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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

April 21, 2017

The Chicago Tribune

Nikky Haley: Iran, not Israel, Bears Blame for ME Crisis

In her first session holding the rotating presidency of the UNSC, U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley tried to turn the spotlight from Israel to Iran, the latest target of the Trump administration's tough talk. "If we are speaking honestly about conflict in the Middle East, we need to start with the chief culprit, Iran, and its partner militia, Hezbollah," Haley told the Security Council Thursday. "For decades they have conducted terrorist acts across the region." For the past two weeks, Haley had encouraged nations attending the quarterly open meeting on "the situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" to tackle Tehran's role in Yemen and Syria. See also, ["UNSC MIDDLE EAST DEBATE SHIFTS FOCUS OFF OF ISRAEL FOR FIRST TIME IN YEARS" \(JPost\)](#)

The Hill

Trump: Iran Not Living Up to 'Spirit' of Nuclear Deal

President Trump warned that Iran is not "living up" to the "spirit" of its international nuclear deal at a press conference on Thursday. "They are doing a tremendous disservice to an agreement that was signed. It was a terrible agreement, it shouldn't have been signed, it shouldn't have been negotiated the way it was negotiated," Trump said as he stood next to Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni in the White House's East Room. "They are not living up to the spirit of the agreement, I can tell you that. And we are analyzing it very carefully, and we will have something to say about it in the not-too-distant future." Trump bashed the Iran deal as too weak throughout the campaign, carrying that stance into office. See also, ["Trump Says Iran Isn't Meeting 'Spirit' of the 2015 Nuclear Deal" \(Bloomberg\)](#)

Channel 2 News

Journalists Join Hezbollah Guided Tour on Lebanon Border

Hezbollah gave journalists in Lebanon a tour of the Lebanese-Israeli border. In the footage of the tour, a senior-level Hezbollah member is heard explaining to the journalists about the openings in the border fence, the area's terrain and the Israeli defense system. The Hezbollah member drew the journalists' attention to the IDF blind spots and the openings in the border fence. When he spoke about the Israeli defense system, he mentioned techniques such as the use of cliffs, ditches and concrete barriers. See also, ["HEZBOLLAH BORDER TOUR OFFERS A GLIMPSE OF POSSIBLE WAR AHEAD" \(AP\)](#)

Times of Israel

US Defense Secretary Arrives in Israel for Two-Day Visit

US Defense Secretary James Mattis arrived in Israel on Thursday for a series of meetings with senior government officials, marking his first visit since becoming the top US defense official. Mattis is scheduled to sit down with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday morning, in a meeting expected to focus on regional challenges including Iran's efforts to dominate the region, and its use of proxy fighting forces in Lebanon, Syria and elsewhere, according to the Prime Minister's Office. The situation in conflict-ridden Syria, the fight against Islamic State and other terror groups, and the two nations' security cooperation will also be on the agenda, the PMO said.

Israel UN Envoy Slams PA Representative over Barghouti

Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Danny Danon castigated Palestinian envoy Riyad Mansour Thursday for expressing solidarity with the Palestinian security prisoners currently hunger striking in Israeli prisons. “The Palestinian representative just praised the striking prisoners,” Danon wrote on Twitter. “Let’s recall who he is talking about. Marwan Barghouti, the leader of the striking prisoners, is a terrorist and a murderer. “Barghouti oversaw (the planning of) dozens of suicide-bombings and was convicted of direct involvement in the murder of five people... glorifying terrorists like Barghouti not only distances us from peace, but dishonors the memories of the innocent victims,” Danon continued. See also, [“Palestinian Resistance Spreads to Israel’s Prisons” \(Washington Post\)](#)

Obama's Israel Adviser Leaves Trump's White House

Yael Lempert, an American career diplomat who was in charge of Israeli-Palestinian policy at the National Security Council under the Obama administration, is set to leave the White House within weeks after prolonging her tenure by three months to help the Trump administration craft its policy on the issue. Lempert made it clear to the White House that she wants to leave her post in the NSC and go back to the State Department. Lempert wanted to do that right after the end of the presidential transition period, but senior officials in President Donald Trump's administration – including the president's special envoy to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Jason Greenblatt – asked her to stay on for a few more weeks, which turned into three-and-a-half months. See also, [“Why Did Trump Keep Obama’s Senior Israel Adviser? Depends Who You’re Asking” \(Ha’aretz\)](#)

Gaza Hospitals on Verge of Blackout Amid Energy Crisis

Hospitals in the Gaza Strip could face blackouts within days as an energy crisis continues to throttle power supplies in the Palestinian enclave. Israel and Palestinian officials estimated Thursday that hospitals would finish their reserve fuel for generators within 48-72 hours. On Sunday Gaza’s only functioning power station stopped working after running out of fuel. The crisis was compounded by a technical fault shutting down a power line between Egypt and Gaza that had provided over six hours of electricity a day. See also, [“Gaza’s only power plant has shut down. Who will pay the bill?” \(Washington post\)](#)

Israel: FIFA Should Not Suspend Settlement Soccer Teams

Israel is increasingly concerned that when the FIFA Congress holds its annual meeting in another four weeks, the international soccer federation will decide to suspend six Israeli soccer teams based in West Bank settlements. Consequently, ambassadors in dozens of capitals worldwide have been ordered to work with officials of their host countries to foil the move. An official involved in the issue said that two weeks ago, Israel learned that Palestinian Football Association President Jibril Rajoub had asked to put the issue of the settlement teams on the agenda of both the FIFA Council, which will meet in Manama, Bahrain on May 9, and the FIFA Congress, which will meet in the same city on May 10 and 11. See also, [“Palestinian FA renew calls for Israel to face FIFA ban” \(Jewish News\)](#)

The Toxic, Suicidal Temptation to Idolize Marwan Barghouti

If the left follows the New York Times and skips over Barghouti's orchestration of vicious murders, to anoint him the Palestinian Mandela, consider it a political kiss of death

By Jonathan S. Tobin, contributing writer to National Review

- It may well be that the hunger strike of Palestinian security prisoners led by Marwan Barghouti has more to do with Palestinian Authority politics than conditions in Israeli jails. But while observers are focusing on Barghouti's campaign to become Mahmoud Abbas' successor, Jewish reactions to the imprisoned intifada leader may just as interesting.
- While some on the Jewish left may harbor hope Barghouti will turn out to be the Palestinian Nelson Mandela, they would do well to put a cap on their enthusiasm. The same resume items that position Barghouti as a natural, if not likely, future leader of Fatah make him poison for those who wish to build support for peace either in Israel or the United States.
- Prior to the Second Intifada, Barghouti was considered to be one of the Fatah Party's genuine moderates. Whether that reputation was deserved, or if his post-intifada efforts to portray himself as uniquely capable of making peace with Israel are accurate, is debatable. But the facts about Barghouti's crimes that were left out of the op-ed by him published in The New York Times last week – and later amended to include them - are precisely what makes him so toxic to Jews.
- Barghouti seems like the ideal man to the 81-year-old PA President Mahmoud Abbas (currently serving the 12th year of the four-year term to which he was elected) because he has spent the last 15 years in an Israeli jail.
- That's an advantage in part because it absolves him of any responsibility in Fatah's kleptocratic misrule of the West Bank. His status as the leader of Fatah's Tanzim terror group during the Second Intifada also gives him credibility with Palestinians. The convictions that brought him five life sentences for being the mastermind of a terror campaign that murdered Israeli civilians make him seem a fitting successor to Yasser Arafat. Thanks to his involvement in terror he's also a Fatah leader who can't be described as a collaborator or weakling when compared to Hamas.
- The Times op-ed generated a firestorm of criticism from American Jews and Israelis. Whether it was an omission or because the newspaper's editors who are stern critics of the Netanyahu government were already invested in the Mandela narrative about Barghouti they left out the fact that he was serving time for multiple murders. For some, the Jewish Right's reflexive efforts to dismiss Barghouti as a killer or an attempt to legitimize terror are an overreaction and indicative of its unwillingness to address the substance of his complaints. But even before this incident Barghouti was seen by such diverse figures as activist Uri Avnery and diplomat Alon Liel as an important figure and possible interlocutor for peace.

- **If the strike continues, sympathy for Barghouti is likely to grow especially among Netanyahu critics. But the favorable mention he and the strike got on the Facebook page of the pro-BDS Jewish Voices for Peace ought to serve as a warning for any supporters of the two-state solution inclined to get ahead of the curve when it comes to anointing him as the next Mandela.**
- **Leaving aside whether treating Barghouti as beyond the pale is justified is almost beside the point. The recent skepticism voiced about the chances for peace in the near future by Yesh Atid's Yair Lapid and Isaac Herzog of the Zionist Union is rooted in a belief that mainstream Israeli voters have no faith in the desire of the Palestinians for peace.**
- **Even if we were to assume Barghouti would embrace reconciliation and peace in the fashion of Mandela the evidence for that dubious thesis is still more a function of wishful thinking than evidence. More to the point, telling even liberal Jews that the man who will bring peace is the unashamed perpetrator of a vicious murder campaign aimed at slaughtering innocent civilians is not exactly a winning political strategy.**
- **With the peace process already discredited in the eyes of most Israelis the last thing the left should do is to embrace Barghouti. They'd be well advised to steer clear of his prison-based campaign to succeed Abbas lest they taint an already minority point of view further by association with the worst aspects of Palestinian politics.**

How Israel is Increasingly Privatizing the occupation of the West Bank

By Miriam Berger, Contributor to Newsweek

- The sun had barely risen and Khairy Masoud, 57, was already in trouble. The father of eight had just passed through the Israeli military checkpoint separating his home in the disputed West Bank and Israel, where he's worked in manual labor for more than 20 years. It was a chilly February morning and he was dressed in baggy pants and a sweater.
- Masoud slouched as he eyed the armed Israeli guard who had just confiscated his work permit and identification card—his most important documents. His infraction: Masoud had been walking toward the large outdoor lot, where Palestinian workers wait for employers to pick them up, when a piece of tissue fell from his pocket, he said. Another Palestinian walking with him flicked a cigarette to the ground. The guard apprehended them for littering.
- A decade ago this checkpoint, known as Sha'ar Efraim in Hebrew and al-Tayba in Arabic, was among the first to hire private security guards rather than deploy conscripted Israeli soldiers. The creeping privatization of security linked to Israel's occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem often goes unnoticed, but critics say it is another way that Israel is cementing the status quo and reducing the chances of a Palestinian state and an end to decades of conflict.
- Around Israel and the Palestinian Territories, Israeli private security guards are increasingly common, from tightly patrolled airport and government buildings to industrial zones and illegal Jewish settlements in the West Bank. They're part of a lucrative industry that benefits from \$200 million a year in government contracts. Today, there are more than 30 crossing points separating Israel and the Palestinian Territories; since the mid-2000s, about half of them have fully or partially outsourced security to Israeli companies. Authorities are currently planning to upgrade nine to 11 more checkpoints by 2019 at a cost of around \$82 million, according to Baruch Spiegel, a retired Israeli brigadier general and senior Ministry of Defense adviser.
- Israeli officials say the use of civilian guards rather than conscripted soldiers has improved professionalism and standardized conditions for the thousands of Palestinians who pass through each day. The Ministry of Defense does not directly employ guards, but does oversee training, salaries and working conditions. The arrangement between private contractors, Jerusalem or border police, the military, Crossing Points Authority and other security bodies differs by checkpoint.
- Israel captured the West Bank, East Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip—territory that Palestinians claim for a future state—after the 1967 war. The 1994 Oslo accords instituted a semi-autonomous government, the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank and Gaza, and deferred Jerusalem's status to future—still stalled—negotiations. Today, the PA in the West Bank maintains close security coordination with the Israelis, which angers many Palestinians. For

the last decade, the Islamist group Hamas has ruled Gaza, which is currently also under Israeli-Egyptian blockade.

- While Israel started as a quasi-socialist state, since the 1980's waves of privatization, particularly under Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in the 2000's, have reshaped the country. After the bloody second intifada (Palestinian uprising) in the early 2000's, the Israeli military began to build a disputed barrier between Israel and the West Bank to block militant attacks and set up permanent checkpoints throughout (some for Israelis or Palestinians only). Israeli authorities described them as "international-like terminals" and called them "crossings," or ma'avar, instead of checkpoint, machsom, the Hebrew term that Palestinians now frequently use.
- "It's bad for young soldiers to have to deal with movements of people and cargo in an ongoing conflict," Spiegel tells Newsweek of the shift to private guards. "And of course it was bad for the image of Israel."
- The extension of security roles to private civilians is also indicative of a shift in how Israelis relate to the occupation, argues Lior Volinz, an Israeli researcher on this phenomenon and Ph.D. candidate at the University of Amsterdam. "The Israeli authorities tried to obfuscate the military nature of the checkpoints by presenting them as professionalized," Volinz tells Newsweek. "So if before you have regular run-of-the-mill, 19-year-old kids from Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, and they have to go work at a checkpoint for say three months, those kinds of things trickle down to public opinion through their family and friends. Today you just think, 'This guy, it's his professional job,' so they don't listen to what goes on there anymore."
- Israeli academic Shira Havkin, who's documented the trend for the Jerusalem-based Israeli Van Leer Institute, argues that despite the political framing of privatization as better than "big government," it's a way for the state to keep control while outsourcing responsibilities. Though Israeli authorities argue that using private contractors is more efficient, it ultimately costs the Defense Ministry more in wages than using conscripted soldiers. At the same time, Harkin says, contracting private firms creates jobs and increases the reach and profitability of the country's security industry.
- Israeli labor lawyer Eran Golan, however, says legally the work should be done by soldiers. He has criticized this arrangement for giving guards the "duties" of public officials but not the rights, such as unionization, and that it also obscures ultimate responsibility for what happens at checkpoints. Many of the guards are young and just out of mandatory military service, which is a prerequisite for the job: While Israel's army is touted for mixing classes and backgrounds, private security work is often the best-paying jobs lower-class and immigrant Israelis can find immediately after the military, Golan says. "They don't have a profession," said Varda Zur, 78, of Machsom Watch, a group of primarily retired leftist Israeli women who monitor crossings. "They aren't skilled in anything. Except for being a soldier."
- Privatization can also be problematic for West Bank Palestinians, most of whom don't speak Hebrew and don't know who to complain to if they have an issue at a checkpoint, says Zur. Each morning at dawn, tens of thousands of Palestinians cross through checkpoints to work in construction, factories and other menial labor jobs in Israel. They wait in cramped, long lines for their permits and bodies to be inspected. As the day progresses, more Palestinians

able to secure coveted permits come and go for hospital visits, work and school. It's a precarious situation, with permits sometimes revoked and frequent delays that can lead to a lost work day. With official unemployment in the West Bank at 26 percent, people have no other option but to keep trying to cross over.

- Checkpoints are sometimes a flashpoint for violence, particularly in the “knife or Jerusalem intifada,” in which Palestinians have been assaulting Israeli civilians and soldiers in “lone-wolf” attacks since 2015. (More than 200 Palestinians and over 40 Israelis have been killed in this wave of violence.)
- Human Rights groups say the deaths of some Palestinian attackers have been avoidable or unjustified. In a rare and contentious case, an Israeli soldier named Elor Azaria was jailed for 18 months in February for intentionally killing a Palestinian attacker who had already been shot and injured after trying to stab a soldier at a checkpoint. Many in Israel objected to Azaria being charged at all because, in the words of several parliamentarians, he was “everyone’s son” conscripted into the army.
- Another case last April, in which a private security guard at Qalandia checkpoint shot and killed two Palestinian siblings, one of whom had a knife, received far less attention in the press. (Civilian guards at Qalandia accompany soldiers checking cars and buses.) A police investigation determined the guard’s actions were justified; the family of the deceased argued otherwise. A government gag order initially withheld from news reports the fact that the guards at the checkpoint were hired by Modiin Ezrachi, the largest security contractor the Israeli government employs. (The Defense Ministry and Border Police declined to speak to Newsweek for this article and private contractor Modiin Ezrachi referred Newsweek to the Defense Ministry.)
- Yet for Palestinians like Masoud, whether it’s private security contractors or Israeli soldiers manning the checkpoints, it’s still “all khara [shit].” Over the years, he’s watched the changes to Shaer Efraim as different security companies have won the contract. Conditions are now better than in 2014, when two Palestinian workers were crushed to death while waiting to cross. The soldiers treat Palestinians more “like animals” than the civilian guards, he said, but overall “there’s no difference.”

To him it is still all the “ihtilal,” the occupation.