

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
December 18, 2014



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

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

Editor's note: Christmas Blessings, Peace and Wonder in the New Year to all our readers. After a brief Christmas break the next Middle East Notes will be available on January 8, 2015. This issue of the Notes will follow a new format: five or six articles will be made available in full and a number of links to other pertinent articles will be offered.

This issue of Middle East Notes highlights the controversy concerning the proposed "Jewish state" law, Israel's diminishing support in Washington, the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, and many links to articles concerning the upcoming UN vote for recognition of the Palestinian State and it demands, elections in Israel, the death of a Palestinian government minister, and many other items of interest.

The policies of the Netanyahu government have weakened support for Israel in the U.S.; more and more critics of Israeli policies are joining most of the European, Latin American and Arab nations in demanding that Israel end its settlements, occupation of the West Bank, oppression and repression of Palestinians, and promote a viable two state solution or give full democratic voting rights to all Palestinians in Israel, East Jerusalem, Gaza and the West Bank. These issues form the background of the Israeli elections to take place in March.

- The United Nations General Assembly adopted six resolutions regarding Jerusalem, the occupied territories and the Golan declaring Israel actions in these areas null and void.
- Jerry Shaw in Newsmax reports that outspoken critics of Israel's influence in Washington have been around for decades, but many of them now believe they are making gains in dismantling the Israel lobby.
- Oudeh Basharat in Ha'aretz writes of the surreal Israeli nation-state in which Arab Israelis are objecting to the threat the "Jewish State" bill poses to the equality they don't even have.
- IMEMC News notes reports that Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas says Palestinians cannot and will not recognize Israel as a "Jewish" state.
- Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP) take special note of Barak Ravid's article in Ha'aretz stating that President Obama's administration is examining taking action against the construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, rather than making do with issuing denunciatory statements.
- Various organizations, including the Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns, have sent a letter concerning the humanitarian crisis in Gaza to John Kerry and Dr. Rajiv Shah, administrator for U.S. Agency for International Development.
- Links to additional articles are listed on page 8.

1) [UN General Assembly: Israel's actions in Jerusalem are null and void](#)

Middle East Monitor, December 2, 2014

The United Nations General Assembly adopted six resolutions regarding Israeli-occupied territories through a recorded vote last night, addressing the areas of Jerusalem and the Syrian Golan.

In terms of Jerusalem, the Assembly voted on a resolution confirming that all legislative and administrative measures taken by Israel to change the legal status of the Holy City of Jerusalem are null and void.

The decision was supported by a recorded vote of 144 countries in favour, six countries opposed, namely Canada, Israel, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Palau and United States, while ten countries abstained from the vote (Australia, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Madagascar, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Paraguay, Togo and Tonga and Vanuatu).

The Assembly also adopted a resolution that stressed the need for Israel, the occupying power, to withdraw from the occupied Palestinian territories, and demanded the complete cessation of all Israeli settlement activity and Israel's compliance with its obligations under international law.

The Assembly's decision also outlined the need for delivering humanitarian and medical aid to the Palestinians.

Another decision was implemented regarding the Syrian Golan Heights as a result of the Assembly's concern for Israel's lack of compliance with Resolution 497 (issued in 1981) calling on Israel to withdraw its forces from the Golan Heights, which have been illegally occupied since 1967.

The decision was supported by 99 countries, rejected by six, while 57 (mostly European) countries abstained from the vote.



The separation barrier between Israel and the West Bank. Photo by Nir Kafri.

2) Israel lobby controversy: 10 outspoken critics of Israel's power in Washington

Jerry Shaw, Newsmax, November 20, 2014

Here are 10 critics of Israel's powerful lobby in the nation's capital:

1. *The Nation* has long been publishing articles critical of the Israel lobby, often stating that billions of dollars are being wasted through political funding for military support of Israel. An article by [Phyllis Bennis](#) argues that Israel's power in Washington is beginning to weaken, but claims that pro-Israel lobby groups on the right still have more money than opponents to influence Congressional members.

2. John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, authors of the controversial "The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy" also argued that the pro-Israel side in Washington was losing steam when the book was published in 2007. The authors claimed it was difficult for politicians to disagree with the Israeli policy when dealing with pro-Israel lobbyists for fear of being branded anti-Semitic, a charge made by other critics.

3. [Occupy AIPAC](#) takes a stand against the powerful Israel lobby group, the American Israel Public Affairs Committee. Like other "occupy" movements that protest in front of institutions, Occupy AIPAC also takes its cause to college campuses for its messages of peace and a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

4. Although three-time presidential candidate Ron Paul describes himself as a non-interventionist, his past remarks make critics say he believes the Israel lobby controls Washington and gets the U.S. involved in unnecessary wars. Paul once said, the "Israel lobby plays Congress like a cheap harmonica," according to [JTA](#), a Jewish news service.

5. CODEPINK, the antiwar women's group, has stated AIPAC calls for military intervention in Syria and Iran, options rejected by the American people. The group held a "Boycott AIPAC" demonstration during the Israel lobby's annual policy conference in Washington to end policies of promoting war and human rights violations.

6. Jesse Jackson, a presidential candidate in 1984, has long been a critic of Israeli policies and was even photographed hugging PLO leader Yasser Arafat in 1979. When Barack Obama was elected president in 2008, Jackson was quoted by the [New York Post](#) as saying the new administration would end "decades of putting Israel's interests first." The Obama campaign denied the charges.

7. [The Institute for Historical Review](#), attacked for its views that deny the Holocaust, claims the influence of American Jews in Washington far outweighs the numbers of people in the Jewish community. The institute, which publishes books and other materials, frequently criticizes the number of affluent Jewish contributors who affect political campaigns.

8. [George Soros](#), a well-known political donor on the left, says the Israel lobby involves the U.S. in military actions. He wrote that AIPAC played a part in convincing the Bush administration to invade Iraq without approval from Congress. He also complained that disagreement with Israel's aggressive policies in the West Bank and Gaza leads to cries of anti-Semitism.

9. [Jewish Voice for Peace](#) is another left-wing organization that plays a role in leading American Jews to reject connections with Israel's military conflicts. The organization advocates peace and human rights issues while rejecting unconditional military aid for Israel as proposed by many pro-Israel lobbyists.

10. J Street is a political action committee that sets itself apart from traditional Israel lobby groups. [CNN](#) headlined a story, stating the group "challenges the Israel lobby from within." J Street takes its argument from the left, calling for an end to Israeli settlements and favoring a two-state solution as the only way to reach peace between Israelis and Palestinians.

3) [The surreal Israeli nation-state](#)

Oudeh Basharat, Ha'aretz, December 3, 2014

In the Egyptian play, "The Witness Who Saw Nothing," Sarhan Abdul-Basir runs to pay his telephone bill. He worries that his phone will be taken away – even though he doesn't even have one.

This is the story of Arab-Israeli citizens and the proposed Jewish "nation-state bill": They are objecting to the threat the bill poses to the equality that they don't actually have.

Therefore, get ready, my dear Arabs, for the expropriation of all the lands that you've hidden in the garret and stored under the floor tiles. It's also time to inform the Agbariah family of Umm al-Fahm, which controls the Dead Sea Works, and the Basharat family of Yafia, which controls Israel Shipyards, that they must return the keys immediately. After all, the assets of the Jewish nation-state belong only to the nation-state's Jewish families.

Meanwhile, the six Arab members of Knesset will have to resign immediately, particularly Housing and Construction Minister Ahmed Tibi, who has been pouring budgets into places like Taibeh and Jisr a-Zarqa. And they wonder why there's a housing shortage. At the same time, difficult as it may be, we're going to have to dismiss all the Arab major-generals in the Israel Defense Forces. How can the IDF win wars if half of the General Staff is Arab, and the Southern Command commander's name is Ahmed?

It's also time for those four Arab tycoons and three Arab bank CEOs to go back to playing backgammon in some Nazareth coffee shop. Oh, and the presidents of the three leading universities in the country will have to get used to queuing up nicely at the local Employment Service office.

The nation-state revolution is not going to leave a single stone unturned. From now, say "farewell and good riddance" to the Palestinian flag, while the anthem "Baladi," will be consigned to the dustbins of history. Finally, instead of the Nakba narrative about the displacement the Arabs suffered in 1948, the children of Israel will learn about the Jewish revolt that liberated the land from foreigners.

It's time to call a spade, a spade. After the nation-state legislation, the world will have total clarity regarding what state we're talking about. After all, the way things have been managed here has always been an aggressive expression of the nation-state in all areas of life, except perhaps during the short period of Yitzhak Rabin's second government. Finally, the nation-state will have a title that befits its grim reality.

That's why the Arabs are now saying that what's happening is the best thing that could have happened to them. No more playing hide-and-seek between the theory and reality; we've merited the nation-state law.

This law is also good for Jewish democrats, the ones who demanded that we, the Arabs, accept the definition of the state. For our part, we repeatedly stressed that we understood that the State of Israel was established as an expression of the self-determination of the Jewish people, and that we understood that this definition was not merely scenery that gets changed every other day. What's more, we also said that the problem was not the state's lack of Jewishness, but its excessive Jewishness, at the expense of democracy and equality.

We told our friends that we knew their intentions were pure, but that the wolf disguised as the kindly grandmother has evil intentions. Today the true face of the right has been exposed, and it's racist and ugly. That why we say to our Jewish friends, out of a feeling of shared fate: Stop dancing with the wolves.

Still, there is some good news. At the initiative of the Sikkui nonprofit association there was a conference last week of Arab and Jewish local council heads to discuss regional cooperation in the center and the north. The good news comes from among those who bid each other good morning at dawn and say good night to their neighbors at sunset.

After all, at the end of the process, Arabs and Jews will still be living together, and whoever advocates a different vision harms his own people, first and foremost.

But this mutual existence must be based on justice. The source of the anger is discrimination, not poverty. Because discrimination carries within it humiliation, and humiliation is contrary to human nature.

And so, my dear Arabs and Jews: If you are discriminated against, rebel. And if discrimination goes in your favor, also rebel.

4) [Abbas: Palestine will not recognize Israel as a “Jewish” state](#)

IMEMC News, December 9, 2014

Palestinians “...cannot recognize a Jewish state,” Mr. Abbas declared, in an interview with Egypt's Akhbar Al-Yawm daily news:

“We will stand against this enterprise, not out of obstinacy, but because it contradicts our interests.”

He reaffirmed the presence of six million Palestinian refugees, including himself, who’ve become homeless since the beginning of the Israeli occupation, in 1948. (*Palestinians now make up the largest refugee population on the planet, according to [United Nations](#) statistics.*)

“Working with Israel is very difficult, if not impossible,” he added.

“We are conducting mutual relations with people who don't believe in peace. You ask for peace, and they do not want it...”

The president also reiterated the Palestinian call for an independent state based on the pre-1967 boundaries, and an end to the Israeli occupation.

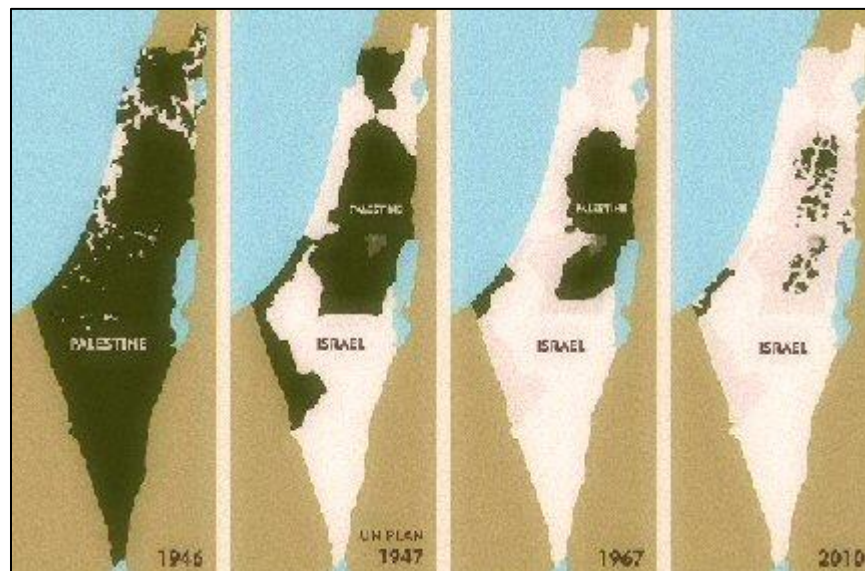
“We want a state in the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, and we want to [set] a date to end the occupation. That is all we want. If Israel agrees to this now, we will go to negotiations. [But] they use deception and excel at media fraud,” Abbas said.

On May 17, 2014, almost all countries in the United Nations voted in favor of Resolution 58/292 stipulating that the borders of a Palestinian state should be based on the pre-1967 borders.

“If we cannot get what we want, there are other steps [we can take]. The first step is joining many international organizations, such as the International Criminal Court and International Court of Justice,” Abbas further added.

“There are 520 international organizations, and [joining them] will surely bother everyone. If there is an appeal to the ICC, and a Palestinian files a lawsuit against an Israeli, they [the Israelis] get scared, because they are wanted and cannot travel.”

Tel Aviv, however, has refused to return to the 1967 borders and is unwilling to discuss the issue of occupied East Jerusalem.



5) [Obama considers taking action against settlements](#)

Jews for Justice for Palestinians (JFJFP)

U.S. mulls harsher action against settlement construction

Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, December 4, 2014

U.S. President Barack Obama's administration is examining taking action against the construction in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, rather than making do with issuing denunciatory statements.

Senior Israeli officials said that White House officials held a classified discussion a few weeks ago about the possibility of taking active measures against the settlements.

A few senior American officials approached by Haaretz did not deny this, but refused to disclose more details. National Security Council spokeswoman Bernadette Meehan refused to comment.

A discussion on such a sensitive and politically-loaded issue in the White House is extremely irregular and shows to what extent relations between the Obama administration and Netanyahu government have deteriorated. In recent years European states have imposed increasing sanctions against the construction in the settlements, while the United States has made do with denunciations.

An Israeli official who was briefed by the Americans on the issue said the administration started discussing it following Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's last meeting in the White House in early October and the public confrontation over the settlements that occurred later.

A day before Netanyahu's visit to the White House, settlers moved into seven houses they bought in the Palestinian village of Silwan in East Jerusalem. A few hours before the meeting, Peace Now reported that the Jerusalem municipality had given its final approval to building 2,600 housing units in Givat Hamatos, a neighborhood beyond the Green Line in Jerusalem.

A few minutes after Netanyahu and Obama had ended their meeting, White House spokesman Josh Earnest rebuked Israel in an unusually harsh statement. He said the Israeli moves "poison the atmosphere" and distance Israel from "even its closest allies."

Netanyahu dismissed the White House rebuke and told Israeli reporters and again in an interview with CBS that the criticism goes "against American values."

Netanyahu's response, which seemed like a personal political attack on Obama, exacerbated the anger in the White House.

The failure of the Netanyahu-Obama meeting and the administration's growing anger over the settlement construction led to the understanding that denunciatory statements, no matter how harsh, have become ineffective. Meanwhile, the continued construction in the settlements, especially in places like Givat Hamatos, threatens to make the two-state solution impossible.

That prompted a White House decision to examine changing its policy and taking harsher measures in response to the construction.

The discussion was attended by senior White House and State Department officials who deal with the Israeli-Palestinian issue. The Israeli official said that several steps were proposed to make it clear to the Israeli government that the United States objects to building in the settlements and to the construction's negative repercussions.

For example, the United States may refrain from vetoing condemnatory resolutions against the settlements in the UN Security Council. Or it could issue clearer instructions to American officials about the ban on cooperating with the settlements or funding activity in them.

The White House has not yet decided on steps against the settlements and when, if at all, to carry them out. Significant steps against the settlements may exact a heavy political price from Obama, while symbolic steps would be meaningless and have no effect.

In addition, it isn't yet clear how the decision to hold early elections will affect the White House's decisions regarding the settlements. One of the aspects of this that is being looked into by the U.S. government is whether American action against the settlements at this point would weaken Netanyahu in Israeli public opinion, or do just the opposite, by portraying him as one who doesn't cave in to international pressure.

**6) Maryknoll plus 20 other groups send letter to State, USAID, urging assistance to Gaza
December 15, 2014**

The Honorable John Kerry
U.S. Department of State

Dr. Rajiv Shah, Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Mr. Secretary and Administrator Shah,

On behalf of the 21 signing organizations, many of whom have long experience and close partnerships with Palestinian civil society groups in Gaza, we are writing to raise serious concerns related to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. As you know, the situation in Gaza was already dire and is now worsening considerably with the onset of winter. Already the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) declared a state of emergency on November 27 due to flooding in the Gaza City area, a worrisome and early signal of what is to come.

Nearly four months after the cessation of Israel's "Operation Protective Edge," an estimated 100,000 people in Gaza still do not have adequate shelter. Electricity blackouts are common and key infrastructure such as water treatment plants have not been repaired. This humanitarian crisis is unconscionable and is the clear result of policy inaction and failure.

Despite the much-touted Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism (GRM), UN OCHA's Access Coordination Unit found that just 2.9 percent of the materials needed for reconstruction and recovery plans have entered thus far, with fewer reconstruction materials entering Gaza in November than over the past three months. This level of access, including in the two months since the GRM was signed, is lower than comparable periods in 2013. As Pierre Krähenbühl, Commissioner-General of UNRWA, noted last month, "the process for reconstruction is proving far too slow and is largely ineffective."

In November, UN OCHA recorded just 287 trucks of construction materials that entered Gaza, whereas to complete reconstruction within three years, a minimum of 735 truckloads of construction materials is needed per day. The Popular Committee for Monitoring the Reconstruction of the Gaza Strip estimates that at the current pace it will take at least 20 years to rebuild the Gaza Strip.

Therefore, we request that the U.S. government:

- Increase the U.S. financial commitment to the reconstruction of Gaza, and ensure that these funds are disbursed immediately to relevant UN agencies and non-governmental organizations operational in Gaza.
- Urge Israel to fully lift the blockade on Gaza, allowing full freedom of movement of people and goods to and from Gaza and lifting restrictions on the import and export of goods, a crucial step for recovery and development of the local economy;
- Urge Egypt to allow full freedom of movement through the Rafah crossing;
- Work with the Government of Palestine/Government of National Consensus, Government of Israel and the UN to resolve problematic aspects of the Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism, including:
 - Removing the requirement that Palestinian homeowners receiving building materials register identifying information in a database accessible to Israeli intelligence agencies;
 - Ensuring that the primary purpose of the mechanism remains the *temporary* facilitation of rebuilding and recovery assistance—i.e., the GRM must not become a tool for enforcing the blockade by creating an additional level of scrutiny for construction materials entering Gaza in the future;
 - Ensuring that reconstruction efforts are carried out in accordance with international humanitarian law and international human rights law, including the clarification that Israeli companies that operate in settlements or are complicit in violations of international humanitarian law must not profit from reconstruction efforts.

As you know well, Israel maintains that their imposition of restrictive measures related to Gaza are necessary for security reasons. All people desire to live in security and stability, including the people of the Gaza Strip. Meaningful security should be rooted in the provision of basic needs and respect for human rights.

Thank you for hearing our views. We look forward to your response.

See complete list of signing organizations at www.maryknollogc.org.

Other current articles of interest:

[U.S. tries to head off Israeli-Palestinian "Al-Asqa war,"](#) Uri Savir, Al-Monitor, November 30, 2014

While right-wing settlers and extremist Palestinians ponder a "war of zealots," the Obama administration considers a tactical deal.

[Congress passes watered-down bill on U.S.-Israel ties,](#) Bradley Klapper, Ha'aretz, Dec. 4, 2014

Bill doesn't include Israel joining U.S. Visa Waiver Program, something Netanyahu, pro-Israel lawmakers pushed for during almost two years of legislative wrangling.

[Judaism or democracy? Elections will show Israel's true profile,](#) Ravid Hecht, Ha'aretz, Dec. 3, 2014

This is an opportunity for Israel to look at itself in the mirror and decide what kind of state it is.

[French MPs vote in favor of recognizing Palestinian state,](#) December 12, 2014

[The State of Two States: Weeks of November 30, December 7, 2014](#)

Pertinent news quotes from Israel/Palestine on the "Two States" proposal and reality

**Israel's destruction of multistory buildings: Extensive, wanton and unjustified, says Amnesty
Palestinian News Network, December 8, 2014**

[Meshal: Jerusalem violence "spontaneous reaction to loss of hope,"](#) Ha'aretz, December 5, 2014

[Israelis, listen to the world,](#) Ha'aretz editorial, December 5, 2014

No election campaign can blur the international reality: The world has had enough of Israeli occupation.

[Israel's two-faced government,](#) Ha'aretz editorial, December 11, 2014

It is hard to grasp why the United States continues to placate Netanyahu.

[What Israel's founding fathers never imagined,](#) Zeev Sternhell, Ha'aretz, December 5, 2014

No one ever envisioned that power would fall one day into the hands of people for whom the oppression of another nation was second nature.

[Palestinians prepare push for UN resolution on statehood](#)

[U.S. urges "swift" probe into PA minister's death](#)

Barak Ravid, Gili Cohen, Amira Hass and Chaim Levinson, Dec. 10, 2014

U.S. joins EU, UN in calling for an "independent" investigation into death of Ziad Abu Ein at West Bank protest; Netanyahu tells PA Israel will probe the incident.

[Netanyahu's election scapegoat: Israel's Palestinian minority,](#) Jonathan Cook, December 4, 2014

[Time for international community to hold Israel accountable -- here's how](#)

Hiba Hussein and Omar Dajani, +972 Blog December 4, 2014

Resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not impossible, but success requires bold measures and the courage to see them through.

[Israelis rattled by search for truth about the Nakba,](#) Middle East Eye, Jonathan Cook, Dec. 9, 2014

First "truth commission" avoids issue of reconciliation as veteran Israeli fighters due to confess to 1948 war crimes.

[Erekat: Palestinians to submit statehood bid to UN Monday,](#) Times of Israel, December 14, 2014

Chief negotiator set to meet Kerry in Rome on Tuesday.