

Middle East Notes
Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns
February 19, 2015



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

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

This issue of Middle East highlights Israeli and U.S. opposition to the speech to Congress by Prime Minister Netanyahu, slated for March 3, the claim by Netanyahu that he speaks for Jews worldwide, ("Israelis in Exile"), the situation in Gaza, U.S. tax exempt funding of settlements, continuing opinion that the "two-state solution" is already impossible, civilian deaths in Gaza, and other issues.

Commentary: Reaction to the invitation to the Israeli prime minister to speak to a joint session of Congress, the split of opinion in both the Democratic and Republican parties on whether or not Netanyahu should make this speech so close to Israeli elections, and growing awareness of the influence of Christian Zionists in the U.S. and the Likud party in Israel and on the U.S. Congress are increasing U.S. public concerns about unquestioning financial, economic and military support of the Israeli government.

The articles listed are excerpted in the following pages. Please use the hyperlink in the headline to read the pieces in their entirety.

- A Ha'aretz editorial writes that despite the embarrassing situation in which Netanyahu finds himself, he must prove that the country's good is more important than his personal good. He must call off his speech to Congress.
- Bradley Burston notes in Ha'aretz that Benjamin Netanyahu does not speak in the name of U.S. Jews, and has nothing in common with the vast majority of them, seven out of ten of which voted for a man he implicitly demonized as "anti-Israel"; but he still intends to speak as their representative before Congress.
- Allan C. Brownfeld writes in the Washington Report on Middle East Affairs that the Israeli government has never recognized that Jewish U.S. citizens were not "Israelis in exile." Prime Minister Netanyahu has repeatedly called upon U.S. Jews to make a "mass aliyah" (immigration) to Israel. No other foreign government argues that millions of U.S. Americans—because of their religion—are in "exile" in the United States and that their real "homeland"—or "nation-state"—is that foreign country.
- Ben Caspit in Al-Monitor states that Israel has quietly changed its stance toward Gaza with a loosening of the blockade to improve the transfer of goods and movement of people in the hope of averting another explosion in the enclave.
- Eric Goldstein in Foreign Policy comments that according to recently released Israeli government data, from the beginning of 2009 until the beginning of 2014, the settlement population grew 23 percent. This growth is partly being funded by millions of dollars from tax-exempt U.S. charities, which help expand and support settlements. Even though this revenue stream arguably violates Internal Revenue Service rules, neither Congress nor the Obama administration has done anything to stop it.
- Rachel Unger in Tikkun writes that the facts on the ground clearly indicate the impossibility of a two-state solution since the separation wall has sucked resources and land onto the Israeli side of the Green Line.
- Other articles of interest.

1) Netanyahu must call off his speech to Congress

Ha'aretz editorial, February, 9, 2015

He is endangering Israel's most important relationship and trampling the remnants of Israeli diplomacy. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is sure that one speech to the U.S. Congress will stop the trend and torpedo the emerging nuclear deal between Washington and Tehran. Netanyahu thinks his mellifluous tones will make the minority such a great majority that even a presidential veto will crumble before it. Actually, Netanyahu wants to unleash the American legislators on their president, and that's improper interference.

We can argue over the emerging deal with Iran and the bargaining points, but the American people are sovereign to decide who will govern them and in what direction their leader will lead. Iran froze its military nuclear program due to the U.S. invasion of Iraq under Barack Obama's predecessor, George W. Bush, but the Americans have had enough of that. They voted for Obama to get their forces out of Iraq and Afghanistan and not enmesh them in another war. ...

2) How dare Netanyahu speak in the name of America's Jews?

Bradley Burston, Ha'aretz, February 9, 2015

... How dare Benjamin Netanyahu pose as a representative of the Jewish people in America and elsewhere, when he does everything in his power to undermine, humiliate, and implicitly demonize as anti-Israel a man whom seven of every ten American Jewish voters chose to represent them – in part because of Barack Obama's role in fostering security cooperation with Israel, including additional funding for the Iron Dome rocket defense system?

For that matter, how can Netanyahu so wholeheartedly fake a pose as the representative leader of the Jewish people, when a Monday opinion survey commissioned by Israel Army Radio showed that 47 percent of his own Israeli public now believes that he should cancel his speech to Congress? According to the survey, only 34 percent of Israelis believe that Netanyahu should go through with the speech. ... When all of this speech business began, Netanyahu seemed to have pulled off the political trifecta: a projected grand climax to his own election campaign, a huge gesture to the Republican Party, and a telling slap to Obama's face.

Lately, though, that's not the way it's playing here. It's beginning to appear less and less like a plea for sanctions more and more like make-believe, the ploy of ploys. If, in fact, Netanyahu's people conclude that the speech has become a campaign liability and he finds a way to cancel, then all of us – American Jews included – will know for sure what the speech was for in the first place.

3) Despite new "nationality bill" claims, Israel is not the "nation-state" of American Jews

Allan C. Brownfeld, WRMEA, March/April 2015, pp. 50-51

In November, a proposal for a basic law titled "Israel, the Nation-State of the Jewish People" passed in the Israeli Cabinet by a vote of 14-6, with two centrist coalition parties opposing it. For the bill to become law it must be approved by the Knesset, Israel's parliament.

There is much opposition to this proposed legislation by those who argue that it would make Israel's non-Jewish citizens—20 percent of the population—less than equal. In fact, of course, Israel's Palestinians already are second-class citizens. Ahmed Tibi, a veteran Arab member of the Knesset, says that there has long been tension between the halves of the term "Jewish democracy," as Israel likes to define itself. He notes that the proposed legislation simply "confirms that the Jewish and democratic

state is fiction.” He described Israel instead as a “Judocracy” that would never recognize the collective rights of “a minority that has long suffered discrimination.”

The claim that Israel is the “nation-state” of “the Jewish people” is on its face fanciful and far from the truth. The “nation-state” of American Jews is the United States, not Israel, just as the “nation-state” of British Jews is the United Kingdom and the “nation-state” of French Jews is France, etc.

The Zionist notion that Israel is the Jewish “homeland,” and that all Jews living outside of Israel are in “exile” is an ideological construct which has no relationship to reality. The overwhelming majority of American Jews, for example, have always believed that Judaism is a religion of universal values, not a nationality, and that rather than being in “exile” in America, they are fully at home. This view has been expressed repeatedly in our history. In 1841, at the dedication ceremony of Temple Beth Elohim in Charleston, South Carolina, Rabbi Gustav Poznanski declared, “This country is our Palestine, this city our Jerusalem, this house of God our temple.” ...

4) Israel reluctantly accepts Hamas rule **Ben Caspit, Al-Monitor, February 3, 2015**

... Slowly and quietly, under the radar, the stance of the Israeli security apparatus regarding Gaza has in recent months been changing. The process began even before Operation Protective Edge. That conflict disrupted its progress but now, after the winds have calmed a bit, it can continue. Israel's blockade policy is beginning to make room for a controlled and rational release of pressure in the Gaza pressure cooker. Another explosion, which will happen soon without substantive change in the lives of Gazans, is not good for anyone. Not for Israel, not for Egypt, not for Gaza.

As of now, Israel is trying to take the pressure off Gaza, to allow the Gazans to manage their economy and develop it. The catch is that Hamas is likely to attribute this improvement to its "victory" in the Protective Edge campaign. People in Israel say that the two things are not connected, that the policy began to change even before the campaign. The fact is, Israelis say, we broke the news about the change in policy to Gaza merchants even before the security deterioration that led to the operation.

It will be hard for the Israelis to prove this, but in the meantime the reality in the area is changing. The numbers of people leaving and entering Gaza are growing significantly, mainly students and laborers going to Judea and Samaria. Israel allows Gaza to export fish, agricultural produce, mainly to the Gulf states and to Palestinian Authority (PA) territory. The fishing zone has been increased. A Gaza reconstruction mechanism was created by UN envoy Robert Serry, PA envoy Prime Minister Rami Hamdallah and Israeli Maj. Gen. Yoav Mordechai, coordinator of government activities in the territories. This mechanism exerts tight regulation over the merchandise and wares that enter Gaza for reconstruction, but it does allow for their entrance.

In other words, Israel is beginning to reconcile itself to Hamas as a governing body and the Hamas movement as the entity that authentically represents the Palestinian people. No one in Israel is in love with the idea. Hamas was, and remains, a terrorist organization whose charter calls for the destruction of Israel. It has no religious or moral mandate to conduct negotiations with Israel or recognize its existence. On the other hand, at the moment this is what the Palestinians want.

5) Can I take a tax-deduction on my donation to Israeli settlements in Palestine? **Eric Goldstein, Foreign Policy, January 29, 2015**

... In late September, settlers moved into 25 housing units in Silwan, an East Jerusalem neighborhood that abuts the Old City to the south and is home to 50,000 Palestinians. The move prompted the Obama

administration to condemn the organization that engineered the purchase — a reference, apparently, to an Israeli association known as Elad — as one “whose agenda, by definition, stokes tensions between Israelis and Palestinians.”

Elad’s name is an acronym for “To the City of David,” the name Israelis use for Silwan. The name reflects the organization’s mission to, in its own words, “strengthen the Jewish connection” in the neighborhood, in particular, and East Jerusalem more broadly “through settlement and environmental and touristic development.” Elad’s agenda coincides with Israel’s state policy of moving its citizens into occupied territory — a position that violates international law. The Rome Statute, the treaty establishing the International Criminal Court, provides that the court may prosecute government officials responsible for the “transfer, directly or indirectly, by the Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupies.”

American taxpayers indirectly subsidize Elad’s work. In 2011 and 2012, the two most recent years for which tax filings are publicly available, Elad received around two-thirds of its donations through a New York-based charity, Friends of Ir David. The charity transferred \$5.6 million in grants in 2012 and \$6.9 million in grants in 2011 to Elad — almost its entire revenue stream. The founder of Elad, David Be’eri, is also a board member of the American charity. ...

For decades, even as every U.S. administration condemned settlement construction, they all allowed it to continue with impunity by avoiding policies that could extract a price for the settlements’ continued expansion. The United States has consistently vetoed U.N. Security Council resolutions critical of settlements, pressured the Palestinians not to go to the International Criminal Court to examine settlements as a possible war crime, and allowed charities to freely send donations to build and expand settlements. It’s up to Congress and the Obama administration to put an end to this double standard and stop enabling Israel’s violations of international law.

6) Life sucked out of two-state solution long ago
Rachel Unger, Tikkun, January 29, 2015

... The Impossibility of a Two-State Solution: The facts on the ground showed the truth. The separation wall sucked resources and land onto the Israeli side of the Green Line, and it seemed that every Palestinian village I visited was within clear sight of a settlement. Peaceful negotiation and violent retaliation alike made the situation worse, as Israelis gained control of more and more territory. The Palestinians I spoke to did not see this broken patchwork of land in the West Bank as their state; they longed for Al-Quds (Jerusalem), for Jaffa, for Haifa. They demanded human rights.

We visited Nabi Saleh, where locals told us about their weekly protests demanding the neighboring settlers give back the water spring they had taken over from the Palestinian village. But their real demand was an end to the occupation. On a farm outside of Bethlehem, an Israeli settler described his work developing coexistence programs with his Palestinian neighbors. He said the settlements are the “fingers of the conflict” and therefore the heart of the solution. He yearned for peace, but when we asked his preferred political resolution he had no answers, and he certainly had no intention of leaving. As he spoke, we strolled through rolling fields, crossing the Path of the Patriarchs, visiting an old Roman bath. I could see why people were fighting over this precious land. After these experiences, it was hard to believe that Kerry thought dividing the land into two states was possible. ...

Rachel Unger is a senior at Wesleyan University, majoring in government with a minor in French. She is writing a thesis on the Palestinian BDS movement. Next year, she will work as a Campus Organizer with MASSPIRG.

Other articles of interest

Consuls in U.S. warn: Israel's friends fear Netanyahu's speech to Congress will harm ties, Baak Reid, Ha'aretz, February 5, 2015

Interview with Hanan Ashrawi, David Hearst, Middleeasteye.net/news, February 4, 2015

The most ugly form of brutality is that against a child, Erynn Baker, IMEC, January 30, 2015

[The State of Two States, Week of February 1, 2015](#)

[The State of Two States, Week of February 8, 2015](#)

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletins](#)

Palestine and human rights treaties: A political tool and a boomerang, Jessica Montell, Foundation for Middle East Peace, February 5, 2015

UN officials warns of further conflict in Gaza, Ma'an News, February 12, 2015

IDF security assessment: The Palestinian Authority can collapse at any moment, Noam Amir/Maariv Hashavua, Jerusalem Post, February 13, 2015

Congress may re-examine special arms deals with Israel, Julian Pecquet, Al Monitor, February 5, 2015

Jon Stewart made it okay to be ambivalent about Israel, Brian Schaefer, Ha'aretz, February 12, 2015

Obama is pursuing regime change in Israel, Aaron David Miller, Foreign Policy, February 12, 2015

Report finds high civilian death toll during Gaza war, Associated Press, February 13, 2015