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Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, July 6

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News Excerpts

July 6, 2017

Times of Israel

Labor Candidate Gabbay: Herzog to Remain Opposition Head

Avi Gabbay, one of two candidates vying to become head of the Labor party, said on Thursday that if he defeats Amir Peretz in Monday's runoff vote he will keep incumbent Isaac Herzog on as opposition leader. In a statement, he said that "fairness and decency require that [Herzog] continue his position, and I would be happy if he would agree to it." Gabbay, who was considered a dark-horse candidate, said that as Herzog was elected to head the opposition, having won 24 seats for the party, he therefore should remain in that position until the next general election.

Ha'aretz

Polls Suggest New Labor Leaders Won't Overtake Bibi's Likud

Polling results reported Wednesday evening suggest that either one of the Israeli Labor Party's potential leaders would not make substantial gains at the expense of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud, or even cause more than a small dent to Israel's centrist parties. A poll by Channel 2 show that if elections for the Knesset were held now with Amir Peretz as head of the Labor Party, the party would garner 15 seats in the 120-seat Knesset. If Avi Gabbay were at the party's helm, the poll shows the Labor Party with just one seat less at 14 seats. A poll by the Walla News website showed the party getting 18 seats with either of the two as party leader.

See also, ["Poll: Likud Remains the Largest Party" \(Arutz Sheva\)](#)

Times of Israel

In Visit Focused on Economy, Bibi and Modi Quietly Talk Terror

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held discreet talks on Wednesday on enhancing security cooperation between the two countries. Modi is currently making the first-ever trip by an Indian prime minister to Israel as Jerusalem touts its growing ties with the second-most populous country. In public, Modi's visit has focused on economic and technological cooperation, with New Delhi said to be keen to de-emphasize defense ties to not hurt India's economic links with Iran and other states hostile to Israel. But in a Wednesday meeting between Netanyahu and Modi, the two were joined by Mossad chief Yossi Cohen for a discussion on bolstering intelligence and security cooperation, especially against international terror groups.

Ha'aretz

For 1st Time, Guards Told to Block Visitors Due to BDS Activity

The Population, Immigration and Border Authority last month issued a directive implementing the recently-passed law that blocks entry into Israel due to "BDS activity." The regulation, entitled "Handling entries at Israel's international border crossings," lists 28 reasons for refusing someone passage, and constitutes the first time such a policy has been set in writing. "BDS activity" is specifically listed. The regulation follows the passing of a law in March that forbids the issuance of a visa or other permit to foreign citizens who have called for a boycott of Israel or the settlements.

Jerusalem Post

Gaza Sewage Forces Shutdown of Israeli Beach

Gaza's sewage situation is so dire that the Health Ministry was forced to shut down Zikim Beach in Ashkelon on Wednesday due to fecal contamination from the Strip. With dwindling electricity supplies unable to power the Strip's already meager wastewater treatment infrastructure, raw sewage is flowing not only through the channels in Gaza, but also to the Israeli beaches of Ashkelon and the Nahal Hanun riverbed. To address the problem, Water Authority representative Baruch Nagar said there are plans to build a NIS 3 million pipeline to pump the Gazan sewage to Sderot for treatment.

See also, ["How Gaza's Electricity Crisis Could Spell Trouble for Israel" \(Jewish Telegraphic Agency\)](#)

Israel Hayom

Thousands of J'lem Housing Units to Be Approved End of July

Construction in Jerusalem is gaining momentum: the local Planning and Construction Committee in Jerusalem, which is headed by Deputy Mayor Meir Turjeman, yesterday approved construction in neighborhoods that lie beyond the Green Line in Jerusalem. The Planning and Construction Committee approved the construction of 196 housing units for the Jewish sector in Jerusalem, including 98 housing units in Ramat Shlomo, 18 housing units for Jewish residents in Beit Hanina and 80 housing units in Ramot, in northern Jerusalem.

See also, ["In Test for Trump, Israel Plans 800 New East Jerusalem Homes" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

See also, ["800 Housing Units to Be Approved Beyond Green Line" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Washington Post

Israel Sues Heirs of Palestinian 'Lone Wolf' Attacker

Israel's state prosecutor's office in Jerusalem has filed a precedent-setting lawsuit against the estate of a Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem seven months after the man carried out a car-ramming attack that left four Israelis dead. Fadi al-Qanbar, 28, drove his truck into a group of Israeli army cadets participating in an educational tour of Jerusalem last January. Four soldiers, three women and one man, were killed in the attack, and he was shot to death by a vigilant civilian. Now, the Jerusalem District Prosecutor's Office is seeking compensation from Qanbar's wife and his four young children, heirs to his estate, for burial costs, such as headstones, loss of earnings and pension benefits it laid out for the victims. The total could be as high as \$2.3 million.

See also, ["Palestinian Support for Violence Drops, Survey Finds" \(Ynet News\)](#)

Reuters

Improving Ties Between Egypt, Hamas Unsettle Pal. Politics

A series of meetings between Hamas and senior officials in Cairo in recent weeks are showing an improvement in ties between Egypt and the Islamist Palestinian movement, with implications for Gaza, Palestinian politics and the wider region. Ismail Haniyeh, who has recently assumed the post of Hamas's leader, said in a speech in Gaza on Wednesday that relations with the Gaza Strip's neighbor to the south-west were warming. In that respect, closer ties between Hamas and Cairo are a serious threat to Abbas, regional analysts said. Not only because they help to bolster Hamas's credibility in the region, but because they empower Dahlan and undermine the ability of the Palestinian Authority to cast itself as the dominant political body for Palestinians, they said.

See also, ["Palestinians Overwhelmingly Oppose Abbas Pressure on Gaza" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

A Passage to India

By Yoav Fromer

- The arrival in Israel of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the largest democracy in the world, is certainly cause for pride. But not necessarily for the reasons that Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu believes. Netanyahu said to Modi at the reception at Ben Gurion Airport: “We have waited for 70 years for you.” He is right. It’s just that he failed to explain: why did Israel and India establish full diplomatic relations only 25 years ago? Even if Prime Minister Netanyahu would prefer to forget the reason, Foreign Minister Netanyahu is keenly aware of it: the Israel-India axis wasn’t really born either in Jerusalem or in New Delhi; it was born in Oslo.
- Ironically and even absurdly enough, Netanyahu proudly presents this historic visit as proof that his foreign policy, which advocates a deadlock with the Palestinians, has borne fruit. He has only forgotten and tried to get others to forget the fact that the current visit is being held to mark the 25th anniversary of a relationship that was established despite and not thanks to that policy. Despite all of the failures and disappointments that were created by the Oslo Accords, the talks that began between Israel and the PLO (and subsequently the Palestinian Authority) in the early 1990s are what set in motion the changes in the international arena that enabled India to free itself from the Non-Aligned Movement—and primarily so from the influence of the Muslim countries that controlled it—and to move closer to Israel and to formally establish relations with it in 1992.
- There is no doubt that we have seen the two countries become much closer in the past several years. Some of that is due to the rise to power in India of the BJP headed by Modi, which, as a national Hindi party was less reliant on the support of the Muslim minority; it is also due to the personal chemistry between Netanyahu and Modi. However, there is no place for friendships in international relations—only interests.
- If and when India is forced to choose between Israel and the Arab states in the event of a conflict with the Palestinians, all of the embraces in the world won’t do us any real good. The map of interests in the region explains why: India has two strategic anchors in the Middle East that are vital for its survival.
- The first is oil. More than half of India’s energy is imported from the Middle East. Given that India’s industry is only developing, its dependence on the Arab states and Iran is only going to increase. The second anchor is the roughly six million Indian workers who earn their livelihood in the Middle East, primarily in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states. They send more than USD 30 billion a year home, which is seven times the size of the volume of Indian trade with Israel and which provides for a significant chunk of its foreign currency reserves. Those are needs that Israel cannot meet and losses that it won’t be able to cover.
- That is why we must not delude ourselves. The arrival of the Indian prime minister in Israel is not proof that Israel does not suffer from international isolation but quite the opposite: it is proof of the enormous potential for Israel that is inherent in either reaching a peace agreement with the Palestinians or, at the very least, in trying to reach one.

- Israel and India have shared international interests, as the prime minister said, but resolving the Palestinian issue and ending the occupation was and remains the key to achieving them. As the UNESCO resolution that was passed just the other day proves, the Palestinian problem isn't going to disappear. Modi's embraces and the yoga exercises that he inspired Netanyahu to begin doing are not going to free Israel from that problem either.

Yoav Fromer teaches politics and history at Tel Aviv University.

Summary:

If and when India is forced to choose between Israel and the Arab states in the event of a conflict with the Palestinians, all of the embraces in the world won't do us any real good. The map of interests in the region explains why: India has two strategic anchors in the Middle East that are vital for its survival. The first is oil. More than half of India's energy is imported from the Middle East. Given that India's industry is only developing, its dependence on the Arab states and Iran is only going to increase. The second anchor is the roughly six million Indian workers who earn their livelihood in the Middle East, primarily in Saudi Arabia and the Persian Gulf states.

3-State Reality Emerges with Hamas-Dahlan Leadership in Gaza

Political reconciliation in Gaza Strip likely to defer war with Israel in short term, but lead to deadlier confrontation later.

By Avi Issacharoff

- **Samir Mashrawi is coming back to Gaza. And his return suggests a political earthquake is about to strike the Strip.**
- **Mashrawi is a loyalist of former Fatah leader and Mahmoud Abbas rival Mohammad Dahlan. Dahlan, the Fatah Preventive Security chief in the Strip, was once emphatically persona non grata for Hamas, and was ousted in the coup that put the Islamist terror group in power there 10 years ago**
- **Mashrawi, regarded as Dahlan's right-hand man and his key aide during periods of intense conflict with Hamas, was particularly loathed because of the central role he played in pursuing Hamas activists in 1996 and 1997. Notorious for shaving their beards off and arresting them for long periods, Mashrawi was one of the first to leave Gaza when tensions between Hamas and Fatah really heated up, during 2007.**
- **But it was Hamas who announced his imminent homecoming. Top Hamas official Ahmad Yusuf conveyed the news Monday in an interview with a Jordanian newspaper. His return is part of an agreement taking shape between Dahlan, Hamas and Egypt, ostensibly to monitor the operation of a committee set up to help families with members who have been killed or injured.**
- **In reality, Mashrawi's return signifies reconciliation — not between Hamas and Fatah, but between Hamas and Dahlan's Fatah faction.**
- **What does this mean for Israel? Three points.**
- **Firstly, as I have noted recently, the danger of war between Hamas's Gaza and Israel is decreasing, for now.**
- **The reconciliation deal between Dahlan and Hamas, currently being negotiated between senior Hamas members, Dahlan's people and Egyptian intelligence, is supposed to pave the way for the opening of the Rafah crossing between the enclave and Egypt, Yusuf said, and the establishment of a new "management committee" — in other words, a de facto new government for Gaza.**
- **This committee will include Hamas of course, representatives of the other Palestinian factions in the enclave, and Dahlan's associates. The intended impact: an improvement in humanitarian conditions in the Strip, which will reduce the likelihood of war.**
- **Which brings us to the second area of significance for Israel. The new arrangement will more completely separate Gaza from the West Bank.**

- A Palestinian state is being created right before our eyes — albeit just in Gaza, without any connection to the West Bank. We will be seeing the emergence of a kind of “three-state” situation — Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza.
- According to Yusuf, Hamas will remain responsible for security in Gaza, while in parallel, the new “committee,” incorporating Dahlan’s people, will oversee Gaza’s relations with the outside world. That means Dahlan’s people will have a presence at the Rafah crossing.
- Unhappily, the third point is that if Rafah is fully opened for the movement of people and goods, Hamas’s preparations for war will gain momentum. Dahlan’s men will not stop the flow of Hamas weaponry or terrorists into Gaza.
- That’s the trap: The new agreement decreases the likelihood of war with Israel in the short term but only delays the next day of reckoning. Hamas will be strengthened in the long term, and so will its confidence. When it comes, the next confrontation is likely to be deadlier and more dangerous for Israel.
- The new agreement will mark Dahlan’s return to center stage — freshly empowered, in contrast to the perceived weakness of Abbas and senior Fatah figures in the West Bank.
- Hamas in recent days rejected a proposed compromise agreement with Abbas’s Palestinian Authority, put forward by UN Middle East envoy Nikolay Mladenov, apparently because of the more attractive Egyptian-Dahlan possibilities.
- The emerging agreement, made up of 15 clauses, heralds historic change on the political front, potentially formalizing the division between Gaza and the West Bank.
- There is still no love is lost between Hamas and Dahlan — and that’s an understatement — or between Hamas and Mashrawi. Years of bitterness will not evaporate overnight. As soon as one side feels threatened by the other, the notion of reconciliation will disappear and they will be at war again. That’s what happened a decade ago.
- But for now, all eyes are on the returning Mashrawi.

Avi Issacharoff, The Times of Israel's Middle East analyst, fills the same role for Walla, the leading portal in Israel. He is also a guest commentator on many different radio shows and current affairs programs on television. Until 2012, he was a reporter and commentator on Arab affairs for the Haaretz newspaper. He also lectures on modern Palestinian history at Tel Aviv University, and is currently writing a script for an action-drama series for the Israeli satellite Television "YES."

Summary:

Unhappily, the third point is that if Rafah is fully opened for the movement of people and goods, Hamas’s preparations for war will gain momentum. Dahlan’s men will not stop the flow of Hamas weaponry or terrorists into Gaza. That’s the trap: The new agreement decreases the likelihood of war with Israel in the short term but only delays the next day of reckoning. Hamas will be strengthened in the long term, and so will its confidence. When it comes, the next confrontation is likely to be deadlier and more dangerous for Israel.