



PASI NEWS

Newsletter of Peace Action of Staten Island, www.peacesi.org 718-989-2881

Calendar:

- WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 13, 7 – 9:30 PM. Syria, ISIS, Refugees? What Can Be Done? Brooklyn for Peace, The Common, 388 Atlantic Ave, Brooklyn
- THURSDAY, JANUARY 14, 6 - 8:30 PM. VOTE on BDS & PARTICIPATE in PLANNING WORKSHOP. Peace Action of Staten Island Meeting. Unitarian Fellowship Hall, 312 Fillmore St.
- COMING IN FEBRUARY: Public forum on Shutting Down Indian Point. Stay tuned for date/time/location.
- TUESDAY, APRIL 19. New York State Presidential Primary.

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PASI Planning Workshop Plus BDS Vote

At the next PASI General Meeting
Thursday, January 14, 2016 6 to 8:30 PM
 Unitarian Fellowship Hall
 312 Fillmore St. (at Clinton Ave.), S.I.

Peace Action of Staten Island will be holding an important meeting on Thursday, January 14th where members will vote on whether to endorse a resolution in support of the Palestinian civil society call for boycotts, divestment, and sanctions (BDS) against Israel. There will also be a planning workshop to discuss PASI's priorities for 2016.

The following resolution in support of the BDS movement was prepared by a committee formed after the November 12th informational presentation on the BDS by Riham Barghouti and Hani Ghazi of Adalah-NY.

The officers and membership of "Peace Action of Staten Island," in response to the call from Palestinian Civil Society (which lives under the control of the Israeli state) for a worldwide boycott, divestment and sanction of all Israeli products including cultural, educational and entertainment activities, do hereby resolve to give our support to the non-violent action of the "Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions" movement. We give this support in an effort to bring peace and justice to the Palestinian people by encouraging an open dialogue with the State of Israel.

The full text of the BDS call is on page 2 of this newsletter. **More information about the BDS movement can be found at <https://bdsmovement.net/>.**

In order to be eligible to vote, according to PASI bylaws, members must have paid their 2015-16 dues by December 14th, at least 30 days in advance of the vote. *The newsletter mailing label will indicate whether your membership is paid up or needs to be renewed.* Please contact pasi.contact@gmail.com if you have any questions about your membership.

The 2016 planning workshop will be facilitated by PASI board members Ilya Jalal and Ghanim Khalil, along with PASI chair Eileen Bardel. 2016 is a key election year locally and nationally. How can we together best advocate for peaceful resolutions to conflict through PASI?

Peace Action of Staten Island welcomes everyone to come to its meeting. New faces are very welcome. **Doors will open at 5:45 pm. Light refreshments will be served.**

Text of “Palestinian Civil Society Calls for Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions against Israel Until it Complies with International Law and Universal Principles of Human Rights”

Editor’s Note: Below is the July 9, 2005 text (<http://bdsmovement.net/call>) of the call by Palestinian Civil Society to civil society around the world to implement appropriate boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

One year after the historic Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ) which found Israel’s Wall built on occupied Palestinian territory to be illegal; Israel continues its construction of the colonial Wall with total disregard to the Court’s decision. Thirty eight years into Israel’s occupation of the Palestinian West Bank (including East Jerusalem), Gaza Strip and the Syrian Golan Heights, Israel continues to expand Jewish colonies. It has unilaterally annexed occupied East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights and is now de facto annexing large parts of the West Bank by means of the Wall. Israel is also preparing – in the shadow of its planned redeployment from the Gaza Strip – to build and expand colonies in the West Bank. Fifty seven years after the state of Israel was built mainly on land ethnically cleansed of its Palestinian owners, a majority of Palestinians are refugees, most of whom are stateless. Moreover, Israel’s entrenched system of racial discrimination against its own Arab-Palestinian citizens remains intact.

In light of Israel’s persistent violations of international law; and

Given that, since 1948, hundreds of UN resolutions have condemned Israel’s colonial and discriminatory policies as illegal and called for immediate, adequate and effective remedies; and

Given that all forms of international intervention and peace-making have until now failed to convince or force Israel to comply with humanitarian law, to respect fundamental human rights and to end its occupation and oppression of the people of Palestine; and

In view of the fact that people of conscience in the international community have historically shouldered the moral responsibility to fight injustice, as exemplified in the struggle to abolish apartheid in South Africa through diverse forms of boycott, divestment and sanctions; and

Inspired by the struggle of South Africans against apartheid and in the spirit of international solidarity, moral consistency and resistance to injustice and oppression;

We, representatives of Palestinian civil society, call upon international civil society organizations and people of conscience all over the world to impose broad boycotts and implement divestment initiatives against Israel similar to those applied to South Africa in the apartheid era. We appeal to you to pressure your respective states to impose embargoes and sanctions against Israel. We also invite conscientious Israelis to support this Call, for the sake of justice and genuine peace.

These non-violent punitive measures should be maintained until Israel meets its obligation to recognize the Palestinian people’s inalienable right to self-determination and fully complies with the precepts of international law by:

1. Ending its occupation and colonization of all Arab lands and dismantling the Wall
2. Recognizing the fundamental rights of the Arab-Palestinian citizens of Israel to full equality; and
3. Respecting, protecting and promoting the rights of Palestinian refugees to return to their homes and properties as stipulated in UN resolution 194.

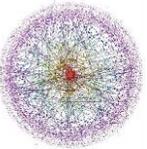
Endorsed by: Palestinian political parties, unions, associations, coalitions and organizations that represent the three integral parts of the people of Palestine: Palestinian refugees, Palestinians under occupation and Palestinian citizens of Israel.

The Complexity of Understanding Daesh (ISIS)

By Ghanim Khalil

Editor's Note: In preparation for our January 14th meeting workshop on "PASI's Direction in 2016," Ghanim Khalil, who recently joined the PASI board, has written a background article about the context of the current violence in Syria, Iraq, and Yemen, Libya, and Somalia. We hope you will take the time to read it before the meeting to help inform our discussion about what role PASI can play in educating ourselves and our community about the humanitarian crisis the world faces today as a result of these conflicts and escalating military involvement.

Introduction



The complexity of understanding Daesh (ISIS, ISI, ISIL, IS), its roots, its rise to power, its ability to maintain itself as a viable force, and its ideologically driven mission to "cleanse" the region in the name of Islam, is for most Americans a perplexing issue. This geographically and culturally misapprehended area is fraught with problems explained away by Western commentators, from politicians and religious figures to news reporters and comedic/political show hosts, as rooted in the failures of the Muslim world to adopt and apply the enlightenment philosophies and principles that produced the Modern West in all its civilizational glory. Hence, Muslims are understood by many to have never progressed beyond ancient and medieval modes of living and understandings of life, and so they stubbornly cling to the dictates of an ancient religion that either requires a reformation or needs to be secularized for progress, rationalism, science, and human rights to take root and flourish. This is why the "Clash of Civilization" thesis advocated by Bernard Lewis and popularized further by Samuel Huntington has been highly influential in shaping U.S. foreign policy in much of the Muslim world. Reality and history, however, is far more complex than the fiction of essentialized Muslims in need of the Western cure or the struggle between two civilizations that are deliberately truncated to represent a Manichean relationship of good versus evil.

Colonialism to Cold War



The context surrounding the subject of Daesh in Iraq, Syria, or Libya involves understanding the intricate web of power relations produced by the conflicts of interest between global and regional powers in a politically/economically vital area of the world the former statesman and the author of 'The Grand Chessboard', Brzezinski Zbigniew, called Eurasia. Eurasia (focusing on the area connecting Europe with Western Asia including much of Arab world) has long been a strategic asset to various powers past and present, and the fact that Muslims have been situated in this area for over a thousand years has been a key problem for Western powers for centuries - even before there was a conceivable "West". The roots of modern-day instabilities in much of the Muslim world, but especially the Middle East, has its roots in the European colonial stratagems of divide/rule and politico-economic influences which continued well into the post-colonial period that prioritized Western interests over the interests of local populations. After the Second World War and the collapse of Euro-colonial powers, the U.S. emerged as a major player in the Middle East opposing the interests and influences of the Soviet Union. During the long decades of the Cold War, beginning with the Eisenhower Doctrine (1957) and reinforced by the Carter Doctrine (1980), U.S. interventionism in this part of the Muslim world eventually changed Muslim attitudes towards the U.S. from mostly positive to overwhelmingly negative. The U.S. Cold War strategy to support dictators, monarchies, and extremist Muslim militant groups as a means to curb communist or socialist influences (or perceived influences) had decades of negative impact on ordinary Muslims, as did the unrelenting support of Israeli policies and the occupation of Palestine.

Revolution in Iran to Invasion of Iraq

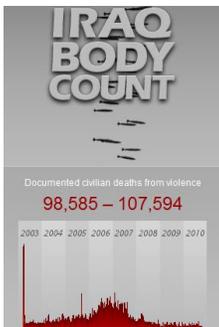
The overthrow of the long-time U.S. ally Irani dictator Reza Shah Pahlavi by various (mostly religious) elements of the Irani revolution in 1979 and the invasion of Kuwait by Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein in 1990 (and his subsequent defeat) provided the U.S. with a *raison d'être* to uphold its geopolitical strategy of maintaining a

balance of power in the Middle East which favors American interests despite the negative impacts on tens of millions of Muslims trapped under utterly oppressive conditions. Al-Qaida is widely seen as an example of blowback rooted in the U.S. use of Muslim extremists in its proxy war against the Soviets. Negative impacts of U.S. foreign policy continued despite the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. The horrific effects of the U.S. led sanctions on Iraq (1991-2003) which caused hundreds of thousands of deaths (mostly children and the elderly), Operation Desert Fox in Iraq, the U.S. bombing of the al-Shifa pharmaceutical factory in Sudan, a rise in Al-Qaida attacks on Americans in Saudi Arabia, Kenya, and Tanzania, and the attacks of September 11, 2001 exacerbated the tensions between millions of people world-wide who tapped into narratives provided by the advocates of the "clash of civilizations" on one side and the narratives of anti-Americanism (Muslim and non-Muslim) on the other.

PROJECT FOR THE NEW AMERICAN CENTURY

The 9-11 attacks gave influential U.S. neoconservatives in power under President Bush an opportunity to implement a grand plan to change the face of the Middle East by planning a war on several Muslim countries including Iraq, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Iran, and Somalia, and Sudan, as recounted by retired Gen. Wesley Clark. Policy analysts noted that not only were none of these nations involved in the 9-11 attacks, they were in fact nations that long opposed the Israeli colonization and occupation of Palestine - a thorn in the side of both Israeli and American foreign policies. A connection between the founders/members of the neoconservative think-tank the *Project For the New American Century* and key members of the Israel-based think tank *Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies* (Richard Perle, David Wurmser, Douglas Feith, and Charles Fairbanks Jr.), was noted after it was revealed that the latter had published a policy document for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (1996) called 'A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm'. This paper advocated the vital need for Israel to overthrow Saddam Hussein, aggressively contain Syria via proxy groups, and over emphasize their threats pertaining to the development of nuclear weapons in order to weaken Iranian influence in the region. Though Netanyahu didn't implement these policies at the time, the authors of the paper found the atmosphere of the immediate post 9-11 fear and hysteria in the U.S. more receptive to their ideas. The U.S. inclusion of Iraq and Iran in "the axis of evil" and its war of aggression on Iraq in 2003 would have immense immediate and long-term negative consequences for the region. Somalia, Libya, and Syria would come to know the fruits of American bombardment years later.

Effects of Iraq War



The destruction caused by the war on Iraq and its occupation via the "Coalition Provisional Authority" allowed the U.S. to dictate the new economic, political, and military landscape of Iraq which led to widespread unemployment and dissatisfaction among the Iraqi population. Peaceful protests were eventually overshadowed by conflicts between coalition forces and armed Sunni and Shiah militant factions that reacted to and/or took advantage of the chaos and insecurity, which the new ruling Shiah governments also manipulated to advocate anti-Kurdish and Sunni policies. These policies disenfranchised and alienated millions of Iraqis. The oppressive measures of the consecutive Iraqi national leadership as well as the ongoing violations of the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Iraqis by the U.S. military (like the war crimes of Fallujah and Abu Ghraib) allowed Al-Qaida to gain a strong foothold in Iraq. A dying group prior to the overthrow of Saddam, Al-Qaida gained new life by shifting to Iraq and co-opting the Iraqi resistance. It formed the group 'Al-Qaida in Iraq' (AQI), led by the militant Abu Musab al-Zarqawi (who was in fact despised by Usama bin Laden). This group would later become what most Muslims call Daesh (ISIS, ISIL, ISI, IS). AQI was largely defeated in Iraq by the "Sunni Awakening" (in 2007) and the death of its leader (in 2006), but the Iraqi government and the U.S. military continued its oppressive policies towards both Sunnis and other minorities. Former CIA intelligence officer Philip Gerald has noted that by 2008 the U.S. government was supporting militants formerly with Al-Qaida with cash and weapons in order to fight AQI, while at the same time backing the Iraqi government in its oppressive crackdown on Sunnis, which it was widely believed would lead to more AQI loyal militants. This perpetuation of the cycle of violence led Gerald to comment that, "The winner in the convoluted process has been everyone who wants to see a civil war." The plan to divide and manipulate not

just Iraq but the region violently in order to create what former U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called "The New Middle East" includes splitting several Muslim nations into dozens of state-lets based on ethnic differences. This has been openly advocated by neoconservatives and political commentators like Lt. Col. Ralph Peters and Michael Ledeen for years. It is seen as a plan that would benefit long-term U.S. and Israeli interests in the region and prevent a unified Muslim front to arise and challenge both powers.

Arab Spring and Its Aftermath



Beginning in late 2010, the Arab Spring set off a chain reaction throughout the Arab world which led to the overthrow of some authoritarian governments (Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen), reform in others (Algeria, Morocco, Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia), further curtailment of people's rights in certain ones (Kuwait, Bahrain), or all out civil war (Libya, Syria). The overthrow of Libyan ruler Muammar Gaddafi (2011) by U.S. led NATO and local anti-Gaddafi militias (among them extremists) led to the fraction and chaos which

allowed Daesh loyal groups to maintain a significant force in Libya. Fearing a similar end, Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad responded to the strong opposition to his rule with massive crackdowns and state violence against protestors and armed groups alike. Civil war became inevitable and what started off as a peaceful protest movement was by 2012 the front line of a proxy war which drew in most of the regional powers, each with their own strategic national interests and goals.

Syrian Civil War



The U.S., having withdrawn (but not completely) from Iraq by the end of 2011, quickly advanced to covertly and overtly support the Syrian opposition, which included extremist militants who were committing massive human rights violations against civilians and Syrian military prisoners of the conflict. It was concerning this U.S. support that the former head of the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, Lt. Gen. Michael Flynn, later explained directly led to the rise of ISIS. The DIA was aware of the presence and dominance of extremist elements (including members of Al-Qaida and allied extremist groups) within the Syrian opposition but intentionally supported them in the hopes of having Bashar al-Assad toppled. This U.S. strategy was complimented by the governments of Saudi Arabia and its allies

Qatar, Kuwait, Jordan, United Arab Emirates, and Turkey, as well as by Israel. Daesh rose to power in Syria when extremist elements within the Syrian opposition passed on weapons to it. This is when Daesh successfully exploited the Syrian civil war and carved out its own territory in Iraq and Syria, beating out other militant groups including its on-and-off ally the al-Qaida offshoot Jabhat al-Nusra (the Nusra Front).

Team Saudi and Team Iran

The wider context of the Syrian civil war is the cold war between Team Saudi (and its Arab and Turkish allies) supported by the U.S. and Team Iran (which includes Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen) supported by Russia. Though this cold war has been problematically described as a Sunni versus Shiah showdown, it is more about how Team Saudi sees Iran as a threat to their authoritarian monarchical forms of government while Iran opposes this form of government and has widely been seen as an alternative (republic). All sides without exception have disregarded the long-term negative impacts on civilians in favor of short-term strategic advantages the civil war has cynically provided. Currently, Assad is doing most of the killing, but all of the above countries are in one way or another involved in massive human rights violations. Team Saudi with the crucial support of the U.S. continues to support extremism against Assad (and therefore Iran, Lebanon, and the influence of Russia). Team Iran continues to support Assad against Team Saudi, the Free Syrian Army, the Kurds, and the U.S. and Israel. Turkey is involved in bombing mostly Kurds and has reportedly been purchasing oil from ISIS, as has been Assad, and the Syrian opposition (which is compelled to purchase this oil from ISIS in order to fight ISIS and Assad). Lebanon (via Hezbollah) tacitly supports Assad and Irani designs for the region in order to maintain its power and address Israeli expansionist policies. Russia is mainly concerned with losing Assad's Syria as a

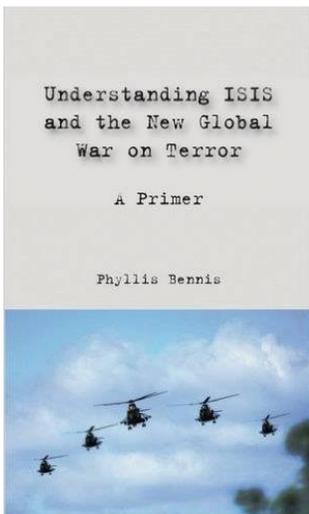
geopolitical ally due to Syria's proximity to the Mediterranean sea. Recent Russian bombing campaigns in Syria has killed mostly civilians. Israel sees the neutralization of Iraq and the proxy war in Syria as an advantage for continuing its active colonization and occupation of Palestine. It has also been reportedly helping extremist militants who are fighting Assad with medical aid. The Kurds and Peshmerga, often lionized by the Western media have also been involved in similar human rights violations as extremist militant groups. French and Jordanian bombings of ISIS positions and facilities in Syria have also, like Russian, U.S., and Turkish bombings, killed mostly civilians.

Where Do We Go From Here?



The complexity of understanding Daesh cannot be rationalized without the above background and context of the current violence we see in Syria, Iraq, Yemen, Libya, and Somalia. Parochial efforts to paint one side or another as good or peaceful becomes problematic in regards to its activities on the ground. The conflicting geopolitical interests of several global and regional powers have ignited and maintained war and other forms of conflict in this and related regions which has increased chaos, caused massive destruction to civilian and government infrastructure, produced millions of Iraqi and Syrian refugees, increased hate between Muslims and Westerners, led to an increase in terrorism threats and actions in Europe, North America, Africa, and Asia, led to the curtailment of rights and freedoms all over the globe, increased the proliferation of weapons of war, and enriched the military-industrial complex at the expense of millions of innocent civilian deaths. All of these nations and groups ought to be held by the same moral and legal standards, and narratives which omit immoral and illegal policies of the U.S. and its allies (Arab and non-Arab) must be rejected. Above all, the dehumanization of billions of people East, West, and everywhere in between must be reversed if there is any hope in preventing following generations of humanity from witnessing the gradual collapse of human civilization.

PASI's Virtual Book Read **Want To Know More?**



A few PASI members are creating a Virtual Book Read of Phyllis Bennis' book *Understanding ISIS and the New Global War on Terror: A Primer*. It is a paperback, 208 pages, published in July 2015 by Olive Branch Press. It costs less than \$15 a copy on amazon.com.

Phyllis Bennis is a Fellow of the Institute for Policy Studies and of the Transnational Institute in Amsterdam. She writes and speaks widely on US wars and foreign policy and is the author of numerous books including, *Understanding the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict* and *Before & After: US Foreign Policy and the War on Terror*. She plays a leading role in US and global movements against wars and occupation.

After getting a copy of the book, email pasi.contact@gmail.com and you will be put in touch with PASI's Virtual Book Read. Start reading!

If you have read other books that you recommend to other PASI members, write up a short review and email it to pasi.contact@gmail.com and we will share on PASITalk, the online yahoo group for PASI members, and, if there is space, include in the next PASI newsletter.



PASI PLANNING 2016

On Thursday, January 14, 2016, at PASI's general meeting, members will participate in a planning workshop for 2016. In preparation, it may help to look back on 2015 to see what we did and to look forward to 2016 to see what we will be facing.

In 2015, PASI's focus was on:

- Black Lives Matter. Our January 15 meeting was a panel discussion on The Eric Garner Case and the Movement for Racial Justice at the Staten Island Museum.
- Peace & Planet Mobilization and No Nukes!. Our March 19 meeting brought Kevin Martin, Executive Director of National Peace Action, to Staten Island to help mobilize Staten Islanders for the April 24-26 Peace & Planet weekend, that included a Sunday march to the UN, to put pressure on ahead of the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review conference at the United Nations. In August, we continued No Nukes! Activities, sponsoring a screening of "Nuclear Savage" and a commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Next Generation Activism. Our June 11 panel of young activists and September 8 "Y2K16: Millennials Speak Out" forum focused on presenting the voices of the next generation of activists.
- Iran Nuclear Deal. On August 26, 2015, PASI joined nationwide protests, this one outside of Rep. Donovan's office in New Dorp in support of diplomacy with Iran.
- BDS. On November 12, PASI invited speakers from Adalah-NY to educate members about the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, a call by Palestinian civil society to put pressure on Israel. A committee was formed to create a resolution on BDS that will be voted on at the January 14, 2015 meeting.
- Syria & Refugees. On December 10, International Human Rights Day, PASI distributed fliers calling on President Obama and Congress to end the Syrian conflict with diplomacy, not bombs, and to shelter refugees fleeing conflict.

In 2016, where do you want to put your energies with PASI?

- Peace Voter. 2016 is a big election year for state representatives, Congressional representative, and President. Peace Action national supports several peace voter initiatives, such as candidate questionnaires, candidate briefings, birddogging, peace voter guides, etc.
- Defending Diplomacy and Human Rights. 2016 brings many risks with efforts to roll back the Iran nuclear deal, the increased U.S. military involvement in the Syrian crisis and the suffering of millions of refugees fleeing conflicts in their homeland.
- Connecting the Dots and Moving the Money. It is 2016 and we still don't have justice for Eric Garner or Ramsey Orta. Our political system is corrupted by big money and corporations. April 26th is the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster. The U.S. is the largest exporter of arms and violence pervades our society.
- Next Generation Activists: How are we supporting, empowering, giving space to the next generation of activists?

Peace Action of Staten Island

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PASI BOARD 2015-16

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Membership Coordinator:

Sylvia Zaage

Thank You for Joining or Renewing Your PASI Membership.

If you aren't a member yet or still need to renew, it's easy.

Membership form

We have a sliding scale membership. No member turned away.
Donations are tax-deductible.

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**THURSDAY
JAN. 14, 2016**

6 to 8:30 PM

**BDS
Resolution
Vote & 2016
Workshop**

PASI Meeting
Unitarian Fellowship
Hall, 312 Fillmore St.
(at Clinton Ave.)

Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba: A 14-Year Legacy of Torture



The **Witness Against Torture** community will be in Washington, DC, from January 3-13, 2016 to fast, reflect and lift the voices of the men unjustly detained at Guantanamo Bay Prison in the streets of Washington, DC.

January 11th, 2016 marks 14 years of torture and indefinite detention at the prison, as well as President Obama's 8th year of broken promises. This is our final chance to hold his administration accountable to their promise to release those unjustly detained and close the prison. Right now 107 men remain detained, 48 of whom have been cleared for release and are held without charge or trial.

<http://www.witness torture.org/events/>

**Staten Island activist Mike May (1963-2015) with Witness Against Torture
protest at Thurgood Marshall Court House, NYC, 2013**

Photo courtesy of Palina Prasadouk