came into power and did not continue with the talks that his predecessor Ehud Olmert says were “four to six months” away from reaching a deal. Instead Netanyahu only endorsed the notion of a Palestinian state after U.S. pressure and several conditions. Beinart says, “Netanyahu's late father, Benzion, explained that his son only ‘supports it [a Palestinian state] under conditions that they will never accept.’”

In his conclusion, Beinart does concede that Abbas and Obama are responsible for some of the failures. He writes, “None of this is to suggest that the Palestinians and the Obama administration bear no blame for the failures of the last three plus years. Even if Abbas were willing to sign a deal (and that remains a big if), he'd still have to contend with Hamas. For his part, Obama has proven less able to nudge Netanyahu because he's failed to establish a rapport with Israel's people.”

Ideas and warnings abound: Other writers had ideas for what must be done to get the parties at the table and several issued dire warnings against attempting to sustain the status quo.

In the [second part of his analysis](#) for *Ynet*, Ron Ben-Yishai writes “lack of trust can be resolved with intense mediation efforts supported by Washington.” Goodwill gestures, such as releasing a group of 160 pre-Oslo era Palestinian prisoners could show the Israeli government is a trustworthy partner. He writes that one benefit of entering into negotiations is that it could

help remove “the Jewish state from its isolation in the international arena and help it garner support for the campaign against a nuclear Iran.”

In his [summary of the UN General Assembly speeches](#), J Street’s Jeremy Ben-Ami writes, “The next U.S. president will have only a brief window for meaningful diplomacy in the months following the election.” To ensure the president takes advantage of that brief window, “It’ll be our job to press for leadership and action from the White House. If we don’t succeed, I’m afraid we’re in for many more sessions at the United Nations filled with harsh rhetoric, simplistic imagery, and little hope of peaceful resolution to the difficult challenges ahead.”

Alon Ben-Meir takes a similar position and wrote a piece for the *Huffington Post* this week titled “Only the U.S. Can End the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict.” He advises whoever is in power after the inauguration to [immediately start working on resolving the conflict](#). He begins, “The Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be resolved without the direct and active involvement of the United States, using both inducements and coercive diplomacy to bring about a peaceful solution. If the conflict remains unresolved over the next couple of years it will most likely precipitate a massive violent conflagration to the detriment of the Israelis and Palestinians, and will also severely damage the U.S.’ security, economic interests and its credibility in the region.”

He suggests that the president visit Israel and the Palestinian Territories after taking office, construct a framework based on prior agreements, appoint a high-profile envoy with a presidential mandate to work on an agreement and involve other Arab nations in the process. Ben-Meir warns that while the world focuses on Iran and delays talking about the peace process, “the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is quietly simmering underneath the surface and is becoming ever more perilous. Israel continues to expand existing settlements and legalize others while the Palestinians remain hopelessly factionalized and aimless, unable to present a unified front to be taken seriously, and thus, leaving the festering conflict in the hands of radicals on both sides.”

Another Christian monastery vandalized: Suspected extremist Israelis [vandalized a Franciscan monastery in Jerusalem](#) on October 4, scrawling “price tag” and an anti-Christian statement on the gate. The Saint Francis monastery is located on Mount Zion, where tradition says Jesus held the Last Supper. Israeli President Shimon Peres condemned the attacks, releasing a statement that said, “Price tag actions are contrary to the Jewish religion and causes great harm to Israel...Holy sites must not be harmed.”

This is the second attack on a Christian site in less than a month. In September, a West Bank monastery in Latrun was vandalized and the doors were set on fire. There have been [several other cases in the past year](#) of Muslim and Christian sites being defaced. Palestinian officials and human rights groups have criticized Israeli authorities for not doing enough to investigate price tag attacks. According to *Reuters*, “A police spokesman said a number of people had been charged in connection with several of the incidents, but gave no details.”

Further reading: The Orthodox Israelis behind the settlement movement in the West bank are also [focusing their attention inward](#) by moving into Arab neighborhoods of mixed Israeli cities to expand the Jewish presence. The newcomers to the towns threaten to disrupt a fragile status quo in cities that have Israeli Arab and Jewish residents.

Thousands of Christian Zionists from around the world [marched down the streets of Jerusalem](#) in support of Israel. The International Christian Embassy of Jerusalem hosted the event that brought 5,000 people from almost 90 countries, including 25 parliamentarians from various nations. This article explains some of the dynamics between these Christians supporters of Israel and Israelis who are troubled by parts of their theology and fear proselytizing. *The Jerusalem Post* provides [more information](#) about the gathering.

Residents of the village Battir, south of Jerusalem in the West Bank are hoping to stop Israel from [building a portion of its separation wall](#) through it. The barrier would cut them off from one-third of their farmland and cause harm to the historical landscape and local wildlife. The Israeli Nature and Parks Authority helped the residents' cause by withdrawing its support in a letter to the Israeli Defense Ministry after considering the environmental impact. A UNESCO official also denounced the wall because the village possesses all of the criteria to be a World Heritage site should the PA submit an application.

2) Christian leaders sign letter to Congress on U.S. military aid to Israel October 5, 2012

In a recent letter to Congress, the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns (MOGC) and 14 other Christian groups urged the U.S. to investigate possible human rights and weapon violations by the government of Israel.

Conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories and the commitment for a just peace continue to deteriorate. In the October 5 letter, the MOGC and other signers expressed their commitment to the pursuit of peace for both Israelis and Palestinians. The religious leaders cited likely violations by Israel of the U.S. Foreign Assistance Act and the U.S. Arms Export Control Act, which respectively excludes assistance to any country that engages in a consistent pattern of human rights abuses and limits the use of U.S. weapons to “internal security” or “legitimate self-defense.”

Examples of human rights violence related to U.S. military support were included as an annex to the letter and, in addition to specific rights violations, the Christian leaders expressed their concern that Israel continues to expand its settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, claiming territory “that under international law and U.S. policy should belong to a future Palestinian state.”

The U.S. Christian leaders wrote that it is “our moral responsibility to question the continuation of unconditional U.S. financial assistance to the government of Israel. Realizing a just and lasting peace will require this accountability, as continued U.S. military assistance to Israel – offered without conditions or accountability – will only serve to sustain the status quo and Israel's military occupation of the Palestinian territories.”

[Read the entire letter here.](#)

3) Israeli left-wing party drafts new Mideast peace plan to replace Oslo Accords

Akiva Edari, Ha'aretz, September 25, 2012

Meretz [left wing political party] chief Zahava Gal-On is promoting a peace plan that would replace the Oslo Accords with a new timetable to end the conflict. Under the plan, Israel would help Palestine be accepted as the 194th member of the United Nations and be the first country to recognize the new state.

"Without determining who is to blame for what, the Oslo process must be replaced by a new paradigm," Gal-On told Ha'aretz. "A Palestinian state is an Israeli interest, so Israel must be the first to recognize it and support its acceptance by the UN."

Gal-On hopes to have the plan approved by Meretz before the next elections.

Under the plan, Israel would declare without preconditions that the conflict must be solved by ending the occupation based on the 1967 borders, with one-to-one land swaps. Meanwhile, Jerusalem would be divided based on the proposals by former U.S. President Bill Clinton - Jewish neighborhoods to Israel, Palestinian neighborhoods to Palestine, and special status for the Holy Basin.

The plan also proposes that the government declare an immediate freeze on settlement activity, as long as is needed to ensure peace negotiations. The talks would last no more than a year, and the gradual implementation of core issues would take no more than four years.

As for Israel's relations with its neighbors, the plan calls on Israel to support the main points of the Arab Peace Initiative and declare a willingness to enter negotiations for its full implementation.

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

4) Real leadership gave South Africa a new future. It can do the same in the Middle East

Terence English, The Independent, September 11, 2012

As the two-state solution becomes progressively more problematic, a third option, a single democratic, pluralistic, bi-national state, requires serious consideration

As a retired surgeon, I have for the last three years been engaged in delivering courses in trauma care to doctors in Gaza and the West Bank. My first visit occurred soon after the Israeli invasion of Gaza at the end of 2008. I was horrified to see the scale of destruction to the infrastructure and the suffering of the population as a result of the blockade that has been imposed on the country since 2006.

Later, in the West Bank I saw the encroachment of Israeli settlements deep into Palestinian territory and the humiliation local people may endure at the numerous checkpoints whilst travelling even short distances within their occupied country. And in East Jerusalem I have seen Palestinian families forcibly removed from homes they had lived in for many years to make way for Israeli settlers.

After being exposed to these experiences, one cannot but wonder how this clash of two such very different cultures and competing nationalist aspirations will end. Palestinians understandably resent the loss of the great majority of the land that was once theirs and the fact that many now live as refugees or under occupation and blockade in the remaining parts. These are no longer contiguous and may exclude them from visiting their holy places in East Jerusalem and Hebron. On the other hand Israelis see the land as having at one time belonged to their forefathers – albeit two millennia ago – and are proud of their creation of a modern state that provides a home and political safe haven for Jews worldwide.

I am no politician but it seems that there are only three options with respect to a resolution of the present untenable state of affairs.

The option most commonly promoted is that of a two-state solution, in which a Palestinian state would be formed from Gaza and from what is left of the West Bank after withdrawal of the Israeli occupation. This, however, has been seriously compromised as a result of the remorseless increase in Israeli settlements since 1967. As a result of this there are now approximately 500,000 settlers in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, most of whom would strenuously resist being resettled within Israel's internationally recognised borders. Another serious problem with the two-state solution is the future of Jerusalem. That the whole city should become the capital of Israel has been regarded as "non-negotiable" by the Israelis, whereas Palestinians see East Jerusalem as their capital of a future Palestinian State.

A second option and one favoured by many Zionists, is that Israel should eventually incorporate the whole land from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River. This implies that Palestinians living in the West Bank would either have to be displaced to neighbouring Arab countries such as Jordan, or accept living in a Jewish state as second class citizens. The injustice of such an outcome hardly bears scrutiny and I cannot believe the international community would ever allow this to happen.

The third option and one that I think should be given more serious consideration than it is receiving is that of a single democratic, pluralistic, bi-national state. The concept of one state shared equally by the two peoples might seem unacceptable if not impossible to most Israelis and Palestinians living in the region. However, as the two-state solution becomes progressively more problematic and impractical there is a need to look critically at a bolder and potentially more lasting solution.

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

5) When "apartheid" seems to be the hardest word

Ami Kaufman, +972, October 3, 2012

How much longer before all of us accept it? How many more years of suffering will Palestinians endure before we get it? How many more Palestinian and Israeli lives will perish before the hardest word of them all sinks in?

The word “apartheid” is applied more and more these days when discussing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. What it does mostly is make people angry, on both sides of the Jewish political map. Even left-wingers will say something along the lines of “sure, there’s an occupation. But apartheid? Come on. No need to exaggerate.”

I myself am using the word more in my posts here on +972. At first it was difficult for me – comparing Israel to what happened in South Africa seemed far from the truth. But then I got to know the situation better, and become more informed.

This post isn’t about convincing anyone that Israel is an apartheid state. Others can do that much better than me. I’m already convinced that certain policies in the West Bank reek of apartheid. And if this situation continues any longer, the road to a full-apartheid state is inevitable. Is it a more cruel apartheid, a less ugly apartheid, or a similar one to South Africa? Is apartheid in the eyes of the be-occupied? I don’t know.

[Read the entire piece on the +972 website.](#)

6) U.S. warns EU against supporting Palestinian UN bid

Saed Bannoura, International Middle East Media Center, October 2, 2012

Member of the Executive Committee of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), Dr. Hanaan Ashrawi, stated that the United States sent a memorandum to countries in the European Union warning of severe consequences against the Palestinian Authority (PA) should they go ahead with their plan to obtain UN recognition as a nonmember state.

Ashrawi said that an American memorandum was sent to several EU countries, and added that the United States will practice pressure on European countries as part of what she called “an American policy that sides with the Israeli occupation against the Palestinians.”

Ashrawi added that the Palestinian rights are inalienable, cannot be given away or abandoned, and added that the Palestinian leadership is acting with the International Community, and is demanding the implementation of international legitimacy resolutions to achieve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.

The official further stated that the Palestinian leadership has been holding talks with different countries in the Arab world, and in different parts around the world, to ensure more international support to the Palestinian bid at the United Nations.

“We are trying to gain memberships in different international organizations and agencies,” Ashrawi said, “We are hoping to be able to submit our UN membership bid before the end of this year, there are many suggestions about the timing of the application, but we are trying to gain majority votes; this means we need the support of half of the member states plus one to be admitted to the UN as a nonmember state.”

The United States warned that supporting the Palestinian UN bid could lead to several negative consequences that could lead to financial sanctions against the Palestinian Authority.

The Guardian newspaper obtained a copy of the memorandum, and revealed that the United States told European countries that “a Palestinian State can only be established through direct negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians,” and urged the EU to support the American efforts that aim at preventing the Palestinian Authority from heading to the UN.

The Palestinian Authority repeatedly confirmed its commitment to peace in the region, and said that heading to the United Nations is not an act of provocation, and is not meant to isolate Israel, but an attempt to involve the International Community in the efforts to secure a just and comprehensive peace agreement in the region.

Israel claims that it is interested in reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians, without preconditions, but its acts on the ground, especially its ongoing construction and expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank, including in occupied East Jerusalem, and its ongoing violations, are transforming the Palestinian territories into isolated ghettos without access to land and natural resources.

The Palestinian territories are already fragmented and isolated due to Israel’s illegal Annexation Wall that separates the residents from their orchards and lands, and due to the ongoing construction and expansion of Jewish-only settlements in the occupied West Bank.

7) Resource: [Kairos USA newsletter](#)

Kairos USA is a movement to unify and mobilize U.S. Christians – lay, academic and clergy – to respond faithfully and boldly to the urgent situation in Israel and Palestine.

Call to Action: [U.S. Response to the Kairos Palestine Document](#) was published in June 2012 and can proudly take its place among other prophetic calls issued by Christians in response to the "signs of the times" in recent history (see Mark Braverman's [report](#) tracing the formation of Kairos USA to his experiences in Palestine and in South Africa).

The work has only just begun, but since the launch Kairos USA has accomplished much: forming a [Board of Directors](#) and bringing on part-time [staff](#); initiating [programs](#) designed to bring the message of Kairos USA to churches, denominational task forces and missions; and creating study guides and materials for schools and grassroots organizations throughout the U.S.

This newsletter includes stories chronicling this formative period and reporting from the ground here and abroad (in this issue we’ll hear from [Bethlehem](#) and [India](#)).

- [Message from the Director: Enter Kairos USA](#)
- ["Call to Action": The creation of the U.S. Kairos statement](#)
- [Meet board member Don Williams](#)

8) Resource: [Civil Society and the Question of Palestine](#)

This newsletter is a project of the UN’s Division for Palestinian Rights, and is intended to provide information on non-governmental organizations’ activities relevant to the question of Palestine.