

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
May 28, 2015



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Photo from separation wall: "A country is not only what it does. It is also what it tolerates." Kurt Tucholsky, 1933

This issue of Middle East Notes has a few more articles than usual. Eight articles are excerpted, with links available to the full pieces. Topics include both the need for and impossibility of the "two state solution"; the disparity between the so-called two sides, the Israelis and Palestinians, which is made to appear to be in perfect balance, but are not so in fact; the permanent occupation of the West Bank; the Vatican recognition of the State of Palestine and declaration of sainthood for two Palestinian women; the continuing Nakba of 1947-49, 1967 and the present; and other articles of interest.

Commentary: Most of the articles in this issue of Middle East Notes might be best understood through the following metaphor: Once upon a time there was a much photographed village. A strong wind came and left only a few buildings standing; the other collapsed "buildings" were then revealed to be only cardboard facades. With the façades no longer in the way, the stark scenery was more clearly revealed.

The reelection of Prime Minister Netanyahu, his public opposition to the "two state solution," his choice of pro-occupation and pro-settlement government ministers, and his support of settlers and the expansion of settlements have confirmed that the past 48 years of "negotiations" to resolve the Israeli/Palestinian conflict were much like a cardboard façade used to conceal a stark reality. This reality is now more clearly revealed and the leadership of Israel continues to lose its international supporters.

Only approximately half the people living in the area between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River – Jewish Israelis – have full democratic, social and economic rights, privileges and obligations. The other half of this population, the Palestinians, have been and are denied the same democratic rights and privileges through the non-stop suppression of the "Israeli Arab" citizens of Israel and of the Palestinian residents of Jerusalem, the repression of the Palestinians living in the "West Bank," the permanent military occupation/annexation of the "West Bank," and the de-facto imprisonment of the people of Gaza.

- Mahmoud Abbas writes in Palestine News Network that the Palestinian people's struggle for freedom and national independence has reached a decisive moment.
- Richard Falk notes in Alternative Information Center (AIC) that the relation between oppressor and oppressed is a paramount precondition for sustainable peace.
- Henry Siegman in the New York Times recommends abandoning the old assumption that Palestinians can achieve statehood only by negotiating with Netanyahu.
- A Ha'aretz editorial states that Netanyahu's new government, which conveys to the world revulsion for any peaceful solution to the conflict with the Palestinians, is steering Israel onto a destructive collision course with its most important allies.
- B'Tselem states that the Israeli occupation is clearly not temporary; it has disinherited, stifled and trampled human rights for nearly 50 years.
- Gaia Pianigiani and Rick Gladstone report in the New York Times about the Vatican's recognition of Palestinian statehood, a symbolic but significant step upsetting to the Israeli government.
- Nir Hasson writes in Ha'aretz that the sainthood of Palestinians Mariam Baouardy and Mary Alphonsine Danil Ghattas is something for which "not only Christians but also Muslims and Jews can be happy."
- The Institute for Middle East Understanding (IMEU) presents the general facts and figures of the Palestinian Nakba.

1) [It's time for Palestine; if not now, when?](#)

Mahmoud Abbas, Palestine News Network, April 28, 2015

The Palestinian people's struggle for freedom and national independence has reached a decisive moment. The two-state formula is under serious threat, due to systematic Israeli policies and practices that have seriously undermined the solution-threatening to make it impracticable in the very near future. More alarmingly, while Palestine takes concrete and determined steps to demonstrate its commitment to international law and human rights by acceding to the main instruments of international law, Israel has taken concrete steps to undermine them, whilst openly and unambiguously declaring its hostility to Palestinian national rights. ...

Ending the Occupation The Palestinian people are pursuing a strategy of internationalization in order to end the occupation, reach a just and lasting peace, and apply the indispensable tool of accountability so as to end Israel's culture of impunity that has perpetuated the conflict and entrenched the occupation. Meanwhile, the Israeli leadership has clearly and repeatedly stated its commitment to preventing the establishment of a Palestinian state, persisting in a program of settlement expansion, institutional racism, and apartheid practices—including against Israeli citizens of Palestinian origin, as was clear during the latest election.

In 1948, our people suffered one of the most dramatic forced displacement campaigns in modern history. The Nakba, or catastrophe, refers to the erasure of 418 Palestinian villages and the forced and systematic displacement of 70 percent of the Palestinian people to make way for the creation of Israel—this continues until the present day. I was a young boy then, but the memory of being uprooted from my hometown of Safad remain fresh. ...

2) [Parodies of parity: Israel and Palestine](#)

Richard Falk, Alternative Information Center (AIC), May 17, 2015

As long ago as 1998 Edward Said reminded the world that acting as if Palestinians were equally responsible with Israelis for the persisting struggle of the two peoples was not only misleading, but exhibited a fundamental in misunderstanding of the true reality facing the two peoples: "The major task of the American or Palestinian intellectual of the left is to reveal the disparity between the so-called two sides, which appears to be in perfect balance, but are not in fact. To reveal that this is an oppressed and an oppressor, a victim and a victimizer, and unless we recognize that, we're nowhere." [interview with Bruce Robbins published in *Social Text* (1998)]

I would rephrase Said's statement by substituting "any engaged citizen and morally sensitive intellectual" for "the American or Palestinian intellectual of the left." We do not need to be on the left to expose the cruel hypocrisy of suppressing gross disparities of circumstances, or more to the point, blocking out the multiple diplomatic, military, material, and psychological advantages enjoyed by Israel as compared to the Palestine. "It is elementary, my dear Watson!" as Sherlock Holmes so often exclaimed, or at least it should be.

Unfortunately, a principal instrument of the mind numbing diplomacy of the United States is precisely aimed at avoiding any acknowledgement of the disparity that at the core of the encounter. As a result, the American public is confused as to what it is reasonable to expect from the two sides and how to interpret the failure of negotiations to get anywhere time and again. This failure is far from neutral. It is rather the disparity that has done the most damage to peace prospects ever since 1967: This pattern of delay has kept the Palestinians in bondage while allowing the Israelis build and create armed communities on occupied Palestinian land that was supposedly put aside for the future Palestinian state.

...

3) Give up on Netanyahu, go to the United Nations

Henry Siegman, New York Times, May 19, 2015

... In the wake of last month's election, the longtime peace activists and diplomats who have devoted much of their professional lives to achieving a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are more depressed and demoralized than ever before.

Well before Mr. Netanyahu declared during the recent election campaign that Palestinians would remain under Israeli military occupation as long as he is Israel's prime minister, Mr. Obama understood that the Israeli government's enthusiasm for continued peace talks with the Palestinians served no purpose other than to provide cover for Israel's continued expansion of Jewish settlements and to preclude the emergence of anything resembling a Palestinian state in the West Bank. ...

The victory of Israel's far right has thus provided an unexpected, if narrow, opening for Mr. Obama, allowing him to call for a reassessment of America's peace policy.

Such a reassessment must begin by abandoning the old assumption that Palestinians can achieve statehood only by negotiating with Mr. Netanyahu. Because of Mr. Netanyahu's statements and behavior during the elections (not to mention the continued construction in the settlements), that belief has been irreparably discredited. It is now certain that a two-state agreement will never emerge from any bilateral Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

Such an agreement can only be achieved if the United Nations Security Council, with strong support from the United States, presents the parties with clear terms for resumed peace talks that will produce an agreement within a specified timeframe. (This would go far beyond a rumored French proposal.) ...

4) World not willing to buy Netanyahu's deceit anymore

Ha'aretz editorial, May 22, 2015

"I don't support a one-state solution. I don't believe this is a solution at all. I support the vision of two states for two peoples – a demilitarized Palestinian state that recognizes the Jewish state," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told EU foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini on Wednesday.

But how can anyone still believe the prime minister? On the eve of the election he renounced the two-states-for-two-peoples principle. Only two days ago he announced that Jerusalem is the capital of the Jewish people alone and now, suddenly, due to pressure, he again declares his support for the two-state solution.

Indeed, it appears that both Mogherini and the Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs Borge Brende are no longer impressed by what Netanyahu says. Brende, a friend of Israel's, made it clear to Netanyahu that the pressure on Israel will increase after the nuclear agreement with Iran is signed. He advised him to accept at least one of the conditions set by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to resume the negotiations. The conditions include stopping the construction in the settlements, releasing the Palestinian prisoners who were incarcerated before the Oslo Accords, conducting continuous negotiations and setting a time table for ending the occupation by the end of 2017. ...

5) 47 years of temporary occupation

B'Tselem, The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories, June 5, 2014

... The presence of Israeli citizens in the West Bank and the settlements and outposts scattered throughout it are the main reason for the massive presence of Israeli security forces there. Israel devotes a great deal of resources to ensure that Palestinians not violate the military orders designed to keep them away from settlements and to keeping Palestinians from attacking settlers or settlements –

attacks that are both immoral and unlawful, the fact that the settlements are a breach of international humanitarian law notwithstanding. The presence of security forces results in daily friction between Israeli troops and Palestinian residents. This, in turn, leads to human rights violations by security forces, including acts of violence and illegal gunfire.

Although the West Bank is not part of Israel's sovereign territory, Israel has applied the lion's share of its legal system to settlements and settlers. As a result, settlers benefit from all the rights granted to citizens of a democratic country, as do the rest of Israel's citizens who live within the boundaries of the Green Line, the 1949 Armistice Line. ...

However, Israel's actions on the ground indicate that it does not see the occupation as temporary. It apparently considers the West Bank, and particularly Area C, as its own, a part of its sovereign territory: seizing lands, using natural resources for itself and establishing permanent settlements. At the same time, Israel evades the obligations it has under the law of occupation toward Palestinian residents of the West Bank, who are permitted to build on only about 40 percent of its territory, including the obligation to safeguard them, uphold their right to property and allow them to exercise their rights to housing, welfare and livelihood. ...

6) Vatican to recognize Palestinian State in new treaty

Gaia Pianigiani and Rick Gladstone, New York Times, May 13, 2015

The Vatican said Wednesday that it had concluded a treaty to recognize Palestinian statehood, a symbolic but significant step welcomed by Palestinians but upsetting to the Israeli government. Formal recognition of a Palestinian state by the Vatican, which has deep religious interests in the Israeli-occupied Palestinian territories that include Christian holy sites, lends a powerful signal of moral authority and legitimacy to the efforts by the Palestinian Authority's president, Mahmoud Abbas, to achieve statehood despite the long paralyzed Israeli-Palestinian peace process.

Israel has grown increasingly alarmed about the increased international acceptance of Palestine as a state since the United Nations upgraded the Palestinian delegation's status in 2012 to that of a nonmember observer state. A number of European countries have also signaled their acceptance of Palestinian statehood.

A statement from a joint commission of Vatican and Palestinian diplomatic officials, posted on the Vatican news website, said "the work of the commission on the text of the agreement has been concluded," and that it would be submitted for formal approval and for signing "in the near future." ...

7) Pope to canonize two Palestinian nuns

Nir Hasson, Ha'aretz, May 11, 2015

Pope Francis will canonize two native-born Palestinian nuns at a ceremony at the Vatican in St. Peter's Square on May 17. The event in Rome will be attended by Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas. As far as is known, Israel will not be sending an official representative.

The nuns are Mariam Baouardy, aka Blessed Mary of Jesus Crucified, who died in 1878 at the age of 35; and Blessed Marie Alphonsine Danil Ghattas, who died in 1927 at the age of 80. They will be the first Arabic-speaking saints and also the first from the Land of Israel to be recognized as such by the Roman Catholic Church. ...

"The two saints lived in Palestine before it was divided. They did not know the Israeli Arab conflict. I am sure they follow our situation from heaven and will continue to intercede for peace and reconciliation in the Holy Land. Their intercession is strong and efficacious. By coincidence, both are called Mary, Miriam. It is extraordinary: This name is common to Jews, Christians, Muslims and Jews. May they become a bridge between us all."

See also: [Modern Palestinian saints a message of peace, justice, and freedom](#), Issa Kassissieh, Ma'an News, May 11, 2015

8) [Quick facts: The Palestinian Nakba, IMEU, May 13, 2015](#)

General facts and figures

- The Palestinian “Nakba” (“catastrophe” in Arabic) refers to the mass expulsion of Palestinian Arabs from British Mandate Palestine during Israel’s creation (1947-49).
- The Nakba was not an unintended result of war. It was a deliberate and systematic act necessary for the creation of a Jewish majority state in historic Palestine, which was overwhelmingly Arab prior to 1948. Internally, Zionist Jewish leaders used the euphemism “transfer” when discussing plans for what today would be called ethnic cleansing.
- The Nakba’s roots lay in the emergence of political Zionism in 19th century Europe, when some Jews, influenced by the nationalism then sweeping the continent, concluded that the remedy to centuries of anti-Semitic persecution in Europe and Russia was the creation of a nation state for Jews in Palestine and began emigrating as colonists to the Holy Land, displacing indigenous Palestinians in the process.
- In November 1947, following the horrors of World War II and the Nazi genocide of European Jewry, the newly-created United Nations approved a plan to partition Mandate Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. It allocated approximately 55 percent of the land to the proposed Jewish state, although Zionist Jews owned only about 7 percent of the private land in Palestine and made up only about 33 percent of the population, a large percentage of whom were recent immigrants from Europe. The Palestinian Arab state was to be created on 42 percent of Mandate Palestine, with Jerusalem becoming an international city.
- Almost immediately after the partition plan was passed, violence broke out and large-scale expulsions of Palestinians began, long before the armies of neighboring Arab states became involved. When Zionist forces finished expanding, the new state of Israel comprised 78 percent of historic Palestine, with the remainder, the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and Gaza, falling under the control of Jordan and Egypt, respectively. In the 1967 War, Israel occupied the remaining 22 percent and began colonizing them shortly thereafter.
- The Nakba did not end in 1948 and continues until today, in the form of Israel’s ongoing theft of Palestinian land for settlements and for Jewish communities inside Israel, its destruction of Palestinian homes and agricultural land, revocation of residency rights, deportations, periodic brutal military assaults that result in mass civilian casualties such as the one that took place in Gaza in the summer of 2014, and the denial of the internationally-recognized legal right of return of millions of stateless Palestinian refugees.

The Nakba by the numbers

- Between 750,000 and one million: The number of Palestinians expelled and made refugees by Zionist paramilitaries, and subsequently Israeli forces, during Israel’s creation in 1947-49.
- Between 250,000 and 350,000: The number of Palestinians expelled from their homes by Zionist paramilitaries between the passage of the UN partition plan in November 1947 and Israel’s declaration of independence on May 15, 1948 - prior to the start of the war with neighboring Arab states.
- Approximately 7.1 million: The number of Palestinian refugees and displaced persons as of 2009, including Nakba survivors and their descendants. They are located mostly in the occupied West Bank and neighboring Arab countries such as Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria, denied their internationally-recognized legal right to return to their homeland by Israel, simply because they are not Jewish.
- Approximately 150,000: The number of Palestinians who remained inside what became Israel’s borders in 1948, many of them internally displaced. These Palestinians (sometimes called “Israeli Arabs”) were granted Israeli citizenship but stripped of most of their land and placed under martial law until 1966. Today, there are approximately 1.6 million Palestinian citizens of Israel, who live as second-class citizens in their own homeland, subject to more than 50 laws that discriminate against them because they are not Jewish.
- At least two dozen: The number of massacres of Palestinian civilians by Zionist and Israeli forces, which played a crucial role in spurring the mass flight of Palestinians from their homes.

- Approximately 100: The number of Palestinian civilians, including women and children, massacred in the town of Deir Yassin on April 9, 1948, by members of the Irgun and Stern Gang, pre-state Zionist terrorist organizations led by future Israeli prime ministers Menachem Begin and Yitzhak Shamir, respectively.
- More than 400: The number of Palestinian cities and towns systematically destroyed by Israeli forces or repopulated with Jews between 1948 and 1950. Most Palestinian population centers, including homes, businesses, houses of worship, and vibrant urban centers, were demolished to prevent the return of their Palestinian owners, now refugees outside of Israel's pre-1967 borders, or internally displaced inside of them. (See here for interactive map of Palestinian population centers destroyed during Israel's creation.)
- Approximately 4,244,776: The number of acres of Palestinian land expropriated by Israel during and immediately following its creation in 1948.
- Between 100 and 200 billion: The total estimated monetary loss of Palestinians dispossessed during Israel's creation, in current U.S. dollars.

(NB – cf. the first three articles of interest below contain more information on the Nakba.)

Other articles of interest:

- [iNakba app shows two sides of Israel's war story, Judy Maltz, Ha'aretz, May 13, 2015](#)
- [65th anniversary of the adoption of Plan Dalet, Institute for Middle East Understanding \(IMEU\), March 8, 2015](#)
- [The Nakba, 65 years of dispossession and apartheid, IMEU, May 8, 2015](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 1, 2015](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 15, 2015](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, May 22, 2015](#)
- ["I'm from that hell called Gaza", WallWritings, James M. Wall, May 10, 2015](#)
- [Stop whining. Long live Israel's new and honest government, Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, May 10, 2015](#)
- [New Israeli government makes no pretense of peace, Daoud Kuttub, Al Monitor, May 8, 2015](#)
- [No Gaza, no peace, Jimmy Carter, Gro Harlem Brundtland, Foreign Policy, May 14, 2015](#) (free registration required)
- [By protecting settlements, Congress joins the ranks of Israel's delegitimizers, Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, May 13, 2015](#)
- [Weakening and discrediting the UN: Mission of Israeli QGOs, Richard Falk, IMEMC, April 20, 2015](#)
- [Israeli veterans say permissive rules of engagement fueled Gaza carnage, William Booth, Washington Post, May 4, 2015](#)
- [UN confirms IDF breaks laws of war, AFP, Agence France-Presse, April 28, 2015](#) (Reports on the summary of the UN inquiry)
- [Dear Congress: "Pro-Israel" is not "pro-settlements," Lara Friedman, The Hill, April 27, 2015](#)
- [The website of the Palestinian BDS National Committee \(BNC\), a wide coalition of the largest Palestinian organizations, trade unions, networks and NGOs.](#)
- [Embracing Israel boycott, Jewish Voice for Peace insists on its Jewish identity, Evan Serpick, Forward, published March 28, 2015, April 3 issue](#)
- [Israeli extremism will encourage global boycott, Omar Barghouti, New York Times, May 11, 2015](#)
- [A bold proposal: Palestine should give its refugees citizenship, Fateh Azzam, Al Shabaka, May 12, 2015](#)
- [Totalitarian control: The quantum mechanics of Israeli totalitarianism, Mark Levine, Al Jazeera, JFJFP, May 7, 2015](#)
- [Confederation is the key to Mideast peace, Yossi Beilin, New York Times, May 14, 2015](#)
- [Why Israel should not exist, Garry Leech, CounterPunch, May 19, 2015](#)