

AMERICA magazine

Of Many Things

[Drew Christiansen](#) | NOVEMBER 16, 2009

This last week the stories of two women brought home to me the pains inflicted by the absence of an Israeli-Palestinian peace. One is Sharihan Hannoun, a young woman who has been living on the street in Jerusalem after her home was seized and occupied by Israeli settlers. The second, a student at Bethlehem University named Berlanty Azzam, was peremptorily deported by Israeli authorities to Gaza.



A third woman, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, demonstrated how, when unmoored from history and experience, American policy in the Middle East can cause pain to all those who had come to hope for change from the Obama administration. Secretary Clinton backed away from the administration's demand for an end to Israeli settlement activity with a proposal for both sides to take up peace negotiations without pre-conditions.

Pressed at a meeting of Arab foreign ministers, she shifted her position once again, but not without praising purported Israeli willingness "to restrain settlement activity" as "unprecedented," though it allows for the planned-for construction of 3,000 new homes. Agreeing to Israeli terms indicates a diplomatic innocence that is uncomprehending of the history of the Israel-Palestinian struggle and the relentless dispossession of Palestinians from the land.

Sheikh Jarrah is a neighborhood of East Jerusalem just inside the Green Line, the old 1949 armistice line between East and West Jerusalem. But in the late 1990s, Jewish settlers, with the support of authorities, began grabbing Palestinian land there. In a few years many once-Palestinian homes were flying the blue and white Israeli flag, and empty lots were sprouting new construction sponsored by overseas "investors."

In recent months, in contravention of the Oslo Accords, the Israeli government has been conducting expulsions and home demolitions in East Jerusalem neighborhoods to consolidate Israeli control of the city.

Ms. Hannoun told me how the settlers awoke her last Aug. 2 at 5 in the morning and gave her 20 minutes to move out. Within two hours the settlers had moved in, and her family's furniture was on the street. According to Catholic News Service, she said police told her they were seizing the house "because you are Palestinian..." and added, "We can take any houses we want...without any papers...because we are Israeli."

If you think this expulsion is a recent phenomenon, I recommend reading Ilan Pappé, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld); and Avi Shlaim, *The Iron Wall* (Norton).

On Oct. 28 Berlanty Azzam, a Christian fourth year business administration student at the Vatican-run Bethlehem University, was seized by the Israeli military, handcuffed, blindfolded and deported to Gaza against the advice of military lawyers. No charges were lodged against her. Her apparent offense: She was born in Gaza City.

Like the settlers' expulsion of Ms. Shanoun, the deportation of Ms. Azzam is an example of the arbitrary treatment inflicted on ordinary Palestinians at the hands of Israeli officials. Any expectation that "unprecedented" limitations on settlement construction, as Mrs. Clinton called them, will hold back Israeli expansion under the leadership of the wily Mr. Netanyahu is a pipe dream. Over many years he has used every available tactic to evade restrictions on Israeli expansion.

For now, hard pressure against settlements is a wiser, more realistic policy than Israeli-Palestinian negotiations without pre-conditions. Better a modicum of justice than a phony, one-sided peace.

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Reader's Comments (3)

1. One of the greatest injustices of our times has been Israel's treatment of the Palestinians. One of the most disgraceful actions of our times has been the United States unilateral support of Israel, and Israel's colonization of the Palestinian lands. In a recent Haaretz article columnist Gideon Levy urged, (in the interest of peace) "America, stop sucking up to Israel". I hope President Obama and Mrs. Clinton will heed Mr. Levy's words. I pray that the US administration will stand firm on its policy of no further Israeli colonization of Palestinian land.

Congratulations to Father Christiansen for speaking out. It is hoped that more of the media will follow his example; and that America will continue to speak out on the dreadful injustices perpetrated on the Palestinians by the Israelis.

By Bernie Tracey on November 6, 2009 at 2:24 PM

2. Christiansen gets it right - but why not an America editorial along these lines - perhaps reflecting on the shameful condemnation of the Goldstone Report by the US house. Unless US Christian voices come out more clearly and strongly against the one-sidedness of US policy, we won't have peace because we'll still be allowing Israel to do whatever it wants AND paying for it.

By John Kane on November 7, 2009 at 3:22 PM

3. Having just returned from an 8-day "witness" trip to Palestine, I deeply appreciate this article....The theme of my visit, which was sponsored by Sabeel (an Anglican group working for peace and reconciliation) was to "show, not tell." Bascially, I saw the five horrid things that the Israeli government is doing to the Palestinians, namely: 1) the Wall that imprisons them; 2) the Settlements that expropriate their land; 3) the Occupation that restricts their freedom; 4) the Demolitions which destroy their homes; and 5) the Prisons that incarcerate whomever they will.

I returned with sadness in my heart, and without a clear idea of what we can do to change this horrible situation. Editorials like yours, Fr. Crhistenson, are a start.

By John McCarthy, ND '58 on November 13, 2009 at 9:54 AM