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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Friday, July 14

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News Excerpts

July 14, 2017

Ynet News

Two Policemen Killed in Terror Attack at Lions' Gate, Jerusalem

Two policemen were killed and a third was lightly wounded in a terror attack on Friday morning when three terrorists opened fire at Border Police forces at the Lions' Gate in Jerusalem's Old City. The three attackers were shot and killed by police. The three terrorists arrived at the Temple Mount at around 7am armed with two Carl Gustav rifles and a handgun. As they approached the Lions' Gate, they noticed Israeli patrol officers and started shooting at them. The terrorists then fled towards one of the mosques in the Temple Mount complex. Police gave chase, shooting, and killed all three.

See also, [*"PA President Mahmoud Abbas Condemns Temple Mount Terror Attack" \(Jerusalem Post\)*](#)

Ha'aretz

Two Bibi Allies Arrested as Israel Cracks Down on Telecom Firm

The controlling shareholder of Bezeq, Shaul Elovitch, and Communications Ministry Director General Shlomo Filber were placed under house arrest as an Israel Securities Authority investigation cracked down on the country's largest telecommunications company. The widening probe of Bezeq now includes what is being called a secret channel for sensitive information between Elovitch and Filber, both considered close to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Elovitch's two-day house arrest, only revealed Thursday, was extended for 9 days while Filber was put under house arrest for 2 weeks. Bezeq CEO Stella Handler was also placed under house arrest for 9 days, as was Elovitch's son Or and former Bezeq director, Amikam Shorer. Several other company executives were also questioned.

Times of Israel

Israel, Palestinians Reach Landmark Water Deal for WB, Gaza

Israel and the PA on Thursday announced a deal to provide millions of cubic meters of drinking water to Palestinians. While Palestinians made plain that the deal, brokered by US President Donald Trump's envoy Jason Greenblatt, has no impact on final-status issues in the peace process, Greenblatt hailed it as a "harbinger of things to come." Environmentalists hailed the deal as a significant step toward addressing water shortages issues, especially in water-starved Gaza.

See also, [*"Trump's Envoy Greenblatt Announces Water Deal Between Israelis and Palestinians" \(Ha'aretz\)*](#)

Jerusalem Post

Trump Opposes House for Allocating Israeli Missile Defense Aid

The Trump administration is concerned with a House committee proposal that would siphon Israeli missile defense aid from a fund that is typically reserved for current US wartime operations. The House Armed Services Committee proposed a \$558 million increase in allocated Israeli aid for 2018 that would come from Overseas Contingency Operations, or OCO – a fund that is effectively uncapped by the Budget Control Act, and has become a loophole through which Congress and the Pentagon get around budget cuts ever since sequestration hit defense programs hard in 2013. Now, President Donald Trump's National Security Council and the Office of Management and Budget are drawing a line on use of the fund – and Israeli missile defense aid is no exception.

Israel Confirms Engaged in Prisoner Exchange Talks w/ Hamas

Israeli officials confirmed that talks with Hamas regarding a prisoner exchange deal are being held and that this is being mediated by Egypt. An Israeli delegation arrived in Cairo in the last few days to discuss the deal. Prime Minister Netanyahu said yesterday at a memorial for those who fell in Operation Protective Edge that the commitment to bring back Oron Shaul and Hadar Goldin is alive and well and that we have never stopped trying to complete that mission, including over the past few days. He also mentioned the two Israeli citizens being held in the Gaza Strip.

See also, ["Israel, Hamas Downplay Report of Progress Toward Prisoner Swap" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

Ma'ariv

Gabbay: Instead of Attacking Gov't, Lapid Attacks Opposition

Labor Party Chairman-elect Avi Gabbay attacked Yesh Atid Chairman Yair Lapid yesterday in response to Lapid's claim two days ago that he lacked the requisite knowledge and experience to lead the country. Gabbay said in an interview with Army Radio: "It is really strange that on the day the submarines affair is blowing up and while the prime minister's attorney and the Communications Ministry director general are being questioned, Lapid comes into the studio, and instead of attacking Netanyahu over the submarines and the investigations, he attacks his colleagues in the opposition. I wonder—is this how they plan to replace the government?"

See also, ["Lapid, Gabbay Fight Over Israel's Political Future" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

Washington Post

As Pal. Leaders Fight Over Gaza, Israel Worries War with Hamas

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas is pursuing a high-risk campaign in the Gaza Strip to squeeze his own people so hard that they might force the Islamist militant movement Hamas to surrender control of the isolated coastal enclave. The 82-year-old leader's Palestinian Authority, which runs the West Bank but has only limited sway in Gaza, has slashed salaries for its employees in the seaside territory, withheld permissions for medical patients to leave and, in its most dramatic step, cut payments for the electricity provided to Gaza by Israel. Israel fears Hamas might lash out with rocket fire, and the World Bank worries the strip could collapse. The United Nations on Tuesday declared that a decade of Hamas rule, Palestinian infighting and crippling blockades by Israel and Egypt have made life for people in Gaza "more and more wretched" each day.

Arutz Sheva

Trump Likely to Say Iran Complying with Nuclear Deal

U.S. President Donald Trump is "very likely" to state that Iran is adhering to the nuclear agreement it signed with world powers, though he continues to have reservations about it, a senior U.S. official said on Thursday, according to Reuters. Under U.S. law, the State Department must notify Congress every 90 days of Iran's compliance with the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Trump has a congressionally mandated deadline of Monday to decide. If Trump does state Iran is in compliance, it would be his second time doing so since taking office in January.

See also, ["Officials: US Expected to Say Iran Is Still Abiding by Nuke Deal" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

See also, ["The Iran Nuclear Deal Has Been a Blessing for Israel" \(Foreign Policy\)](#)

Netanyahu Tries to Steer Clear of Submarine Scandal

By Ben Caspit

- **Maj. Gen. (res.) Eliezer Marom, the former commander of the Israeli navy, has the reputation of being one of the most daring officers in the history of the Israel Defense Forces. On July 11, he earned another, more questionable honor. He is now the first major general to be interrogated by the police for serious crimes, including graft, and to be placed under house arrest. These actions are part of the police investigation of the German submarines purchased by Israel.**
- **Just one day before Marom, who commanded the Israeli navy from 2007 to 2011, was interrogated, police detained the person closest to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, attorney David Shimron, who was later placed under house arrest. They also detained Brig. Gen. Avriel Bar Yosef, Netanyahu's former appointee as head of the National Security Council, and businessman Miki Ganor, who negotiated Israel's acquisition of the submarines and other naval vessels from German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp.**
- **AI-Monitor reported on the "Submarine Affair" several months ago. The current wave of arrests, which jolted Israel July 10-11, drew public attention to the scandal after a lengthy undercover investigation. The arrests in Israel came one week after Germany's National Security Council approved the naval deal between Israel and German shipbuilder ThyssenKrupp, having been convinced that there was no graft on the German side of the deal. The move by the Israeli police was a slap in the face to the Germans, since the deal itself, valued at about \$10 billion, now has a very serious question mark hanging over it.**
- **A statement released by the State Attorney's Office in February said that the prime minister was not a suspect in the affair. Now it is obvious that he will have to be interrogated in order to get his version of the series of events and suspicions, as they are now being revealed. The entire episode has caused former Defense Minister Moshe Ya'alon and Knesset member Erel Margalit (Zionist Camp) to call it the biggest corruption scandal since the founding of the state. Ya'alon even took it a step further in an interview with CNN on July 11, saying that he is convinced that Netanyahu himself will also be indicted as a result of the affair.**
- **The question now is whether Netanyahu knew about the involvement of his close confidante, Shimron, in mediating and promoting these deals between the German shipbuilder and Israel's defense establishment. If he did know, it would pose a very serious conflict of interest, even before the possibility that the prime minister was promised financial compensation is investigated. The basis for this conflict of interest is the fact that Netanyahu actively promoted huge deals involving the German shipbuilder. He pushed to acquire three new Dolphin-class submarines, against the advice of the Israeli navy and the defense establishment at large, while attempting to retract an international tender to provide Israel with four patrol boats to protect Israel's gas platforms in the Mediterranean.**
- **Throughout this entire time, Shimron acted on behalf of businessman Ganor, who represents the German shipbuilder in Israel.**

- To complicate matters even further, the person who removed Shaike Bareket, the previous mediator between ThyssenKrupp and Israel, was then Israeli navy chief Marom. Bareket was replaced by Ganor, who had no prior experience negotiating naval deals. What he did have was the backing of the attorney closest to Netanyahu. At the same time, there was an enormous increase in the volume of deals planned between the shipbuilders and Israel, and in the commissions demanded by the mediator of those deals.
- Police are now investigating all of these suspicions. Shimron was interrogated for a third consecutive day, for a total of almost 30 hours. Al-Monitor has learned that the police had employed an extensive network of bugging devices against many of the suspects over the past few months and collected considerable information also in various banks. They identified significant sums of money, which were transferred from Marom's account in Israel to overseas accounts, and they collected other evidence as well. Netanyahu has yet to be interrogated, and the official position is that he is not under suspicion. Nevertheless, no one involved in Israeli politics has the slightest doubt that the flames are getting closer to the prime minister himself.
- The scandal could send shockwaves across many other fronts as well. The very legitimacy of the process by which Israel conducts its arms deals could suffer repercussions on deals with other countries. This could include the relationship between the Israeli and American defense establishments, with Israel being a major client of the US arms market. Fortunately, US law makes it almost impossible to pay commissions to agents and mediators with US aid money or other funds. However, it is not especially difficult to get around these laws and find alternatives to make such payments. The last thing that the Israeli arms industry (when it comes to exports) or the Israeli defense establishment (when it comes to imports) needs right now is the spotlight of a police investigation on these very sensitive dealings.
- As for Netanyahu, even if he somehow manages to steer clear of being linked directly to the affair, there can be no doubt that the prime minister's image is suffering a serious blow as a result of it. It will be hard to find any Israeli who believes that the prime minister would promote deals worth billions of dollars without him knowing that the deal was being mediated by his cousin and close confidante (Shimron and Netanyahu are related), who also represented one of the parties.
- The entire incident is yet another blow on the Teflon-coated steel lining that has protected Netanyahu over the last eight years as Israel's sole prime minister. At the same time, there has been progress in the other investigations into Netanyahu's affairs, including "File 1000" (Netanyahu allegedly receiving gifts) and "File 2000" (his dealings with Yedioth Ahronoth publisher Arnon Mozes). A major investigation into the Israeli communications firm Bezeq is also developing, with another of Netanyahu's close confidantes, the director general of the Ministry of Communications Shlomo Filber, also summoned for police interrogation.
- These blows have been landing with increasing regularity over the last year and could cause serious harm to the immune system of Israel's most powerful prime minister of the past several decades. The most current assessment is that elections will not be held as scheduled, but will have to be moved up to the start of next year.

Ben Caspit is a columnist for Al-Monitor's and senior columnist for other Israeli newspapers.

Summary:

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AIPAC Feeling the Heat to Address Israel's 'Ayatollah' Judaism

By Rabbi Eric Yoffie

- Several weeks have passed since “Black Sunday,” the day on which Israel’s cabinet decided to suspend the Western Wall agreement and hand total control over conversions in Israel to the ultra-Orthodox forces in the religious establishment. (The conversion decision was later delayed for 6 months.)
- In Israel, the attention of the press and public has turned to other things. But in America, an anguished debate continues throughout the Jewish community. Disbelief and dismay remain the dominant sentiments of U.S. Jewish activists. Community leaders who view themselves as Israel’s staunchest defenders now feel dismissed by an oblivious and uncaring Israeli Prime Minister.
- Among engaged non-Orthodox Jews – and the non-Orthodox are 90% of the American Jewish community – the anger is virtually universal, but a consensus has not emerged on what to do with that anger.
- How should we give expression to the resentment that we feel? How should we convince Israel that there are times when nurturing the Jewish world takes precedence over coalition politics? On these and other questions, there are as yet no clear answers.
- Still, if you listen closely, responses are beginning to take shape. Based on conversations I have had and my own sense of the community, I suggest that American Jews have reached three conclusions about their recent trauma.
- 1. American Jews have given up on Benjamin Netanyahu as the leader of world Jewry, a role that usually belongs as a matter of course to Israel’s Prime Minister.
- Netanyahu remains his country’s political leader, responsible for Israel’s economy, foreign relations, and defense. Diaspora Jews will recognize that fact whether they agree with him on these matters or not. But that is not true for other things that the prime minister of the Jewish state has always undertaken to do. As spokesman and defender of the Jewish people, unifier of the Jewish world, champion of Jewish interests, and advocate of Jewish values, Netanyahu is finished, forever.
- There is a simple explanation for this. Diaspora Jews have concluded that Netanyahu views the Jewish world – or at least the non-Orthodox part of that world – with contempt.
- And while the immediate reason is his suspension of the Kotel agreement, this was, in fact, only the last straw. Netanyahu never visits Reform or Conservative synagogues when travelling abroad and shuns Reform and Conservative institutions, rabbinic ordinations and conventions in Israel. And he stays away from major celebratory events that would suggest a public embrace of the Jewish world’s largest religious movements. Terrified of offending Haredi sensibilities, the Prime Minister has spent four terms distancing himself from millions of Jews who care deeply about Israel and want only a modicum of respect in return. And now, finally, it can be said that his personal credibility on religious matters with those Jews has been dealt a blow from which he will never recover.

- **2. American Jews will not withhold financial donations to Israel as a means of influencing Israel's government.**
- **This issue has been raised by Daniel Gordis in a widely-discussed blog post. Gordis affirms the right of American Jews to be heard on religious issues and suggests that the time has come to "use the power of their purse" to force the government's hand. At the same time, he expresses doubts that they will have "the unity and stomach to use it."**
- **Rabbi Gordis is to be commended for his tough line, which some Diaspora donors have applauded. But most American Jewish leaders do not find it compelling. And it is not because they don't have the stomach for it but because they know it won't work.**
- **Gordis talks of Diaspora "leverage," but it doesn't exist.**
- **Israel is a rich country, ranked 21st in per capita GDP, between Italy and Spain, on the OECD list. American Jews withholding contributions might hurt some institutions a bit but would cause barely a blip in Israel's economy. It would also be seen by most Israelis as petulant and patronizing. And this too: Philanthropic giving, wisely done, is one of the few areas that builds real bridges between American and Israeli Jews, creating opportunities for cooperative projects and face-to-face interaction. Why fiddle with that?**
- **Some American Jews will redirect some of their giving and offer greater support to projects that promote religious pluralism in Israel. That will be welcome, but that is as far as the donor rebellion will go.**
- **3. American Jews will expect AIPAC to readjust its priorities and become an advocate for religious freedom in Israel.**
- **The only organization in America that has the clout to change religious realities in Israel is AIPAC, and American Jews are beginning to understand that. AIPAC, after all, is responsible not for the relatively piddling sums that are donated by charitable groups to Israel but for the massive amounts of American military aid that are essential for Israel's survival.**
- **Traditionally, of course, AIPAC steers clear of Israel's internal concerns. But that is certain to change. Immediately after the Cabinet decisions on the Kotel and conversion, AIPAC leaders arrived in Jerusalem to warn Netanyahu of a "crisis of faith" between Israeli and American Jews. These leaders denied, of course, that they were exerting pressure. They were there, they insisted, only to offer the Prime Minister their "analysis."**
- **But the fact is that AIPAC was feeling the heat from their grassroots activists, most of whom are non-Orthodox Jews who are as furious as everyone else at decisions that they see as foolish and gratuitous. And not only that. AIPAC's leaders know that American support for Israel is not automatic but rests on the values that America and Israel are seen to share.**
- **Every religious crisis in Israel strengthens America's growing sense that Israel is an ultra-religious place, filled with extremists and fanatics. Religious fanatics are in fact a small minority in Israel, but as a recent survey has demonstrated, most Americans do not know that. And when they think of Israel's brand of Judaism, it is the Ayatollah brand that comes to mind.**
- **This is unfair, but it is the reality of the moment. And it is also very dangerous for Israel's cause. And AIPAC members, locally and nationally, understand this very well.**

- Right now, what is going on in AIPAC is mostly behind-the-scenes whispering. But I am betting that the actions of Mr. Netanyahu will change AIPAC's culture. And the day will come, very soon, when AIPAC leaders will arrive in Jerusalem not with "analysis" but with demands - for religious freedom, religious change and religious sanity.

Eric H. Yoffie, a rabbi, writer and teacher in Westfield, New Jersey, is a former president of the Union for Reform Judaism.

Summary:

Traditionally, of course, AIPAC steers clear of Israel's internal concerns. But that is certain to change. Immediately after the Cabinet decisions on the Kotel and conversion, AIPAC leaders arrived in Jerusalem to warn Netanyahu of a "crisis of faith" between Israeli and American Jews. These leaders denied, of course, that they were exerting pressure. They were there, they insisted, only to offer the Prime Minister their "analysis." But the fact is that AIPAC was feeling the heat from their grassroots activists, most of whom are non-Orthodox Jews who are as furious as everyone else at decisions that they see as foolish and gratuitous. And not only that. AIPAC's leaders know that American support for Israel is not automatic but rests on the values that America and Israel are seen to share.