

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
January 22, 2015



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This issue of Middle East Notes focuses on the destruction/non-reconstruction of Gaza, Arab and Israeli responses to the massacre in France, the Palestinian initiative to join the International Criminal Court (ICC), the economics of the Israeli settlements, links to articles on the history and reality of Zionism, calls for Palestinian statehood, Israel's growing international isolation and other issues of interest.

Commentary: ISIS, the massacre in France, the Israeli/Palestinian stalemate, support of and opposition to Palestine bringing human rights charges against Israel in the ICC have focused world attention on those who choose to use nonviolence based on respect for the human rights of all to resolve conflicts, and terrorists who only escalate violence by committing acts of personal and/or state terror to seek their exclusive goals.

- Aura Kanegis of the AFSC gives an eye witness account of the unnatural disaster she viewed on a recent trip to Gaza.
- Zvi Bar'el writes in Ha'aretz of the tens of thousands people in Gaza enduring bitter cold weather while waiting to receive money to rebuild their homes and materials to do so.
- Rabbi Marc Schneier in a Ynetnews op-ed states that mainstream Muslims around the world have issued strong and unambiguous statements against virtually every violent attack, condemning such acts as immoral, yet their responses barely register in the public consciousness.
- Uri Avnery writes in Gush Shalom that terrorism means striking fear. The three Islamic terrorists in Paris succeeded in doing that. They terrorized the French population, the people of Europe and the world.
- Aeyal Gross reports in Ha'aretz that the ICC will consider four issues in examining whether Israel has a case to answer for its actions in the Palestinian territories.
- Ma'an News Agency states from Jerusalem that of all the hurdles to peace negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, perhaps the largest is the 150 or so Israeli settlements in the West Bank. These communities, considered illegal by the UN, are fracturing Israel's relationship even with its allies
- Links to Churches for Middle East Peace's Bulletins, Israel Policy Forum's State of Two States, and many other articles are also included.
- Learn more about two notable books: *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land*, edited by Donald E. Wagner and Walter T. Davis and *Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe*, written by Jo Roberts.

1) An unnatural disaster: What I saw in Gaza

Aura Kanegis, American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), January 7, 2015

Note: Several U.S.-based AFSC staff visited Gaza recently. Aura Kanegis, AFSC's Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, was among them. This was her first trip to Gaza. Below are excerpts of her reflections and photographs from the trip witnessing the recent devastation of Operation Protective Edge, just the latest round of violence against a people under siege. Read the entire reflection by clicking the headline above.

...And then we are in Shuja'iyya. The evidence of deadly surgery spreads wide to full-scale blocks of destruction, massive piles of rubble, more concrete and rebar skeletons broken and dangling, devastation as far as the eye can see. We stop asking about survivors, but we see them persisting with life amid the wreckage – entire families living in precariously balanced upper floors of smashed and tilted buildings, laundry hung across ruins, kids playing a makeshift game of volleyball strung across a narrow street between crumbled houses.



Those houses still standing are riddled with massive bullet and mortar holes. A cemetery wall has been blown apart, gravestones smashed in a grim second death. Clothes, lamps, dolls, and signs of everyday life have been churned into rubble by the manmade tornado that destroyed block after city block. Kids swarm through the street in school uniforms, while many adults simply sit inside their destroyed homes, waiting. Amid the chaos we see a group gathering, then music... it is a wedding. Here and now, a wedding.

...Crimes against humanity have been committed in all of occupied Palestine in a deeply misguided quest for security by those once targeted for the same. Beyond the more obvious violence in Gaza we see slow and systematic ethnic cleansing in the West Bank and East Jerusalem through continuing displacement from sprawling illegal settlements, land grabs, the separation barrier, a network of settler roads Palestinians cannot use, resource theft, carefully constructed economic isolation, crushing restrictions of Palestinian movement, and a network of racist laws.



2) In dark and cold post-war Gaza, it may take a miracle to rebuild

Zvi Bar'el, Ha'aretz, January 13, 2015

Below are excerpts. Read the entire piece by clicking on the link embedded in the headline.

St. Mark's Coptic Orthodox Cathedral in Cairo ... has not witnessed such a gesture since it was built in 1965, during the era of then-President Gamal Abdel Nasser. Egyptian President Gen. Abdel-Fattah al-Sissi "dropped in for a visit" at the cathedral on January 7, during the Coptic Christmas Mass, to honor the community and give a short political speech.

Instead of talking about Muslims and Christians, Sissi declared that "all of Egypt is one hand" – that is, everyone is an Egyptian citizen – and won over their hearts. Since Nasser's visit to the Al-Azhar Mosque in Cairo 59 years ago, no Egyptian president has visited a house of worship – even though Egypt does not officially separate church and state. It is impossible to overestimate the importance of this presidential gesture. The upcoming parliamentary elections, scheduled to take place in March and April, also contributed to this show.

Sissi's effort to extend his hand to the Christians bears a lot of significance as far as civil society in Egypt is concerned. While in Iraq and Syria the Christians are being persecuted and slaughtered by Islamic terrorist organizations, Egypt is trying to send a different message. Not only Sissi has recently honored Christians. Moussa Abu Marzouk, deputy of Hamas leader Khaled Meshal, crossed the border into the Gaza Strip and joined a delegation of Hamas leaders on a visit to the Church of Saint Porphyrius in the Zeitoun neighborhood of Gaza City to greet "our Christian brothers."...

Gaza's 2,500 Christians were apparently not the only ones who celebrated Christmas. Journalists reported that many Muslim families bought Christmas trees this year (which can cost up to \$90 each) and decorated their homes in order to "spread a little bit of joy after the tragedy of the war," as one Gaza resident was quoted as saying. But "joy" is very far from describing reality in Gaza. The bitter cold has made the lives of tens of thousands, left without homes because of the Israeli bombings, even worse. Schools have still not been repaired, and salaries in general have been frozen.

The chairman of the government committee on rehabilitating the Strip, Mohammad Mustafa, who is also deputy prime minister, presented a report last week on the rebuilding effort. The report states that most of the money promised for the reconstruction has yet to arrive. The \$200 million that Qatar pledged as part of its total of \$1 billion in aid has yet to be seen. The promised transfer of \$75 million from the Gulf states has yet to be deposited, and only Japan has provided the \$500,000 it promised for removing rubble. ...

The most burning and threatening problem is the payment of salaries. After a temporary solution was found in October – when Qatar transferred \$1,200 for each of the 42,000 unpaid employees of the government in Gaza – the disagreement has once again heated up. Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas announced that he will not pay the salaries for as long as Israel freezes the transfer of the Palestinian tax money it collects on the behalf of the Palestinian Authority. Israel has been withholding the funds since the Palestinians applied for membership in the International Criminal Court at the end of last year.

3) Why aren't Muslim leaders being heard?

Rabbi Marc Schneier, Ynetnews, January 11, 2015

Below are excerpts. Read the entire piece by clicking on the link embedded in the headline.

Why don't Muslim leaders speak out?

That question comes up every time terrorists purporting to be deeply religious Muslims carry out armed attacks that kill innocent people. Where, commentators ask, are the moderate Muslim leaders and why aren't they decrying the horrors perpetuated by fellow Muslims?

In fact, mainstream Muslims are speaking out, clearly and consistently. Leaders around the world, many of whom I know personally through my work at the Foundation for Ethnic Understanding, have issued strong and unambiguous statements virtually every time a violent attack has occurred, condemning such acts as immoral and counter to the fundamental precepts of Islam. Yet somehow their responses are not being heard, barely registering in the public consciousness. ...

In the days immediately following the massacres at Charlie Hebdo and the Hyper Casher, all of the major French Muslim organizations expressed unambiguous, passionate and often quite eloquent denunciations of the attacks; not only condemning the wanton killings carried out by the attackers as counter to the values of Islam, but also explicitly defending freedom of expression; even when such speech is offensive to Islam and Muslims.

The largest and most influential of these organizations, the French Council of the Muslim Faith, put the issue at stake in sharp relief by not only denouncing the murderous attack, but specifying, "This extremely grave barbaric act is also an attack against democracy and freedom of the press." ...

In the U.S., the Islamic Society of North America repeatedly speaks out against extremism of all kinds and was among the first Muslim organizations to denounce Boko Haram. Another important American Muslim organization, the Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC), has been outspoken ardent not only in condemning terrorism, but in denouncing the trend toward extremism and totalitarianism within the Muslim world, which manifested itself last year most prominently in the rise of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. ...

... [Too] often, Islam is not only portrayed negatively, but falsely, as a monolithic entity. As a result, the general public often fails to grasp that there is a diversity of opinion within Islam and that most Muslims condemn extremism and violence.

Yes, Islamist extremism is a genuine threat to world peace. But those who lump all Muslims together, and dismiss as meaningless the courageous stand of the moderate majority against extremism, aren't helping to win that battle. Rather, they're strengthening extremism by perpetuating a false narrative of perpetual conflict between Islam and the West. That is something which we must fight with all our might.

4) [Waving in the first row](#)

Uri Avnery, Gush Shalom, January 17, 2015

Below are excerpts. Read the entire piece by clicking on the link embedded in the headline.

By committing two attacks (quite ordinary ones by Israeli standards) the three Islamist terrorists spread panic throughout France, brought millions of people onto the streets, gathered more than 40 heads of states in Paris. They changed the landscape of the French capital and other French cities by mobilizing thousands of soldiers and police officers to guard Jewish and other potential targets. For several days they dominated the news throughout the world.

Three terrorists, probably acting alone. Three!!! For other potential Islamic terrorists throughout Europe and America, this must look like a huge achievement. It is an invitation for individuals and tiny groups to do the same again, everywhere.

Terrorism means striking fear. The three in Paris certainly succeeded in doing that. They terrorized the French population. And if three youngsters without any qualifications can do that, imagine what 30 could do, or 300! ...

To conduct an effective fight, one has to put oneself first into the shoes of the fanatics and try to understand the dynamic that pushes young local-born Muslims to commit such acts. Who are they? What do they think? What are their feelings? In what circumstances did they grow up? What can be done to change them? ...

I have often tried to explain to my Arab friends: the anti-Semites are the greatest enemy of the Palestinian people. The anti-Semites have helped drive the Jews to Palestine, and now they are doing so again. And some of the new immigrants will certainly settle beyond the Green Line in the occupied Palestinian territories on stolen Arab land.

The fact that Israel benefits from the Paris attack has led some Arab media to believe that the whole affair is really a "false flag" operation. Ergo, in this case, the Arab perpetrators were really manipulated by the Israeli Mossad.

After a crime, the first question is "cui bono," who benefits? Obviously, the only winner from this outrage is Israel. But to draw the conclusion that Israel is hiding behind the Jihadists is utter nonsense.

The simple fact is that all Islamic Jihadism on European soil hurts only the Muslims. Fanatics of all stripes generally help their worst enemies. The three Muslim men who committed the outrages in Paris certainly did Binyamin Netanyahu a great favor.

5) Analysis /ICC inquiry is a game changer for Israel

Ha'aretz, Aeyal Gross, January 19, 2015

Below are excerpts. Read the entire piece by clicking on the link embedded in the headline.

“The same court that after more than 200,000 deaths in Syria didn’t see a reason to intervene there, in Libya, or in other places, finds it necessary to ‘examine’ the most moral army in the world.” That was the response of Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman to [last Friday’s announcement](#) by the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, that they would be opening a preliminary examination of the situation in Palestine.

Given that the ICC in 2011 issued arrest warrants for Saif al-Islam Gadhafi, the son of the deposed Libyan leader, and Libyan intelligence chief Abdullah Senussi, Lieberman is either exhibiting woeful ignorance or not telling the truth. ...

From the moment in November 2012 that the UN General Assembly recognized Palestine as a non-member state (its previous status was non-state observer), it was clear that the current prosecutor would have difficulty not accepting Palestine as a state, and it is now recognized as the 123rd state to join the court.

The UN secretary-general, the president of the ICC Assembly of States Parties and the court registrar have all recognized the Palestinian affiliation, and so did the prosecutor. Now the gap between the Israeli and international stance is becoming eminently clear.

Palestine cannot be accepted as a UN member state because that requires the recommendation of the Security Council – which the United States would veto. But there’s no such veto in the General Assembly, and the ICC is not a UN body; nor is it subordinate to the Security Council. The General Assembly and the ICC have proven to be effective mechanisms to bypass the hegemony, fortified by their veto, the Americans have in the Security Council. According to the ICC constitution, however, the Security Council may ask that the court not deal with a specific issue for 12 months, and to renew such a request. ...

If, after examining all these considerations, the prosecutor thinks there are grounds to move forward, she will then have to examine whether there is a reasonable basis for concluding that crimes were committed. If there is such a basis, the real investigation will begin.

Such an investigation might be conducted both against Israelis – regarding civilian casualties in Gaza and in connection to the settlements – but also against Palestinians responsible for attacks on Israeli civilians.

Even if charges are filed against Israelis, they could not actually be tried unless they were extradited to the court, the chances of which are extremely small.

However, there is no doubt that the rules of the game have changed. Israelis and Palestinians alike are coming, for the first time, under the jurisdiction of an international criminal tribunal. If the foreign minister is surprised, it’s probably because he hasn’t yet internalized that Israel’s legal stance regarding a variety of issues is very far from the internationally accepted positions.

6) The economics at the heart of Israel's illegal settlements

Ma'an News Agency, January 8, 2015

Below are excerpts. Read the entire piece by clicking on the link embedded in the headline.

JERUSALEM (IRIN) -- Of all the hurdles to peace negotiations between Israeli and Palestinian leaders, perhaps the largest is the 150 or so Israeli settlements in the West Bank.

These communities, considered illegal by the UN, are fracturing Israel's relationship even with its allies: The pro-Israeli head of the UK parliament's foreign affairs committee this year declared that a decision to develop a new settlement "outraged me more than anything else in my political life."

Despite an unofficial freeze on settlement planning, in late December the Jerusalem Planning and Budget Committee set the stage for approving building permits for some 400 homes on Palestinian land in Jerusalem, and approved a plan for 1,850 more homes in a neighbourhood that sits on the border.

While they are often thought of as the result of a religious quest by Jews to claim new territory, in fact for most settlers the reasons for moving are economic - encouraged through government-planned incentive schemes to move into occupied land. But for some, the process of living in a settlement may have a radicalizing effect. ...

"People come here looking for different things," said Avi Zimmerman, head of Ariel's Development Fund and the de facto spokesperson for its municipality. As an observant Jew, he came eight years ago looking for a heterogeneous community.

"You'll find people who came for the quality of life, even for the relief from the humidity of Tel Aviv."

But the financial benefits are top for many. House prices in Israel have risen rapidly for the last seven years, with the high cost of living and food prices sparking mass protests in the summer of 2011. The average apartment in Ariel costs 1,098,774 NIS (US\$280,537), a far cry from the Tel Aviv average of 2,363,268 NIS (\$603,386). ...

Palestinian officials have said they will take into account the motivations of settlers in negotiating the boundaries of a future Palestinian state. In the end, they see all settlements as encroaching on Palestinian land, whether the settlers have come for the fresh air and cheap accommodation or because of religious fervour.

Links to other articles of interest – click to read:

- [Churches for Middle East Bulletin, \(and further readings\) January 9, 2015](#)
- [Churches for Middle East Bulletin, \(and further readings\) January 16, 2015](#)
- [The State of Two States - Week of January 11, 2015](#)
- [Mourning the Parisian journalists yet noticing the hypocrisy, Michael Lerner, Huffington Post, January 9, 2015](#)
- [U.S. law & Abbas' post-UNSC moves: An explainer, Lara Friedman, Peace Now, January 5, 2015](#)
- [U.S. duplicity in punishing Palestine for joining the ICC, Alexander Halaby, IMEMC News, January 11, 2015](#)
- [Arab world insists on support of West for Palestinian statehood, Uri Savir, Al Monitor January 11, 2015](#)
- [Zionism Unsettled: A Congregational Study Guide, The Israel/Palestine Mission Network of the Presbyterian Church \(USA\), January 2014](#)
- ["Zionism Unsettled" guide removed from Presbyterian Church \(USA\) website, Jaweed Kaleem, Huffington Post, June 28, 2014](#)
- [Lamenting the decline of "liberal Zionism" is futile - since it never really existed, Allan C. Brownfeld, Washington Report on Middle East Affairs \(WRMEA\), January/February, 2015, pp. 48-49](#)
- [Palestinians recognize ICC jurisdiction for Gaza war, Ynetnews, January 6, 2015](#)
- [UN calls on Israel to unlock PA tax payment, Ma'an News Agency, January 16, 2015](#)
- [Losses continue to pile up for Abu Haikel family on Tel Rumeida, Christian Peacemaker Teams Palestine, January 17, 2015](#)
- [The irrelevance of liberal Zionism, Richard Falk, Foreign Policy Journal, January 4, 2015](#)
- [Israel's facing worsening international isolation, warns Foreign Ministry paper, Itamar Eichner, Ma'an News Agency, January 14, 2015](#)
- [Israel's hateful, misguided policy against the weakest of the weak, Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, January 18, 2015](#)

Books of interest:

[Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land](#), A book edited by Donald E. Wagner, Walter T. Davis, foreword by Walter Brueggemann, Wipf and Stock Publishers

A critical examination of political Zionism, a topic often considered taboo in the West, is long overdue. Moreover, the discussion of Christian Zionism is usually confined to Evangelical and fundamentalist settings. The present volume will break the silence currently reigning in many religious, political, and academic circles and, in so doing, will provoke and inspire a new, challenging conversation on theological and ethical issues arising from various aspects of Zionism--a conversation that is vital to the quest for a just peace in Israel and Palestine.

The eight authors offer a rich diversity of religious faith, academic research, and practical experience, as they represent all three Abrahamic faiths and five different Christian traditions. Among the many themes that run through *Zionism and the Quest for Justice in the Holy Land* is the contrast between exclusivist narratives, both biblical and political, and the more inclusive narratives of the prophetic Scriptures, which provide the theological foundation and the moral imperative for human liberation. Readers will be drawn into a compelling, readable, and stimulating series of essays that tackle many of the complex issues that still confound clergy, politicians, diplomats, and academic experts.

[Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe](#), Jo Roberts, Dundurn Press. *Reviewed by Scott Schaeffer-Duffy, Sojourners, January 2015*

In 1973, immediately following the Yom Kippur War, I watched the movie *Exodus*. I was so swept up by Leon Uris' depiction of the Zionist struggle that I wrote in my journal, "The U.S. should do everything it can to defend the state of Israel!"

Two years later, I read a history of the Arab-Israeli conflict in a serialized encyclopedia of World War II. It transformed me into an impassioned defender of Palestinian rights. Clearly, the historical narrative one accepts is critical to determining how a conflict is understood.

Jo Roberts' book *Contested Land, Contested Memory: Israel's Jews and Arabs and the Ghosts of Catastrophe* challenges the nationalist mythologies of both Israelis and Palestinians, peoples largely in denial of each other's histories. With exhaustive research and numerous personal interviews, Roberts has created a book that is both sensitive to and challenging for partisans of either side.

Roberts begins with the story of an Israeli Jew whose memories of idyllic childhood vacations in a particular village are shattered when she learns from a Palestinian boyfriend that his family was displaced from that village by Israeli soldiers in 1948. Roberts goes on to offer a history of Zionism that is not without its share of heartbreak. From persecution in Catholic Spain to the Dreyfus affair in France and government-sanctioned pogroms in Russia, she reminds us of the prevalence and ferocity of anti-Semitism, which led many to join the movement to create a Jewish state in Palestine. She includes a report to President Truman about 250,000 Holocaust survivors, who in late 1945 were still confined in former slave labor and concentration camps because no country, including the U.S., would accept them as refugees. Roberts makes a convincing case that many Jews went to Palestine because they literally "had nowhere else to go."

In 1948, modern Israel is born and the Palestinians displaced—700,000 as refugees, 150,000 as internally displaced people. For Israeli Jews the event is a joyful national holiday, while for Palestinians it is the “Nakba” (Catastrophe), disparate depictions contested to this day. Roberts describes how Israelis tried to erase the memory of their country’s former inhabitants by demolishing hundreds of Palestinian villages and remaking all the maps with new Hebrew names. Israeli history books recast the ethnic cleansing of most Palestinians as a voluntary departure. Meanwhile Palestinian historians dwell on their displacement and either deny or minimize the Holocaust. The disconnect between the two peoples discourages empathy. For many peace activists, the primary causes of ongoing conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians are Israel’s occupation and settlement of Palestinian and Syrian territory seized in 1967 as well as the unresolved status of Palestinian refugees from 1948. While Roberts acknowledges both problems, she traces the root cause of the conflict to the Zionists’ original aspiration to create a Jewish and democratic state in a land whose residents were primarily not Jewish.

Israel’s self-understanding as a people ever on the verge of extermination feeds its mistreatment of the Palestinians. Roberts writes, “Israeli national identity oscillates between the twin poles of the Holocaust and the Six-Day War, victim and vanquisher—the latter is the antidote to the former. Permanently vulnerable, Israel must respond to any attack with massive force.” Palestinian-Israeli lawyer and journalist Marzuq Halabi agrees: “If you are afraid, and you have power, then you can be very violent, as with the Israeli occupation.” By the same token, if you are traumatized by oppression, as the Palestinians are, and in denial of the other’s suffering, you can be violent as well.

Thankfully, Roberts includes the voices of people who see the conflict differently. In 1921, the religious existentialist philosopher Martin Buber told the Zionist Congress that the Jewish people should announce “its desire to live in peace and brotherhood with the Arab people and to develop the common homeland into a republic in which both peoples will have the possibility of free development.” Unfortunately, the Zionists pursued the creation of an ethnocracy instead, a Jewish state that negates the history and rights of other occupants, a recipe for conflict.

A small minority of Israeli historians and others have come to embrace a post-Zionist vision of Israel: a single state with equal rights for all its present and former inhabitants. They assert that the physical return of the Palestinian refugees would pose enormous problems, including a security risk for Jews. But they also recognize that acknowledging that refugees suffered an injustice that needs redress (some returning to Israel, some receiving reparations, some receiving citizenship from their host countries) would go a long way toward reconciliation. *Contested Land, Contested Memory* is at once eye-opening and thoughtful, invaluable for anyone wanting to better understand the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Scott Schaeffer-Duffy is a member of the Saints Francis and Thérèse Catholic Worker in Worcester, Mass.