

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**June 11, 2015**



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This issue of the Middle East Notes focuses on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's and his chosen ministers' rejection of any viable Palestinian State, his increasing attempts to control all Israeli media, the challenge to the U.S. to reformulate its non-military support of the Israeli government, the equivocation or substitution of the State of Israel by many Israeli Jews for monotheism as the heart of Jewish identity, the example of Pope Francis in his prophetic role calling for peace and justice, and other issues.

**Commentary:** The "conflation balloon" is deflating. With Netanyahu's reelection and his selection of cabinet members, more and more friends of Israel are freer to criticize his political choices and actions especially concerning the Palestinians in Israel, East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza without being demonized themselves. Since the founding of the State of Israel in 1947 and especially since its territorial expansion in 1967, criticism of Israel has often been conflated into a delegitimization of Israel, into a rejection of the Israeli people, into an anti-Semitic attack on Jews all over the world.

- Gideon Levy notes in Ha'aretz that "Hasbara" is the Israeli euphemism for propaganda, and there are some things, said the late ambassador Yohanan Meroz, that are not "hasbarable." One of them is Israel's treatment of the Palestinians.
- Hagai El-Ad writes in the New York Times that Palestinians are powerless to choose Israeli officials, who make the weightiest decisions affecting them.
- Bernard Avishai in the New Yorker notes that Netanyahu's reelection has allowed him to maneuver for control of all the news media. He is positioned to regulate cellular service and Internet providers, license private broadcast channels, and influence the management of public television and radio.
- In a Talking Points Memo, Mikhael Manekin claims that no one in the international diplomatic community wants an Israeli government that openly opposes the two-state solution. It is time for the U.S. to have a new strategy for dealing with the Israeli right's rejection of the two-state solution.
- The Foundation for Middle East Peace has compiled quotations of statements of Netanyahu and 11 of the principal ministers of his new government unequivocally stating that there will not be a "two state solution."
- Robert Cohen writes in an article for Jews for Justice for Palestinians that, for most Jews, there exists an almost unchallengeable belief that the State of Israel has become central to their understanding of Jewish identity. Belief in the inherent goodness of Israel has become a tenet of faith equal to their commitment to monotheism. Most Jews have successfully and seamlessly merged their ancient mythological understanding of the Promised Land with a 19th century blood and soil ethnic nationalism.
- Yossi Sarid writes a satirical article in Ha'aretz in which he states that the new spirit Pope Francis is trying to bring to the world isn't suitable for Israelis. Here, in the Holy Land, nobody speaks of peace any more, or of justice, either. So what's the point of recognizing the "State of Palestine" now, of all occasions? He ends his article by saying that no one in the Jewish world today can match the pope's stature; no rabbi can light a candle to his holiness. The Torah world, like its teachers and rabbis, is stagnant.
- Other articles of interest

***Click on the headline of each article to read the piece in its entirety.***

## **1) Israeli propaganda isn't fooling anyone – except Israelis**

**Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, June 4, 2015**

And propaganda shall cover for everything. We'll say terrorism, we'll shout anti-Semitism, we'll scream delegitimation, we'll cite the Holocaust; we'll say Jewish state, gay-friendly, drip irrigation, cherry tomatoes, aid to Nepal, Nobel Prizes for Jews, look what's happening in Syria, the only democracy, the greatest army. We'll say the Palestinians are making unilateral moves, we'll propose negotiations on the "settlement bloc borders," we'll demand recognition of a Jewish state and we'll complain that "there's no one to talk to."

We'll wail that the whole world is against us and wants to destroy us, no less. The deputy minister will call on Switzerland to boycott, the minister will declare that boycotts are unacceptable, the deputy director of the Foreign Ministry will explain that a bigger budget is needed, and Sheldon Adelson will convene an emergency conference in Las Vegas – and despite it all, nothing will budge. Propaganda won't cover for everything. ...

Granted, in a country full of propagandists, it has been working for close to 50 years already; most Israelis are convinced that all is really fine with us; that the IDF is really moral and the occupation is really an occupation of no choice; that Israel can live by the sword forever and be dismissive of the whole world, that it can tyrannize the Palestinians, wreck Gaza every other year, shoot children and believe that justice is on its side and that the world will see this too. That propaganda can replace any other policy.

That you can fool the whole world all the time. You can come up with all sorts of new (and strange) conditions every two or three years for ending the occupation and insisting that the spit we're feeling is just raindrops. You can blame the Palestinians for everything and obscure the simple fact that this brutal occupation is Israeli. You can tell the world that it all belongs to us because the Bible says so and believe that anyone will take you seriously. You can be sure that the memory of the Holocaust will serve us forever, and justify any injustice. ...

## **2) Israel's charade of democracy**

**Hagai El-Ad, New York Times, May 31, 2015**

Israel's occupation of the Palestinian territories is nearing the half-century mark, and Israel's new right-wing government offers little hope of ending it. Nevertheless, the new government promises something else of value: clarity. And with that clarity, the opportunity to challenge the prolonged lie of the occupation's "temporary" status. For if the occupation has become permanent in all but its name, what about the voting rights of Palestinians? ...

If you look at all the land Israel controls between the Jordan and the Mediterranean, that area contains some 8.3 million Israelis and Palestinians of voting age. Roughly 30 percent — about 2.5 million — are Palestinians living outside Israel under varying degrees of Israeli control — in East Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. They have some ability to elect Palestinian bodies with limited functions. But they are powerless to choose Israeli officials, who make the weightiest decisions affecting them. International humanitarian law does not grant a people living under temporary military occupation the right to vote for the institutions of the occupying power. But "temporary" is the operative word. Military occupations are meant to have an end. And common sense says half a century is not "temporary." ...

A day will come when this occupation ends. It may end with one state, two states, or something else. That specific political choice is beyond the deeper question of human rights, as long as the option eventually chosen respects the human rights of all. For now, the one choice we cannot make is to continue calling the current reality democratic and the occupation temporary. Clarity may be of value after all, if it helps bring the occupation's end sooner.

**3) [Benjamin Netanyahu: Media manipulator](#)  
Bernard Avishai, *The New Yorker*, June 4, 2015**

... [Benjamin] Netanyahu won reelection, and the legislation's sponsors lost their leverage. But the Prime Minister's maneuvering for control of the news media did not end with the sinking of the bill. While forming his new government, he extracted written pledges from potential coalition partners not to vote against any legislative initiative or regulatory decision by the minister of communications, coyly implying that he might add the post to his responsibilities as Prime Minister—which he did. This role, and these pledges, position Netanyahu to regulate cellular service and Internet providers, license private broadcast channels, and influence the management of public television and radio. His defense of Israel Hayom's supremacy in print is trifling compared with his growing power to control greater Israel's airwaves. "Netanyahu is like a pianist who's gathered all the keys for a keyboard," Yaron Ezrahi, a Hebrew University political scientist who founded *The Seventh Eye*, an Israeli press-criticism magazine, told me. "Do we expect him not to play?" ...

**4) [Well, now we know: Netanyahu will never support a two-state solution](#)  
Mikhael Manekin, *TPM Café: Opinion*, May 27, 2015**

Virtually no one in the international diplomatic community wants an Israeli government that openly opposes the two-state solution—but the time has come to face the uncomfortable truth. While it has been clear for years that Netanyahu is stalling talks, building settlements and strengthening the hard right in Israel, the world has continued to hope that Netanyahu's overt ambiguity over the two-state solution means he is willing to go there at the end of the day.

... The international community wants a Palestinian state alongside Israel for strategic and ideological reasons, and has formed no working plan for Israeli rejectionism. What will the U.S. do if Netanyahu officially rejects the idea of a Palestinian state? No one knows. ...

... It is time for the U.S., too, to understand that Israel's new rightwing government has done away with political equivocation. That realization must be matched by a new strategy for dealing with the Israeli right's rejection of the two-state solution.

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**5) [In their own words: Israeli officials on a Palestinian state](#)  
Foundation for Middle East Peace staff, May 29**

- Benjamin Netanyahu, Prime Minister: "I think anyone who is going to establish a Palestinian state and to evacuate territory is giving radical Islam a staging ground against the State of Israel." (*Politico*, 03/16/15)
- "I think the Israeli people understand now what I always say: that there cannot be a situation, under any agreement, in which we relinquish security control of the territory west of the River Jordan." (*Times of Israel*, 07/13/14)
- Naftali Bennett, Minister of Education: "I will do everything in my power to make sure they [Palestinians] never get a state." (*The New Yorker*, 01/21/13)
- "We are not going to give up more land. This approach has failed. Now, if it means that the world will penalize us, that is unfair but so be it." (*Times of Israel*, 02/17/15)
- "Israel cannot withdraw from more territory and cannot allow for the establishment of a Palestinian state in the West Bank." (*New York Times*, 11/06/14)
- In a 2010 television debate with Palestinian Israeli Ahmed Tibi: "When [Palestinians] were still climbing trees, we had a Jewish state here... We were here long before you." (*972 Magazine*, 01/01/13)

## **6) Jewish land trumps Jewish god - Reclaiming the language of Jewish identity**

**Robert Cohen, Jews for Justice for Palestinians, May 24, 2015**

As time goes on I'm attracting more and more hostility. ... Recently I have been described as a "traitor," a "Marxist," "narcissistic" and "shameful" because I have advocated for boycotts in support of Palestinian human rights. ...

But what is it my critics want me to be loyal to?

In their world view what should I be defending? Land grabs? Water appropriation? House demolitions? Child arrests? Judicial apartheid? Shoot to kill policing? A fifty year occupation the rest of the world says is illegal? Should I turn a blind eye when Israeli soldiers provide testimonies from the streets of Gaza that tell us how brutal their orders were towards Palestinian civilians last summer? ...

Meanwhile, for those Jews still attending synagogue regularly, there also exists an almost unchallengeable belief that the State of Israel has become central to our understanding of Jewish identity. Belief in the inherent goodness of Israel has become a tenet of faith equal to our commitment to monotheism. We have successfully and seamlessly merged our ancient mythological understanding of the Promised Land with a 19th century blood and soil ethnic nationalism. ...

When I read through the verses in Exodus and the accompanying commentaries in my prayerbook, I see nothing that creates a requirement to defend Settlements, Checkpoints, Separation Walls, Jewish-only buses or indeed the members of a new Israeli government who seem to have only a passing acquaintance with democracy and human rights. ...

My hope is that others will start to recognise the contradictions and inconsistencies that currently sit so centrally to their Jewish identity. A critique of Israel cannot be outlawed from our synagogues nor banned from our secular discourse.

There is a great deal of concern that lies in my desire to reclaim the language of Jewish identity. Our relationship to Israel and the Palestinians has become defining for us individually and collectively. Nothing less than the future of Judaism and the Jewish people is now at stake.

## **7) Pope Francis proves how stagnant Israel has become**

**Yossi Sarid, Ha'aretz, May 29, 2015**

The new spirit Pope Francis is trying to bring to the world isn't suitable for us Israelis.

... Here, in the Holy Land, nobody speaks of peace any more, or of justice, either. So what's the point of recognizing the "State of Palestine" now, of all occasions? And why praise a terrorist like Mahmoud Abbas and call him "a man of peace" – just to hurt our feelings?

The whispered rumors are that the Vatican is plotting and scheming to use the Holy See's status to bring Israeli and Palestinian hearts closer, as though the embers were still crackling and there was still hope. ... Has the voice of the chief rabbi sounded in our land as has the voice of Pope Franciscus, warning day and night of injustice and inequality as the main threats to the human race? When have we last heard a rabbi taking on the fight of a poor, underprivileged person? ...

... No one in the Jewish world today can match the pope's stature; no rabbi can light a candle to his holiness. The Torah world, like its teachers and rabbis, is stagnant.

### Other articles of interest:

- [Churches for Middle East Peace \(CMEP\) Bulletin – On the way to two states there are settlements, May 29, 2015](#)
- [CMEP Bulletin - Foreign consequences for Israel, maybe – June 5, 2015](#)
- [Israeli NGO Breaking the Silence meets Obama aides in Washington, Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, June 5, 2015](#)
- [Which countries are failing to deliver Gaza aid?, Integrated Regional Information Networks \(IRIN\), May 22, 2015](#)
- [Apartheid in Israel is about more than just segregated buses, Ha'aretz, Aeyal Gross, May 26, 2015](#)
- [France to push 18-month timetable for Mideast peace, Times of Israel, May 21, 2015](#)
- [God save Israel – Israelis won't, Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, May 23, 2015](#)
- [Likud win brings ultra-Orthodox and pro-settler dominance, Neri Zilber, Foreign Policy, May 26, 2015](#)
- [Israel lurches right with formation of new government, Noam Sheizaf, Al Jazeera America, May 6, 2015](#)
- [Israel's shield, Colum Lynch, Foreign Policy, June 1, 2015](#)
- [Dear world: Netanyahu is calling you stupid, Lara Friedman, Huffington Post, May 29, 2015](#)
- [Israel's problem isn't BDS – it's the occupation, Ravit Hecht, Ha'aretz, June 3, 2015](#)
- [Obama doubles down on criticism of Netanyahu and Israel's politics of "fear," David Francis, Foreign Policy, June 2, 2015](#)
- [The silence of the deceived, Elyakim Haetzni, Ynet News, June 2, 2015](#)