

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
November 8, 2012



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

This week's Middle East Notes focus on growing apartheid practices by Israel, an ultra-nationalist coalition being formed for elections in that country, the "Israelification" of U.S. security policies and a very informative address by former Ambassador Charles W. Freeman on Middle East issues. His comments on Israel are especially noted.

- **November 2 Churches for Middle East Peace (CMEP) Bulletin:** After last week's visit to Gaza by the Emir of Qatar who promised \$400 million in aid for the beleaguered territory, the rift between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is widening. New outposts on the West Bank continue to jeopardize any possibility of a "two state" solution.
- **Water apartheid, wall construction in West Bank Christian areas:** Israeli actions concerning greater Bethlehem land are highlighted in the October issue of the Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation News.
- **An ultra-nationalist bloc has destroyed all illusions of Netanyahu's moderation:** +972 reports that in a surprise move, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party and Avigdor Lieberman's Israel Beiteinu will merge to run on a joint ticket in the upcoming elections. This positions Lieberman on a future path to the premiership.
- **The Levy Report serves Israel haters:** YnetNews reveals that Jeremy Ben-Ami, the president of J Street, says legalizing West Bank outposts would endanger Israel's future as Jewish state.
- **Christian leaders cannot be cowed into silence over Israel's abuses of human rights:** Rabbi Brian Walt writes in Ha'aretz that the price of "interfaith dialogue" cannot be silenced by Christian leaders on Israel's human rights violations.
- **The Israelification of U.S. security policy:** Andrew Bacevich writes in the November issue of Harpers that a nation seeking peace-as-dominion will use force more freely. This has long been an Israeli predilection; it has become the U.S.'s as well. U.S. national-security policy increasingly conforms to patterns of behavior pioneered by the Jewish state. This "Israelification" of U.S. policy may prove beneficial to Israel. But it's not likely to be good for the United States.
- **Change without progress in the Middle East:** Former U.S. Ambassador to Saudi Arabia Charles Freeman gave this keynote address at the recent Arab-U.S. policymakers conference

1) Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin

November 2, 2012

Gaza-West Bank divide grows: After last week's visit to Gaza by the Emir of Qatar who promised \$400 million in aid for the beleaguered territory, [there are concerns](#) that the rift between the Palestinian Authority and Hamas is widening. Hamas runs governmental ministries, police forces and border crossings in Gaza, leaving little motivation to give up power for the sake of unity with the Palestinian Authority. Qatar's money reinforces and legitimizes Hamas at a time when the PA's economy is collapsing and it is losing popular support.

Yasser Abed Rabbo, an adviser to PA President Mahmoud Abbas, explained the reservations the West Bank leadership has about the emerging relationships in the Arab world that Hamas is forging, telling the Associated Press, "No one should deal with Gaza as a separate entity from the Palestinian territories and from the Palestinian Authority."

The new housing, hospital and roads built with Qatar's financing will create thousands of jobs and in turn, [raise Hamas' popular support](#) with Gazans. In its \$760 million 2012 budget, Hamas only dedicated \$14 million of it to "welfare." In addition, this year Saudi Arabia has given \$250 million and Turkey \$300 million. Gaza is rebuilding after the disastrous 2008-2009 Cast Lead invasion by Israeli forces aimed at stopping rocket attacks from Israel. In large part due to smuggling materials from Egypt, the World Bank figures, reports that construction started in the first half of 2011 grew by 220 percent. Nicolas Pelham [writes](#) for the *New York Review of Books*: "The economic effects have been remarkable: after notching six percent growth in 2008, the Gazan economy grew by 20 percent in 2010 and a whopping 27 percent last year; unemployment in the formal economy fell to 29 percent, its lowest in a decade and an improvement of eight percentage points in a year."

This \$400 million Qatari aid package comes at a precarious time for the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, which is experiencing a deepening financial crisis and declining support. A September World Bank report warned that the PA [faces a \\$400 million budget shortfall this year](#) and it could be worse if donors do not meet their pledges. Pelham writes that as Arab governments shift millions of dollars in aid money from the PA to Hamas, they are "signaling what may be a historic shift in Palestinian politics."

Abbas is focusing on an [upcoming vote in the UN General Assembly](#) to upgrade the Palestinian Authority from "observer" to "non-member state." The vote could happen either November 15 or 29 according to sources. Palestinian leaders are concerned about the financial ramifications of such a move. Israel could withhold tax transfers that make up 33 percent of the PA's budget. The United States would also cut off most funding. Arab states have pledged \$100 million but Palestinians are skeptical of actually receiving it. Any further budget constraints would exacerbate problems in the West Bank and present a stark contrast to the growing Gazan economy. However, Abbas could receive a boost in popular support for securing increased international recognition.

Violence continues: While Hamas has succeeded in gaining visibility with the Qatari leader's visit, it is unclear how far it can go without [meeting the conditions](#) most countries place on dealings with Hamas: they must denounce terrorism, recognize Israel and accept previous

agreements with Israel. The ongoing violence in Southern Israel and Gaza shows that relations are not getting any rosier. This week more than 20 rockets were launched into southern Israel and Israel struck several targets in Gaza.

Gershon Baskin [explains](#) in the *Jerusalem Post* the cycle of Israeli targeted assassinations and rocket fire: "This is the scenario that has repeated itself a dozen times over the past few years. The results are almost always the same – tens of people killed in Gaza, significant damage to property in Israel, enormous costs to the economy in Israel as a result of a shutdown of a large part of the south and about \$40,000 for every Iron Dome rocket fired. There are no strategic achievements for either side and both sides admit (at least to themselves) that neither side is interested in escalating the conflict at this time."

Further reading

- Abbas took a [moderate stance](#) in Israeli TV interview, vowing there will not be a new armed intifada on his watch. He also said he believes, "[the] West Bank and Gaza is Palestine and the other parts (are) Israel."
- Former Israeli leaders Ehud Olmert and Tzipi Livni announced on Wednesday that they are discussing a partnership that could lead to a [joint campaign](#) to defeat Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the January election.
- Israeli settlers have set up [two new unauthorized outposts](#) in the occupied West Bank, the anti-settlement Peace Now group said on Wednesday. An Israeli Defense Ministry official said demolition orders had been issued against the dozen or so temporary structures at the two locations. He declined to say when they might be removed.
- J Street President Jeremy Ben-Ami writes an op-ed warning Israelis and their government that [legalizing West Bank outposts](#) would endanger Israel's future as Jewish state.
- The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land sent out a press release regarding the [planned route of the separation wall](#) in the Cremisan valley. The Catholic Orderlies write, "The issued seizure orders affect Al Walaja village and 58 Christian families from Beit Jala whose livelihood depends on this land. Furthermore, the two local Salesian congregations located there would be negatively affected in their Mission work towards the local community."
- [Al Jazeera English](#) and [+972 Magazine](#) share video reports of some of the issues facing the Palestinian olive harvest this fall.

2) Holy Land Christian Ecumenical Foundation News

October Issue

NGOs call on European Union to restrict trade with Jewish settlements: A new report by 22 aid, development and church groups from nine EU countries says products from Jewish settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem should no longer be allowed to bear a "Made in Israel" label. The U.K. already says that food from Jewish settlements cannot be labeled "Produce of Israel" but must instead be labeled "Produce of the West Bank." [Read more...](#)

"Water apartheid" in the Occupied Palestinian Territories: A December 2011 report by a French parliamentary committee calls Israel's allocation of water in the West Bank "apartheid". This report closely preceded the United Nations release of data showing that almost half of the West Bank is geographically off limits to Palestinians. [Read more...](#)

Catholic bishops of the Holy Land: No Vatican OK to the separation wall in the Cremisan Valley: The Assembly of Catholic Ordinaries of the Holy Land strongly condemns the project of the separation wall that the Israeli authorities want to build in the Cremisan valley, between Bethlehem and Jerusalem, and categorically denies any Vatican "green light" to the work, deemed illegal even by the standards of international law. [Read more...](#)

[3\) + 972 Newsletter](#)

November 2, 2012

Netanyahu, Lieberman merge to form rightist mega-party: In a surprise move, Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party and Avigdor Lieberman's Israel Beiteinu will merge to run on a joint ticket in the upcoming elections. [The ultra-nationalist bloc, writes Noam Sheizaf](#), dashes all illusions of Netanyahu's so-called moderation, and positions Lieberman on a future path to the premiership.

Netanyahu hopes "Likud Beiteinu" will get more Knesset seats than would the sum of the two parties running separately. But guest contributor [Yacov Ben Efrat notes that the competing demographics](#) of the parties' constituencies just might drive supporters away. And [Larry Derfner believes that Netanyahu's merger](#) with Lieberman, notorious abroad for his unabashed racism, might have "brought Israel a sizable step closer to the limits of Western tolerance."

Who is voting in the elections, anyway? Take a look at this useful [breakdown of the political rights of the various groups](#) under Israeli control. And our Knesset Poll Tracker has been updated with six new polls, all published in the last 48 hours. [Check out the latest numbers here.](#)

The war on the Palestinian olive harvest: This year's olive harvest has been the most challenging yet for Palestinian farmers. Since January, settlers, with the backing of the army, have destroyed or damaged thousands of olive trees, threatening the livelihoods of some 80,000 or so families. [Read more about those challenges here](#), and [watch this Israel Social TV report](#) on the Israelis who are traveling to the West Bank on weekends to lend a hand.

[4\) Levy Report serves Israel haters](#)

Jeremy Ben-Ami, YnetNews, November 1, 2012

For a moment there appeared as though the [Levy Report](#) was shelved, but we have recently learned that parts of the report, which advised to legalize West Bank outposts, may be brought to the cabinet's approval. Adopting all or some of the report's recommendations would endanger Israel's future.

They can place us on a slippery slope towards one state, which may or may not be democratic and may not be [Jewish](#). These recommendations would also hurt Israel's standing in the international community.

As someone who has been a part of the discussion about Israel in the international arena I know that Israel needs friends. I can clearly see how we can create a consensus and cross-border partnerships in support of Israel.

The Levy Report's recommendations cross the boundaries within which Israel can maneuver. Judge Edmond Levy's recommendation to legalize Jewish outposts and his assertion that Jews have a legal right to settle in the West Bank create an incomprehensible gap between Israel and the global consensus. Should the Israeli government adopt his recommendations, the country would be further isolated from the global mainstream.

In order to shore up international support for Israel's right to Jerusalem and its refusal to allow Palestinian refugees back into its territory, the country must maneuver within the internationally-recognized framework - the 1967 lines, UN Resolution 242 and land swaps.

Just as the Israeli government cannot convince the world that the earth is flat, it will not be able to create a narrative that is detached from the international viewpoints, particularly when these viewpoints are expressed by its close allies the US, Canada and Germany.

The position that is expressed in the Levy Report will make it difficult for Israel and the defenders of the Jewish homeland (such as the organization I represent) to deal with those who hate and attack it. We mustn't give them more weapons.

But even more importantly, the Levy Report's recommendations threaten Israel's future as a Jewish and democratic state. As a Jewish-American pro-Israeli lobby, we work in the U.S. to bolster Israel and help secure its future as a Jewish and democratic country. And there is only one way to do this: The two-state solution.

In Israel, the months leading up to the elections will be accompanied by attempts to fan the flames – just as the right-wing politicians are doing by promoting the Levy Report's recommendations.

But we must not allow the election campaign to jeopardize Israel's status and future as a Jewish and democratic state. Prime Minister Netanyahu, who understands the international arena very well, knows that as far as the international community is concerned, adopting the Levy Report means that Israel is adopting extremist positions at the expense of moderates. Therefore, making practical use of this report would cause immense damage to our one and only homeland.

Instead of prompting the legalization of outposts and expansion of settlements in Judea and Samaria, Israelis and supporters of Israel worldwide should see a brave leadership that will advance a peace initiative and deal with the great challenges the country will be facing in the near future.

5) Christian leaders cannot be cowed into silence over Israel's abuses of human rights

Rabbi Brian Walt, Ha'aretz, October 31, 2012

In his recent Ha'aretz op-ed, "Heading toward an irreparable rift between U.S. Jews and Protestants," my colleague, Rabbi Eric Yoffie, sharply criticized the recent letter to Congress by leaders of Protestant churches that called for U.S. military aid to Israel to be contingent on Israeli compliance with American law. Nowhere in his article, however, did Yoffie mention the

central concern of the Christian leaders' letter: the overwhelming evidence of systematic human rights violations by the Israeli military against Palestinians.

Over the past two weeks, I had the privilege of leading an interfaith delegation including several leaders of the civil rights movement, younger civil and human rights leaders, Christian clergy, academics, and several Jews, on a two-week trip to the West Bank.

We were all shocked by the widespread human rights violations that we saw with our own eyes and that we heard about from both Palestinians and Israelis. Several black members of our group, including those who participated actively in the civil rights movement, remarked that what they saw on the West Bank was "frighteningly familiar" to their own experience, a systemic pattern of discrimination that privileged one group (in this case, Jews) and denigrated another (Palestinians).

Together we walked down Shuhadah Street in Hebron, a street restricted to Jews and foreigners where Hebron's Palestinians are mostly not allowed to walk, even those Palestinians who own houses or stores on the street. This street was once the center of a bustling Palestinian city. Now the area is a ghost town with all the Palestinian stores shut down by the Israeli military.

We visited several villages on the West Bank whose land has been expropriated by the Israeli government and where their nonviolent protests against this injustice are met with rubber bullets and tear gas (we saw with our own eyes many empty canisters of tear gas made in the U.S.). We witnessed a demonstration in Nabi Saleh, watching soldiers in armored cars launch tear gas and shoot rubber bullets against children who were throwing stones. In this village, soldiers routinely enter homes in the middle of the night to arrest children, who are handcuffed and blindfolded, and taken to interrogation without the right to the presence of a parent or of consultation with a lawyer. The shocking abuse of children that we heard about from several sources, including Israeli lawyers, was particularly disturbing.

Our delegation also saw the rubble of Palestinian houses demolished by the Israeli authorities and waited in long lines at check points as Jewish motorists were waved through or passed unimpeded through special settler checkpoint.

[Read the entire piece on Ha'aretz's website.](#)

6) How we became Israel

Andrew J. Bacevich, Harper's Magazine, November 2012

Peace means different things to different governments and countries. To some it suggests harmony based on tolerance and mutual respect. To others it serves as a euphemism for dominance, defining the relationship between the strong and the supine.

In the absence of an existing peace, a nation's reigning definition of the word shapes its proclivity to use force. A nation committed to peace-as-harmony will tend to employ force as a last resort. The United States once subscribed to this view—or, beyond the confines of the Western Hemisphere, at least pretended to.

A nation seeking peace-as-dominion will use force more freely. This has long been an Israeli predilection. Since the end of the Cold War and especially since 9/11, however, it has become America's as well. Consequently, U.S. national-security policy increasingly conforms to patterns of behavior pioneered by the Jewish state. This "Israelification" of U.S. policy may prove beneficial to Israel. But it's not likely to be good for the United States.

In June 2009, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described what he calls his "vision of peace": "If we get a guarantee of demilitarization . . . we are ready to agree to a real peace agreement, a demilitarized Palestinian state side by side with the Jewish state." Now the inhabitants of Gaza and the West Bank, if sufficiently armed and sufficiently angry, can certainly annoy Israel. But they cannot destroy it or do it serious harm. The Israel Defense Forces wield vastly greater power than the Palestinians can possibly muster. Still, from Netanyahu's perspective, "real peace" becomes possible only when Palestinians guarantee that their putative state will forgo even the most meager military capabilities. Your side disarms, our side stays armed to the teeth: that's Netanyahu's "vision of peace" in a nutshell.

Netanyahu's demands, however baldly stated, reflect long-standing Israeli thinking. For Israel, peace derives from security, which must be absolute and assured. Defined this way, security requires not simply military advantage but military supremacy, and threats to supremacy require anticipatory action, the earlier the better. The IDF attack on Iraq's Osirak nuclear reactor in 1981 provides one especially instructive example. Israel's destruction of a suspected Syrian nuclear facility in 2007 provides another.

But along with perceived threat, perceived opportunity can provide sufficient motive for anticipatory action. In 1956 and again in 1967, Israel attacked Egypt not because the blustering Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser possessed the capability (even if he proclaimed the intention) to destroy the hated Zionists, but because preventive war seemed to promise a big Israeli payoff. In 1956, the Israelis came away empty-handed. In 1967, they hit the jackpot operationally, albeit with problematic strategic consequences, to wit, an irreconcilable dispute between a growing population of Israeli settlers and an even more rapidly growing population of Palestinians, both claiming ownership of the same land. ...

This article ran in the November 2012 issue of Harper's magazine, but the most accessible link to read it in its entirety appears to be at TheAmericanConservative.com.

7) Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference: Change without progress in the Middle East

Keynote address by Charles W. Freeman, October 25, 2012

The 21st annual Arab-U.S. Policymakers Conference (theme: "Arab-U.S. relations amidst transition within constancy: Implications for American and Arab interests and policies") was held Oct. 25-26 in Washington, D.C. Below are excerpts from the keynote address given by Charles Freeman, former U.S. ambassador to Saudi Arabia.

"If the aim of our invasion and occupation of Iraq was to eliminate an enemy of Israel and secure the neighborhood for the Jewish state, we did not succeed. Israel's adversaries were instead strengthened even as it made new enemies – for example, in Turkey – and began

petulantly to demand that America launch yet another war to make it safe, this time against Iran. Mr. Netanyahu wants America to set red lines for Iran. Everyone else in the region wishes the United States would set red lines for Israel. ...

"Iranian-American relations are at their lowest level in the 137 years since the two countries first began to deal with each other officially. There is no serious dialogue between the two governments. People-to-people exchanges between the U.S. and Iran are virtually nonexistent, and media on both sides are biased and inaccurate in their reporting about the other. The United States has effectively outsourced its Iran policy to Israel, with the only difference between the two presidential candidates being whether to do so with reservations or without. The issue Israel cares about is whether Iran acquires nuclear weapons, not Iran's aspirations for hegemony in the Persian Gulf region, its struggle with Saudi Arabia for leadership of the world's Muslims, or its search for strategic advantage in Bahrain. In virtually every respect it must be admitted, the American view of Iran more closely mirrors Israel's than that of our Arab friends.

"Israel's view combines what can only be described as psychotic fears that Iran might attempt to annihilate the Jews in the Holy Land with entirely rational apprehensions about the impact on Israel's military freedom of action if it loses its nuclear monopoly in the region. Few outside Israel believe that Iran's possession of nuclear weapons would embolden it to attack Israel, given Israel's ability to obliterate Iran in response. And no one has suggested that Iran might attack Israel with anything other than nuclear weapons – which it doesn't yet have. But Israel's threats to attack Iran give Iran a very convincing reason to try to secure itself by developing a nuclear deterrent. Given this logic, Israel's fear of losing its nuclear monopoly in the Middle East seems likely to become a self-fulfilling prophecy. ..."

"The United States, joined by some of its allies, has bypassed the UN to impose what it describes as 'crippling sanctions' on Iran. American politicians and pundits gloat over the suffering these are causing the Iranian people. Washington has offered Tehran no way to achieve relief from these sanctions other than complete capitulation to U.S. and Israeli demands. Meanwhile, the U.S. Congress has provided generous funding to efforts to overthrow the Iranian regime. America is working with Israel and the Mujahedin-e Khalq to carry out cyber warfare and assassinations inside Iran. By any standard, these are acts of war inviting reprisal. There is no negotiating process worthy of the name underway between the U.S. and Iran. ..."

[Read the entire address on the Middle East Policy Council's website.](#)