

**Middle East Notes**  
**Maryknoll Office for Global Concerns**  
**April 30, 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's articles focus on concerns such as: the best U.S. response to the Israeli/Palestinian and other Middle East conflicts could be a lessening of involvement, Zionism's close connection to growing anti-Semitism, increasing threats to the survival of Israel as a Jewish, democratic, and an accepted member of the community of nations due to the current policies of the Israeli government, a shift in U.S. public opinion from blind and unquestioned support of Israel, questions concerning the continuing absolution of Israel from the Deir Yassin and all other massacres, the continuing violation of Palestinian human rights through Israel's settlement outpost system, and other issues.

*Commentary: The reelection of Prime Minister Netanyahu with his public rejection of a viable "two state solution," his weakened relationship with President Obama, the opposition of Israel to an Iran nuclear accord, the continuing non-resolution of the Palestinian Israeli conflict, justice concerns of "Israeli Arabs," the on-going response of the U.S. and other countries to ISIS, all seem to be calling into question the U.S. unconditional support of Israel other than through guaranteed military assistance. Due to its occupation of the West Bank and blockade of Gaza, Israel does not have the support of Arab countries and is facing growing criticism from Europe, along with a world-wide increase in the BDS (boycott, divestment and sanctions) movement of products from the West Bank and of the companies involved. Concerns are surfacing that Israel in its efforts to be a Jewish state for Jews alone has been moving it away from being a democratic state, and is risking the loss of being an accepted member of the community of nations.*

- Kai Bird writes in *The Nation* that it is time for the U.S. to walk away from the Middle East, especially the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, and leave that region to its own bad behavior. He believes that the Middle East today is a far more dangerous neighborhood than it was three decades ago.
- Philip Weiss comments in Mondoweiss on a speech given by Norman Finkelstein on the new anti-Semitism at the University of Wisconsin: Jewish organizations assert that there is no connection at all between Israel's actions and anti-Semitic activities; but the opposite is the case, Finkelstein said. Israel and Jewish groups could do a lot to reduce anti-Semitism by disavowing Israel's actions or disavowing that Israel is a Jewish state.
- In a rather long but challenging article in Vox, Max Fisher reflects on Israel's dark future in that its internal crisis has grown so great that it threatens the survival of Israel as we know it today: as a Jewish, democratic, and an accepted member of the community of nations.
- Nahum Barnea states in Ynetnews that with a U.S. president who is losing patience with the insults hurled at him, a failed Israeli attempt at reshaping the Iranian nuclear agreement and a looming UN resolution on the Palestinians, it's time for Netanyahu and the Israeli government to reboot their international policy.
- Ilan Pappé writes in the Electronic Intifada on how Israel was absolved of Deir Yassin and all other massacres and that in fact, it has been let off from all the crimes it committed in 1948 and ever since.
- Yossi Gurvitz states in the +972 Blog that at the core of Israel's settlement outpost system lies the systemic violation of Palestinian human rights. When an outpost is created, it grabs territory, which later becomes the core of the outpost. This territory often includes private Palestinian land. Around the core there is what is known as the SSA – "special security area" – which Palestinians may not enter except on special occasions, since it serves as the perimeter of the outpost. Outside the SSA there is Palestinian land that becomes a source of friction as the outposts expand.
- Other articles of interest

## 1) [The case for disengagement in the Middle East](#)

Kai Bird, *The Nation*, April 6, 2015

... The Middle East today is ... a far more dangerous neighborhood than it was three decades ago. Unimaginative leaders in Israel and throughout the Arab world have made bad choices, but America's ill-considered military interventions have consistently made things worse.

So what is America to do? I love the Middle East. My earliest childhood memories are of Jerusalem. I love the colors and smells and cadence of Arabic spoken in the streets of Cairo or Beirut. I also love the modernity and verve of Tel Aviv. But all my instincts are to protect my Middle East from my America. These are two different worlds—and we Americans, firmly ensconced in one of these worlds, have no understanding of the other.

Furthermore, after all our bloody, misbegotten interventions, we have no standing, no legitimacy as mediators, let alone as peacekeepers. I assure you, we do nothing to improve the situation with our boots on the ground and our deadly drones circling overhead. In the Arab world, we have historically aligned ourselves with generals and kings and narrow-minded sectarian tribal leaders. In Israel, we have become the ultimate enablers of Likudites devoted to colonization.

It is time to walk away and leave these people to their own bad behavior. Let the Israelis occupy—and then let them grapple with the consequences. I oppose any academic boycott of Israeli institutions, but I support an economic boycott of products and services in the settlements. I believe we need to engage at every possible point with the Israeli people—but also to impose a policy of coldly correct diplomatic relations with the Israeli government. I would not give the Israelis a dime in military assistance. And I believe we should support the right of Palestinians (and others) to petition the International Criminal Court for redress when their human rights are violated. ...

*[This article appeared in the April 6, 2015 edition of The Nation and is part of The Nation's 150th anniversary special issue. Download a free PDF of the issue, with articles by James Baldwin, Barbara Ehrenreich, Toni Morrison, Howard Zinn and many more, \[here\]\(#\).](#)*

## 2) [Israel could reduce anti-Semitic violence by not calling itself the Jewish state, Finkelstein says](#)

Philip Weiss, founder and co-editor, *Mondoweiss*, April 10, 2015

Last month at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Norman Finkelstein gave a speech on “the new anti-Semitism” to the Students for Justice in Palestine chapter. The speech contained a number of interesting ideas; let me summarize a few.

The most important one involves Zionism's role in fostering anti-Semitism. Jewish organizations assert that there is no connection at all between Israel's actions and anti-Semitic activities; but the opposite is the case, Finkelstein said. And Israel and Jewish groups could do a lot to reduce anti-Semitism by disavowing Israel's actions or disavowing that Israel is a Jewish state.

*Finkelstein: “It's often claimed that there's... no causal nexus between Israeli actions and anti-Semitism, that you can't blame it on Israel, that there's no connection between the... spikes in Israeli violence against Palestinians and the upticks in anti-Semitic violence. When in fact if you go through the evidence collected over many years, that's exactly what the evidence does show: each time Israel launches another of its murderous assaults, anti-Semitic incidents peak in Europe. And they're often perpetrated by disaffected angry Muslim youth. If in recent times, a larger fraction of these incidents are violent, it's the blowback from the brutish fanaticism currently plaguing the Arab Muslim world.*

*“Now if you're really concerned about these spurts of anti-Semitism, and you want to contain them, then there are obvious things you can do.*

*"Number one, Israel can stop carrying out massacres...."*

*"Another thing is: Israel can simply stop calling itself a Jewish state, so Jews wouldn't have to bear the burden for its criminal actions."*

*"And the third thing is, official Jewish organizations in the diaspora, they could cease defending Israel's criminal actions so it won't appear as if Israel when it carries out these actions is acting in the name of the Jewish people."*

The problem hasn't been helped by the fact that Netanyahu "in a new phase of his megalomania" is calling himself the representative of the entire Jewish people.

*"When Muslim youths in Europe take him at his word, and they exact revenge on those whom he claims to represent, it might not be right, but it's not surprising either." ...*

### **3) [Israel's dark future](#)**

**Max Fisher, Vox, April 13, 2015**

In June 1967, Israel won a stunning military victory against its neighbors, elating Israelis and the global Jewish community with a sense that the grand experiment of a Jewish state might really work. Three weeks later, amid Israel's national euphoria, the country's founding prime minister **emerged** from retirement to warn Israelis that they had sown the seeds of national self-destruction. David Ben-Gurion, 81 years old, insisted that Israel, which had conquered the Palestinian territories of Gaza and the West Bank in the war, must immediately give them up. If they did not, he said, this act of forcible occupation would corrupt the Jewish state and possibly destroy it outright. His speech was barely covered in the Israeli press and widely ignored by Israelis. The Palestinians have lived under Israeli occupation now for 48 years. ...

Quietly, gradually, an internal crisis has grown so great that it threatens the survival of Israel as we know it today: Jewish, democratic, and an accepted member of the community of nations. If something does not change, then that Israel cannot survive. An Israel that is authoritarian, that is isolated in the world, and that betrays the ideals of its founders will take its place. It will retain the Israeli flag and national anthem, it will stamp "Israel" on its passports, but it will not be Israel as Zionists like Herzl and Lipsky — and millions of Jews who believed and still believe in their vision — hoped and intended. ...

Israelis cannot say they were not warned, nor that warnings have come only from liberals and peaceniks. The alarm Ben-Gurion sounded in 1967 has gone off many times before and since. "[Even] after the formation of a Jewish majority, a considerable Arab population will always remain in Palestine," Jabotinsky, the early Zionist leader whose ideas inform today's Israeli right, wrote in the years before Palestine had become Israel and Palestine. "If things fare badly for this group of inhabitants then things will fare badly for the entire country. The political, economic and cultural welfare of the Arabs will thus always remain one of the main conditions for the well-being of the Land of Israel." ...

Israelis may have made their decision. They are pushing their country down a path whose destination is clearer every day: undemocratic, isolated, and a hostile occupier of a foreign population. This is not unique in history; many countries have traded away aspects of their democracy or abandoned it completely. There is every reason to believe Israelis will choose to join them.

#### **4) Netanyahu must wake up to the new reality**

**Nahum Barnea, Ynetnews, April 18, 2015**

... The fate of the Iranian nuclear program now rests with the ayatollahs – and them alone. Iran's status as a nuclear threshold nation has been recognized by the international community – including the United States.

Israel took a major blow, of historic proportions. Jerusalem's huge public relations drive came to naught. Governments weren't the only ones that brushed us aside; Israel's closest friends on Capitol Hill, those who represent constituencies with large Jewish populations and who enjoy the support of Jewish billionaires, are now doing the same. At this point in time, a responsible government would stop and rethink its course of action.

A new course of action must start with the Obama administration. Officials in Washington understand what the nuclear deal with Iran means to America's allies in the Middle East – and Israel first and foremost. They are looking for a way to balance it, to compensate America's allies and to limit the damage. Obama is willing to go far on this issue – much further than his predecessors ever did.

But Netanyahu has his own agenda: Judging by his speeches over the past few days, he appears to believe that everything is still open to change, that the members of Congress are still sitting in the auditorium and applauding him. He's like Emperor Nero, who played on his fiddle while Rome burned. ...

The United States' blind support of Israel will not last forever, Obama has warned. There's been a shift in public opinion. Look what's happening on American campuses. Ask students what they think about Israel.

#### **5) How Israel was absolved of Deir Yassin and all other massacres**

**Ilan Pappé, The Electronic Intifada, April 10, 2015**

... On 1 April 1948, the Zionist forces that had been given the instruction to cleanse dozens of Palestinian villages from the western side of Jerusalem received a large bundle of orders. Among them was a directive from the intelligence service of the Hagana depicting every village as an enemy base and anyone above the age of ten as an able fighting male. The villages and the men and children in it were thus considered legitimate military targets to be destroyed and killed. ...

The massacre of Deir Yassin, by no means the worst or the last in the history of Palestine, symbolized what was so unique about the Palestinian plight. Immediately after it occurred, the people who initiated it (the Zionist leadership) blamed their extreme wing for doing it and apologized.

At the same time, they published as widely as possible the news in order to frighten those living at the next locations in their journey of expulsion and destruction. They were about to assault the cities of Palestine and they hoped that the massacre would cause people to flee. It did not work that well; they had to massacre and expel by force the people of the towns throughout the month of April 1948. ...

*The author of numerous books, Ilan Pappé is professor of history and director of the European Centre for Palestine Studies at the University of Exeter.*

#### **6) West Bank outposts: An entire system of dispossession**

**Yossi Gurtvitz, +972 Blog, April 22, 2015**

... When an outpost is created, it grabs territory, which later becomes the core of the outpost. This territory often includes private Palestinian land. Around the core there is what is known as the SSA –

“special security area” – which Palestinians may not enter except on special occasions, since it serves as the perimeter of the outpost. Outside the SSA there is Palestinian land that becomes a source of friction. Why is it a source of friction? Because the goal of outposts is to expand. Adee-Ad, our test case, now includes territory nearly 30 times its original size. How do outposts expand? Israeli civilians arrive in the vicinity and either attack Palestinian farmers or damage their crops. This is done in order to terrorize them and force them to abandon their land. When the land is abandoned, it is taken over.

In order to do so, of course, the outposts require assistance from their main partner, the government of Israel: soldiers who do not prevent violations such as settler riots; policemen who do not properly investigate attacks on Palestinians; prosecutors who close cases without due cause; a Civil Administration that does not enforce its own demolition orders; government offices that hurry to provide services for illegal settlements; and at the end of the line – the state attorneys, who time and again appear in court to defend these massive violations of the law, not to mention postponing bringing an end to them for long as possible. [Time after time](#), the state proposes legalizing these outposts as a gift to the lawbreakers. ...

#### **Other articles of interest:**

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 17, 2015](#)

[Churches for Middle East Peace Bulletin, April 24, 2015](#)

[U.S.: It will be hard to support Israel in UN if it steps back from two-state solution](#), Barak Ravid, Ha'aretz, April 27, 2015

[How Israel hid its secret nuclear weapons program](#), Avner Cohen and William Burr, Politico Magazine, April 15, 2015

[How Israel was absolved of Deir Yassin and all other massacres](#), Ilan Pappé, The Electronic Intifada, April 10, 2015

[Israel no longer unites American Jews. But exploring Judaism could.](#), Peter Beinart, Ha'aretz, April 16, 2015

[Israel's nation-state talk means the return of the yellow star](#), Gideon Levy, Ha'aretz, April 16, 2015

[Israel is but an American protectorate, far from true independence](#), Nehemia Shtrusle, Ha'aretz, April 21, 2015

[After deal Palestine turns to UN for statehood](#), James M. Wall, Wallwritings, April 7, 2015

[Prisoners Day Report on Palestinian detainees, their suffering and their plight](#), International Middle East Media Center, April 16, 2015

[Liberating Israelis from the mentality of occupation](#)

Eitan Bronstein Aparicio and Dr. Eléonore Merza Bronstein, +972 Blog, April 23, 2015