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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

Thursday, August 31

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News Excerpts

August 31, 2017

Yedioth Ahronoth

Netanyahu Attacks Media, Left at Likud Rally

Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu convened a group of 2,000 Likud activists yesterday for a Rosh Hashanah toast, but his speech revolved primarily around two issues: the media, and Eldad Yaniv and Meni Naftali. Netanyahu spoke about his achievements as prime minister ... but then got to his favorite part: an attack on the media. Netanyahu skillfully fanned the flames of his audience's anger towards the media, and the audience responded with boos and curses against the representatives of the media outlets who were present in the auditorium. Labor Party Chairman Avi Gabbay said in response: "Neither the suffering of the disabled, nor the beginning of the new school year, the housing crisis and the traffic jams. The media, the media, the media. Stateliness, unity and addressing the real issues will replace this."

See also, ["Netanyahu Assails Israel's 'Fake News Industry' to Thousands of Supporters" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

See also, ["He was once Netanyahu's housekeeper. Now he's on a mission to bring him down" \(Washington Post\)](#)

Yedioth Ahronoth

Russian Missiles Protecting Hizbullah

According to Syrian reports, the Russian military has placed its advanced S-400 defense system close to the new Iranian missile plant that will build the long-range precision rockets against Israel. *Yedioth Ahronoth* learned last week of the Iranian plan to move the Lebanese missile plant to Syria, and Prime Minister Netanyahu confirmed on Monday, in a conversation with UN Secretary General Guterres, that the Iranians were building such a plant in Syria and in Lebanon.

See also, ["Report: Russia stations S-400 batteries near Iranian arms factory in Syria" \(Ynet News\)](#)

BICOM

UN Secretary General Visits Gaza

The UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres ended his tour of Israel and the Palestinian territories yesterday with a visit to the Gaza Strip and Israeli communities near the Gaza border. Guterres received an IDF security briefing as he flew by helicopter to the Gaza border, where he went to kibbutz Nahal Oz and was shown a Hamas tunnel. Guterres said he was impressed by the Israeli families who represent a "fantastic example of solidarity, humanity and tolerance" by expressing a desire for "peace and reconciliation" instead of a "natural feeling of anger". He then entered the Gaza Strip and gave a press conference at an UNRWA school in Beit Lahiya where he described Gaza as "one of the most dramatic humanitarian crises." Jason Greenblatt, US President Donald Trump's special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, also toured the Israeli-Gaza border on Wednesday and called for the Palestinian Authority "to resume its role in the administration of Gaza," in light of the damage that Hamas has caused to the Gaza Strip.

See also, ["Trump's Peace Envoy: PA Must Rule Gaza, Hamas Has Failed to Meet People's Basic Needs" \(Ha'aretz\)](#)

AI-Monitor

UAE, Egypt Approve More Aid for Gaza, Hamas

Hamas and Egypt are moving forward quickly on projects to aid the Gaza Strip. A delegation from the National Islamic Committee for Social Solidarity, along with officials from Egypt and the United Arab Emirates, will work with experts from both countries to oversee funding. A solidarity committee source told AI-Monitor on condition of anonymity, "The Emirati-Egyptian committee will fund projects in the Gaza Strip and oversee them [at a total] of \$15 million a month, paid by the Khalifa Bin Zayed al-Nahyan Foundation [in the UAE] for humanitarian work." The source noted that several sectors will be targeted, such as health, housing (building residential apartments) and electricity.

Ha'aretz

Israel and Donors to Spend \$32m Sending Goods to Syrians

Israel and donors to the country are set to spend at least 115 million shekels (\$32 million) sending goods to Syrian civilians this year – about 95 million shekels from donations and 20 million shekels from the army budget for the cause. The 95 million shekels has already been spent on medical equipment, food and medicine. Donations have come from organizations such as the Peres Center for Peace. The numbers do not include the cost of providing medical treatment for Syrian civilians inside Israel, which is estimated in the tens of millions of shekels or higher. That sum is funded by the finance, health and defense ministries. More than 3,000 Syrians wounded in the civil war have been treated at Israeli hospitals.

Channel 2 News

3,000 Housing Units in Judea and Samaria about to be Approved

A large number of new housing units in Judea and Samaria are scheduled to be approved for construction next week, but will only receive final authorization in another several weeks, after the scheduled meeting on the issue was pushed off until after the UN General Assembly meeting in New York so as not to provide Abu Mazen with "ammunition" beforehand. Sources who were involved in drafting the plans said that a total of roughly 3,000 housing units will be presented to the committee for its approval. Defense Minister Avigdor Lieberman is planning on introducing a new policy that is designed to scale back the procedural red tape so as to reduce the number of headlines about construction and to reduce the opposition to construction.

Ha'aretz

Israel's Supreme Court to Gov't: Reconsider Western Wall Deal

Israel's Supreme Court sent a clear message to the government on Thursday that it wants it to reconsider its decision to suspend a plan to create a new egalitarian prayer space at the Western Wall. The Supreme Court is expected give the state 30-to-60 days to respond to the following two questions: Would the government be willing to revisit its decision to suspend the Western Wall agreement, and if not, do the state's attorneys believe the Supreme Court has the authority to impose the agreement on the government?

We're Not Against You, We're For Israel

By Ben-Dror Yemini

- **Mister Prime Minister, I have a surprise for you. You have some justified complaints. You have accomplishments. They are certainly cause for pride, not only for you but for all of Israel. I listened closely to the statements you made yesterday. I reread those statements. And here is another surprise: in the past several years I've written about some of those things myself. Israel is truly a success story. We have a wonderful country. Sometimes, in the heat of argument, as you said, there are some people among us who forget that. And that mustn't be forgotten.**
- **You also made several other pertinent points about the country, its achievements and accomplishments. All that is true. However, Mister Prime Minister, Israel belongs to the group of democratic countries. The media in France doesn't report about the excellent harvests in the vineyards or nuclear energy. The French media criticize the leadership. Because the media's job in a democracy is to expose injustices and not to present the leaders' accomplishments.**
- **So it is true that Israel is not an isolated country. You're right. But who was responsible for creating the greatest and worst rift in recent months with American Jewry, which serves as a strategic anchor for the State of Israel? Who cancelled the Western Wall arrangement, which the current government approved, and by so doing punched the American Jews in the face? And who restored the Haredi monopoly over conversion, despite the fact that even a majority of the Orthodox rabbis in Israel and the world are hopping mad about that? That was you, Mr. Netanyahu. Did you expect us not to write about that? To ignore it?**
- **You are deeply troubled by corruption. This was your second meeting with supporters within less than a month in which you inveighed against the media. I belong to the group within the media, and I don't think that I'm part of a minority, who prays three times daily in hope that you'll prove to be innocent. I am with the defense, not the prosecution. But several things have happened in the past few months that raise serious questions. When one of your lawyers handles the submarines deal privately and your other lawyer perhaps, only perhaps, handles the submarines deal as a state's envoy, and both of those lawyers are partners in the same firm, so what is it exactly that you want? For us to ignore that? For us to be silent? For us not to investigate? For us to betray our duty and mission?**
- **It is true that sometimes the accusatory finger-pointing is over the top. Sometimes it becomes evident that the details that were reported were not entirely accurate. All that is true. But the media is not the court. It doesn't operate under the restrictions of evidentiary law. It reports things that are visible and known. Contrary to your allegations, the media did not go easy on Ehud Olmert. He became a broken man with the media's help, despite the fact that a large number of journalists really liked him. He was not given a pass.**
- **It's convenient for you, Mr. Netanyahu, to talk about Meni Naftali. You might also have some good arguments against him. Perhaps. But he is only a small part of the story. A very small part. Did you or did you not receive hundreds of thousands of shekels worth of gifts? Is that proper, in your opinion? Can you really compare Olmert's hobby of collecting pens to your**

hobby of receiving cigars and all the other gifts you received? Moreover, you know how things ended for Olmert. Which means that your comparison is liable to boomerang. You end up losing.

- **Allow me, Mister Prime Minister, to put a serious proposal to you. Leave the media alone. As opposed to what you believe, it isn't the enemy. It's nettlesome and it's annoying, but it isn't the enemy. Do some soul-searching. Perhaps, only perhaps, your behavior has become clownish? No, this isn't a question of left and right, as you'd like us to think. Because the acceptance of hundreds of thousands of shekels worth of gifts, canceling the Western Wall arrangement, granting the Haredim a monopoly, canceling the equal sharing of the burden [of military service] as part of your wholesale sell-out to the Haredim, are issues on which you have acted contrary to Israel's national interest. It is the lengthy duration of your term in office that has made you cynical. Don't let the applause in the orchestrated rallies deceive you. There are tens and hundreds of thousands of citizens who are not members of the left who question you. They cannot understand your behavior, which time and time again raises questions.**
- **You have made achievements, Mister Netanyahu. But it is you who too many times on the personal and national level have undermined them. We aren't against you, Mister Netanyahu. We are for the State of Israel.**

Trump Keeps World Guessing on Iran Deal's Future

By Laura Rozen

- Critics and defenders of the nuclear deal with Iran are equally in the dark about President Donald Trump's intentions ahead of the next congressionally mandated deadline to certify Tehran's compliance Oct. 15.
- The arrival of White House Chief of Staff John Kelly a month ago, combined with the subsequent departure of Trump's chief strategist Steve Bannon, his bombastic deputy Sebastian Gorka and several hawkish National Security Council officials aligned with Bannon, have reduced access to the president for those advocating outright abandoning the deal. Kelly, a retired four-star Marine general, has imposed strict protocols, requiring that any information going to the president be submitted first for review by White House staff secretary Rob Porter. Kelly has also stopped the Oval Office open-door policy, limiting who can gain access to the president's ear.
- A senior White House official told Politico that Kelly's goal is essentially that the "president has to get good briefings, he has to get good intelligence." The official said, "We have to be putting him in a position to make good decisions."
- Indeed, former US Ambassador to the UN John Bolton this week complained in an article outlining his plan for quitting the Iran nuclear deal that he had been denied permission to present his proposal to Trump.
- "I offer the Iran [proposal] now as a public service, since staff changes at the White House have made presenting it to President Trump impossible," Bolton wrote in National Review. "Although he was once kind enough to tell me 'come in and see me any time,' those days are now over."
- According to Bolton, Bannon had asked him in late July to draw up a "game plan" for how Trump could exit the nuclear deal. Bolton's plan calls for the United States not only to pull out of the agreement and reimpose unilateral US sanctions on Iran, but also to provide bunker-busting bombs to Iranian foes such as Israel. Bolton also encourages "resistance" to the current regime through support to ethnic minorities, including the Kurds and Baluchis, as well as the "democratic Iranian opposition" such as the People's Mujahedeen of Iran, formerly a State Department-designated terrorist group.
- But even as Iran deal critics and regime-change proponents find themselves stymied in their efforts to access Trump, more pragmatic foreign-policy hands and Iran deal proponents are far from confident that their views will prevail. Washington's European allies are similarly uncertain about how Trump will proceed, even as they insist that their commitment to the 2015 deal remains firm.
- "Things are getting worse," Richard Nephew, a former member of the US nuclear deal negotiating team, told AI-Monitor. According to his discussions with US government contacts, Trump "has become stuck in his view that the deal needs to go, that Iran is cheating on it, and that we need to have the appropriate response."

- Nephew, now with Columbia University, said he estimates that there is a 50/50 chance decertification will happen in October. But even if Trump does recertify Iran's compliance, confidence that he will stick to the agreement over time will remain low, inhibiting the economic relief and international investment that Iran feels entitled to under the deal.
- In a clear warning to Washington, European Union foreign policy chief Federica Mogherini said this week that the 28-member bloc would defend the Iran deal from possible US efforts to gin up phony and politicized claims Iran that is not complying with the accord.
- "So today, two years on, compliance with the deal is certified by the IAEA [International Atomic Energy Agency] ... not by one single individual country," Mogherini said in a speech to EU ambassadors Monday. "And we will have to repeat it time and again in these months to come everywhere."
- Mogherini added, "I was glad to hear at the beginning of this month from the re-elected president of Iran, [Hassan] Rouhani ... his personal commitment to continue to implement their part of the deal."
- "There is no alternative" to the Iran nuclear agreement, French President Emmanuel Macron told French ambassadors Tuesday. "In the context of what we are living through, the 2015 agreement is what allows us establish a constructive and demanding dialogue with Iran."
- France is also indicating to the Trump administration that it would be willing to try to negotiate a follow-on agreement with Iran that also addresses the country's ballistic missile program, presumably under the condition that the United States not exit the existing deal.
- Macron indicated Tuesday that the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) "could be supplemented by work for the post-2025 period (and) by an indispensable work on the use of ballistic missiles," French Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Agnes Romatet-Espagne told reporters at a briefing today. "This work could be the object of future consultations with our partners."
- The next IAEA report on Iran's compliance with the JCPOA is expected to be distributed to member states of the IAEA board Friday, said Kelsey Davenport of the Arms Control Association. The next IAEA board meeting is scheduled for Sept. 11 through Sept. 15, shortly before world leaders head to New York for the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly. Trump is expected to address the gathering Sept. 19.
- Iran and Russia have also reportedly requested that a ministerial meeting of the seven nations that negotiated the deal be held on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly. If it occurs, it would mark the first meeting between US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif. The State Department did not indicate whether Tillerson would be open to attending such a meeting, which does not appear to have been formally scheduled yet.
- Nephew said the one foreign leader he thought could possibly influence Trump on the merits of the Iran deal was Russian President Vladimir Putin, but the former US negotiator isn't sure whether Putin is highly motivated to do so.

- Nephew said, “The one question that does kind of remain — is there an international leader out there whose views [Trump] trusts who is in a position to convince him otherwise? The only name I heard ... was Putin.”
- Russia is indeed urging the US administration to stay in the deal, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov said this week.
- “Russia is currently working on persuading the US leadership to keep the ... Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action,” Ryabkov was quoted as saying by Sputnik on Tuesday. “We are focusing our efforts ... on convincing our partners in the US government that they need to fulfill their duties under Iran’s nuclear deal.”
- In the meantime, officials who work on Iran issues expect they may have to cancel any social plans they have made for the evening of Oct. 15.