



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Monday, May 15

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News Excerpts

May 15, 2017

Jerusalem Post

Israeli Experts: Country Dodged the Cyber Bullet This Time

Israel had made it through the cyber storm that engulfed tens of thousands of computers in 104 countries on Friday largely unharmed, a range of Israeli cyber experts and public officials said on Sunday. The cyber attack was unusual as it has been attributed to organized crime, as opposed to a powerful state apparatus like Russian or Iranian intelligence. Previous cyber attacks on such a large scale had only been attributed to state actors. But combined with a US National Security Agency hacking program that has been distributed online for public use as well as organized crime becoming more sophisticated in its cyber abilities, many experts said the massive attack was the first of many.

See also, [*"PM Confirms No Major Damage to Israel from Recent Cyber Attack"*](#) (Ynet News)

Times of Israel

Trump Set to Become 1st Sitting US President to Visit Kotel

Donald Trump is slated to become the first incumbent US president to visit the Western Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem. George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama all have visited the Jewish holy site, but either before or after their tenures as president. The White House has yet to publish the itinerary for Trump's May 22 visit—the 11th presidential trip to Israel since Richard Nixon in 1974—but according to sources involved in the planning, he is set to visit the Western Wall.

See also, [*"As Trump's Visit Looms, Tour of Yad Vashem Still Unconfirmed"*](#) (Times of Israel)

Ynet News

Bennett Urges PM to Reneg on Two-State Solution

Education Minister Naftali Bennett (Bayit Yehudi) warned Saturday night that Israel's failure to revise its policies regarding the peace process with the Palestinians could result in outside nations determining its fate. "We cannot continue to pursue a bunker policy," said Bennett, whose party expounds a platform rejecting any notion of a two-state solution. "Israel must initiate its own vision otherwise, as it appears once again, its fate will be decided by others." The comments were made in reference to President Donald Trump's upcoming visit to Israel in May.

See also, [*"Shaked: Netanyahu Must Tell Trump There Is 'No Chance for a Palestinian State'"*](#) (Ynet News)

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US and Israel Exchange Views Over Embassy Move

The US and Israel publicly exchanged views over the weekend on the impact of relocating the US Embassy to Jerusalem on the peace process. A week before US President Donald Trump is scheduled to visit Israel, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said in an interview to *NBC*: "The president, I think rightly, has taken a very deliberative approach to understanding the issue itself, listening to input from all interested parties in the region, and understanding what such a move, in the context of a peace initiative, what impact would such a move have." In response, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that moving the US Embassy to Jerusalem would boost peace efforts by impressing on the Palestinians the city is the capital of the Jewish state.

Ha'aretz

Israel, Jordan Trade Barbs Over Death of Jordanian

The death of a Jordanian tourist, who was shot dead after stabbing an Israeli cop in Jerusalem, has provoked a war of words between Israel and Jordan on Saturday. Mohammed Skaji, 57, was shot dead by the officer after attacking him with a knife. Making no mention of the stabbing, Jordanian Minister for Media Affairs Mohammed Momani issued a statement calling Skaji's death a "crime" and saying that as Israel is the occupying force in Jerusalem, it is responsible for it. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's bureau called the Jordanian minister's statement "outrageous," saying it amounted to an expression of support for a terrorist attack.

See also, ["Jordan 'Holds Israel Responsible' for Killing Their Citizen Who Was Stabbing a Policeman" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Reuters

Palestinians Hold Local Elections in West Bank, But Not Gaza

Palestinians held municipal elections on Saturday in the occupied West Bank, a first democratic exercise in years, but one that has also raised tensions between the rival Fatah and Hamas movements. With no legislative or presidential elections in sight, the municipal ballot is seen as a popularity test for Western-backed President Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah party, caught in a deep rift with Islamist Hamas. Underlining the political schism, about 800,000 Palestinians were expected to vote for representatives in 145 local councils in the West Bank, but not in the Gaza Strip.

See also, ["Palestinian Terrorist in Killing of 6 Israelis in 1980 Elected Hebron Mayor" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

See also, ["West Bank Vote Highlights Palestinian Split" \(Voice of America\)](#)

Times of Israel

Security Forces Gear Up for Nakba Day Protests in West Bank

Israeli security services were on high alert on Monday as Palestinians are expected to launch protests against the "catastrophe" that was the creation of the State of Israel, officials said, amid already high tensions in the West Bank over an ongoing hunger strike by Palestinian security prisoners. Palestinians and some Arab Israelis mark the Nakba, or "catastrophe" — namely the dispossession that accompanied the creation of the State of Israel — every year on May 15. The day is marked with a siren that blares for one second for every year since 1948 — 69 seconds this year — and with marches across the West Bank, Gaza, inside Israel and occasionally abroad as well.

See also, ["Top PA Negotiator: Israel Must Apologize for Nakba" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Yedioth Ahronoth

Herzog Presents "Dream Team Government"

Opposition Chairman Yitzhak Herzog posted on Facebook this weekend his "dream team government," saying which people he would like to have join him in the cabinet along with top Zionist Union officials. Herzog placed a picture of himself at the head of the circle, followed by Moshe Kahlon, Ehud Barak, the former chiefs of staff Ashkenazi, Gantz and Yaalon; Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid, Tzipi Livni and MK Orly Levy-Abekasis, who recently quit the Yisrael Beiteinu faction. "A thought for the weekend: What is your opinion about a cabinet with the people in the picture, along with the top tiers of the Zionist Union," Herzog wrote on Facebook alongside the picture.

What Israeli-Right Gets Wrong About Security, Occupation

Ehud Barak reviews 'Catch 67,' a book he says is steeped in right-wing ideology and therefore fails to identify the real threat facing Israel's existence.

By Ehud Barak, former-Prime Minister of Israel

- I opened Micah Goodman's new book, "Milkud 67" ("Catch 67: The Ideologies behind the Disagreements Tearing Israel Apart," Dvir, 224 pages, 94 shekels; in Hebrew), with great curiosity. After books that reveal "times past" – from "Maimonides and the Book that Changed Judaism" (published in English in 2015) to "Moses' Final Speech" (Hebrew, 2014) – he's suddenly writing about "times present." "Catch 67" confronts the conceptual foundations, theses and practicalities related to the most critical and emotional dispute of our generation, involving the direction in which we are headed – the future of the territories, the Land of Israel, security, peace arrangements.
- Goodman maintains that as a result of the turmoil Israel has experienced in the 50 years since 1967, conflicting rigid ideologies have emerged on both the right and the left. Having become an integral element in each side's identity, they do not allow for an open, substantive discussion. To disengage from this situation, which he terms "Catch 67," he suggests downgrading the ambition "to solve the problem" into a more limited goal of "escaping from the trap," basically by transforming the problem from "existential" into "chronic." This will bypass the need for ideological compromise, avert a "collision of identities" and make possible the "amelioration of the Israeli discourse."
- In Goodman's words, "The New Right and the New Left are something of a mirror image. The New Left no longer claims that withdrawal will bring peace, but that the continued presence in the territories will eventuate in a catastrophe; the New Right no longer claims that the continued presence in the territories will bring redemption, but that withdrawing from them will eventuate in a [security] catastrophe."
- According to Goodman, in the eyes of the right (including, it should be noted, the messianic-religious right), "withdrawal from the Judean Hills and Samaria will shrink Israel to minuscule dimensions and turn it into a weak, vulnerable state that will ultimately collapse." In the eyes of the left, "continued Israeli presence in the territories will bring about Israel's moral disintegration, isolate it politically and cause its collapse demographically." The right asserts that "realization of the left's vision will lead to the state's total crash, the left asserts that realization of the right's vision will lead to the state's total crash." Goodman thus creates symmetry between the arguments of the right and the left, and this, or at least so he maintains, is the basis for the catch. A hundred pages later, he writes, "It turns out that everyone is in the right. And because everyone is in the right, everyone is trapped."
- I reject this conclusion outright. The Middle East is a tough neighborhood and the threats are real. However, Israel is the strongest state in the region, and the symmetry that Goodman invokes is nonexistent.

- He is comparing a definite threat to the future of the Zionist project with technical military risks (the deployment of a hostile force west of the Jordan River in the future, or missiles and terrorism from outside or inside in the immediate term), which, though not to be belittled, do not pose a threat to Israel's existence and also have more than one possible response (for example, by way of technology, weapons acquisition or operational conceptions).
- The catastrophe the left describes – “one state, which will lead to an Arab majority and a prolonged civil war, or, alternatively, an apartheid state steeped in violence and facing an ongoing threat of collapse” – is, lamentably, an accurate portrayal. Whereas the catastrophe the right describes is not of the same scale. Separation from the Palestinians does not constitute an existential threat, and the argument that in its wake it would be impossible to defend Israel, is incorrect. Most of those who have been engaged with Israel's security throughout the country's history, and who believe in security before and above every other consideration, view separation from the Palestinians in Judea and Samaria – combined with Israeli security control over the whole area for any foreseeable future – as part of every interim agreement. And they view “territorial compromise” and “two states for two nations” as part of any final-status agreement, when it comes. If we are not wise enough to consider a territorial compromise, we face a danger, not only to the state's character and its status internationally, but above all to security. Including the battle against terrorism. [...]
- Goodman positions himself ostensibly in the center of the political map, analyzing and critiquing right and left alike. In fact, though, whether consciously or not, he adopts the basic assumptions of the right, as if they were engraved a priori in reality, even though some of them are blatantly untenable – and by doing so he contributes, regrettably, to their dissemination in the mainstream. [...]
- How did the ideologies develop?
- Goodman sets forth the development of three streams in Zionism: right, left and the religious-Zionist movement. A right wing dreamed of liberal maximalism (Ze'ev Jabotinsky), a left wing dreamed of a socialist “exemplary society” (David Ben-Gurion and Berl Katznelson) and religious Zionism of a mild and moderate character (Haim-Moshe Shapira) dreamed of national resurgence spiced with Jewish heritage.
- And then came 1967 and shook things up. In the religious-Zionist movement, a vision of approaching redemption was ignited. Shapira's moderate language was supplanted by the ideas of Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook and his son Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook. On the left, weakened by economic privatization, the quest for an “exemplary society” gave way (in the wake of the peace treaty with Egypt) to the idea of “peace.” Subsequently, according to Goodman, the secular right suffered a setback when (in the wake of the first intifada) the liberal element overcame the maximalist thrust; and the Zionist left collapsed when the second intifada overcame the idea of peace. With all these ideas bruised and battered, only one concept remained strong and firm: that of (Kook-style) right-wing religious Zionism.
- But nothing endures forever: In 2005, the Gaza pullout dealt a blow to messianic Zionism and rattled confidence both in the implacable advance to redemption and in Abraham Isaac Kook's notion that secular Zionists, by force of a somewhat mystical connection, served as the “messiah's donkey,” striving “without conscious awareness” to bring the messianic goal.

- The messianic-religious right completed a hookup with the secular-maximalist right, and together, according to Goodman, they underwent a second turnabout after the Gaza pullout. Basically, the element of imminent redemption was weakened and, following the actualization of scenarios that Gaza would be taken over by extremists – leading to rocket attacks on Israel – security fears intensified. Thus, on the right, the “principle of redemption” was replaced by the “principle of security.” According to Goodman, the Zionist left also underwent another turnabout (in the wake of the second intifada) and “converted the hope for peace into fear of [the consequences of] the crimes of the occupation.” [...]
- Factual and logical traps
- Goodman’s book is well-written, clear, articulate and readable. In contrast to the author’s previous books, however, the subjects he deals with here are more earthly; their foundations rest on security, strategy and politics, which are not Goodman’s fields of expertise. As a result, he falls into the same factual and logical traps that he warns us to avoid. For example, time after time he urges us to depart from the fixation forced on us by the “ideology” that has become part of our “identity” and to concentrate on fact-based arguments and logic, through openness and attentive listening. However, the book’s main parts, dealing with the “ideologies” and the political “arguments” put forward by the different streams, are saturated to the core with elements of the right wing’s identity-based “ideology,” which pose as substantive “arguments” even when they are blatantly untenable factually.
- If I were not confident beyond any doubt of the author’s intellectual integrity, I would say that this was an instructive example of post-truth and “alternative facts” being interwoven into a political debate. Since I am certain of Goodman’s integrity, I can only assume that while writing the book he met, on the one hand, too many right-wingers who presuppose that their “ideology” is a priori embedded in reality and constitutes part of it. Which, of course, is not the case. And, on the other hand, that he apparently met too few left-wingers, people from the House of Hillel, or politically unbiased experts, who could have enlightened him.
- Deep anxiety
- Security is perhaps the most important issue of all, and its presentation in the book suffers from two serious flaws. First, in numberless places throughout the book, the unfounded assertion appears, in various formulations, that without full Israeli control of the Judea and Samaria ridgeline, Israel is not defensible. The author’s whole depiction of Israel’s security situation is informed by deep anxiety, which is understandable emotionally but rests on a flimsy factual basis. And let it be said from the outset: We must not make light of any adversary or enemy. There is no mercy for the weak in the Middle East, and there is no “second chance” for those who are unable to defend themselves.
- Israel must always be vigilant, strong and ready to vanquish every assailant. Israel is the strongest country in the region militarily, strategically and economically, and – if we forge our relations with the United States skillfully – will also be so diplomatically, and be able to maintain its qualitative military edge. Israel can and must weigh its future and its moves based on an understanding of the possibilities afforded by the position of strength I have described. Anxiety is not a healthy national strategy.

- If a regional power like Israel lapses into a pessimistic, passive, self-victimizing frame of mind, the result will be paralysis, missed opportunities to transform the situation from the ground up, and bleak prophecies that will (because of the paralysis) prove self-fulfilling. There is no mention of these simple truths in the book.
- Israel's location and its small dimensions are termed "bad opening conditions that threaten Israel's very ability to survive." Regarding the importance of the Judea and Samaria hills, Goodman states as a matter of fact: "Without them the country is not defensible." Period.
- And he sums up, "The implication of all this is simple: Whoever controls the hills controls the center of life of the Jewish people," or, "The conclusion of the previous chapter is sharp and simple: Israel must not leave the territories that were conquered in the Six-Day War." Categorical. And he adds, "The combination of location and place creates a situation in which Israel is not only surrounded by enemies but also has difficulty defending itself against them." Half-true. Barely.
- This is exaggerated, absolute and oversimplified. Small dimensions indeed, and if they could be extended by incantation, focused prayer or a flicker of wishful thinking, without risks and costs, we would all choose that route. But obviously that is not the case. Yet was it not from that constricted border (which it is indeed essential to change in a future agreement) that we embarked on the greatest of our victories, against three enemies? With two of them we already have peace treaties (albeit not ideal), while the third, Syria, has been wallowing in a civil war. There's much to do, but for those shaping our actions, there's no room for fear.
- And it is here that the second serious flaw in the author's understanding of security appears: its reduction to one dimension. The Judea and Samaria ridgeline that rises above the coastal plain is not without military value, but neither is it the be-all and end-all. Security is not only a dominating observation point and positions to emplace weapons. Security is a totality. It is the sum of military, civilian and diplomatic capabilities, and it is also national morale. These simple truths, too, go unmentioned in the book.
- The right-wing version of the demographic challenge, which is presented in the book as deserving serious consideration, is totally wrong. It reminds me of the arguments of climate-change deniers, a collection of half-arguments and half-wishful thinking in the "alternative facts" style. Contrary to the author's proposition that "it's definitely possible to surmise that the Jewish majority is not about to disappear in the foreseeable future," the demographic threat is definite, and the timespan for its actualization is measured in years, not in generations. These are facts. Not beliefs.
- In his discussion of this subject, the author gives too much weight to the deniers of the demographic threat, whose reasoning is at times absurdly weak. He ignores the fact that the "demographic window of opportunity" will close very soon, and that the "demographic Judgment Day" is approaching – when the Palestinians will revise the character of their struggle and place at the center of their agenda the "one-state" demand" in the "state for all its citizens" version. The situation in which the extremists on both sides are calling for one state, dreaming of one state and working to achieve it, is transforming the "one-state" vision into the true existential threat to Israel in our generation.

- 'The left,' according to Goodman
- The second subject, in addition to security, that is addressed in the book with seemingly a priori ideological bias, is "the left." Goodman reduces the left to a radical left that exists, if at all, on the margins of Meretz voters, and by doing so serves the arguments of the right wing, simplifying their (supposed) proofs. The left, in his opinion, "changed again and... is engaged primarily with questions of human rights and the damage of the occupation." Or, "The conclusion is that it is forbidden to withdraw from Judea and Samaria and entrust security... relying on faith in international guarantees." And again: "Those who draw the Zionist lesson find it hard to believe that it's possible... to risk leaving the territories and trust in guarantees from the world's nations..." What is at issue here? Has anyone on the left suggested dismantling the IDF? Forgoing freedom of operation in general? And self-defense in particular? Who is this "left" that's being talked about? Does it include Moshe Dayan, Yitzhak Rabin, Haim Bar-Lev, Motta Gur, myself? The chiefs of staff who followed us?
- Are they the "naive" types who would rely solely on international guarantees? And who exactly on the right will teach us the meaning of security? Goodman is now revealing to us that the "security principle" is the political anchor of the right, and "international guarantees" are the flimsy prop of the left. Really? "International guarantees" and the human rights dialogue are part of the left's argument, but not its principal part. They are subordinate to the two primary tenets, whose test, according to the responsible left, lies in deeds. Not in talk. They are: (A) security, before and above everything; and (B) the "wholeness of the nation" and its unity take precedence over the "wholeness of the land." Similarly, the "security principle" is part of the right's argument, but its professional and substantive base is shaky, and peeking at us from beyond it, slightly tainted by messianism, are the doctrine of Rabbi Kook and the "one-state" agenda.
- In the chapter dealing with the Jewish-halakhic aspect of the "catch," we learn that both Maimonides and Rabbi Ovadia Yosef – the latter alluded explicitly to the question of the territories – ruled that piku'ah nefesh (saving of lives) and considerations relating to the risk to human life should tip the scales, and that at the end of the day, the decision is up to the professionals, meaning the experts. If they say that not returning the territories means immediate certainty of the danger of war and puts life at risk, then they should be returned. Here Goodman fails again, and with him, or before him, the right wing in Israel, in the test of acting according to the conclusions that arise from their arguments.
- For what do the experts say? An absolute majority of Israel's security personnel, in the IDF, the Shin Bet and the police believe that Israel would be safer and more efficiently defensible if, within Israel that is so precious to all of us, a "separation line" were to be drawn that would include the "settlement blocs," the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and a military presence along the Jordan River and at a few other strategic sites. Within that line, there will be a solid Jewish majority for generations, and on the other side, an appropriate area for a demilitarized, viable Palestinian state, with agreed-upon, bilateral security arrangements. Have these facts vanished from the author's line of vision? Could it be, heaven forbid, that these truths were shelved (they are expert facts and arguments, not opinions or political positions) because their assertion brings about the collapse of the "security principle" argument, which is all that precludes the identification or cataloguing of the right as "messianic"?

- Those in charge of our security on a daily basis and who make life-and-death decisions, must plan and operate according to reality as it is, not according to wishful thinking or political “belief.” The fact that almost all of them find themselves on the left side of this dispute should have signaled us clearly this is indeed the reality. It’s a pity Goodman did not see this.
- The “blind spot” in the right’s perception of the security task in the territories extends also to fighting terrorism. The book’s security discussion rests on the implicit assumption that continued rule on the ground does not exact a price in the battle against terrorism. The truth is the opposite. The assessment of security personnel is that terrorism that springs from within a civilian population is more easily fought from behind a defined “separation line,” with freedom of action across it, than from within a jumble of populations. The intimate mix hampers intelligence acquisition and impairs the ability to respond before there are victims.
- The responsible left does not maintain that we should rely on someone else (Palestinian or other) exclusively. The responsible left maintains further that continued control of the territories as such entails a significant security risk. The responsible left maintains a strong and ever-stronger IDF, backed by Israel’s technological superiority and by the ties with the US, is the foundation stone of security. And it is sustained by Israel’s status internationally, its economic might and the internal unity within the country, as far as we succeed in preserving it. The responsible left maintains that considerations of “net security” together with demographics and the need to hold to the moral high ground, have created an imperative to separate from the Palestinians while ensuring security; that the goal remains “two states.” The responsible left does not take as its point of departure a “liberal universalism,” as Goodman claims, or justice for the Arabs, but considerations of “security first.”
- The responsible left is the political stream in Israel that carries within it the true Zionist lesson – that “we can rely only on ourselves” – bolstered by a comprehensive, broad, deep perception of the essence of security – a perception that addresses the horizon, not only the present, and grasps that in the 21st century, security is not only dominant hills, but a broad totality. It is the responsible left that continues to maintain the conception espoused by Ben-Gurion and Dayan, by Peres, by Rabin and by me, together with many others. It is the conception that actualizes in its vision and its deeds the building of the “iron wall” that led us to victories in our wars, that led Egypt and Jordan to make peace with us and that sustains us today in the struggle against terrorism. It is the broad conception whose implementation pushed the Arab world from the “three noes” of Khartoum in 1967 to the Saudi Initiative of 2002 and the “Arab League Proposal.”
- In contrast, the right wing, whose deep, true motivation is the “wholeness of the land” before – and even at the expense of – the “wholeness of the people,” seeks to evade political decisions until construction outside the “settlement blocs” has created an irreversible situation. The chimes of imminent redemption resonate in their ears. They are voiding the “security principle,” which they adopted, of many of its components, by reducing its contents to issues of weapons emplacement and topography; by shutting their eyes to other aspects of security and to the aspect of time; and by ignoring the broad expert agreement on the compatibility of Israel’s security needs and interests with the paradigm of the “two-state” solution, when the time comes. Above all, the right wing is at fault in ignoring the fact that a security concept should stem from a realistic, expert comparison of alternatives and risks, subject to the reality principle, and not a thrust for a predetermined faith-based solution. [...]

Summary:

For what do the experts say? An absolute majority of Israel's security personnel, in the IDF, the Shin Bet and the police believe that Israel would be safer and more efficiently defensible if, within Israel that is so precious to all of us, a "separation line" were to be drawn that would include the "settlement blocs," the Jewish neighborhoods in East Jerusalem and a military presence along the Jordan River and at a few other strategic sites. Within that line, there will be a solid Jewish majority for generations, and on the other side, an appropriate area for a demilitarized, viable Palestinian state, with agreed-upon, bilateral security arrangements. Have these facts vanished from the author's line of vision? Could it be, heaven forbid, that these truths were shelved (they are expert facts and arguments, not opinions or political positions) because their assertion brings about the collapse of the "security principle" argument, which is all that precludes the identification or cataloguing of the right as "messianic"?