

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
January 4, 2018

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The five featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, and especially the response of the Palestinians, the UN, and select nations of the world; the U.S. "peace processing" that has served only to entrench and legitimize Israel's military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land; the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital as a radical break with nearly 70 years of official United States policy and with the international community; the Israeli claim that its control over Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is temporary, despite lasting longer than South African Apartheid by any measure; and timely links to CMEP and to other articles of interest.

Commentary: With the beginning of the New Year it seems to the Palestinians and many justice and peace groups around the world that a new vocabulary is needed to describe and understand the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. "Settler colonial project" might be more accurate than "occupation" as a description of Israel's relationship with the Palestinians. "Open air mega-prisons" could replace "occupied territories". The United States Government rather than "honest broker" for Israeli and Palestinian efforts at reconciliation might now be referred to as "Israel's lawyer." A present "bi-national state" with "disenfranchisement of the Palestinian population" might replace pointless negotiations for a "two state solution." Hopefully 2018 will be a year of greater honesty and accuracy in both vocabulary and peace/justice actions.

Features:

- Rashid Khalidi writes in *The Nation* that every dark cloud has a silver lining. President Trump may have inadvertently cleared the air. He may have smashed a rotten status quo of US "peace processing" that has served only to entrench and legitimize Israel's military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land for a quarter-century.
- Hanan Ashrawi in the *New York Times* states that President Trump in recognizing Jerusalem as Israel's capital is making a radical break with nearly 70 years of official United States policy and with the international community.
- Noa Landau notes in *Haaretz* that an overwhelming majority of 128 member states of the UN voted in favor of the resolution rejecting the American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, with only 9 voting against and 35 abstaining.
- Jack Khoury in *Haaretz* comments on Mahmoud Abbas' Christmas message in which he lamented Trump's recognition of Jerusalem, stating that the U.S. decision is 'insulting' to Palestinians and to the 'message of Jesus'.
- Fady Khoury states in the *+972 Blog* that by claiming that its control over Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza is temporary, despite lasting longer than South African Apartheid by any measure. Israel is able to justify a regime that denies one group political and civil rights while privileging another.
- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins

1) [After Jerusalem, the US Can No Longer Pretend to Be an Honest Broker of Peace](#), Rashid Khalidi, *The Nation*, December 8, 2017

“Every dark cloud has a silver lining. The torrent of complex problems that Donald Trump has unleashed by his recognition of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital will plague United States policy and Middle East peace-making for many years. You cannot un-recognize a capital once you have recognized it. Whatever caveats he may offer, Trump has effectively accepted Israel’s annexation of vast swaths of the occupied West Bank into greater Jerusalem, and its declaration of this entire zone as its “eternal undivided capital.”

“But in plunging the Middle East into what may be a prolonged crisis, and saddling future generations of American policy-makers with the burden of dealing with the mess he has made, Trump may have inadvertently cleared the air. He may have smashed a rotten status quo of US “peace processing” that has served only to entrench and legitimize Israel’s military occupation and colonization of Palestinian land for a quarter-century, which has made more difficult a just, lasting peace between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

“After Trump, how can the eternally dishonest broker—‘Israel’s attorney,’ in the words of veteran State Department official Aaron David Miller—even pretend to act as a mediator? Trump has, in effect, adopted wholesale the Israeli position that all of Jerusalem belongs exclusively to Israel, and that all of it—including areas extending far north, south, and east of the city—is Israel’s capital, denying the Palestinians any national or political rights there. He has thereby nailed the United States flag to a position that antagonizes virtually every Palestinian, Arab, and Muslim, and the overwhelming majority of peoples and governments around the world.” ...

“If, moreover, Trump’s action drives a stake through the heart of the truly dreadful made-in-Israel plan that presidential son-in-law Jared Kushner is peddling, that would be an entirely good thing. The Kushner plan has been rumored to involve a noncontiguous Palestinian “state” in a fraction of the West Bank and Gaza, without its capital in Jerusalem, without real sovereignty, without control over its own borders or its security, and without any right of return for Palestinian refugees. Calling this travesty a Bantustan would be an insult to apartheid South Africa. No Palestinian leader can accept anything like this and retain a shred of self-respect or the support of his or her own people.” ...

“So, in spite of himself, in delivering a blow to international law, to multiple United Nations decisions, and to 70 years of U.S. policy, going back to the partition resolution of November 1947, Trump may have unwittingly shown us a path toward a better way to dealing with the question of Palestine than any that has been on offer for a long time.

“It is time to get away from the idea that Israel’s most fervently partisan supporter and supplier of money and arms can be a mediator. The United States is not neutral: It is a party to this conflict, fully on the side of Israel. This is despite the fact that polls consistently show that a majority of Americans want the United States to be neutral and evenhanded in its dealings with Israelis and Palestinians, and that nearly half of all Americans, and a majority of Democrats, would go so far as to support sanctions or stronger action against Israel over settlement construction.” ...

“An entirely new basis for negotiations must be grounded in *all* UN resolutions, including UNGA 181, which entitled the Palestinians to a state much larger than just the West Bank and Gaza, or than the scraps the Kushner plan envisages for them; and UNGA 194, which promised Palestinian refugees who were expelled during Israel’s establishment return and compensation. Instead of the skewed bases on which all previous negotiations have taken place, there must be a return to bedrock principles of justice and equality for both peoples involved in this conflict.” ...

...“Trump has shown us that peace in Palestine is far too serious a matter to be left to the antics of the sinister lot of Keystone Cops who are currently in charge in Washington.”

See also: [How Washington Lost Its Status as an Arab-Israeli Mediator](#)

2) [Trump Is Making a Huge Mistake on Jerusalem](#) , New York Times, Hanan Ashrawi, December. 7, 2017

“President Trump announced on Wednesday (December 6, 2017) that his administration is making a radical break with nearly 70 years of official United States policy and with the international community: He is recognizing Jerusalem as Israel’s capital.

“This decision will be interpreted by Palestinians, Arabs and the rest of the world as a major provocation. It will cause irreparable harm to Mr. Trump’s own plans to make peace in the Middle East, and to any future administration’s efforts, as well. It will also undermine the United States’ own national security. The president should reconsider this decision immediately.” ...

“With his announcement on Wednesday, Mr. Trump has legitimized Israel’s illegal actions and sent the message that the United States no longer has any regard for international conventions or norms, and that might and power prevail over justice and the law.” ...

“By rewarding its claim on Jerusalem with official recognition, Mr. Trump is giving Israel a free hand to accelerate its policies of creeping annexation of the occupied Palestinian territories and its deliberate attempts to erase the Palestinians’ historical, political, cultural and demographic presence in historic Palestine.” ...

“Wednesday’s announcement may finally put to rest the dream of a two-state solution, which has been on life support for years already — after more than 25 years as the United States government’s official goal. For if all of Jerusalem is part of Israel, then East Jerusalem cannot be the capital of a Palestinian state, rendering the idea of two states living side by side in peace obsolete.” ...

See also:

[Recognition of Israel After Trump's Jerusalem Move](#)

Speaking at emergency Islamic summit, Palestinian leader says Saudi king promised him there will be no peace deal without Palestine and East Jerusalem as its capital)

[Exclusive 'Two-state Solution Is Over,' Top Palestinian Diplomat Says After Trump's Jerusalem Speech](#)

In exclusive comments to Haaretz, Saeb Erekat, chief Palestinian peace negotiator, said that Trump's decision forces Palestinians to strive for 'historic Palestine, from the river to the sea'

3) [In Blow to Trump and Netanyahu, UN Rejects U.S. Recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's Capital](#) Noa Landau, Haaretz, December 21, 2017

“In a major diplomatic blow to Israel and U.S. President Donald Trump, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution rejecting the American recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, with 128 member states voting in favor of the resolution and a mere nine voting against it. (Israel, U.S., Guatemala, Honduras, Marshal Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, Palau and Togo.) “...

...“[Twenty-one] countries were absent and 35 abstained, notably Australia, Canada, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Romania, Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovia, Argentina and Mexico.)” ...

“Netanyahu used strong words to bash the international body even before the vote, calling it a "house of lies" and proclaiming that ‘the State of Israel rejects this vote outright’ and that ‘Jerusalem is our capital, we will continue to build there and additional embassies will move to Jerusalem.’

“The General Assembly's emergency discussion was being held at the request of Turkey and Yemen, who turned to the UN after an Egyptian draft resolution was presented to the Security Council and was vetoed by the United States, although the other 14 member states voted in its favor.”

4) [In Christmas Message Aimed at Trump, Abbas Says Palestinians Will Never Accept Any Peace Plan From U.S.](#), Jack Khoury, Haaretz, December 22, 2017

“Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas came out Friday (12/22) against the American peace initiative and said the Palestinians would not accept any plan made by the Americans due to U.S. President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem, a move that was widely rejected by the world in a UN vote Thursday.(12/21/17)

“In a Christmas letter to Christians, Abbas wrote that the Palestinians will not "accept any plan from the U.S." due to the White House's "biased" support of Israel and its settlement policy.” ...

During a news conference in Paris, Abbas urged France and Europe to play a stronger role in peace efforts, saying the U.S. ‘no longer an honest mediator in the peace process.’” ...

“‘It is because of this U.S. decision to support illegality and the blatant violations of our rights, that we will not accept the U.S. as the mediator in the peace process nor are we going to accept any plan from the U.S. side. The U.S. chose to be biased,’ he wrote. ‘We are inspired by the message of Jesus, who refused injustice and spread a word of hope. The Holy Bible says 'Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice, for they will be filled.' Threats against those who support justice will be met with the same spirit and response from our nation and from millions of dignified people around the world.’”...

See also:

[Pope Francis Uses Christmas Speech to Call for Two-state Solution Following Trump's Jerusalem Decision](#)

In his annual 'Urbi et Orbi' Christmas address, Pope Francis feels 'winds of war' in world following Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital, 'sees Jesus' in suffering children worldwide.

[Analysis The Palestinians Just Gave Netanyahu What He Always Wanted for Christmas](#)

If there is one goal the Israeli premier has devoted his entire career to, it is trying to sever ties between the Americans and the Palestinians – and Abbas has handed it to him wrapped with a bow.)

5) [Beneath the illusion of a temporary occupation lies apartheid](#) Fady Khoury, +972 Blog, December 13, 2017

“The Oslo peace process entailed a Palestinian acceptance of ‘the right of the State of Israel to exist in peace and security,’ while in return Israel only recognized the Palestinian Liberation Organization as ‘the representative of the Palestinian people.’ Israel has never recognized Palestine or the Palestinians’ right to an independent state in the occupied territories. To this day, Israel has never formally recognized the Palestinian people’s right to independence in any internationally binding document.”...

“Whatever the truth about Israel’s commitment, this equilibrium, often called the ‘status quo,’ is fairly stable. It allows Israel to maintain the existing state of affairs so long as it serves its interests, and as long as there are no demands that force it to deviate from the status quo or make meaningful concessions.”...

“However, if we examine the entire area that Israel effectively controls, which stretches over the whole territory from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River, and subtract the element of temporality, we are left with is an apartheid regime that grants different rights and protections based on the ethnic identities of its residents.

“In the West Bank and Gaza, this regime manifests in the two separate legal systems applied to persons based on their ethnicity, to which ‘citizenship status’ acts as a proxy. Within the recognized borders of Israel, it is expressed through an ethno-democratic regime, constituted and maintained through ‘demographic gerrymandering’ and substantial limitations on political mobilization by Palestinian citizens of Israel.

“This temporary state of affairs allows Israel to simultaneously deny Palestinian independence and justify the privileging of the Jewish population in each and every one of the sub-territories under its effective control. However, if one considers that the South African Apartheid regime lasted for 43 years (from 1948 to 1991), it becomes clear that the so called temporary nature of the apartheid regime to which all Palestinians are subject has become permanent, having been in place in one form or another from 1948 to this day.

“If facts on the ground, created by Israel, led President Trump to recognize Jerusalem as the capital of Israel — without extending a similar recognition of East Jerusalem as the capital of Palestine — then perhaps it is time to inform our vision of the future with the full set of facts on the ground. Maybe it’s time to transform the paradigm from one of dividing the indivisible space to one where we, Palestinians and Jews, share it equally.”

See also:

[Netanyahu's Party Votes to Annex West Bank, Increase Settlements](#)

While most Likud ministers support the move, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has not commented; however, he hasn't prevented the vote, which he did with contentious issues in the past.

[Abbas: Israel's Goal, With Trump's Backing, Is Consolidation of an Apartheid Regime](#)

A day after the Likud central committee voted to urge its leadership to annex the West Bank, the Palestinian leadership responds with vow to revisit agreements.

['We Won't Take Part in Occupation': Dozens of Teens Refuse to Enlist in Israeli Army in Letter to Netanyahu](#)

'The army is carrying out the government's racist policy that violates basic human rights,' 63 teens write to Netanyahu and Israeli military chief Gadi Eisenkot.

6) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins

Dec 8, 2017 - [\[Bulletin\] Jerusalem Announcement Imperils Peace](#)

Dec 15, 2017 - [\[Bulletin\] The World Reacts to Jerusalem Recognition](#)

Dec 22, 2017 - [\[Bulletin\] Christmas in Bethlehem, After Trump's Jerusalem Decision](#)