

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**March 16, 2017**



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

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The six featured articles and the related links in this issue of the Middle East Notes focus on the latest episode of "Good Night With Asaf Harel" during which he claimed that Israel is an apartheid state and castigated fellow Israelis for ignoring the occupation; confirmation of David Friedman by the Foreign Relations Committee; J Street affirmation that two states is the only solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict; daily hardships in Gaza that could eventually push the Hamas government into a new clash with Israel; reaction to the new law entitling the government to deny entry to supporters of boycotts against the country or its settlements in occupied territory; two CMEP Bulletins: "Broader Middle East," and "Future of US Embassy Unknown."

**Commentary:** Israeli TV host Asaf Harel and American film actor Richard Gere see and speak of "facts on the ground" – apartheid and occupation – which seem to be un-seeable and seldom spoken of by most Israelis.

"Ever since the right wing took power, more and more voices are warning of apartheid. Are you kidding? Apartheid has been here for ages. Ages. It's just that we're (Israelis) on its good side, so it doesn't really bother us." (Harel)

"Obviously this occupation is destroying everyone. There's no defense of this occupation. Settlements are such an absurd provocation and, certainly in the international sense, completely illegal – and they are certainly not part of the program of someone who wants a genuine peace process. Just to be clear about this: I denounce violence on all sides of this. And, of course, Israelis should feel secure. But Palestinians should not feel desperate." (Gere)

- [Haaretz](#) provides a video of the last episode of "Good Night With Asaf Harel" during which Harel castigates Israelis for ignoring the occupation and claims that Israel is an apartheid state.
- Amir Tibon reports in [Haaretz](#) that David Friedman was confirmed by the Foreign Relations Committee on the force of the GOP majority and one Democratic vote. The nomination now awaits the approval of the Senate.
- Dahlia Scheindlin in [+972](#) reports on an interview with J Street President Jeremy Ben Ami who is undeterred and steadfast in his belief that two states is the only solution to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict.
- Amos Harel writes in [Haaretz](#) that the daily hardships in Gaza are like a ticking bomb that could eventually push the Hamas government into a new clash with Israel. If that happens, Netanyahu and his ministers won't be able to say they didn't know.
- Taly Krupkin states in [Haaretz](#) that in light of the new law entitling the government to deny entry to supporters of boycotts against the country or its settlements in occupied territory, more than 100 Jewish studies scholars have signed a letter in which they threaten to refrain from visiting Israel in protest.
- Links are provided to two CMEP Bulletins: March 3, 2017 - Broader Middle East, and March 10, 2017 - Future of U.S. Embassy Unknown

1) [WATCH In Last Monologue, Israeli Comedy Show Host Implores Israelis to Wake Up and Smell the Apartheid](#) ,  
Haaretz, March 3, 2017

“An Israeli comedy show host's searing indictment of Israeli society has gone viral on social media, raking in over 5,000 shares in the two days since it was posted on the show's Facebook page on Monday. (Feb. 27)

“In the video, (click link above to see and hear with English subtitles) Assaf Harel of "Good Night With Asaf Harel" castigates Israelis for ignoring the occupation and claims that Israel is an apartheid state.” ...

See also:

[Richard Gere to Haaretz: Settlements Are an Absurd Provocation, the Occupation Is Indefensible](#)

[Opinion: The roots of Israeli apartheid](#) - The New Arab

2) [David Friedman, Staunch Settlement Backer, Approved by Senate Panel as Envoy to Israel](#), Amir Tibon,  
Haaretz, March 9, 2017

“The Senate Foreign Relations Committee voted on Thursday to approve the nomination of David Friedman, a vocal supporter of Israeli settlements and a longtime associate of U.S. President Donald Trump, as the next U.S. ambassador to Israel.

“Eleven Republican senators voted for Friedman, joined by Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ) who broke ranks with fellow Democrats, all remaining nine of whom voted against the nomination. “ ...

“Friedman's nomination now heads to the Senate floor. A date for a vote has not yet been scheduled, but it is almost certain that Friedman will be approved, since Republicans have a larger majority on the floor than in the committee, and a few more Democrats could join Menendez and vote in favor. One senator to watch in that regard will be Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, who hasn't yet announced how he plans to vote.” ...

See also: [Opinion: David Friedman unfit to be ambassador to Israel](#), San Francisco Chronicle

3) ['I'm part of a dying breed that believes in two states'](#), Dahlia Scheindlin, +972, February 28, 2017

“The election of Donald Trump has emboldened fears that the two-state solution will officially be tossed into the dustbin of history. But J Street President Jeremy Ben Ami is undeterred, steadfast in his belief that two states is the only solution.+972 Magazine speaks to him at the annual J Street conference about the rise of Steve Bannon, the possibility of a regional plan for peace, and why he thinks Palestinian citizens of Israel do not form a ‘natural alliance’ with his organization’s constituency.

“Under the dark cloud of Israeli and American leaders who appear united in their disinterest in a two-state solution, and the growing refrain in policy circles that the ‘window’ is gone, J Street, the organization whose signature policy goal is a two-state resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — might have found itself foundering. What new ideas can be found when all avenues to the goal have been exhausted? What role does it have left to play in such a bleak context?

“The annual J Street Conference that ended Monday in Washington DC raised all these questions — minus the despair. Organizers said that over 3,500 people had turned out, panel rooms were packed to standing-only. The

abundant cheering and whooping sometimes felt spontaneous and emotional, at others seemed tinged with effort to be enthusiastic.

“One person whose enthusiasm seems effortless is Jeremy Ben Ami, the founder and president of the liberal Zionist organization. Despite all signs pointing to perdition, Ben Ami is indomitable, ticking off a long list of vital roles J Street has to play in the changed landscape of both America and Israel, and insisting on the singular viability of two-state solution. I spoke to Ben Ami as the conference neared its end on the role J Street must play in influencing U.S. government policy, among other things.” ...

See also:

[Opinion: Only Two States - Nothing Else](#), The Jerusalem Post

[Bernie Sanders: We Need to End the 50-year-long Israeli Occupation](#), - Haaretz

[Defense Chief Lieberman: U.S. Warned of 'Immediate Crisis' With Trump if Israel Annexed West Bank](#) - Haaretz

[Opinion Five Ways Israel Will Make You Hate Israel This Week](#) – Haaretz

[When the US wanted Palestine to be one democratic state for all](#) – Electronic Intifada

**4) [Analysis Gaza 2017: Israeli Watchdog Can Already Start Collecting Evidence for Next Post-war Report](#), Amos Harel, Haaretz, March 3, 2017**

“The daily hardships in Gaza are like a ticking bomb that could eventually push the Hamas government into a new clash with Israel. If that happens, Netanyahu and his ministers won’t be able to say they didn’t know.

“Many of the volatile elements that led Israel into war in the Gaza Strip in summer 2014, enumerated in the state comptroller’s report on Operation Protective Edge, are back in place in the spring of 2017.

“The report quotes warnings that the cabinet ministers heard from the coordinator of government activity in the territories, Maj. Gen. Eitan Dangot, and his successor, Maj. Gen. Yoav (Poli) Mordechai, in the year and a half before the war.

“Both warned of the implications of the worsening humanitarian situation in Gaza and said the serious infrastructure problems there – problems with the water and electricity supply – very high unemployment levels and sense of being choked off could lead to a violent eruption.

“The daily hardships in Gaza are like a ticking bomb that could eventually push the Hamas government into a new clash with Israel. If that happens, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his ministers won’t be able to say they didn’t know.” ...

See also: [Analysis Israel's Gaza War Failure Was First and Foremost a Diplomatic One](#), - Haaretz

[Volatile and dangerous: a look at the humanitarian crisis in Gaza](#), - Ynetnews,

[Can senior Hamas figure resolve Gaza's electricity crisis?](#) – Al Monitor

[Resource: The impact of the siege on women in Gaza](#), +972

[Opinion Illegitimate Targets on Both Sides of Israel's Border](#), Amira Hass, Haaretz

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[Has Israel recognized link between Gaza blockade, security threat?](#) - *Al-Monitor*

[Gaza report: 'Not about justice for Israel's victims'](#), Al Jazeera

5) [Israel's Travel Ban Backlash: Over 100 Jewish Studies Scholars Threaten to Not Visit Israel in Protest](#), Taly Krupkin, Haaretz, March 10, 2017

“Dozens of prominent Jewish scholars worry they won't be able to visit Israel anymore, citing a new law entitling the government to deny entry to supporters of boycotts against the country or its settlements in occupied territory. Meanwhile, only days after the passing of the new law, more than 100 Jewish studies scholars have signed a letter in which they threaten to refrain from visiting Israel in protest.

“Among us are those who oppose the BDS movement, those who oppose BDS but support a settlement boycott, and those who support BDS,’ says the petition that has come to the attention of Haaretz, although it has not yet been published.

“In spite of our different views, we stand in strong opposition to the new law. It will be bad for Israel, bad for the cause of democracy at this fragile moment, and bad for the principles of free speech and thought on which our scholarship is based. We hope that the Israeli judiciary will overturn the new law and assure us that our political speech will not prevent us from continuing our rich scholarly interactions with Israeli colleagues in the field of Jewish studies. Should the law stand, we may no longer be permitted—nor permit ourselves—to enter the State of Israel.” ...

See also: [New entry law a reminder that Palestinians live in Israel's prison](#) - +972

[Balfouring the Middle East](#) – JFJFP

[Opinion Am I Too Dangerous to Enter Israel?](#), Haaretz

[Cornel West Tells Haaretz: Israel's Travel Ban Shows BDS Is Getting Stronger](#), Haaretz

6) Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletins:

[CMEP Bulletin - March 3, 2017 - Broader Middle East](#)

[CMEP Bulletin – March 10, 2017 - Future of US Embassy Unknown](#)