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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

May 12, 2017

Ha'aretz

U.S. Envoy: Trump's Serious About Peace, Work With Him

The new American ambassador in Tel Aviv, David Friedman, has held quite a few conversations in recent weeks with diplomats and senior Israeli officials. In these conversations, he repeatedly stressed that given Trump's strong desire to make the "ultimate deal" on the peace process, Israel must cooperate with his diplomatic initiative and help it succeed. A senior Israeli official familiar with the messages Friedman has delivered, said the ambassador termed Trump a great opportunity for Israel, someone who greatly wants to help the country, inter alia by achieving a peace agreement with the Palestinians. See also, ["Israeli Right Wingers No Longer See Trump As 'Messiah'" \(Forward\)](#)

AP

Palestinian Leader Hails Trump's Mideast Peace Efforts

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has welcomed U.S. President Donald Trump's efforts to negotiate a Middle East settlement. Speaking Thursday after talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Russia's Black Sea city of Sochi, Abbas said the Palestinians were ready to cooperate with Trump's efforts to broker a peace deal. Abbas, who met Trump in Washington last week, has expressed willingness to meet Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu under the auspices of the American president. It's not clear if such a meeting is in the works for Trump's visit to the Holy Land later this month.

Jerusalem Post

Abbas: Moscow Essential to Resolving Conflict

Peace between Israel and the Palestinians cannot be achieved without the participation of Russia, Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas said during a meeting with President Vladimir Putin in the resort city Sochi on Thursday. "It is impossible to solve the Palestinian issue without Russia's meaningful participation in the peace process," Abbas said, according to Tass, an official Russian news agency. "That is what we have been emphasizing at all international meetings." Abbas, who visited the White House last week, arrived in Russia on Wednesday to meet with Putin and other officials. See also, ["Putin's Week Started Badly but Then Trump Made Russia Great Again" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

Ha'aretz

Trump's Israel Policy Turns Jewish Groups Topsy-turvy

When Donald Trump won the presidential election in November, a clear division emerged within the U.S. Jewish community, particularly the parts of it that are active and engaged on issues relating to Israel. Today, six months later and just days before Trump is scheduled to visit Israel and the PA, the picture has changed. Left-wing Jewish organizations that vowed bitter resistance to Trump are suddenly expressing cautious optimism about his Israel policy, saying they will support him if he proves to be serious about wanting to obtain a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. On the right, meanwhile, Trump remains popular but there are signs of worry and, in some quarters, even disappointment. See also, ["Meet the Jews who vouch for Trump aides Bannon and Gorka" \(JTA\)](#)

Reuters

Hezbollah: Future War Would be on Israeli Territory

Lebanese Hezbollah said on Thursday that any future conflict between the Shi'ite group and Israel could take place inside Israeli territory, as tensions rise between the arch foes. Hassan Nasrallah, Hezbollah's leader, also said in a speech televised live that the group was dismantling all its military positions along Lebanon's eastern border with Syria, and this area would now be patrolled just by the Lebanese army. Hezbollah, an ally of Tehran and Damascus, has been fighting for years in Syria's conflict against an array of rebels and Sunni Islamist fighters. The Syrian conflict has also been an arena where tensions between Israel and Hezbollah have ramped up. Recent Israeli air strikes against Hezbollah targets in Syria appeared to mark a more assertive stance toward the group. The two sides last fought a war in 2006. See also, ["Hezbollah says it has secured Lebanon's border with Syria" \(Fox News\)](#)

Jerusalem Post

Top US General Aligns with Israel's Concerns over Iran

Jerusalem is concerned Iran may build a powerful new front against Israel if it is allowed to play a role in enforcing the Russian-proposed de-escalation zones in southern Syria, Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, said during a visit to Israel this week, according to a statement published on Thursday. An agreement on de-escalation zones and safe zones in several large areas of western and southern Syria, including along the Israeli border on the Golan Heights, was signed last week in Astana, Kazakhstan, by Russia, Iran and Turkey. And while Israel is pleased with progress being made in the fight against ISIS, it is concerned about the role Tehran will play in the region and particularly in Syria, starting "the day ISIS is defeated," he said. See also, ["Hezbollah presence in Syria a big threat to Israel, Dunford says" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ynet News

Large international military exercise in Jordan

More than 7,000 military personnel from more than 20 nations, including Jordan, the US, Italy, Pakistan, Belgium, Lebanon and Saudi Arabia are in Jordan for joint military exercises called Eager Lion. The soldiers come from land, maritime, and aerial forces. For the first time, this year's exercise will also include a global strike mission, conducted by two US Air Force B-1B "Lancers." The aircrafts will embark on a non-stop, 35-hour, 14,000-mile flight over Jordan and will have to refuel four times while in flight. "The size of participation this year has become as an outcome of our dedicated concerns to exchange the expertise of military commanders and all strategic, operational and tactical levels. These circumstances, that the region and the world are experiencing, which are related to terrorism dangers that distort our divine religion, urge us to combine the effort, the joint-cooperation and exchange of expertise in order to counter terrorism in all its forms and types," Brig. Gen. Khaled Shar'rah, director of the Jordan Armed Forces Joint-Training Directorate said. See also ["IRAN SAYS U.S. AND ALLIES' MILITARY MOVES IN SYRIA WILL FAIL, AS TROOPS SEEN TRAINING REBELS" \(Newsweek\)](#)

Give Trump a Chance

While it's hard to believe that the US president will bring about a conflict-ending agreement, the challenge he presents to Netanyahu and Abbas is good enough.

By Nahum Barnea, senior columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- One of the greatest stories in the Bible (2 Kings 7) is about the siege launched by the army of Aram on the city of Samaria. Four leprous men sat at the city's gate and debated: "Why sit we here until we die? If we say, we will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we sit still here, we die also."
- The four men decided to go to the enemy camp, where they were surprised to find no one there—the Aramaic army had fled to the east at night, beyond the Jordan River. They ate and looted the tents, and then suddenly remembered that no one in the besieged city knew what had happened. If they kept the secret to themselves, they would be punished. "This day is a day of good tidings," they said before going back to save the city.
- These verses were the subject of Hebrew poetess Rachel's poem "Yom Besora" ("A Day of Good Tidings"), a wonderful and unrealistic poem, an anthem of purism. I would rather die in a siege than be saved by lepers, she wrote: "I do not want to receive news of redemption from the mouth of a leper." Purism is a poets' privilege. In determining a state's fate, purism is a recipe for paralysis. Who am I referring to right now? US President Donald Trump.
- Trump will arrive in Israel in two weeks for a one-day visit. He will come here from Saudi Arabia, the country that former US President Barack Obama despised and that Trump is now embracing enthusiastically. The decision to start with Saudi Arabia and Israel is aimed at showing, first and foremost, that he is the opposite of Obama. This is what guided him on the first 100 days of his presidency—to prove that he is Obama's rival.
- He is ignorant, superficial, a fabricator and keeps zigzagging. All the accusations hurled at him contain more than a grain of truth. But after 100 years, in which serious people have tried to end the Israeli-Arab conflict and failed, giving a non-serious president a chance likely won't hurt us. Former Prime Minister Golda Meir, who was a serious person, mocked Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, saying: "They don't deserve a Nobel Prize; they deserve an Oscar." Nobel or Oscar, our peace with Egypt has lasted for 40 years.
- One of the characteristics of the conflict is the parties' addiction to details. They can fight for years over the location of a joint industrial zone or over fishing rights. These fights sometimes stem from real concern about the future, and sometimes from tactical or propaganda considerations. In recent years, delving into the details has been a sort of distraction. Neither Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu nor Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas believe in an agreement. The purpose of the small shoe mines they are scattering on the ground is to spare them the need to make real decisions. Abbas and Netanyahu are much less different than their followers will admit.

- **Former prime minister and defense minister Ehud Barak calls this technique “the Molho mines,” after Netanyahu’s emissary, attorney Isaac Molho, whose job is to invent the preconditions that would thwart negotiations in advance. The classic example is the salaries transferred by the Palestinian Authority to prisoners’ families, including families of arch-murderers. There is no way to morally justify this custom, but there is no way to cancel it either if Abbas wishes to live. Netanyahu just wants to damage Abbas’ reputation.**
- **Former US Presidents George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Obama believed that conflicts should be resolved through negotiations. They are serious people. During their terms, they put quite a lot of effort—themselves or through envoys—in advancing the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, one mine after another, one barrier after another. None of them arrived at the Promised Land to terminate the conflict. In their memoirs, they attributed the failure to leaders’ rejectionism or to changes of circumstances. They all shared one platform: The conflict is solvable; the solution is known—two states, the 1967 borders with slight amendments. The way to reach the solution is through negotiations.**
- **Trump is different. He doesn’t care about the details. In this sense, he presents a challenge to Netanyahu and Abbas. He strives to reach a deal before anything else, and then send the lawyers to finalize the details. That’s how he bought and sold hotels. He sees no difference between one deal and another. If both parties say they want a deal, let them reach a deal and give him credit for it. Otherwise, they will be presented in his tweets as complete liars.**
- **I find it hard to believe that Trump will bring about a conflict-ending agreement. But if he assumes the role of the child who cries out that “the emperor has no clothes,” that would be good enough. Give him a chance.**

Netanyahu's Vision of One-State-One-People Solution

By Akiva Eldar, contributor to AI Monitor Israel Pulse

- Ahead of his upcoming visit to Israel, US President Donald Trump should update the two options he presented at his joint Feb. 15 White House news conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. These were either two states for two people — one Jewish and one Palestinian, on the land between the Mediterranean Sea and the Jordan River (Israel's territory together with the West Bank) — or one state for the two people on all this land.
- As Education Minister Naftali Bennett said in an AI-Monitor interview with Ben Caspit on May 8: Trump must now be told the truth. So this is the truth: The option being promoted by Netanyahu and Bennett is one state for one people. One state for the Jewish people, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. As far as they are concerned, the Palestinians are not “a people” and never were “a people.” Therefore, they do not deserve a state. They should thank Israel for not expelling them from their homes and for even being willing to make “economic” peace with them.
- The truth is that since 2009, when Netanyahu first spoke of a two-state solution in his landmark Bar-Ilan speech, more than 100,000 people have been added to the population of the Jewish people in Area C (under Israeli civil and security control) — the part of the West Bank intended for a future state of the Palestinian people. In 2009, there were about 300,000, now there are over 400,000. The truth is that out of Area C, which comprises some 60% of the West Bank, Israel has designated 36.5% as “state lands” — namely lands belonging to the State of Israel, of course. Some 63% of Area C is under the jurisdiction of the local and regional councils of Israeli settlements; some 30% is designated as Israel Defense Forces live-fire drill zones. The truth is that the Israeli authorities grant very few construction permits to Palestinians in the remaining areas, and treat with indifference the abuse of Palestinians by Jewish thugs in the illegal Israeli outposts.
- The truth is that senior government ministers are promoting a legislative initiative designed to turn all the Jewish population between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River into one solid mass. No more Green Line (which delineated Israel from the West Bank until 1967), and no (virtual) red line of apartheid. According to this joint initiative by Justice Minister Ayelet Shaked (HaBayit HaYehudi) and Tourism Minister Yariv Levin (Likud), all Israeli legislation would apply to the West Bank, too. Needless to say, they don't mean that it would apply to the Palestinian majority living there, but to settlers.
- From the explanations furnished by Levin, one of Netanyahu's closest allies, it appears that the proposed bill leaves the Palestinians with only three options: living forever under foreign occupation, emigration or expulsion. Levin said with no trace of ambiguity, “The settlement of Judea and Samaria is a fait accompli. ... The measure we are leading will put an end to the blatant discrimination and the disregard by the laws of the State of Israel against the regions of the homeland and the Israeli citizens living there.” In other words, one could say that the move that Shaked and Levin are promoting will offer a juridical stamp of approval (not a legal one, as the settlement enterprise is contradictory to international law) to clear discrimination and to

Israel's ignoring the human rights of 2.5 million West Bank Palestinians. Such a policy has a name: Apartheid.

- The Shaked-Levin initiative is a direct sequel to the regularization law, which enables the Jewish people to expropriate Palestinian land rights in the area intended for a sovereign state of the Palestinian people. In a Feb. 6 Knesset debate, Science Minister Ofir Akunis (Likud) responded to critics of that bill by saying, “We are voting on the link between the Jewish people and its land. Fortunately, the public places its trust in us and not in you, which also means that it believes the Land of Israel belongs to the people of Israel.”
- Akunis and his government colleagues keep coming up with new laws designed to silence opponents of apartheid in the territories or, euphemistically speaking, of the solution calling for one state for one people.
- The political right does not want the public to know what this “belonging” of the land of Israel to the people of Israel, as Akunis described it, looks like — a “belonging” that is actually conducted through military occupation, banishment and violation of international law. Proponents of the two-state solution, such as Peace Now, B’Tselem and Breaking the Silence, impede the political right’s efforts to present Israel as a victim of the Arabs. As far as the Israeli right is concerned, Israel is not an occupier, but a victim, while the Palestinians dare act against it in international fora, such as the international soccer body FIFA. The Israeli government sees nothing wrong in having the soccer clubs of settlements located outside Israel’s sovereign borders included in its national soccer league.
- President Reuven Rivlin took the opportunity during his May 7 meeting with German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to protest UNESCO’s criticism of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories. Rivlin repeated HaBayit HaYehudi leader Bennett’s mantra that “a nation cannot be a conqueror in its own land.” But unlike Bennett, the president advocates full equality for all Israeli citizens, regardless of religion, race or nationality. Nonetheless, this week the ministerial Legislative Committee voted in favor of the proposed nationality law, which even gained preliminary Knesset approval, granting priority to the Jewish people — the one who “is not a conqueror” in its own land — over the non-Jewish people living in its state.
- Zionist Camp Knesset member Erel Margalit said in response to the ministers’ approval of the nationality law, “A government that is afraid to determine the country’s borders is not entitled to determine its nature.” The truth is that the government is not afraid to draw the state borders. But instead of deciding them in a diplomatic agreement, it does so by establishing facts in the occupied territories. And it does so by endless deception. On the one hand, the prime minister implores the Palestinians to return to the negotiating table, and on the other, he advances the nationality law, explaining that he has to “ensure the future of the people of Israel in the Land of Israel.” Pay attention: “Land of Israel,” not “State of Israel.” Sometimes he says that in the foreseeable future it appears that Israel must control all the territories and promises that it will forever live on its sword, and other times he accuses the leadership of the Palestinian people of incitement to violence against Israel.
- The next time Trump meets Netanyahu, he must demand that the prime minister present the government and the Knesset with a proposed resolution saying that the government of Israel “commits to promoting the establishment of a state for the Palestinian people based on the

1967 borders. Until then, it will freeze all construction in the Israeli settlements.” At the end of their previous meeting, Trump said that unlike his predecessors at the White House, he believes a deal can be made between Israel and the Palestinians. Such a resolution is essential for a true regional peace deal. And as Bennett said, Americans like those who tell the truth.