

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
July 12, 2012



[Read previous weeks' Middle East Notes](#)

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

Also note that the next Middle East Notes are being published every other week in July. The next Notes will be on July 26. There will be no Notes in August; we will resume weekly issues in September.

This week's Middle East Notes includes materials on the settlements, the IDF, a detailed history on the separation barrier and its effects on Palestinians and Israelis alike, and a present Israeli policy to drive Palestinians and Bedouins from the Jordan Valley.

- **The July 2 and July 6 CMEP Bulletins** present a number of articles and links to articles giving information of settler activity, implications of the election of Egypt's president, and fear of another intifada.
- **Beyond tribal loyalties: Personal stories of Jewish peace activists:** Ruth Tenne reviews this book which reflects on the Zionist ideology and practices through the personal accounts of Jewish peace activists who have dared challenging the ingrained beliefs held by their community and families. Posted on the Palestine News Network website.
- **A post "Arab Spring" Palestine:** Ramzy Baroud writes: "Will the Arab Spring serve the cause of Palestine?' [This] question ... has been repeatedly asked, in various ways, over the last year and a half. Many media discussions have been formulated around this very inquiry, although the answer is far from a simple yes or no."
- **The Separation Barrier** might be the biggest, most expensive, most important construction project in Israel's history. To mark the 10th anniversary of its inception, +972's Haggai Matar has published a series of stories about the wall and its history, arguments in favor and against its construction, its effects and side effects and an analysis of its possible implications on regional politics in years to come.
- **Water torture:** Gideon Levy reports in Ha'aretz that the IDF confiscates water containers that serve hundreds of Palestinian and Bedouins living in the horrific Jordan Valley heat to implement Israel's strategic goal: to drive them from their lands and purge the valley of its non-Jewish residents.

1) CMEP Bulletins July 2 and July 6, 2012

Settlers leave Ulpana: On [June 28] the Israeli government and settlers from the Ulpana neighborhood in the Beit El settlement came one step closer to concluding a five-year saga over the homes built on private Palestinian property. The Supreme Court of Israel ruled in May that the government must remove five apartment buildings in Ulpana by July 1. The court's decision put Prime Minister Netanyahu in a tough spot, between the rule of law and the elements of his coalition that oppose any settlement evictions. In the end Netanyahu told Knesset members,

“Israel is a democracy that observes the law, and as prime minister I am obligated to preserve the law and preserve the settlements. And I say here that there is no contradiction between the two.” Seeking to reaffirm his settler credentials after deciding to evict the Ulpana residents, on June 6 his government announced 851 new homes in various West Bank settlements, including 300 units on other parts of Beit El.

This did not wholly convince the settlers to leave Ulpana. The government negotiated with the residents to leave peacefully for months in order to avoid a confrontation between the settlers and the Israeli army when the time came for them to leave. The residents finally accepted an offer to relocate, provided their homes are allowed to come with them. The Israeli government promised them that the five apartment buildings would be moved piece by piece over the next three months to another section of Beit El that is currently being used as an army base.

On [June 27], the Israeli border police showed up in Ulpana to ensure residents left their homes and help them move. Only one family initially refused to leave but the police “gently” carried out the father and the wife eventually left without a struggle. The biggest headaches came from the Hilltop Youth, a group of young and fierce settlement proponents. The youth took over an empty apartment, despite the effort made by Ulpana residents to stop them. The police eventually removed them, making six arrests.

Peace Now spokesman Ori Nir wrote, “The deal that was struck and the peaceful evacuation that followed show that this can be done: that Supreme Court orders can be carried out; that settlers can be moved from their homes without all hell breaking loose; that the Israel public cares very little about the troubles and tribulations of settlers who bought houses that were illegally constructed on land owned by Palestinians.” ...

NYT op-ed raises fears of intifada: On June 22, *The New York Times* published a piece by Nathan Thrall from the International Crisis Group that warned of a possible third intifada brewing in the Palestinian territories. He points out that the security cooperation between the Palestinian Authority and Israel, financed by the U.S. and Europe, has been such a “success” that Israelis have “the luxury of forgetting that there is an occupation at all.”

There have been two Palestinian intifadas in the past. The term means “shaking off” and in this context, refers to two major Palestinian uprisings. The first came in 1987 and largely involved nonviolent popular protest that eventually resulted in the Oslo Accords. The second caused significantly more bloodshed for Palestinians and Israelis, beginning in late 2000. The events caused renewed efforts for peace (Arab Peace Initiative, Geneva Initiative, Road Map for Middle East Peace), but had severe consequences for Palestinians on the ground as Israel increased security measures restricting movement.

The prison hunger strikes and accompanying protests this spring hinted at the unrest brewing amongst Palestinians. PA President Mahmoud Abbas expressed fears that if the situation could not be controlled, the PA may collapse. A former member of the Israeli security agency substantiated these fears by saying, “When the concentration of gas fumes in the air is so high, the question is only when the spark will come to light it.”

According to Thrall, Israelis are also not showing much initiative when it comes to the peace process. He cites Matti Steinberg, a former senior adviser to Israeli security chiefs, who says President Abbas is the Palestinian leader Israel has dealt with and warns of taking him for granted. Steinberg points out, "The Israeli center is caught in a vicious cycle. It argues that it cannot make peace while there is violence, and when there is no violence it sees little reason to make peace."

[Read the entire July 2 Bulletin here.](#)

Morsi is sworn in: What is next? The Egyptian Supreme Court inaugurated Mohammed Morsi as the country's first democratically elected leader on [June 30]. Morsi's Muslim Brotherhood affiliation caused anxiety among many in Israel and the U.S. over Egypt's continued commitment to the Egypt-Israel peace treaty. The 1979 agreement normalized trade and diplomatic relations between the countries. The treaty was largely unpopular with the Arab populace and led to Egypt's ten-year suspension from the Arab League and the death of Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat in 1981. ...

New York Times writer Thomas Friedman penned a piece expressing hope that a democratic Egypt will lead to a better implementation of the treaty with Israel if both sides can change "some deeply engrained behaviors." He criticizes right-wing Israeli politicians and analysts for blaming the Muslim Brotherhood victory on President Obama because he did not intervene to "save" Mubarak. Friedman writes, "Sorry, naïveté is thinking that because it was so convenient for Israel to have peace with one dictator, Mubarak, rather than 80 million Egyptians..." Although historically the Jewish people have maintained better relationships with rulers than the general public, this "model of the vertical alliance only makes sense with authoritarian political systems. As soon as authoritarianism breaks down, and a process of democratization begins... the opinions of the people — in this instance, ordinary Arabs — will matter."

So far, signs show that the treaty will remain cool, but intact. Muslim Brotherhood officials expressed their disapproval of the agreement but say it is not a priority for the new president. In his speech after the results were announced, Morsi said, "we will honor the international treaties and agreements, and will create balanced international relations based on mutual interests and respect."

Even if Morsi wants to actively work to revoke the treaty, it is unlikely to come into fruition because the Egyptian military still has great influence in the new government structure and limits the powers of the president. It is in the military's best interest to keep the agreement in place because it receives \$1.3 billion annually from the U.S. for signing and maintaining the treaty.

Prime Minister Netanyahu released a cautious statement after the election announcement saying, "Israel appreciates the democratic process in Egypt and respects the results of the presidential elections...Israel looks forward to continuing cooperation with the Egyptian government on the basis of the peace treaty between the two countries, which is a joint interest of both peoples and contributes to regional stability."

Officials from Hamas, the Palestinian offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, celebrated Morsi's victory and now hope that it will lead to a more open border between Gaza and Egypt. Gaza's Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh intends to visit Morsi in Egypt in the next two weeks to discuss the matter but again, the Egyptian military's authority will make any significant change unlikely.

PA police crack down on protestors: This past weekend, senior Palestinian and Israeli officials planned to meet for the first time in almost two years. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas invited new Israeli Vice Prime Minister Shaul Mofaz to meet in Ramallah but several factors caused the meeting to be called off.

In response to the planned meeting, hundreds of Palestinian protestors demonstrated outside Abbas' compound Saturday calling on the Palestinian Authority to not negotiate with Israel while chanting for an end to the Oslo accords. The Palestinians for Dignity group used the demonstration to call for a new strategy of resistance to end the occupation, including the end of PA security coordination with Israel.

The protestors were met with violence from PA security forces, preventing them from reaching the compound. This sparked a subsequent protest the next day against police brutality, which was also violently suppressed. On the third day of protests, government officials claim that the police were given orders to allow the protestors to continue on to the compound.

The protest raised concerns for many Palestinians skeptical of the PA Security Forces and their role. PLO official Hanan Ashrawi condemned the violent repression, which she said attacked public freedoms, harmed the image of the Palestinian people and state institutions, and jeopardized Palestine's democratic future. She also emphasized that the youth are the leaders of the future, and as such, need to be engaged in public life and listen to their protests. The PLO is calling for an independent commission to investigate the violent response to the protests. Israeli media speculated that the meeting might have actually been cancelled as a result of tensions between Mofaz and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israel's coalition faces another test: There has been turmoil in Israel's new broad coalition over the past few weeks and it is now under threat of falling apart. The surprising coalition was formed between Likud leader Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Kadima leader Shaul Mofaz two months ago in lieu of new elections, giving the prime minister a supermajority of 94 of Parliament's 120 members. The unity deal attempted to provide stability to Israeli politics as the government is facing tough issues, such as reforming the Tal Law, which currently exempts the ultra-Orthodox Jews, from mandatory military service and was declared illegal by the Israeli Supreme Court, which ordered the Israeli government to scrap the law by August 1.

Exemption for ultra-Orthodox raised the issue of equal burden for all Israeli citizens, which in turn, made the ultra-Orthodox supporters question why the law does not also include Arab-Israelis, whose identity complicates their role in serving a Jewish state. This caused a debate as to who should be obligated to serve in the military.

On [July 2], Netanyahu disbanded the Plesner Committee charged with reforming the law, which was headed by a member of Kadima. According to Netanyahu, the committee failed to reach an agreement that would secure a Knesset majority after several members walked out.

Mofaz is now threatening to break up the coalition, as the universal draft was his primary goal in joining with Netanyahu. The prime minister has said to preserve the coalition and address the Tal Law, he will convene the leaders of the Likud and Kadima parties to formulate a workable proposal. If they fail, the military will draft its own resolution according to its needs.

The IDF is calling for national service as a solution, which would extend to all Israeli citizens but would not require military service. Instead, citizens who are incapable of military service can do national service work, a broad community-based assignment ranging from patrolling playgrounds to assisting medical staff in hospitals. This allows ultra-Orthodox and Arab-Israelis to contribute to their community without military service. ...

[Read the entire July 6 Bulletin here.](#)

2) [Beyond tribal loyalties: Personal stories of Jewish peace activists](#)

Ruth Tenne, Palestine News Network

This is a revelatory, unique book which reflects on the Zionist ideology and practices through the personal accounts of Jewish peace activists who have dared challenging the ingrained beliefs held by their community and families.

They represent a growing number of Jewish people of all walks of life, different generations, background, and life experience who live in countries around the world - Australia, Canada, Israel, United Kingdom, and the United States. Yet, there is an underlying common thread of humanity and a search for justice which links them together, and has been formed through a long journey of painful self-searching and personal agony. In the words of Avigail Abarbanel who meticulously and perceptively edited and prefaced the book: "To me the stories seem to complement each other, and together paint an interesting and valuable picture of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and activism in this area." (Introduction, p. xxiv)

[Read Tenne's entire review on the Palestine News Network website.](#)

3) [A post "Arab Spring" Palestine](#)

Ramzy Baroud, July 5, 2012

"Will the Arab Spring serve the cause of Palestine?" is a question that has been repeatedly asked, in various ways, over the last year and a half. Many media discussions have been formulated around this very inquiry, although the answer is far from a simple yes or no.

Why should the question be asked in the first place? Hasn't the Arab link to the Palestinian struggle been consistently strong, regardless of the prevalent form of government in any single Arab country? Rhetorically, at least, the Arab bond to Palestine remained incessantly strong at every significant historical turn.

True, disparity between rhetoric and reality are as old as the Arab-Israeli conflict. But the relatively small divide between words and actions widened enormously following the Arab defeat in the 1967 war, which cemented U.S.-Israeli ties like never before.

The war brought an end to the dilemma of independent Palestinian action. It shifted the focus to the West Bank and Gaza, and allowed the still dominant Fatah party to fortify its position in light of Arab defeat and subsequent division.

The division was highlighted most starkly in the August 1967 Khartoum summit in Sudan, where Arab leaders clashed over priorities and definitions. Should Israel's territorial gains redefine the status quo? Should Arabs focus on returning to a pre-1948 or pre-1967 situation? The PLO insisted that the 1967 defeat should not compromise the integrity of the struggle. It also stressed that Palestine -- all of Palestine -- was still the pressing issue.

Then-Egyptian President Jamal Abdel Nasser's messages seemed, for once, befuddled, although he continued to advocate conventional military confrontation with Israel. Syria, on the other hand, didn't attend the summit.

International response to the war was not promising either. The United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 242 on Nov. 22, 1967, reflecting the U.S. wish to capitalize on the new status quo (Israeli withdrawal "from occupied territories" in exchange for normalization with Israel). The new language of the immediate post-1967 period alarmed Palestinians, who realized that any future political settlement was likely to ignore the situation that had existed prior to the war, and would only attempt to remedy current grievances.

Then, the boundaries of the conflict permanently changed. For some, Palestine and its conflict became more of a burden than a shared responsibility. Official Arab solidarity with Palestinians became a form of everyday politics -- essential to claim relevance to greater Arab causes, but extraneous in terms of substance and application.

Present-day Palestinian leaderships -- since there are several bodies that claim to represent Palestinians "everywhere" -- also learned how to stage-manage official Arab manipulation of Palestine. They often did so out of desperation, as they urgently needed a physical base and sources of financial support. Over time, it became clear that official Arab solidarity with Palestine was mostly -- although not entirely -- a farce. The solidarity they speak of is either entirely nonexistent, or grossly misrepresented.

[Read the entire piece on Ramzy Baroud's website.](#)

**4) [The Wall: 10 years on](#)
Haggai Matar, +972.com, June 29, 2012**

The Separation Barrier might be the biggest, most expensive, most important construction project in Israel's history. To mark the 10th anniversary of its inception, +972's Haggai Matar publishes [a series of stories about the wall and its history](#), arguments in favor and against its construction, its effects and side effects and an analysis of its possible implications on regional politics in years to come.



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 1: The great Israeli project](#) April 9, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 2: Wall and peace](#) April 11, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / Part 3: An acre here and an acre there](#) April 13, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 4: Trapped on the wrong side](#) April 21, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 5: A new way of resistance](#) May 5, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 6: What has the struggle achieved?](#) May 9, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 7: A village turned prison](#) May 12, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on / part 8: A working class under siege](#) June 1, 2012



[The Wall, 10 years on: part 9 / Dividing land – water, fauna, flora](#)

5) [Water torture](#)

Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, July 8, 2012

Avi is an inspection coordinator for the “Civil Administration” - the occupation regime, to speak without euphemisms. Presumably Avi likes his job. Maybe he’s even proud of it. He doesn’t bother mentioning his last name in the forms he signs. Why should he? His ornate “Avi” signature is sufficient to carry out his diktats. And Avi’s are among the most brutal and inhumane diktats ever to be imposed in these parts.

Avi confiscates water containers that serve hundreds of Palestinian and Bedouin families living in the Jordan Valley. The containers are these people’s only water source. In recent weeks, Avi has confiscated about a dozen containers, leaving dozens of families with children in the horrific Jordan Valley heat, to go thirsty.

The forms he takes pains to complete, in spiffy style, say: "There is reason to suspect they used the above merchandise for carrying out an offense." Avi's bosses claim the "offense" is stealing water from a pipe. This is why the containers are seized - with no inquiry, no trial. Welcome to the land of lawlessness and evil. Welcome to the land of apartheid. Israel does not permit thousands of these wretched people to hook up to the water pipes. This water is for Jews only. Even the greatest Israeli propagandists could not deny the nationalist, diabolical separation taking place here.

The axis of evil is located about an hour's drive from your home. But emotionally distant and far from the heart, it inspires no "social protest." And on the scale of Israeli evil, it is one of the worst. Backed with forms and bureaucracy, applied by ostensibly nonviolent inspectors, it involves not a drop of blood, yet leaves no drop of water either.

The Civil Administration is supposed to take care of the people's needs. But it does not stop at the most despicable measure - depriving people and livestock of water in the scathing summer heat - to implement Israel's strategic goal: to drive them from their lands and purge the valley of its non-Jewish residents. The stealing of water, whether it did or didn't take place, is of course only the excuse. Even if there was such a thing - what choice do these people have? The authorities won't allow them to connect to the water pipe running through their fields; pipes whose water is flowing to saturate the settlers' green vineyards and fields.

Last week I saw the people whose water container Avi had confiscated, leaving them thirsty. Newborn babies, a handicapped little girl, a small boy post-surgery, women and old folks, and, of course, the sheep - the only source of income here. Denizens with no water - in Israel, not in Africa. Water for one nation only - in Israel, not in South Africa.

But this is not the only watershed. A few days ago, the Israel Defense Forces decided to hold training exercises in the area. What did it do? Evicted the residents from their homes for 24 hours. Not all of them - only the Palestinians and Bedouin. It occurred to nobody to evict the residents of Maskiot, Beka'ot or Ro'i. The authorities don't call that apartheid, either. Where did the IDF evict them to? Wherever the wind carries them. Thus some 400 people were forced to leave their huts and tents and spend a day and a night on the arid soil by the roadside, exposed to the elements. Amjad Zahawa, a 2-day-old infant, passed his third day under the hot sun, with no shelter over his head. Greetings, Amjad; welcome to the reality of your life.

Avi, as we have already mentioned, loves his work and is proud of it. Dozens of others like him are also doing this contemptible work. But they are not the only ones at fault. Behind them stand millions of Israelis who are entirely untouched by all this. They blithely drive through the valley roads, paying no heed to the endless embankment alongside the road, imprisoning the residents and blocking their access to the road.

There is an iron gate every now and then. The soldiers, representatives of the merciful occupier, show up every few days to open the gate for a moment. Sometimes they forget, sometimes they are late. Sometimes they lose the key, but what does it matter? The occupation is enlightened, Israel is right, the IDF is the most moral army, and apartheid is merely an invention of Israel's haters. Go to the Jordan Valley and see for yourselves.