

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
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The five featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the Palestinians' increasing reliance on the international community for negotiations with Israel; the need to circumvent the United States to achieve real peace; the recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital as an expression of U.S. political backing and military funding of Israel; the need to go 'back to the basics' with recognition that guaranteeing Palestinians' rights is the foundation for any political solution; Israeli boredom and exhaustion with the occupation, and Palestinian humiliation and suffering caused by it; links to CMEP Bulletins; and three book recommendations.

Commentary: President Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital and recent words of total support of Israel from Vice President Pence have reinforced the Palestinians' move towards assistance from the international community in achieving peace and justice. The Palestinians and most nations of the world have been aware of a clear bias toward Israel by U.S. administrations in all negotiations and peace-making efforts. The present U.S. administration has now made this bias obvious to the people of the United States. As the 51-year occupation goes on and the two state solution is replaced by consideration of some form of bi-national state, life becomes more difficult and hopeless for nearly half of the people living "between the Sea and the River." Israel's reliance on military power and U.S. support have not and will not bring peace and justice to the Israelis and Palestinians. Without a solution this conflict can only deepen and expand.

- Jack Khoury notes in *Haaretz* that Mahmoud Abbas said that: 'Israel killed Oslo Accords and that future negotiations will now take place within context of international community.'
- Sam Bahour writes in *Haaretz* that when Pence says: 'We stand with Israel. Your cause is our cause, your fight is our fight', it's clear America is only interested in offering Israel blind political support and abandoning the Palestinians. Real peace must now mean circumventing the U.S. administration.
- Ramzy Baroud writes in *Al Jazeera* that it is time for a new beginning. US President Donald Trump's decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital came as no surprise to most Palestinians, for, after all U.S. political backing and military funding of Israel is older than the Israeli occupation of Palestine.
- Haggai Matar writes in *+972* that one state or two states is asking the wrong question. What is desperately needed now is a return to basics and a recognition that guaranteeing Palestinians' rights is the foundation for any political solution.
- Gideon Levy writes in *Haaretz* that after 51 years, Israelis want a leave of absence from dealing with the occupation. A time-out of a few years, maybe a few generations, until "things work out. The occupation bores Israelis. But while they are exhausted and bored, the Palestinians are bleeding and struggling.
- A delegation of U.S. Hispanic Catholic bishops completed a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in January and issued a statement entitled "Bridges, Not Walls."
- Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins
- Book recommendations

1) [Abbas Declares Oslo Accords Dead: 'Trump's Peace Plan Is a Slap, We'll Slap Back'](#) Jack Khoury, Haaretz, January 15, 2018

“Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas on Sunday (January 15) said Israel killed the Oslo Accords and called U.S. President Donald Trump's Mideast peace plan "a slap in the face" during a dramatic meeting in Ramallah on Sunday, adding that ‘we will slap back.’

“Abbas said that ‘today is the day that the Oslo Accords end. Israel killed them. We are an authority without any authority, and an occupation without any cost. Trump threatens to cut funding to the authority because negotiations have failed. When the hell did negotiations start?!’

“He added that ‘any future negotiations will take place only within the context of the international community, by an international committee created in the framework of an international conference. Allow me to be clear: We will not accept America leadership of a political process involving negotiations.’” ...

“‘Our stance is a Palestinian State in the '67 borders with a capital in East Jerusalem and the implementation of decisions by the international community, as well as a just solution for refugees.’

“‘We are for the national struggle, which is more effective because there is no one else we can rely on.’

“‘The Americans asked us not to join the 22 organizations including the International Criminal Court. We told them that we wouldn't join, as long as they don't close the PLO offices in Washington, don't move their embassy to Jerusalem, and freeze building in the settlements. They didn't agree, and as such, we're not obligated to any agreements. We will join those organizations.

“‘We accepted 86 decisions in the UN Security Council for the Palestinians, and none of them were implemented. Another 46 were vetoed by the Americans.’” ...

See also:

[At Davos, Trump Turns Middle East Peace from a Promise into a Fantasy](#)

[Palestinians Respond to Trump: If Jerusalem Off Table, Then U.S. No Longer Has Seat at the Table](#)

[Palestinian Ambassador to U.S.: We Had Hopes for Trump but He Backstabbed Us](#)

2) [Mike Pence Just Confirmed America's Exit From the Mideast Peace Process](#) Sam Bahour, Haaretz, January 23, 2018

“U.S. Vice President Pence couldn't have said it more clearly.

“‘I am here to convey one simple message. America stands with Israel. We stand with Israel because your cause is our cause, your values are our values, and your fight is our fight,’ he said Monday in Israel's Knesset.

“He doubled down on the Trump administration's plan to move its embassy to Jerusalem, and repeated, mantra-like, the claim that the U.S. decision to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital was justified as ‘fact.’ The word ‘Palestinian’ was barely mentioned, and ‘Palestine’ – not at all.

“Pence also said the U.S. would support a two-state solution, but only if both sides support it – echoing Trump's comments at his Jerusalem announcement. The meaning? The U.S. is abandoning the two-state solution. A sovereign Palestinian state is no longer a necessary and critical aim of U.S. foreign policy.” ...

“If the international community’s policy is to achieve two states for two peoples, it will have to pursue an independent policy position that circumvents the Americans. The international community’s political influence in this arena has long been negligible, given the U.S. monopoly over the peace process. Now, it's time for them to step up.” ...

“After 24 years, reliance on American "leadership" has led to the creation of numerous Palestinian Bantustans, surrounded by an occupying military power that continues to occupy with impunity, bankrolled by European taxpayers: the EU and its member states are by far the largest donors to the Palestinians.” ...

“Israeli intransigence and blatant violation of international law is fuelled by its belief that, no matter what it does, the U.S. will always insulate it from meaningful rebuke. Palestinian desperation is driven by a conviction that America’s overwhelming support to Israel makes negotiations pointless, as Israel has little incentive to concede when it receives so much money, weapons and blind political support.” ...

See also:

[Zionism Has Distorted U.S. Foreign Policy, Says Allan Brownfeld](#)

[Israeli soldiers talk about the occupied territories](#)

3) [What is next for Palestine?](#) Ramzy Baroud, Al Jazeera, January 18, 2018

...“Since Trump signed the Jerusalem Embassy Law on December 6, many Palestinian intellectuals voiced their ideas about the proper course of action for their leadership and their people.

“There has been much talk about a new Palestinian strategy. Palestinian officials have ‘threatened’ to shift the struggle to a one-state solution - as opposed to continuing to pursue the defunct "two-state solution", to exclude the US from the ‘peace process’ and so on; but there are few indications that their discourse is anything but transient and opportunistic.

“In this article, I sought the opinion of 14 independent Palestinian intellectuals from across Palestine and the diaspora. Although they subscribe to different ideological schools of thought and come from different generations and locations, they shared a lot of ideas. Palestinians are demanding change, or, in the words of renowned Palestinian historian Salman Abu Sitta - interviewed below - they want to ‘go back to the roots.’

[The titles and authors of the 14 short opinion pieces in the article are as follows:]

“Going back to the roots” by Salman Abu Sitta - historian and president of the Palestine Land Society.

“Rallying the people” by Lamis Andoni - writer and journalist based in Amman, Jordan.

“Defeating Zionism” by Mazin Qumsiyeh - West-Bank-based author, scientist and director of the Palestine Museum of Natural History

“Resurrecting the PLO” by Samaa Abu Sharar - journalist and activist based in Beirut, Lebanon.

“A third Intifada is a must” by Ibrahim Sa'ad - writer and academic based in the UK.

“Internationally-aligned strategy” by Sam Bahour - Chairman of Americans for a Vibrant Palestinian Economy, based in Occupied Palestine.

“Yes to popular resistance, no to political elitism” by Yousef M Aljamal - Palestinian PhD candidate at the University of Sakarya, Middle East Institute, Turkey.

“International intifada” by Iyad Burnat, the head of the Popular Committee against the Wall in Bil'in village, West Bank.

“Full steam ahead with BDS” by Randa Abdel-Fattah - academic at Macquarie University, Australia.

“Un-participate” by Haidar Eid - one-state activist and Associate Professor at Al-Aqsa University, Gaza.

“Fearing the worst in Gaza” by Rawan Yaghi - Gaza-based writer and University of Oxford alumna.

“Resistance” by Mohammad Nofal - former political prisoner and retired teacher.

“The struggle continues...” by Ahmad Khaleel Al-Haaj - activist and writer based in Gaza.

4) [One state or two states? You're asking the wrong question.](#) Haggai Matar, +972, January 29, 2018

“A new poll reveals that following Trump’s Jerusalem declaration there has been a drop in support for the two-state solution among both Israeli Jews and Palestinians in the occupied territories – with both communities dipping below the 50 percent level. Only Palestinians with Israeli citizenship who live inside the Green Line show overwhelming support for this solution.” ...

“These new findings have significant value, as they expose Trump’s devastating impact on the chance to end the occupation in the foreseeable future, while sounding the alarm bells over the hopelessness of both sides, such that violence and bloodshed are actually gaining traction as possible solutions to our troubles.

“And yet, we must not view the poll results as a harbinger of ‘the end of the two-state solution’ or ‘final proof that one state is the only way to go.’ One state? Two states? You’re asking the wrong question.”...

“The one or two state debate also ignores the fact that for years there has been no peace process through which to promote either solution. Meanwhile, Israel currently enjoys international support and legitimacy of the sort it has not enjoyed in years, allowing it to give up on even the pretext of leading a [pointless] ‘peace process,’ as Noam Sheizaf recently noted. Discussions on what a theoretical solution might look like — as opposed to thinking about how to pressure the Israeli leadership into ending the occupation — are very convenient for Israel.” ...

“What we desperately need now, both within the Israeli society and in the international community, is to go back to the basics and recognize that any solution must recognize Palestinians’ rights as the foundation for any political solution. Without such recognition, we will only be serving Israel’s attempts to maintain the status quo. So, one state or two states? Let’s first stand up together for Palestinians rights and reject occupation. If that works, any political solution that follows could do just fine. We could save the internal fierce debates within our camp for then.”

See also:

[Palestine and Israel: One state, or two?](#)

[Palestinian-Israeli Pulse](#)

[The 'Two-state Solution' Only Ever Meant a Big Israel Ruling Over a Palestinian Bantustan. Let It Go](#)

5) [A Leave of Absence From the Occupation](#) Gideon Levy, Haaretz, January 21, 2018

... “But while these debates are underway, the Palestinians are marking the 51st year they’ve been living this way — the third and fourth generation living in the reality of the first two weeks of 2018. They ran out of time a long time ago. They also want to take a leave of absence from the occupation, but somehow it’s not working out for them. They also would love to live without enlightened Israelis next to them, but that hasn’t worked out either.

“Public debate in Israel, which is waning, is one of the signs of the big denial: Such debate ignores the existence of the unimaginable distress and fears of the other people; it ignores the other people’s blood that is cheaper than water and the terrible price that those people are paying day and night, and that time ran out for those people long ago. Security needs are always only Israeli security needs. When the discussion is about fears, it’s only Israeli fears.

“After 51 years, Israelis want a leave of absence from dealing with the occupation. A time-out of a few years, maybe a few generations, until “things work out.” Dealing with the occupation has exhausted them. They don’t want to deal with the nudniks who remind them of it – they repeat themselves so often, those nudniks, over and over again. Like Roger Waters.

“There is no greater impertinence or hubris than this. Dealing with the occupation is a hassle. The occupation itself is a much greater hassle. The occupation bores Israelis; the occupier really is a little bored.

“But while we are exhausted and bored, the Palestinians are bleeding, struggling, humiliated and battered. Every day, every night, in our backyard. They have no time. It ran out long ago. Their parents ended their lives under inhumane conditions; they want something better for their children at least. Maybe for their grandchildren.” ...

6) [“Bridges, Not Walls : Reflections of the Bishops' Pilgrimage for Peace in the Holy Land”](#) by a delegation of U.S. Hispanic Catholic bishops, January 28, 2018.

“We came as Pilgrims of Peace to this Land that is Holy to Jews, Christians and Muslims. We encountered many walls and some bridges, as we sought out those on the peripheries. As Pope Francis repeatedly reminds us, we believe peace with justice for the two peoples and three faiths of this Land can only come through building ‘bridges, not walls.’” ...

7) **Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins**

Jan 05, 2018 - [\[Bulletin\] New Year, New Challenges to Peace](#)

Jan 12, 2018 - [\[Bulletin\] Trump's Jerusalem Recognition Exposes Tensions](#)

Jan 19, 2018 - [\[Bulletin\] U.S. Slashes Funding for UN Refugee Agency](#)

Jan 26, 2018 - [\[Bulletin\] Pence's Role in Mideast Policy Under Scrutiny](#)

8) **Books recommendations:**

A) [A Life Worth Living](#) by Sabella, Bernard; Resource Publications(December 2017)

Amidst a sometimes confusing barrage of news about the Middle East, Dr. Bernard Sabella, a Palestinian Christian, offers an enlightening, often humorous, personal narrative accompanied by reflections on lessons learned from his life in a conflict zone. *A Life Worth Living* speaks with a voice worth listening to, alternately

anecdotal and analytical, touching our hearts while pondering the past, present, and future of the Holy Land. A terrific memoir....

B) **[The Biggest Prison on Earth: A History of the Occupied Territories](#) by Ilan Pappé, Oneworld Publ. (June 2017)**

Professor Ilan Pappé's latest book is a review of Israeli policy towards the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The historian sheds light on the mechanism that has been created to rule millions of Palestinians, who have effectively lived in an open air prison for 50 years.

C) **[Palestine: The Reality: The Inside Story of the Balfour Declaration](#) by J.M.N. Jeffries, Olive Branch Pr; Reprint edition (May 16, 2017)**

First published by Longman Green, London, this book had a short life; the entire stock and the publisher's premises were destroyed by the German blitz in 1941. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 is a document that profoundly affected the Middle East. Palestine: The Reality is an expertly researched inside story of the Declaration. It is also a vivid and personal account in which J.M.N. Jeffries exposes the real authors and progenitors of the Balfour Declaration, along with their personal stories, motives, conspiracies, and political aims.