



S. DANIEL ABRAHAM  
CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

## Israel and the Middle East News Update

*Friday, July 7*

### Headlines:

- U.S. Opposes Israeli Advancement of Plans in Jerusalem
- Israeli, PA Generals Agree on 10-15 Years of IDF Presence in Jordan Valley
- Putin and Netanyahu Discuss Demilitarized Zone in Southern Syria
- UNESCO Set to Vote on Motion to Declare Hebron Endangered Site
- Qatar: We're too Rich to Worry About What Saudi Arabia Thinks
- EU Parliament to Host Families of Palestinian Hunger Strikers
- Mennonite Church to Divest in protest of Israeli Policies
- Maccabiah 2017 Opens with a High-Energy Ceremony

### Commentary:

- **Yedioth Ahronoth: "Peretz vs. Gabbay: Old News vs. Hot News"**
  - By Nahum Barnea, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth
- **AI Monitor: "Netanyahu Offers Friendship to Those Ignoring Palestinians"**
  - By Akiva Eldar, Columnist at AI Monitor Israel Pulse

# News Excerpts

July 7, 2017

## Ha'aretz

### **U.S. Opposes Israeli Advancement of Plans in Jerusalem**

U.S. President Donald Trump's administration on Thursday reiterated its opposition to "unrestrained" settlement construction, and its commitment to reaching an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement. A White House official said in reply to a construction announcement by the Jerusalem municipal authorities of hundreds of units in East Jerusalem, that "President Trump has publicly and privately expressed his concerns regarding settlements and the Administration has made clear that unrestrained settlement activity does not advance the prospect for peace." See also, ["Israel Advances Two Construction Plans Beyond Green Line in Jerusalem" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## Jerusalem Post

### **Israeli, PA Generals Agree on IDF presence in Jordan Valley**

Israeli and Palestinian Authority military officials agreed in principle to an IDF withdrawal from the Jordan Valley within 10 to 15 years of a broader West Bank pullout, the US general who drafted a security plan under the Obama administration said in an interview with *The Jerusalem Post*. "A deal is reachable if the sides get over the politics," said retired Gen. John Allen, a former commander of US forces in Afghanistan and special envoy to ex-secretary of state John Kerry, during talks he led in 2013-2014. Allen stressed that Israeli political leaders on both sides never came on board with the plan. See also, ["Trump team looks to Obama-era West Bank security plan – report" \(Times of Israel\)](#)

## Ynet News

### **Putin and Netanyahu Discuss Demilitarized Zone in S. Syria**

Israel is pressing the United States and Russia to secure a demilitarized zone in southern Syria where Hezbollah and other militant organizations backed by Iran will not be able to operate, according a report in the British Times Thursday. According to the report, Israel is also closely following the talks between the United States and Russia in Amman in regards to the future of southern Syria. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Russian President Vladimir Putin even spoke on the phone on Thursday. According to the Kremlin, Netanyahu requested the phone call and the two leaders continued their exchange of views on Russian-Israeli cooperation. See also, ["Israel Tells U.S. It Doesn't Want Russia Policing Safe Zones in Southern Syria" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

## Times of Israel

### **UNESCO Set to Vote on Motion to Declare Hebron Endangered**

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is set to anger Israel for a second time in less than a week on Friday by voting on a Palestinian-led motion to have the Tomb of the Patriarchs in the Old City of Hebron in the West Bank, inscribed as a Palestinian world heritage site. The UN body's World Heritage Committee, currently meeting in Krakow, Poland, is expected to decide on the proposal on Friday, three days after passing a resolution denouncing Israeli activity in the Old City of Jerusalem. On Tuesday, the heritage committee backed the Jerusalem resolution 10 to three, with eight abstentions. The Hebron motion is likely to pass as well. See also, ["WILL UNESCO INSCRIBE CAVE OF PATRIARCHS AS MUSLIM MOSQUE TODAY?" \(Jerusalem Post\)](#)

The Times

## **Qatar: We're too Rich to Worry What Saudi Arabia Thinks**

Qatar threw down the gauntlet yesterday to the four Gulf neighbours blockading the small nation, telling them it was too rich to be threatened. Ali Sharif al-Emadi, the Qatari finance minister, told *The Times* that the state's huge financial reserves, built on the sale of natural gas over decades, meant it could withstand sanctions. "We have sovereign wealth funds of 250 per cent of gross domestic product, we have Qatar Central Bank reserves, and we have a ministry of finance strategic reserve," he said. See also, ["Saudi minister says Qatar boycott to remain in place" \(i24 News\)](#)

i24 news

## **EU Parliament to Host Families of Pal' Hunger Strikers**

The European Parliament's Delegation for Relations with Palestine is slated to host a meeting with the families of Palestinian prisoners who participated in a recent mass hunger strike, according to a statement released on Thursday. Seventeen European Parliament members condemned the initiative in a stern letter issued to European Parliament President Antonio Tajani. "We are utterly appalled at the understanding that our colleagues from the Delegation for Relations with Palestine (DPAL), under the pretext of discussing 'the situation of the Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails after the hunger-strike,' are in fact offering a public platform to relatives of convicted terrorists," the letter read. "We, Members of the European Parliament, are seriously concerned with the message this forum sends to our constituencies amidst such turbulent times in Europe." See also, ["DPAL stands up for the rights of Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails" \(EU Parliament\)](#)

AP

## **Mennonite Church to Divest in protest of Israeli Policies**

The Mennonite Church USA voted Thursday to sell its holdings in companies that profit from the Israeli occupation over Palestinian territories, the latest American Christian group to do so. The decision was made at a national Mennonite convention in Orlando, Florida. Although the economic impact is expected to be minimal, such votes are closely watched as a measure of views on Israel and the Palestinians from within the U.S., the Jewish state's closest and most important ally. The resolution directs managers of the \$3 billion Everence church fund to regularly screen holdings to avoid any economic support for Israeli policies in the occupied territories. See also, ["US ambassador invites Israeli settler heads to July 4 celebration for first time" \(i24 News\)](#)

Times of Israel

## **Maccabiah 2017 Opens with a High-Energy Ceremony**

Thousands of Jewish athletes, their families and spectators filled Jerusalem's Teddy Stadium on Thursday night to launch the opening of the 20th Maccabiah Games. It was a night of celebration, as some 10,000 athletes from 80 different countries, marched into the center of the stadium by delegation, against a backdrop of dozens of undulating images of each of their flags. The name of each nation was announced, from countries like Albania with three athletes, and Morocco with one, to China and Puerto Rico, participating for the first time, or the US and Israel, each with the largest delegations of 1,061 and 2,400, respectively. See also, ["THOUSANDS OF ATHLETES IN JERUSALEM FOR "JEWISH OLYMPICS" \(AP\)](#)

## **Peretz vs. Gabbay: Old News vs. Hot News**

*The two Labor finalists have one thing in common—their Mizrahi descent. In any other aspect, they are very different. Amir Peretz's advantage, as well as his weakness, is his rich political experience. Avi Gabby is Peretz's mirror image: New, fresh and inexperienced.*

By Nahum Barnea, columnist at Yedioth Ahronoth

- Amir Peretz and Avi Gabbay have one thing in common: Their Mizrahi descent. In any other aspect, they are very different. Labor voters who will go to the trouble of returning to the polling stations next Monday will determine not only who will head their Knesset list in the next elections, but also the party's nature, its image, the voter base it will try to attract, and maybe even its fate.
- Between the first and second voting rounds, the Labor Party is entering a six-day war. Each of the two finalists will try to get his rivals from the first round to join his camp. None of those rivals will declare their support voluntarily. There is unfinished business; there are aspirations. Peretz's advantage is his rich political experience. That's also his weakness: In his many years in politics, he has gained quite a few enemies. Gabby is Peretz's mirror image: New, fresh and inexperienced.
- As these elections have proved, however, the candidates—maybe apart from Peretz—have no camps within the party who vote according to orders received from above. Perhaps because of its weakness, perhaps because of its unattractiveness, the Labor Party can afford to hold free, clean and democratic elections.
- Peretz is five points ahead of Gabbay. That's a significant advantage. But Gabbay has momentum. Peretz is old news—Gabbay is hot news. The media will celebrate with him until he becomes old news. Peretz has proven in the past that he is capable of reaching some right-wing voters in the development towns. This breakthrough, however, had limited power. It didn't win elections.
- Gabbay's potential hasn't been tested yet. Allegedly, he is very promising: He has something to offer Yair Lapid's voters, Moshe Kahlon's voters and Likud voters who have had enough of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Like French President Emmanuel Macron, he is attractive because he isn't part of the existing system. He hasn't made unpopular compromises, he hasn't been involved in personal and public affairs and he hasn't broken promises.
- But the elections in Israel are far, and if Gabbay is elected, the other parties may have an interest in postponing the elections even more. Israel is a country that wears out its politicians. By the time the elections arrive, he may become old news. He will have to make his choices, left or right, and the elections will drive voters away. The fact that he isn't a Knesset member—which means someone else will receive the title of opposition leader and the aura provided by the Shin Bet bodyguards—won't contribute to his success.

- Isaac Herzog suffered a serious defeat Tuesday evening. He didn't lose his chances during the race, but rather in the weak and winding path he has taken since the general elections. He failed to provide his party with charisma and leadership. What he doesn't have, he doesn't have. Nevertheless, he is a skilled politician who knows how to build bridges. Labor needs people like that.
- The Labor Party's pavilion at the Tel Aviv Convention Center was located at the end of the compound. Only a few dozen activists waited for the results, mostly Gabbay's young supporters. The wretchedness was all over the place, but in the current era of uncertainty, today's wretchedness could turn into tomorrow's success. Everything is unpredictable and every person is free to choose his own way.

**SUMMARY:** Gabbay's potential hasn't been tested yet. Allegedly, he is very promising: He has something to offer Yair Lapid's voters, Moshe Kahlon's voters and Likud voters who have had enough of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Like French President Emmanuel Macron, he is attractive because he isn't part of the existing system. He hasn't made unpopular compromises, he hasn't been involved in personal and public affairs and he hasn't broken promises. But the elections in Israel are far, and if Gabbay is elected, the other parties may have an interest in postponing the elections even more. Israel is a country that wears out its politicians. By the time the elections arrive, he may become old news. He will have to make his choices, left or right, and the elections will drive voters away. The fact that he isn't a Knesset member—which means someone else will receive the title of opposition leader and the aura provided by the Shin Bet bodyguards—won't contribute to his success.

## **Netanyahu Offers Friendship to Those Ignoring Palestinians**

By Akiva Eldar, Columnist at AI Monitor Israel Pulse

- Upon his arrival in Israel on July 4, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was accorded an honor generally reserved for American presidents; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed him in person the moment he set foot on Israeli soil and did not leave Modi's side until he boarded his plane — and for a good reason. Unlike US President Donald Trump and most leaders visiting Jerusalem, Modi did not take the opportunity to hop over to the neighboring city of Ramallah, headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank. It is unusual, to say the least, for such VIPs visiting Israel to identify so fully with Netanyahu's disregard for the Palestinian neighbors living for half a century under Israeli domination. Israel need not worry that the Indian Foreign Ministry will condemn the Netanyahu government's harassment of human rights organizations, as the German Foreign Ministry did last month.
- Standing beside his guest at Ben-Gurion Airport, Netanyahu said Modi's visit would deepen bilateral cooperation on issues of security, agriculture, water and energy. One other area — peacemaking — did not even rate the type of lip service customary on such occasions. Why spoil a festive visit with such pesky trifles? Let's enjoy celebrating the 25th anniversary of full diplomatic relations between the world's biggest democracy and a small state that boasts about being “the only democracy in the Middle East.”
- Two events paved the way for the historic change in Israel's ties with India, as with several other important states, foremost among them Russia, China, Japan and South Korea. The first breakthrough occurred at the international Middle East peace conference convened in Madrid in October 1991, attended by high-ranking delegations from Israel, the leadership of the PLO and Arab states. The second event was the signing of the Oslo Accord between Israel and the Palestinians two years later, in September 1993. The “peace process” that was meant to free the Palestinian people of Israel's occupation and to shut down the Israeli settlement enterprise in the West Bank only resulted in freeing foreign states from the primary and secondary boycott imposed on them by the Arab League for trading with Israel. The ensuing Israeli-Palestinian negotiations did not hasten the end of the occupation, nor did it slow the pace of settlement construction. But even though the peace process came to a halt after the Oslo Accord and settlements were — and are — still being constructed, the Israeli embassies in New Delhi, Moscow, Beijing and Seoul remained open.
- These embassies were soon staffed by military and economic attaches. At the same time, arms dealers and counterterrorism experts popped up like mushrooms after the rain. India became the biggest client of Israel's Military Industries, with a shopping list that included missiles, drones and cyberwarfare technologies, to name a few. In light of these developments, one has to wonder what Netanyahu meant when he spoke at the reception for Modi of “our common quest to provide a better future for our peoples and for our world.” Does the quest for perpetuating the Israeli apartheid regime in the Palestinian territories ensure a better future for

the people of Israel? How does a huge contribution to the arms race between two hostile nuclear powers — India and Pakistan — benefit the future of humanity?

- Modi responded in a similar vein, saying that the partnership between the two countries is based on democratic principles. Modi seems not to have heard of the systematic, ongoing violation of Palestinian human rights by Israel and the abuse of organizations dedicated to protecting those rights. He doesn't know about Netanyahu's incitement against minorities and the use of excessive force against civilians. Indeed, India is a huge country facing many challenges, but it is hard to believe Modi is unaware of the latest US State Department report on human rights practices around the world in 2016. The chapter devoted to India says "the most significant human rights problems involved instances of police and security forces abuses, including extrajudicial killings, torture and rape; corruption, which remained widespread. ..." The report indicates that Netanyahu could learn a thing or two from Modi about ways to ban foreign state donations to civil society organizations, which according to both of them damage the public interest.
- The next high-ranking visitor due in Israel, Rwandan President Paul Kagame, who arrives July 8, could teach Netanyahu more than a thing or two about suppressing human rights and democracy. With a grim history of wars and a later work of ethnic reconciliation, still, Kagame too was honored with a grim chapter in the US report. Also, his military provides gainful employment for Israel's defense industries and experts. Kagame was re-elected in 2010 with 93% of the vote, but the three opposition parties were not allowed to participate in the elections. Two of their leaders were thrown in jail and the third was detained and later went into exile, while his deputy was assassinated. Several journalists were kidnapped, and Scotland Yard warned two Rwandan civilians residing in Britain that the Rwandan government "poses an imminent threat to your life." Israel nonetheless trains Kagame's people and even boasts of doing so. In a video clip posted in April on its Facebook page, the Israel Border Police is shown training Rwandan police in fighting techniques, targeted shooting, fast weapons discharge and making arrests, among other things.
- So who says half a century of occupying another people isolates Israel in the international arena? Israel's comrades in arms are multiplying — from India to Africa — joining Israel's veteran conservative friends on Capitol Hill. They all ostensibly prove that there is no foundation for the criticism of the government's foreign policy. Netanyahu is successful in convincing Israelis that Israel can manage quite well without the friends of the Palestinians in the West. The emerging states of Asia and the fractious African continent are slowly taking the place reserved in the hearts of Israelis for Europe.
- How long will this work? Until the friends in Paris, Berlin and Madrid decide to change their priorities: start with a photo-op with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah and then, if time permits, pop over to Jerusalem to ask Netanyahu how goes his "quest for a better future for our peoples and the world."

**SUMMARY:** Upon his arrival in Israel on July 4, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was accorded an honor generally reserved for American presidents; Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu welcomed him in person the moment he set foot on Israeli soil and did not leave Modi's side until he boarded his plane — and for a good reason. Unlike US President Donald Trump and most leaders visiting Jerusalem, Modi did not take the opportunity to hop over to the neighboring city of Ramallah, headquarters of the Palestinian Authority, in the West Bank. It is unusual, to say the least, for such VIPs visiting Israel to identify so fully with Netanyahu's disregard for the Palestinian neighbors living for half a century under Israeli domination. Israel need not worry that the Indian Foreign Ministry will condemn the Netanyahu government's harassment of human rights organizations, as the German Foreign Ministry did last month.